

Monergism

28 SERMONS ON THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE

REV. JOHN WITHERSPOON

Monergism

28 SERMONS ON THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE

REV. JOHN WITHERSPOON

28 Sermons on the Christian Life

by Rev. John Witherspoon

Table of Contents

[SERMON I: The object of a Christian's desire in Religious Worship - Exodus 33:18.](#)

[SERMON II: The Glory of Christ in his Humiliation - Isaiah 63:1](#)

[SERMON III: The Deceitfulness of Sin - Hebrews 3:13](#)

[SERMON IV: The Believer going to God as his Exceeding Joy - Psalm 43:4.](#)

[SERMON V: The Christian's disposition under a sense of mercies received - Psalm 116:7](#)

[SERMON VI: A view of the Glory of God humbling to the Soul - Job 42:5, 6](#)

[SERMON VII: Man in his Natural State - Rev. 3:17](#)

[SERMON VIII: An Inducement to come to Christ - Rev. 3:17](#)

[SERMON IX: Trust in God - Isaiah 50:10](#)

[SERMON X: Trust in God - Isaiah 50:10](#)

[SERMON XI: On the Purity of the Heart - Proverbs 30:7, 8, 9.](#)

SERMON XII: Seeking a Competency in the wisdom of Providence - Proverbs 30:8

SERMON XIII: The Danger of Prosperity - Proverbs 30:9

SERMON XIV The Danger of Adversity - Proverbs 30:9

SERMON XV: On the Religious Education of Children - Mark 10:13, 14, 15, 16

SERMON XVI: Devotedness to God - Psalm 116:16

SERMON XVII: The Righteous scarcely Saved, and the Wicked certainly Destroyed - 1 Peter 4:18

SERMON XVIII: The Yoke of Christ - Matthew 11:30

SERMON XIX: The Glory of the Redeemer in the Perpetuity of his Work - Psalm 72:17

SERMON XX: The Petitions of the Insincere unavailing - Psalm 66:18

SERMON XXI: The absolute necessity of Salvation through Christ - Acts 4:12.

SERMON XXII: The Trial of Religious Truth by its Moral Influence - Matthew 7:20

SERMON XXIII: The Charge of Sedition and Faction against good Men, especially faithful Ministers - Acts 17:6.

SERMON XXIV: Prayer for National Prosperity and for the Revival of Religion inseparably connected - Isaiah 51:9.

SERMON XXV: Seasonable Advice to Young Persons - Psalm 1:1

SERMON XVI: Ministerial Fidelity in declaring the whole Counsel of God - Acts 20:26, 27

SERMON XXVII: Ministerial character and duty - 2 Cor. 4:13

SERMON XXVIII: The Success of the Gospel entirely of God - 1 Cor. 3:5, 6, 7

SERMON I

THE OBJECT OF A CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy Glory - EXODUS 33:18

THESE are the words of an Old Testament Saint; of that Moses, who, as a servant, was faithful over all the house of God. True piety is the same in substance in all ages, and points at one thing as its centre and its rest, the knowledge and enjoyment of God. In the preceding verses, Moses had been employed in earnest prayer and intercession for the people of Israel. He had met with success and acceptance in these requests; for it is said, in the 14th verse, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And in the 17th, "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name." The condescension of a gracious God, though it satisfies, does not extinguish the desires of his saints, but rather makes them more

ardent and importunate; for he immediately adds, in the words of the text, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. It is highly probable, from what follows, that this desire included more than was proper for the present state; yet such a discovery as was possible, or could be useful to him, is graciously promised, "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy."

My dear brethren, it is our distinguished privilege, that we have daily unmolested access to the house and ordinances of God. We ought to rejoice, that we have so many clear and express promises of the divine presence, in New Testament worship. But what cause have we to be ashamed, that we are so exceeding prone to stop short in the threshold, to content ourselves with the mere form, instead of earnestly breathing after real, inward, and sensible communion with God? I have therefore chosen this subject, in the view of that solemn ordinance, The Lord's Supper, where we have a sensible representation of Christ crucified, the great mean of our access to God, that we may serve him on that occasion particularly, and the remaining part of our lives habitually, in spirit and in truth. And, Oh, that we may have daily more experience of the sweetness and benefit of his service on earth! and may daily long more for that time, when we shall serve him in a manner infinitely more perfect and joyful in his temple above!

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, in dependance on divine strength.

I. To explain what is the object of a saint's desire, when he faith in the words of Moses, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

II. To improve the subject—particularly by pointing out what is the most proper preparation for such a discovery.

I. Then, I am to explain what is the object of a saint's desire, when he faith, in the words of Moses, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. It is very probable, from the passage following the text, which I have read, that Moses had some regard to the sensible appearance, which, in that dispensation, did often accompany or notify the immediate presence of the angel of the covenant. He desired, probably, to be strengthened for beholding stedfastly the Shechinach, or bright and luminous cloud which sometimes appeared over the tabernacle, and, by its glorious lustre, tended to affect the mind with a sense of the power and Sovereignty of the Lord Jehovah. But this, surely, was not all; for this, in itself, was only a subsidiary mean which served to carry their views to the real and spiritual glory of God. To the last therefore, we shall confine our attention, as to what the gospel particularly opens to us, and what believers are enabled, by faith, to apprehend.

When Christians, then, desire to see the glory of God, it seems chiefly to imply the following things: 1. They desire to see the glory of an eternal independent God; they desire to see the only living and true God in his own inherent excellence and infinite perfection. God is the source and sum of all excellence; or, in the language of the Psalmist, "the perfection of beauty." Every thing noble or beautiful in the creature, is only a faint ray from the fulness of the Creator's glory. Therefore he is the proper object of the highest esteem, and most profound veneration, of every reasonable creature. The vision and fruition of God constitute the employment and happiness of heaven: and even here, while they are in preparation for the higher house, the saints desire such a discovery of the divine glory as their condition will admit of, and take pleasure in contemplating his nature, as revealed to them both in his word and in his works. They dwell with adoring wonder, on all his attributes, which are boundless and unsearchable: the immensity of his being, who fills heaven and earth with his presence, who seeth in secret, and from whom the thickest darkness cannot cover us; his irresistible power, "who spake, and it was done, who commanded, and it stood fast;"—who called this great universe out of nothing into being, "who doth in the army of heaven,

and among the inhabitants of the earth whatever seems good unto him:" his infinite holiness and purity, "with whom evil cannot dwell, nor sinners stand in his presence; who looketh to the moon, and it shineth not, to the stars, and they are not pure in his sight:" his infinite wisdom, "who worketh all things according to his will, who bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought, and makes the devices of the people of none effect:" his boundless goodness, which fills the earth, and flows in plenteous streams to all the creatures of his power.

But, perhaps, some are saying, what is there extraordinary or peculiar in all this? is it not clearly revealed in the word of God? can any Christian be ignorant of it? If Moses, in that early dispensation, desired a discovery of the divine perfections, nothing of that kind is wanting to us, who, since the fulness of time, have so complete a revelation in the New Testament. But, my brethren, I must beg of you to observe these two things:

1. That there is in the fulness of the Godhead an infinite and endless variety even for the employment of our intellectual powers. Well might Zophar, in the book of Job, say, Job 11:7, 8, 9, "Canst thou, by searching, find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

2. That the real and proper knowledge of the glory of God is by inward and spiritual illumination. The holy Scriptures themselves, however clear a discovery they contain of the nature of God, are no better than a sealed book to many even of the greatest comprehension of mind. It is one thing to think, and speak, and reason on the perfections of God, as an object of science, and another to glorify him as God, or to have a deep and awful impression of him upon our hearts. Real believers will know this by experience. A discovery of the glory of God, is not to inform them of a truth which they never heard before, but to give lively penetrating views of the

meaning and importance of those truths of which they had, perhaps, heard and spoken times without number. Sometimes one word spoken of the Eternal, the Almighty, the Holy One, will be carried home upon the conscience and heart with such irresistible force, as to shew them more of God than ever they had seen before. O what a difference is there between the way in which we use the same words in prayer or praise, at one time, and at another! None but downright atheists will deny the omniscience and omnipresence of God; but how far is this general acknowledgment from that overwhelming sense of his presence which believers have sometimes in his worship in public or in secret. What a new sense of God's presence had Jacob at Bethel, when he said, Gen. 28:16, 17, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not: and he was afraid, and said, how dreadful is this place? this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" What a sense of God's presence had Hagar, Gen. 16:13, when "she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, thou, God seest me; for, she said, have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" or Job when he expresses himself thus, Job 42:5, 6, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes?"

I shall only further observe, that it plainly appears that this discovery of the glory of God, belongs only to his own people. Wicked men are said, in scripture, to be such as know not God. They are also described a little differently, as not having God in all their thoughts; not but that wicked men may have a general or customary belief, in the being and perfections of God, but because they have not that intimate sense of his presence, that discovery of the glory and amiableness of his perfections, which is peculiar to his own children. Even the natural perfections of God, his power and wisdom, cannot be beheld with such veneration by any, as by those who are sensible of their obligations to serve him. But above all, the glory of his infinite holiness and justice can never be seen, but by those who desire to submit to it; nor the glory of his infinite mercy, but by those who see themselves indebted to it. This leads me to observe,

2. That the believer desires to see the glory of a gracious and reconciled God, not only infinitely glorious in himself, but infinitely merciful to him. This view ought never to be separated from the former. Take away the divine mercy, and the lustre of his other perfections is too strong for us to behold. The power, wisdom, holiness and justice of God, separated from his mercy, speak nothing but unmixed terror to the guilty. It is very probable, that there was something in the desire of Moses, in the text, according to his own view, ignorant and unadvised; but God granted his request only in such a way as could be useful to him. When he says, I beseech thee shew me thy glory, the answer is in the following terms, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy," And again, it is said in the following chapter, 6, 7, verses, "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin: and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the childrens children, unto the third and fourth generation."

We may also see, that in the whole dispensation of divine grace to men, God is represented as coming under a peculiar relation to them; and they are called not only to serve him as God, but to trust in him as their God. Every hearer must be sensible, how essential this is to a believer's desire, of seeing the glory of God. He cannot consider him as God over-all, without, at the same time, remembering, that he is one with whom he hath to do. There is also a necessity here peculiar to ourselves. The holy angels consider him as their Maker and their happiness: but the children of Adam must consider, not only his goodness to the innocent, but his mercy to the guilty. This glory of God shines brightly, and shines only in the face of Jesus Christ. God we are told, "dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto. No man hath seen God at any time; but the only begotten of the Father, he hath declared him." In this wonderful

dispensation, indeed, all the perfections of God are found united; but above all, "Grace and mercy shine and reign through righteousness, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here I must add, that the believer not only desires to see the glory of God's mercy, in general, as displayed in the gospel, in which he may have a share, but to take an appropriating view of it, as what he hath a clear right and title to call his own. Doubtless the mercy of God is published, offering salvation to the chief of sinners. It is their duty to accept of it; it is their interest to cleave to it. But they are many times deterred by what they see in God, they are many times discouraged by what they feel in themselves, and are afraid to assert their title to so great a blessing. But when, by the Holy Spirit, they are enabled to see the infinite price paid for their redemption, in the cross of Christ; when they see the riches of divine grace, in the cross Christ; when they hear the urgent invitations to them to believe in the cross of Christ; when they are enabled freely to renounce and quit hold of every other claim; when their hearts are sweetly constrained by the bonds of their Redeemer's love; they can then look upon God as their reconciled Father, through him who hath made peace, by the blood of his cross, and say unto him, My Lord! and my God! What an endearing view is this of the divine glory, and what ineffable satisfaction springs from it, to the foul? What an unspeakable consolation to those who have been wounded in their spirits, and grieved in their minds, when they are enabled to apply the encouraging promises of the holy scriptures? Isa. 1:18. "Come, now, and let us reason together, faith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Isa. 43:25, I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake; and will not remember thy sins, 44:22. I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

3. The believer desires to see the glory of God, as an all-sufficient God. This is a necessary view of God, as the support and happiness of

the creature, as well as the strength and consolation of the sinner.

My brethren, man was made for living upon God; forgetting this, he first went astray from him. Self-sufficiency, and a delusive sense of independence, is inseparable from a sinful state. Conviction levels a blow at the foundation of this mistake. Serious consideration shews us how insufficient we are for our own happiness. Daily experience discovers the inherent vanity of all created comforts in themselves, and as separated from God. When the penitent returns to God, he not only returns from the service of other masters, to him, as his rightful Lord; but forsakes all forbidden joys, and cleaves to God as his happiness, and rests in him as his portion. Does not this appear from the uniform language of scripture, with regard to both parts of the covenant? what belongs to God, and what belongs to man. See the tenor of an early promise to the father of the faithful, Gen. 15:1. "Fear not Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Multitudes of others are of the same import.

The power and providence of God, in behalf of his people, are largely and beautifully described in the ninety-first Psalm, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the share of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and buckler," &c. 2 Cor. 6:17. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, faith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, faith the Lord Almighty." On the other hand, the invitation, or exhortation to return, is ordinarily pressed from the profit of the change, Isa. 55:1. Ho, every one that thirsteth! come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." And, to name no more passages, when God came to establish the faith of Abraham in his promise, he says, Gen. 17:1, "I am the Almighty," or as it ought to be translated,

"the all-sufficient God: walk before me, and be thou perfect." Now, believers desire to see the glory of God, as all-sufficient; and all discoveries of this nature are attended with unspeakable complacency and satisfaction. They see the glory of an infinite God as theirs, and rejoice in the richness of their portion. Wearied with repeated disappointments, and deeply convinced of the vanity of the creature, they rest in him, as able to give them complete happiness; happiness that will never change! happiness that will never be exhausted: He that hath chosen God as his portion, hath, as our Saviour beautifully expresseth it, made "choice of that good part, which cannot be taken away from him."

My brethren, we are now come to the very substance of practical religion. The glory of an all-sufficient God, appears as more than a balance to all that pretends to rival him in our affections; to all that we are called to give up for his sake. When the believer sees the fulness of God, then his anxiety, and distressing sears, of every kind, are at an end. Does he want provision? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing." Does he want friends? God is able to make his enemies to be at peace with him. Does he want any outward comfort? God is able to procure it, or make him happy without it. Not to mention particulars; the triumph of faith, in this view, is to attain an absolute and unconditional resignation to the will of God, with a firm persuasion, that he is able to make all things work together for our good, and willing to bestow every thing that is for our real interest. It is to say with the prophet, Hab. 3:17, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation."

I shall, that the divine all-sufficiency is to be considered, as regarding our sanctification as well as comfort. What distress does not the Christian often suffer from the treachery of his own heart, and from

the power of surrounding temptations? Covered with shame for his past unsteadfastness, convinced, by experience, of his own weakness, he hath no other refuge but in God. And what courage does he derive from the fulness of divine perfection, the greatness of divine power, and the faithfulness of the divine promise? "My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness." He then says, with the Psalmist, Psal. 71:16, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."

II. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And, 1st, Let us admire the divine condescension, in admitting his saints to a discovery of his glory. Solomon says, with very great propriety, in the language of astonishment: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" The same ought to be, nay, the same certainly are, the sentiments of every real believer. But let us remember what has been hinted at above, that our access to God, and our communion with him, is, and only can be, through the Mediator of the new covenant, in whom we have access, by faith, unto God.

2dly, Let me beseech you to try yourselves, whether this ever hath been your attainment, and whether it is your sincere desire? Do you know, in any measure, what it is to see the glory of the true God? Hath he appeared before you in terrible majesty? Have your very souls been made to bow down before him, and to give him the glory that is justly due to his name? Have you seen the glory of a reconciled God? Have you chosen him, in Christ, as your portion? Have you devoted yourselves, without reserve, to his disposal? Again, have you seen the glory of an all-sufficient God? Surely I speak to many who have seen the vanity of the creature. Probably you have tasted a little of the sufferings of a sinful state. Where did you seek your consolation? where do you find your support? Have you learned the holy and happy art of pouring out your souls to God? Have you felt the sweetness of it? And have you said, with the Psalmist, Return unto thy rest, O my soul! for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with

thee? Is it your earnest desire to see the glory of God? Can you say with the Psalmist, Psal. 63:1, 2, "O God! thou art my God, early will I seek thee: my foul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

3dly, I will now proceed to exhort you, in the most earnest manner, to diligence in seeking after real communion with God in his instituted worship. How highly are we favored with light and liberty? how little are many sensible of their privileges? I have often, on such occasions, put you in mind of the fatal effects of a heartless, customary, formal worship; it is provoking to God, pernicious to others, hardening to the heart, and ruining to the soul. Were but a society of those Protestants abroad, who are lying under persecution, to enjoy the season which we now enjoy, what an edge would be upon their spirits? what a sense of gratitude in their hearts? what fire and zeal in their affections? Strange, indeed, that public prosperity should be so stupifying, and the approach of eternity to every individual should not be awakening; while the young and strong are hurried off the stage, while every day is bringing us nearer to our last, while every ordinance is adding to our charge, that we should not desire to see the glory of God in his sanctuary here, that it may be the earnest of our future inheritance, and prepare us for his immediate presence hereafter.

Suffer me to speak a few words to those that are young. God is my witness, that their welfare is at my heart. Perhaps you will think, what hath been said hardly applicable to you. The desire of Moses, the man of God, intimate communion and fellowship with God, the attainment of ripe and experienced Christians, all this you will say, is unsuitable to me: nay, perhaps, by a bastard humility, you will say, to expect it, would be presumption in me. But you are greatly deceived: there are none who have more gracious invitations to come unto God than young sinners: there are none who have greater reason to expect nearness to God than young saints. Do you not read, that God revealed himself to Samuel, the child, when he neglected Eli, the old

prophet? Besides, I would recommend earnestness and affection to you; not only for your greater profit, but to prevent your apostasy. A little religion is very hard to hold; it is like a lamp which is hardly lighted, which the least breath of wind will extinguish, or a tree that is but newly planted, which a rude thrust will overturn. Unless you make God and his service, your hearty choice, you will not carry it long as your burden, but will be soon tempted to throw it down. Be concerned, therefore, I beseech you, to attend on his instituted worship, not in a careless and formal manner, but let the "desire of your souls be to his name, and the remembrance him."

I shall now conclude the subject, by offering to those, who would see the glory of God, a few directions, as to the best preparation for such a discovery. 1st, If you would see the glory of God in his sanctuary, be serious in self-examination, and in the renunciation of all known sin. Holiness is an essential attribute of the divine nature; and, therefore, he must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. Thus the Psalmist resolved with himself, Psal. 26:6. "I will wash mine hands in innocence, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord!" It is true, none, who have any knowledge of the corruption of their own hearts, can reasonably hope to be perfectly free from sin in the present life: yet a real Christian will have it, as the object of his daily study, to "cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, that he may perfect holiness in the fear of God." It was sin that first rendered us unfit for communion with God; and therefore, our recovery of this happy privilege will be but in proportion to our sanctification. To bring sinful dispositions, indulged, and still suffered in the heart, to the worship of God, and to expect acceptance in such a state, is implied blasphemy, and the greatest dishonor we can possibly do to him.

2. In order to see the glory of God, you must be clothed with humility. No disposition more essentially necessary to a Christian at all times, but more especially, when he makes an immediate approach to God in his worship: Isa. 66:2. "For all those things hath mine hand made: and all those things have been, faith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite

spirit, and trembleth at my word." And, indeed, how can we consider the nature of that God whom we worship, and our own sinful and miserable estate, without being struck with a sense of the necessity of deep humility and self-abasement in our intercourse with him? It is particularly to be noticed, that self-abasement, and even self-abhorrence, is the immediate effect of a sense of the divine presence. See to this purpose, Isa. 6:1–5. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple: above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory! And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Wo is me; for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" See also Job 42:5, 6. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Let us endeavor, therefore, to be truly and inwardly humble. Let us remember the grace of redemption, what guilty criminals we were, before unmerited mercy and sovereign love found out a way for our recovery. Happy they, where humility arises from a real exercise of soul! How difficult, how rare a thing, is true humility? How easy is it to use modest and submissive expressions, compared to attaining a truly humble and mortified state of mind? May almighty God, by his power, make us humble; and do thou, O blessed Jesus! "cast down every high thought, and lofty imagination, that exalteth itself against thee."

3. In the last place; if you desire to see the glory of God, be fervent in preparatory prayer: if there is any blessing that requires importunity and wrestling with God, surely this high and happy privilege of communion with him in his house must be of that kind. And I think, we are warranted to say, that, in the divine government, there are some blessings that require more importunity than others. See a remarkable passage, Mark 9:28, 29. "And when he was come into the

house, his disciples asked him privately, why could not we cast him out? and he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." If some devils were so obstinate in their possession, that the same degree of faith and fervor which prevailed over others, could not cast them out, must not the same thing hold, from analogy, with respect to other mercies? And how justly are indifferent, luke-warm worshippers denied that blessing which they so lightly esteem? Let me therefore, earnestly, beseech every serious person not to restrain prayer before God, but to repeat and urge the plea, that he would be graciously present with us; that he would pour down his Spirit from on high, and make us to know, to our happy experience, "that a day in his courts is better than a thousand; and that it is better to be door-keepers in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

SERMON II

THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN HIS HUMILIATION

— This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? Isaiah 63:1. second clause

MY brethren, all the works of God are great and marvellous, worthy of the attention and admiration of his rational creatures. The contemplation of what is now revealed of him, is the noblest employment of which we are capable in this world: and the more clear and enlarged contemplation of him shall be our employment and happiness in the world above. But of all the works of God, there

is none in which his perfections are so signally displayed, as in the redemption of an elect world through Jesus Christ. All other views of his glory are faint and fading in comparison of this. However much we are called to adore the power and wisdom of Creation, or the goodness and bounty of Providence, our praises are extremely defective, if we omit that new song which he hath put into our mouths, even praise to our God for his unspeakable gift.

Redeeming love, my brethren, is the immediate object of our attention in the holy ordinance of the Lord's supper. Here is a symbolical representation of it, that faith may be strengthened by the aid of sense. I hope, therefore, it will not be improper, by way of preparation for it, to take a view of the glory of our Redeemer's character, whose sufferings we are now to commemorate. As salvation is an agreeable sound, so the name of a Saviour is a delightful name to every believer. I may therefore safely presume upon the attention of all such at least, while I endeavor to set him before you, as he is represented in the strong and forcible language of the text, Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? Such a theme will be the most proper introduction to the work of this day; that, as we are to commemorate Christ's sufferings as an extraordinary event, he is here spoken of, and his appearance inquired into, in words of astonishment and admiration: Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah! this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength! I shall not spend time in assigning the reasons why interpreters generally apply these words to Christ, but only observe, that, on this supposition, they contain a mixed representation of glory and suffering, of strength and abasement, which is the very substance and meaning of a Saviour on the cross.

Agreeably to this, the single point I have in view, in the present discourse, is, through Divine assistance, to point out to you, in what respects the glory of our Redeemer was apparent even in his sufferings, and shone through even the dark cloud that covered him

in his humiliation, or in the language of the text, how he might be said, to travel in the greatness of his strength: and then I shall make some practical improvement of what may be said.

1. I am to point out to you, in what respects the glory of our Redeemer was apparent even in his sufferings, and shone through even the dark cloud that covered him in his humiliation. As the love of God to man, in providing redemption for him, was inconceivable, so the mean which he employed, in accomplishing this great work, was equally astonishing. That his eternal and well-beloved Son should veil his divine glory, clothe himself with human flesh, subject himself to a life of pain and suffering, and at last make his soul an offering for sin upon a cross—This, as it was not after the manner of men, nor bore upon it any of the marks of human wisdom, as it was designed and doth tend, to abase the pride of man, and exalt the grace of God; so it is with difficulty that man can be brought to an approbation of it. "The cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." It is therefore proper, that when we are to commemorate the incarnation and death of our Redeemer, we should attend to these evidences of his divine glory that still appeared even in his lowest abasement. By this means, while we grieve for the sufferings that sin brought upon him, we may still triumph in his power; for he is glorious even in his red apparel, and travels in the greatness of his strength.

I must here observe that I do not mainly intend, in discoursing on this subject, to establish the truth of our Saviour's divine mission, against those who deny it on the above or any other account: this would be too cold and abstracted an argument for our present purpose. What I propose, is chiefly and directly designed for heightening the devotion, for quickening the love, and increasing the faith and comfort of believers. However, at the same time, considering the humiliation of Christ in the light of an objection against his divine commission from the suggestions of human wisdom, what shall be said may also be considered as an answer to this objection, and serving to remove the offence of the cross.

1. Upon this subject, therefore, observe first, the glory of our Redeemer, in his sufferings, appears from his ready and chearful undertaking of the work of our redemption. There can be little honor to any man in submitting to what he cannot avoid, or doing what he dare not refuse; but the humiliation of Christ was perfectly voluntary, as no constraint could be put upon him. Therefore his original dignity and greatness, is not only, if I may speak so, preserved unhurt, but improved and heightened by the grace of infinite condescension. This circumstance of Christ's readiness to undertake the work of our redemption, is often taken notice of in scripture. Psal. 40:6, 7, 8. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God!"—It is certain, that redemption could not be the work of a creature; and it is also probable, that no created being would have been willing to essay it. Nay, it is thought by many to be the import of the remarkable passage just now cited, which is applied by the apostle Paul to our Saviour, that in the councils of heaven it was actually proposed to those glorious spirits that surround the throne of God, and their strength and inclination both were found insufficient. Neither is there any thing improbable in the supposition, that God might discover to them his purpose of mercy, upon a proper mediator interposing, and that none was found willing to subject himself to divine wrath, incurred by rebellious man. If so, then it is not only in one sense, but in all senses true, what Christ is represented as saying in the 5th verse of the chapter where my text lies, "And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury it upheld me." This interpretation may be confirmed by something similar to it, recorded, John, 6:5, 6. "When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he faith unto Phillip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to prove him; for he himself knew what he would do." There is another passage which gives us nearly the same idea, viz. of Christ's being only capable of taking the charge of the redeemed and their

interest in Providence, Rev. 5:2, 3, 4, 5. "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much because no man was found worthy to open, and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." How glorious then was the compassion of our Redeemer, who so willingly and cheerfully subjected himself to that abasement and suffering, to which none could constrain him? Thus he says to himself, John 10:17, 18, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." He is not represented as merely consenting, because none else could or would perform the work, and so having it as it were devolved upon him by necessity; not as yielding with reluctance, and overcome by great earnestness and importunity, but saying with readiness and cheerfulness, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book, it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea thy law is within my heart."

There is one circumstance which deserves particular notice, when we are considering the dignity of our Redeemer's undertaking; that he did well and thoroughly understand the difficulty of it, and the weight of that wrath which he submitted to endure. It is not such an evidence of greatness of mind, when a person involves himself in difficulties, and exposes himself to dangers, if he only runs an uncertain risk of meeting with them, or has but a confused and indistinct apprehension of their nature; but it discovers a peculiar fortitude of spirit to have a clear view of sufferings, and yet composedly and steadily to submit to them for a good end. So true is this maxim, that it seems to be the only thing that renders human life supportable, that all future sufferings are uncertain even in the event, and, at any rate, in their nature but imperfectly known. Now,

how does it serve to illustrate the glory of our Redeemer's undertaking, that he had a clear and perfect foreknowledge of every event that was to befall him? He knew the number and malice of the enemies he had to encounter; and the bitterness of that cup, the dregs of which he was to drink off: Yet steady to his purpose, and conscious of his own power, he went out to the combat as one assured of victory. As he began so he carried on his work, with the same undaunted resolution; witness what he says, Luke 12:50. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" All this, my brethren, is further confirmed, by some passages which are recorded toward the close of his life, when he drew near to the concluding scene of his sufferings, Matt. 16:21. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and Scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." — 20:17, 18, 19. And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again." Luke 9:51. And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." To these I shall only add, John 18:11. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall "I not drink it?" Thus did there appear a glory even in his humiliation, a majesty even in his suffering; and thus did he come forth and travel in the greatness of his strength.

In the second place, the glory of our Redeemer, in his humiliation, appears from the greatness of those sufferings which he endured. Though, to the eye of sense, a state of suffering is apt to appear contemptible; to those who justly view the sufferings of Christ, there will be found far greater evidences of his power. A weak person is crushed by a small weight; but he who is able to endure uncommon sufferings, shows himself to be possessed of uncommon strength.

Now, our blessed Lord and Saviour did, in his life, in this world, endure the greatest and most dreadful sufferings. His whole life was one continued track of the heaviest sufferings of which human nature is capable. Isa. 53:3. "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not!" This, my brethren, is a known subject, yet it is the subject which we ought, by faith, to dwell upon this day; and, indeed, the benefit and comfort of believers does not depend on things new and engaging to the fancy, but on the Spirit of God setting home known truths with force and efficacy on the heart. Let me therefore beg your attention to two or three obvious remarks on the sufferings of Christ. (1.) His afflictions began early, with his first entrance into the world. No sooner did the man Christ Jesus see the light of this world, but presently did affliction salute him. Immediately after his contemptible birth, did Herod, that bloody tyrant, seek to destroy him; so that we may allude to that expression, Rev. 12:4. "—And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born."

(2.) His afflictions were constant and perpetual, without interruption. It is recorded, not only by Christians, but even by heathens, who had heard of his life, that he was never observed to laugh, but frequently seen weeping; so that he well accomplished that prophesy, "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." It is probable, from several passages in the prophetical writings, that he was of a very tender and sensible frame; and therefore his afflictions had a great and powerful effect upon him. They so deeply touched him, that his body was wasted, and his strength melted and decayed, which is the usual effect of lasting and continued sorrow. Isa. 52:14. "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Ps. 22:14, 15. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels: my strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws: and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." So that we may also

apply to him what Job says of himself, Job. 16:8. "And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me, beareth witness to my face."

(3.) His afflictions were of the severest kind. This I might show you, at large, from the history, by particularizing them all: I only mention four, poverty, reproach, temptation, and sympathy with others. He was so poor, as to depend upon the charity of others for his substance; and could say, Luke 9:58. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." — Reproach was thrown upon him without measure, and of the worst kind. He was called a glutton and a wine-bibber, a deceiver, a blasphemer, a Samaritan, and one that had a devil. Now, my brethren, all that know any thing of human nature, know that reproach and contempt are perhaps the hardest to bear of any sufferings to which we are exposed; and the authors of these calumnies were such whose circumstances rendered them most sharp and severe; for they were the Scribes and Pharisees, or the ministers of those times, who served in the temple, as the whole history shows, and his own natural relations, as appears from Mark 3:21. John 7:3, 4, 5.—Another remarkable affliction our Lord endured, was temptation, and that of the grossest kind, as is plain from Matth. 4:3–11. We are told, "he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." What was the precise nature and influence of such temptations on him, we cannot know; only it deserves notice on this particular, that whereas some of the other afflictions he endured, were such as his perfect purity could not but render more tolerable than otherwise they would have been, this on the other hand, was such, that by how much the more pure and holy he was, so much the more distress would he feel on being assaulted with the vile temptations of the devil, and having his horrid and abominable suggestions presented to the fancy. — I only further mention his sufferings, from sympathy with others. The most excellent and worthy of the human kind are such as have the tenderest feelings of the sufferings of others. Now, since he was a perfect man, since tenderness seems to have been his ruling character, and his errand

into the world a message of love flowing from infinite compassion as its cause, we must suppose him liable to the severest sufferings of this kind. I know the hard-hearted, selfish world, will find it difficult to conceive this as a source of severe suffering, especially such as have no regard to any thing beyond this world. But this is not the case with all; for I am certain there are some whose sharpest pangs have been occasioned by the sufferings of others, especially when of a spiritual kind. To form some conception of this, let us imagine, what must be the anguish of a pious and affectionate parent, on the death of a wicked child, who apparently trod in the path of the destroyer, and of whom he hath the greatest reason to fear, that he no sooner closed his eyes on the light of this world, than he lifted them up in the torments of hell. Now, as compassion was stronger in none than in the man Christ Jesus, so none could have so clear a view of the misery of those who were the objects of it; and therefore, no doubt, this was a source of the deepest affliction to his soul.

(4.) In the last place, the afflictions of our Lord not only continued but increased, through his life, till they, at last, issued in an extraordinary conflict with the powers of darkness, and an immediate subjection to the wrath of a sin avenging God. Let it be observed, that though I here mention particularly his enduring the wrath of God, as the last and finishing part of his sufferings, I do not mean to confine his sufferings from the hand of God to this season. Without all question, every part of his humiliation was satisfactory to the divine justice, and contributed to appease the wrath of God. This cup was put to his mouth so soon as he assumed our nature; he continued to drink of it daily, and was therefore justly stiled a man of sorrows; but, in the close of life, he came to drink off the very bitterest dregs of it. The waves of divine wrath went over him; and he waded still deeper and deeper in this troubled ocean, till he was well nigh overwhelmed. That Christ suffered under the wrath of God in an eminent degree, is manifest both from the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the relation given of the event in the New. Isa. 53:5–10. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with

his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." See the relation of his sufferings in the garden, Matth. 26:38, 39. "Then faith he unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O, my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt!" Mark 14:33, 34, 35, 36. "And he taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and faith unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death! tarry ye here, and watch: and he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed, that if it were possible the hour might pass from him! And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee: take away this cup from me! nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt!" Luke 22:43, 44. "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him; and, being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly! and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground!"

That the same deep distress of soul continued upon the cross, is plain from this lamentable exclamation, Matth. 27:46. "And, about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lamasabachthani! that is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" In what manner, precisely, Christ suffered the wrath of God on this occasion, it would be too bold for us to determine;

whether it was only God's withdrawing from his human soul the comforts of his sensible presence—his being assaulted and distressed with the infernal suggestions of the devil—his having a lively picture presented to his imagination of the miseries of mankind here, and hereafter, on account of sin, and suffering with them by compassion and sympathy—or, finally, God's positively inflicting upon him, for a season, the same punishment in kind, at least, if not in degree, that should have befallen those for whom he suffered, and which the impenitent still shall for ever endure. This last is by some supposed impossible and contradictory, as much of their misery arises from an evil conscience, from which he was absolutely free; and from despair of mercy, which none will affirm that even God's desertion of him at that awful season did imply. It is probable, there was a mixture of all these particulars in his mingled cup. And, as to the last, I shall only say, that the pain and anguish that follows any reflection of a rational soul is only connected with it by the determination of God the Creator of our spirits: therefore it was certainly in the power of the Almighty to inflict a sense of pain in any kind, or in any degree, on the holy created soul of the man, Christ Jesus. And I see no other contrariety to the divine perfections, in inflicting that very anguish on the holy and innocent Saviour, than in substituting him in our room at all, and bruising him for our iniquities. One thing is certain, that, in his life, and at his death, he suffered what was a full reparation of the dishonor done to God; a sufficient vindication of the purity of his nature and the authority of his broken law, and what purchased pardon and peace, sanctification, and eternal glory, to a whole world of elect sinners.

And now, my brethren, from this view, did not our Redeemer travel in the greatness of his strength? Was it a small strength that could go through all this track of suffering, without sinking in the way? Yet this did he with unshaken constancy; and, as his giving up his life was the last part of it, so he expired not, before he could say, IT IS FINISHED! Well, then, might the answer be given to the question in my text, Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the

greatness of his strength? in the words that follow, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save,"

We proceed to observe in the third place, that the glory of our Redeemer in his sufferings, appears from the purity of his carriage, and the perfection of his patience under them. The former consideration shows his natural strength, (so to speak) and this his moral excellence. Affliction is the touchstone of virtue, tries its sincerity, and illustrates its beauty. Therefore we are told, Heb. 2:10. That it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Nothing could give a greater value to the sacrifice he offered up, than the meekness and patience with which he resigned that life which was not forfeited, but voluntarily surrendered. Isa. 53:7. "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." It is worth while to reflect, on that continued and invincible patience with which he went through the several steps of his sufferings: that reproach and calumny, that contempt and abuse, which he met with from those in whose interest he was so deeply engaged, did not excite his indignation, but his compassion. Luke 19:41. And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." When his ignorant disciples would have defended him from the assaults of his enemies, he says, John 18:11.—"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" When he entered upon the last and heaviest part of his sufferings, and began to feel their anguish, he says, John 12:27, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! but for this cause came I unto this hour." And in that dreadful season, when in the midst of his hardest conflict, this is the form of his prayer, Matth. 26:39. "O my Father! if it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And a little after, verse 42. "O my Father! if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be

done." Was not this divine glory shining through the dark cloud that encompassed him? Was not this the patience of a God? And, in spite of the shame of the cross on which he hung, did it not constrain the centurion that attended his crucifixion to say, "Certainly this was a righteous man! Truly this was the Son of God!"

In the last place, The glory of a suffering Saviour appears from the end he had in view in his sufferings, and which he so effectually obtained. This was none other than the glory of the great God, and the everlasting salvation of elect sinners. It was to do the will of his heavenly Father that he came into the world, and in doing this he delighted. Towards the close of his life he thus addresses his Father, John 17:4, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He not only exhibited a fair and bright image of the divine glory in his personal character, while he dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, but in his work as Mediator, illustrated all the perfections of God; and in particular, glorified his justice and magnified his mercy. If therefore a worthy end beautifies and ennobles any difficult undertaking, this excellent purpose must give dignity to a crucified Saviour.

But ought we not to add, the end so closely connected with this, the salvation of perishing sinners. Is not this a design, of the beauty of which we ought to be particularly sensible? Had not our compassionate Redeemer slept in between us and the stroke of divine justice, we had for ever lain under the wrath of the Almighty. And, Oh, how unable had we been to bear that vengeance which was so heavy to him! How glorious does he appear to the convinced sinner in his red apparel! and what reason has he to say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!"

I shall now conclude this head with observing, that I have all along considered Christ as God and man, in one person, our Mediator. I am sensible, however, he could only suffer in his human nature, and indeed became man that he might be capable of suffering. But it was

the inconceivable union of the human nature with the divine, from which he derived his glory, which gave him strength for suffering, and made his sufferings of value sufficient for the purchase of our redemption.

I come, now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And,

1st, We are, here, called to admire and adore the unsearchable wisdom, and unspeakable love of God. There is a boundless depth in all the works and ways of God, and particularly here. Upon a slight view, we may be apt to take offence at the cross; to hide our faces from him; to be disgusted at an incarnate God, the Lord of glory, despised and trampled on by a proud Pharisee; the Creator of the ends of the earth standing at the judgment feat of a weak mortal; and the Author of life giving up the ghost. But, upon a nearer inspection, must we not admire the harmony of the divine attributes, in our redemption, upon this plan? that these perfections which seem to limit each other in their exercise, should be, in conjunction, more illustriously displayed: that God's infinite holiness, and abhorrence of sin, nay, his impartial justice, should be more displayed in the pardon than the condemnation of the sinner: that so signal a defeat should be given to the enemy of souls, even when he seemed exulting in the success of his designs: that our Lord, by death, should destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and, by being listed up from the earth, as unworthy of a place on it, he should draw all men unto him, joining thus the extremities of glory and baseness, power and humiliation, and travelling in the greatness of his strength. This, without doubt, shall afford subject for the adoring inquiry of glorified saints to eternal ages; and we ought to begin it here, saying with the Psalmist, Psal. 72:17, "His name shall endure forever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed!"

2dly, Suffer me to improve the subject, by shewing the guilt and danger of all who are not reconciled to God, especially those, who, by

continuing in unbelief and impenitence, shall die in that condition. There is nothing we can more justly infer from what hath been said, than the holiness of God, and his detestation of sin. Such is the hardness of heart of many sinners, and such their partiality to themselves, that it is a matter of the utmost difficulty to convince them either of their guilt or danger. But, if you have any belief in the truths of the gospel, if you believe the certainty of that transaction which we are this day to commemorate, with what fear and trembling ought you to reflect upon the justice of God? If he punished sin so severely in the person of his own Son, how shall he punish it in the persons of the finally impenitent? If a temporary suffering of the wrath of God was so terrible to him, who travelled through it in the greatness of his strength, what shall it be to those who shall lie under it to eternity, without the least ray of hope or consolation? what shall it be to those who shall have nothing to support them in their unchangeable abode, but an accusing conscience, and despair of mercy?

I cannot help observing, hear it, O sinners, and tremble! that a despised gospel shall be an aggravation of the guilt, and an addition to the misery, of all to whom it was offered, Heb. 2:2. "For, if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"—Heb. 10:28, 29. He that despised Moses' law died, without mercy, under two or three witness: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" The severity of the punishment of sinners rejecting the gospel, shall bear a just proportion to the love and mercy of God manifested in that dispensation. If these are justly called unspeakably great, the other must be inconceivably dreadful. Every drop of that blood, which was spilt in behalf of sinners, shall be as oil to the flames that consume the impenitent, and make them burn with greater fierceness, to all the ages of eternity. Remember, I beseech you, that our Saviour shall

continue in the character of administrator of the covenant of grace, till the final doom of sinners be ordained. The same person, whose soul was made an offering for sin, and who groaned on Calvary, shall, one day, come in his own and in his Father's glory, attended with his angels, as the ministers of his justice; then "every eye shall see him, and those also that pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Then how shall his enemies stand before him, when those who came to apprehend him fell to the ground, at his word, even in his humiliation? Those who obstinately refuse to be the trophies of his grace, shall then be the monuments of his vengeance. It is very remarkable, that as the nation of the Jews were a people uncommonly favored of God, particularly by the enjoyment of the personal ministry of Christ, and hearing the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth; so, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, by rejecting him, the judgment that fell upon them was the most signal, and terrible, and lasting, that ever was inflicted on any people. In this they were an example of the fate of a whole world of sinners; and, indeed, the destruction of Jerusalem is described in such terms as do naturally suggest to us the final judgment of the world, and teach us what to expect, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Now the Saviour is in the posture of a humble supplicant, standing at the door of many hard hearts, and knocking, and asking admission. Now does he earnestly beseech you, by his mercies, to be reconciled to God; but then shall he put on the frowns and terrors of a judge; and how shall they be able to lift up their eyes towards him, who now trample upon his love? See a representation of this matter, Rev. 6:14, 15, 16, 17. "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places: and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, bid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the

mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand!" It is remarkable, that the wrath here spoken of, is called the wrath of the Lamb. Strange expression indeed! but strongly signifying, that his present meekness, and patience, and suffering shall inflame and exasperate his future vengeance. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, I would beseech every sinner in this assembly, to consider the things that belong to his peace—that the same strength and power of our Redeemer, that was evident in his suffering in our stead, that is evident in working out the salvation of his own people, shall also be evident in the judgment of his enemies. Psal. 2:11, 12. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

In the 3d place, I would improve this subject, for the encouragement of sinners to return to God through Christ. It was for this very end, that God laid help upon One that is mighty, and raised up a chosen One out of the people. Is there, then, among you, an awakened sinner, who trembles at the prospect of Divine wrath, upon whose heart God, in his mercy, has carried home a conviction of his lost state, and who is crying out, What shall I do to be saved! Behold, here, the peace-speaking blood of the Lamb of God! Behold, here, not only your ransom paid, and justice fully satisfied, but a powerful, an Almighty Saviour, able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him! He has gone through his work, in the greatness of his strength! He hath foiled your spiritual enemies, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross! My brethren there is the greater need earnestly to intreat your attention to this, that a slothful despondency, and diffidence of success, is what keeps many sinners from a hearty return to God. There is more of this in the hearts of many than they themselves are aware of: I do not mean despair of mercy alone, but despair of recovery from a state of sin, of deliverance from the bondage of corruption, and attaining to the

disposition and character of God's children. Are there not many of you, my brethren, who, though you, in some measure, see the excellence and happiness of a state of savor with God and holy conformity to his will, yet finding how strongly you are wedded to the world and its sinful enjoyments, and knowing, by experience, the unsuccessfulness of former resolutions taken in your own strength, you have no hope of success, and so, in a sullen obstinacy, refuse to attempt what you think you cannot accomplish? Do you not see, from what hath been said, both your former error, and what is now the proper cure? You can do nothing of yourselves; but through Christ strengthening you, you may do all things. He is an Almighty Saviour: he is stronger than the strong man who detains you in bondage: he is able to knock off the strongest fetters, and let the prisoners go free. Wherefore, I beseech you, my dear friends, as you value your everlasting interest, that you do not sit still and perish, but arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with you.

In the 4th place, the same instruction, with little difference, may be given to the people of God. As self-righteousness and self-confidence, are the ruling characters of the unregenerate: so they are diseases never entirely cured in this world, even in the best, and lamentably prevalent in many of God's own children. As their work is to obtain a victory over their corruptions and grow in the exercise of every Christian grace, they often attempt both these, too much in their own strength. As the natural and unavoidable consequence of this, they meet with frequent disappointments; these make them ready to sit down in slothful carelessness, and decline the struggle to which they find themselves unequal, nay, too often not without secret murmurings and complaints against God, as a hard master, requiring bricks, and giving no straw; instead of concluding, from their unsuccessfulness, that they must have taken their measures wrong, they conclude the attempt itself to be vain, and the work impracticable. But, my brethren, here is a truth, which not only the word of God every where teaches, but which almost every part of his Providence towards us is intended to ratify, that in us dwelleth no good thing; that we can hardly have too low an opinion of our own

worth, or our own strength; but, at the same time, that God is able and willing to perfect strength in our weakness. He is able to uphold the weakest self-denied Christian in the midst of the most dangerous temptations, though he often suffers the self-sufficient to fall before his enemies. Wherefore, my dear friends, believe in the Almighty power of your Redeemer; and I hope you will know to your experience, that "he giveth power to the saint, and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength."

In the 5th place, suffer me to improve this subject, for the comfort and refreshment of every disconsolate and mourning soul. As weary and heavy laden sinners are the persons to whom the call of the gospel is addressed, so surely it also speaks peace to weary and heavy laden saints. This world was plainly designed as a place of trial and discipline, and not of complete rest to the children of God. It often pleases him, in his sovereign and holy providence, not only to afflict them with outward trials, but to hide his face from them, and visit them with distress of soul. May not all such see, from what has been said, that they are but conformed to their Redeemer; that they are but treading in the path which he hath sanctified: and is it not "enough for the disciple, that he be as his Master, and for the servant, that he be as his Lord?" It would be a great point gained, if we could but be convinced, that afflictions are what we must look for, and so not hastily and rashly conclude, that he is "rebuking us in his wrath, and chastening us in his hot displeasure." Is it not comfortable, and is it not true, that Christ hath taken away the sting of death, and of every suffering from his people, and left nothing but that correction which is healthful and necessary? Above all, ought you not to look to the power of your Redeemer, and his almighty strength, as sufficient to support you now, and at last work your complete deliverance? Banish every thought that tends to represent your case, either as singular to abate your sense of the divine goodness, or as desperate to weaken your hands in seeking relief; and make your request to God, "with strong crying and tears, that he, as the God of hope, would fill you with all joy, and peace in believing, that you may rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

6th. I shall now conclude all, with an earnest invitation to all intending communicants, to come to the table of the Lord, and, by faith, to feed upon the rich entertainment that is there provided for them. See here the price of your redemption; the evidence and security of your pardon; the seal of God's love to you; and the certain pledge of every necessary blessing. "It pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell, and of his fulness you may all receive, and grace for grace." His body, broken, is the bread of life, that must nourish your souls to their everlasting state. His blood, shed, is a never failing cordial to a broken spirit, and a most excellent refreshment to the soul that pants in a parched wilderness. May the Lord himself meet with us and bless us, visit us with his gracious presence, and make us joyful in his house of prayer. Amen.

SERMON III

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN

But exhort one another daily, while it is called to day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of Sin. HEBREWS 3:13

WE see many mysterious things in the frame of nature, and the course of Providence. But nothing can be more mysterious and wonderful than what we may often see in the state of our own hearts. When there is no present solliciting temptation, and when we consider, in a cool and deliberate manner, the consequences of vice and wickedness, even barely from the dictates of natural conscience, it seems surprizing, that, in any instance, we should yield to it; that we should be induced to break the peace of our own minds, and provoke the vengeance of an Almighty Judge; nay, to do so for a trifling, momentary, and uncertain satisfaction. But if it be unreasonable to offend God at all, and to take but a few steps in the paths of sin, how much more above measure astonishing is it, that men should adhere to their former mistakes, and should not open their eyes after repeated admonitions of their danger, and daily experience of their own folly!

I believe every body will be sensible, that many sinners, even setting aside the consideration of some of the most important religious truths, act in a manner so directly opposite to their own present interest as is not to be accounted for, without supposing them under an amazing degree of blindness and infatuation. This is to be resolved into the deceitfulness of sin, a circumstance on this great subject well worthy of our most serious attention.

In entering on the deceitfulness of sin, let us reflect a little on the meaning of the expression. Who is it that is deceived; It is the sinner

himself. Does he need to be deceived? Is there not in us all a strong enough direct inclination to that which is evil, ready to burst asunder every restraining tie? There is so; and yet there is more in our danger than merely a propensity to sin. There is also a deceit and imposition which over-reaches us, and insnares us into the commission of what, but for that mistake, we would have avoided or abhorred. There is very frequent mention made of this in scripture; many cautions against being deceived; and indeed all sin is represented as error and delusion, in which a deceived heart hath turned us aside.

Again, if the sinner is deceived, who is it, or what is it that deceives him? Here we must observe, that when we speak of sin's being deceitful, it is not so much any thing without us, taking the advantage of our weakness, but it is the effect and evidence of the strength of corruption within us, which makes us see things in a wrong light and draw unjust and pernicious consequences from them. Let us always remember, that the whole frame of nature, although it be the scene of temptation, and even the fuel of concupiscence, is faultless in itself; nay it presents us every where with lessons of piety and obedience to its Author. The mistake here arises wholly from ourselves. There is a remarkable difference between the deceitfulness of sin and deceit of any other kind; in worldly transactions, the person deceived is never supposed unfaithful to himself, but is imposed on by the superior art and cunning of the deceiver. But it is otherwise in spiritual matters, where the deceitfulness of sin is but another form of speech for the corruption and treachery of our own hearts. It is true, in some instances of delusion, there is an activity of outward agents, if I may speak so, the devil and wicked men, who use no little industry to seduce others, and lie in wait to deceive; but this, if I mistake not, does not belong properly to the deceitfulness of sin, which lies in the disposition of our own hearts, and is what lays us open to their snares.

I shall only further observe, by way of introduction, that this subject is equally applicable to good men and bad. Both ought to dread, and

both ought to be warned of the deceitfulness of sin; it betrays good men into distress, as well as bad men into ruin.

In further discoursing on this subject, I shall,

I. Endeavor to open a little the chief branches of the deceitfulness of sin.

II. Consider the duty sounded upon it, of exhorting one another daily.

III. Make some practical improvement of the subject.

First, then, I shall endeavor to open a little the chief branches of the deceitfulness of sin: And I think the deceitfulness of sin may be divided into these three general branches. 1. Its disguising itself, and wholly concealing its nature. 2. Its forming excuses for itself, and thereby extenuating its guilt. 3. Its insinuating itself by degrees, and leading men on from the voluntary commission of some sins to the necessity of committing more.

1st, then, The deceitfulness of sin appears from its disguising itself, and wholly concealing its nature. Though the great lines of the law of God are written upon the conscience in so strong and legible characters, that it is difficult wholly to efface them, yet it is plain that men have often brought this about to a surprising degree. The Psalmist David, sensible how often sin is concealed from our own view, exclaims, Psal. 19:12, "Who can understand his errors! cleanse thou me from secret faults." What ingenious reasonings do men often use with their own minds to prove the lawfulness of what inclination leads them to, either with respect to profit or pleasure? When the heart pleads the cause, the understanding is a very favorable judge. Every one may find a great number of examples of this in his own experience, and may daily see the unhappy effects of it in others.

For the better illustrating of this truth, that sin is often wholly concealed, even from the man in whom it dwells, be pleased to attend to the following observations:

(1.) Sometimes it shows itself in the prevalence of loose principles. I am sorry to say, that we live in an age in which infidelity of the grossest kind, is spreading its poison among all ranks and degrees of men. But why is it so readily entertained? Because it either sets men at liberty from the ties of conscience and a future reckoning altogether; or greatly narrows the extent, and weakens the obligations of the law of God. How sweet and palatable to the corrupt mind is every thing that removes restraints, and suffers the sinner to walk in the ways of his own heart, and the sight of his own eyes? It is not reason, but inclination, that makes proselytes to these destructive doctrines. The truth is, would you reason impartially, you would conclude that the principles must be false which tend to set men at ease in their crimes. When therefore the arguments in their favor are so easily admitted, we have just ground to affirm that it is owing to the deceitfulness of sin.

(2.) If we proceed from principles to practice, and from generals to particulars, we shall find how sin disguises itself, and hides its deformity from our view. It never appears in its own proper and genuine dress, nor loves to be called by its proper name. Thus excess and intemperance is called, and unhappily thought by many, a social disposition and good fellowship. Pride and unchristian resentment, is called honor, spirit, and dignity of mind. Vain pomp, luxury, and extravagance, are styled taste, elegance, and refinement. Sordid avarice and love of money, calls itself prudence, frugality, and good management. Levity, folly, and even obscenity, is often called innocent liberty, cheerfulness, and good humor. So great is the deceit, and so secure does the sin lie under its disguise, that a minister may preach with the utmost severity against these several vices, and the guilty persons hear with patience or approbation, and never once think of applying it to themselves.

This deceit discovers itself also by its counterpart. How common is it to stigmatize and disparage true piety and goodness by the most opprobrious titles. Tenderness of conscience, is, by many, reproached under the character of preciseness and narrowness of mind. Zeal against sin, and fidelity to the souls of others, is called sourness, moroseness, and ill nature. There was never yet a faithful reprovener, from Lot in Sodom to the present day, but he suffered under the reproach and slander of those who would not be reclaimed. I might easily run over many more instances in both these kinds; for, to say the truth, the whole strain of fashionable conversation is often nothing else but an illusion put upon the mind, that it may lose its horror of vice; and it is greatly to be lamented, that this is done with so much success. In many cases, young persons especially, are inspired with a hatred and aversion at true and undefiled religion, and that under the most plausible pretences. Many, my brethren, there are who are far from thinking it themselves, and yet fall under the denunciation of the Prophet Isaiah. 5:20–24. "Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Wo unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Wo unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

(3.) But the highest degree of this branch of the deceitfulness of sin, is, when it not only puts on a decent and lawful appearance, but assumes the garb of eminent piety and worth. There is nothing impossible in this. As Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, so some of the greatest sins will take the name, and arrogate the honor, of the most distinguished virtues. I do not here mean the case of gross hypocrisy; that is foreign from the present

subject. Hypocrites know their own insincerity well enough, and only put on an appearance of piety to deceive others. But even when there is no known or deliberate hypocrisy, sin may insinuate itself under the appearance of the most important duties. Men may indulge the most hateful passions with the greater liberty, when they think they are doing what is acceptable to God.

The cross of our blessed Master is full fraught with instruction of every kind. It gives us, particularly, a striking example of what I have now said. His enemies, who persecuted him with unrelenting malice through his life, and at last prevailed to have him hanged on a tree, did it, some, no doubt, from a pretended, but many of them from a misguided zeal for religion. He was crucified as a deceiver and a blasphemer; and that in this they were misled, appears from the language of his prayer for them on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." What a conviction should this give us of the deceitfulness of sin; that the greatest sin that ever was committed on earth, was yet considered, by the guilty, as a duty!

Let us also consider our Saviour's remarkable prediction on the same subject, and how often it hath been fulfilled: John 16:2. "They shall put you out of the synagogues! yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service." My brethren, think a little on the many dreadful persecutions which good men have endured for conscience sake; the terrible tortures they have been exposed to, in which the utmost invention of the human mind has been employed to aggravate their distress. Think, in particular, of the horrible tribunal of inquisition, which is, to this day, in full authority in countries not very distant; and does it not inspire you with the highest detestation of the bloody tyrants? But there is another reflection not so frequently made, yet at least equally proper. How great is the deceitfulness of sin in the human heart, that can make men suppose that such atrocious crimes are acceptable to God? Yet they certainly do so. Neither would it be possible for them, so entirely to divest themselves of every sentiment of humanity, if they were not inflamed by the rage of bigotry and false zeal. Let not any

imagine, that these are dreadful crimes, but which they are not in the least danger of. We ought to maintain the greatest watchfulness and jealousy over our own spirits. It may very easily, and does very frequently happen, that an apparent zeal for religion is more than half composed of pride, malice, envy, or revenge.

Nor is this all. In the above cases, by the treachery of the human heart, sins are changed into duties, and, in many others, every day, duties are changed into sins, by the perversion of the principle from which they ought to flow. Many a sober, temperate person, oweth his regularity more to a lust of gold, than to any sense of duty and obedience to God. The desire of praise, or the fear of reproach, is many times a restraint more powerful than the apprehension of eternal judgment. Men may put one duty also in the place of another, and by that means convert it into sin. Nay, with regard to all our duties, we may be tempted to place that trust and dependance on them which is only due to our Redeemer's perfect righteousness; and, instead of acts of obedience, make them idols of jealousy before God.

How great then the deceitfulness of sin, which is capable of putting on so many and such artful disguises, and even to counterfeit true piety, which stands in the most immediate and direct opposition to it! There are more ways than I can possibly enumerate, by which men deceive themselves, and become obstinate and incorrigible in what is evil, by mistaking it for what is good. Justly does the Apostle, in this passage, warn Christians against being hardened; for if sin can hardly be restrained, even by the most constant vigilance, and the most steady resistance, what progress will it not make, what strength must it not acquire, when it is approved and cherished, nay, when it is prosecuted with all that care and attention which ought to have been employed for its utter destruction?

2. In the second place, The deceitfulness of sin, appears from its forming excuses for itself, and thereby extenuating its guilt. That it is natural for sinners to form excuses for themselves, and endeavor to

extenuate their guilt, daily experience is a sufficient proof. Nay, it is usual to observe, how able, and ingenious, persons, otherwise of no great capacity, are in this art; even children discover the greatest quickness and facility in it, and are no sooner challenged for any thing that is amiss, than they are ready to produce an apology. The disposition, indeed, seems to be hereditary, and to have been handed down to us from the first parents of the human race. On their being challenged for their disobedience, each of them confesses the fact, but immediately adds an excuse, Gen. 3:11, 12, 13. "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldest not eat; And the man said, the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, what is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." You will easily be sensible, that it is impossible for me to enumerate the several excuses, or distinct alleviating circumstances, that may be pleaded in favor of particular sins, because these are infinitely various. I intend, therefore, only to mention some of the chief considerations that are offered by pretended reasoners, or which have a secret influence upon the mind of the sinner; and which lessen the impression of the evil of sin in general.

(1.) One excuse, which, however weak, has no small influence in setting men's minds at ease in the commission of sin, is no other than the commonness of it; and that there are multitudes of others in the like condition. It is wonderful to think what boldness sinners often derive from this circumstance, and how hard it is to persuade them of the danger of what is common and generally practised. Even good men are often carried away with prevailing and epidemical sins. We may take the illustration of this from any particular sin. How ready are men to think, and even to speak, in the following manner? If this be a sin, I am sure I am not singular in it; there are many others guilty as well as I. They seem to look upon the practice of others, as a sort of support and justification of their own conduct.

But, my brethren, I beseech you to consider how delusive and dangerous these thoughts are to your immortal souls. If any credit is to be given to the scripture representation, the human race, in general, is under guilt: and therefore, the commonness, nay, the universality of any practice, is not sufficient to give it a sanction, as lawful and safe, Will the law of an unchangeable, God be altered or abated in favor of his apostate creatures, because of their number? Is there such a number of offenders, as to be able to make head against their almighty Creator? Sometimes, indeed, the transgressors of human laws are so numerous, as to be formidable to their very judges; but no such thing can take place here. Or will it, in truth, be any consolation to the sufferers in hell, that they have society in their torment? Were a great number of malefactors to be executed together, would this alleviate the punishment to any one of them? I apprehend it would rather increase it, since they would, in a good measure, feel each others sufferings; as it certainly would add greater horror to the sight. Wherefore, my dear brethren, I beseech every one of you, to consider the necessity of reconciliation and peace with God, and that it is not less important and necessary to you, on account of the multitudes you see around you so fast asleep in security and sloth.

(2.) Another excuse that men often make for their sins, is, that they are comparatively small. When they see, think, or hear of the monstrous and atrocious crimes of others, they are ready to bless themselves in their security, and to reckon upon their less degree of guilt, as a species of innocence. Believe it, my brethren, I have found, with concern, persons in a dangerous sickness, or the prospect of death, taking comfort to themselves, and mentioning, with much satisfaction, that they were not so bad as some others; that they had never committed this or the other heinous crime; that they had never done as this or the other desperate profligate had done, with whom they were acquainted. To all such we may justly apply the words of the apostle, 2 Cor. 10:12. "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves:

but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves, are not wise."

There is a wonderful propensity in the proud spirit of man, to gratify itself by comparison with others. Comparison, indeed, is the very fuel of pride; for of what are we proud, but of something in which it is supposed we excel. Is there any thing more common in conversation, when any instance of the sin or folly of others is narrated, than for the hearers, every one, to take the benefit of it to himself, and to say, I am sure I should never have done so and so, had I been in his case. Scarce any man finds fault with another for his conduct in his station, without blazoning and displaying his own real or imagined excellence. I do not say, that good men are wholly free from this fault; yet, as the principles of sin and grace are directly opposite, in general, the same views that make a bad man proud, tend to make a good man humble.—The gross sins of others, which incline careless persons to glory, that they are free from the charge, often tend to discover to the Christian the sinfulness of his nature, which is capable of such impiety. They fill him with humble adoration, and thankfulness to that gracious God, who only maketh him to differ. He knows, that had he been left to himself, he might have exceeded the most abandoned profligate within the compass of his knowledge.

Let me therefore, my brethren, caution you and myself against all excuses drawn from comparison in any form. For, not to mention how ready we are to mistake and be partial to ourselves in making the comparison: not to mention that, though we were ever so impartial, as the hearts of others are not open to us, nor the motives of their conduct, we cannot make it with certainty: I only insist, that all comparisons, whether they be just or unjust, are unspeakably pernicious. It is not your being better or worse than others, that will justify you before God, or be the matter of inquiry at the last day. You will not then be asked, whether you were as profane a blasphemer as such a person? as great a liar as another? as great a drunkard as another? as great a whoremonger as another? No. You must be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and all that are there found

wanting, shall be cast into the lake of fire. You may leave it to a wise and righteous God to proportion the severity of his judgment to the atrociousness of the sinner's guilt. "But except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." A man may be drowned in five fathom water, as well as in five thousand; and, therefore, let none foolishly flatter themselves with the hope of security, even though they really see many (to speak in the language of scripture) "tenfold more the children of hell than themselves."

(3.) Sinners are apt to look for another source of excuses for their sins in themselves. They are strongly inclined to make a merit of any actions they have done that are materially good, and think that some indulgence is due to their faults and miscarriages on that account. They set their good works and their faults, as it were, in opposite columns, as if they intended, in that manner, to strike the balance. There is very much of this disposition in the natural unenlightened mind. We find many sentiments similar to this in the heathen world. 'Every man,' says a certain author, 'has some virtues, and some faults; he that hath more virtues than faults, is a good man; and he that hath more faults than virtues, is a bad man.' I am sensible there might be some justice in such a comparison, after a person has really been brought to the service of God upon genuine principles. It might then serve to shew whether God or the world hath most of our prevailing love, and our habitual service. But this rule is highly pernicious, when an ignorant or vicious man endeavors to apply it: for, first of all, these very actions, which they suppose to be good, not flowing from a real principle of obedience to God, are falsely reckoned virtues in them. O that self-righteous persons would but faithfully examine the motives from which many of their boasted virtues flow! The more they knew of themselves, and their own real character, the less would they be inclined to glory in its excellence and perfection. It is certain, that even in the world, the more a man presumes to commend himself, the less others are disposed to esteem him; and is it not strange, that the self-justification, which is insufferable to our fellow creatures, should be the foundation of our hope before a holy and heart-searching God?

But, besides, I beseech your attention to the following circumstance: even the false supposition, just now mentioned, proceeds upon an absolute mistake of the nature of moral obligation. There is no proper merit in the obedience of a creature, neither hath it, in the least degree, any title or tendency to extinguish the guilt of crimes. If esteem, love, and obedience, all in the highest degree, be truly and properly due unto God, no reward can be pleaded for on account of the performance, much less can it have the effect of procuring pardon where duty hath been neglected. Let me beg of you to reflect upon a matter of experience, which is but seldom attended to. Does the general goodness of a man's character incline even the world to indulge him in more bad actions than another? It does just the contrary. A man, who hath been eminent in piety during a long course of years, if he goes astray in any one instance, will be more deeply reproached, and his character will suffer more by it, I may even say, it will suffer an hundred-fold more for the fame action, than the character of another whose conduct has been more imperfect and unequal.

I look upon it as the duty of a minister to bend his whole force against a disposition to self-righteousness. And, indeed, whether we take it from scripture or reason, we shall see that the hope of a sinner must arise not from extenuation, but confession; not from human merit, but from the divine mercy. This is so plain, that had men but any real and just convictions of their obligations and duty to God, such a plea would never come into their minds. Suppose any person were challenged for a debt which he really owed, and he should answer in this manner, It is very true, I have not paid this; but I paid a debt to you at such a time, and another at such a time, and a third at such a time; would it not be natural for the other to reply, True indeed; but were not all these debts separately due? will your paying one discharge you from another? is not this as much due now as any of the rest were before? If therefore you will give the fame justice to your Maker that you expect: from another, you must confess that a whole life of perfect and spotless obedience would do just nothing at all to extinguish the guilt of the lead sin. Be not therefore so foolish

as to rest your hope on that self-righteousness, which, in truth, is no better than filthy rags, and however excellent and perfect it were, could have no effect in procuring the forgiveness of sin.

(4.) There are some to be found, who endeavor to excuse their actual transgressions, as being no more than the necessary effects of original sin. This we find frequently done by those who are no friends to religion in general, and, perhaps, believe as little of the reality of original as the guilt of actual sin. In such, therefore, it is no more than a pretence, that they may rid themselves of the apprehension of both. But there are also some who do not seem to be enemies in principle to the truths of the gospel, who yet are very ready to excuse themselves for particular sins, by laying the blame upon their nature in general. It is my nature, they will say; I have so strong a disposition to it, that I cannot help it. Thus they seem to sit quite easy under the dominion of sin, and, by giving up all hope of overcoming it, are led to forbear all endeavors to resist it.

On this I cannot help observing, again, how opposite the principles of sin and holiness are. The sin of our nature, which, in true penitents, is matter of humiliation and sorrow, is often produced by others, as an extenuation of their crimes. See how the Psalmist David expresses himself, Psal. 51:5. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." These words were not spoken by way of alleviation, but confession and aggravation. In the same spirit does the apostle Paul speak in a great part of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, particularly verses 14–24. "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law, that it is good. Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that

when I would do good, evil is present with me: for I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

That there is something mysterious in the first occasion and conveyance of original sin, on which captious persons may raise cavils, to perplex themselves and others, I readily allow. But, after all they can say, it is certain, both from scripture and experience, that all actual sin is not only personal but voluntary. Is there any person, who will dare to maintain, in the face of his Supreme Judge, that he is laid under compulsion, or an irresistible necessity, to think, speak, or do what is wrong? Does any man commit sin, but from his own choice? Or is he hindered from the performance of any duty to which he is sincerely and heartily inclined? If this were indeed the case, it would not be true, what we are told in the sacred oracles, that God will be "just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth."

I must also observe, that, upon the plan of the gospel, the force of this excuse is entirely taken away; because the renovation of our natures is there ascribed to the power and energy of divine grace. Though we are not able to reform our natures, God is able to renew them. Though we cannot resist corruption, God is able to subdue it. Our weak and helpless state by nature, is so far from being a proper excuse for sin, that a just and humbling sense of it is the very first step towards a recovery. "Of ourselves, we are not able to do any good thing, but through Christ strengthening us we may do all things." We are exhorted to pray for the influences of the Spirit, in the sure hope of acceptance: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." So that, on the prevailing of sin, we have just reason to take the whole blame upon ourselves, and to say, "We are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels."

(5.) In the last place, some are bold enough to excuse their sins, as being only the effects of the irresistible will of God, who hath decreed whatsoever comes to pass; some in a more artful and covered way; and some more openly and explicitly make use of God's absolute pre-determination of every event, as taking away the guilt of their voluntary actions. This hath been a very old excuse. It was the spirit of that language you find, Ezek. 33:10. "Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, thus ye speak, saying, if our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" The same thing is mentioned by the apostle Paul, Rom. 9:19. "Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" This infamous and blasphemous excuse is not only often made for particular sins, but is made a pillow of sloth in general, and sinners lay themselves asleep upon it in security, saying, if it be the will of God, they should be saved, the event is infallible, let them take ever so desperate a course; and if otherwise, it is impossible for them to oppose his irresistible decree.

In order to oppose this profane perversion of divine truth, let me put you in mind, what sin and folly it must be in us, to set the nature of God at variance with his revealed will, or one declaration of his in opposition to another. It is from the scriptures alone, that you learn God's supreme dominion and appointment of every event. And is it not certain, that the same scriptures do lay the guilt or sinfulness of every action to the sinner's charge? Does not God absolutely refuse, nay, in infinite condescension, he solemnly protests against having it imputed to himself. Let the guilty hear and tremble, Ezek. 33:11. "As I live, faith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel!" And again, James 1:13. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Perhaps, some will say, we cannot reconcile the certainty of events with the freedom of actions, or the imputation of guilt. But what is this, but saying we are not able to fathom or

comprehend the perfections of an infinite God? And is this any cause of wonder? It would not be the true God, if you could search him out; it would not be the Almighty, if you could find him to perfection. "It is higher than heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

Surely, my brethren, it is manifest, that the same God, to whom all his works are known from the beginning of the world, and who rules by his power for ever, hath established a necessary connexion between the means and the end, between the cause and effect. And, as it would be altogether madness in common life, to sit still and forbear activity and diligence, under pretence of its being impossible to hinder or alter the will of God; so it is equally mad and impious, to lay the blame of our sinful hearts and inclinations on the appointment of God. He can and doth control and over-rule, by his sovereign providence, all his creatures and all their actions, in a subserviency to his own glory; but, as to the sinfulness of every deed, the sinner alone is chargeable with it, and in the day of judgment, the sinner alone must answer for it.

Before I proceed to the third branch of the deceitfulness of sin, I must beg your attention to a few observations on what hath been already said. And,

1st, You may observe how various and involved, and how deep-laid the excuses for sin are. The ways of the world, the general prevalence of sin, and many of those very circumstances which ought to make us dread its influence, and fill us with abhorrence of it, are frequently made use of to extenuate its guilt. The corrupt inclination of our hearts, which is the source of all sin, and may be said to be the essence of sin, is often made use of to excuse or palliate its effects, as the badness of the tree for the sourness of the grapes. How ill qualified are we to judge fairly on such a subject? We are partial in our own cause, and give an unjust decision from our relation to the pannel. Down then with the reasonings of the carnal mind. Suspect

them, dread them, shut your ears against them. What reason is there to fit down in silence, and humbly acquiesce in the account given us of our character, and state, by a God of infinite holiness? There is no error to blind his judgment, no interest to bias his inclination, and there is no equal who may contend or enter into judgment with him.

2dly, You may see that the excuses for sin, are not only insufficient, but deeply criminal. In the form they assume, they may appear plausible; but, when they are stripped of their disguise, they will appear to be horrible. The immediate pretence may appear to have nothing very atrocious in it; but when they are traced to their source, they will be found to take their rise from the most malignant infidelity or atheism in the heart. You see, from what has been said, that many excuses for sin, at last, land in laying the blame upon God himself. All the encouragement we take in sin from the divine patience, all our abuse or perversion of the gifts of nature, or the course of providence, lands ultimately here. Let us therefore pray, that it may please God to open our eyes on the wonders of his law, on the riches of his grace, and the greatness of his power. Let us confess, that "to us belongeth shame and confusion of face; but to our God belongeth mercy." Let us adopt the words of the Psalmist, Psalm 19:12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

3. I proceed, now, to the third and last branch of the deceitfulness of sin, viz. Its insinuating nature, by which it leads men on, in an insensible manner, from one degree of wickedness to a higher, and, after the voluntary commission of some sins, lays them under a sort of necessity of committing more. I think it is probable that the apostle had this particularly in his view in the text, where he says, Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. And certain it is, my brethren, that wicked men do not see the whole course they are to run at one view, but are drawn in by little and little. Take the most abandoned sinner in this guilty world, and there was a time of his life when he would have trembled to think of the crimes which he

afterwards committed. Thus Hazael, King of Syria, when he was told by the prophet Elisha, of the unnatural barbarity and cruelty he would be guilty of among the children of Israel, he could not believe so ill of himself, but answered, with a kind of abhorrence, "What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" But such is the nature of sin, that it carries men away, if they yield to it, infinitely farther than they themselves intended. We find this taken notice of by moral writers in every age and country. Many of the ancients used to represent it by a very expressive similitude, viz. that the way of vice lies down hill; so that if you take but a few steps, the motion is soon accelerated, and becomes so violent and impetuous, that it is impossible for you to resist it.

This is certainly a circumstance, with respect to the nature of sin, which lies at the foundation of practical religion, and to which I would particularly intreat the attention of the younger part of my audience. Neither is it unsuitable to persons of any character, as it will contribute to enforce upon their minds, a sense of the necessity of constant vigilance, and of constant prayer. In order to represent the matter to you in the stronger light, I shall endeavor to lay before you some of the chief steps and gradations by which a sinner is brought into a hardened state; and show how naturally, and in a manner necessarily, they lead him forward from one to another.

(1.) Men enter and initiate themselves in a vicious practice by smaller sins. Though every sin hath that malignity in it that it deserves God's wrath and curse both in this life and that which is to come, yet there are some sins, which, in themselves, as well as from several circumstances which attend them, are far more heinous in the sight of God than others. These are too alarming to the conscience of a young sinner; and, therefore, he only ventures upon such as are smaller at first. I hope you will not think it too minute or trifling, if I mention that every particular kind of vice creeps in, in this gradual manner. Many have begun to steal, with taking away things without their parents knowledge from their own house, thinking there could be little fault in this; and then picked up small things, perhaps, from

people of better rank, saying to themselves, they will never be the worse of it, they can easily spare it; but time has perfected them in their trade, till they ended their days upon a scaffold. Some have begun with little arts of equivocation, and concealing the truth, who, in time, came to boldness and obstinacy in gross falsehood. And many have begun with levity of carriage, and vanity of dress, who have ended in lust, whoredom, and open prostitution. My brethren, though we are all born in sin, and powerfully inclined to that which is evil, from our first entrance into the world; yet we have also a witness for God in our own consciences. There seems to be some reluctance in the first commission of sin; some sorrow and regret for departing innocence. It is a saying of one of the heathens, "No man becomes all of a sudden very wicked!" or, if I may use the expression, is made perfect in sin. It usually takes some time, and is carried on by progress and improvement, though some, alas! make wonderful proficiency in it, and advance at a very great pace. These lesser sins, then, are the introduction and preparation for what afterwards shall follow; they begin the attack upon conscience, which, at last, ends in a total overthrow and defeat.

(2.) Let us now follow the sinner to the next stage of his unhappy course. Having once begun in the ways of sin, he ventures upon something greater and more daring; his courage grows with his experience; and he gives himself more liberty to walk in the ways of his own heart, and the sight of his own eyes. Now, sins of a deeper dye do not look so frightful as before. The reason of this is plain, or rather there are many reasons which concur in producing this effect. Custom makes every thing familiar, even to despising the authority of God, and counteracting the strongest obligations. Sinners, after some apprenticeship to this infamous trade, commit such sins as lay waste the conscience, and offer the greatest violence to their own minds; these still lead forward to others, and to every new transgression, if I may speak so, they are driven by a stronger inclination, and with-held by a weaker resistance. No sin comes by itself alone, but stands in close connexion with many others. Some sins teach us how to commit others, as well as afford an opportunity

to do it. I have heard of a servant who went into an apartment with no other intention than to gratify appetite, by making free with some sweet-meats; but happening to see something very valuable lying open, which might be easily concealed, could not resist the temptation, but commenced thief, and, came, at last, to a miserable end. Many sins also bring others after them, as excuses to cover them. So that no person, who once breaks over the limits of clear and unquestionable duty, knows how far he may be carried before he returns back, or rather whether he may not be so deeply involved, as never to return at all. This leads me to observe,

(3.) That open sins soon throw a man into the hands of ungodly companions. This effect is necessary, because they determine his character; and according to the old observation, those of like disposition, by a natural and powerful instinct, are led to associate together. No sooner do men begin to take liberties in their conduct, than they begin to shun the society of good men; the presence of such is a restraint upon them; their example is a reproof to them, and awakens any principle of conscience, which yet remains unsubdued, to reproach and sting them; whereas, in society like themselves, they are greatly emboldened, by seeing vice practised, and by hearing it justified. Behold the sinner, then, with corrupt communication as well as corrupt inclination! The danger of this we are warned of by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 15:33. "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners." As united fires burn the fiercer and the stronger; so a sinful society improves and grows in impiety, and every member joins his brother's pollution to his own. It is not easy to say, how much profane companions are instrumental in reciprocally undoing one another. But surely if those, otherwise virtuous, are often in danger of being led away with the error of the wicked, much more must they who are themselves so disposed, and are every whit as ready to follow a bad advice or example, as others are to give it.

I cannot forbear adding upon this subject, that seriously disposed persons are as much afraid of the society of loose persons, as they are

impatient of theirs. This makes the separation still more complete. And even when they are occasionally joined, the fear of calling their pearls before swine, who may trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend them, often shuts their mouths. It prevents them from giving that salutary instruction, and useful admonition, which their heart might dictate, or the necessity of the case might require. I confess, my brethren, when I consider the unspeakable advantages for true piety, which arise from the relation, the company, or the friendship of eminent Christians, it fills me with the deepest concern for those unhappy persons, who, by their conduct and circumstances, are necessarily deprived of every thing of this kind, nay, are daily exposed to all the contrary snares. I dare say, not a few in this assembly will bear witness, as I desire to do with inward gratitude to God, what infinite benefit arises from the society of the excellent ones of the earth; to have been instructed and trained up by pious parents in the fear of God; to have had your lot cast in a family which was a house of prayer; to have the faithful admonitions of a truly conscientious friend; and to have the daily edifying, restraining, comforting, animating example of an eminent Christian, as well as a share in his fervent prayers. Nay, I will say more, the very precious remembrance of such, after they have entered into rest, whether parents, children, friends, or neighbors, has the noblest and happiest effect in reproofing our sloth, and stirring us up to be "followers of them, who, through faith and patience, do now inherit the promises." How miserable those who are wholly ignorant of every such privilege! How deceitful is sin, which daily administers the most deadly poison, and, at the very same time, closes up the way on every side, and debars the infected victim from every mean that might contribute to his cure!

(4.) In the next stage, the sinner begins to feel the force of habit and inveterate custom. The frequent repetition of acts of sin constitutes a habit. How powerful this is, and hard to be overcome, experience is a daily standing proof. We are warned of the danger of habitual wickedness in many passages of scripture, particularly Jer. 12:5. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then

how canst thou contend with horses? and if, in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Chap. 13:23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Nature itself, in this, as in many other instances, is full of spiritual instruction. Habits of any indifferent kind, when once established, can hardly be overcome even by the greatest effort of resolution; even any motion of the body, or any particular word or phrase in discourse, if once they have taken place by custom, are hardly ever laid down. But, it must be observed, that habits of sin are not only infinitely more hurtful than habits of a common kind, but they are also much more obstinate. They fall in with the bent and disposition of corrupt nature; and, therefore, are like a double cord, not easily broken.

Behold then the sinner rooted and settled in an evil way! Before, it might have been expected, that an awful dispensation of Providence, or the convincing demonstration of the word of God, might have had an effect upon him; but now, though it is still possible, it becomes less and less probable. A tree, when it is newly planted, may be easily removed, or may be overturned by a blast of wind; but, when once it has spread its roots in the ground, and long kept its possession, the most violent tempest may bend its top a little, but cannot shake its firm foundations. So the sinner, that has been long habituated to wickedness, and confirmed by a long course of time, will stand even the storms of affliction, and, if they do bend his haughty spirit, yet they will not break his stubborn heart. I do not mean to set bounds to the almighty power and sovereign grace of God. He, no doubt, may, and, in some instances, has plucked the most advanced sinners as brands out of the fire. But these instances are few and uncommon, for some of the great ends of his government. It is not the ordinary way of his dealing with us; and he hath sufficiently warned us against trusting to it. He hath threatened to make the sinner feel the natural consequence of obstinacy, by ceasing to strive with him, and giving him up to the lusts of his own heart.

It is an awful, but, useful lesson which young persons may learn from what they see in the world about them. Those who have been long habituated to idleness, what a hopeless thing is it to attempt to bring them to apply? Those who have been long habituated to drunkenness and intemperance, or sensuality of any kind, we ought not to say they are inclined to it, but they are compelled to it by the irresistible calls of these appetites which they are no longer able to control. All who observe them, are so sensible of it, that they consider it, as in vain to speak to them, and think they may just as well speak to the wind or the storm: nay, we may often perceive the poor unhappy wretches themselves sensible in some measure, of their captivity, though unable to break the chains that bind them. Some drunkards have been known to be filled with the deepest vexation, and ready to tear their own flesh, on reflection of their beastly condition, and yet drawn, by an irresistible force, to the next temptation — Nothing can set in a clearer light the deceitfulness of sin, than comparing the strength of habits, with the slow and silent manner in which they steal on. One single act of sin seems nothing; but one after another imperceptibly strengthens the disposition, and enslaves the unhappy criminal beyond hope of recovery.

(5.) The next stage in a sinner's course, is, to lose the sense of shame, and sin openly and boldly. Sin is, in itself, a dishonorable thing, which hath, in many instances, the testimony of mankind against it, though their practice be on its side. Hence comes the veil and covering of hypocrisy. Most part of sins are the works of darkness, because they shun the light. But, when once a sinner has come to a certain degree, he throws off every mask or covering, and sins in the face of the sun. He no more seeks darkness for his evil deeds, but walks as "destruction that wasteth at noon-day." The observing eyes, and censuring tongues of men, are, now, no bar in his way; since the strength of inclination and habit is such, that he must indulge himself, he takes courage, and refuses to be restrained.

The prophet Jeremiah mentions it as an evidence of a high degree of degeneracy in the children of Israel, that many of them had lost all

sense of shame, Jeremiah 6:15. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord." And, without all question, it is an evidence on an uncommon height of impiety, when even natural shame is gone; and whoever are in that condition, have lost a very powerful fence to virtue. So long as shame, remains, it is a great draw-back upon them in their licentious practices; but, when it is no more, they are without curb or restraint, they draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin, as it were, with a cart-rope. And that men are naturally carried to this bold and shameless impiety, is evident from the very nature of the thing. Repeated acts of sin, which must be known, offend natural modesty so frequently, and accustom a man so much so shame, that he loses the sense of it in time altogether. Of this we have but too many examples.

(6.) Another stage in the sinner's progress, is, to harden himself so far, as to sin without remorse of conscience. The conscience of a sinner, for a long time, bears its testimony against him, and every outward indulgence costs him some inward uneasiness; but, after he hath given himself over to abandoned wickedness, it frequently ceases its reproof. This victory he may obtain two different ways: 1. The easiest and speediest way is by hearkening to loose principles. These, at once, set the mind at ease, and blunt the reproofs of conscience. But of this I have spoken on a former head. 2. The other way is practical. The frequent repetition of atrocious crimes stupifies the conscience. They, as it were, weary it out, and drive it to despair. It is much the same with the monitor in our own breast, and any friend who has a concern for another; if he finds that instruction, admonition, reproach, are all in vain, he, at last, loosens the reins, and suffers him to take his course. Now, what must be the condition of a man, who has out-sinned even his conscience itself? he must surely be kept within no bounds, but triumph in his miserable conquest. The apostle Paul tells us, 1 Tim. 4:2, of some who are guilty of "speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience feared with a

hot iron." And thus describes the condition of some sinners, Eph. 4:19. "Who being past feeling, have given themselves over "unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Perhaps, it may be thought some degree of comfort to a sinner to have overcome his conscience, so that he is no more harrassed with its reproofs. But consider, I pray you, that all that he hereby gains, is only to be a little farther out of the way of recovery, a little nearer to destruction. What avails it, that he has rendered himself insensible of his danger? This will neither screen him from it, nor make it lighter when it falls. There is something, on the contrary, extremely terrible in the condition of that man who is insensible of the judgment awaiting him, and still going on, till he lift up his eyes in torments that shall never have an end. But, before this, he has frequently some further steps to go. Having finished his character, he proceeds to finish his work; and, therefore, in the

(7.) Place, Improved sinners often come to boast and glory of their wickedness. It is something to be above shame; but it is more still to glory in wickedness, and esteem it honorable. Hear what the apostle Paul says of such, Phil. 3:18, 19. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." How many are there who have studied to excel each other in the glorious art of debauchery and riot, and then proclaim their own praises upon the subject! How dreadful and how pernicious a character! for it is never separated from its counterpart, despising and reproaching true religion, and a stedfast adherence to its laws. It gives me great concern to say, that there is so much pains taken amongst us, to give countenance to profanity; so that it requires no small measure of courage and resolution not to be ashamed of our Master's cross. To what height of wickedness are those arrived, who have thus inverted the natural order of things, have mastered their own judgment, and turned their reason upside down. Glorious ambition indeed! to have made such a progress downward toward the brute creation, both as to their bodily appetites and the

sentiments of their minds. There remaineth but one step more for them to take, viz.

(8.) Not to be content with being wicked themselves, but to use all their art and influence to make others so too. This is to be zealous in sinning, and industriously to promote the interest of the internal cause. How often do we find those who have no fear of God before their own eyes, use their utmost endeavors to extinguish it in others, to laugh down the qualms of their consciences, and break any reluctance they may seem to have at running to the same excess of riot with themselves? Some are so eminent this way that they resemble the Pharisees who "compassed sea and land to make one proselyte," and when they had made him, they made him "two-fold more the child of hell than themselves." So will zealots in vice, compass sea and land to make a proselyte to the devil. It is hard to tell to what we should attribute this extraordinary conduct. Is it that they are really persuaded they have made a wise choice, and out of their great generosity and affection to their brethren are willing to make them partners of their joy? This I am afraid will hardly be believed by any reasonable man. It is more probable, that as they resemble in many other respects their father the devil, so they resemble him also in malice, "going about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour." They already begin to feel their misery by sin, and desire to bring as many as possible into the same condition, as a wretched (and indeed mistaken) source of consolation in their future wo.

And now to close the scene, those who have thus far hardened themselves shall be given up of God to judicial blindness of mind, and hardness of heart. When this sentence takes place, they are incapable of mercy, and marked out as vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction. That God sometimes, in his righteous judgment, lays the sinner under this awful sentence, is evident from the following passages of scripture, Isa. 6:10. "Make the heart of this "people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart,

and convert, and be healed. John 12:39, 40. "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, he hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Rom. 1:28. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." 2 Thess. 2:11, 12. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they shall believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." This is always a consequence of their former obstinacy. As they despise and trample upon his mercy, he gives them over to themselves and the masters they have chosen; he finishes the day of his patience and long-suffering, and devotes them to the judgment they deserve.

And now, my brethren, view (and view it with terror!) the dreadful consequence of the deceitfulness of sin, and by what fatal steps it leads on to that hardness of heart which is a sure prelude of eternal misery. Who that ventures upon the practice of sin, ever intends to go so far? They mean only to take a short trial of the pleasures of vice; but it gains upon them insensibly, and fixes its hold still faster and faster, till they are its absolute slaves. I shall conclude this illustration of the deceitfulness of sin with observing, that there is an exact correspondence between the progress of a saint in holiness and meetness for heaven, and the progress of a wicked man in sin, and his growing fitness and preparation for hell. A new convert finds it hard at first to separate himself from his sins, and confine himself within the bounds of duty; he has some relenting thought towards his lusts, as old companions from which he is to part forever. Just so a young and unexperienced sinner finds some reluctance at sin, some uneasiness from the challenges of conscience, and painful forebodings of his unknown future fate. — A good man after walking some time in the paths of virtue finds the way become smoother and easier, and serves God with greater constancy, and with greater pleasure. Just so the sinner finds it more easy, through time, to violate his conscience, does it more frequently, and with less

remorse.—A good man soon associates himself with the excellent ones of the earth, he is instructed by their conversation, emboldened by their example, and assisted by their prayers. Just so the sinner soon finds, or is found out by those who are like him in inclination; they join in confederacy, adopt each others principles, and follow each others practice. — A good man in time is thoroughly confirmed, becomes possess of a prevailing love to God and holiness; so that it is his very nature, his delight, as well as duty. Just so the sinner, in process of time, is governed by his lusts: they acquire that authority over him that they do not solicit but demand indulgence. — A good man is fortified in his choice, and despises the smiles and frowns of a corrupt world. Just so the sinner lays aside shame, and says, nay but I will do that which hath proceeded out of my mouth. — A good man is filled with concern for the interest of religion. Just so the sinner espouses the cause of profanity, will plead it in his conversation, and strengthen it with his substance.—In fine, a good man is at last raised above the world, his heart is in heaven, and he longs to be carried there. Just so the sinner fills up the measure of his iniquity; the infernal passions take possession of the whole man, he becomes weary of the earth for the few good men that are in it, and is fully prepared for the language of blasphemy and despair.

II. I Proceed now to the second general head, which was to consider the duty which is sounded by the apostle on the deceitfulness of sin. viz. mutual exhortation, Exhort one another daily, while it is called, to-day. This I shall do by some reflections on the three following particulars. 1st, The persons who are obliged to exhort others. 2dly, The season in which this duty is to be performed. And, 3dly, The manner in which it is to be performed, if we hope to do it with success.

1. As to the persons who are obliged to exhort others. It seems in this passage to be laid upon Christians in general, without any exception, exhort one another; and there is little doubt, that it may and ought to be understood in the greatest latitude. This is perfectly consonant to the spirit of true religion, to our relation one to another, and to the

constant language both of the Old and New-Testament. The two great branches of practical religion, the heads of the two tables of the moral law, are love to God and love to man; and as our love to man ought to take its rise from our love to God, so there can be no expression of it more natural, or more necessary, than an endeavor to warn them of the deceitful nature and dangerous consequences of sin. This is a duty which is sounded with the highest propriety on the deceitfulness of sin. For as it deludes the sinner himself, often in an insensible manner, others may be supposed to observe his condition, and to see the imposition more clearly, and are therefore obliged, by the dictates both of humanity and piety, to awaken him as it were from his lethargy, and admonish him of his danger. Oh, my brethren! consider how clear and unquestionable this duty appears in common matters. Suppose any man were to observe an apartment on fire, and know of several persons sleeping over it, or near it, in security, when a few moments delay would wrap them in the flames, what a monster of injustice and barbarity would he be reckoned, if he did not give them immediate notice, that they might flee from the danger. Is the danger of sin less real? Is it less terrible? Just the contrary. The loss of substance, or the loss of life, by fire in our dwellings, is not once to be compared with having soul and body forever tormented in the fire of hell.

Agreeably to this, we find frequent mention of this duty both in the Old and New-Testament. It is a precept in the Levitical law, Lev. 19:17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." Prov. 9:8. "—Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." Phil. 2:4. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Heb. 10:24. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works."

There is no doubt, at the same time, that this duty, however general, lies with peculiar and heavier obligations on some than on others, and varies a little according to the different relations we stand in to one another. You will easily be sensible how much it is the duty of

those who have the ministry of reconciliation committed to them, who are entrusted with the charge of precious souls, to be urgent and earnest in their exhortations, to all without exception; to be at all proper pains to fit themselves for awakening the attention, enlightening the understanding, and convincing the consciences of their hearers. It is their duty to do what in them lies, to trace the subtil workings and windings of the human heart, and to know the depths of Satan, as the scripture expresses it, to declare the whole counsel of God, and keep back nothing that is profitable for their hearers. It is not to be denied that you ought to hear them with patience and attention; that they have a right to speak with freedom and boldness to persons of every rank and character; and that there ought to be a particular fire and edge in their exhortations, since they watch for your souls as those who must give an account unto God.

There is also a particular obligation upon superiors of all sorts, whether in office, as magistrates; in station, as persons of wealth and opulence; in years, as those whom time and experience should have enriched with solid wisdom; in relation, as parents and masters of families, to be frequent in exhorting others, and warning them of the deceitfulness of sin. It is laid upon them, and expected of them, that they should not live to themselves, that they should not satisfy themselves with exacting and looking for the respect and deference which is their due; but that they ought to exert themselves, in giving useful instruction or salutary admonition to all who are within their sphere. Is sin so deceitful? Are the unwary and ignorant so easily misled, and so hardly recovered? Then surely those who ought to excel others in knowledge, should be careful to impart it for the benefit of the weak. Undoubtedly, my brethren, it is not only a Christian, but a noble and amiable character, for those who are exalted above others, to be full of compassion to their inferiors, and in their whole conversation breathing a desire after their spiritual good.

But it is also plainly a part of Christian friendship, even for equals to exhort one another, and kindly to communicate their mutual

experience in the spiritual life. "The lips of the righteous (we are told by Solomon) feed many." O how rare and difficult a duty! But wherefore should it be either difficult or rare? The Love of God leads to it. The state of your brethren requires it. And surely it is neither unpleasant nor hurtful to him that performs it. I am sensible where the difficulty lies. We suppose there are few who will hear it with patience, or receive it with profit. Alas! my brethren, it is too true, we hear on all hands, complaints, that people will not take advice; that they are but offended, instead of being reformed. Perhaps, indeed, this is as much owing to the manner of giving, as to the backwardness of receiving counsel. However, we shall allow the objection; and since the duty is mutual, I hope it will not be reckoned wandering from the subject, if I beseech you to submit to one another's exhortation. We all stand in need of it; we may all be the better for it. What though it be administered imprudently or harshly for the manner; nay, though it may flow from envy, pride, or malice, as the principle; you will lose nothing by hearkening to the counsel. I do not remember any thing recorded more truly glorious for a monarch, than what we are told of Philip of Macedon, that he heard reproofs not only with patience, but with pleasure: and I am sure, there is nothing more like a Christian, than to profit, not only by the admonitions of friends, but by the reproaches of enemies. If they are just, reform what is amiss; if they are probable, abstain from the appearance of evil: if they are neither the one nor the other, submit to them with patience, as a part of the will of God.

2. I come now to consider the season in which the duty of mutual exhortation is to be performed, Exhort one another daily, while it is called, to-day. By which we are to understand, that it is to be done frequently, and without delay. This, my brethren, will perfectly accommodate the subject of this discourse to our present situation, when entering on another year. We have many admonitions of the quick passage of time; and all these serve to enforce the exhortation of the wise man, Eccles. 9:10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." If any hearer has

received a conviction of the deceitfulness of sin, or the duty of mutual exhortation, he ought seriously to consider, that the present time only is his; that he knoweth not what a day or a night may bring forth; and that delaying or postponing what he may do at present, is at the possible or probable hazard of its being left undone for ever. I beseech you, my brethren, to make this use of the commencement of another year. There is no difference, in one sense, between one day and another, as much of life is spent, and as much of our dying frame is wasted in one day as in another; but our computation and reckoning of revolving years, by the principal seasons, only helps us to mark the constant, though silent passage of time, which, like a flowing river, is bearing us all down into the ocean of eternity. Has any of us then a relation, friend, or child, to whose eternal interest he desires, or sees it to be his duty to contribute? let him be speedy and diligent, whether by instruction, admonition, example, or even prayer: you know not how short a time the opportunity may last. By and by all these relations shall be dissolved. How many who were with us last year, are now sleeping in the dust; their state irrevocably fixed for eternity, either entered into rest, and happy in their Redeemer's presence, or reserved in chains of darkness, and looking forward, with despair and terror, to the general judgment. No warning of the deceitfulness of sin there; they know it, and feel it, in inward reproach, and everlasting self-condemnation. No preaching of the gospel there; no hope of recovery, or place for repentance there: so that we may justly address every hearer of the gospel, in the words of the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. 6:1, 2. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

I shall only add, that the deceitfulness of sin, and the precariousness of time, are considerations which serve greatly to strengthen one another. As time wastes, the sinner hardens; not only is the season passing away, but the work is becoming still more difficult, and, at last, as I have shown before, in the course of nature, and by the

appointment of God, totally impossible. It is the danger of a hardened state, that the apostle urges; particularly in this passage, as the argument to diligence, But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. And, indeed, elsewhere, we are cautioned against delay, for the same reason. Thus, in Psal. 95:7, 8, which is cited a few verses after the text, "—To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness."

3. Let us consider the manner in which this exhortation must be given, if we hope to do it with success. And, here, I must acknowledge, there is so great a variety of cases, that it would be extremely difficult, or almost impossible, distinctly, to enumerate them all, and give the different directions that are suited to each; there must be a great difference in the manner, according to the end proposed. Superiors of all sorts, magistrates, ministers, and heads of families, may, and ought to reprove, both with authority and severity, because the end is not singly the reformation of an individual, but the preservation of others, and the general good: nay, even private Christians may often be called to reprove, in much the same manner as a public testimony of their abhorrence of sin: they may have it, chiefly, in view, to save or edify the by-standers, by refuting the calumnies of an enemy, bearing down triumphant wickedness, or disgracing an open factor for the devil.

But as I reckon the passage of scripture, which is the subject of my discourse, has an eye, chiefly, to brotherly admonition, for the benefit of the person concerned, I shall just mention some of the most important directions for doing it with success. These shall be both negative and positive.

1st. You ought not to reprove at an uncertainty, upon bare rumor and suspicion. This is what many people have done, and thereby have, in a great measure, lost all the pains they have bestowed. Where men are reprov'd in the wrong place, or for what they either are not guilty

of, or are much less guilty than is supposed, it often puts them upon self-justification, and hardens them against all reproof for the time to come.

2dly. It ought not to be done when the offending person is in an ill temper to receive it. Though no time ought to be lost in doing what good we can to our neighbor, especially to the precious soul; yet it is worse than losing time to attempt it, when he is in a disposition to reject it: for example, it is usually improper presently after the sin is committed, because then the heat is not over, nor the uproar of the passions and affections appeased. Many a domestic reproof is thrown away in this manner. Perhaps, a husband comes home disordered in liquor, and his wife meets him with a surly countenance, and reproachful language; the offence is too recently taken by her to speak with meekness, and the provocation too recently given by him to hear with patience: hence dissensions and quarrels arise; and, perhaps, he is hardened in his sin, by thinking he hath greater cause to be displeased with his wife for the frowardness of her temper, than she has to be displeased with him for his intemperance. On the other hand, it is not improbable, that, by waiting till the return of calmness and reflection, the sin may be set in such a light, as to carry conviction to the conscience, and, by the blessing of God, prove the means of reformation. Many are the admirable remarks of Solomon on this and the like subjects; particularly, Prov. 15:23. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

3dly, We are not to reprove those whom we have reason to believe to be such desperate wretches, that they would be but the more exasperated, and sin in the more daring manner, on account of the reproof. To these it would be no act of love and charity, as it would provoke them to dishonor God still more highly, and so heap still heavier loads of wrath and vengeance on their own heads. It is a saying of Augustine, one of the fathers: 'If we therefore abstain from admonishing wicked men, because the season does not suffer it, or, we fear, they may become worse by it, that seems to be the counsel of

charity.' And alas! how many are there, who, when they are reproved for their sins, though very justly, are presently kindled into a rage, fall a blaspheming and railing at piety, and all that profess it, and seem more confirmed than ever in their hatred and opposition to it. Therefore we are expressly warned of the danger of this by Solomon, Prov. 9:7. "He that proveth a scorner, getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth himself a blot." And, to the same purpose, our blessed Saviour, Matt. 7:6. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." On the other hand, positively, when reproof or exhortation are administered,

1st, It should be made appear, as much as possible, to flow from love and affection as its principle. It is plain that this ought to be its principle, in order to its being a duty acceptable to God; and there will be little hope of its success with men, unless this appear to their conviction. It would, indeed, be greater perfection to profit by the malicious invectives of enemies; but every body will allow, that is not ordinarily to be expected; for this reason, all ostentation and vain glory is carefully to be avoided, and every thing that may look like only affecting superiority; for the same reason, it should, in all ordinary cases, be done in as secret a manner as circumstances will permit it. The case of public offences, to be sure, must be excepted; concerning which we are told, "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear." But, in other cases, not only of private injury, but of private sins, the rule of our Saviour is to be observed, Matth. 18:15. "—If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." I cannot say all that might be said on this subject; but nothing can be of greater importance, than, if possible, to show that it flows from love: for, where the offender is truly convinced of this, even though he should not be reformed, it is very seldom that he is displeased. Therefore,

2dly, As it ought to flow from love as the principle, so it ought to be conducted with meekness in the same manner. No railing or reviling expressions, which will look like the wounds of an enemy, to destroy, and not the balm of a physician, to cure. Therefore the Apostle gives us advice, in the following terms, Gal. 6:1. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." This last expression gives an inimitable beauty to the apostolic counsel. Our own sins should fill us with compassion as much as resentment against sinners, and should make us take the same gentle methods with others that we would wish to be taken with ourselves, if we were in their condition. We are of the same nature, liable to the same temptations, and, if left of God, may easily fall into the same miscarriages. Besides, as it is most suitable to our state and character, so it is most likely to have a proper effect. Meek and gentle admonitions will penetrate the heart, when rough and clamorous reproofs will be rejected and despised. Thus Solomon says, Prov. 25:15, "By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone." And, Chap. 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger."

3dly, Reproof should be given with some degree of zeal as well as meekness; we should avoid the extreme of remissness as well as severity. A slight careless reproof is often worse than none; for it is ready to make the offender think lightly of his own offence. There must, therefore, be such evident weight and concern of spirit, as may serve to evidence as well his danger as your own love. For this reason, I beg leave to observe, that speaking in a way of jest, and merriment, on sins of an atrocious nature is deeply criminal, and highly pernicious. Solomon tells us, "Fools make a mock at sin." Though a turn to raillery and pleasantness of temper is reckoned a very harmless as well as agreeable disposition; yet great care ought to be taken of the subjects on which it is exercised. It is only smaller weaknesses that ought to be treated in this manner. Sins against God should be treated with a gravity and seriousness from the importance of their nature and effects. I shall give an instance of this. Swearing,

and taking the name of God in vain, is sometimes ridiculed, instead of being reprov'd. This seldom has a good effect. The crime is of so atrocious a nature, and so direct an assault upon the majesty of God, that it ought not to be treated lightly, as only a small indecorum, or breach of good manners. It ought, indeed, to be despised for its folly; but at the same time it ought to be deeply abhorred for its guilt.

4thly, In the last place, In admonishing one another for particular sins, we should still keep in view the source of all sin, a polluted nature; and the great danger of the sinner, as in a sinful state. Though particular miscarriages may give the occasion, it is of small moment to convince them of the folly of such or such a practice, unless you point out to them the necessity of repentance, in general, upon evangelical principles. I have rarely seen that any arguments were sufficient to reform a sinner of any particular fault he was once addicted to, but those drawn from eternity, and the awful effects of the displeasure of a holy God. Present inconveniencies, however great, soon lose their effect, and are quite unequal to combat a vicious inclination, or wrestle with the power of habit. But, though it were otherwise, what a small matter is it to cure a man of being a drunkard, or a swearer, or a whoremonger, if still you leave him a slave to sin, upon the whole, a servant of the devil, and an heir of hell? It is plainly with a view to the final consequences of sin, that the Apostle recommends mutual exhortation in this passage, Exhort one another daily, while it is called, to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Would you, therefore, admonish any person to his real profit? make use of particulars, to convince him of the evil of all sin, as such, and its power and influence over him by nature. When you reprove him for any fault he has committed, shew him the deceitfulness of sin, and where, if he do not speedily stop, he will be landed at last. Let his eternal state be the motive that urges you to the duty, and let the same great consideration be made use of to carry home the instruction with power and efficacy upon his heart.

5thly, In the last place, Let those who would acquit themselves of this duty, in a proper manner, be particularly watchful and circumspect

in their own conduct. It is evident, that nothing can be more unsuitable, than for those, who take upon them to admonish others, to be grossly and visibly blameable themselves. It is, indeed, so intolerable, that nobody can bear their instructions with patience. You know, from daily experience, that recrimination is the first thing to which those who are reprehended betake themselves. The moment they are challenged, the reply is ready, Why, you yourself, do so and so, or, perhaps, worse. So prone are they to this, that many times they will upbraid men with innocent or lawful things, as if they were faults, to cover their own guilty practice. Now, if this is the case, how much more hurtful must it be for those, who reprove others, to be really liable to just accusation themselves, and, perhaps upon the same subject? Therefore our Saviour says, with the greatest strength and propriety, Luke 6:41, 42, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either, how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou, thyself, beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye?" Perhaps, my brethren, some of you are saying within yourselves: Alas! you have now destroyed the whole effect of what has been urged, at so great length, on the duty of mutual exhortation; for where is the man that is without sin, to reprove his neighbor? My brethren, no doubt we have all such failings as ought to make us do it with meekness and self-denial; yet surely we both may and ought to walk so circumspectly, as not to be justly liable to heavy accusations. Though there is no holding of intemperate tongues, yet, surely, there is such a thing as a conversation becoming the gospel, which will entitle the servant of Christ to appear with some measure of courage in his master's cause; nay, and such an habitual love of mankind, as may sometimes open their ears to his salutary counsel. And, believe it, those who begin to make conscience of their duty to their neighbor, either in a family, or a wider sphere, will find its powerful and happy influence as a restraint upon their own conduct. They will be naturally led to double their diligence, lest their example should unhappily frustrate

the effect of their reproofs. — One particular more I must add, that the next thing to being always in the right, is to be humble, and ready to confess when you have been in the wrong. This also is a scripture precept, James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." I am persuaded that few things would add greater weight to any person's admonitions, than his being willing to confess, and ready to amend, any thing that was pointed out to him as blame able in his own conduct.

I come now, in the last place, to make some practical application of what has been said. And,

1. From what has been said, you may see the great corruption and depravity of our nature. I look upon it as of great moment to have a deep and growing conviction of this truth. It is the language of scripture, it is the language of experience, and it is the parent of humility. I observed, in the beginning of my discourse on this subject, and it appears from every thing that has been said upon it, that the deceitfulness of sin is but another expression for the treachery of the human heart. In vain would the objects of sin appear before us; in vain would Satan and his emissaries present their solicitations, if our own inclination did not plead powerfully in their favor. To be deeply convinced of this, will lead to the exercise of penitence, and to self-denial, which is the best mean of our support and preservation. If the deceitfulness of sin lies chiefly in ourselves, that man will guard against it in the most effectual manner, who has learned to fear himself as his own greatest enemy.

2. From what has been said, let us be led to strictness and frequency in self-examination. If sin is so deceitful, it may easily lurk unobserved. Self-knowledge is a study of as great difficulty as importance. You have heard what artful disguises sin puts on, and how dreadfully some have been led astray. The very best duties may be polluted by sinful motives, and the very worst things may be done by an erring conscience, of which we may justly say, with our Saviour, Matth. 6:23, "—If therefore the light that is in thee be

darkness, how great is that darkness!" The old heathen precept, "Know thyself," was reckoned so excellent a saying, that they supposed it to be a revelation from Heaven. And, in the holy Scriptures, we have many exhortations to self-examination. I shall only mention that of the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. 13:5. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Nay, after all our pains to examine ourselves, there ought to remain such a suspicion of our own treachery, as should make us intreat, humbly and earnestly, the more impartial trial of a heart-searching God, Psal. 19:12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Psal. 139:23, 24. "Search me, O God! and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

3. From what hath been said, let me beseech all, but especially young persons, to beware of the beginnings of sin. It may be said of sin, in general, as Solomon says of strife, "the beginning of it is like the letting out of water." Beware of all that discourse which tends to give you slight thoughts of any sin. Sometimes men consider sins as small sins, and therefore tolerable. Many parents have thought it wrong to check their children for the follies and levities of youth, and have found, to their melancholy experience, that when follies had been suffered to ripen into crimes, they had taken too deep hold to be rooted up. Many make light of sin by comparison. How common is the pretence of the drunkards: We are harming nobody; we are not speaking ill of our neighbors; we are not oppressing the poor. In the mean time, they are soon led to cursing and blasphemy; and, perhaps, by their riotous living, they are unable to pay their just debts, rob the industrious poor of their right, and, for the indulgence of a beastly appetite, bring their own offspring to beggary and ruin. Such is the behavior of many of your harmless people; men of social friendly dispositions, that, if you believe them, would not wrong their neighbor of a farthing to their knowledge; and yet it would be happy for any man to fall into the hands of highway robbers, rather than into their society. How short-sighted men are! they not only forget to

look forward to the other world, but look not even to any distance in this. From time to time we are made fools by sin, which never asks more of us than the present compliance; yet, if this is granted, never leaves us till our state is irrecoverable. What reason have all to be afraid of that deplorable hardness of heart which is the consequence of the continued indulgence of sin. Let us never consider any sin by itself, but together with that ugly train which it draws behind it; and, then, though our false hearts might plead for the indulgence of a single lust, they may not be so willing to submit to that deluge of vice which follows fast at its heels.

4. In the last place, I shall close the subject, by addressing an exhortation to those of my hearers, who have been long and hardened sinners; who have many habits of vice cleaving to them; who have hitherto despised the gospel, and even sat in the seat of the scornful. No doubt, you have heard, in vain, and, perhaps, with contempt, many exhortations of this kind before; and therefore, there is, humanly speaking, but little hope, that any thing I can say will have the effect. However, as our blessed and gracious Master has commanded his gospel to be preached to every creature, this Prince of the kings of the earth is able, by his Spirit accompanying the word, to lay the proudest and the boldest of his enemies prostrate at his feet; let me beseech you, in his name, to hear, that your souls may live. Why will you longer continue at enmity with him, while he is offering you mercy? Nay, he is treating you with mercy in every instance of his kind providence, in the renewed messages of his blessed word, and in his dying agonies on the accursed tree! Have you been long wedded to sin? he is able to set you free; he came to destroy the works of the devil, and is able to knock off the strongest setters, and restore liberty to the most sorrowful captive. "We, then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Remember, on the other hand, I beseech you, the dreadful vengeance that awaits the despisers of the gospel. If you still refuse the gracious offer; if you will not suffer his mercy to be glorified in your recovery, his holiness, power, and justice, shall be illustrated in your perdition. Time is hastening away; judgment is

hastening on; no refusing to appear at that bar; no deceiving or biassing that judge; no room to escape; no source of consolation under that sentence. How insupportable the reflection on opportunity irrecoverably lost! And how terrible the sanction which follows upon the offer of mercy! You may read it, Prov. 1:24–31. "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

I only add, if any impression is made on your minds, of the importance of eternity, suffer it to abide there. Let it have an immediate effect. Of all the deceits of sin or Satan, none more fatal than that of putting off convictions to a more convenient season. I conclude, therefore, with the words of Solomon, Eccles. 9:10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest." Amen.

SERMON IV

THE BELIEVER GOING TO GOD AS HIS EXCEEDING JOY

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.
- PSALM 43:4

IT is of great moment to attend to the proper mixture of reverence and love which ought to possess our hearts in the worship of the living God. If they arise from proper principles, they will not destroy or weaken, but strengthen one another. A believer can never lye too low in the dust before the most holy God; he can never be too sensible either of his distance as a creature, or his guilt and unworthiness as a sinner: but, at the same time, he can never be too deeply penetrated with a sense of divine love, or have too strong and ardent desires after communion and fellowship with God. The truth is, the lower we are in our own sight, it doth but the more illustrate and magnify all the grace that is shewn to us in the gospel: and the more joyfully we contemplate the fulness of our portion in an infinite God, it will but the more bring back this reflection, and constrain us to confess, that we are less than the least of all his mercies.

In several passages of the Psalms of David, we have very warm and fervent expressions of the delight which the man after God's own heart had in the worship of his sanctuary. There are few of these more beautiful and forcible than the passage of which my text is a part, "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." That which seems to have brought the Psalmist to this striking and beautiful thought, was, his being under the pressure of heavy affliction; and, particularly, in a state of distance and banishment from the temple service. This led him to flee for refuge to God, his almighty friend and unchangeable portion. Did the Psalmist then go to God as his consolation in distress? What reason is there for every Christian to go to him as his Father and his God, not only for support under the various trials of this mortal state, but for happiness and peace after he hath seen and felt the inherent vanity of every created enjoyment?

All I shall further add upon the words is, that what David is here praying for, is to be brought to the temple of God, to have access to his courts, and communion with him there. This he plainly looks upon as a source of exceeding joy; and, surely, to those who are duly

disposed for it, there is not, there cannot be, in this world, a more delightful employment than the joint celebration of our Creator and Redeemer's praise; than the united voice of his servants in his temple. It is the nearest approach we can make to the employment of heaven, and the most sensible foretaste we can have of its happiness in this foreign land.

But, my brethren, I must limit the subject to what is the particular and distinguishing employment of this day,—the holy ordinance of the Lord's supper, commemorating our Redeemer's dying love. This was called by the ancients the Eucharist, or Sacrifice of Praise. And, indeed, no disposition is more proper or necessary, in attending upon it, than a joyful and thankful frame of spirit. This will be like a precious perfume, which will fill the house with its fragrance, and will greatly strengthen every other gracious disposition; and, therefore, my intention is, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To shew you what matter of joy and satisfaction there is to every sincere Christian, in what is represented to our view in the sacrament of the Lord's supper; or, for what reasons we ought, in this solemn service in a particular manner, to go to God as our exceeding joy.

Having done so, I shall make some practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction.

In the first place, then, I am to shew you what matter of joy and satisfaction there is to every sincere Christian, in what is represented to our view in the sacrament of the Lord's supper; or for what reasons we ought in this solemn service, in a particular manner, to go to God as our exceeding joy. I am deeply sensible, my brethren, that I have entered on a talk to which I am very unequal, to raise your minds to that sublime temper, of joy in God, and to disclose that fountain of joy there is to every believer, in what his Redeemer has done, and is still doing for him. It is so great a subject, that we ourselves may see how unfit a mortal tongue is to speak of it: and therefore, I shall, in the entry, pray "that God may shed abroad his

love in our hearts; that he may send forth his light and his truth, that they may be guides to us." and accompany the word spoken with the powerful energy of the spirit of consolation. But a little of that real communion with God which is the work of his Spirit, and which he sometimes vouchsafes to his people, will give them such a lively sense of his love and joy in him, as they themselves know may be felt, but cannot be expressed: and I cannot forbear already observing to you, that the meanest real Christian shall, one day, in the higher house, have such a fulness of joy, and such conceptions of God and his Redeemer's love, that he shall look down, with wonder, at the weak and imperfect stretches of our imagination after it now. But so long as we are here, let us patiently content ourselves with what is given us as necessary to support our weary steps in this desolate wilderness; with what this ordinance, instituted for enlivening our faith, supplies us for our comfort and joy.

For this purpose, let me beg your attention to the following considerations.

1. You ought to go to God, in this ordinance, as your exceeding joy, because, in it, you have the fullest assurance and the clearest evidence of the forgiveness of your sins, and peace with your offended Maker. This is the preliminary mercy, which, with respect to fallen creatures, must open the way to every other blessing. Nothing so much damps our joy in God, and lessens our satisfaction in addressing him, as consciousness of guilt. This it is that makes religion so unpleasant to the carnal worldling; even the secure sinner, who seems to walk without fear, is yet deterred by natural conscience from drawing near to God. He does all in his power to rid his mind of the thoughts of God's ordinary and constant presence with him in every place. A horror of his Maker possesses his mind at all times; he cannot love him as a gracious Father, because he hates him as an enemy, and fears him as a righteous judge. Nay, the same thing it is that makes us all feel so frequently an aversion at the duties of religion. The cold hand of a spirit of bondage freezes up the affections. Trembling and fear taketh hold upon us. An inward dread

and jealousy of our own state throws a gloom and darkness, as it were, through the temple of God. And, with whatever strength or beauty the promises or privileges of the saints may be set forth, there is a secret restraint upon us, and as a voice discharging us from touching them, as forbidden fruit. Were we but as pure, and free from guilt, we should, with as much joy and satisfaction, draw nigh to God, as the angels do in Heaven.

I have been the more full in opening this to you, that you may see the foundation there is in nature, and in fact, for the leading doctrine of the gospel, "Christ Jesus set forth as a propitiation for sins, through faith in his blood."

His blessed body was broken, and his precious blood was shed, for the remission of sins. Are you to commemorate this? are you to receive the visible signs and the appointed seals of it? does not this assure you, that your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake? Are your sins very great? are they many in number, and heinous in their aggravations? Consider the infinite value of this sacred blood. It was no less than that of the eternal Son of God, who cheerfully undertook our cause: "and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isa. 53:5. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; "and with his stripes we are healed." O unsearchable mystery! O the infinite holiness of God! O the tremendous justice of God! How well may the exhortation be pressed, Isa. 1:18. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Well may we say with the apostle Paul, 1 Tim. 1:15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world, to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Are you afraid of the condemning sentence of the law, Gal. 3:13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Are you ashamed to appear before God in your own undeserving character, hear, and comply with your Saviour's own counsel, Rev. 3:18. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou

mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." In the spotless robes of your Redeemer's righteousness, you shall be adorned for the courts of your God, and dwell in his presence. Are you afraid to apply all this to yourselves? This is the express purpose of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, to confirm and close the covenant of peace with every partaker. Do you doubt the sincerity of the offer upon God's part? See him dispensing the healing medicine, "This is my body, which was broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Hear him saying, Matth. 11:28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Hear him further saying, John 6:37. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Isa. 55:1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." Rev. 22:17. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." All who have truly groaned under a sense of guilt may here see their pardon sealed, and may and ought to rejoice in it, as theirs; and, unless they doubt the faithfulness of God's word, or the efficacy of their Saviour's merit, may triumph in both, and set at defiance the thunders of the law, the reproaches of conscience, and the accusations of the devil. They may say with the apostle Paul, Rom. 8:33, 34, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

2. You ought to go to God in this ordinance, as your exceeding joy, as it affords the strongest and most illustrious proof of divine love. This, my brethren, is the immediate subject of our contemplation in the Lord's supper; and I chuse to consider it as an argument by itself, separately from its fruits, because nothing serves more to heighten our affection to, and delight in God, than a firm persuasion of his

love to us. Is it a comfortable thing to have the pardon of our sins? It is also unspeakably refreshing, and even ravishing, to view, in faith, the wonderful means by which it is accomplished. We may consider, shortly here, the riches of redeeming grace, as extending to the sinners of Adam's race in general; and then what it is for every believer to consider himself as the determinate object of divine regard in the councils of peace. The whole perfections of an infinite God shine with united lustre in the work of redemption. His power, wisdom, holiness, and justice, are severally and jointly illustrated in it. His unsearchable wisdom is mentioned, Rom. 11:33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" His mighty power, Eph. 1:19. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." The righteousness of his government, Rom. 3:26. "To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just, and "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." But love is most conspicuous of all: and is therefore most frequently insisted on, John 3:16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Rom. 5:8. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Eph. 3:17, 18, 19. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints; what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." And indeed, my brethren, it passeth the power of man to open fully the greatness of the love of God to sinners in Christ Jesus. It is a subject which we are so far from being able now to exhaust, that it shall afford matter for adoring inquiry to all eternity, whilst the everlasting God lives and reigns with his saints, and unfolds to them, age after age, more ample views of his goodness and greatness. By what shall we measure the love of a friend, but by the greatness of his gifts? What sentiment then shall we entertain of the love of God for his (justly styled) unspeakable gift? He has given us his only begotten Son, "who was from eternity in the bosom of the Father; the brightness of

his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" the best and greatest of created beings, nay, the whole creation itself, had been nothing compared to it.

The truth is, I am ready to think that there seems to be something like divine contrivance, and infinite design, in this particular circumstance. All created things are in themselves equal, and alike easy, to the power of God, being but the effects of his simple will. For this reason there could be no comparative greatness in any such gifts. There was therefore but this one way left to express an uncommon degree of love, that he who was one and equal with the Father, should himself be employed in the message, and "bear our sins in his own body, on the tree." Nothing else could have made man an expensive purchase. Nothing else that God could bestow, would have had any appearance of doing violence to himself; or could give meaning and beauty to that expression, Romans 8:32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Lord of the vineyard, in the parable, is represented as in suspense, how to fall upon a method to break the stubbornness of the husbandmen, Luke 20:13. "Then said the Lord of the vineyard, what shall I do? I will send my beloved Son, it may be they will reverence him when they see him." Let us paraphrase and apply it. God, who bears the person of the matter of the vineyard, may be supposed to say, what shall reclaim these obstinate children of mercy, become rebels? Nothing but the invincible force of superior love. But wherein shall the love of the eternal God appear to advantage? in nothing but an eternal gift: they shall not be cheaply purchased, they shall be bought with blood, with that sacred blood, which shall be the surprise of angels, and the wonder of heaven. These reflections I would make with reverence, on this elevated and delightful, but awful and tremendous theme. One thing appears clearly from them, that it is not only obscuring the lustre, not only weakening the force, but destroying the very being of redeeming love, to deny the proper and eternal Godhead of Christ, the Mediator. But, Oh! my brethren, what an improvement is it, to the contemplation of the love of God, for each of us to consider

himself as having been from eternity the object of it. While I taste the streams of his bounty, may I thus trace it back to its source! Did he love me from the foundation of the world! Did he pity me, when in unprovoked rebellion against him! Did he make so gracious provision for my recovery and salvation! Did he make atonement for my guilt, by the blood of his own Son! and conquer my heart by the power of his sovereign grace! What returns of praise and gratitude are his due? With what joy ought I to remember my Redeemer's death at his table, in the hope of sharing with him his crown and his throne, in a higher state?

3. You ought to go to God, in this ordinance, as your exceeding joy; as you have in it the clearest and fullest assurance of receiving from him all that is necessary for your comfort and happiness, while you continue here. There are, in a strict sense, but two ends of going to God in his worship and ordinances, to express our sense of, and thankfulness for favors received, and as beggars for more. Now, my brethren, in this ordinance you are not only called to celebrate the love of a gracious and reconciled God, but to trust in the fulness of an all-sufficient God. That we may view this the more distinctly, there are these two kinds of blessings we stand in need of, those that relate to our spiritual life, and those that relate to our temporal comfort.

1st. Those that relate to the spiritual life. What is the great desire of every real servant of God in this house? Is it not to have your hearts more inflamed with the love of God, and more devoted to his fear? Is not sin your greatest burthen, and its remaining influence your greatest grief? Now, where can you have a more reasonable hope of getting your gracious dispositions strengthened, or your sins mortified, than at a communion table? Is it not expressly designed for your spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace? And as the institution of these sensible signs is a remarkable proof of divine condescension, so I can hardly conceive any thing more wisely and happily calculated for this excellent end. What can more strengthen your faith in a dying Saviour, than being allowed to look upon the signs of his broken body, and his blood poured out? What can speak

greater peace to the conscience, than your being allowed and invited to receive him explicitly? "This is my body, broken for you." What can more happily serve to kindle and inflame your love to God, than the immediate contemplation of his infinite love for you? Where can you take such a hateful view of sin, as a detested object, as at the Lord's table, where you see it in your Saviour's sufferings? Where and how can you lay such a bond upon the conscience, as by receiving the seals of this sacred engagement? How can you give such a deadly wound to your strongest lusts, as by nailing and affixing them to your Redeemer's cross? What motive of future obedience equal to bearing about in your bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus? See what the apostle says, 2 Cor. 5:14. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." Gal. 2:20. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." What remedy can you find for your own weakness, like the all-sufficiency of Christ? Col. 2:9. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the God-head bodily." 1 Cor. 1:30. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." I will not so widely handle the subject as to cite to you all the passages which show that the spirit of sanctification is a part of the purchase of your Redeemer, and one of his gifts to those who humbly implore it. Is it not well known, and do not believers at his table, sensible of their own weakness, and confident of their Saviour's power, get their feet upon the necks of their enemies, and say, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."

2d. They have here all things necessary for their temporal comfort. They have a complete remedy for their cares, as well as their sins. As at the Lord's table you lay hold of the covenant of peace, so there, if any where, you may see, that it is ordered in all things, and sure; your food and raiment, and all necessary provision, is contained in it; and Christ's body is the pledge. How gracious the promise! your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things, Psal.

34:8, 9, 10. "O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints! for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing." Isa. 33:16. "He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure." Deliverance from suffering is contained in it, Psal. 34:19. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Strength and grace to suffer with patience is contained in it, Isa. 43:2. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The sanctified use and improvement of suffering is contained in it, Rom. 8:28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." 2 Cor. 4:16. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Consider, especially, that at the Lord's table you have an immediate view of the great foundation of reliance on divine Providence, Rom. 8:32. "He that spared not own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" 2. That God, who was so lavish of his love, as not to spare even his own Son, but gave him up to be despised, buffeted, and crucified for you, will not be so inconsistently hard, as to refuse the small gift in comparison of a little earthly good. He whose soul was redeemed by the blood of Christ shall not lose his body for a little bread.

I cannot help observing, here, of what universal use and benefit the doctrine of Christ crucified is, and how high a place it ought to hold in our esteem. It is not only useful for assuring us of the pardon of sin, but makes us superior to all those sufferings, of every kind, which took their rise from sin. The path of a Christian is sometimes thorny and difficult; and many of the weaker order of saints have even a greater sensibility of the inconveniencies of life than some thoughtless sinners. These last maintain a sort of bustle and contest

for worldly pleasure, and, with a sturdy self-sufficiency, can, if I may speak so, return the blows and buffets of adverse fortune, while the feeble of Christ's flock become sunk and heartless under a frowning Providence. But is not the Lord's table a place of refuge? and is it not matter of experience, that they have sound consolation there? Whatever their complaints have been, whether of sickness, or poverty, or loss of relations, or the slanders of their enemies, they have adored the sovereign will of God in them all; they have been brought to a placid submission to his providence in them all; nay, they have happily seen and confessed his wise and merciful purpose in them all. It was not without a view to his trials, that the Psalmist, in the text, desires to go unto the altar of God, unto God his exceeding joy. And you may see how he expresses himself in the following verse, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted within me! hope in God; for I shall praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!"

4th. I come, now, in the last place, to observe, that this ordinance is a source of joy, as it is a pledge and earnest of heaven; a foretaste of that eternal happiness which God hath prepared for his faithful servants in the world to come. This, my brethren, ought never to be out of our view while we sojourn in this valley of tears.

This eternal joy is what our Redeemer has given us the fullest assurance of. It is he who hath drawn aside the curtain, and opened to us a joyful prospect into the holy of holies, into the blessed mansions of perfection, purity, and happiness within the veil. In one of his last discourses to his disciples, when he was about to leave them, he tells them, it was to be but a short separation; for that he would come again, and carry them with him; and that they should never more be divided, John 14:2. "In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you;" and not only hath he left the promise of his return, but hath instituted this ordinance, on the one hand, to keep up the memory of his former appearance; and, on the other, to keep up our hopes of his second coming, and what he will then bestow, 1 Cor.

11:23. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." It is intended to support the languishing faith of his people, and make them tread, with constancy, in his strength, the same paths of virtue and self-denial that he did, in hopes of shortly sharing his crown and reward, Heb. 12:1, 2. "— And let us run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." And how highly proper is this institution for pointing us to the glorious issue of our Christian conflict? In it, we have, at once, a proof of the certainty—of the excellence,—and even some perception of the nature of heavenly glory.

How certain and infallible is that happiness to the saints, which our exalted Redeemer, the Amen and faithful Witness, hath passed his word for, and gone before, in our name, to take possession of? Heb. 6:19, 20. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the vail, whither the forerunner is for us entered."—1 Cor. 15:23. "But every man in his own order, Christ, the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's, at his coming." However high an hope it may seem for such as we are, to aspire to a station so near the throne of God, to his presence and fellowship; yet it is not too much, after what is already bestowed upon us; after what Christ hath done, it can beget no surprise, that this should be the conclusion of it; after he hath borne our sins in his own body, and with his own blood washed away our guilt; after he hath sanctified and cleansed us by his holy Spirit, made us the children, and imprinted the image of his Father upon our hearts; after he hath kindled in our souls a flame of divine love, and made us content with nothing but himself, and with no place where he is not; surely he will not leave us comfortless; he can have no other design than to carry us to live with him, and reign with him for ever and ever.

Does not this representation also serve to show the excellency of the heavenly glory? It is called in scripture, "the purchased possession." And, oh! my dear brethren, how great, beyond expression, must that inheritance be, which was so dearly bought, for which every price, but the blood of the eternal Son of God was rejected! See his body broken, and his bloodshed; and there see what heaven has cost; and this it cost to him, who had dwelt there from eternity, and could not be deceived in its worth. It was no unnecessary expence, idly thrown away, but what alone was equal to the glorious purchase. Had we nothing else, by which to guess at that, which eye hath not seen, this, of itself, ought to be sufficient to raise our hopes, to the highest pitch, and give us the most exalted conceptions of its infinite glory.

And may I not add, upon this head, my brethren, that this ordinance is, to many, an earnest and foretaste, as well as an assurance, of the happiness of heaven. Is it not the sensible communion with God, which some of his saints even here enjoy, a resemblance, though saint, of that full and perfect communion which they shall enjoy with their Creator and Redeemer in the world above? John 14:23. "—If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." What is heaven, but to be free from sin; to contemplate the glory of an infinite God; to be filled with a sense of his love; and to be beyond the reach of temptation to offend him any more. Now, when the believer sees his pardon sealed with his Redeemer's blood; when he is filled with a hatred of all sin, and a humble confidence of being delivered from its power; when his very complaints are put to silence, and the frailties of a dying body are left behind, or swallowed up by the hope of a blessed resurrection; what is this, but the very dawn of heaven in the soul! what is this, but the shout of victory! and an earnest of that day of complete triumph, when all his enemies shall be brought under his feet!

I am sensible that the frame of many communicants will be but a bad emblem of heaven; and, if they measure it by that standard, it will give them but low and sorry notions of it. This, however, is not the

case with all; and there are few real Christians, but in some parts of their lives, have felt such inward joy in God, that they have been ready to say, with the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, It is good for us to be here. Neither is there any place where it may be more reasonably expected than at a communion table: every pious soul should breathe out this prayer of the Psalmist, Psal. 63:1, 2, 3, 4. "O God! thou art my God! early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee! my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is: to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary; because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee, while I live! I will lift up my hands in thy name!"

And now, my brethren, what reason is there for every sincere communicant to go to God in this ordinance, as their exceeding joy. It points us forward to that blessed time when we shall indeed be satisfied with that fulness of joy, and those rivers of pleasures that are at his right hand. We are glad now, indeed, to help our flagging conceptions with symbols and figures: But then shall our eyes see the glorious Saviour standing at the right hand of God, surrounded by ten thousand of his saints, who have been redeemed by his blood. This life is but a scene of misery and sorrow, where wretchedness is often to be seen, and lamentations heard, even in the dwellings of the righteous; But then all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes, and these songs of praise begin which shall never end. Now we are borne down with prevailing corruption, which, as a dead weight, depresses our spirits: But then shall we be perfectly freed from all impurity, and serve our God and Redeemer with the same spirit and joy as the angels do in heaven. Now we are but as young unfledged birds, which in learning to fly can but flutter a little, and immediately take refuge in the earth: But we shall soon soar above it; rising with unwearied wings and never failing strength.

Let us forget for a little the weakness of mortality, and carry our thoughts to the general assembly of the church of the first born, where no suspicion of our false heart being admitted shall remain,

when all the wide congregation shall join in celebrating the praises of Almighty God, and of the Lamb; and there shall not be one jarring or one discordant note in the universal harmony. Thus I have laid before you what a source of joy there is to the believer, in the holy ordinance which you now have access to partake of, and proceed, in the

Last place, to make some practical improvement of the subject. And,

1. May I not, in a few words, observe how great is the goodness of God, in providing so rich an entertainment for us in our present state. This life has been expressly designed, in Providence, as a scene of difficulties and trials. We are here in exile from our Father's house; yet doth he not leave us altogether desolate, but hath given us this as a token and pledge of his love, before the full manifestation of it. Here is food to give us vigor for our journey, in this valley of tears: Strength to embolden us against our enemies, that we may hold on our course steadily, without wearying. Will it be matter of eternal surprise, that the only begotten Son of God should do honor to our world, by taking up his abode in it, and dignify human nature by wearing it himself, and uniting it to his own? Is it not a continued proof of the same condescension, as well as an evidence of divine wisdom, that he should leave to every age this standing memorial of himself, his appearance and work, that sense itself might be partner with faith, in rejoicing over his goodness? If his hearers were blessed with his heavenly voice, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, during his personal ministry, let us with admiration and joy, look upon the symbols of his sufferings and death: let us survey the picture of his agony drawn by himself, and let us remember what it promises, and what he is now gone to prepare for his faithful followers.

2. Let us, by way of improvement, consider a little for whom this joy is provided; does not this need explication? And are not many of you saying within yourselves, surely obstinacy itself cannot deny, that here is great cause of joy to some: but who are they? is it not a joy

with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, that pertains only to a privileged few? This inquiry is highly needful, as the great spring of joyless communions is the want of a personal application of the blessings of our Redeemer's purchase. That I may neither unwarrantably discourage any, nor prostitute this precious privilege to the unworthy, I shall observe, that this joy is truly applicable to all to whom it is desirable; to all whom it may be useful, but in different lights, according to their different characters.

1st, All those who have not only laid hold on Christ for salvation, but have some degree of humble confidence in the divine mercy, on whom the Lord has lifted up the light of his reconciled countenance. If there are any such among us, as God forbid but there were, they ought; but why do I say they ought; for, no doubt, they certainly will go to God as their exceeding joy. To you, my brethren, it belongs, with wonder and gratitude, to survey these blessings to which you know your title, and to join in that heavenly anthem, Rev. 1:5, 6. "— Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his father, to him be glory, and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Rev. 7:12. "Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Let your faith follow your risen Redeemer to his Father's throne, and look forward to what he is doing and preparing for you, as well as backward to what he hath already done. If Satan be under your feet; if sin be crucified on your Saviour's cross; and cares and sorrows kept at a distance, I hope it will help you to some conception of the felicity of that state, "where there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God, and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him."

2dly, In this ordinance there is matter of joy and consolation to the fearful and doubting Christian, who, not without desires after God, and the remembrance of his name, yet is full of solicitude and anxiety, and dare not positively affirm his own interest in the Saviour. What is set before us in this ordinance, particularly what I

have this day opened up on the subject, will show how well it is fitted for strengthening the weak, and comforting the feeble-minded. But, to explain this propriety a little, let me ask you is your doubt of God's willingness to receive returning sinners? This doubt the Lord's supper is a full resolution of; this table spread by his appointment, is an express stipulation, on his part, of pardon and peace, to all who are willing to accept of them on the terms of the gospel? Well, but what are the terms of the gospel? Infinitely free and gracious, on the one hand, and exceeding strict and severe on the other; full forgiveness to the chief of sinners, without any merit or qualification on their part; complete deliverance from the power of corruption; and sanctification by the Holy Spirit of grace. What then are the severe terms? Truly to accept of them just as fully and freely as they are offered; to receive forgiveness as mere mercy, which we have not deserved, and desire deliverance from every sin without exception; and to expect to obtain it not from ourselves, but by the strength that is in Christ: the true self-denial of the gospel is the hardest sacrifice to human pride. Men may cry up morality, and boast of it, and trust in it, and never practise it; but heartily to approve of the whole law of God, and breathe after conformity to it, as the purchase of Christ's death, and the effect of our union with him, and giving the honor of it only to him, this, if I mistake not, is the obedience of faith. Now, do you doubt whether you have accepted Christ on these terms? This is not doubting, but refusing; and I have no consolation for you. But if you are willing that Christ should be all, and you should be nothing, and sincerely grieve for the sin and impurity that still cleaves to you, and even for your unbelief, and the hardness of your hearts, come to this table, and "my God shall supply all your wants from his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

3dly, That I may, if possible, yet farther illustrate and commend the divine grace, here is matter of joy to all without exception: "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself!" You have cause to be thankful, that, for your former contempt of mercy, you have not been cut off from the land of the living, and condemned for ever to the flames. O that you were

sensible what grace and patience is exercised towards you in your daily preservation! that your past refusals have not been accepted as your final choice, and your state determined beyond redemption! I do, now, upon this solemn occasion, when the body and blood of Christ, as broken and shed for sinners, is to be set before you, by his warrant and authority, beseech you, by the mercies of God, and pray you to be reconciled unto him. Shall I be obliged, on this season of joy, amidst so bright a display of divine love, to unsheath the sword of almighty vengeance, and denounce the terrors of the Lord? No, my brethren, I rather chuse, now, to beseech than to command, to invite than to threaten you; to shew you the wrath of God falling upon your Saviour than upon yourselves; and shall not his love constrain you, shall not his mercy persuade you, not to reject the counsel of God against yourselves? Will you prefer the pleasures of sin, carnal mirth, and sensual riot, to all the blessed fruits of divine love? You will say, I suspect, that you have but a cold notion of all this profusion of language about joy in God; it is because you know it not. Do but taste and see, that the Lord is good! I am sensible, however, it is in vain to speak to any but those who are weary of their sins; and therefore I shall only, in our Saviour's words, call all those "who are weary and heavy laden to come unto him, that they may have rest." As this ordinance is proper for ratifying former engagements, so it is also proper for entering into covenant with God, and solemnly giving yourselves to be his. And oh that this may be a day and place, marked in the registers of heaven, when and where many joined themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten or recalled!

3. The last use to be made of this subject, is to show you what is your proper employment at the Lord's table. It ought to be a joyful, thankful application of the blessings of Christ's purchase to your souls. Be strong in faith, giving glory to God; not only celebrate his love, but improve it, by asking, in faith, every thing necessary to your sanctification and peace.—I shall shut up all, by desiring you to use the Psalmist's preface, in going unto God, who says, in the 3d verse, "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me into thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles." In order to raise and

elevate your minds, to fix and engage your unsettled hearts, apply to God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, that he would dispose you for his service; that he would shed abroad his love in your hearts, and make you joyful in his house of prayer. And my earnest prayer to God for you, is, that he would at this time, convert some, or (why should we limit him?) every profane sinner in this assembly; pull off the mask of hypocrites, and shew them their own likeness; that he would make it a joyful communion to many of you, and a profitable communion to all. Amen.

SERMON V

THE CHRISTIAN'S DISPOSITION UNDER A SENSE OF MERCIES RECEIVED

Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. PSALM 116:7

IT is the language of nature, as well as of grace, to cry to God in distress. When great extremity shows the weakness of all other help, there remains so much of God written on the consciences even of the most profligate, as excites them to this duty. The truth of this observation appears from many scripture examples, as well as every day's experience. But though bad men may cry to God for deliverance from suffering, they know little, if any thing at all, of returning to God in duty and gratitude, for the mercy received, Psal. 78:34–37. "When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter

him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him; neither were they stedfast in his covenant." See also the account of the ten lepers, Luke 17:12–17. "And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off, and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And, when he saw them, he said unto them, go shew yourselves unto the priests; and it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and, with a loud voice, glorified God, and fell down on his face, at his feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan: and Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" They all cried alike for the cure; but the greatest part soon forgot their obligation to their merciful Saviour.

It is no way difficult to account for this behavior in bad men; but, alas! it is melancholy to think how much of this unhappy disposition is to be found even in the best. When the pressure of any trial is felt, they flee to God as their refuge and security; with fervent supplication, and earnest wrestling, they intreat his help. But, though we must not charge any sincere servant of God with an entire forgetfulness of his goodness, or open desertion of his service; yet, I am afraid, that many are very defective in this particular; and that few, very few, preserve the same solicitude to improve their mercies, as to obtain them.

My intention is to apply this to us, who have lately been at the Lord's table; and, I hope, before going there, not a few were earnest in their prayers for the divine presence. Urged by the sufferings of this mortal body, the loss of outward comforts, the power of inward temptations, or a desire of the return of an absent God, or the quickening of a slothful spirit, they fought consolation in this holy ordinance; they went to seek the Lord, going and weeping. I hope also, and believe, that many went not in vain, but "found him whom their soul loved, found him, and would not let him go." All such ought to imitate the Psalmist in the spirit that breathes through the

whole of this Psalm; and, particularly, in the words of my text: Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

I need only say, in a very few words, that the whole Psalm is an expression of his gratitude for deliverance from great sufferings, from enemies cruel and treacherous. They were also of an inward, as well as an outward kind, as all his trials did ordinarily bring sin to remembrance, and fill him with a humbling sense of the awful judgments of a holy and righteous God. He seems also to have been particularly exercised in prayer to God his all-sufficient help: ver. 3, 4. "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul," He thereupon celebrates the mercy of God, and wearing the bonds of love, desires to express his obligations in the strongest terms, and to satisfy them by the most chearful obedience: verse 12. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"

In discoursing further, at this time, I shall just observe, that the words of the text contain the Psalmist's resolution: Return unto thy rest, O my soul.—And the reason on which it is founded; — for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. These two, as applicable to the servants of God in general, and ourselves in particular, I shall distinctly consider, not in the order of the words, but in the order of nature.

I. I shall describe the state of those with whom God hath dealt bountifully.

II. Explain the import of the Psalmist's resolution, which ought to be theirs: Return unto thy rest, O my soul.

And then shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. Then, I shall describe the state of those with whom God hath dealt bountifully; and I am just to describe this, in its great lines, from

experience, beseeching every one present to hear it with application; and to add such circumstances to the several particulars, as will make them completely suitable to his own state—Observe, then,

1. That the Lord hath dealt bountifully with those from whom he hath removed any affliction under which they groaned, and for deliverance from which they prayed.—If we would count our mercies, they are very many: and we often lose both the relish of them, and the benefit of them, by not observing them. Those who are delivered from sickness, or the fear of it, in themselves, or their relations, ought to be sensible of the goodness of God, who maketh them to lye down and rise up in safety.—If any had reason to fear confinement from ordinances, or from usefulness, they should say, with the Psalmist, Psal. 118:16–19. "The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord doth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; the Lord hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord."—If any were oppressed with calumny and reproach, and God hath hidden them from the strife of tongues, hath pleaded their cause, or brought forth their "judgment as the light, and their righteousness as the noon-day," The Psalmist says, Psal. 118:10–14, "All nations compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about; but, in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns; for, in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me, that I might fall; but the Lord helped me: the Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation." If any are delivered from the sear of want, and a reasonable prospect given them of competent and suitable provision for themselves and families; if they can remember the time, whether lately or at a greater distance, when they seemed to be threatened with poverty and dependance, and all the shame, distress, and temptation that attends that ensnaring state; if, I say, they can remember this, and see how God, by a gracious providence, has led them by the hand; has given them food to eat and raiment to

put on, and even honored them with the ability and the heart to stretch out their hands to the poor and needy, the fatherless and the widow; surely he hath dealt bountifully with them. They ought to say with the Psalmist, Psal. 23:5, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over."—If any have been burdened with a sense of guilt, the arrows of the Lord within them, and the poison thereof drinking up their souls, and God hath revealed himself to them, as pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; if they have been enabled to lay hold, with clearness and confidence, of the great atonement, they have surely tasted of his love: Or, if a spirit of bondage and slavish fear has given a forbidding aspect to the paths of piety, or hath brought a gloom and darkness upon the paths of providence, and it hath pleased God to speak peace to their souls, by the Spirit of consolation, they will say with the Psalmist, Psalm 103:1, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name."—Or, finally, if any hath complained of a dead, slothful, secure frame, resting too easily in the form, and minding little of the power of godliness, and it hath pleased God to touch their hearts and lips with a live-coal from off his altar; to command their attention by his word; to excite their affections in his worship, and to give a new strain of Watchfulness and tenderness to the whole of their conversation: they have surely the greatest reason to say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

2. The Lord hath dealt bountifully with you, if you can observe a particular mark and signature of his providence in your mercies. It is one thing to receive the bounty of providence, and another to discern and confess the hand that bestows it. Even with regard to the blessings that are, in a great measure, common to every thing that lives, it is a matter of the highest moment, and of great influence in religion, to have a deep and serious conviction from whom they flow, to be sensible of the absolute and constant dependance of every creature upon God. It places us immediately in our Maker's presence; for, as the apostle Paul says, Acts 17:27, "—He is not far

from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being."

But though this is not to be neglected, I have something farther in view, viz. When we can observe the particular steps of providence, as well as the gracious intention of it, as the fruit of special and distinguishing love. The foot-steps of Providence are to be seen often in the means,—in the season,—and in the nature of the mercy.

1st. When the means by which any mercy is brought about are extraordinary, and far beyond the reach of human wisdom, it serves to show that God himself hath been their help. Sometimes the children of God are left to prove the weakness of all created help, and to be urged in a manner to the brink of despair, that their deliverance may be the more signal, and may the more evidently point out the very finger of God. What a mercy is it, when the enemies of good men wait for their halting, and hope to overcome them, and yet they are remarkably delivered, and out of weakness are made strong? See how the Psalmist prays, Psal. 86:16, 17. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me. Give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid. Shew me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me."

2dly. Sometimes the providence of God is seen in the season of the mercy. It is bestowed when it is most needed, or when it may be of greatest use. When the faith of his people is beginning to fail, it frequently meets with unexpected and eminent support, Ps. 73:2. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone: my steps had well nigh slipt." v. 10. "Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." Psalm 94:16, 17, 18, 19. "Who will rise up for me against the evil doers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." When they have duties of

importance before them, they have sometimes such supplies of grace and strength given them, as to carry them through with comfort and with credit. Sometimes, to prepare them for trials which may be before them, they have uncommon measures of consolation from above; and sometimes under or after trials, for their support and comfort, they meet with all in the Creator, and much more than they lost in the creature. And I hope, my brethren, many have cause to adore the wisdom, as well as the grace of God in public ordinances, that directs his ministers, as well as his Spirit, to such instructions as may be most suitable, both to the wants and the desires of his saints. How excellent is found instruction, at any rate! But what a new beauty and excellency does it acquire, in the eyes of that person, to whose inward complaints it is directly suited? We may say of it as Solomon says, Proverbs 15:23, "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it?" — 25:11. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Isaiah 50:4. "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

3dly. Once more: The signature of Providence is sometimes seen in the nature of the mercy, when it is exactly suited to the state and character of the person concerned. Our temper, station, duties, have in them a very great diversity; and there is frequently an opportunity to observe how God dispenses his gifts with wisdom and propriety. If he gives to the rich, humility, thankfulness, or liberality; to the poor, patience, trust, and resignation: If he keeps the weak from temptation and trial; and fills with fortitude those who are to meet with resistance; and, in general, accommodates his mercies to their apparent necessity, can it be denied, that he deals bountifully with them. We are taught this truth in a very tender passage, Psal. 103:13, 14. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." In many instances, indeed, this kindness and condescension is to be observed both in the nature of mercies, and in the measure of afflictions, Isa. 27:8. "In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt

debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind."
This leads me to observe,

3. That the Lord deals bountifully with his people, when he gives them a clear and satisfying view of the salutary end, and enables them to make a sanctified use both of their trials and mercies. I need not tell you, that calamities of various kinds are inseparable from this state of mortality and of sin; neither need I tell you that the children of God never were, nor ever shall be exempted from their share. But, as their mercies have a quite different nature and influence, from those which are bestowed upon a careless, secure world; so their trials have a peculiar direction, and are capable of a spiritual improvement: nay, they are represented in scripture, as the fruit and evidence of love, Heb. 12:5. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor saint when thou art rebuked of him." Psalm 89:30, 31, 32, 33. "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail."

Now, my brethren, sometimes the children of God may struggle for a season under afflictions, and find much difficulty to adhere stedfastly to their duty: nay, what do I say? truly they may sin not a little by impatience in their hearts, and speaking unadvisedly with their lips, as well as by sinking under the stroke, and manifesting unbelief and distrust in the rock of their salvation. They may be also greatly at a loss to interpret the language of Providence, and discover the cause of God's controversy with them. They may say, with the Psalmist, Psal. 77:6–9, "I call to remembrance my song in the night; I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah." Or, with Job, Job 10:1–3, "My soul is weary

of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee, that thou shouldest oppress? that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?"

But what a mercy is it, when it pleaseth God to reconcile our minds to the will of his providence; to set home upon the conscience his right of sovereignty; his title to dispose of our persons, our reputation, our substance, our relations, without exception, and without condition, even as he will. O how happy! to be able to say, with our suffering Saviour, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And, again, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Is this unreasonable? Nothing less. Should he not do what he will with his own? Is it impossible? Blessed be God, it is far from it. How happy, my brethren, to have our corruptions mortified by suffering! to have the spirit broken by contrition and penitence, when the body is broken by sickness or distress; to weaken our attachment to the world, when it is showing its instability and uncertainty as our possession; to hate the sin for which, and not the God by whom the stroke is inflicted, let it be of what nature soever it will? O how happy to have divine consolation under suffering! an angel from heaven strengthening us! the soul following hard after God! when the believer is enabled to delight himself in God, even in the absence of all outward comfort! and to say with Hab. 3:17, 18, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!" O how happy is it, when we experience the sanctifying effects of suffering, to be able to look back upon it, and find the bitterness and severity over, or mitigated by time, but the fruits of it remaining, and daily gathering strength! One affliction, truly sanctified, prepares the mind for others to follow, and makes them both more tolerable, and more useful. He who has sought, and found

consolation in God, under one affliction, is refreshed, braced, and armed for another combat; he is not so much afraid of new and unknown enemies, because he knows where to find sure and effectual support. There is something very noble and animated in that part of the apostle Paul's discourse to the elders of Ephesus, which relates to his sufferings for the gospel, Acts 20:22, 23, 24. "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." I cannot go through either every kind of suffering, or every kind of benefit we may receive from it; but we have the pleasure of seeing the scripture saints, both in the Old and New Testament, bearing witness to the salutary consequence of affliction. Thus David says, Psal. 119:67, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word:" and verse 71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." And the apostle Paul, Rom. 5:3. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." And so certain is this truth, that, I am persuaded, there is no serious exercised person among us, but is willing to strengthen the evidence by his own testimony.

I may add, that the Lord deals very bountifully with those to whom he gives the sanctified use of their mercies; when in general mercies have not led to security or pride, but to thankfulness, and even to a holy concern to improve them to the glory of God; when great abundance of outward possessions has not led to sensuality, or profanity, or hardness of heart; but, on the contrary, to humility, usefulness, liberality; when a numerous or growing family, children springing up as olive plants round about the table, only fill the parents with a tender concern to train them up in the fear of God, and season their young hearts with early impressions of religion; when, instead of a foolish jealousy or ambition to have your children

more sumptuously dressed than others, your great care is to have them kept from the society of the vicious, and to have them no way behind the very best accomplished in every branch of useful knowledge; when you are favored with the esteem and affection of others, and God enables you to improve your influence by zeal and diligence in doing good.

These are all sanctified mercies; and, as the Lord deals bountifully with those on whom they are bestowed from time to time; so, in acts of solemn worship, it is an unspeakable happiness, when such views are taken of our state and situation, and of the aspect of providence towards us, as serve to confirm and strengthen every holy disposition, and lead us in the paths of truth and righteousness. In the

4th, And last place, The Lord hath dealt bountifully with those whom he hath admitted to the most intimate and spiritual communion with himself; those whom he hath carried above the sphere of temptation, filled them with sensible joy in the Holy Ghost here, and earnest desires after the complete and perpetual enjoyment of his presence in heaven. My brethren, it is no contemptible communion with God, when the soul is poured out in penitential sorrow, filled with hatred of sin, with a love of God's laws, or submission to his providence; when the Spirit shines with clearness either on commands or promises, and makes the heart approve and rest in them; but there are also special happy seasons, when the believer may be said to leave his mercies, trials, sins, and duties, altogether at a distance, and to rejoice in the contemplation of an infinite God. He is the proper object of the highest esteem, and most ardent love of every reasonable creature; he is the immediate object of delight and wonder to the celestial hosts; and sometimes he vouchsafes some degree of the like exalted joy even to the saints on earth. It seems to have been the desire of Moses, when he says, Exod. 33:18, "—I beseech thee shew me thy glory." And the same seems to have been the happy attainment of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration; of which see the account, Matth. 17:1–4, "And after

six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light; and, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." The lustre of their Master's appearance, and what they heard of his intercourse with the two inhabitants of heaven, seems to have made them quite forget that they had any thing to do on earth: or, at least, made them very unwilling to return to their former state.

How shall I explain this, or bring it down to the conception of worldly men? Perhaps it is wrong to attempt it; but, left any should go away, speaking with contempt or indignation of communion with God, as extravagance, enthusiasm, and folly, I shall take leave to support it by the following illustration. Suppose any of you were, as perhaps you have been, admitted to the sight of some exceeding strange and wonderful appearance in nature or art; will not this sometimes fill you with inexpressible surprise and delight? will it not, for a time, quite suspend your attention to any thing else? Your business, cares, fears, and other pleasures, will be all forgotten for a season. Now, if this is the case, I desire to know, why the glory of the true God, discovered in his word, and illustrated by his Spirit, may not, or ought not to be the subject of the greatest wonder, and most exalted pleasure, to those who truly love him? The truth is, there is so much to be seen, that is surprising and astonishing, both in the nature and works of God, in creation, providence, and redemption, that the only thing that hinders us from dwelling with delight on this great subject, is the sinfulness of our nature, which too strongly prompts us to flee from him. When therefore the believer is freed from the apprehensions of guilt, and goes to God, as his God, in gratitude and duty, it is no wonder that he tastes a little of that unspeakable joy that is at his right hand. I doubt not, but many will say this is true. O let but the light of his reconciled countenance shine upon me, let me be but free from the doubt, suspicion, and fear,

suggested by my sins, and heaven would immediately begin to dawn upon my soul!

As intimate communion with God may be said to bring down something of heaven to earth, so it always carries the desires of the soul from earth to heaven. It is not only made up of faith and contemplation in the present state, but of hope, which breathes after further discoveries in a state of greater perfection. It not only increases desire, but helps our conceptions. The soul, if I may speak so, climbs up to the summit of present enjoyments, that it may see the farther into what still remains. It says, as it were, if such the glory and lustre of the outer court, what must be the unvailed splendor of the holy of holies. You see the apostle Paul makes this use of comparative reflections, 1 Cor. 13:9–12, "For we know in part; and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but, when I became a man, I put away childish things: for now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." 1 John 3:2.—"And it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Alas! my brethren, that intimate communion with God should be so rare, and that so few of us should attain to the disposition of the Apostle of the Gentiles, who desired "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." Let us be ashamed of it. Surely many of us have tasted a good deal, and seen a good deal more of the vanity of the world, which ought to wean our affections from it. Happy, happy they! who can use the language of the apostle to the Philippians, Phil. 3:20, 21. "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." And, Titus 2:13. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

That there are some who have been formerly, and of late, so happily visited with the divine presence, I have little doubt; and to as many as have been so, surely I am warranted to say, the Lord hath dealt bountifully with you.

II. I come now to the second thing proposed, viz. to explain the import of the Psalmist's resolution, or his exhortation to his own soul, which all in the same situation ought to imitate, Return unto thy rest, O my soul. It may, perhaps, be supposed only to imply, that he resolves to forget his anxiety and care, and solace himself in that state of quiet and security to which he was happily brought by the kindness of Providence; but though, no doubt, this may be considered as, in part, the meaning of the words, I cannot think it is the whole. It would be doing great injury to the holy Psalmist, to suppose that he was not carried upward, in his views, to the Author of his rest, or to God himself, as the rest of his soul. The whole Psalm, indeed, breathes his piety and gratitude to God; and his desire of testifying it by every proper and acceptable expression. Taking the words, therefore, in this light, we may suppose them to imply the following particulars:

1. Return, and give the praise where it is due; and humbly acknowledge God as the author of thy mercies. He had, as we see by the preceding verses, earnestly implored help from God in his distress; and now desires to confess that it came from no other quarter. We are exceeding ready to fail in this particular; sometimes we look upon the outward means and visible instruments of our deliverance, and forget the Supreme Disposer of all events, who employs them, directs them, and blesses them. Sometimes we embrace the mercy itself with so much complacency, that we forget both our former necessity, and the author of our deliverance. In opposition to both these, it is our indispensable duty, to ascribe every mercy we receive, and every deliverance with which we are favored, to God, as its proper author, and to offer him the tribute of praise, and to bless his name for ever. James 1:17. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of

lights." I admire the manner of speaking frequently found in scripture, where the kindness of men towards us is immediately and expressly attributed to the agency of God, Gen. 39:21. "But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favor in the fight of the keeper of the prison." Acts 7:9, 10. "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt; but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the fight of Pharaoh, King of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt, and all his house." Dan. 1:9. "Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the Prince of the eunuchs."

How great a duty, and how important a part of religion, praise and thanksgiving to God are, may be seen in every page of the holy scripture, both in the way of precept and example, Deut. 8:10. "When thou hast eaten, and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God, for the good land which he hath given thee." Psalm 136:1, 2, 3. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods; for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords; for his mercy endureth for ever." Psal. 103:1, 2, 3. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." Psalm 145:1, 2. I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever." And that this duty ought particularly to be discharged by those who have been highly favored of God in any respect, is very plain. Though the glory of God is the subject of habitual adoration, and the constant course of his bounty, the subject of habitual gratitude, yet new and special mercies, give, as it were, a new spring, and add strength and vigor to the soul in this exercise. Our praises ought to be particular, as well as general; and those who observe and record the special instances of divine mercy toward them, will find a fulness of heart in this duty, to which they are perfect strangers, who satisfy themselves with a general and indiscriminate acknowledgment of the divine bounty. Many of the

Psalms of David are monuments of his gratitude, for particular interpositions of Providence in his behalf, and bear particular marks of reference to the time and circumstances of his distress.

I only add, upon this subject, that the Psalmist might well say, in this sense, Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for a tender and affectionate acknowledgment of the mercies of God, not only makes us find our rest in him, but makes his mercies rest with us; it increases the sweetness of every comfort;—it purifies its nature;—it prolongs its duration.—It increases the sweetness of it: for this I appeal to the experience of every child of God. Do you ever taste so much real delight in any mercy, as when you pour out your heart to God in gratitude for bestowing it; even in gifts from men we are sometimes sensible of a higher value in them, on account of the person who gave them, than any worth they have in themselves. This holds, in the strongest manner, with regard to God; the more we return our mercies in praise to the giver, the more we possess them, and the greater richness we discover in them.—It also purifies their nature. Many instances of divine goodness regard our state and circumstances in the present life; they are the objects of sensible gratification, as well as religious gratitude. Now, when we observe and celebrate the kindness of him that bestows them, they not only strengthen the body, but sanctify the soul. Is it not something more than barely outward provision, when we say with the Psalmist, Psalm 23:5, Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over?"—Again, it prolongs the duration of our mercies. One of the consequences of the weakness and imperfection of the present state, is, that we are ready soon to forget our mercies, and to lose the relish of them. In how many instances do we find, that what gave us great and sensible pleasure at first, becomes, in time, habitual, and, at last, indifferent to us? Now, praising, and confessing the goodness of God in them, serves to write them upon our hearts; to continue the sweetness of common mercies; and keep up the memory of signal mercies, or those of an extraordinary kind. Health, strength, provision, and comfort, when they are not interrupted, are apt to be

quite overlooked; but the daily acknowledgment of divine goodness, gives us not only the possession, but the use of them. Signal mercies, in time, slip out of the memory, but the more we have acknowledged them, they will be the more easily recalled to remembrance. I have known instances of pious persons appointing fixed days of thanksgiving for extraordinary deliverances, which served to renew their sense of them, and gave them some degree, at least, of the same joy and gratitude which they felt when the event happened. Some also, by keeping a record in writing of the paths of divine providence toward them, are able to read them over at proper times in their order, to compare them together, and thus, as it were, to have a rich feast upon a whole life of mercies, the remembrance of many of which would otherwise have been effaced by time.

2. This expression may imply returning to God, and delighting in him as our reconciled God, and supreme portion and happiness. This is indeed the rest of the gracious soul, which gives him more joy than all outward possessions taken together. His outward possessions have no value, but as they flow from it, and lead back to it. He says with the Psalmist, Psal. 4:6, 7, 8, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety. Psal. 73:23, 25. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Now, my brethren, this rest is frequently disturbed, and meets with interruption in the present life. Sin is the chief cause of interruption; it raises an interposing cloud, and separates between God and us. But it is also sometimes interrupted by affliction, and distresses of various kinds. These two causes have a mutual relation, and a mutual influence one upon another. Afflictions bring sin to remembrance, and sin squeezes the bitterest ingredients into the cup of affliction; so that it sometimes becomes a cup of trembling. The believer is often

ready to mistake the rod of fatherly correction for the exterminating stroke of avenging justice: hence the bitter and heart melting complaints of many of the children of God. Job 6:4. "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit, the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." Psal. 42:6, 7. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Lam. 3:1-4. "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned, he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old, he hath broken my bones."

While this continues, the believer is excluded from his rest; and indeed the more peace he can take in any thing, while at a distance from God, so much the worse sign it is of his character; so much the more fearful symptom of his state. But when the Lord hath loosened his bonds, lifted up his countenance upon him, and given him peace, is it not proper and natural for him to say, Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. When he hath seen the marks of distinguishing love in his mercies; when he hath tasted consolation under suffering, or communion with God, in public or in secret, will not this dispose him to rest in God, to improve the happy season, and desire its continuance? All things else are vain, and have proved their vanity, but complete satisfaction is here.

I have no doubt, my brethren, that this is, if not the only, yet one of the chief senses, in which we ought to understand these words. Rest, you know, supposes labor, and even weariness before. Rest also seems to imply that which is the end of labor, or the desire of the weary. It also signifies that which is to continue, or that we wish to continue without further change. In this sense it is used, Psal. 132:8, and 14, "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it:" which

refers to the ark of the testimony taking a fixed abode, and being no more carried about from place to place. The same sense is conveyed to us by Heb. 4:9, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." When, therefore, the Psalmist says, Return unto thy rest, O my soul, it means that God, and his favor, was his supreme and ultimate desire, the very centre of his hope. Is it not so with every real servant of God? All true religion points to, and ends in this. All religion, without this, is an empty form. And when we return to this, after any interruption, is it not like the distressed mariner, after having been driven about in a tempestuous ocean, and threatened every moment with destruction by the rising billows, at last obtaining sight, and entering with heartfelt joy into a haven of security and peace?

3. In the last place, this expression implies a confidence and reliance on God for protection and security against future dangers. This seems necessary to the completeness and perfection of any deliverance. The danger may be warded off for a season; if there is ground to fear its immediate or speedy return, the state is very precarious, and the comfort very imperfect; but those who are delivered from fear of evil, and think they can depend upon their defence and guard, have received a deliverance indeed.

Now, this is the view which a believer is particularly led to take of God, as his sure and all-sufficient help. He considers the greatness of his power, the operation of his providence, and the faithfulness of his promise. How often does the Psalmist express, in the most triumphant manner, his dependance upon God? Psal. 18:1, 2, 3. I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies." Psal. 62:5, 6, 7. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God." Psal. 146:5, 6. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose

hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is, which keepeth truth for ever."

My brethren, this trust and dependance on God is a very considerable part of the rest and comfort of the believer's soul. He is, on all hands, surrounded with enemies, liable to suffering, exposed to temptations. The more he knoweth of himself, the more he feels his own inherent weakness and insufficiency. But, in God, he sees full and adequate provision for all his wants, Psalm 34:22. "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

This trust is also, in a particular manner, generated, by remembering the past goodness, or by a sense of the recent mercy of God. We have daily experience of our own weakness and unsteadiness in this respect. When our hopes are in any measure disappointed; when calamities threaten; when afflictions visit us, we are ready to yield to the dark suggestions of fear and despondence; but when we contemplate the great goodness of God on former occasions, or when we have met with any singular manifestation of his grace and favor, it serves to strengthen our confidence, and often, indeed, to cover us with shame for our unbelief and distrust. On the whole, then, a believer who imitates the Psalmist in this expression, Return unto thy rest, O my soul, may be supposed to say, "Thou hast tasted, O my soul, of the loving kindness of God! he hath brought thee out of deep waters; he hath calmed thy fears; he hath set thy feet upon a rock; he hath established thy goings; Blush, blush! when thou considerest how easily thy confidence was shaken; how prone thou wast to sink under affliction; and, upon every new trial, to doubt his power, and distrust his promise. But, now, return unto thy rest; lay aside thy fears, which have so unhappy an influence both on thy progress and comfort. Commit thy ways to him, and he will bring thy desires to pass."

I come now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said: And, 1st, From what hath been said, you may

observe one great branch of the sinfulness of the world in general; forgetfulness of God; and unthankfulness for his mercies. How little sense of the divine goodness is in the hearts of men? how formal, cold, and frozen their language in praise? how languid their endeavors to serve him, from whose indulgent hand every blessing they enjoy flows? One would think that here might be some hold even of worldly men, who have not wholly extinguished the light of natural conscience. The greatest part of this discourse has been directed to those of another character. Suffer me, now, to speak a little immediately to them. You are not insensible to worldly comforts; on the contrary, you love them too ardently; you seek them too eagerly; you indulge them too liberally. Consider, I beseech you, who it is that bestowed them; who it is, that, when he pleaseth, can blast them to you, or withdraw them from you. O the blindness and infatuation of mortal men! How passing and transitory are all created comforts! How certain and speedy the approach of death and judgment! Think what return you have made for all the goodness of God toward you from the womb even till now. And let me beg every hearer to recollect how far he stands indebted to God for continued health, for plentiful provision, for remarkable deliverances, for early instruction, for providential warnings. And if God, by his Spirit, has raised convictions in your minds, or earnestly pleaded with you in his gospel, in what a terrifying light will all this despised goodness appear, when you come to the brink of that gulf which separates you from an eternal world, but, above all, when you appear before God in an unembodied state? It is my duty to set this before you with plainness and fidelity; it is your present privilege, that you hear the things that belong to your everlasting peace. May God himself write them upon your hearts, and constrain you to flee, by saith, to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.

2dly. Let me also beseech every serious person, who now hears me, to consider how far he hath sinned against God and his own comfort, by forgetting the goodness of God, both in common and special mercies. It is surprising to think how little we make conscience of

this duty, and even when it is remembered in some measure, in what a lifeless, heartless manner it is performed. How little proportion is there between the prayers of distress, and the songs of deliverance? how little sense upon our minds of the many gracious interpositions of divine Providence in our favor? If he hath invited us to communion with himself; if he hath brought us into the secret chambers, and made his banner over us to be love, how soon is it forgotten? how little desire of its continuance? what saint endeavors to recover it? how little concern to improve it? Strange, indeed, that some, after tasting of the heavenly manna, should seel so unseemly a longing after the flesh-pots of Egypt.

But do you not sin as much against interest and comfort, as your duty? To forget a mercy, is to lose it; to give thanks for it, is to preserve and increase it. It is a very common mistake for serious persons to sit brooding over their sorrows, and, by that means, at once, to increase their sufferings, and to prevent their deliverance. I do not know a more useful direction to melancholy or dejected Christians, than by a deliberate effort of mind, from a sense of duty, to recollect, and give praise to God for the many mercies which he hath bestowed on them. This may be a happy mean of silencing their complaints, of turning the tide of their affections, and giving them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Is not thankfulness the improvement of mercies? and hath not God said, to him that "hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

3dly, I shall conclude, with offering the three following directions to those who are truly sensible of the goodness of God.

1. Be circumspect and watchful; though a thankful frame of spirit is of great advantage, both for your sanctification and peace, yet it is not out of the reach of temptation; let it not produce pride, security or self-sufficiency. It is an excellent direction given by the Psalmist to

men in high station and prosperity, Psalm 2:11, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling," Take heed also, lest it degenerate into carnal and sensual joy, making you rest with complacency in the creature, instead of being led by it to place your delight and happiness in the unchangeable Creator.

2. Be public-spirited and useful; if the Lord hath dealt bountifully with you, commend his service, and speak to his praise. This was often the resolution and practice of the Psalmist David, Psalm 66:16. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." Psal. 145:5, 6, 7. "I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works; and men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts; and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness." Let me recommend this particularly to Christians of age and experience. It gives religion a very discouraging aspect to younger persons, when such have nothing to utter but complaints. On the contrary, where can we behold a more edifying sight, than an aged person ready to bear testimony to the peace and comfort of true religion, dying by necessity to the pleasures and gaities of time, but living above them on the earnest of his future inheritance; and, instead of a sretful spirit arising from the frailties of a tottering frame, preserving a chearfulness and serenity of mind, in the hope of a blessed resurrection.—I imagine I hear some say, nothing is more true; but, alas! I am not the person: I see nothing in me, but causes of complaint, or grounds of fear. I believe it is so with all; but you have mistaken, or perverted the meaning of the exhortation. I did not advise you to boast of yourself, but to speak to the praise of God. I believe it is good, in most cases, to resist desponding sears, as so many temptations, and send them away, as hinderers of your duty, without a reply. Or, may I not justly say, admitting the truth of all that you can advance against yourselves, is it not but so much the more reasonable, that you should say with Jacob, Gen. 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, that thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

3. Be frequent and diligent in secret prayer. This is the way to preserve your watchfulness, and to increase your usefulness. The more you converse with God in secret, you will speak with the more judgment and profit to men in public. This is the way to dispose of your complaints. What signifies repeating them to men, who may despise you, and, at best, can only pity you, when you may carry them to God, who can effectually help you? Speak as much ill of yourselves to him as you please; but be so just as to speak honorably of him, and his service, to others who converse with you.—Now, may the Lord supply all your wants, from his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus. May he give you the sanctified use of every step of his providence, whether of mercy or of trial. "May the God of peace, Heb. 13:20, 21, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

SERMON VI

A VIEW OF THE GLORY OF GOD HUMBLING TO THE SOUL

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. JOB 42:5, 6

MY brethren, we can have no experimental knowledge; and, indeed, we have not much distinct knowledge at all of the nature of religion, as it takes place among angels, and other intelligent beings, who have

kept their first estate, and never were polluted by sin. From some things, however, recorded in scripture, we have reason to believe that they appear before God with the greatest lowliness and self-abasement, that they are at all times deeply penetrated with a sense of the infinite disproportion between themselves, as derived, dependant, limited, imperfect beings, and the eternal, immutable, omnipotent Jehovah. Thus in the vision of Isaiah, in the sixth chapter of that book, verse 1, 2, 3, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." But if this is the case with these exalted and happy spirits, how much more must a deep humiliation of mind be necessary to us, who, by sin, have rendered ourselves the just objects of divine wrath, and whose hope of salvation is founded only on the riches of divine grace? We ought never to forget, that every instance of the favor of God to man, is not to be considered as the exercise of goodness to the worthy, nay, not merely as bounty to the needy, or help to the miserable, but mercy to the guilty.

For this reason, as repentance is necessary to every sinner, in order to his reconciliation with God, so those Christians preserve the justest views of their present state and character, as well as the foundation of their hope, who frequently renew this salutary exercise. I cannot help saying further, that those make the wisest provision for the preservation of their inward peace, who frequently water that tender plant with the tears of penitential sorrow. To assist you in this exercise, and to point out the proper grounds of it, I have chosen to insist a little on these words, in which you see the effect which a discovery of the glory and majesty of God had upon his servant Job: I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

It is not necessary to my present purpose, to enter far into the dispute between Job and his friends, although, no doubt, the words of the text have an evident relation to it. The controversy seems plainly to have turned upon this point. His friends finding him in deep distress, under the most complicated affliction, would needs have it, that no good man could be so frowned upon by a righteous God; and therefore, that his former profession must have been hypocritical and false. This is evident from the manner in which Eliphaz opens the charge against him, chap. 4:6, 7, 8, 9. "Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed." In opposition to this, Job asserts and maintains his integrity in general, and withal, affirms their opinion to be false, for that God, in his just and sovereign providence, brings affliction both on the righteous and the wicked. That this is the proposition which he all along endeavors to support, is plain, as from many other passages, so particularly from chap. 9:22. "This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the perfect, and the wicked."

Thus stood the matter, in dispute, between Job and his friends, in which, though that good man had supported the truth, on the subject of divine Providence; yet, in the heat of the debate, and the anguish of his own sufferings, he had let fall some expressions, not only of impatience, but of disrespect to the conduct of the Lord his Maker. For these he was first reprov'd by Elihu, and afterwards, with unspeakable force and majesty, by God himself, who asserts the sovereignty of his power, and the righteousness of his providence. On this discovery of the glory of divine perfection, the sufferer was deeply humbled, and expresses a sense of his own vileness and folly, in the 4th and 5th verses of the fortieth chapter: "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no

further." And, again, in the beginning of the forty-second chapter, concluding with the words of the text.

It is not improbable, from the beginning of the thirty-eighth chapter, that it pleased God to give Job some visible representation of his glory and omnipotence. This was not unusual, in ancient times, before the canon of the scripture was closed. But, no doubt, the discovery which chiefly affected him was inward and spiritual, carrying home, with irresistible force, the great truths which we still find recorded in a manner inimitably noble and sublime. I have heard of thee, says he, by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. This implies, that, as seeing gives a more distinct, full, and satisfying knowledge of any thing, than hearing of it only by the report of others, the impressions which he then had of the majesty and glory of God, were far stronger than any he had ever felt before.—Therefore, says he, I abhor myself. It filled him with self-loathing and abhorrence.—And I repent in dust and ashes. This is either, in general, a strong expression of deep penitence and sorrow, of which dust and ashes were anciently the signs; or, perhaps, it has a particular reference to his present miserable and afflicted state, described in chapter 2:8. "And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he fat down among the ashes." As if he had said, Lord, I am deeply sensible of the evil of every rash word, of every rebellious thought. I confess, that thou hast afflicted me in truth and faithfulness; and that, in this low and desolate condition, it becomes me to lay my hand upon my mouth, and to repent of that guilt which would have fully justified thy providence in a still heavier stroke.

The words thus explained, present to us this general and most important truth, that a discovery of the perfection, glory, and majesty of God, has a powerful influence in leading us to repentance; and that the clearer this discovery is, the more sincere will be our repentance, and the deeper our humiliation. In discoursing further on this subject, at present, I propose, only, through Divine assistance,

I. To make some observations, at once to illustrate and confirm the proposition above laid down, as to the effect of a discovery of the glory of God. And, in the

II. And last place, to make some practical improvement of what shall be said.

I. Then, I am to make some observations, at once to explain and confirm the proposition just now laid down, as to the effect of a discovery of the glory of God. But, before we enter on what is principally intended, I must intreat your attention to the following preliminary remarks:

1. That this truth will hold equally certain in whatever way the discovery is made. It may please God to manifest himself to his people in very different ways. Sometimes it may be in a way wholly, or in part, miraculous, as in the case of Job, Isaiah, and some others mentioned in scripture; sometimes by affecting dispensations of Providence; sometimes by his ordinances, or instituted worship, accompanied with the operation of his Spirit; and sometimes by this last alone, without the help or accession of any outward mean.

2. I hope it will not be thought improper, that, in reasoning on the influence of a discovery of the glory of God, I sometimes bring in view the additional manifestations given us in the gospel, of the divine glory. This, to be sure, could not be supposed to make a part of what was discovered to Job, to whom that mystery, hid from ages and generations, and only opened in the fulness of time, was very obscurely, if at all known. But the example, afforded us in the text, leads us to a general truth; in the illustration and application of which, we may make use of all that is known to us of the nature and government of God. The

3. And principal remark is, that, when I speak of the influence of a discovery of the glory of God, I mean an internal and spiritual discovery, and not such a knowledge as is merely speculative, and

rests in the understanding, without descending into the heart. There is a common distinction to be met with in almost every practical writer, between knowledge merely speculative, that swims in the head, and practical or saving knowledge, that dwells in and governs the heart. That there is such a distinction in fact, experience obliges every man to confess: but it is extremely difficult to speak in a clear and precise manner upon it; to tell wherein it consists; or to show how these two sorts of knowledge differ otherwise, than by their effects. Yet even to point out their radical difference, seems necessary to me, who propose to show the happy influence and powerful efficacy of this knowledge, when it is of the right kind.

For this purpose, my brethren, be pleased to observe, that a barren speculative knowledge of God, is that which fixes chiefly on his natural perfections; or, if it be supposed to take in such as are moral, it is only to reason upon them as an object of science; but the true knowledge of God, is an inward and spiritual discovery of the amiableness and excellence of his moral perfections; or, to speak more in the scripture style, to perceive that he is indeed "glorious in his holiness. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." This is the language of celestial adoration, of those who "see him as he is, and know even as they are known." The same, in some measure, is the view given to every real child of God on earth, and, alone, serves to distinguish his children of every rank, and every degree of capacity, from others of an opposite character. Let me suppose a poor Christian, weak in understanding, and unassisted by education, who is witness to any extraordinary act of divine power: for example, a thunder storm, seeming to rend the heavens asunder, and either laying some ancient and venerable pile in ashes, or, perhaps, striking some persons to death, in a manner swifter than thought; he is immediately affected with a sense of the sovereignty of the Lord of nature, the holiness of every part of his will, the duty of absolute subjection in the creature, and the sinfulness of every rebellious thought. But, above all, he is struck with a sense of the malignity of sin, which has introduced so many natural evils, and, as it were, armed the incensed elements in their Maker's cause. Such a person,

though he can express his thoughts but very poorly, nay, though he can hardly speak to others with coherence or consistency, sees much more of God, than he who can reason on the planetary system; who can trace the beauty, variety, and extent of the Creator's works, and thence infer the necessity of a self-existent, almighty, and intelligent first cause. The one may expatiate on the wonderful works, or the wise purposes, of the Author of nature; the other feels and confesses him to be God. Alas! my brethren, we see too often, that knowledge and holiness in us, do not bear proportion one to another. We see every day examples of the greatest intellectual abilities, the noblest natural talents, being abused to the worst of purposes; for such I must always reckon, their serving no higher end than to adorn and set off the possessor, or burn incense to human vanity.—By a discovery, then, of the perfections, majesty, and glory of God, I understand the glory of his infinite holiness; that holiness which is inseparable from his nature, which shines in all his works, and in all his ways.

These observations being premised, let us now consider what influence a discovery of the glory of God hath in producing repentance, and increasing humility. And, in the

1st Place, It hath this effect, as it tends to convince us of sin, and particularly, to bring to light these innumerable evils, which a deceitful heart often, in a great measure, hides from its own view. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God which discovers and exposes the works of darkness. That a view of the divine Majesty has a strong tendency to give us a deep sense of our own sinfulness, is plain from many scripture examples. That of Job, in our text, is one directly in point. Another you have in Isaiah, ch. 6:5. where the reflection of the prophet, on a view of the divine glory, is, "Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Another instance you may see in the apostle John, who upon a view of the Redeemer in his glory, was, in a manner, deprived of life, through excessive fear. Rev.

1:17. "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." The only other instance I mention is of the apostle Peter, who, on the unexpected appearance, or rather from a view of the power of Christ, manifested in a miracle, was immediately struck with a sense of guilt, Luke 5:8. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, depart from me, for I am sinful man, O Lord."

It is not difficult to explain how a view of the divine holiness tends to discover and to affect us with a sense of our sinfulness. Nothing makes any quality appear so sensibly as a comparison with its opposite. The application of a straight rule marks the obliquity of a crooked line; nay, it marks even the least degree of variation, which by a less accurate trial would not have been discovered. Any piece of deformity appears more hideous and shocking when compared with perfect beauty. For the same reason, a clear view of the holiness of God, and a sense of his intimate presence with us, tends to bring sin to remembrance, as well as to cover us with confusion for those sins, which before we were able to justify, palliate, or conceal. We are expressly assured that our first parents, immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, were sensible of their guilt, and I cannot think they were wholly insensible of the omniscience and omnipresence of God. Yet we find that their fear greatly increased (doubtless from a sense of sin) when they heard God's voice in the garden, Gen. 3:8. "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

You may take a very plain and simple illustration of this from daily experience. Are there not some persons of loose principles and irregular practice, who, when by themselves, or in society like themselves, justify many of their sins, and to all appearance, commit them without remorse, as innocent, if not laudable? But let the same persons be carried into sober company, especially into the presence of any person eminent for piety and gravity, and they will be restrained and ashamed, and not able to open their mouths in defence of their licentious carriage. The mere presence of such a

person carries instant irresistible conviction with it, by forcing a comparison between piety and profligacy; that is to say, good and evil, light and darkness. So certain a truth is this, that one of the ancient heathen authors gives it as a rule for moral conduct, "that men should always imagine themselves in the presence of such a man as Cato, renowned for gravity and virtue." But if the fancied presence of a mortal, in whom some saint rays, if I may speak so, of the divine Image appear by reflection, has so much influence, how much greater would be the effect of a firm persuasion of the real presence of a holy God, "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?" What is it else than this that makes wicked men flee the society of the good as painful, and shun the thoughts of God as intolerable; so that it is the scripture character of such, that they say unto their Maker, practically, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

2. A discovery of the glory of God serves to point out the evil of sin, the aggravations of particular sins, and to take away the excuses of the sinner. Let us remember what I observed in a preceding part of this discourse, that it must be a discovery of the glory of the divine holiness; not only a knowledge of the true God, and understanding what he is, but a view of his infinite glory and beauty in being such. It must necessarily set the evil of sin in the clearest light, that all sin, as such, strikes immediately at the very being and perfections of God. When the law of God shews us our sins, we may be ready to complain of its strictness and severity, and wish to slip our necks from under the yoke. But when we see that the law could not be otherwise than it is, without being faulty; when we see that it is nothing else but a fair transcript of the moral perfections of God; and when we look up to the great and bright original, it must convince us that all sin is a direct opposition to the nature, as well as a rebellion against the will of God. If he is infinitely perfect and glorious, sin must be infinitely hateful and abominable. No man can plead for sin, in any instance or in any degree, but he must blaspheme the nature and perfections of God, to which it stands in opposition.

All men, indeed, by nature, are enemies to God himself, in their minds, by wicked works; and they hate his law, because it is spiritual and pure. There are also too many in this age, who have very relaxed principles as to the extent and obligation of the law, and, of consequence, very flight thoughts of the evil of sin. But a view of the glory of God rectifies, at once, these fatal errors, and carries home such conviction of the rights of the Creator, the obligation and subjection of the creature, and the beauty and excellence of that image which was stained by sin, as forces us to adopt the language of the Holy Ghost; "How evil and how bitter a thing is it to depart from the living God!" God grant that there may be many in this assembly, who understand and feel the force of this truth! There is need, my brethren, to attend to it; for all convictions of sin, which do not proceed from this source, or do not necessarily include this view, whatever pain or terror they may occasion, will prove empty and fruitless at last. Though there may be a slavish fear of the power of God, unless there be a view of the infinite evil of sin, there cannot be any lasting and saving change.

The same view also points out the aggravation of particular sins. The more clearly we understand the nature of God, our relation to, and dependance upon him, the more will we perceive the aggravation of every sin which bursts asunder these bonds. A view of the glory of God must either be general or particular; or, perhaps, for the most part, there is a mixture of both. My meaning is, that when there is a discovery of the glory of God in general, there is often, at the same time, a peculiar and striking display of some one attribute, of power, wisdom, justice, or mercy. Now how strongly does this impress upon the mind, a sense of the evil of those sins which strike directly against that perfection which happens to be set in the strongest point of view? When any display is given of the omniscience of God, how does it make us sensible of the impiety and folly of secret sins? Dan. 2:47. "The King answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret." When the power of God is made manifest, how does it aggravate the guilt of

presumption and confidence? Isa. 45:9. "Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker: let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? or thy work, he hath no hands?"

When the wisdom of God is displayed, doth not then all distrust appear highly criminal? Ought we not to say with the Psalmist, Psal. 27:1. "The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" When we have a view of our absolute dependance upon, and unspeakable obligations to the divine bounty, what a sense does this give us of the sin of unthankfulness, and forgetfulness of God? Of how many unhappy sensualists may this complaint be made? Isa. 1:2, 3. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Without any further enumeration, it will appear undeniable, that the clearer the discovery of the glory of God, the more must not only the evil of sin in general appear, but every particular crime must be loaded with new aggravations. I cannot help mentioning here, in a few words, that this is the immediate effect of a discovery of the glory of God, as it shines in Jesus Christ. The unmerited, unparalleled love, manifested to sinners in the gospel, greatly aggravates their ingratitude and rebellion. And the more that believers reflect upon their own conduct, and compare it with the grace and condescension of their Redeemer, the more they must abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes.

I only add, on this head, that a discovery of the glory of God takes away the excuses of the sinner. How prone men are to excuse and palliate their sins, we all know by experience. It is a light sense of the evil of sin, that leads us to commit it; and there is no reason to be surprised, if this, joined with self-interest, makes us ingenious in forming an apology for it after the commission. Hence often arise hard thoughts of the threatenings of God against sin, as severe.

Hence also unbelieving thoughts, which will not admit, that ever he will fulfil his word, or execute the threatened judgment. But a discovery of the glory of God, particularly of his infinite holiness, by shewing the evil of sin in its proper colours, stops every mouth, drags the sinner into the presence of his Judge, and strips the guilty criminal of every vain plea. We see plainly, in the case of Job, that he had such a view of the power, dominion, and absolute sovereignty of God, as put him entirely to silence, and convinced him, that there was no room for contending; no place for comparison between so unequal (must I call them) parties, God and man, Job 40:4. "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth."

This right of sovereignty in God, and the duty of absolute, immediate, unconditional subjection in the creature, I find plainly and frequently established in scripture. It is, indeed, entirely in this style, which may well be called the style of the King of kings, that God speaks to Job in the four chapters preceding that where my text lies. Though he is brought in speaking, to resolve a difficulty in providence; yet, you may observe, he does not say one word as to the justice of his proceeding; but, under many of the strongest images, sets forth his irresistible power, chap. 38:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast; understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof?" And, again, chap. 40:8, 9, 10, 11. "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency, and array thyself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him."

The sovereignty of God, is what, of all things else, sinners, while they continue in that character, are least capable of understanding, and least willing to submit to. This is not to be wondered at; because the very nature of sin consists in casting off our allegiance, and, as far as in us lies, rejecting the authority of God. But, my brethren, a real discovery of his glory, at once, raises him to the throne, and humbles us at his footstool, and is, as if we heard a voice from heaven, addressed to us in the following striking words, Isa. 2:10, 11. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." One who hath so known God, will perceive, that there can be no more proper reply to objections, on the part of man, to the divine procedure, than that of the apostle Paul, Rom. 9:20. "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

3. A discovery of the glory of God serves to point out the danger of sin. It is the hope of impunity, that emboldens the sinner to transgress, and to persist in his transgressions. For this reason, we find the scriptures, in general, attributing the impenitence of sinners to these two great sources, ignorance and unbelief, Psal. 14:1. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." And, in verse 4. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" that is to say, such bold rebellion in their conduct plainly discovers the atheism of their hearts. To the same purpose, Psalm 10:11, 13, "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it.— Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require it." But a discovery of the divine glory, at once destroys the foundation of this stupid security, and impious presumption. It realizes the very being of God more than before, as is plainly implied in the words of Job: I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. It makes his presence sensible, and teaches us, that "all things are naked before him." So that there is no hope of lying concealed. It sets before us his holiness and justice; that he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

So that, while his nature continues the same, the guilty and impenitent cannot possibly obtain pardon. Above all, it sets before us the terror of his power, which is infinite and boundless; so that nothing can be more vain, than for the sinner to hope either to escape or resist.

Agreeably to all this, we find, that, in the holy scriptures, in which God hath been pleased to make himself known to us by external revelation, it is by asserting, and, as it were, displaying, and producing to view, the glory of his infinite perfection, that he endeavours to deter us from sin, and animate or encourage us to duty. When God gave the law to the children of Israel, he gave them, at the same time, a display of his greatness and majesty in a very awful manner. To express his sovereign authority, and the absolute propriety he had in them, he introduces it with these words: "I am the Lord, thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." You may also remember, how often, in appointing the several Mosaic constitutions, these significative words are repeated, I am the Lord. In the same manner, to impress his people with a sense of the evil of sin, as committed against such a God, he declares his own absolute dominion, Mal. 1:14. "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

When he would give his people a deep conviction of the folly and danger of secret sins, he sets forth his omniscience and omnipresence, Jer. 23:23, 24. "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." When he would express the danger of obstinacy and disobedience, he gives a very lively idea of his infinite power, Jer. 5:22. "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it."

The very same thing he doth to encourage the trust of his own people, Isa. 44:6. "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God." When he would make us sensible, that, if we continue in sin, it is impossible for us to escape punishment, what a terrible representation does he give of his dreadful and irresistible vengeance? Prophecies of Nah. 1:5, 6. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

Thus we see, that God, in scripture, reveals the glory of his own nature, as the effectual means of restraining us in the commission of sin, or turning us from it; and plainly supposes, that nothing but ignorance of him can encourage sinners in their rebellion. Neither can it be denied, that when there is an inward and powerful discovery of these truths to the mind, it must lead us to repentance, and lay us prostrate before his throne, in obedience and submission. Who, that knoweth the Almighty, will run upon the thick bosses of his buckler? or will not rather use this dutiful language of Job, chap. 9:2, 3, 4, 5, 6. I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? which removeth the mountains, and they know not; which overturneth them in his anger; which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble."

4. In the last place, a view of the divine glory tends to leads us to repentance, as it sets forth his infinite mercy, and affords encouragement to, as well as points out the profit of repentance. Just and proper conceptions of God cannot be given us, without including his great mercy. This bright perfection shone, even on Mount Sinai, through all the terrors of that legal dispensation, Exod. 33:18, 19.

"And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Exod. 34:5, 6, 7. "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Without the knowledge of this amiable attribute, all the other perfections of God would signify little to bring us to true repentance. Without this, they carry nothing in them but unmixed terror to the guilty. Without this, therefore, the consideration of his infinite holiness and purity, his inflexible justice, and almighty power, would only serve to drive us further from him, by throwing us into absolute despair. But when, to all the other perfections of God, we join his infinite mercy, the true knowledge of him serves not only to destroy criminal presumption, but to animate to dutiful submission. Thus the Psalmist expresses himself, Psalm 130:3, 4, "If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Here you may observe, that, when he says, "there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared," he not only means, that there is encouragement to serve God, but that his mercy itself leads to that filial reverence which is so essential a part of true penitence. The greatness and mercy of God happily conspire in melting the heart of the sinner. There is an expression of singular beauty, Hos. 3:5. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord, their God, and David, their King; and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter days."

This leads me to observe, that it is in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that we have the brightest and clearest display of divine mercy. It is in Christ, that we have the true and saving discovery of the glory and perfections of God. And it is particularly in him, that we have an united illustration, and joint display of

greatness and goodness, of majesty and mercy. In the undertaking of our blessed Redeemer, we have a very clear and affecting view of those perfections, that shew the evil of sin, and the danger of the sinner. Never did the holiness of God shine brighter, or his hatred and indignation against sin, appear with greater terror, than when the sword of his justice was drawn out against the man who is his fellow. When God swept away a polluted world by an universal deluge; when he overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven; when the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These were terrible proofs of his hatred of sin, of the justice and holiness of his nature. Yet were they, after all, but faint evidences, in comparison of what were given, when "he who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God,—was sound in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

But, at the same time, in this great event, hath he not magnified his love? Rom. 5:8. "But God hath commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet "sinners, Christ died for us." How shall we think or speak on this unfathomable subject? Christ Jesus is the fruit of the Father's everlasting love to sinners of mankind. How great the giver! how unspeakable the gift! how mean and worthless the objects of his love! God is love. Power, wisdom, holiness, and justice, shine, indeed, in the doctrine of the cross. But, above all, grace and mercy prevail, "and reign through righteousness unto eternal life." What a melting view to every convinced sinner! Zech. 12:10. "—They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one that mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." Must they not, with Job, abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes? This is a circumstance frequently taken notice of with regard to the gospel converts. Jer. 31:9. "They shall come with weeping; and with supplications will I lead them." Jer. 5:4, 5. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they, and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord, their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their

faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten." I shall close this head, by addressing to you the words of God to the children of Israel, Joel 2:12, 13. "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

I proceed, now, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And,

1. You may learn, from this subject, the force and meaning of those passages of scripture, in which the whole of religion is expressed by the knowledge of God. Thus, Prov. 9:10. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." The same thing is affirmed by our blessed Saviour, John 17:3. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." On the other hand, wicked men are often described by this short and expressive character, that they know not God, as in 2 Thess. 1:8. "—In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God." The truth is, God is either wholly unknown, or greatly mistaken by wicked men. None but his servants do truly see his glory; and the more they see of him, the more they are assimilated to him. Thus the apostle Paul describes conversion in the following terms, 2 Cor. 4:6. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." And, in the same epistle, chap. 3:18, he thus describes the progress of the christian life, "But we all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

2. From what hath been said on this subject, you may learn the great danger of a state of ignorance. If repentance, which is the beginning

of true religion, takes its rise from a knowledge of the nature and perfections of God, does it not follow, that those who are grossly ignorant, are not only in a contemptible, but in a deplorable state? that they must be strangers to the power and practice of religion, and, dying in that condition, must perish eternally? It is much to be lamented, that even amongst us, who have the means of instruction in so great plenty, there are still many who continue grossly ignorant. How inexcusable are those parents, who do not make conscience of diligently training up their children in the knowledge of the things that belong to their eternal peace? I must also intreat all heads of families, whom God hath enabled to hire the labor of others, seriously to think of the obligation that lies upon them, to instruct their servants in the principles of religion, and not suffer any under their roof to perish for lack of knowledge. Do not think you have done enough, when you have given them food and wages, if you wholly neglect their precious souls. I do not expect to prevail upon you, faithfully to discharge this duty, by any arguments but those drawn from the glory of God, and your own everlasting interest; but I cannot help, at the same time, putting you in mind, that it is very much for your temporal interest. Depend upon it, the more conscientiously you discharge your duty to them, the more honestly, diligently, and cheerfully will they serve you. It is very common to hear complaints of the slothfulness, unfaithfulness, and insolence of servants; but, if we consider, seriously, what belongs to the duty of a master, there will be found, perhaps, as many, and as great faults, on this side as on the other. It is surprising, that some seem to expect, in a poor uneducated creature, all manner of decency of behavior, sweetness of temper, integrity, and diligence, and are ready to storm upon the least defect, while, at the same time, they show no example in their own conduct, but of a visible neglect of duty both to God and man. Oh! my brethren, have pity on the ignorant, especially the younger sort, who would learn, if they had teachers. Ignorance is always a secure, insensible state. They know nothing, and therefore they fear nothing. Public instruction is, in a great measure, useless to those who are not prepared for it by more familiar teaching at home.

Let ministers speak never so plainly from the pulpit, it is still to many of them a strange language, which they do not comprehend.

3. From what hath been said on this subject, you may see the necessity of regeneration, or an inward change of heart, in order to real religion. You have heard above, that it is not a speculative knowledge of the nature and perfections of God, or understanding what he is, that leads to repentance, but a view of his excellence and amiableness, as glorious in his holiness. This none can have, but those who are in some measure transformed into the same image. Hence it is, that wicked men do not cherish, but avoid the thoughts of God. Hence it is, that extraordinary tokens of the divine power and presence, signal judgments, and unexpected strokes on themselves, or their relations, distress and terrify them, and bring them under a slavish bondage for a little, but produce no love; no desire of union; no cordial submission. Hence also appears the foolishness of that sinful, but general propensity in men, to ask after a sign, and to desire that other and different evidence should be given them of the truth of religion than God hath seen meet. We have an example of this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded, Luke 16. towards the close. There the rich man is represented, as intreating, that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren for their warning. When Abraham refers them to the revealed will of God, Moses and the prophets, he urges his request thus, ver. 30, "And he said, nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent;" to which the answer is given immediately, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

There have been others at different times, who have desired such extraordinary proofs; but they would of themselves, be attended with no real benefit. Though you had been on Mount Sinai with Moses, it would have produced terror, but no other effect, without a spiritual discovery of the real glory of God. See Exod. 19:16. "And it came to pass, on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders, and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the

trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." And the same book, ch. 20:18, 19. "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off: and they said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Another evidence of the same thing, may be taken from the case of devils and damned spirits. They have, no doubt, a sensible demonstration of the being, and, probably, a very clear intellectual knowledge of the nature of God; yet hath it not any effect in changing their dispositions: on the contrary, the more they know of him, who is so opposite to their temper, they hate him the more; it inflames their natural enmity, and makes it rage with double violence. This, I think, appears very plainly, both from the reason of the thing, and from the following passages of scripture, Matth. 8:29, it is said of two demoniacs: "And behold they cried out, saying, what have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Mark 5:6, 7. "But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, what have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." And again, Mark 9:20. "And they brought him unto him; and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him, and he fell on the ground, and wallowed, foaming." From which passages, we may perceive, agreeable to what has been observed, that the presence of Christ increased, at once, the rage and misery of the unclean spirits. Let this excite us to pray, that it would please God to reveal himself to us by his Spirit, and give us the saving knowledge of him, as he is "in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to himself."

4. Suffer me, on this occasion, shortly to address myself to those, who are strangers to true religion. Let me beseech them, while they are yet in the way, and whilst the Spirit of God is striving with them, in his word and ordinances, to lay down the weapons of their rebellion against him, and to lay hold, by faith, on the atoning blood of Christ for their reconciliation and peace. Are there not some in

this assembly, who have yet no knowledge of God, but that which makes his service a burden, his Sabbaths a weariness, and his people contemptible or odious? Are there not some tender spirits, who are passionate lovers of this present world, but unable to bear the view of mortality and misery in their fellow-creatures; who tremble at the gloom of a church-yard, or burying vault, and turn pale as ashes at the sight of a death's head, or an open grave? I beseech you, my beloved hearers, to join, with the terror of divine power, the riches of divine grace; and let both constrain you to "acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace, that thereby good may come unto you." I know no way, by which you may avoid meeting with the king of terrors; but you may set him at defiance under the protection of the King of kings. There is no profit in forgetting, but there is both honor and profit in conquering death. Some are unhappily successful, for a season, in banishing every dismal idea from their minds. The false and flattering pleasures of life engross their attention, and intoxicate their minds. But in a little time, Behold the supreme Judge "cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." He is now beseeching you with tenderness, and waiting on you with patience. Embrace, therefore, the happy season. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

5. In the last place, you may see the reason why every truly good man, the more he groweth in religion, the more he groweth in humility. Growth in religion implies, or carries in it, a growing discovery of the glory of God, as it shines in his works, his word, his ordinances, his providence. This necessarily leads to self-abasement. O how contrary to religion is pride! But, above all others, how absurd, criminal, intolerable, is spiritual pride? what a proof of self-ignorance, as well as forgetfulness of God! The first views of a penitent are fixed on the enormities of his life; but when these are, in some measure, subdued, additional discoveries of the glory of God bring forth the latent corruptions of his heart. What affecting complaints does that eminent, zealous, faithful minister of Christ,

the apostle Paul, make in the following well known passage, Rom. 7:18. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not." And verse 23, 24. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Nay, the clearest views which a believer can take of the riches of divine mercy through a Redeemer, though they afford unspeakable consolation in God, tend also deeply to humble him, under a sense of his own unworthiness. The doctrine of the cross is not more refreshing to the broken in heart, than it is abasing to the proud; for it was chosen of God for this very purpose, "that no flesh should glory in his presence."

On the whole, my brethren, as you cannot live under the direction of a better habitual principle, so you cannot prepare for any act of solemn worship more properly, than by deep humility. To improve this disposition, let me intreat you to make a serious and impartial search into the sins you have been guilty of, in heart and conversation, by omission or commission; by neglecting your duty to God, or the ill performance of his worship, in public, in family, or in secret; by neglecting your duty to your neighbour, to yourselves, to your relations; or doing that which is wrong, by indulging, in any measure, the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life." To conclude all, you will never have a more satisfying evidence, that your acts of worship, ordinary or more solemn, have been acceptable to God, than if they serve to clothe you with humility, and make you adopt and relish the words of Job in the text: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

SERMON VII

MAN IN HIS NATURAL STATE

Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. REV. 3:17

IN order to preach the Gospel with success, it is necessary that we should begin, by establishing the great and fundamental truths, on which all the rest are built, and to which they constantly refer. Nay, it is necessary, that we should often look back to these, and see that we be not off the foundation, or that it be not weakly, or imperfectly laid. Of this sort, I take the guilt, misery and weakness of our nature to be; and therefore have chosen the words now read, as the subject of discourse, in which the spirit of God reproves the self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness of the church of Laodicea.

Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, &c. I suppose you will all easily understand, that the words are figurative, and are spoken entirely with a view to the spiritual date of that church. In this light, let us consider what is precisely their meaning.

We may either suppose, that this charge is brought against the church of Laodicea, because there were many there, under the profession of the Gospel, who were, notwithstanding, still in a natural and unrenewed state—strangers to the power of religion; of which, their being thus unhumbled, and insensible of their guilt and misery, was the evidence; and for which the remedy is prescribed in the following words: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see."

Or we may suppose, that this reproof was in a great measure applicable to them all, in general; believers and unbelievers; the best

of them being exceedingly prone to trust in themselves that they were righteous; instead of that humble dependance on the merit and grace of their Redeemer, which ought not only to be the refuge of the sinner, but the confidence of the saint. And there is no question, that this is a proper caution to professing Christians in every age, to beware of splitting on the rock of self-sufficiency.

But as this disposition reigns in the heart of every one, that is yet at a distance from God—is the foundation of their security and impenitence, and is what they must be brought off from, before they can be reconciled to God; it is for their benefit, that I chiefly design this discourse, though it may also be useful, and shall be in part, applied to the children of God. It is an affecting thought, when pursued to its consequences; yet alas! it is unquestionably true, that in every assembly, such as this, of professing Christians, there are not a few, who are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, under the wrath of God, and liable to the condemning sentence of his law; and at the same time, that the far greatest part of them are ignorant of it, and know not, that they are wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked.

In discoursing farther upon this subject, therefore I shall

I. Endeavor to prove and illustrate this truth: that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God.

II. I shall briefly shew you, that being brought to a lively sense, and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step, to the saving knowledge of God, in Christ—And in the last place, shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place then, I am to prove and illustrate this truth; that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God. What is said in this passage of the Laodiceans, is universally true, of the posterity of

Adam. Unless an inward and essential change has been wrought upon them by the grace of God, they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. It is also true of them, as well as the Laodiceans, that they know it not; but vainly presume themselves to be rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing. If these two things are jointly true of many of you my hearers, there is nothing in which you can have so great a concern: therefore, let me earnestly beseech your most serious attention, to what shall be said: as the success of this conviction is necessary, to your understanding or profiting by any other part of divine truth, as I shall afterwards shew you.

The proof of the truth here asserted, can be only of two kinds. 1. From scripture, which is the testimony of God declaring it. 2. From the visible state of the world, and our own experience finding it to be so.

1. That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, appears from the express, and repeated testimony of the word of God. And this testimony we have, not only in particular passages, carrying the truth, but in the strain and spirit of the whole, and the several dispensations of Divine Providence there recorded, which are all of them, built upon this supposition, and intended to remedy this universal evil.

See what God declares: Gen. 6:5. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart, was only evil continually." And again, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." We may take the psalmist David's testimony of himself, as a sample of the rest of mankind; and indeed he plainly intimates, that it is a common calamity. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Behold! I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

We may take also the testimony of the apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, which is the more full to our present purpose, that as he had never been at Rome, he is there laying the foundation of religion in general, and the Christian dispensation in particular, by a clear and explicit proof of the need the world had of a Saviour, from its universal corruption and depravity. See then what he says—"What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one." And again—"Now we know that what things soever the law faith, it faith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be flopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.—For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

You may also see that the apostle traces this disorder to its very source—"Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

I shall add but one express scripture testimony more.—"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

But besides the particular passages of scripture, positively declaring this truth, the whole frame and contexture of the scriptures, and all the dispensations of Divine Providence recorded in them, are a proof of the same thing. Man is every where considered as in a fallen and sinful state. Every thing that is prescribed to him, and every thing that is done for him, goes upon that supposition. It is not one man, or a few men, that are in scripture called to repentance, but all without exception. Now repentance is only the duty of a sinner. An innocent person cannot repent; he has nothing to grieve for in his heart, or to forsake in his life. It is also proper to observe, that one of the scripture characters of God is, Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. Now, he could not be to us a forgiving God, and there would be no need that he should be revealed under that character, unless we were sinners, that stood in

need of pardon. Mercy, indeed, is the distinguishing attribute of God, and this can only have respect to offenders. All the other perfections of God, might be exercised towards pure and holy creatures; but mercy, only towards sinners. He might be a good, holy, just, wise, powerful God, to persons in a state of innocence, but he can shew mercy only to the guilty.

Do not the dispensations of God's providence shew the same thing? He sent the flood, as a testimony of the wickedness of the world, and for the punishment of a guilty race. Remember also the sacrifices, which were appointed, and accepted by God, from the beginning of the world. Sacrifices are for atonement, and expiation. They are plainly a substitution in the room of a forfeited life. It is doing violence to common sense, to make them any thing else. The whole Jewish economy, which had in it so many sacrifices, so many offerings, so many washings and purifications, does plainly suppose, the person using them to be infected with sin, or moral pollution. Had not this been the case, they had been extremely absurd and improper.

But the strongest testimony of all, that God hath given to the guilt and corruption of mankind, is his sending his own Son into the world, to redeem them, by the sacrifice of himself—To what purpose redeem them, if they were not in bondage? Why so costly an expiation, if our lives had not been forfeited to divine justice? But that it was for this purpose, that Christ came into the world, is so plain, from the whole of the scriptures, that I shall select but one passage out of many, to prove it—"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

What is said already on this head, is a full proof from scripture, that man is now, by nature, in a state of sin; that he is also, in consequence of that, in a state of misery, and liable to the wrath of God, is proved by many of the same passages, and by many others

—"For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness—For the wages of sin is death," &c. But I need not multiply passages to this purpose; for in all God's dispensations, the deserved punishment of sinners is as evident as their sinfulness itself. It is indeed fully proved, from the essential perfections of God, particularly his holiness and justice. He is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity. Evil cannot dwell with him, nor fools, that is, sinners, stand in his sight.

Is not all this then my brethren, a sufficient proof, from the testimony of God, that man in a natural state, is sinful and miserable? shall we affirm ourselves to be whole, if he saith we are unsound? Do we know more than God? Will we not give credit to the fountain of truth? Nor is it any objection to this, that we ourselves know it not, or are but little sensible of it. One considerable part of the disease, is blindness of understanding: so that we may, and must, till our eyes are opened, be ignorant of our danger—We may think and say, that we are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, while we are wretched and miserable, and blind and naked.

2. The same thing appears from the visible state of the world, and our own experience. Unbelievers are apt to hear with indifference and neglect, what they are told from scripture testimony, unless otherwise confirmed to them; and it is with the unbeliever we have now to do. Besides, the establishment of this truth, upon other evidence than that of scripture, ought to have a powerful influence, in inducing men to believe the other truths in scripture, that are connected with and sounded upon it. I think it therefore, highly proper, to lay before you what evidence we have of our lost state, from the observation of the world, though the scriptures had been silent. I would likewise recommend to all, what shall be said on this subject, to preserve your faith unshaken, and keep you from blasphemous, unbelieving thoughts, if at any time you should be tempted to them: since even unenlightened reason confirms the

foundation of divine truth, and nature, and providence conspire in preaching the doctrine of divine grace.

Now, doth not our experience, as well as the observation of others, shew us, that we are born in sin, and conceived in iniquity? May we not say from our own knowledge, that the imaginations of the heart of man, are only evil from his youth, and that continually? Is there not a proneness, and tendency to evil, universally to be observed in mankind? and a backwardness and aversion to that which is good? Is not this apparent even in children, upon the first dawn of reason in their minds, and the first sight of choice or inclination in their hearts? Surely it must be owned, that in that early period, they are at least comparatively innocent—If any among us, is without sin, it must be the youngest; yet folly is bound in the heart of a child. How hard is it to guard them from evil, and to inspire them with good dispositions, even by the wisest and earliest care, in their instruction? and even after the most successful pains, are there not still many remaining blemishes, through the prevalence of corrupt nature, which shew, that the ground-work itself, was faulty? But on the contrary, how easily do men learn that which is evil? Do they need to be taught? Is it not enough to give them licence? How just is that description in Jeremiah? They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I am far from denying, that men are improved and forwarded in sin, by instruction and example, as well as in that which is good: but it is plain, they are far apter scholars, in the first, than in the last; which plainly shews they are more powerfully disposed to it by nature. Nay, is it not evident, from the universal experience and testimony of those, who act from a principle of Religion; that it is extremely difficult, with all the care they can take, to resist: the propensity of nature to the contrary? And that in the best, it often gets the superiority, when they are off their guard? Is not this an evidence of the depravity and corruption of human nature, and its tendency to evil? Are those who hate sin, often overcome by it, and shall those who love it, presume to say, they are free from it?

If any should ask, how I prove that that course of action to which human nature is inclined is evil, without the assistance of scripture? I answer, from reason; and that many ways—from its pernicious effects on societies, and private persons; from the testimony of the world in general, when others than themselves are concerned, and from the testimony of every man's conscience in his own case. Who is there, that does not often feel in himself, a powerful tendency to what he cannot but in his heart condemn? Is not his conscience God's vicegerent? and doth not natural religion, as well as the religion of Christ, declare him corrupt? So that I may say with the Apostle Paul, not citing the passage as a proof, but as an illustration and description of the character, and state of natural men. "For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile, accusing or else excusing one another."

Thus there is as much light remaining with us since the fall, as to shew, that we are out of the way, but not to bring us back to it again.

As a serious consideration of the state of the wicked may shew us our natural impurity, so it hath been long ago discovered, and confessed by many of the ancient heathens, who never heard of the name of Christ, nor knew of the remedy. These, discerning by nature, the perfectly pure and holy nature of God, and comparing it with the dispositions prevalent in man, could not reconcile them together; but concluded, that a creature so corrupt, could not come in that condition out of the hands of its Creator. This difficulty some of them endeavored to solve by a state of pre-existence; which bears some resemblance to the true solution, given of it in the holy scripture: viz. the apostacy of our first parents; which entailed a corrupted nature upon their posterity, in which the light of nature and revealed truth, seem almost wholly to coincide.

It is to the same thing that I cannot help attributing the practice, that so universally prevailed over the heathen world, before the coming of Christ, of offering sacrifices, to appease the wrath of the deity, supposed to be offended. That the custom of sacrificing prevailed very generally, perhaps universally among the heathen nations, at the greatest distance from, and having no correspondence with each other, is a certain and unquestionable fact. Neither do I see to what cause we can ascribe it, unless to one of these two; either an ancient tradition, from the beginning of the world, and spread with the inhabitants through the several parts of it, as they separated and peopled it; or to the common condition of human nature, which dictated the same thing to persons in such distant places.

If the first of these suppositions is embraced, which indeed I suppose to be the truth, it appears that sacrifices were appointed by God to man in his fallen state, for the pardon of sin, and that they had reference to the great propitiatory sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

If we prefer the last supposition, it would seem as if the consciousness of guilt had uniformly prompted men in all ages and nations, to offer up some atonement for their offences. In both cases, it equally serves to prove the corruption and sinfulness of human nature.

Now, as what hath been said, plainly proves the impurity of man in his natural state, so his misery and liableness to punishment may also be proved; both as a natural consequence of his sinfulness, and even more plainly by itself. There is not only a considerable degree of actual misery in the world, but plain presages of more to follow it in the world to come. Need I take up much time, in enumerating the several miseries and calamities incident to human life? Are not oppression and injury from one another, poverty, sickness, pain and death, the plain fruits of sin, and visible tokens of God's displeasure? Man with some marks of superiority and excellence of nature, is even, by means of his superiority, his knowledge, and foresight of his

own sufferings, more miserable, than any other of the creatures, that is equally subject to the stroke of death.

To the whole, I shall only subjoin one consideration more, which is applicable to both parts of the argument—I have often thought, that the natural terror and fear, with which men are possest of the presence of God, or any remarkable token of his power, is nothing else but an indication of guilt, or an apprehension of wrath.

You may see some incidents in scripture, from which it is natural to conclude, that when God makes any visible manifestation of his glory, or sends any of his angels or ministers from heaven to earth; those who are present, are filled with the utmost dread and terror.

Thus in the relation given of God's appearance upon Mount Sinai, it is said; "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." See another example, in Isaiah—"Then said I, woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." And in the New Testament, in the apostle John—"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."

And is not this always the case, in all ages, that upon any remarkable appearance of an inhabitant of the other world, or even when any such thing is falsely apprehended, the inhabitants of this world are filled with extraordinary terror? What is this do you imagine, but consciousness of guilt, and apprehension of vengeance?

Innocence has no enemy, and it has nothing to sear. We are all in much the same case with Adam, immediately after his first transgression; when he heard God's voice in the garden, he was afraid, and fled, and hid himself—We read of no such fear possessing him, while he retained his innocence, but as soon as he had sinned, he began to dread an avenging God.

From all this then, I would conclude, that reason accords with scripture, in saying, that all have sinned and come short of the glory

of God: that man in a natural state, is wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

SERMON VIII

AN INDUCEMENT TO COME TO CHRIST

Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. - REV. 3:17

HAVING in a former discourse, proved, and illustrated this truth; that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God:—I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was to shew you, that being brought to a lively sense and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step to the saving knowledge of God in Christ.

On this, I shall not need to spend much time, as it is so exceedingly plain, both in itself, and from what hath been already said—It is however necessary to set it clearly before you, in order to lay a foundation for the improvement of the subject.

If the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified, proceeds upon the supposition of our sinful and miserable condition by nature; then surely, it can neither be valued, embraced, nor improved; and indeed, I think hardly understood, by those who know not this their natural state. What Christ hath done, and promises to do in our behalf, is designed as a remedy for our distressed condition; and

therefore, till the distress is known, the remedy will be set at nought. If a physician should offer his care and skill for the recovery of a man, who esteemed himself in perfect health, would he not deride the proposal, so long as he continued in that opinion? If any man should offer a charitable supply of clothes and food, to one who imagined himself immensely rich, and gloried in his riches; would he not look upon it as the grossest insult?

Just so is the gospel treated, by all such as see not their misery. What is the substance of the gospel? 'To you O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Behold! I preach to you Christ crucified, a Saviour suited to your necessities, able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him. He is well fitted to be a mediator, between you and your offended Maker. He hath offered himself up, a sacrifice to the justice of God for your sins, by the merit of which, you may be saved from deserved and impending ruin. He offers himself as a guide, to direct your feet in the way of peace—to stand by you in the difficulties and dangers to which you are exposed, and to give you by his communicated strength, a complete victory over all your enemies.'

What reply doth the unconvinced sinner make to all this? Why he saith, 'I know nothing of this misery you suppose, wherefore then a Saviour? I see no sin, what necessity then, for an atonement? I fear no wrath, therefore will seek for no Intercessor. My eyes are open, therefore I will have no guide. I know of no enemies, and therefore, will not enter into contention with a shadow, or flee when no man pursueth.'

These, my brethren, are either directly, or implicitly, the thoughts of men, in a secure and unconvinced state; and while they are so, they can see no form nor comeliness in the Saviour, nor any beauty, that they should desire him.

It is otherwise with the broken in spirit. He sees his own vileness and unworthiness, and therefore cannot lift his eyes to God, but through

the atoning blood of Christ. He fears the avenger of blood, and therefore flees to the city of refuge—The message of the gospel is to him indeed glad tidings of great joy, and he counts it a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

The justice of this representation you may see, from what our Saviour himself says of the end of his coming. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

See also the terms of his invitation. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Appetite, and knowledge of necessity, is first required, or supposed, to the bestowing of Gospel blessings—"Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

I shall only add, that we find by the instances recorded in scripture, of such as were converted by the preaching of the gospel; that their conversion took its rise from conviction of sin—"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?" See also the instance of the jailor—"Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: And brought them out, and said sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Repentance unto life, and the return of the sinner to God, proceeds from the same cause, in every age. Who are the persons who believably apply to Christ for the pardon of their sins, but those who see they are undone without him? Who are the persons in whose eyes he is most precious, and who maintain the most habitual dependance upon him? Are they not those who have been most effectually humbled, and see their own insufficiency for any thing that is good?

From all this I conclude, that none can come to Christ by faith, but those who see themselves to be wretched, and miserable, and blind,

and naked.

Let us now make some improvement, of what hath been said upon this subject, for your instruction and direction.

1. I would improve what has been said on this subject, for discovering the danger of many among us, who have never yet been brought to a just sense of their character and state. Even the general belief, that such often have in the scriptures, may shew them what they have to fear. I might no doubt first of all observe, how very guilty and miserable those are, who are most notorious for sins, of the grossest and most shameful kind. But my subject leads me more directly to consider, who are in general, unrenewed, than to mark the several degrees of guilt in particular sinners. From the text therefore, and the illustration of it, I am authorized to declare to you, and I beseech you to hear it with application; that all such as were never brought to a real discovery, and inward sense of their miserable condition by nature, are still in a state of wrath, and strangers to the power of religion, whatever may be their profession, and whatever may be their present peace. Oh! how easy is it, to lay asleep a natural conscience, and to keep a deceitful corrupt heart in a state of ease and security? Some formality in outward duty, some moderation in sin, so to speak, the natural decay and weakness of human passions, or youthful lusts, in a character formed by human prudence, and regulated by health, credit or gain, is often made to supply the place of a heart renewed by the spirit and grace of God. But consider, I beseech you, that though some may be ten-fold more the children of the devil than others, yet all by nature, are the servants of sin; and "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—It is not only such as are profane, or unclean; such as riot in brutish sensuality; such as are the plagues of human society; who live in brawls and contention; but all, in whom an essential change has never been wrought, that are thus concluded under condemnation.

It is usual for men to take encouragement, from seeing others worse than themselves; and to consider all the threatenings in scripture, as

levelled against the chief and capital offenders; but my text is chiefly directed to such as say they are "rich, and increased with goods." Can you say then, my brethren, that you have been brought under genuine convictions of sin? Have you been obliged to fall down prostrate before God, when fitting upon the throne of his holiness? Have you found the sentence of death in yourselves, and discovered no remedy but in Christ? If this has never been your case, you have reason to fear, that you are yet "in the gall of bitterness, and in "the bond of iniquity."

But I must tell you also, that this is matter of feeling more than of profession. It is not enough to speak honorably of Christ, or of his works. Many do so, who never felt their necessity, or seriously and in good earnest applied to him. It were a happy thing, if all among our hearers, who call for evangelical preaching, who quarrel with us when they think we do not preach the Saviour's cross—the lost state of man, and the doctrine of free grace, were experimentally acquainted with these truths. Many such have only been accustomed to hear the Redeemer spoken of with reverence. They may be able to imitate the language of some of his servants, though they know very little of that brokenness of spirit, which accompanies true repentance.

But lest this should be in any measure mistaken, I must make these two observations—the first is, that a lively sense and deep conviction of sin, is, properly speaking, but a negative mark of true religion; giving us to know, that the unhumiliated are yet impenitent. For it is certain, that many have been under very strong convictions, nay, have been driven to the very borders of despair with terror, who yet never were effectually changed, but stifled their convictions, and returned to their former security of heart, and carelessness of life.

Secondly, there may be some on the other hand, who are truly born of God, in whom the terrors of conviction have not been very remarkable. This happens most frequently in the case of those, who are called in their infancy, or earlier years, and who have had the

advantage of a careful, and pious education. It would be destructive of the comforts of God's children to lay down one method, in which he always proceeds. He is free and sovereign, in the manner of his dealing with sinners; and softens some hearts by kindness, as well as others by correction. So that if the end be brought about, we need be less solicitous about the steps of his procedure. Yet I think humility of spirit is inseparable from real religion; and if it be less visible in the anguish of repentance, it will be still manifest in the temper of the penitent.

II. Let me now, for the improvement of this subject, lay down a few of the best and most solid evidences of genuine conviction of sin. And,

1. It is a good sign that conviction is genuine, when there is a clear and deep apprehension of the evil of sin, as well as the danger of it. When the mind dwells not only on the atrocity of particular crimes, but on the aggravation of all sin, as such: When the sinner is truly offended with himself, for departing from his Maker's service; breaking his holy laws; forgetting or despising his innumerable mercies. There may be, and there is often an apprehension of suffering when there is little sense of the evil of sin: but the conviction is then genuine, when it makes the sinner not only remember what he has done, but confess what he has deserved.

2. It is a good evidence, when the sense of the evil of sin abides and grows, even though the fear of wrath may in a great measure have abated.

It is observable, that conviction of sin usually takes its rise from some gross or heinous acts, which first alarm the conscience, and in such a situation the attention of the penitent is fixed on nothing else but the enormities of his life. If this view continues, and produces its effects, he is soon brought to see and confess the inherent vanity of his heart; the worldliness of his affections; and the unprofitableness of his conversation. It is a very common thing for persons who seem

to have some sense of the commission of crimes, to have little or no sense at all of the neglect of duty, and of living daily to themselves. It was a heavy charge, however, brought by the prophet against Belshazzar: "And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Wherever there is true repentance, though there may be the greatest peace of mind, there will be also a deep and growing sense of the evil of sin, and the obligation of being habitually devoted to God.

3. It is a good evidence, when there is a continued and growing esteem of the necessity and value of the mediation of Christ. It was to save sinners that he came. A sense of sin is necessary to our receiving him; and in proportion to its strength will certainly be our attachment to him. This indeed, is the great and vital principle of the spiritual life—"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself to die for me."

4. The best and surest mark of real conviction of sin, is, if it leaves you possessed of a deep hatred and abhorrence of it, and a daily solicitude to fly from it. Some may counterfeit a sense of the evil of sin to their own hearts; may have a real fear of its bitter consequences; and even a presumptuous reliance on Christ for pardon; and yet may, in some instances, adhere to the practice of it.

Floods of tears from such a person, avail nothing: but he hath certainly truly sorrowed for sin, who in his practice forsakes it; that is to say, he is not willingly subject to any known sin—but says with Elihu, "That which I see not teach thou me: If I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

III. Let me beseech all serious persons, to improve this subject for the trial of their state. Examine, by the principles above laid down, the reality, and the progress of religion in your souls. Have you a growing sense of the evil of sin, and of your own unworthiness?—

This is at once an evidence, and a mean of growth in grace. He that thinks least of himself is highest in God's account; and the more a believer increases in holiness and real worth, the more he increases in humility. As it is an evidence, it is also a mean, of further improvement; for he that hath the deepest sense of his unworthiness and weakness, will certainly live most by faith on the merit and grace of his Redeemer.

Therefore, Christians, try yourselves by this important sign. Whether do you, by religious duties, build yourselves up on self-righteousness, or do you only learn by them, how far you fall short of what is incumbent on you? What innumerable evils compass you about? and therefore how much you have need of mercy instead of reward? Do you look upon the works of righteousness which you have done, as something, by which you merit at the hand of God; or do you look upon them, as the evidence of his own work in you, and for you, and give him the glory, to whom it is due?

IV. I shall now conclude the whole, with a few directions for producing and preserving this profitable sense and conviction of sin. And,

1. Let me beg of every hearer, the serious consideration of himself and his ways. Many have no sense of their sinfulness, because they have no knowledge of themselves at all; but go through the world in uninterrupted thoughtlessness and unconcern. Is there any thing of greater moment than the state of your minds, and your hope towards God? Inattention is perhaps a more universal cause of impiety, than high handed and obstinate profanity. Would you but seriously consider your ways, and lay to heart the things that belong to your peace, I would count it a hopeful circumstance; and expect, you would speedily see your danger, and God in his mercy would lead you to the cure.

2. Give yourselves much to reading, and hearing the word of God. The entrance of his word giveth light.—It is profitable for doctrine,

for reproof, and correction: but it is particularly necessary for conviction; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. What wonder, if those who never open a bible, and seldom enter into the house of God, should be ignorant of their guilt and misery? The word of God shews his right in you, pleads his cause, and challenges your apostasy. It is exceedingly rare that those who have fairly turned their backs upon God's instituted worship, are disturbed in their security; but are suffered to sleep on till they sleep the sleep of death. But it frequently happens, that those who attend ordinances, even from no higher principle than curiosity, custom, or form, find that the word of God is a fire and hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces: "that it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

3. In the last place. Let me beseech you, often to feat yourselves in the immediate presence of God, or rather, frequently to recollect, that you can no where go from his spirit, or sly from his presence. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God, that discerns, and discloses the works of darkness. We may often excuse, or palliate our conduct to men, and even hide its deformity from our own view, when we could not justify it to ourselves, if we reflected, that "it is open and manifest, in the fight of God."—If therefore there is any thing in your practice, which you are inclined to palliate, and apt to excuse—suppose you were standing at the judgment seat of Christ, where all of us shall shortly be; and think, whether your excuses will then stand the test of his impartial search.

"If our hearts condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." It is therefore the duty and interest of every sinner, to take shame and confusion of face to himself, and apply to the "blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things, than the blood of Abel."

SERMON IX

TRUST IN GOD

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

ISAIAH 50:10

IT is said of every real believer, that he walks by faith and not by sight. If this is true it will follow, that his faith must be exposed to a variety of trials, while he continues in a world of sense. These trials arise from the state of his own mind—from his outward condition—from the state of the world with which he stands connected—and from the mutual influence of all these, one upon another. From this situation it is easy to see, that there are few duties, for the exercise of which a good man will have greater or more frequent occasion than that of trust and reliance upon God. Trust is the duty and the refuge of the needy—of the dependant—of the weak—of the timorous, and the distressed. How many are included under one or more of these characters; or rather, who is it that can say he is altogether excluded?

Agreeably to this, we need but open the sacred volume, to perceive how frequent the exhortations are to trust in God, and how many views are given us of his power, wisdom, mercy and faithfulness, to encourage us to an unshaken reliance. At the same time, I am sorry to say, that there are few duties which are more imperfectly understood by many professing Christians. Even pious persons often sin both on the right hand and on the left, that is to say, both by diffidence and presumption. I have, therefore, laid hold of this opportunity, and made choice of this passage of scripture, in order to

open and illustrate a little this important duty of a servant of God. How seasonable it is you will easily perceive, for in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we have set before us Christ Jesus the unspeakable gift of God—the great pledge of his love, and the great foundation of our reliance upon him, not only for his saving mercy in general, but for every necessary blessing in our way to eternal life.

This passage of scripture is also well suited to the subject. It was spoken to the Jews in a lax and dissolute age, when many had turned their backs upon the service of God—had deserted his ordinances and despised his servants, which is always an occasion both of affliction and temptation to his own children. This appears from the first words of the chapter. "For thus saith the Lord, where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? And which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away." As also from the 3^d and 4th verses. "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

In discoursing further on this subject, it is proposed, through the assistance of divine grace,

- I. To open a little the character and state of those who are called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.
- II. To explain the duty of trust, and point out the foundation of it.
- III. To apply the subject for your instruction and comfort.

In the First place then, I am to open a little the character and state of those who are here called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

Their description is as follows: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness,

and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God." It will help us to enter into the spirit and meaning of the prophet's words, if we keep in view the state of the Jewish church, hinted at a little while ago. "Who is among you;" that is, if there is one or more—if there is a small select number in the midst of general corruption and depravity, who have kept their garments unpolluted, though iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold. "That feareth the Lord?" You know it is common in scripture to describe religion in general by some particular leading branch of it. The fear of God is often made use of for this purpose, as in that passage, there shall be no want to them that fear him. It may, therefore, signify those who have a sincere and unfeigned regard to the commandments of God, and have chosen him as their portion and hope. Those who desire and deserve to be distinguished from the profane despiser—the secure formalist, or the disguised hypocrite. Those, in a word, who are, and who desire to appear to use the strong language of scripture upon the Lord's side in every struggle, and who resolve with Joshua, that whatever others do, for their part they will serve the Lord.

But I cannot help thinking, we may also, with great safety, explain the words in a closer and stricter sense, and suppose, that by fearing the Lord is to be understood a due reverence for his infinite majesty, a humble veneration for his sacred authority. This is a most excellent sence or guard to the conscience in an evil time, and a noble preservative from the spreading infection and insinuating poison of prevailing or fashionable sins. It is also the usual character of a dissolute age to have cast off fear, to treat the most sacred things with scorn, and to look upon that holy solicitude to avoid sin, which appears in the carriage and language of a child of God, as a mark of meanness or weakness of mind. In such an age, one who fears God is well described by the prophet Isaiah. "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

The next part of the character is, "and obeyeth the voice of his servant;" that is to say, is willing to hearken to the message of God, by the mouth of his servants. The words of the text, no doubt, may be considered as primarily referring to the inspired prophets, who bore an immediate commission, miraculously attested, from God. Many, even of these, were set at nought, their message derided, and their persons insulted, when they attempted to stem the tide of prevailing vice, or boldly denounced the divine vengeance against high-handed sinners. But the sincerely pious obeyed their voice. I shall make no scruple to apply this to ourselves, and the present age. Our blessed Redeemer hath established in his church a standing ministry, and the regular administration of ordinances. And though we have this treasure in earthen vessels, yet in no other way doth he now communicate his will, and vouchsafe his presence to his people, but by the reading and hearing of his word, and attendance upon his instituted worship. It will, no doubt, therefore, be a part of the character of a good man, that he will love the ordinances, and obey the voice of the servants of God, that he will consider him who hath sent them, and receive instruction, not as the word of man, but as it is indeed and in truth, the word of God.

On the other hand, when iniquity prevails, when irreligion and profaneness lift up their heads, one of the most usual concomitants, and one of the surest proofs of it, is a neglect of ordinances, and contempt of those who are concerned in their administration: how far this is at present the case, I leave to yourselves to judge. While I speak this, my brethren, I do by no means desire to see an ignorant people distracted by the gloomy terrors of superstition, or led blindfold by the enchanted cord of implicit faith. But sure I am, there is an extreme on either hand, and those who truly fear the Lord, will honor the persons, and obey the voice of such as plead his cause and speak in his name. You may rest assured, that though they neither deserve nor claim any authority on their own account, yet so long as they stand in the divine counsels, and speak the divine word, their message will be attended with this awful sanction, "He that despiseth

you, despiseth me, and he "that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

The last part of the character here drawn, which lays the foundation for the subsequent direction is, "that walketh in darkness and hath no light." Darkness and light, besides their literal, have often a metaphorical sense in scripture. They are, indeed, used with a good deal of latitude and variety. But I think their metaphorical signification may be reduced to these two general heads.

1. Sometimes light signifies knowledge, and darkness signifies ignorance—as in Eph. 5:8. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light." Acts 26:18. "To turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Job 37:19. "Teach us what we shall say unto him, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness."

2. Sometimes darkness signifies distress or trouble, and the correspondent signification of light is deliverance and joy, as 2 Sam. 22:28, 29. "And the afflicted people thou wilt save, but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down, for thou art my lamp, O Lord, and the Lord will lighten my darkness." Job 19:8. "He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass; he hath put darkness in my paths." Psalm 97:11. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Esther 8:16. "And the Jews had light, and gladness, and joy and honor."

None of these senses is to be excluded in the passage before us. Believers may walk in darkness, when ignorant or uncertain as to what nearly concerns them, as well as under distress and trouble. They have also a mutual influence upon, produce, and are produced by, one another. For illustrating this a little more particularly, observe, that a good man may walk in darkness. 1. When he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the divine favor. 2. When he is under the pressure of outward calamity. 3. When the state of the church is such, that he cannot understand or explain, in a satisfying

manner, the course of divine providence. These particulars I have it not in view to enlarge much upon, but only to explain them so far as is necessary to lay a foundation for what shall be afterwards offered on the duty to trust in God.

1. Then, a good man may walk in darkness when he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the divine favor. I apprehend that some measure of hope in God's mercy is essential to true piety, and not only the right, but the possession of every child of God. Faith and despair are beyond all question inconsistent. Faith and hope are inseparable. Yet certainly the excellent ones of the earth may be sometimes involved in great perplexity and doubt. This is plain from scripture examples, from daily experience, and from the nature and reason of the thing. How violent a struggle do we often find the Psalmist David in, between hope and fear? "O my God, my soul is cast down in me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." How many do we see every day under a spirit of bondage, who, though they still cleave to God as their portion, yet are often full of fears, and seldom dare confidently affirm their interest in, or relation to him. And indeed how can it be otherwise? While we are here, our sanctification is but imperfect; and alas! with regard to many, it is often hard to determine, whether we should not write upon it, *mene tekeli*, as essentially defective.

Sin separates between God and his people, and causes him to hide his face from them. Nay, sometimes, though there be no particular or provoking crime, as the cause of his controversy with them, he may withdraw from them the light of his countenance, to exercise their vigilance, or to try their patience. I know, my brethren, that the distress of serious souls, when mourning after an absent or an angry God, crying to him in secret, and following hard after him in his ordinances, is by many treated with the highest degree of contempt. But surely, if peace of mind from a well-founded hope of the divine favor, is the greatest of all present blessings: and if this, from the variableness of our own conduct, is sometimes more, sometimes less

strong, and sometimes wholly suspended: when this last is the case, it must occasion inexpressible concern, and there can be no greater evidence of irreligion and impiety, than to call it in question.

2. A good man may walk in darkness when under the pressure of outward calamity. This, in a real believer, is never wholly separated from the former. Even in itself, indeed, no affliction for the present is joyous but grievous. The disorders of this feeble frame, poverty and straitness of provision, unjust slander and reproach, must be deeply and sensibly felt by every good man, even as he is a man. To this may be added, the loss of relations, and concerns for the sufferings of others of every kind, which is always most distressing to the best and tenderest spirits. But outward calamities by those that fear God, are felt most sensibly when they are considered as the rod of his anger, and bring sin to remembrance.

When he visits his own children with any of his fore judgments; when he follows them with breach upon breach, they are ready to say, "Surely he is setting me up as a mark for his arrows, he is counting me his enemy."—They are often at a loss to understand the cause of his controversy with them; and they also find it often extremely difficult to bring their minds to a patient and submissive resignation to his holy will. To those who know their duty, and desire through divine grace to comply with it, it is no small difficulty to be obliged to struggle with a rising and rebellious heart within, as well as suffering from without, and to be alternately calling in question, the certainty either of the love of God to them, or of their love to him.

3. A good man may sometimes walk in darkness from the aspect of Providence, and the state of the Redeemer's kingdom. The works of God are sought out of them who have pleasure in them. But when they are not able to penetrate the depths of the divine counsels, this becomes often a source both of distress and temptation. When wicked men are suffered to prosper at their will—when the good are oppressed by the power and tyranny, or persecuted by the malice, of their enemies—when the most generous attempts for the revival of

truth and righteousness are rendered abortive—when the professing servants of God are divided into parties, or marshalled under names, and their zeal made to spend itself in unnecessary, sinful and hurtful contentions—when offences come, and those of the highest profession or attainments are suffered to fall into gross crimes, by which the mouths of enemies are opened to blaspheme; then may, and must we adopt the words of the Psalmist—Ps. 73:10–14. "Therefore, his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them: And they say, how doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

I proceed now to the second and chief thing proposed from this passage, which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation.

Trust, in the most general view we can take of it, may be thus explained. It is a reliance or confidence in God, that however discouraging appearances may be for the present time, yet, by his power and wisdom, our desires and expectations shall take place, whether as to deliverance from trouble, or the obtaining of future blessings.—When we can attain this happy frame of spirit, it is an inconceivable relief and ease to the mind under suffering, and is excellently expressed by the Psalmist—Psal. 55:22. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Let us then endeavor to explain the grounds of this as distinctly as possible. And God grant that it may be done, not only in a clear, but in a solid and satisfying manner, so as to assist you in the practice of real and vital religion.

I have already said, that our expectation is from the power and wisdom of God. May we then reasonably expect, and is it our duty to believe, that we shall receive all that we desire, and that is within the reach of divine power and wisdom? These have no bounds at all. We

know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. This suggests to us that there is something more necessary, in order to lay a proper foundation for trust, viz. his goodness, to make our expectation probable, and his promise to make it certain. Even created beings can often do what they will not. This holds particularly with regard to God, whose power is directed in its exercise by his goodness, and limited by his wisdom. His goodness, in general, encourages us to go to him with a peradventure, or who can tell whether he may not be gracious? But in order to make our trust both distinct and strong, we must go to his promise, "for he is faithful and keepeth covenant and truth for ever." Trust then, my brethren, rests ultimately on the promise. It must be precisely commensurate, or of the same extent with the promises. Whoever doubts or calls in question the certainty of what God hath promised, is chargeable with distrust; and whoever expects to receive, in kind or degree, more than he has promised, is so far guilty of presumption. This is the general rule, and I think it carries such evidence with it, that every one must be sensible it is just, who hath heard it with any measure of attention.

But the great difficulty yet remains, which is, to apply this rule to the various cases that occur in the spiritual life, and to tell any particular person what it is his duty firmly to believe, and hope he shall receive from God, and what it would be presumptuous and sinful in him to fix his expectation on. This is plainly of the greater importance, that the more particular our trust is, as to the object of desire, it is the more powerful a support to the mind. At the same time it frequently happens, that the more particularly our desires are formed, the foundation of our hope appears the more uncertain and questionable. On this account you may observe, that it is of the greatest moment to understand the nature and tenor of the promises; or rather, indeed, to explain the foundation of trust, and to explain the nature and tenor of the promises is one and the same thing.

For this end, it may be proper to distinguish the promises of God, as to futurity, into two heads, absolute and conditional. By absolute promises, in this place, I understand only those that are so in the most unlimited sense, that is to say, revealed as a part of the fixed plan of Providence, suspended on no terms but what all, of every character, may expect will certainly come to pass. Such are the promises after the flood, that summer and winter, seed time and harvest should not fail—the coming of Christ in the flesh at the fulness of time, to the ancient Patriarchs, and to us—the downfall of Antichrist—the preservation of a church on earth, let its enemies be or do what they will—the calling of God's ancient people, the Jews, and the coming of Christ to judge the world at the last day. These are all called promises in scripture, and so far as they can be of any use to the people of God, either for direction in duty, or restraint from sin, or consolation under trial, they are to be depended on, in the most absolute manner, for they rest upon the certainty of the holy scriptures, and the truth of the unchangeable God, who "is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent."

SERMON X

TRUST IN GOD

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.
ISAIAH 50:10

HAVING, in a former discourse, opened the character and state of those who are called upon, and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord, and entered upon the second thing proposed, which was to

explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation; and having in this view considered the nature of absolute promises—I proceed,

2. To consider the nature and use of conditional promises. These I am obliged, for greater distinctness, to divide into three different heads.—1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state.—2. There are promises, the performance of which is suspended on our compliance with something previously required, as the condition of obtaining them.—3. There are promises, not only suspended on both the preceding terms, but upon the supposition of some circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unknown. Let us consider each of these with care and attention.

I. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state, which are, therefore, to be applied, and rested on, according as the evidence of our being of this character, or in this state, is clear or obscure. In this I have particularly in view, the blessings of salvation, the pardon of sin, peace with God, the spirit of sanctification, and a right to everlasting life. These all lie in an unbroken chain and inseparable connexion, and might have been more briefly expressed, by an interest in Christ the Saviour, who is the author, source and sum of these blessings; "for all the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us." Let no judicious attentive hearer be surprised or dissatisfied, that I have ranked these among conditional promises, for you may observe that I have expressed myself thus, they are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. In this, they certainly differ from the promises properly absolute, mentioned above. It is far from my intention to do injury to that fundamental truth, that salvation is by grace. I esteem that doctrine which proceeds upon a self-righteous system, to be contrary to the word of God, and most pernicious to the souls of men. There is nothing at all required in scripture to be performed by us, as a purchasing or meriting condition. Every gracious act of the divine government in

our favor, is the fruit of the Redeemer's purchase, and every holy disposition wrought in us, is the effect of his almighty grace. But it is certain, at the same time, that in order to our accepting those blessings, we must be truly and deeply humbled, and see ourselves to be incapable and helpless. We must be unfeignedly willing to renounce all claim of merit, and accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; that is, in its full extent, and in the free and sovereign manner of its communication. So far, surely, we must say, the promises of the gospel are conditional, or wholly pervert the word of God. I know of no promises then to the unbelieving and impenitent, unless you call that a promise, that they shall have "their portion in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

Hear it, my dear brethren, it is the needy, thirsty, sensible soul, that is invited to come and find rest. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If any shall think fit further to say, that the very destination of the vessels of mercy, is of God's sovereign pleasure, that conviction itself is by a day of his power, and that faith which interests us in Christ's righteousness is his gift; I agree to the whole, but observe that it is improperly introduced here. No use can possibly be made of the divine decree in the application of the promises. It is inverting the order of things. Can any man say, I trust in the mercy of God, because I have been ordained to everlasting life? No man can derive comfort from this, till by his effectual calling it is published, and begins to be accomplished; and then he may look back with wonder and gratitude to that everlasting love, by which he was chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Can you judge of the fruit of a tree by looking upon the root? No, but you judge of the strength and deepness of the root, by the fulness of the fruit, and the vigor and verdure of the branches. From an improper mixture of what belongs to the secret will of God, and what belongs to us, as our duty, much error and confusion arises.

Now, my brethren, as to the application of these promises of pardon and peace, the humbled sinner, the man among us who walketh in darkness and hath no light—who is burdened with a sense of guilt, and discouraged by the threatenings of the law, the accusations of conscience, and the pure and holy nature of God; who perhaps has all this aggravated by distress and trouble, is called to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. He is invited to consider and rest on the extent of the call, the immutability of the promise, and the riches of divine grace. If he is so far from pleading any merit in himself, or being dissatisfied with the plan of salvation laid down in the Gospel, that he is making every thing an argument against himself, and dare not lay hold of, or appropriate so unspeakable a mercy: This is just the effect of distrust, and he is called, in the strongest manner, in the text, to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." With how many gracious assurances for this purpose is the scripture filled. John 6:37. "All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Heb. 7:25. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Rev. 22:17. "And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." All things, Christ excepted, are to be renounced, and the all-sufficiency of a Redeemer is to be the foundation of our hope. The penitent will say with the apostle, Phil. 3:8, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith."

2. There is a second class of promises, the performance of which is suspended on our previous compliance with something required as the condition of obtaining them. In these we are not only called to accept of the divine mercy, but commanded to obey the divine will.

The order in which I have placed these, will, I hope, prevent you from misunderstanding or misapplying what may be said on them. This class includes all the promises in scripture regarding the daily progress of a believer in his sanctification and conformity to God, as well as the increase of his comfort and peace. I am sensible, that as the reconciliation of a sinner to God, and his right to what is called in scripture the promise of eternal life, is of free and unmerited mercy, so, no doubt, all the inferior or subordinate promises flow from the same source, nay, in a certain measure, they are entirely upon the same footing with those formerly mentioned; that is to say, final perseverance, real growth in the Spiritual life, and necessary comfort, are the sure and purchased portion of every one that is born of God. Rom. 8:29. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." But in the distribution of those gifts, particularly in their measure, there is not only an unknown regard to the good pleasure of God, but a known and established regard to our conduct in duty. Thus the abundant supply of the spirit is the fruit and return of diligence in prayer. Matth. 7:7. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." See also Ezekiel 36:25. compared with the 37th. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you." &c. Thus saith the Lord, yet for all this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Thus also inward consolation, as well as outward security, is expressly promised as the effect and reward of uniformity and diligence in duty. Isa. 32:17. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." As the counterpart and illustration of this, you see, that a departure from the path of duty brings on the threatened, or perhaps I ought to call it the promised, rod of correction. Psalm 89:30–33. "But if his children shall forsake my law, and not walk in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not take from him, nor suffer

my faithfulness to fail." In the same, manner, Isa. 40:30, 31. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their Strength; they Shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary —they shall walk and not faint." Agreeably to all this, you know, our blessed Lord prescribed watchfulness and prayer as the great preservatives against temptation, and whoever expects either spiritual strength or comfort, while he relaxes his diligence in the way of duty, is guilty of that sin, which is called in scripture, tempting God; and shall assuredly meet with a dreadful disappointment.

My brethren, as much of the daily exercise of real believers regards their progress in sanctification, and their peace and comfort, it is proper that you should carefully attend to the tenor of these promises, and to what ought to be your reliance upon them. I shall sum up, in a few particulars, what I apprehend to be of most importance.

1. Trust in These promises implies self-denial, and a deep sense of your own weakness. These promises would be unnecessary and superfluous, were we not insufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good. Trust in God stands directly opposed to all self-dependance. Proverbs 3:5. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding." How jealous God is, if I may speak so, of the honor that is due to him in this respect, may be seen from the many soul and shameful crimes into which he permitted some of his best saints to fall, when they were off their guard by sloth, or still more provoked him by pride and presumption. Noah's drunkenness, Moses's passion, David's adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of his master. 1 Cor. 10:11, 12. "Now all These things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." For this reason the apostle Paul says with great propriety, and with great force, which is

equally applicable to himself and other believers, a seeming paradox. 1 Cor. 12:10. "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2. As we are to put no trust in ourselves, so we are to exercise the most unshaken confidence of our being able to discharge any duty or undergo any trial by the help of the Almighty—Oh! how ready are we to sin on both hands? How often do we presume upon our own strength and forget the necessity of applying for divine aid?—And on the other hand, how prone are we to timidity or despondence in difficult cases? When corruptions have long kept their ground, we are ready to dread their influence, and to make but little out of the promises in scripture, that we shall be made "more than conquerors through him that loved us." We have learned, by sad experience, that in us dwelleth no good thing, and yet it is long before we will attend to the lesson that follows hard upon it, "My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness."

3. As these promises are expressly made to the diligent, you must still remember that your own attention and application to duty is essentially necessary, and that the assistance promised from on high, is always represented in scripture as an argument and encouragement to diligence, and not a warrant or excuse for sloth. Philip. 2:12. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is also well worthy of notice, that the same prophet Ezekiel, who says, chap. 36:26. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," changes the form of his expression; and in another place, chap. 18:31, 32, speaks in the following terms; "Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." In consequence of this,

4. In the last place, trust in God will make us ready to acknowledge, that when we fail in duty, when we forget or break our resolutions,

the fault is certainly in ourselves. It is impossible to excuse or justify ourselves in any degree, without laying the blame, in the same proportion, upon God, and calling in question his faithfulness and truth. But whatever our treacherous hearts may sinfully suggest, we are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels. We find him pleading his own cause, in this respect, in many passages of scripture. Isa. 59:1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Upon the whole, trust in these promises is no other than an humble and diligent application to duty, under a deep sense of weakness, and dependance on promised strength, accompanied with a firm persuasion, that "in the name of the Lord we shall tread down our enemies," and go on from strength to strength, "till we appear before God in Zion."

3. Another class of promises are those that are suspended, not only on the same conditions with the two former, but upon some other circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unseen. These are temporal mercies or rather temporal prosperity, deliverance from present distress, and abundance or affluence of outward enjoyments. Perhaps we may also add spiritual consolation, and sensible joy in God. I find no temporal promise precisely fixed to the servant of God but this: "Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure?" and it is certainly his duty, in the most straitening circumstances, to maintain a confident dependance on the power and wisdom of Providence for necessary supply. I do not condemn those, who, when reduced to extremity, have actually pleaded this divine promise, and against hope, have believed in hope; and I am persuaded, instances have not been wanting, of relief furnished in a manner next to miraculous. But as to every other degree of temporal prosperity, God hath reserved it in his own hand to give or with-hold it at his pleasure, that is, as he sees it will be most for his glory, and the benefit of his people. It is lawful then, my brethren, for you to endeavor to procure, by honest industry, the increase of your substance, to look well to the state of your flocks and your herds, and

to ask by prayer the blessing of God upon your labors. It is lawful, and it is your duty, by regularity and care to preserve life and health, as well as to ask of the Father of your spirits, recovery from sickness, or deliverance from any other kind of distress. But you are not warranted to believe that these petitions shall be granted in hand, or in your own time and measure, even though you ask them in sincerity with the prayer of faith. There may be reasons for withholding them, and yet you may be accepted in your prayers. An infinitely wise God knows best what is for your good, and he only hath a right to determine in what part of his own service; where and how long he shall employ you. Trust in God, therefore, in this respect, implies a careful attention to the tenor of the promises with regard to temporal mercies, and not to look for, or even, if possible, desire what he hath not promised to bestow.

If I am not mistaken, we shall find it of moment, upon this subject, to observe, both what he hath not and what he hath certainly promised. He has nowhere promised that his own people shall be the richest or the greatest on earth; but he hath certainly promised to bless their provision, and assured them that a little that a just man hath, shall be better than the riches of many wicked. He has not promised that they shall be free from suffering; but he hath certainly promised to support them by his own presence under their distress. Isa. 43:2. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The truth is, he hath promised that "all things shall work together for their good." In one word, they have indeed all mercies promised, only they themselves are not in a condition, at present, to judge what they may use with safety, and what not. As the heir of an opulent estate, though he is proprietor of all, yet is laid under restraint while in infancy and non-age, because he would soon ruin himself if it were committed to his own management; so the believer, though an heir of God, and joint heir with Christ, yet till he is meet for the inheritance, he must be at his Maker's and Redeemer's disposal. Take in, therefore, only this limitation, and

then see his extensive charter. 1 Cor. 3:21. "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and "ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." What then is the duty of a child of God? It is to breathe after more and more submission to the divine will, and to annex this reservation to every petition of a temporal nature, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And oh! my brethren, how happy the person who hath seen the weakness of human judgment; who waits the intimation of God's will, before he will suffer his desires to fasten with eagerness on any earthly comfort, and who endeavors to keep himself free from perplexity, by an humble and submissive reliance on the all-sufficiency of God!

I observed in entering on this part of the subject, that spiritual consolation, or sensible joy in God, is to be considered as a promise of the same class, which must, therefore, be asked with submission, and is dispensed according to the good pleasure of a gracious but sovereign God. I am sensible, as has been formerly observed, with another view, that some degree of comfort necessarily follows from a believer's relation to God, but many pious persons seem to desire and to expect sensible comfort in a higher measure than God sees it meet to give them, or, than is proper for them in the present state. It is with spiritual prosperity as with temporal, every one cannot bear it. Therefore, it is our duty still to be sensible that we have much more comfort and peace than we deserve, and as we desire and strive for greater degrees of it, to accompany these desires with much humility and resignation to the will of God.

I proceed now to the last thing proposed, which was to make a practical application of this subject for your instruction and direction.

1. From what has been said, you may see what judgment you ought to form of inward suggestions, and strong or particular impressions upon your minds. There are some extremely prone to interpret a text of scripture, suddenly suggested to their minds, or any strong

impression made on them, as an immediate message from God, to be directly applied to themselves: Others, in opposition to this, as enthusiastical and visionary, seem to give up every expectation of being able to say with the Psalmist, I bless the Lord who hath given me counsel, my reins also instruct me in the night season." I beg, therefore, that you may observe, that the suggestion of a passage of scripture, of itself gives no title to the immediate application of it, because the great deceiver may undoubtedly suggest scripture, as we find he could reason from it in our Saviour's temptation. We are, in every such case, to consider the tenor of it, if it be a promise or encouragement, that is, how and in what manner it may be safely applied. If any thing happens to be suggested that expressly suits our present condition, either by setting home the obligation of duty, with particular evidence upon the conscience, or pointing out the grounds of comfort, it ought to be thankfully acknowledged as from the spirit of God. For example, if a person under the power of a spirit of bondage, and fear of divine wrath, hath suggested to him any of the extensive gracious assurances of mercy to the chief of sinners, it is his duty to lay hold of it. It is directly suited to his condition, and would be the very thing that a wise and judicious pastor would recommend to him for his relief. He may therefore, without hesitation, bless God for it, if it is brought with power and efficacy upon his heart. In the same manner, if a person under trouble hath suggested to him any of the promises of support under it, surely he ought, in the discharge of his duty, firmly to rely on the accomplishment of that part of the word of God. But in the reflex examination of a person's character or state, to apply the sudden suggestion of a promise or privilege, perhaps of a conditional nature, is certainly both sinful and dangerous. Sinful, because without warrant; and dangerous, because leading to delusion.

2. From what hath been said, you may see what it is that we ought to seek for with the greatest earnestness, and may hope to obtain with the greatest confidence. Recollect, I beseech you, the order in which I have mentioned the promises of God as the objects of trust and reliance. First of all the promises of salvation, deliverance from the

guilt of sin, and a right to everlasting life; next whatever is necessary to the preservation and improvement of the spiritual life; and then in the third place, proper accommodation and suitable provision in our passage through the present world. They are here ranked according to their value in themselves, and the value which we should put upon them. Let us, therefore, take care that we never violate this order, which is necessary, not only because of their comparative value, but because of their mutual influence one upon another. It is in vain for us to expect to attain to the habit or practice of holiness, till we are united to God by faith in Jesus Christ. All the promises of the gospel are ratified in him. All the divine fulness is treasured up in him. Every divine gift is dispensed by him. Therefore, he says John 15:4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." And the apostle Paul, Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

In the same manner nothing can be more preposterous than to fix our affections upon temporal mercies, or our attention upon the promises that relate to them, so as to lose view of our interest in God's favor, and the progress of our sanctification. All the temporal promises in scripture are made to the children of God as such, and for carrying on the purposes of his grace in them.—Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. There is no promise in the whole volume of inspiration to the wicked and impenitent. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." He will either rebuke them in his wrath and chasten them in his hot displeasure, or give them up to a cursed, hardening, stupifying prosperity, than which, no state on earth, is more to be dreaded.—Christian! never suffer an anxiety about your outward state to supplant or go before, or even to be separated from a concern, that you may not be sound wanting when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. Let me beseech you to adore the wisdom, justice and mercy of God, in the order he hath established, according to the different nature of the promises. That which is of most, nay, properly speaking, of unspeakable value, and radically contains all the rest, is placed first in order, and offered in the most free and gracious manner, without money and without price. Salvation is preached to the chief of sinners, and a Saviour held forth as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. Many uses might be made of this, but the single use I intend to make of it, at present, as connected with the duty of trust, is to silence the complaints of envy and impatience. How prone are many to look with an evil eye upon the more extensive possessions and greater apparent outward comfort which others enjoy? Does it not astonish you to think how much unbelief and ingratitude there is in those repining thoughts? Meanness of rank, and poverty of state, are no hinderance at all to an interest in Christ, and a right to everlasting life. Nay, the gospel is preached to the poor.—Many a Lazarus has been carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich and luxurious have lifted up their eyes in torments. Will you, can you, dare you then complain? Will you envy the man of the world, his stately palace—his elegant furniture, and his sumptuous fare? What is the amplest portion in the present life compared with the sure mercies of David? What child of God would exchange with any wicked man a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne?

I beseech you to add to all this, that, even with regard to present peace or comfort, there is no comparison between a good man and a bad. "A man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses." This is a truth not only often repeated in the sacred oracles, but written in the clearest and most legible characters in the history of Providence.—Nay, even independently of virtue or religion itself, every human calamity, whether arising from sickness, reproach, contention, fear, or ungratified desire, rages with greater violence in the higher, than in the lower stations of life. A vain and conceited monarch once sent to ask at an heathen oracle, who was the happiest man on earth? and met with a deserved disappointment

in the reply. If we should put a question much more profitable, as well as much more easily resolved, in what rank of life the most exquisite human misery has been sound? I have no doubt but it ought to be answered, upon a throne. Experience will always ratify the wife man's observation: Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. A sanctified lot is an inestimable treasure. The blessing of God on a cruise of oil, and a pot of meal, is better than inexhaustible mines of gold and silver. What cause of contentment and patience to the child of God!

In the last place, you may learn from what has been said on the subject, what is the plainest, the shortest, and indeed the only sure way to deliverance from distress or calamity of whatever kind. It is to fly to the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, to renew the exercises of faith in him, and, in proportion as it pleases God to fill you with all joy and peace in believing, you will perceive every other covenant-blessing flow clear and unmixed from this inexhausted source. It will lead to repentance, humiliation and submission. The sanctified use of the affliction will be obtained, and this brings deliverance of itself; for no rod will be continued longer, than it hath answered its end. At any rate, when suffering is necessary, grace, to suffer with patience, shall not be withheld.—Would you have any more, and is not this remedy always at hand? Can the poorest man say it is not within the reach of his purse? It is, at once, effectual and universal. It was once said in contempt of a worthy and pious minister, that he made so much of the blood of Christ, that he would apply it even to a broken bone. But bating what may be thought indecent in the expression, chosen on purpose to bring a good man into ridicule, the thing itself, I make bold to affirm, is a great and a precious truth. Faith in the blood of Christ makes a man superior to all sufferings. It softens their aspect—it abates their severity—nay, it changes their nature. When a man is under distress or calamity of any kind, and considers it only in itself, and independently of his relation to God, it retains its old nature, and tastes with all the bitterness of the original curse; but when it is considered as limited in its nature—in its measure and its continuance by a kind Saviour,

the believer submits to it with patience, as a part of his Creator's will; bears it with patience in his Redeemer's strength, and sometimes is enabled to embrace it with pleasure, as serving to carry him to his Father's presence. Is this going too far? No, my dear brethren; these are great realities to which the word of God, and the experience of his saints, bear united evidence. Many here present, I doubt not, have been witnesses of this truth in the carriage of their relations now with God; and not a few, I trust, will repeat the testimony to succeeding ages. I conclude all with that animated passage of the apostle Paul—2 Cor. 4:16, 17. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

SERMON XI

ON THE PURITY OF THE HEART

Two things have I required of thee, deny me them not before I die: remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.— PROVERBS 30:7, 8, 9

MY BRETHREN,

OUR dependent condition as creatures, and much more our dangerous condition as sinners, exposed to daily temptation, renders

prayer a duty of the most absolute necessity. You must all be sensible, how frequent and pressing the exhortations to it are in the holy scriptures. And, indeed, there cannot be a better evidence of a right temper of mind, than an habitual disposition to the exercise of this duty.

But as prayer is a necessary duty, we ought to give the greater attention to the manner in which it is performed. We ought to ask only for such things as are truly safe and useful. We ought also to offer up our prayers with importunity, or reserve, according to the nature and comparative importance of those blessings we desire to obtain. All our wants are perfectly known to God; he is also the best judge of what is fit for us, and therefore, our petitions, should be well weighed, and expressed in such terms, as, at the same time that they intimate our desires, leave much to himself, as to the measure and manner of satisfying them.

We have an excellent example of this pious and prudent conduct, in the prayer of the prophet Agur, just read in your hearing. All his requests are summed up in two general heads. These he seems to insist upon, as absolutely necessary to ask, with that humble, holy confidence which is founded on the divine promise, that if we ask any thing agreeable to his will, he heareth us. He seems also to ask them, as what would fully satisfy him, and be sufficient for the comfort of the present life, and the happiness of the life to come. "Two things," says he, "have I required of thee, deny me them not before," or, as it ought rather to be translated, "until I die."

These two requests are conceived in the following terms—"Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches." The first, viz. "remove far from me vanity and lies," evidently relates to the temper of his mind, and the state of his soul. The second, viz. "give me neither poverty nor riches," relates to his outward condition or circumstances in the present life. There are two things in the general structure of this comprehensive prayer, that merit you particular attention. First, The order of his request; beginning with

what is of most importance, the temper of his mind, and his hope towards God; and then adding, as but deserving the second place, what related to his present accommodation.

Secondly, The connection of his requests. The choice he makes as to his temporal condition, is in immediate and direct subserviency to his sanctification. This is plain from the arguments with which he presses, or the reasons which he assigns for his second petition. "Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

My brethren, I am persuaded that this subject can hardly be, at any time, unseasonable to a Christian assembly, as our misplaced, excessive, and unreasonable desires are the greatest enemies to our progress in holiness, as well as to our comfort and peace. Perhaps, however, there are some circumstances that render it peculiarly proper for this auditory. Young persons are very apt to cherish vast and boundless desires as to outward things; and having not yet experienced the deceitfulness of the world, are apt to entertain excessive and extravagant hopes. The truth is, rich and poor, young and old, may here receive a lesson of the utmost moment.

Let me therefore intreat your attention, while I endeavor to open and improve this passage of the holy scriptures; beginning, at this time, with the first request ——"Remove far from me vanity and lies."

In discoursing on which, I will endeavor,

I. To explain the import of it, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend.

II. Apply the subject for your instruction and direction.

I. I am to explain the import of the prophet's prayer, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend, in the petition, "Remove far from me vanity and lies." The word vanity,

especially when it is joined, as it is frequently in scripture, with lying, or lies, is of a very large and comprehensive signification. The word in the original, translated vanity, properly signifies lightness or emptiness; and lies signify falsehood, in opposition to truth.

I imagine we shall have a clear conception, both of the meaning and force of this phrase, if we make the following remark: God himself is the great fountain of life and existence; the great I AM, as he emphatically styles himself to Moses; the original and the only reality, if I may so speak. All other beings have only a dependent and precarious existence; so that the creation itself, though his own work, compared to him, is vanity. "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Therefore, in a particular manner, the word is often used to denote the folly of all idolatrous worship; or the giving the respect and honor to any thing else, which is due to God alone. "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain; or can the heavens give showers, art thou not he, O Lord our God."

Sometimes it is used to denote the folly or unprofitableness of any vice, and particularly of an ill-founded conceit of ourselves, as well as of all fraud and dissimulation, in word or action. So that this prayer for our souls, short as it appears to be, when considered in its full extent, will be found to contain a great variety of important matter,—This I shall endeavor to give you a brief account of, under the following particulars.

I. We are hereby taught to pray, that we may be preserved by divine grace, from all false and erroneous principles in religion; so as we may neither be deceived by them ourselves, nor any way instrumental in deceiving others. This, by what has been said of the use of the words in scripture, appears to be implied in the request, and it is of more moment than some are willing to allow. The understanding being the leading faculty, an error there, spreads its unhappy influence through the whole temper and life. Whereas, on

the contrary, light in the mind produces fidelity and security in the conscience, and tenderness in the conversation. You may observe, that through the whole history of the Old Testament, idolatry, or a departure from the knowledge and worship of the true God, is the leading sin, and the fruitful source of every other vicious practice. We sometimes, indeed, seem to stand astonished at the excessive proneness of the ancient Jews to this sin. But we need only a little reflection to discover, that an evil heart of unbelief continues the same at bottom, and daily produces the like dangerous effects. How prone have men been in all ages, to depart from the simplicity of the truth. In how many different shapes have they perverted it! One age, or one country, has been polluted by one error, and another by an opposite, impelled by the unstable and irregular fancies of men of corrupt minds. In the last age, the great theme of the carnal reasoner was, to attempt to expose the scripture doctrine of God's certain knowledge, and precise ordination of all events; and in this, fate and necessity have become the strong hold of infidelity, and are embraced, or seem to be embraced, by every enemy of true religion without exception. Error, shifting its ground, indeed, is but natural; for lying vanities are innumerable; but the true God is the same "yesterday, to day, and forever."

At this very time, how abounding and prevalent is infidelity, calling in question the most important and fundamental principles, both of natural and revealed religion! And how properly is this described, by the expression in the text, vanity and lies; for it always takes its rise from the pride and vanity of the human heart! Sometimes a pride of understanding, which aspires to pass judgment on things far above its reach, and condemn things long before they are examined and understood: Sometimes, also, from a pride of heart, or self-sufficiency, that is unable to endure the humbling and mortifying view, given us in scripture, of our character and state. Oh how readily do men turn aside from the truth! With what greediness do they drink in the flattering but destructive poison! Need I point out to you the fatal effects of such principles taking place? It loosens the obligations to obedience, takes off the edge of the reproofs of

conscience, and thus removing restraints, leaves men, in the emphatical language of the holy scripture, "to walk in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes."

But in this request, "remove far from me vanity and lies," I would not have you confine your views to the most gross infidelity and avowed opposition to God. Pray also, that you may be preserved from error, or mistake of any kind; but especially such as have the greatest influence on the substance of religion.

A clear apprehension of the holy nature, and righteous government of God—the infinite evil of sin—the foundation of our peace in the blood of the atonement—and the renewing of our natures by the Holy Ghost, seem to me absolutely necessary to true and undefiled religion. And they are the truths, which particularly serve to exalt the Creator, and lay the creature in the dust. When, therefore, we consider how grateful to corrupt nature every thing is, that tends to foster pride—to create security, and set the mind at ease, in the indulgence of sin; we must be sensible of how great importance it is, to pray for divine direction, and divine preservation. Nothing is more dangerous to men than confidence and presumption—nothing more useful in faith and practice, than humility and self-denial.

2. This prayer implies, a desire that we may be preserved from setting our affections on such objects, as are but vain and unsatisfying, and will, in the end, disappoint our expectation. I take this to be not only a part, but a very important part of the prophet's meaning. The world is the great source of temptation; the powerful and unhappy influence of which we may daily see; or rather, all of us daily and sensibly feel. What it possesses the fancy, misleads the judgment, inflames the affections, consumes the time, and ruins the soul, but these present enjoyments, of which the wisest of men, after a full trial of them, hath left us their character vanity of vanities.

I am sensible that I have now entered upon a subject, which is far from being difficult to enlarge upon, and yet perhaps, very difficult to

treat with propriety, or in such a manner, as to have the intended effect. There is nothing more easy than, in a bold declamatory way, to draw pictures of the vanity of human life. It hath been done by thousands, when, after all their broken schemes, and disappointed views, they have just suffered shipwreck upon the coast of the enchanted land of hope. But from such men we may expect to hear the language of despair, rather than of experience; and as it is too late for the instruction of the sufferers, so it very rarely has any effect in warning others to avoid the danger. What I would, therefore, willingly attempt, is, to consider this matter in a sober scriptural light; if so be that it may please God to carry conviction to our hearts, and make it truly useful, both to speaker and hearers.

Let me, therefore, my brethren, point out to you, precisely, wherein the vanity of the world lieth. The world, in itself, is the workmanship of God, and every thing that is done in it, is by the ordination, or permission of God. As such, it is good, and may be used in subserviency to his honor, and our own peace. But through the corruption of our nature, the creature becomes the rival and competitor of the Creator for our hearts.—When we place our supreme happiness upon it, instead of making it a mean of leading us to God, then its inherent vanity immediately appears.—When men allow themselves in the indulgence of vicious pleasures, how justly may they be called vanity and lies? They are smiling and inviting to appearance, but how dreadful and destructive in their effects? "Whoredom and wine, and new wine take away the heart." Those who refuse to be confined by the laws of piety and sobriety, vainly think they are walking at liberty, when they are bringing themselves into subjection to the severest and most inflexible of all masters. Read the just and striking description, by Solomon, of the effects of whoredom; and reflect on the innumerable calamities brought, in every age, on persons and families by unbridled lust. See also the effects of intemperance and excess—"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." And again: "the drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it

moveth itself aright; at last, it biteth like a serpent, and singeth like an adder."

Think on the unhappy consequences, of dishonesty and fraud. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."—You may also see, in innumerable passages of scripture, that oppression of others, as it is a sin of the deepest dye, so it is often remarkably overtaken, and punished in the course of Providence, even in the present life. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

But there is something more in this request, than being preserved from practices directly vicious; for the setting of our hearts upon worldly things, and making them our chief portion and delight, is certainly seeking after vanity and lies. They are far from affording that happiness and peace, which we demand of them, and expect from them. "A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked." Can there be any thing more comfortable to experience, than that strong expression—"Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." You may also find in the word of God, many warnings of the folly of those, who travel in the path of ambition, and put their trust in man. "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whole hope is in the Lord his God." But the most comprehensive remark of all upon this subject is, that human life itself is so exceedingly precarious, that it must write 'vanity and emptiness' on every thing, the possession and use of which is confined to the present state. "Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth." What a striking picture does our Lord draw of the vanity of human happiness, in that parable of the ground of the rich man, which brought forth plentifully? "And he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to

bestow my fruits?"—And while this man is sedulously employed in making provision for a long and happy life, "God said unto him, thou-fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?"

The whole of the preceding representation may be summed up in this excellent sentence of the wife man: "The wicked worketh a deceitful work; but to him that soweth righteously shall be a sure reward."

Now, my brethren, need I add, how prone we are to be led astray, in a greater or less degree, by such "vanity and lies?"—I do not insist upon the many victims, which, in every age, have been seen to fall by the destructive hand of vice. How many have been ruined by lust, stain by intemperance, or beggared by dishonesty! But I in treat you particularly to observe, that when we set our affections immoderately upon any earthly object or enjoyment, or when they are not truly sanctified, how much they disappoint our expectation in possession, and what scenes of distress we prepare for ourselves by their removal.

3. This request, "remove far from me vanity and lies," implies, that God would graciously preserve us from deceiving ourselves, and thinking our character better, and our state safer than it really is. When we take a view of the state of the world, and the conduct of those who have not yet cast off all belief of eternity and a judgment to come, it is impossible to account for their security, but by a great degree of self-deceit. We may say of them with the prophet Isaiah, "He feedeth of ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And from the representation given by our Saviour, it is plain, that many shall continue in their mistake, and only be undeceived at the last day. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." How awful a reflection this! How dreadful a disappointment to discover our misery, only when there is no more hope of escaping it! Is there not a possibility of this being the case with many of you, my brethren; and do you not tremble at

the thought? I would not wish any, in general, to give way to a spirit of bondage, or slavish fear; but the best of the children of God have often discovered this holy jealousy of themselves. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me, then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." And again; "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

This leads me naturally to add upon this subject, that we ought to pray for preservation from self-deceit, as to particular branches of our character and conduct, as well as our general state.—Many, even upon the whole good men, are occasionally and insensibly brought, for a season, under the direction of sinful passions. They may be indulging themselves without suspicion, in what is, notwithstanding really provoking to God, injurious or offensive to others, and, in the issue, hurtful to their own peace. They may be making an enjoyment a talent, a relation an idol, when they think they are keeping within the bounds of duty. They may be indulging a sinful resentment, when they think they are promoting the glory of God. Many an excuse for neglecting commanded duty, from prudence or difficulty, satisfies ourselves, which will not stand in the day of trial. What reason for the prophet's prayer in the sense just now assigned, "Remove far from me vanity and "lies."

4. In the next place, this request implies, a desire to be preserved from pride and self-conceit, upon any subject. There is not any thing that affords a stronger evidence of our being unacquainted with ourselves, and our own state, than that propensity to pride and vanity, which is so common to us all. It is thought by many, that pride was the sin of the angels, that cast them down to hell. It is plain, that pride was the main ingredient in the first sin of man. And perhaps it is a just and proper description of all sin as such, that it is a dethroning of God, and setting up self to be loved, honored and served in his room. This sin is by no means confined to the worst of

men, in whom it, hath an absolute dominion; but retains and discovers an unhappy influence in the very best.—Every thing may be the fuel of pride: our persons, our performances, our relations, our possessions; nay, so pliable, and at the same time so preposterous is this disposition, that men are sound sometimes proud of their very vices and defects. But how ill do pride and vanity suit such poor mortals as we are, who seem born but to die?—Who after passing through a longer or shorter series of weaknesses, disappointments and troubles, must, at last, be laid in the silent grave, to moulder in the dust. We are dependant creatures, who have nothing, and can have nothing but what we receive from the unmerited favor of God. We are unwise and ignorant creatures, who know nothing to the bottom, and therefore, are liable to continual mistakes in our conduct. Those among us, who have the greatest comprehension of mind, and know most, as it serves to shew the comparative ignorance of the bulk of mankind, so it serves to convince themselves how little they do know, and how little they can know after all, compared with what is to them unsearchable.

But above all, we are sinful creatures, who have rendered ourselves, by our guilt, the just objects of divine displeasure. Is there any who dares to plead exemption from this character? And do pride and vanity become those, to whom they manifestly belong? Can any thing be more foolish, than indulging such dispositions? There is a very just expression of one of the apocryphal writers: "Pride was not made for man, nor a high look for him that is born of a woman." Indeed they are so evidently unsuitable to our date and circumstances, that one would think, we should need no higher principle than our own reason and observation to keep us free from them. We do, however, need the most earned and assiduous addresses to the throne of grace, to have all pride and vanity removed from us.—How hateful is pride to God! We are told, "he resisteth the proud." On the contrary, no disposition is more amiable in his sight, than humility. "He giveth grace to the humble." And again: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose

name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

It must, therefore, be the duty, and interest of every good man, not only to resist pride and vanity, but to make it a part of his daily supplication to God, that he may effectually be delivered from both.

5. In the last place: This request implies a desire to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation of every kind. It is one of the glorious attributes of God, that he is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He also requires of all his servants, and is delighted with truth in the inward parts. But there seems to be some difficulty in this part of the subject, more than in the others. Some will say, why pray to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation? This might be an exhortation to the sinner, but cannot be the prayer of the penitent. If they are sincere in their prayer, it seems impossible there can be any danger of fraud. Fraud implies deliberation and design; and though it may be concealed from others upon whom it is exercised, it can never be concealed from the person in whom it dwells, and by whom it is contrived. This is the very language of some reasoners, who infer from it, that though there are many other sins to which a man may be liable without knowing it, yet this can never be the case with dissimulation.

But, my brethren, if we consider how apt men are, upon a sudden temptation of fear or shame, or the prospect of some advantage to themselves, to depart from strict veracity, and even to justify to their own minds, some kinds and degrees of deceptions, we shall see the absolute necessity of making this a part of our prayer to God. Nay, perhaps I may go further and say, that we are as ready to deceive ourselves in this point as in any other.

Upon this important subject, there is one consideration to which I earnestly intreat your attention. Thorough sincerity, simplicity and truth, upon every subject, have, in the world, so much the

appearance of weakness; and on the contrary, being able to manage and over-reach others, has so much the appearance of superior wisdom, that men are very liable to temptation from this quarter. It is to be lamented that our language itself, if I may so speak, has received a criminal stain; for in common discourse the expression, a plain well-meaning man is always apprehended to imply, together with sincerity, some degree of weakness; although, indeed, it is a character of all others the most noble. In recommendation of this character let me observe, that in this, as in all the particulars mentioned above, "the wicked worketh a deceitful work; but he that walketh uprightly walketh surely." Supposing a man to have the prudence and discretion not to speak without necessity, I affirm there is no end which a good man ought to aim at, which may not be more certainly, safely, and speedily obtained by the strictest and most inviolable sincerity, than by any acts of dissimulation whatever.

But after all, what signify any ends of present conveniency, which dissimulation may pretend to answer, compared to the favor of God, which is forfeited by it? Hear what the Psalmist says. "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart."—Let us, therefore, add this to the other views of the prophet's comprehensive prayer—"Remove far from me vanity and lies."

For the improvement of this part of the subject, observe,

1. You may learn from it how to attain, not only a justness and propriety, but a readiness and fulness in the duty of prayer.

Nothing is a greater hinderance, either to the fervency of our affections, or the force of our expressions in prayer, than when the object of our desires is confused and general. But when we perceive clearly what it is that is needful to us, and how much we do need it, this gives us, indeed, the spirit of supplication. Perhaps it is more necessary to attend to this circumstance, in what we ask for our souls

than for our bodies. When we want any thing that relates to present conveniency, it is clearly understood, because it is sensibly felt.—There is no difficulty in crying for deliverance from poverty, sickness, reproach, or any other earthly suffering; nay, the difficulty here is not in exciting our desires, but in moderating them: not in producing fervor, but in promoting submission: But in what relates to our souls, because many or most temptations are agreeable to the flesh, we foresee danger less perfectly, and even feel it less sensibly; therefore, a close and deliberate attention to our situation and trials, as opened in the preceding discourse, is of the utmost moment, "both to carry us to the throne of grace, and to direct our spirit when we are there."

2. What hath been said will serve to excite us to habitual watchfulness, and to direct our daily conversation. The same things that are the subjects of prayer, are also the objects of diligence.—Prayer and diligence are joined by our Saviour, and ought never to be separated by his people.—Prayer without watchfulness is not sincere, and watchfulness without prayer will not be successful. The same views of sin and duty—of the strength and frequency of temptation, and the weakness of the tempted, lead equally to both. Let me beseech you then, to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Maintain an habitual diffidence of yourselves—Attend to the various dangers to which you are exposed. Watchfulness of itself will save you from many temptations, and will give you an inward warrant, and humble confidence, to ask of God support under, and deliverance from such as it is impossible to avoid.

3. In the last place, since every thing comprehended in the petition in the text, is viewed in the light of falsehood and deceit, suffer me, in the most earnest manner, to recommend to my hearers, and particularly to all the young persons under my care, "an invariable adherence to truth, and the most undisguised simplicity and sincerity in the whole of their conversation and carriage." I do not know where to begin or end in speaking of the excellency and beauty of sincerity, or the baseness of falsehood. Sincerity is amiable, honorable and profitable. It is the most shining part of a

commendable character, and the most winning apology for any miscarriage or unadvised action. There is scarcely any action in itself so bad, as what is implied in the hardened front of him who covers the truth with a lie: Besides, it is always a sign of long practice in wickedness. Any man may be seduced or surprized into a fault, but none but the habitual villain can deny it with steady calmness and obstinacy. In this respect, we unhappily find some who are young offenders, but old sinners.

It is not in religion only, but even among worldly men, that lying is counted the utmost pitch of baseness; and to be called a liar the most insupportable reproach. No wonder, indeed, for it is the very essence of cowardice to dare to do a thing which you have not courage to avow. The very worst of sinners are sensible of it themselves, for they deeply resent the imputation of it; and, if I do not mistake, have never yet arrived at the absurdity of defending it. There is scarcely any other crime, but some are profligate enough to boast of it; but I do not remember ever to have heard of any who made his boast, that he was a liar. To crown all, lying is the most wretched solly. Justly does Solomon say: "A lying tongue is but for a "moment." It is easily discovered. Truth is a firm consistent thing, every part of which agrees with, and strongly supports another. But lies are not only repugnant to truth, but repugnant to each other; and commonly the means, like a treacherous thief, of the detection of the whole. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to every one of you, the noble character of sincerity.—Endeavor to establish your credit in this respect so entirely, that every word you speak may be beyond the imputation of deceit; so that enemies may, themselves, be sensible, that though you should abuse them, you will never deceive them.

SERMON XII

SEEKING A COMPETENCY IN THE WISDOM OF PROVIDENCE

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me. PROVERBS 30:8

I PROCEED now to consider the second branch of the prophet's prayer, which regards his outward condition or circumstances, in the present world. On this subject he expresses himself thus: "Give me neither poverty nor "riches."

Do not think, my brethren, that this is a subject of little importance; or that it is unconnected with the spiritual life. On the contrary, there are few things of more moment, than to have our desires of temporal blessings limited and directed in a proper manner. Not only is worldly mindedness the everlasting ruin of those who are entirely under its dominion; but even good men are liable to many temptations from the same quarter. They may hurt their own peace, give offence to others, or lessen their usefulness by a sinful excess in their attachment to the world, or by a criminal negligence in not giving a prudent and proper attention to it. Be not surprised that I have mentioned the last of these as well as the first, for the prophet prays for deliverance from the temptation arising from both extremes. Idleness and sloth are as contrary to true religion, as either avarice or ambition; and the habit when once taken, is perhaps more difficult to remove.

In order to treat this subject with the greater distinctness, I shall first shew you what we may learn in general from this prayer: secondly, explain the particular object of the prophet's desire; and in the last place, make applications of what may be said by recommending it to your choice.

I. In the first place, then, we may learn in general from this request, that it is lawful to pray for temporal blessings. It is not unworthy of a Christian, whose conversation is in heaven, to ask of God, what is necessary to his support and preservation in the present life. If I were to mention all the examples of this in scripture, I should transcribe a great part of the Bible. Though inferior in their nature and value to spiritual blessings, they are necessary in their place; and it is upon this footing they are expressly put by our Saviour. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." They are needful to the prolonging of our natural life till we finish our work, and are fitted for our reward. Therefore, though miracles are a kind of suspension of the laws of nature, and the ordinary course of providence, yet we find God sometimes working a miracle to supply the wants of his servants. It had been no more difficult for God to have kept Elijah from hungering, than to have made the ravens fetch him provision; or to have made, as in another case, a barrel of meal, or a cruise of oil, the lasting and sufficient support of a whole family. But he chooses rather to supply the wants of his people, than cause them to cease, that he may keep their dependance constantly in their view, and that a sense of their necessities may oblige them to have continual recourse to him for relief.

Again, we may here learn, that God is the real and proper giver of every temporal, as well as of every spiritual blessing—A sentiment this, of the utmost consequence, to be engraven upon the heart. We have here an instance out of many, in which truths known and confessed by all, have notwithstanding little hold upon the mind. How few are truly sensible of their continual obligations to the God of life? Consider, I beseech you, that whatever you possess of any kind, it is the gift of God. He holdeth your soul in life, and guards you by his providence in your going out and in your coming in. He covereth your table and filleth your cup. Have you riches? It is by the blessing of the God of heaven—"The blessing of the Lord," saith Solomon, "it maketh rich. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." Have you credit and reputation? It is God that hideth you from the strife of

tongues. "Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue, neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh." Have you friends? It is he that giveth you favor in their fight. Have you talents and parts? It is the inspiration of the Almighty that giveth thee understanding.

II. Let us now explain the particular tenor of this petition, and point out the object of the prophet's desire: "Give me neither poverty nor riches." It is plain we are not to suppose the prophet, in any degree, refusing submission to the will of God, by his thus making choice of a particular state of life—Doubtless he resolved to be at God's disposal, and believed that he was able to sanctify to him a state of the highest prosperity, or of the deepest adversity. It was no distrust of God, but self-denial and diffidence of his own strength, that suggested this prayer. Therefore, in adjusting his desires and expectations, he pitches upon that state that appeared to him liable to the fewest snares. Thus our blessed Saviour, though it is his will that we should fear no enemy when going out in divine strength, yet teaches us to pray—"Lead us not into temptation."

Poverty and riches are here mentioned as the two extremes; in neither of which we should wish to be placed, but in a safer middle between the two; so as, if it please God, we may neither be urged by pressing necessity nor over-loaded with such abundance as we may be in danger of abusing.

But perhaps some will say, where is the middle? How shall we be able to determine what we ought to desire, since there is so immense a distance, and so many intermediate degrees between the extremity of want, and the countless treasures of the wealthy?

But, my brethren, if we do not hearken to the illusive calls of ambition, avarice and lust, it is by no means difficult to apprehend the meaning of the prophet, and apply it to persons of every rank. Regard, no doubt, is to be had to the various stations in which God hath thought fit to place us. This difference of station requires

supplies of the conveniencies of life, suited to the part we are bound to act. That manner of life which would be decent and liberal in one station, would be reckoned mean and sordid in another. Therefore, what would be plenty and fulness to persons in inferior stations, would be extreme poverty to persons placed, and called to act, in higher and more exalted spheres. But after we have taken in the consideration of every difference that may happen on this score, there is something in the prayer that belongs in common to persons of all stations namely, that we should be modest in our desires after temporal good things, and take care not to ask only to gratify a sensual inclination, but for what is really necessary or useful to us. The last is reasonable and allowable, the other is unreasonable and justly condemned by the apostle James. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

But the first part of this request is explained by the last, contained in the words, "feed me with food convenient for me." That we may be able to enter into the true spirit of this petition, I shall just compare it with some other scriptural forms of prayer on the same subject, and then endeavor to point out what I take to be the chief instruction intended to be conveyed to us by it.

As to the scripture forms of prayer for temporal provision, the precedence is undoubtedly due to that excellent form left us by our Saviour, in which we find this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." You may next attend to the prayer put up by Jacob in ancient times.—"And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, if God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." It is more than probable that the apostle Paul alludes to Jacob's expression, in his excellent advice to all Christians. "But godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in

destruction and perdition—for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

It is obvious to remark, that all these prayers and this apostolic counsel run in the same strain. They all begin and are founded upon a regard to God, and a mind rightly disposed towards him: "If the Lord," says Jacob, "will be with me"—"Remove," says Agur in my text, "far from me vanity and lies." Our Saviour begins his prayer with petitions for the glory of God, with which the happiness of our souls is inseparably connected; and the apostle maintains godliness as the great source of contentment with our portion in this life.

We may further observe, that there is the same method observed in all these prayers. The expressions vary a little, but the request is the same. Jacob wishes for the divine protection, with food to eat, and raiment to put on. Agur for food convenient for him; and in the Lord's prayer we ask for our daily bread. There is no specifying of any particulars—no mention made of this or the other quantity of provision. Their desires are summed up in this general request, and the quantity and quality wholly referred to the good pleasure of God. It is certain that God hath sometimes granted to his own people, riches in great abundance; and, at the same time, has given his blessing to enjoy them, and honored the possessors, by enabling them to glorify him in the use and application of them. But the direct desire of riches, I do not think, hath any warrant from precept or example in his word. And when they are bestowed as a blessing, and not a curse, it is commonly on those who, by their superior concern about the better part, shew that they will put them to their proper use, as in the case of Solomon, recorded in the first book of Kings. "In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ask what I shall give thee. And he said, give thy servant an understanding heart. And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said, because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast

asked for thyself understanding, to discern judgment: Behold I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor."

Now this I take to be the main instruction intended to be given us with respect to our prayers for temporal mercies; that we should not pretend to set bounds to God, but leave the measure of them to his determination.

For further explaining this truth; and, at the same time recommending it to your regard, be pleased to attend to the following observations.

1. Consider that God, infinitely wise, as well as gracious, is certainly the best judge of what is most fit and convenient for us. We know so little of ourselves, that we really know not how we should behave, if placed in particular circumstances, until we are tried. The world has actually seen many examples of those, who were loud in their accusations of others, behaving worse when placed in the same stations. And, indeed, I should naturally expect, that an impatient, envious, disobedient subject would, if raised to power, be a cruel, insolent, unjust oppressor; that a petulant, peevish, obstinate servant would make a capricious, severe, unreasonable master.

If we were to carve out our own lot, and to have all our own desires gratified, there is great reason to presume, we would throw ourselves into the most disagreeable circumstances with regard to our souls, and probably consult but ill for our peace and comfort in this world.

Let me put a few questions to every one that secretly murmurs at his state. Are you sure, that if you were advanced to a place of power and trust, you would be able to carry with prudence, resolution and integrity? Are you sure, that if you were supplied with riches in great abundance, you would not allow yourselves to wallow in pleasure, or

to swell in pride? Are you sure, that if you were raised to high rank, surrounded by flatterers, and worshipped by servants, you would, in that standing, behave with humility and condescension; or that pressed on all hands by business, company, or amusements, you would still religiously save your time for converse with God?

A life of piety in an exalted station is a continual conflict with the strongest opposition. What says experience upon this subject? Solomon did not wholly, and to the end, resist the temptation of riches and dominion. In the whole compass of history, sacred and profane, I do not remember any example of a man's behaving better in point of morals, in a prosperous, than an afflicted state, excepting one that hath this appearance, viz. Cicero, the Roman orator. His conduct in prosperity was full of dignity, and seemed wholly directed to the public good; whereas in adversity, it was to the last degree mean and abject—But probably the reason of this was, that pride, or rather vanity, was his ruling passion, and the great motive to his illustrious actions; and when he fell into adversity, this disposition had no scope for its exercise.

Christians, the Lord knoweth our frame, and is well acquainted with what we are able to bear, and consequently what state of life will be upon the whole most convenient for us. It is, therefore, our interest, as well as duty, to refer ourselves entirely to him, and leave him to choose for us. This is not only the doctrine of scripture, but so agreeable to reason and good sense, that it has been acknowledged by several of the Heathen Philosophers, who have expressed themselves in terms perfectly similar to those of the inspired writings. The prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades, is very remarkable; that he should beseech the Supreme God to give him what was good for him, though he should not ask it; and to withhold from him whatever would be hurtful, though he should be so foolish as to pray for it.

2. As God is certainly the best judge of what is good for us, so resignation to him is a most acceptable expression both of our

worship and obedience. Single duties are particular acts; resignation is the very habit of obedience. The wisdom and goodness of God are acknowledged in the most authentic manner, when his holy and sovereign Providence is humbly submitted to, and cordially approved. Every impatient complaint is an impeachment of Providence; every irregular desire is an act of rebellion against God. Therefore a submissive temper must be highly pleasing to God, and is the way to glorify him in the most unexceptionable manner. The rather indeed, as it is impossible to attain this temper, but by sincerely laying hold of the covenant of peace, which is ordered in all things and sure. This teaches us the grounds of submission. This procures for us the grace of submission. This stains the pride of all human glory. This changes the nature of our possessions to us, and us to them. This spiritualizes a worldly mind, and makes us know, in our own experience, that all the paths of the Lord to his own people, are mercy and peace.

3. Such a temper of mind will greatly contribute to our own inward peace. It will be an effectual preservative from all unrighteous courses, and unlawful, or even dishonorable means of increasing our worldly substance, and consequently save us from the troubles or dangers to which men expose themselves by such practices. It will preserve us from perplexing anxiety, and many uneasy fears for futurity. It will bring us the near and sure way to the greatest of all earthly blessings—a contented mind.

Such will be the sweet and delightful effects of depending upon God, and leaving it to him to furnish our supplies as he sees most convenient for us. Whoever can pray with the prophet—"give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me"—may be fully assured, that his desire shall be gratified, as it is perfectly agreeable to the will of God.

I conclude with reading to you our Saviour's exhortation on this subject—"Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what

ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

SERMON XIII

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY

Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? Or, lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.—
PROVERBS 30:9

I PROCEED now to consider the arguments by which the prophet enforces his wise and well conceived prayer. These, in connexion with the two branches of the prayer, stand thus; "Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? And give me not poverty, lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." If Agur's prayer is conceived in the most modest and humble terms, the reasons, with which he supports it, are every way becoming a truly wise and good man. You see in them a prevailing concern for the honor and glory of God, and his own preservation in the paths of piety and virtue. You see in them a humble sense of his own weakness, and the danger of temptation; he, therefore, desires to be placed in such a state of life, as will expose him to the fewest trials. An excellent disposition this, and highly worthy of our imitation. How happy would it be for us all, if a desire to please God

and preserve our integrity, lay always nearest our hearts, and had a constant and commanding influence on every step we took in our journey through life.

Neither riches nor poverty are bad in themselves. Neither of them is any recommendation, or hinderance to the favor of God, who is no respecter of persons—there are good and bad in all ranks. Men may be rich and yet pious, or poor, yet strictly just and honest. It is, I confess, often done, yet it is highly criminal to look upon all that are rich in this world as profane; and it would be equally so to look upon all that are poor as destitute of integrity. Yet it is undeniable, that, from the corruption of the human heart, these two extremes do often become strong temptations to the particular sins mentioned in the text; which we shall now consider separately, in the order in which they lie in the passage before us.

"Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?"

As to the fact, that riches do often lead to profanity and contempt of God, experience, and the state of the world prove it in a manner too plain to be denied. We not only see that those, who are born and educated from their infancy in the higher ranks of life, are most prone to neglect the duties of religion; but those who, from a low or mean condition, are remarkably raised in the course of Providence, do often change their temper with their state, and show the unhappy influence of riches in leading them to a forgetfulness of God. Are there not some, who were regularly in God's house when they but barely subsisted, who have not time for it now, when they are busy and wealthy? Are there not some families, where the worship of God was constant and regular in early life, while they were undistinguished, and now it is no more to be heard in their sumptuous palaces and elegant apartments? Shall I say, that any worm of the earth is become too considerable to fall down before the omnipotent Jehovah?

I may add, as being of great importance in the present subject, that such changes do often take place gradually and insensibly, very much contrary to men's own expectation; so that we really do not know ourselves, nor can we determine before trial, how far we would resist or yield to the force of temptation. The prophet Elisha foretold to Hazael, the cruelties he would be guilty of when raised to an higher station; to which he replied with disdain and abhorrence; "What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, the Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."—The conduct of the children of Israel in their prosperity, is but an emblem of the general conduct of the children of men. "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked. Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness: Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation."

What hath been said might be sufficient to shew the propriety of the prophet's prayer; for if such hath been often, or generally, the influence of worldly greatness upon other men, why should any be so confident as to presume it would be otherwise with themselves? But perhaps it may afford matter of useful instruction, to inquire a little further into the subject—to trace the causes of this effect, and shew how and why riches become an inducement to irreligion and profaneness, for this will best enable us to apply the remedy. When I speak of examining the causes of this effect, I confess that no reason can be given for it, but what reflects great dishonor upon human nature in its present state. Were we to judge of the matter by the dictates of sound reason, we should naturally expect to find it directly contrary. God is the author of every blessing which men possess, and his gifts should lead us to gratitude and acknowledgment. It seems natural then to suppose, that those who are most highly favored in the course of Providence, should discover the greatest sense of obligation, and be ready to make every dutiful return. One would think that though the poor should be impatient, surely the rich will be content and thankful. Is not this reasonable? Had any of you bestowed many favors upon others, would you not expect that their gratitude should bear some proportion to the

number and value of benefits received? Had any of them been remarkably distinguished from the rest, would you not expect from them the most inviolable fidelity and attachment? Strange, that our conduct should be so directly opposite in the returns we make for the goodness of our Maker! That those who are distinguished from others by the largest possessions, and the greatest fulness of all temporal mercies, should be the most prone to wickedness of all forts; but especially, that they should be peculiarly inclined to forgetfulness and contempt of God! Yet so it is in truth. But however dishonorable it is to human nature, let us search into it a little, and perhaps we may discover the cause of impiety in persons in affluent circumstances, and the danger the prophet would avoid, by attending to the following observations:

1. An easy and affluent fortune affords the means, not only of pampering our bodies, but of gratifying all our lusts and appetites. They are as strong probably in persons of inferior stations, but Providence has rendered the gratification more difficult, and in some cases impossible. Many work through necessity, who would be as idle and slothful as any, but for the fear of want. These will be the first and readiest to reproach the rich, and call them idle drones, who revel in that abundance for which they never toiled; and to put to their own credit that which is wholly owing to the restraints under which they are laid. Many are generally sober, because they cannot afford the charges of intemperance, who want nothing but the means, to riot in the most brutal sensuality. But to persons of great wealth, the objects of desire are always placed in full view, and are evidently within their reach: so that the temptation has uncommon force, and few are able entirely to resist it.

2. The indulgence of pleasure insensibly induces a habit, and leads men to place their happiness in such enjoyments. Habit you know is very powerful, and while the habit acquires strength, the power of resistance is gradually weakened. These gratifications consume so much time, that there is little left to reflect upon God, and our relation to him. I reckon it none of the least temptations to persons

of high rank, that not only their self-indulgence, but the attendance and obsequiousness of others, so engrosses their attention, and wastes their time, that they have few opportunities of calm and sober reflection; or at least, can easily escape from it, and take refuge in company and amusement. Add to this, that a great variety of sensible objects and enjoyments render the mind, not only less attentive to things of a spiritual nature, but indeed, less able to understand them.

3. Observe further, that when the better part is thus neglected, and no care taken of the cultivation of the mind, every vice will spring and shoot up in the soul, as briars and thorns do upon uncultivated ground. Sin, my brethren, is natural to us; it is the produce of the soil; if it is not destroyed, it will not die; if it is but neglected, it will thrive. Now when ever persons fall under the power of vice, they begin first to excuse, and then to vindicate it. Those who are under the government of lust, soon find it would be their interest that there was no such thing as religion and virtue. Whatever we wish, we are easily led to believe to be true. Loose and atheistical principles then find a ready admittance, and are swallowed down greedily. This is a short sketch of the steps by which people in affluent and easy circumstances, are often led to deny God, and to say: "What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" Loose principles are, at first, more frequently the effect, than the cause of loose practices; but when once they have taken deep root, and obtained full dominion in the heart, they have a dreadful and fatal influence on the devoted victim.

But, my brethren, I find a strong inclination to make another remark, though perhaps it may be thought of too refined and abstract a nature. It is, that the danger of affluence in leading to contempt of God, arises from the nature of all sin as such. The original and first sin of man, was plainly affecting independence. They desired and expected to be as gods, knowing good and evil. And full sin properly consists in withdrawing our allegiance from, and throwing off our dependence upon God, and giving, as it were, that esteem, love and service to ourselves, in one shape or another, that is due only to him.

Now observe, that affluence nourishes this mistake, and suffering kills it. The more every thing abounds with us, the more our will is submitted to, and our inclinations gratified on every subject; the more we look upon ourselves as independent, and forget our obligations to God. Whereas, on the other hand, disappointments and calamities open our blind eyes, and make us remember what we are. Was not the proud monarch of Babylon inspired with this delusive sense of independence, when he expressed himself thus: "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake and said, is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" But mark the more powerful word of the King of kings.—"While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee!" That this is the proper source of worldly greatness, may be seen in the temper such persons usually acquire and settle in, which is pride, insolence and contempt of others. Nay, it appears still more clearly in some few instances, in which the intoxication comes to its height, and the poor deluded mortal literally aspired to be considered and treated as God. It may seem incredible, but we have the most authentic evidence that history can afford, that some men have demanded and received divine worship. This was the case, not only with Alexander the Great, who was really an illustrious prince, but with some of the later Roman emperors, who were the meanest and basest of all men. No wonder then, that prosperity makes men neglect God, when it prompts them to sit down upon his throne, and rob him of the service of his other subjects.

Before I proceed to the other part of the prophet's argument, suffer me to make a few remarks, for the improvement of what has been already said, And,

1. See hence the great malignity and deceitfulness of sin. It hardly appears more strongly from any circumstance, than that which has been the subject of this discourse, viz. that the gifts of God, in the

course of his Providence, are so far from exciting our gratitude, in proportion to their number and value, that on the contrary, those who receive most are usually most profane. They make his favors instruments of rebellion against him, and return contempt for his indulgence, and hatred for his love.

Let us not take occasion from this to gratify our own envy, by particular or personal reproach against those who are great, or have become rich amongst ourselves; but let us act a far wiser and juster part, and be humbled for the sinfulness of our nature, and warned of the deceitfulness of sin. We may feel the feeds of this disposition in us all. You find the wife man charging a similar ingratitude upon man in general. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." And do you not observe every day, nay, has it is not turned into a proverb, that we think light of our mercies, spiritual and temporal, when they are common and abundant? And what is the true and proper interpretation of this, but that the greater God's goodness is to us, commonly the less is our gratitude to him?

2. Let me beseech you to make a wife improvement of the advantages you enjoy over one another. Let them excite in you a holy emulation to testify your sense of superior blessings, by superior piety and usefulness. Do you excel others in any respect? Are you successful in trade? Have you risen to reputation? Are you exalted to offices of dignity? Are you endowed with capacity of mind? Can you remember the time when those were your equals who are now your inferiors? Do not look with insolence upon others, making odious, and perhaps unjust comparions. Do not swell in pride and self-complacence, as if by your own power you had made yourselves to differ, but rather look the other way, to God, who is the maker both of rich and poor, and pray that your thankfulness and duty to him may exceed that of the poor man, as much as his liberality to you exceeds what he has thought proper to bestow upon him. This affords me an opportunity of relating a little piece of private history, that happened in Great

Britain, and appears to me very worthy, of remembrance, and very conducive to the ends of edification.

A gentleman of very considerable fortune, but a stranger to either personal or family religion, one evening took a solitary walk through a part of his own grounds. He happened to come near to a mean hut, where a poor man with a numerous family lived, who earned their bread by daily labor. He heard a voice pretty loud and continued.— Not knowing what it was, curiosity prompted him to listen. The man, who was piously disposed, happened to be at prayer with his family. So soon as he could distinguish the words, he heard him giving thanks with great affection to God, for the goodness of his providence, in giving them food to eat, and raiment to put on, and in supplying them with what was necessary and comfortable in the present life. He was immediately, no doubt, by divine power, struck with astonishment and confusion, and said to himself, does this poor man, who has nothing but the meanest fare, and that purchased by severe labor, give thanks to God for his goodness to himself and family, and I, who enjoy ease and honor, and every thing that is grateful and desirable, have hardly ever bent my knee, or made any acknowledgment to my Maker and preserver. It pleased God that this providential occurrence proved the mean of bringing him to a real and lasting sense of God and religion.

Let all persons in health, quiet and plentiful circumstances, learn from the preceding discourse, what it is they ought clearly to guard against.—Pride, security, forgetfulness of God, are peculiarly incident to that state. "Lo this," saith the Lord to Jerusalem, "was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." A serious reflection on the obligation such lie under to God for what they have received in their continued dependance upon him, and the instability of all earthly things, would save them from the hurtful influence of worldly prosperity. To enforce this, I shall only read the apostolic charge to Timothy. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not

high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

SERMON XIV

THE DANGER OF ADVERSITY

Lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.
PROVERBS 30:9

I PROCEED now to consider the argument by which the prophet urges the second branch of his request, which, in connexion, runs thus—"Give me not poverty, lest I be poor and steal." Having not only explained the general principle that runs through the whole of this subject, but also very particularly pointed out the dangers attending an opulent and wealthy state, I shall endeavor to do the same thing with respect to a state of poverty and straitness. While I attempt this, I am sincerely sorry that there is so much propriety in the subject; and that it is so well suited to the circumstances of the inhabitants of this place. You see the prophet considers the great and general temptation to which the poor are exposed, to be dishonest, by using fraudulent means of relieving their wants, or bettering their condition. You see also, he considers this temptation in its progress, not only inclining them to act unjustly, but sometimes proceeding to the terrible degree of concealing or supporting the fraud by falsehood, and perhaps at last by perjury or false swearing; lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

Let us first consider a little the matter of fact, as it appears in experience, and then a few of its principal causes.

As to the first of these, shall I be afraid to affirm, that extreme poverty often inclines persons to dishonesty and fraud? Will it be thought harsh and severe to those already sufficiently depressed! As I would not seem to stand in this place, and flatter the pride of the greatest and most eminent of my fellow-sinners, so neither will I dissemble the truth from a false compassion for the poor. This would indeed be doing them the greatest possible injury; it would be treating them, from mistaken tenderness, as the rich are often

treated from the fear or partiality of those who are about them; fostering their self-deceit, and not suffering them to hear the most salutary truths, because they are not pleasing to the flesh.

It is undoubtedly matter of experience, that great poverty makes many take unjust and unwarrantable methods of procuring relief. Not only so, but they seem often disposed to justify and defend them, as if they had a title to rectify the mistakes of Providence, in the distribution of worldly possessions. This, in the event, receives great encouragement from some who seem to have imbibed a general false principle, and act upon it, both in their own conduct, and in their judgment of others. In the division of controversy, or dividing disputed property, when one party is, or is supposed to be rich, and in easy circumstances, and the other poor, and in a mean condition, they think that instead of acting according to strict justice, the advantage should always be made to fall to the poorer side. This conduct is considered by some, not only as lawful, but as laudable. It is however a false principle, and is condemned in scripture, which says, "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause." It may be thought, perhaps, that the other is the more common and dangerous partiality, and probably it is so; yet this also is blameworthy, and when followed out, as I am afraid it too often is, must involve numbers unawares in the guilt of stealing; for when they have once laid down this rule, that the poor have some claim upon the rich, they are ready to apply it to their own case, and extend it very far. But in all matters of property, or right and wrong, whether a person is rich or poor, ought to be utterly out of the question; the only thing to be considered is, what is just and lawful. The rich are indeed, in point of conscience, bound to assist the poor; but this must be their own act; no person can take the smallest part of their property without their consent, but he is guilty of an act of injustice; and violation of the law of God. No person has a right to make them generous and charitable against their wills, or to exercise their own generosity and charity at their expence. This must be left to the Supreme Judge at the last day, who will say to them, "I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick

and in prison and ye visited me not." But what will give us the most distinct view of the influence of poverty, as a temptation, is the too frequent conduct of those who are reduced from what was once their state, to poverty or debt, by misfortunes or extravagance, or mismanagement of their affairs. The temptation of poverty is not by far so great to those in the meanest ranks of life, whose income, though small, is not very disproportionate to what hath always been their condition; as to those who are reduced from a higher to a lower state—The few, who in such a situation preserve their integrity inviolated, and their sincerity of speech unsuspected, deserve the highest honor. Nay, I am persuaded that, bad as the world is, every person in reduced circumstances, would meet with compassion and assistance, if all about him were sensible that he had neither lost his substance by neglect, nor wasted it by riot, nor concealed it by fraud. But though we cannot help ascribing some measure of what is laid to the charge of persons in this unhappy state, to the rage and resentment of those who have suffered by them; yet alas, there is too great reason to affirm, that they are too often guilty of prevarication and fraud, the sins mentioned in the text.

I will dwell no longer upon the fact, but will consider a little the reasons of it, which will directly serve to promote the design of this discourse, by exciting men to concern and solicitude, as well as pointing out the proper means of avoiding the temptation. The general reason of this, to be sure, is obvious to every body, that persons in poverty, being strongly solicited by the appetites common to all men, and not having of their own wherewith to gratify their desires, are tempted to lay hold of the property of others. They grudge to see that others have the enjoyments from which they are debarred; and since they cannot have them in a lawful, make bold to seize them in an unlawful way. But this I do not insist on, that I may mention one or two particular reasons, which will suggest suitable exhortations to duty.

1. The first I shall mention, is ignorance. This is peculiarly applicable to those in the lowest ranks of life. Through poverty they are not so

well instructed as they ought to be, in the principles of religion, and the great rules of duty. An ignorant state is almost always a state of security.—Their consciences are less tender, and they are less sensible of the great evil of prevarication and fraud. I am obliged, in fidelity, to say, that in the private inspection of my charge, though I have sound some instances both of poverty and sickness borne with the most pious resignation, there are also some whose condition might move the hardest heart, living in the most sordid poverty, grossly ignorant, and, at the same time, so dispirited, so slothful, or so proud, that they will do little to obtain knowledge for themselves, or communicate it to their children. Many will not attend upon the public means of instruction, because they cannot appear in such a decent garb as they could wish; and for the same reason they keep their children from them, till they contract such habits of idleness and vice, that they come out into the world without principle, obstinate and intractable. Is not the duty here very plain? All such should exert themselves to obtain the knowledge of the things which belong to their peace. They should neither be unwilling nor ashamed to make application for supply; and even the coarsest raiment should not hinder them from appearing in the house of God. Thus they will find acceptance with him, if they worship him in the beauty of holiness, preferable to those who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and their hearts are after their covetousness.

2. Another great reason why poverty becomes a temptation to fraud is, that they are introduced to it insensibly, and led on by degrees. The sin steals upon them by little and little. People involved in their circumstances, to get rid of importunity and solicitation, make promises, more of what they hope or wish, than of what they are able to do. Necessity serves as an excuse for their failing to their own minds, and thus they are gradually brought into a breach of sincerity, and proceed from lower to higher degrees of falsehood. Little arts of evasion are first made use of, and doubtful practices are entered upon. One sin seems necessary to strengthen or conceal another, till at last the grossest fraud, and sometimes perjury itself, closes the unhappy scene. I have read an excellent observation, that there is

hardly such a thing as a single sin; they are always to be found in clusters. I am sure, this holds in a particular manner as to sins of injustice. They are so interwoven and connected together, that you cannot receive any one without being obliged to admit the rest. This is one great branch of the deceitfulness of sin in general; with a view to which the apostle says, "But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

3. I only mention one other reason of poverty being a temptation to fraud, viz. that in time it destroys the sense of shame. I am not ignorant, that a sense of shame, which is nothing else but a fear of the censure of others, neither is, nor ought to be the main principle of a good man's actions. But as there is no other principle at all in many, so it is a good assistant, and corroborative when justly directed; but now, through the corrupt maxims of the world, poverty is so much the object of contempt, and those who are in this state, meet every day with so many marks of neglect from all, that before their condition is known, they will do almost any thing to conceal it, and after it is known, they become in time so destitute of shame, that they are under no further restraint.

From this particular branch of the subject, let me put you in mind,

1. What reason many have to be thankful to the God of life, who hath given them their daily provision, if not in all the abundance of immense riches, yet in fulness and sufficiency. An humble, thankful disposition is not only your duty, in return for the divine bounty, but is itself the richest and sweetest ingredient in all temporal mercies.—It is that, indeed, which makes them mercies.—Envious persons do not taste what they have, their evil eye being fixed on what they cannot obtain. Things in this respect are just what they seem to be. Our comforts are as we are enabled to relish them. The same possessions which are despised by the impatient or ambitious, are a treasure and abundance to the humble and grateful.

2. If poverty is a temptation, it ought to be an argument to all to avoid it, or seek deliverance from it by lawful means. Apply yourselves with steadiness and perseverance to the duties of your calling, that you may provide things honest in the fight of all men. It is a duty of the law, and of the gospel; and it hath this promise, in general, annexed to it, that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Read, I beseech you, that vast treasure of useful instruction, the book of Proverbs; where you will meet with many excellent counsels and wise observations upon this subject. Of these I shall mention at present, but two passages, selected both for the soundness of the instruction, and the beauty of the illustration. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." And again; "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down."

3. Are any of you poor and reduced in your circumstances, set a double watch upon your conduct, and earnestly pray that God may preserve you from fraud and disingenuity of every kind. Rather suffer yourselves to be stripped of every thing, and apply to the charity of others, which is not sinful, and ought not to be shameful, than take any dishonest methods of bettering your state. O melancholy thought, that many, when they become desperate in their circumstances, become also desperate in their courses, and drown the reflection of their consciences in slothfulness and sensuality! Sincerity, integrity, patience and sobriety in a ruined fortune are doubly eminent; at least, whatever they may be in the sight of the world, they are honorable and precious in the sight of God, and of all good men.

Before concluding, suffer me to make one or two reflections on the subject in general; the several parts of which I have now explained. And,

1. On what hath been said on this subject, I would graft this important lesson; that you should not only study to preserve yourselves from sin, but from all such circumstances of temptation as are dangerous to human constancy. This was the very ground of the prayer of the prophet in my text, and is the substance of the reasons he assigns for his request. We are taught the same thing in the strongest manner, by the several instances of human frailty, and the folly of presumptuous confidence, recorded in scripture. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We are also taught the same thing by him who knew what was in man, as he has given us directions in the form of prayer which he taught his disciples, to say, Lord, "lead us not into temptation."

Are you really unwilling to do evil, you will be concerned to keep yourselves out of the way of every solicitation to it. This is constantly the effect of a judicious and solid piety, and those who act otherwise shew that they either have no real goodness, or that they are very weak Christians, and little acquainted either with themselves, or this present evil world.

2. You may learn how necessary it is, that you should look for the divine assistance and direction, to avoid the temptation of every state of life. We are truly of ourselves unequal to the trials with which we are surrounded. Not that there is any thing unjust or oppressive in the measures of Providence; but because it seems good to our Maker, to oblige us to a constant dependance upon himself and his promised help. "But God is faithful, who will not suffer "you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The least temptation may prove too hard for us, if we neglect to apply for supreme aid; but in divine strength, we may bid defiance to the most formidable opposition. This temper is well exemplified and described by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecution, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

3. From what hath been said, you may see what an inseparable connexion there is between true religion and your employments and state in this present world. They have a mutual, strong, and constant influence upon one another. It is a fatal, though a common error to separate them; entirely to confine religion to the times and places of immediate worship, and suppose that it hath nothing to do with the maxims of trade and commerce, or other worldly callings. On the contrary, your impressions of things spiritual and eternal, will direct and regulate your views as to the present life; and your success or misfortunes in worldly schemes, will have a certain and visible effect upon your Christian conversation, and the state of your souls. Therefore, let them never be separated in your own views, and let them still be kept in their proper order and subordination. Though the light and trivial use, not only of the name of God, but of scripture-language, is both sinful and dangerous; and though a forward ostentatious piety may sometimes look suspicious, yet it were to be wished we had more of a grave and habitual acknowledgment of God in all our ways. This was the language of the Patriarchs of old. In one of the former discourses upon this subject, I took notice of Jacob's prayer, when he set out for Padan-aram. See after the increase of his family, how he expresses himself in answer to his brother Esau. "And he lift up his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, who are those with thee? And he said the children which God hath graciously given thy servant." See also the apostolical direction for the manner of projecting our future purposes.—"Go to now, ye that say to-day, or to-morrow, we will go

into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."

4. In the last place, let me beseech, in the tenderest manner, every one of you, rich and poor, to remember an approaching eternity. It will not be long till the honorable, and despised, the wealthy and the needy, the master and the servant, shall lie down in the dust. Lay hold of that covenant of peace which is ordered in all things and sure. Hear a great and constant truth. "What is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" How many a Lazarus is now in Abraham's bosom; and how many a rich man, that once lived delicately on earth, is at this moment tormented in hell-fire! The gospel of peace is now preached in your ears. Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved. I cannot promise that you shall be rich, but all things necessary are assured to you by the divine promise; food and raiment, support under trials, strength for duty, and in the world to come, everlasting rest.

SERMON XV

ON THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Preached in the Old Presbyterian Church in New-York, to a very numerous audience, on the evening of the second Sabbath in May, 1789.

And they brought young children unto him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not:

for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. MARK 10:13, 14, 15, 16

THERE are few things in which persons of reflection, in general, and especially those who fear God, are more agreed, than the importance of the rising generation; or, which is the true meaning of that expression, the importance of the instruction and government of youth.

This is a subject of great extent, and may also be taken up in a great variety of lights. I am one of those who think that it may, as well as many others, be, with much advantage, considered doctrinally; and that a clear view of divine truth upon every subject, will have the most powerful and happy influence, not only in directing our sentiments, but in governing our practice.

There is much to be seen of the proper glory of the Redeemer in this passage of scripture—His usefulness—his attention to improve every seemingly accidental occurrence for the purpose of instruction, and his amiable condescension to all who humbly applied to Him, and tender feeling for their wants and weaknesses. It appears from this passage, that the inhabitants about Jordan, where he then was, not only brought their sick to be healed, as they did in most other places, but brought young children "that he should touch them." In Luke they are called infants; and in the latter end of the passage now read, it is said, he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them; so that it is probable they were all of them of very early age, and some of them perhaps, literally what we call infants, who could not yet speak or walk. I see not the least foundation for what some commentators imagine, that they might labor under some disorder, from which the parents supposed he would cure them: If this had been the intention, the disciples would not, probably, have found any fault with it. The probability is, that the parents or relations of the children brought them, expecting that he would lay

his hands on them—authoritatively bless them, and pray for them; from which they believed important benefits might be derived to them. The disciples, we are told, "rebuked those that brought them," supposing, doubtless, that it was an impertinent and unnecessary interruption of their master, and that the children could receive no benefit at that early time of life; and who knows but, like the human wisdom of later times, they might think the attempt superstitious as well as unnecessary. However, our Lord was of a different opinion, and said—"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

Now the single subject of this discourse shall be to inquire, What is the import of this declaration? and, What we may understand our Saviour as affirming, when he says, of young children or infants, "of such is the kingdom of God?" After this, I will give such advices as the truths that may be established shall suggest, and as they seem to me most proper to enforce.

Let us then consider what we may understand our Saviour as affirming, when he says of young children or infants, "of such is the kingdom of God."

And, in the first place, we may understand by it, that children may be taken within the bond of God's covenant; become members of the visible church, and, in consequence, be relatively holy. I do not found the lawfulness of infant baptism on this passage alone, and mean to enter into no controversy on the subject at this time; but, as it is clearly established in other passages, it may well be understood here. At any rate so far as I have affirmed is undoubtedly certain, that they may be admitted within the bond of God's covenant. We know, that under the Old Testament, they received the sign of circumcision, which in the New Testament, is said to be "a seal of the righteousness that is of faith." (Rom. 4:11.) Many benefits may arise from this. As in the natural constitution of man, many advantages and disadvantages are derived from parents upon the offspring, so in the moral constitution of divine grace, many blessings, spiritual and temporal,

may be inherited from pious parents. Children are the subjects of prayer; and, of consequence, within reach of the promise. The believer may justly hope for his seed dying in infancy, and in after life, many eventual providential mercies may be expected from that God who "sheweth mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him."

It was usual in the most ancient times, for aged or holy persons to bless children formally. I do not recollect in ancient history, a more beautiful, or more tender scene, than that we have recorded, Gen. 48:15. of the patriarch Jacob's blessing his grand-children, the sons of Joseph, when he was about to die—"And he blessed Joseph and said, God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which sed me all my life long to this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac: And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." We are told by an ancient writer of the Christian church, that Ignatius, afterwards bishop of Antioch, was one of those children thus brought to Christ for his blessing; and there is no reason, that I know of, to oppose the tradition: For supposing him to have been an infant, or even from 2 to 5 years of age, it would make him only between 70 and 80 at the time of his martyrdom, in the year 108 from the birth of Christ.

2. The declaration "of such is the kingdom of God," may be understood to imply, that children may, even in infancy, be the subjects of regenerating grace, and thereby become really holy. This is plain from the nature of the thing; for if they can carry the corrupt impression of Adam's nature in their infant state, there can be no doubt but they may be renewed after the image of him that created them. Almighty power can easily have access to them, and can, in answer to prayers, as well as endeavors, form them for their Maker's service. See what the prophet Isaiah says, 28:9. "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Those that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts." Samuel was a child of prayer, and dedicated to God from his infant

years, and it is said of him, 1 Sam. 2:26. "And the child Samuel grew, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men." It is an expression frequently to be found in pious writers, and among them that are far from denying the universal corruption of human nature, that some may be said to be sanctified from the womb—that is, that the time of their renovation may be beyond the reach both of understanding and memory; and this being certainly possible, may justly be considered as the object of desire and the subject of prayer. Few, perhaps, have failed to observe, that some children discover upon the first dawn of reason, an amiable and tractable disposition, and drink in spiritual instruction with desire and delight; while others discover a frowardness and repugnance, that is with much difficulty, if at all, and sometimes never, overcome.

3. I think this declaration implies, that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit, even by outward means, than is generally supposed. No doubt the reason of the conduct of the disciples was, that they supposed the children could receive no benefit. In this, from our Lord's answer, it is probable he thought them mistaken. I will not enlarge on some refined remarks of persons as distinguished for learning as piety; some of whom have supposed, that they are capable of receiving impressions of desire and aversion, and even of moral temper, particularly, of love or hatred, in the first year of their lives. I must, however, mention a remark of the justly celebrated M. Fenelon, archbishop of Cambray, because the fact on which it is founded is undeniable, and the deduction from it important. He says, that 'before they are thought capable of receiving any instruction, or the least pains are taken with them, they learn a language.—Many children at four years of age can speak their mother tongue, though not with the same accuracy or grammatical precision, yet with greater readiness and fulness than most scholars do a foreign language after the study of a whole life.' If I were to enlarge upon this I might say, they not only discover their intellectual powers by connecting the idea with the sign, but acquire many sentiments of good and evil, right and wrong, in that early period of their life. Such is the attention of children, that they often

seem to know their parents' tempers sooner and better than they know their's, and to avail themselves of that knowledge to obtain their desires.

To apply this to our present subject, or rather the occasion of it, allow me to observe, that the circumstances of solemn transactions are often deeply engraven upon very young minds. It is not impossible that some of those young children might recollect and be affected with the majesty and condescension of Jesus of Nazareth, and the impression be attended with happy fruits. At any rate, as no doubt the parents would often relate the transaction to their children, this would be a kind of secondary memory, and have the same effect upon their sentiments and conduct.

4. This declaration implies, that the earliest, in general, is the fittest and best time for instruction. This part of the subject has been treated at full length by many writers in every age, I therefore shall say the less upon it—Only observe, That the importance of early instruction is written upon the whole system of nature, and repeated in every page of the history of Providence. You may bend a young twig and make it receive almost any form: but that which has attained to maturity, and taken its ply, you will never bring into any other shape than that which it naturally bears. In the same manner those habits which men contract in early life, and are strengthened by time, it is next to impossible to change. Far be it from me to say any thing in opposition to the infinite power and absolute sovereignty of God; but let us also beware of considering these as opposed to the natural course of things, or the use and efficacy of means. We have many warnings upon this subject in scripture, where the recovery of an habitual and hardened sinner, is likened to a natural impossibility, Jer. 13:23.—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." God will reserve to himself his own absolute sovereignty, but it is at every sinner's own peril if he presume upon it and abuse it.

5. This declaration of our Saviour—"Of such is the kingdom of God"—may imply, that, in fact, the real disciples of Christ chiefly consist of those who are called in their earlier years. The visible church of Christ is a numerous and mixed society; but his mystical body, consisting of real believers, I think we are warranted from this passage of scripture and others, as well as the analogy of faith, and the reason and nature of things, to suppose, consists for the most part of those who are called in infancy and youth. This is an important truth, and deeply fraught with instruction to all, of every rank. There are some called after a course of opposition to God, but they are few in comparison; therefore the apostle Paul styles himself—"One born out of due time." Perhaps experience and a deliberate view of the state of the world, is sufficient to prove this assertion. The instances of conversion in advanced life, are very rare: and when it seems to happen, it is perhaps most commonly the resurrection of those seeds which were sown in infancy, but had been long stifled by the violence of youthful passions, or the pursuits of ambition and the hurry of an active life. I have known several instances of the instructions, long neglected, of deceased parents, at last rising up, asserting their authority, and producing the deepest penitence and real reformation. But my experiences furnishes me with no example of one brought up in ignorance and security, after a long course of profaneness, turning, at the close of life, to the service of the living God. The most common case is, that the deep sleep continues to the last, and, as the saying is, they die as they live; though in some instances, when the sins have been of the grossest kind, conscience awakens at their going off the stage, and they seem, as it were, to begin the torments of hell with the terror of despair.

You will find in some practical writers an opinion, or sentiment, that seems not ill-founded to the following purpose, 'Some are called at the eleventh hour that none may despair,' and there are few, that none may presume. Others make a distinction, not without ground, as it seems founded upon the wisdom and equity of the divine government; That when the gospel comes to a people that had long sitten in darkness, there may be numerous converts of all ages; but

when the gospel has been long preached in plenty and purity, and ordinances regularly administered, few but those who are called in early life are ever called at all. A very judicious and pious writer, Mr. Richard Baxter, is of opinion, that in a regular state of the church, and a tolerable measure of faithfulness and purity in its officers, family instruction and government are the usual means of conversion, public ordinances of edification. This seems agreeable to the language of scripture; for we are told God hath set in the church "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers," (not for converting sinners, but) "for perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ." It seems to add further weight to this, that most of those who are recorded in scripture as eminent for piety, were called in early life; and we know not but it may have been the case with others, though not particularly mentioned: Those I have in view, are Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Josiah, Daniel, and the three Children, in the Old Testament, and in the New, John Baptist and John the beloved disciple; of whom I may just observe, that no other reason has ever been given for the Saviour's distinguishing him by particular affection, but that he was the youngest of the twelve.

6. In the last place, this declaration implies that the comparative innocence of children is a lesson to us, and an emblem of the temper and carriage of Christ's real disciples. This instruction we are not left to infer for ourselves. Our Lord has made the remark in the passage where the text lies, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein." This is directly levelled against the pride of self-sufficiency, and every rough and boisterous passion. It is remarkable that the very same image is made use of in several passages of scripture. Thus, Matth. 18:1, 2, 3, 4. "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." So

also the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 14:20. "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men:"—And further, 1 Peter 2:1, 2. "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,—as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."—The graces of the spiritual life recommended to us by this beautiful image, are humility, gentleness, teachableness, sincerity, and easiness to be reconciled: all which are remarkable in young persons, and are frequently lost or vitiated by growing years.

I come now to make a practical improvement of the subject, which shall be confined to pointing out the duties suggested by the foregoing truths, as they are severally incumbent on, 1. parents; 2. children; 3. every hearer of the gospel.

1. Let us consider the duties incumbent on parents. Is it so, that of children or infants the Redeemer said, of such is the kingdom of God? Then parents should be (1) thankful. Thankfulness is a happy frame of spirit in itself, and powerfully reconciles the mind to difficult, and animates it to important duties. Be thankful then for the honor that is done you, for the trust that is reposed in you, and for the encouraging promise of God to assist and accept of you in the discharge of it. "Children are the gift of God, and the fruit of the womb is his reward." I cannot easily figure to myself any greater earthly blessing than to have children to be the objects of your care and diligence while you live, and to inherit your name and substance, when you yourselves must, in the course of nature, go off the stage. And is it a little honor to be intrusted with the care of these rational creatures of God, born for immortality, and whose present peace and future welfare depend so much on your conduct? Are you not called to prepare members for the church of Christ?—"for of such is his kingdom;" and however important the ministry of the gospel is (which I should be the last to detract from) you may know, that it is out of a minister's power to speak to the understanding of those who are not prepared by previous instruction. But above all, how thankful

should you be for the encouragement given you to bring your children to the Saviour, and the promise of his blessing. "He took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them." Fathers! Mothers! What ground of praise to the condescending Saviour!

(2.) Be early and diligent in instruction. This is the great and substantial evidence you are called to give of your thankfulness for the mercy. You have heard that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit by outward means than is commonly supposed: Let not, therefore, the devil and the world be too far beforehand with you, in possessing their fancy, engaging their affections, and misleading their judgment. Is it a fable, or do I speak truth when I say, many children learn to swear before they learn to pray. It is indeed affecting to a serious mind, to hear children lisping out ill-pronounced oaths, or scurrilous and scolding abuse, or even impurities which they do not understand; so that the first sentiments they form, and the first words they utter, are those of impiety, malice, or obscenity. Nay I have seen children in their mother's arms actually taught to scold, by uttering angry sounds, before they could speak one word with distinctness. It is wholly impossible for me here to introduce a system of directions as to the method of early instruction; this must be learned elsewhere and at another time; but I mean to impress your minds with a sense of the importance and necessity of the duty, and I will add, the efficacy of it. Remember the connection between the duty and the promise—"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I knew a pious and judicious minister, who affirmed, that we did not give credit to that part of God's word if we did not believe the certainty of the promise, as well as the obligation of the duty; he was of opinion, that every parent, when he seemed to fail, should conclude that he himself had been undutiful, and not that God had been unfaithful.

(3.) Be circumspect and edifying in your example. All the arguments that press the former exhortation, apply with the same, perhaps I

may say, with double force to this. Example is itself the most powerful and successful instruction; and example is necessary to give meaning and influence to all other instruction. This is one of the oldest maxims upon the subject of education;—The Roman satyrist says, "Nil dictu visuve foedum hæc limina tangat intra quæ puer est." Let nothing base be seen or heard within these walls in which a child is. And if children naturally form their sentiments, habits and manners, by imitation of others in general, how much more powerful must be the example of parents, who are every hour in their sight, whom nature teaches them, and whom duty obliges them to love, and when it comes recommended by the continual intercourse, and the endearing services that flow from that intimate relation.

(4.) Lastly, parents are taught here perseverance and importunity in prayer. This, indeed, is an important thing upon every subject of our requests to God. Our Saviour spoke a parable on purpose to teach men, that they should pray and not faint, Luke 18:1. And if we are called to believe, that "if we ask any thing agreeable to his will, he heareth us," what more agreeable to his will than frequent and importunate prayer for the temporal and spiritual happiness of children—What a support this to the faith of prayer. You ought, at the same time, to remember that, as the prophet Jeremiah says, "it is good for a man to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of God." The answer of prayer may come at a much greater distance than we are apt to look for it. There is a remarkable anecdote handed down to us, respecting the famous St. Augustine. He was the son of an eminently pious woman, whose name was Monica, yet he was in his youth very loose and disorderly. One of his fellow-citizens, it is said, seeing him pass along the street, reflected upon him with great severity, as a disgrace to society; but another made answer, that he was not without hopes of him after all, for he thought it next to impossible that the son of so many prayers should perish.—And we know, that in fact, he became in due time one of the most eminent champions for evangelical truth. There is not the least doubt that many prayers, and especially of this kind, may have their answer and

accomplishment after the believer that offered them has been many years sleeping in the dust.

2. The truths above illustrated, suggest important advices to children, that is, to such young persons as are able to understand and apply them. (1.) Preserve a tenderness of heart, and be thankful that you are not yet hardened by habitual guilt, nor sentenced to perpetual barrenness by the judgment of a righteous God. Esteem, embrace, improve the precious but flying season. Hearken to the instructions of parents; the admonitions of pastors, the lessons of providence, and the dictates of God's holy spirit speaking by the conscience. Think of the amiableness of early piety in the fight of men; and its acceptableness in the fight of God—"I love them that love me," says he by his prophet; "and they that seek me early shall find me."

(2.) Be not satisfied with, or trust in outward privileges. If you are the children of pious parents, who have lived near to God; if you have been favored with early instruction, unless these advantages are improved, they will not plead for, but against you, at the great day. This is the dictate both of scripture and reason, "to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required." There is a common saying, that is neither agreeable to truth nor experience, and yet sometimes obtains belief in a blinded world, that the children of good people are as bad as any: as if early education, which is of so much influence in learning every thing else, should have no effect in religion. On the contrary, where do we expect to find pious youth, but in pious families, or sober and industrious youth, but in sober and industrious families? I should call that man prudent in the conduct of life, who in the choice of a servant, an apprentice, or a partner in business, would pay almost as much attention to the blood and parentage, as to the person with whom he was to be immediately connected. But if we take notice of what probably gave occasion to the mistake, viz. that the wicked children of pious parents are the worst of any, it is a truth of the utmost moment, and easily accounted for. They burst asunder the strongest ties, they are under the

unhappy necessity of mastering conscience by high-handed wickedness, and commonly come to speedy and deferred ruin: "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

(3.) Do not satisfy yourselves with a name to live, while you are dead. Though some young persons religiously educated, by falling into dissolute society, become open profligates, there are others who retain the form without the life of religion: Therefore, if nature hath given you amiable dispositions; if these have been cultivated by a pious and prudent education; if you feel the restraint of natural conscience; if you are desirous of public praise, or afraid of public shame, do not neglect any of these preservatives from sin; but yet endeavor to obtain, and see that you be governed by a principle superior to them all, the hope of final acceptance with God through Christ. Ask of him to give you a new heart, and a new spirit, to "create you a new in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them."

In the last place, this subject suggests some important instructions to the hearers of the gospel in general. (1.) Lose no time in providing for your great and best interest. Every argument that tends to shew the importance of early piety, may be applied, with equal or greater force, to shew the danger of delay in more advanced years. What is wife or amiable in youth, is necessary to those who are nearer their journey's end. But considering myself as speaking to professing Christians, what I would earnestly advise you, is, to apply the principles above laid down, to particular purposes, as well as to your general conduct. If conscience or providence has pointed out to you any thing that you may do to advantage, either for yourselves or others, lose no time in setting about it, because you do not know how little time may be yours: So says the wise man, Ecc. 9:10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

(2.) Do not forget the improvement of this subject, which our Saviour himself has pointed out; imitate the temper of children; learn to be humble and teachable, gentle and easy to be intreated. Both watch and pray against all violent attachments, rude and boisterous passions, and deep rooted resentment. Observe how the little lambs lay down their resentment, and forget their quarrels. Under this particular, it is proper to recommend a decency of deportment, and a contempt of all vanity and affectation, as well as simplicity and sincerity of speech, and a contempt of all artifice and refinement. The apostle has given an excellent description of this, 2 Cor. 1:12. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

(3.) Set a good example before others in general, but especially young persons. The old rule, *Maxima debetur pueris reverentia*, ought to be pondered as well as recollected. It is of much importance what our visible conduct is, at all times, and in all places, because we continually contribute to form each others tempers and habits; but greater caution is necessary in presence of young persons, both because they are most prone to imitation, and because they have the least judgment to make proper distinctions, or to refuse the evil, and choose the good. Some instances might be given; in which things might be said or done, before persons of full understanding, without injury, that could not be done without injury, or at least without danger, before persons in early life.

(4.) In the last place, be not wanting in your endeavors and prayers for the public interest of religion, and the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. Support, by your conduct and conversation, the public credit of religion.—What is more powerful over the minds of men and the manners of the age, than public opinion? It is more powerful than the most sanguinary laws. And what is public opinion? It is formed by the sentiments that are most frequently heard, and most approved in conversation. Had we a just sense of the importance of visible religion, what a powerful principle would it be,

of prudent, watchful, guarded conduct, in every state and circumstance of life? Whatever reason there may be to complain of the frequency of hypocrisy, or seeking the applause of men, I am afraid there is no less reason to complain of the want of attention to that precept of the apostle, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others;" or of our Lord himself, Matt. 5:16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." I apprehend that these seemingly opposite faults, are not always separated, but often found in the same persons; that is to say, there may be a strong desire after, and endeavor to obtain public applause, by a few splendid and popular actions, and yet but little attention to that prudent and exemplary conduct, which promotes public usefulness. Consider what you have heard, and the Lord give you understanding to improve and apply it, for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON XVI

DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD

Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. PSALM 116:16

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is something so fervent and affectionate in the language of the man after God's own heart, that it is extremely proper to be

adopted by us in acts of adoration, trust, or supplication to God. I am at a loss to determine, whether we ought to consider the Christian's access to God, at his holy table, chiefly under one or other of these views. I am inclined to think that it is a sort of compound or union of the whole—Veneration and worship of the eternal God, and the incarnate Redeemer, exhibited to us, and as it were brought near to us by the help of the instituted signs: Reliance and confidence in God, from the opportunity given us of laying hold of his covenant: and thankful supplication to God for his support and countenance, in the surrender of ourselves to his service. I cannot help looking upon the words of the Psalmist in this passage, as carrying in them a mixture of all these holy affections. "Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds: I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

This Psalm, of which David is universally admitted to be the author, seems plainly to have been composed after some signal deliverance, of which the remembrance was fresh upon his mind. It was such as had brought his life itself into the most imminent danger. He acknowledges in the verse preceding the text, the peculiar and gracious care which God takes of the life of his people: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints;" and then makes the profession of relation, gratitude, and duty, contained in the words of the text. — As they seem to me to be very comprehensive, and with great propriety to express what ought to be the habitual temper of a Christian, and the frame of spirit with which a communicant ought to draw near to God at his table; I shall endeavor, in dependance on divine grace,

I. To open the import of the Psalmist's declaration and purpose.

II. To apply it to you as hearers of the Gospel in general, as well as with a view to the sacred employment immediately before you.

First, then, I propose to open the import of the Psalmist's declaration and purpose in the text. This I think may be included in the following particulars, to which I intreat your serious attention.

1. This expression of the king of Israel, implies a very humble sense of his distance from, and dependance upon God, as his creature. This is the first view which a penitent hath of himself when he returns to God. It is the first view which a good man hath of himself in his approaches to or communion with God. And indeed it is what ought to be inseparable from the exercise of every other pious affection. To have as it were high and honorable thoughts of the majesty and greatness of the living God, and a deep and awful impression of the immediate and continual presence of the heart-searching God—this naturally produces the greatest self-abasement, and the most unfeigned subjection of spirit, before our Maker. It leads to a confession of him as Lord over all, and having the most absolute right not only to the obedience, but to the disposal of all his creatures. I cannot help thinking this is conveyed to us in the language of the Psalmist, when he says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant." He was a prince among his subjects, and had many other honorable distinctions, both natural and acquired, among men; but he was sensible of his being a servant and subject of the King of kings; and the force of his expression, "truly I am thy servant," not only signifies the certainty of the thing, but how deeply and strongly he then felt a conviction of its truth.

Suffer me to say, my brethren, that there is much more in this, than many apprehend. The scripture speaks often of the knowledge of God, of a discovery of the glory of God, as a thing peculiar to his people, which is very different from merely speculative opinions as to his nature and perfections. It implies an awful impression of his power and greatness, a deep sense how little the creature is before him, and how entirely it is in his hand. I love that expression used by several pious writers of the last age, of bowing before the sovereignty of God. When a believer or a worshipper hath a proper view of this; when it is brought home upon his spirit; it as it were banishes all

other things, all other relations, all other persons; and he is, to his apprehension, alone in the presence of the invisible God. And then what abasement of soul is of necessity produced! then no language can be found sufficient to express his vileness and nothingness in his own fight. He may be a rich man among his poor neighbors, or a great man among his numerous attendants, or a learned man among the ignorant vulgar; but alas, he is no more than sinful dust and ashes before the omnipotent Jehovah. There is something very magnificent in the description given by the prophet Isaiah of the majesty of God, and the correspondent sentiments of those who see and feel it, in the 2d chapter of his prophecies, verse 10, 11. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." And again, verses 19, 20, 21, 22. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that thy a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats: to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

2. This declaration of the Psalmist implies a confession of his being bound by particular covenant and consent unto God, and a repetition of the same by a new adherence. This, as it was certainly true with regard to him, having often dedicated himself to God, so I take it to be concluded on the reiteration of the expression here, "Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant." As if he had said, 'Oh Lord, it is undeniable; it is impossible to recede from it. I am thine by many ties. I am by nature thy subject and thy creature; and I have many times confessed thy right, and promised my own duty.' I need not mention to you, either the examples in the Psalmist's writings, or the occasions in his history, on which he solemnly surrendered

himself to God. It is sufficient to say, that it was very proper that he should frequently call this to mind, and confess it before God, as what, though it could not make his Creator's right any stronger, would certainly make the guilt of his own violation of it, so much the greater. It was certainly also a repetition of those engagements, and a solemn promise of continued adherence to them. There is no appearance in his language, that he either regrets or repents his subjection to God; on the contrary, he manifests his deliberate approbation of it, as his interest as well as duty. What he says here to God, has something of the same meaning with what he says elsewhere to his own soul. Psa. 16:2. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord." And he afterwards expresses the greatest complacency in this choice, verses 5, 6, of the above Psalm, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and my cup; thou maintained my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

I take it to be very natural for pious persons to look back upon their former engagements to God. It is a part of the worship they owe to him, not only to glorify him as God, but to adhere to him as their God. It comes in with propriety as a part of confession, of praise, and of holy resolution. It humbles the spirit under a sense of sin, as a breach of promise, as well as duty. It is matter of praise that we have been inclined and enabled to give ourselves to God, according to the beautiful sentiment of David, who gives thanks to God, that he and his people had been enabled to make such free and liberal contributions to the building of the Temple, 1 Chron. 29:13, 14. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." It is also plainly a part of our new engagement, which is no more than a ratification of what we have often and willingly done before.

3. This declaration of the Psalmist is an expression of his peculiar and special relation to God, "I am thy servant and the son of thine

handmaid." There is another passage of his writings, where the same expression occurs, Psal. 86:16. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me, give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid." There is some variation indeed among interpreters in the way of illustrating this phrase. Some take it for a figurative way of affirming that he was bound in the strongest manner to God, as those children who were born, of a maid-servant, and born in his own house, are in the most absolute manner his property. Others take it to signify his being not only brought up in a visible church of God, but in a pious family, and educated in his fear; and others would have it to signify still more especially, that the Psalmist's mother was an eminently pious woman. And indeed I do not think that was a circumstance, if true, either unworthy of him to remember, or of the spirit of God to put upon record. In the New Testament, we find the apostle Paul, taking notice of a similar circumstance in the case of Timothy, 2 Tim. 1:5. "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, &c." Without determining precisely in what sense to take the words, it is certainly added here to signify some peculiar and intimate relation to God, which laid him under the strongest ties of adherence and subjection.

As there was much beauty and propriety in the Psalmists mentioning this circumstance, so every pious person ought especially in the Lord's supper, to recollect the peculiar relations he stands under to God. Even as members of the visible church we are the servants of God, born in his house, baptized in his name, favored with the light of the gospel, blessed with clearness and fullness of instruction, animated by eminent and shining examples. As many as have been brought up either as children or servants in pious families, separated from the solicitations, and sheltered from the insults of wicked men; careful instruction, regular government, faithful admonition and kind invitation, laid as it were a strict and powerful constraint upon them, brought them into, and kept them in the paths of piety and truth: ought they not to remember it with humility and gratitude, nay, if by means of but one pious parent, or other relation, had been brought to acquaintance with God, it ought to be remembered as

laying them under peculiar ties. To all which I shall only add, that if by the goodness of a gracious God, any former means of instruction, public or private, or singular dispensation of providence, has been accompanied with power, it ought to be improved in this new surrender of ourselves to God, at once to increase our present gratitude and promote our future stedfastness in the paths of obedience.—This leads me to observe,

4. That the declaration of the Psalmist implies a sense of gratitude for signal mercies, "Thou hast loosed my bonds." I think it is probable that what he had in view immediately here was, deliverance from personal affliction, probably a dangerous sickness, threatening immediate dissolution. But the way in which it is introduced and the use to which it is applied, is equally suited to deliverances of every kind and use, to all signal mercies which were greatly needed or highly prized. He ascribes the honor of it to God, he puts it to his own charge as a debt due to God, and on this account proposes a return of duty and gratitude to God. It were no difficult matter to produce examples of a similar conduct in the Psalmist, on his being favored with remarkable deliverances in his family, from the enemies of his country, from slander and reproach, or in unexpected honor and advancement, as was his from the sheepfold to the kingdom of Israel.

Now ought not every good man, to follow the example of the Psalmist in this particular, to remember and acknowledge all instances of signal mercy. There is scarcely any person, but may recollect several examples of these in the course of their lives. They may remember how earnestly they desired deliverance in the time of danger, what a sense of gratitude was upon their minds, when the mercy was recent, and this may be profitably improved, for strengthening the ties which they lie under to God their Saviour. This will have a double effect, if the deliverance was implored by the prayer of faith, and if any marks can be discerned, of their having obtained the sanctified improvement of it. But above all, with what propriety may they adopt the language of the Psalmist, if they have been delivered from bondage of spirit, as well as fear and solicitude as to their outward

state. And it frequently happens, that these two go together. It was almost always so with the Psalmist, and is natural to expect that it will be so with every serious person; for affliction brings sin to remembrance, and they not only tremble, for the issue of the trial under which they groan, but apprehend the holy displeasure of that God, who cast them into the furnace, and with whom they have to do. But if the candle of the Lord again shineth upon them, and they are walking in the light of his countenance, they may well say with the Psalmist, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the son of thy hand-maid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

5. In the last place, This declaration implies a solemn dedication and surrender of himself to God, and his service for the time to come. This is the end of the retrospect which he takes of his character and state, "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." He was resolved to live a life of gratitude to God, to take all methods of openly and publicly acknowledging him as the author of his mercies. If we would see further his purpose, we may look back to the 8, 9, 10, ver. "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." He promises therefore a life of obedience, and as the source of thankful trust and acquiescence in God, he seems by the 11th verse, to have been disconcerted by discovering the treachery of men, but every thing is rectified and made up by the goodness and all-sufficiency of God.

So my brethren, ought every person who is this day to sit down at the table of the Lord, after a serious recollection of all his past mercies, to devote and consecrate himself unto God. Take him for your portion: place your happiness in his favor; receive your daily bread from him as his gift; pay for every mercy the tribute of praise; live not upon the creature without God, but endeavor to enrich and sweeten created comforts, by communion with God: Resolve to serve him with your body and spirit which are his, serve him sincerely, resolving that nothing shall have quiet possession of your heart, or indulgence in your life, that is contrary to his will. Serve him with

zeal, espouse his interest, plead his cause, and esteem if your honor, if by your authority, by your talents, by your substance, you can promote his glory. Put your trust in his providence. You are yet in the body, liable to all the vicissitudes of this mortal state. Be persuaded of the infinite wisdom and all-sufficiency of God. Let him dispose of you freely. Resist excessive anxiety and fear, and oppose to all the gloomy horrors of a fruitful apprehension, the shield of faith in almighty strength, which is able to bear you up superior to every trial, and to every enemy. Do in every state of difficulty as the prophet Isaiah, in the name of God, invites the people of Israel to do on the approach of public judgment, Isaiah 26:20. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

I proceed now in the last place, to make some practical improvement of this subject,

1. Suffer me, my brethren, to plead with every sinner; to plead with every hearer in this assembly, the right of his Maker to his service. He hath made and formed you, and his visitation preserves your spirits. He only holdeth your soul in life, and unto him belong the issue from death—Of him, and to him, and through him, are all things. Have you therefore served him as your master, and placed your happiness on his favors. I choose, my brethren, to assert God's dominion over his creatures, that if it please him to accompany it with his spirit, it may carry conviction to many who are living in quiet and self-satisfaction, although they are dead in trespasses and sins. Many, if they are free from grosser corruptions, are no way apprehensive of the danger of being without God in the world. Ignorance of themselves, extenuation of sin, foolishly placing a merit in a few common outside duties, and presumptuous hopes in God's general mercy, are the delusive grounds of the hope of such persons. Nay, sometimes, alas for their folly! the chief thing they have to trust to, is the ill that they have not done. I really do not swear, says one, I hate drinking abominably, it is a beastly vice. What signify these

partial justifications? I have known, though it is not common, I confess, an habitual adulterer that would not swear, and I could shew you a covetous hard hearted wretch, grinding every day the faces of the poor, that will neither drink nor swear. But are you the servants of God? are you devoted to his fear? believe it first, there is an absolute necessity of an entire change in your nature, to fit you for the kingdom of God. You are his creatures, you ought to be his servants, and in one sense indeed his enemies are his servants, because they are under the dominion of his Providence, and shall at last be the movements of his vengeance. Be warned then in time, for you may rest assured that no man hath hardened himself against him, and prospered.

2. But in the next place, I must not omit giving warning of their danger, to such as are living in open and avowed profanity. They are so far from being the servants of God, that they are his enemies, his confederated enemies, and the enemies of every thing that stands in a visible relation to him. I will once more, my brethren, take the liberty to denounce the judgment of God, against all such persons, and I am preaching the gospel of Christ while I am doing so, for he shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire. And all profane swearers that speak the language of hell on earth, shall have it as their abode for ever. All despisers of the sabbath of rest.

SERMON XVII

THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY SAVED, AND THE WICKED CERTAINLY DESTROYED

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 1 PETER 4:18

ALL mankind may be divided into two great classes, the righteous and the wicked, the friends and the enemies of God, the heirs of glory and the heirs of hell. These, though mixed together on earth, and in many cases not easily to be distinguished by men, are yet essentially different in their characters, and shall at last meet with a very different fate. Of how much moment would it be for every one to see his own character and state before the final separation, when the judge shall divide them, one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats!

There are many awful tokens of divine justice and holiness in the administration of Providence, which ought to be considered by us, as preludes to the great day of retribution, when God shall render to every man, according to his works. The apostle Peter, in the verses preceding the text, is speaking of the divine judgments which were coming upon that generation, and which were in part, to fall even upon the church and people of God.—From this he takes occasion to point out the infinitely greater danger of impenitent sinners, who were exposed, not only to the same or heavier temporal strokes, but to a final and eternal destruction, verse 17, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" Considering also that God in righteous severity, sees it necessary to make even his own people to pass through the furnace, and through much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of God, he institutes the comparison in the text, to point out the dreadful state of the finally impenitent; "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

In discoursing further upon this subject, what I propose is,

I. To explain the import of the declaration, or supposition, in the first part of the text, that "the righteous scarcely are saved."

II. To consider the conclusion drawn from it, by the apostle, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

III. I shall make a practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction.

In the first place then, I am to explain the import of the declaration, or supposition, in the first part of the text, that "the righteous are scarcely saved." There is the greater necessity of this, that the expression is both strong and singular. There are many passages indeed, that carry in them truths akin to it, and founded upon it; but the sentiment itself, is almost peculiar to this passage, that the righteous are scarcely saved." There are some, who suppose that the expression is borrowed from, or alludes to Prov. 11:31. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." The meaning they give thus: Even the righteous must expect to meet with sufferings and calamities on earth, much more, wicked men, under the just displeasure of a holy God. But I think it is plain, that the apostle in our text, has an eye to the decisive judgment of the last day; for he says in the preceding verse, "What shall the end be of them, that obey not the gospel of God." It is nowhere said in scripture, that wicked men shall be punished in the present life, in a manner fully adequate to their guilt, much less that a just and visible proportion is to be observed between their sufferings and those of the servants of God. On the contrary, they are called the men of the world; it is said, they have their part and portion in this life, and their prosperity, compared with the trials and sufferings of good men, appears to have been in every age a source of temptation to the children of God.

We must therefore understand the apostle, as speaking of the eternal state, both of the righteous and the wicked, in the correspondent parts of this passage. What then is the meaning of the righteous being scarcely saved? It cannot mean that there is any defect or straitness in the mercy of God. The invitation to sinners in the gospel, is not only urgent, but full, free, and infinitely gracious. It

cannot mean that there is any defect in the mind or power of our Redeemer, as if the security of those who put their trust in him were to be doubted, or their victory over all the enemies of their salvation were uncertain. To affix any such meaning to the words, would be to set them in direct opposition to many other passages of scripture, and to do the greatest injury to the divine wisdom and truth. In order therefore, to open the import of this interesting declaration, you may observe the following things:

1. The righteous may be said to be scarcely saved, because all are justly liable to divine vengeance, and it is only of the free grace, and sovereign mercy of God, that any are saved. This, my brethren, is a truth of the greatest moment, repeated in almost every page of the sacred oracles, but which none can either understand or approve, till they are effectually humbled by the spirit of God. It is however, the sum and substance of the gospel. See in what terms it is described by the apostle Paul, Eph. 2:4–10. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ: (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." There is not a believer on earth, nor a saint in heaven, but who is ready to acknowledge, that he was by nature an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works; that he had highly provoked him, and that if God had dealt with him in strict justice, he would have been for ever banished from his presence and enjoyment. Probably many will recollect the time of their ignorance and security, and admire the patience of God towards them, and see that they are indeed scarcely saved, since they have been brought back from the very brink of destruction. If any malefactor had been arraigned, judged and condemned to die, and after apprehending the just punishment of

his crime, should be saved by an act of royal clemency, at a stake or on a scaffold, would he not consider himself as scarcely saved. But this is no more than a just image of the state and views of a pardoned sinner, and what will continue to be the views of those who have entered into rest. They are clothed with white robes, as an emblem, not of innocence, but absolution, and the song of praise which they sing, intimates the condition from which they were brought, Rev. 5:9. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;" verse 12. "Worthy is the lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

This leads me to observe, that as their salvation is of sovereign grace in the Father's love, so it was purchased by the most amazing sufferings of their Redeemer in their room. They are scarcely saved, not only from the want of merit in themselves, but from the infinite expence and cost laid out by him for their redemption. Such was the evil of sin, and so deplorable the state of the sinner, that the wisdom, truth, and holiness of God, seemed all to demand his perdition. The whole creation could not furnish a sufficient ransom; for the redemption of the soul was precious, and it ceased forever. Then the eternal Son of God, clothed with infinite mercy, and conveyed in sovereign power, presented himself as our Redeemer, saying, "Lo, I come," &c. Oh, amazing truth! Oh, unsearchable subject! Justly may we say, that the righteous scarcely are saved, since it required so costly an expiation. Let us remember in faith, what our Saviour endured in the garden and on the cross, before he could say it was finished; and we shall be constrained to confess that it was no easy undertaking to redeem those souls that were forfeited to divine justice.

To conclude this particular, the righteous are scarcely saved, because the application of this redemption to their souls, and their being brought to an unfeigned acceptance of it, required the almighty power and energy of the spirit of grace. This also is a part of that

revealed truth, which the natural man hears with reluctance, and cannot receive. Yet it is not only plainly taught in scripture, but daily ratified in experience. John 1:13. "Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Without the power of the holy Ghost, the gospel may be preached to sinners from day to day, and from year to year, and yet they shall continue in their natural and miserable state.

It is the work of the spirit to open the blinded understanding, to awaken the secure and dozing conscience, and to bend the stubborn will to the obedience of the gospel. We are also plainly given to understand, that if a sinner long resists the motions of the Spirit, the consequence, in the economy of providence, is frequently that this divine agent departs from him, and ceases any longer to strive with him. Every such person is left to himself, given up to the dominion of his lusts, and the enslaving power of habit; and so fills up the measure of his iniquities, till he is ripe for final judgment and destruction. Let us severally consider, that if such provision was made by an all-wise God, for the recovery of such of his creatures as had fallen by their iniquity, it could not be unnecessary. And surely the whole of these views conspire in opening the meaning and confirming the truth of what we are told in this passage, that the righteous are scarcely saved.

2. The righteous may be said to be scarcely saved, because their number is but very small. There are few that be saved in comparison of those that perish, and in comparison of those that seek and pretend to hope for salvation.

This, if it be a truth, is certainly pregnant with meaning, and deeply interesting. I know there are some who have no great love to any thing that directly tends to disturb the repose of a drowsy slothful spirit, who are fond of denying or calling in question this truth. They allege that our Saviour evaded it as an improper question, when proposed to him by his disciples. Luke 13:23. "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" But truly I cannot see how

he could have answered it more plainly, or indeed more properly, than in the following words, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I "say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Especially if we compare them with the parallel place in Matth. 7:13. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

What shall be the number of the redeemed at last, and what proportion it shall bear to the whole race of Adam, before the end of this state of things, it is impossible for us to know. It is pleasant to indulge the hope that it shall be very great, and that there are times yet to come, when the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom shall be glorious, and the triumphs of his grace perhaps universal. But when we speak of the number of such as shall be saved, we must speak of it as relating to those whom we now see, and their characters as drawn in the oracles of truth. And surely if we pay the least regard to the marks of religion laid down in scripture, we must be sensible what multitudes are living in direct opposition to them, and that there are many, who though they are called by the name of Christ, and maintain some degree of outward profession, yet they are far from being Christians indeed and in truth. Matth. 7:21. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

3. When the apostle says that the righteous scarcely are saved, it may mean that many make not only a common but an eminent profession of religion, who yet shall be sound finally defective, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. It may mean, that not only the ungodly and openly profane sinners shall be rejected, but that all who seem to be righteous shall not be sound so upon trial. This seems to lead us to consider the difference between the charitable, general, and uncertain judgment of man, and the strict, infallible, and decisive judgment of God. This is beautifully represented by our Saviour, in the parable of the tares of the field, Matth. 13:24, and onwards; but you may particularly see what is said from the 28th verse, "The

servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay, left while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

There is a circumstance to be particularly attended to here, that not only shall many deceive their fellow creatures by a false profession, but not a few shall more effectually and more fatally deceive themselves, saying they shall have peace though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. There are many exhortations in scripture, to guard against deceiving ourselves; of which I shall only mention one, Gal. 4:7. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If our Saviour sound it necessary to say to the twelve whom he had chosen, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of;" much more may the same thing be said to numbers of professing Christians in these last days. There are many sins that may adhere to a religious profession, or be covered with a sacred veil, which yet are inconsistent with true religion. See what the apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. 13:1. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." And the apostle James 1:26. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." It is an awful description given us by our Saviour, Matth. 7:22. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

I shall only add one evidence, with which experience furnishes us, that even in an eminent profession there may be at bottom no sincerity. There never was a time of trial in the church by persecution, but there were several of the most eminent in station,

gifts and profession, who were guilty of apostacy; a sure evidence that they were not sound in the faith, and a great lesson of humiliation and caution to us. True religion bears all trials, and it is only he that endureth to the end that shall be saved. It is highly probable, that the apostle had this very thing in view, in the passage where my text lies; for in the preceding verse, he had been animating them to suffer as Christians, and concludes in the following verse thus, Wherefore let them that suffer, according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator."

4. In the last place the righteous are scarcely saved, because those who are saved, shall be saved with much difficulty. That is to say, it will require the utmost exertion of their care and vigilance. They may expect a continual conflict with temptations and trials from without, and the stirrings of corruptions from within. There is nothing more contrary to the scripture view of our christian course, than to suppose it a state of unmolested quiet, security and indulgence. It is represented to us by every image that carries in it the idea of opposition, activity and vigilance. It is striving, Matth. 7:13. "Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:" It is contending in a race, Heb. 12:1. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." It is fighting, 1 Tim. 6:12. "Fight the good fight of faith," and it is represented as incessant labor, Phil. 2:12. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Indeed when we consider from what, and how many quarters, we must expect opposition, this truth will appear with the fullest evidence. Consider the implacable hatred of the great adversary, the reproach and injuries of wicked men, their still more pernicious example and solicitation, the allurements of the world, in this sensible state, and the treachery and deceitfulness of our own hearts.

Of the great danger of all these we have the greatest reason to be convinced from the confession and testimony of those who have gone before us; yet over them all the believer must obtain the victory, and shall obtain it in his Redeemer's strength. 1 John 5:4. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

There is nothing here said contrary to what the scripture informs us, of the peace and consolation that attends the practice of true religion. It is not said to discourage the believer; but to put him on his guard, and to warn him not to mistake the nature and foundation of that peace he is entitled to expect. It does not consist in a neglect of his enemies, far less in a confederacy with, or subjection to them, but in the assured prospect, and growing evidence of his victory over them; Further, the inward consolation of a Christian does not consist in thinking light of sin, by excusing it, or justifying himself by denying it; but in unfeigned self-denial, a willingness to see the evil of sin, and taking shame to himself by confessing it, together with evangelical views of divine mercy in the pardon of it, and the promised strength of divine grace to enable him to resist and subdue it.

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was to consider the inference drawn in the last part of the verse, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" I need scarcely tell you, that the form of a question used here, is a very common figure of speech to signify their dreadful situation. This just but very awful inference, is intended for the terror of those who live in open ungodliness, and avowed contempt of divine mercy. Perhaps it may be proper from the context, to consider a little the time when the wicked shall be exposed to this terrible danger: and then the import of the threatening itself. As to the time when the difference is to appear, it may be,

1. In a time of public calamity, or any remarkable visitation of divine severity. Such a time is described, Luke 21:25, 26. "There shall be

upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Then the conscience of the most obdurate is sometimes alarmed. I am sensible, and I have formerly hinted, that good men have no charter of exemption from outward sufferings. But in these times of general trial, the difference between them and others is very great. They have an anchor of hope in the favor of a reconciled, and in the wisdom and providence of an omnipotent God. But the profane and ungodly, terrified by the reproaches of a guilty conscience, are made to tremble, through fear of the execution of deserved judgment.

2. In a time of personal distress, and apparent danger of death. This important change is no light matter, even to the best. They have often no small degree of solicitude and fear, as to the manner of going through this last and decisive conflict. But how much more fearful an aspect must the king of terrors wear, to the impenitent sinner? when the charm is dissolved, and all his sinful pleasures are turned into worm-wood and gall; when he sees he must bid an eternal farewell to every sensual delight, enter into a world of spirits, and appear in the presence of God. But,

3. Both these are only preparatory to the day of judgment, "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." Then his people shall lift up their heads with joy, for the day of their redemption has arrived. But with what inexpressible confusion shall the wicked then be covered? In vain shall they call upon the mountains and hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb. Now they affront his person, oppose his reign, resist his spirit, and scorn his servants. But where shall they appear, and what will they do, when the "Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel?"

This leads me more particularly to consider the import of the inference in the text, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall

the ungodly and the sinner appear?" And I think it plainly carries in it three things, that from the holiness and severity of God, and the righteous scarcely being saved, we may learn the certainty, the greatness, and the justice of the punishment of impenitent sinners.

1. The certainty of it. That as the threatenings are awful, the execution shall be inevitable. Men are exceedingly prone, from partiality to themselves, and from the suggestions of the father of lies, to disbelieve the threatenings as well as the promises of God. This was a great part of the temptation to the commission of the first sin, Gen. 3:4. "And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die." And the credit that was given to it at that time, has been continued by sinners in every subsequent age. They are ready to presume upon the general goodness of God, and to flatter themselves that his threatenings shall be either wholly remitted or greatly abated. We find that some men of corrupt minds have even set themselves to reason against the rigor of the scripture denunciations against sin, and the eternal punishment of sinners.

But how fatal the delusion? The truth of God is an inseparable bar to this deceitful expectation. If. 3:10, 11. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him." Ps. 50:21, 22. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and let them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, left I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Nay, not only is this asserted in the word of God, but the whole procedure of divine Providence serves to confirm it. If the salvation of the righteous is with difficulty obtained; if their redemption is so dearly purchased; if Christ must bleed before they can be forgiven; how shall the ungodly be able to stand in the judgment! If even the servants of God must be exposed to so many sufferings in the day of trial, what must be the condition of his enemies in the day of retribution? If even the sins of the holy must be visited, how shall the crimes of the impenitent pass unpunished?

This is plainly one part of the truth contained in this passage; and whoever will deliberately consider the uniform tenor of the holy scriptures, and compare it with the dispensations of divine Providence, will have reason to tremble at the dreadful state of incorrigible sinners, and to say with the apostle Paul, Heb. 12:25. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."

2. The expression in the text implies the greatness of the punishment of sinners. It is indeed, my brethren, every where represented in scripture in such terms, as serve to convey to us the most dreadful apprehensions of its weight, as well as the deepest conviction of its certainty. It is represented as the blackness of darkness forever, and as a worm that shall never die. But the image most commonly used is fire, which is the most terrible to sense, of all the elements we have any knowledge of. It is a lake that burns with fire and brimstone for evermore. Without entering at all into the question, how much is literal, and how much figurative in these images, the just conclusion from them is, that those who shall be the final monuments of divine vengeance, shall be in a state sorrowful and comfortless as darkness, painful as a gnawing worm, and dreadful as fire.

This is also manifestly sounded on the reflection in the text, "if the righteous are scarcely saved:" if they suffer so much at present by divine permission; if they suffer so much by the persecution of the ungodly, what a load of vengeance awaits the wicked in the day of reckoning, when he will recompense tribulation to the troublers of his chosen? If there is so much holy severity necessary on account of sin even in the present life, which is the time of divine forbearance, even towards the children of God, who are the objects of his everlasting love, what shall be the state of those who have out-sinned the season of his grace, and forfeited all title to his mercy, on whom he intends at once to glorify his justice, and to magnify his power. Hear the words of the Holy Ghost 2 Thess. 1:9. "Who shall be

punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,"

3. The expression in the text, implies the justice of the punishment of sinners. This is a circumstance always to be taken in, for at the last day he shall judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained. He shall judge the world in righteousness and the people with his truth. This is a circumstance not only for the illustration of the glory of God, but for the manifestation of the present truth. If the punishment of sinners were not just, it could not be great; if it were not known and felt by themselves to be just, it would not be intolerable.

SERMON XVIII

THE YOKE OF CHRIST

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. - MATTHEW 11:30

A CLEAR view of divine truth is of the utmost moment, both to the holiness and comfort of the children of God. They are sanctified by the truth. It is no less necessary, by manifestation of the truth, to turn sinners from the error of their ways; for the word of God is quick and powerful. While we keep these things in view, we ought also to remember, that the truths of God are injured, not only by opposition, but perversion. We are assured that those who are unlearned and unstable, wrest this good word of God to their own destruction. If this is the case, it follows naturally, that as the bait is most dangerous, when the hook is most effectually concealed; so

falsehood will be most apt to insinuate itself, when it wears the habit, and has the greatest resemblance to real truth.

The reason of my using this introduction to what shall be offered on the text now read, is, that it is one of the passages most frequently, and most artfully perverted, or most unhappily misapplied. It contains a most important and salutary truth, if taken in its proper meaning, and according to the analogy of faith. But as it is wrested and perverted by men of corrupt minds, it is often made to convey a stupifying and dangerous poison. What more important, than to destroy the unjust accusations of the father of lies, as if religion were a heavy and insupportable burden? But if, on the other hand, the same thing is made use of to sew pillows for all armholes, and sing the sinner asleep in security, it is equally destructive. Therefore, in discoursing of this subject, through the assistance of divine grace, I will endeavor,

I. To show you what you are not to suppose, implied in this declaration of our Lord, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light."

II. What is its true and proper meaning, and

III. In the last place, to apply the subject.

First, then, I am to show you what you are not to suppose implied in this declaration of our Lord, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light." On this, I beseech you to attend to the following observations.

1. When our Saviour says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light," you are not to suppose that he has narrowed the extent, or weakened the obligation of the law of God. There are some who speak in such terms, as if they thought that Christ had granted some license and indulgence to human corruption: that he had abated the severity of the law, and would not be so highly offended by the transgression of it. Because we are taught that he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, or the rigor of its sanction as a covenant of works, they speak as if they thought, or at least so as to lead others to think, that he

hath made void the obligation of it as a rule of duty. But the law of God is perfect, eternal, and unchangeable. It is a transcript of his own nature, which he will not, or which, I speak it with reverence, he cannot dispense with. The scripture expressly says, that he cannot deny himself.

Now our blessed Lord himself has told us upon this subject, Math. 5:17, 18. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Agreeably to this, he hath been so far from narrowing the extent of the law, that he hath asserted its honor, vindicated it from the false glosses and loose interpretation of the Scribes and Pharisees; and pointed out its spirituality and influence upon the conscience and heart. See several instances of this in the above cited chapter, particularly verses 21, 22, and 27, 28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: and, whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." How distant is this from relaxation, or from modifying and accommodating the law to the corruptions of men! And as to the obligation of the law, nothing is more clear, than that our Saviour has not taken from, but added to it in many ways. He has added to it by the clearness of the discovery which he hath made of the divine nature and will; by the most glorious display of divine mercy through him; and as a just and necessary consequence, by the awful threatenings which he hath denounced against those who shall continue to despise the grace of the gospel. Hebrews 2:2, 3. "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great

salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" And the same epistle, ch. 10. verses 26, 27, 28, 29, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

2. When our Saviour says, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," you are not to suppose he means to say that real, and acceptable obedience to the law of God, is an easy thing to men, as they are in themselves, or in a sinful and unrenewed state. Oh, say some, the gospel is a humane and gentle dispensation, the same does not bear hard upon human weakness. If we should make him to say this, my brethren, we should make him to speak in direct opposition to many other passages of scripture, as well as to daily experience, and the nature and reason of the thing. Men may if they please, create to themselves an image of religion, that shall be quite gentle and pliant, that shall have nothing in it offensive to corrupt nature, or at any time opposed to the manners of fashionable life; but nothing can be more distant from New-Testament truth. There we are told that, Rom. 8:7, 8, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh, cannot please God." There we are told, that men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, that their recovery is the work of omnipotence, even the mighty power of God, and that none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, but God alone. But why should we multiply passages of scripture to this purpose, when it is manifest from the nature of the thing and daily experience? If it were easy in this sense to put on Christ's yoke, it would also be common. Is not the prevalence of wickedness a proof to the contrary? Can any thing be more opposite than sin and holiness? None. Not even light

and darkness. Can any man then serve two masters? Is it an easy thing to love sin, and practise holiness? Do we see it is so in any instance? Do we reckon it is easy for the drunkard to deny his appetite, when he sees the liquor giving its colour in the cup, and moving itself aright? Is it easy for the malicious person to govern his tongue, or the covetous man to open his heart? The truth is, it is a direct contradiction, for the law of the Lord searches, and chiefly requires the obedience of the heart; and therefore to suppose, or imagine that the generality of men, who are under the dominion of sin, may notwithstanding keep the commandments of God, is an absurdity which we would not be guilty of, in any other subject. Either, says our Saviour, "make the tree good and his fruit good;" &c. "Can a fountain send out at the same place, sweet water and bitter?"

3. When our Saviour says "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," you are not to suppose, that it is an easy or trifling thing, or what the sinner may do at any time by his own strength, to turn from sin to God. Nothing can be a more pernicious or a more stupifying dose to a poor careless sinner, than to make him suppose that he may easily at any time repent, when necessity shall urge him to it. The whole system of divine truth stands in direct opposition to this error. There our condition by nature is considered as not only miserable, but helpless. It is divine power alone that can effect the change, John 6:44. "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Psal. 110:3. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." The greatness of the change necessary to salvation demonstrates the same thing, John 3:3. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—The multitudes that perish is a further proof. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," &c. To this may be added the danger of delay, and the hardening power of habit as frequently mentioned in scripture, Eccles. 12:1. "Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? then may ye also, who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." To

crown the whole, there are instances in which the day of God's patience, and forbearance is closed, and the sinners eyes shall not be opened on his danger, Luke 19:41, 42. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." 2 Thess. 2:11. "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

4. When Christ says, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," we are not to suppose that even the children of God shall meet with no difficulties in their way. It seems to be the mistake of some persons to think that so soon as they have truly embraced the gospel, and obtained peace with God, the conflict is over, they shall have an easy and slothful assurance, without opposition either from affliction or temptation. But this is quite contrary to what the scripture teaches to expect. It teaches us to lay our account with opposition from every quarter, injury from without and even treachery from within. The life of a christian must be a life of vigilance and prayer. Outward peace, ill founded peace, a secure unfaithful conscience, is what we have the greatest reason to dread. These are hard sayings in the gospel, which even the children of God find it difficult to receive. We are exposed to continual temptation from the world and from worldly men, and to frequent trials both as we are men and christians, Heb. 12:5. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children, my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor saint when thou art rebuked of him:" In the christian warfare there is no truce. It is only he that shall endure to the end that shall be saved —The last enemy that shall be destroyed, is death.

Having thus rejected these false and mistaken apprehensions sometimes suggested by this passage of scripture, and greatly encouraged by smooth and mollifying teachers, it remains, that I should proceed to point out the true and proper meaning of it, and what we are to understand when the Redeemer invites sinners to come to him, by saying, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

And because there are many things pertaining to this subject, that throw light upon each other, I shall endeavor to take in the whole compass of it, making however the illustration of each particular very short.

1. The yoke of Christ may be said to be easy, and his burden light, because his right to command is undeniable; the authority with which he is invested is complete and full. I have placed this first, because it lies at the foundation of all religion, and is nothing else but the supreme authority and absolute dominion of Jehovah. We all naturally think it hard to submit to usurped authority, or unjust dominion; but when the title to command is clear, obedience immediately appears to be reasonable and necessary, and becomes our unfeigned choice, or the desire of the heart. Thus, nothing can be more clear than the right of our Maker to the obedience and submission of all his creatures. It is the sense of this carried home upon the conscience, that gives the first rise to conviction of sin. A discovery of the power and majesty of the living God, lays the creature in the dust, and produces subjection. But when to this is added, that he is Lord and proprietor of all; that all things were made by him, and for him, then sin appears in the light of injustice and rebellion, and obedience, absolute and unconditional, is felt to be his due. Believe it my brethren, when the revolted creature returns to his allegiance; when the convinced sinner sees the guilt of his rebellion, it at once reconciles him to the law, and makes him willing to put on the yoke.

The same thing is a constant and growing principle of obedience to the believer. He sees that he is not his own. He perceives and admits his Creator's and Redeemer's right. He is convinced, that as all things were made for, as all things shall finally tend to, so that every intelligent creature ought supremely to aim at the glory of God. It is this radical principle that chiefly constitutes the difference between genuine obedience, and that constrained service which may be sometimes falsely so called. Hence it is that true obedience is considered as a debt that is due to God; false obedience on the

contrary is considered as a debt charged upon God. The real christian is happy in so far as he is able to obey, and sincerely grieves for any remaining backwardness and reluctance in his mind. The yoke may well be said to be easy, when he is brought to that temper and disposition, that it is not what he does, but what he omits, that fills him with grief, or covers him with shame.

2. The Redeemer's yoke is easy and his burden light, because all his commands are in themselves perfectly just and right. It is hard indeed, to be obliged to do what we cannot approve, and so long as the sinner has any objection against the law, obedience must be a burden. But every renewed mind obtains a discovery of the infinite amiableness of the divine nature, and the excellence and perfection of the divine law. The law is holy, says the Apostle, Romans 7. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good." The law of God is a transcript of his own infinite excellence, and therefore must be perfect and faultless. We may take up this matter in a very simple, and at the same time clear and conspicuous point of view. The sum of the moral law is, "Thou shalt love," &c. The whole is contained under these heads, especially the first of them, from which the other is a corollary. Is there any thing more manifestly reasonable, than that we should love supremely, what is supremely excellent? or where is the rival, that can plead a better title to our affection? If he hath commanded us to love what was not amiable, or to do what was not reasonable, there would have been ground for complaint. If we take the sense of the second table, by itself, we shall see the same thing very plainly, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" or which is the same thing, whatsoever ye would, that men do unto you, do ye the same unto them." Is this unreasonable? Is any man's reason so perverted, or his conscience so depraved, as to complain of this, as an unjust, or oppressive law. There are some who talk upon this subject, in such a manner, as we may truly say of them, with the apostle, "They speak of the law, and know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" and they will say, our Saviour has made merciful abatements of the law. Pray has he made any abatement of the love of God, and of our neighbor?

Would you be satisfied to hear any man trace out a system of moral duty, and make any alteration in these? Yet they are the whole in substance; wherever these are, every thing will follow of course. If you love God supremely, and your neighbor as yourselves, you will neglect no duty to the one or to the other.

When I am upon this branch of the subject, the reasonableness of God's commands, it will be proper to obviate an apparent, and at the same time, an important objection. You will perhaps say, to keep the commands of God, is above our power. Have not you yourself, often taught us, that no mere man in this life, is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? Can that be reasonable then that is impossible? Now consider I pray you what sort of impossibility this is. It is not natural, but moral. It is not want of power, but want of inclination. Nothing is required of us, that is unsuitable to our situation, or above our natural powers; so far from it, that even what was our duty before, if by any accident it becomes impossible in this sense, it ceases to be a duty. God no where commands you to be taller or stronger, than he has made you: and though he commands you to labor, working with your hands, if he confines you by sickness, this duty no longer binds. He has given you faculties, and natural powers for every thing that he requires. Are not all your powers, both of mind and body, as fit for your Maker's service, as any other purpose? Is not the tongue as fit to speak truth, as falsehood: and every member of the body as fit to do what is lawful or useful, as what is sinful or hurtful: The commands of God, then, are neither impossible or difficult to those, who are willing to obey them. No man can say with truth, that he desired with all his heart, to do his Maker's will, and could not. But perhaps some will say, this indisposition itself, is my nature, I cannot help it. If any think this excuse may be offered to God, let him first make trial of offering it to his fellow creature; or suppose another to offer it to himself. Suppose you should complain of another, for stealing your substance, or blasting your name, or otherwise injuring you; and that he should answer, that he could not help it. What, you would say, you could not help it; what necessity obliged you? Why says he, it was my nature,

because I hate you, and it grieves me to see you prosper. Would that be accepted as an excuse? I think not; for it is the very essence of the injury. On the whole, it plainly appears, that the commands of God are all reasonable and just, neither can they suffer any abatement, without infringing upon the holiness of his own nature, and the wisdom and equity of his government itself.

3. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because all his commands have an immediate and direct tendency to promote our own comfort and happiness. They are not less reasonable as they express the right of the Creator, than they are gracious, as they are calculated to promote the interest of the creature. I do not mean here, only or chiefly, the great reward which he hath in mercy provided and promised to those, that keep them, but that in their own nature, they are fitted to promote our happiness.

I have before sufficiently taken notice, that we are not to understand, by keeping the commands of God, a constrained outward obedience, without the inclination of the heart. Constrained obedience, I confess, is neither acceptable to God, nor delightful to man. But when the service of God, is chosen from the heart, it is both delightful and profitable in all respects. If we examine the matter with care, we shall find, that true religion consists in the exercise of the most noble and grateful affections of mind, or rather the one leading disposition, which when rightly directed as to its object, makes the sum of religion, and is also the source of felicity. It is love, supreme love to God, and through him, and for him, to all his creatures, that is the sum of religion, and must not every body be sensible, that this is a temper and frame of mind, much more desirable, than its opposite. Carry the one and the other, through all their branches and expressions, and see if they will bear the comparison. From love spring thankfulness, contentment, submission, benevolence, beneficence, meekness, compassion, forgiveness; and from hatred spring ambition, rage, impatience, malevolence, envy, revenge and cruelty. If there were no law of God

at all, which of those tribes of affections is most desirable of itself, or most conducive to our inward comfort and peace?

If we try this matter by experience, let us ask the children of God, whether they have found his service burdensome; whether they would exchange a meek, thankful, and contented frame of spirit, for the storms of rage, envy, or ambition. Do they look with a jealous or envious eye, on the liberty of wicked men? on the contrary, they would not exchange with any of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. Perhaps, though there is great blindness in the understanding itself, of wicked men, we may learn the truth even from their experience and confessions. We many times hear them acknowledge their bondage; and when they do not explicitly acknowledge it, yet it is easy to perceive it. You never hear a bad man taking comfort to himself, from the evil he has done, but sometimes comparatively from the greater evil that they have not done. Without going particularly through every minute circumstance, let us just say in general, that whether we consider the inward temper, or the outward practice, our relations, business, and enjoyments in life, or hope for futurity, we cannot in any instance depart from the commandments of God, without at the same time acting contrary to our own manifest interest: so that Wisdom says with great truth and justice, Prov. 8:36. "He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me, love death."

4. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because he has given the most free and gracious invitation to sinners to return to God. By his sufferings he purchased their pardon, and is invested with full authority to negotiate peace. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved him to suffer, that repentance and remission of sins," &c. What we are particularly to remember upon this subject is, that the invitation is without reserve or exception, to all of every character, however deep and aggravated their offences. If. 1:18. "Come now, and let us reason together, faith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." 1 Tim. 1:15. "This is a faithful saying,

and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The offer is also free as to the terms, without any costly or meriting condition. Isa. 55:1. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Rev. 22:17. "And the spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that heareth say, come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Can there be any thing more encouraging than these gracious invitations? Here it is that we ought to take in the wife and happy constitution of the Redeemer's person, as the son of man, as well as the son of God, and the meekness and gentleness of his disposition, this was prophesied of him of old, Isaiah 42:1, 2, 3. "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break; and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." This was beautifully and admirably fulfilled by his appearance in the flesh, by the meanness of his birth, though not of his parentage, by the poverty and self-denial of his life, by the meekness and lowliness of his carriage, not only through life, but in the last and suffering stage of it; for he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; when he was reviled, he reviled not again. So that he might with the greatest justice say as in the context, take my yoke.

5. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because he hath made abundant provision of divine strength, to enable us to keep his commandments. How gracious these laws, when the law-giver communicates strength for performance? This takes away all objection, and removes every difficulty. What is impossible with man, is possible with God. There is no heart so hard, but omnipotence is able to soften it; no temper so depraved, but the Creator is able to renew it. The conversion of a sinner is always considered in scripture as the work of God. "God who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness," &c. The promise of

the new covenant is thus described by Ezekiel 36:25. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." And in the New Testament, faith which unites us to Christ, and every other good disposition, is represented as the gift of God, Eph. 2:8. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

And as the conversion of sinners to the daily growth of the spiritual life, in believers, is to be imputed entirely to the same cause, for this end it was, that it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell in Christ; and we have this testimony from the apostle John 1:16. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

SERMON XIX

THE GLORY OF THE REDEEMER IN THE PERPETUITY OF HIS WORK

His name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. PSALM 72:17

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THE whole system of Providence and grace was fixed in the eternal purpose of God, before the foundation of the world. Hence he is represented, Is. 46:10. as, "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My

counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The writings of the Old Testament give us the history of the several openings of this plan, during that dispensation, in which we may observe almost continual references to the appearance of an illustrious person, at a certain important period, called the fulness of time.

The appearance of the Saviour in our nature, including his obedience, his sufferings and death, his triumphant resurrection and ascension, was an event so astonishing in itself, and so great in its effects, as being the means appointed of God for the redemption of a lost world, that we need not be surprised at the great care taken in the Old Testament church, to keep it always in view. It was natural for holy and good men, who had so many intimations given them of it, to think on it with pleasure; and when they were led to speak of future times, to bring in this remarkable period, and mention it with rapture.—And when God inspired his servants to prophesy of the prosperity and happiness of his church and kingdom, he could not fail to raise their descriptions, and lead them to give such views of things as were suitable to that great event, which was to be such a signal illustration of his glorious goodness, and so great a blessing to mankind.

Hence it is, that we find several prophecies begun, in appearance, to celebrate some public blessing, at or near the times in which they were delivered, gradually so heightened by several expressions, as we may perceive that in their full extent they could only relate to the times of the Messiah. Such, for instance, is that in my text: for if we lay together the accounts we have of Solomon, in scripture, and the felicity of his reign; if we remember the scandalous steps he made in the latter part of his life, the dreadful rent that happened in the reign of his son and immediate successor; and that after the course of a few ages, Judah was carried into captivity—we must be sensible, that the expressions in my text, are by far too much exalted, if nothing else was intended by them. But if we consider them as relating to Messiah the Prince, then we see every thing literally fulfilled to the utmost import and extent of the prophetic language, "His name shall endure

forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed."

It is below the majesty of the scriptures, to make use of strong and lofty expressions to denote a very common and ordinary event, to which they cannot be applied without making great abatements. This is a fault men often fall into; but it would be very unjust to impute it to persons speaking under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God. We may therefore lay it down as one good rule for understanding the prophetic writings, that whenever they rise far above the subject they were treating of, into expressions literally applicable to the Messiah, and which, in their full extent, can belong to none but him, he is to be considered as chiefly in the view of the Spirit of God. Now, this being the case with my text, as I hope appears sufficiently from what has been already said, I shall consider it as a noble and animated prophecy of the glory of his reign; which will be the more proper introduction to this day's work, as what we are now to be employed about is an eminent part of its accomplishment.

In discoursing further on it at present, I shall circumscribe the subject, and only,

I. Endeavor to open the import of this magnificent declaration, as understood of Christ, "His name shall endure for ever," &c.

II. Make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and assistance in the present duty.

First, then, let us endeavor to open the import of this magnificent declaration as understood of Christ—"His name shall endure for ever," &c. And in the first place it carries in it an assurance of the greatness of his power as a Saviour, and the perfect security of all those who put their trust in him. The word name often signifies the excellence or perfection of the person named or referred to.—This is especially the case in scripture, with respect to God, where his name

is just his glory and all sufficiency revealed. The name of the Lord is in many passages of equivalent meaning with the power of God: thus, Prov. 18:10. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Psalm 20:1. The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee." This may with the greater propriety be applied to Christ, that you may know the name of Jesus, was by the express appointment of the angel of the Lord, given to him at his birth, to denote the great deliverance he was to work for sinners, in saving them from their sins. This is the great errand on which the Son of God came into the world, 1 Tim. 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The success he should have in this work is often celebrated, as Isaiah 53:10, 11. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his feed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." His power as a Saviour, to break the chains of Satan, and to deliver the captive soul, is frequently declared in the strongest terms, as Isaiah 42:6, 7, 8. "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Isaiah 63:1. Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." This power of Christ to save, seems to be plainly called his name, 1 John 3:23. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Thus it is reasonable to think, that the power of Christ as a Saviour is celebrated in our text, as what would ever

remain a sure and plentiful source of salvation to mankind, and be ever depended upon and acknowledged as such, by all the redeemed.

This glory of Christ's name as a Saviour, has a particular respect to the wretched and deplorable state of those, who are the objects of his mercy, and that there are none beyond the reach of his power. That there is none so loaded with guilt or so stained with pollution, but he is able to purchase their pardon, and to effect their deliverance. Persons you know afflicted with inveterate and dangerous diseases, are apt to hearken with eagerness to the name of an eminent physician, from whose skill they may entertain some hopes of recovery, and the greater and more illustrious his name is, they are apt to place the greater confidence in him. So when we hear that Christ's name shall endure for ever, it should encourage all sinners of whatever rank to fly to him, and to put their trust in him. God reasons thus in illustrating his own mercy, Isa. 1:18, 19. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:" and to the same purpose, Isa. 55:7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But he hath given us still greater encouragement, by committing the work of our salvation to so glorious a person, in whose hand it cannot fail, Psalm 89:18, 19. "For the Lord is our defence; and the holy One of Israel is our King. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty: I have exalted one chosen out of the people." Isaiah 9:6. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace." Not to insist on the many passages of the New-Testament, which point our attention to the power and dignity of Christ, I shall only mention, Heb. 7:25. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come

unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

I shall only further say, that the glory of Christ's name, as an almighty Saviour, may be considered in its superior lustre to every thing that might be supposed to come in competition with him, or pretend to be put in this place. This is certainly the meaning of a great name, when applied to men. He is said to obtain the greatest name, who outstrips or eclipses others by the glory of his deeds; the same must be the meaning of this passage, as applied to our Redeemer; "his name shall endure for ever." The names of others shall soon be lost. Their inferior brightness will soon decay: but his shall continue for ever with unfading and increasing lustre.

This, my brethren, is a circumstance that ought never to be omitted. We cannot honor Christ as an almighty Saviour, unless we believe and remember, that he is the only Saviour. There are some passages in the prophetic writings, in which God asserts his own incommunicable glory, in opposition to the vanities of the Gentiles, and that in language inimitably strong, Isa. 40:17, 18. "All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" Isaiah 43:10, 11, 12, 13. "Ye are my witnesses, faith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour. I have declared and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" Hos. 13:4. "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no God but me: for there is no saviour beside me." The same peculiar and exclusive honor belongs to Christ, as the hope of sinners, Acts 4:12. "Neither is there salvation in any other:

for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

I might illustrate this sense of the passage before us, by shewing you that all the rites and ceremonies of the ancient dispensation, derived their efficacy from their relation to Christ. But I shall only tell you, that all the dependance which you place upon any thing else for your acceptance with God, is an injury to the honor of your Redeemer; that all self-righteousness and self-dependance, to which there is in man by nature so strong a tendency, obscures the lustre of that name which shall endure forever. That as he is able to save sinners, to the uttermost, so they shall never obtain salvation, but by him. As it is he who laid the foundation of this great work, who carries it on through all the steps of its progress, and at last brings it to perfection, so he will have, and why should he not have, the undivided glory.

2. This leads me to observe, that the magnificent declaration in the text, concerning Christ, implies the immortal honor and renown which he would acquire by the work of man's redemption. Every one knows, that in scripture style, to get a name is to acquire renown and glory, by some illustrious achievement; as 2 Sam. 8:13. "And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of Salt, being eighteen thousand men."

And surely, my brethren, the undertaking of Christ was the most glorious in itself, the most arduous in its accomplishment, the most blessed in its effects, and the most generous and disinterested in him, that can possibly be conceived. Think on this part of the subject, I beseech you, with attention; and weigh the intimations we have of it in scripture. And for this purpose observe, that he acquired glory with God, with angels, and with men.

As the salvation of sinners was a work in which the glory of God the Father was eminently illustrated, so he is represented as looking with the highest complacency on Christ, in the undertaking and accomplishment of it. Thus Matth. 3:17. "And lo, a voice from

heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And again, at his transfiguration, Matth. 17:5. "And while he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." Is. 42:1. "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." We see also, that God is represented as having put the highest honor on the Redeemer, in reward of his sufferings. Phil. 2:9, 10, 11. "Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Heb. 2:9. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." See also Heb. 12:2. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

I am sensible, my brethren, that this delight and approbation, which the father is represented as expressing in the undertaking of the Son, is a subject of the most elevated nature, on which we ought to think and speak with the utmost veneration, and with the greatest reserve. But since he hath revealed, it is our duty to improve it. Does it not carry your thoughts naturally to that expression we find used in scripture, at the finishing of the material creation, mentioned at the end of every day's work, and repeated on a review of the whole, Gen. 1:31. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

We must needs conceive, the omnipotent Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as possessed, not only of absolute and unchangeable perfection, but of infinite and inconceivable felicity. And may we not, must we not conceive, that this felicity consists both in the

contemplation and exercise of all his glorious attributes, and in nothing more than in the redemption of sinners, in which his power, wisdom, holiness, justice and mercy, are severally and jointly so conspicuously displayed. Nay, may we not venture, with reverence, further to say, that the three persons in the Trinity, by their distinct properties, and peculiar agency, receive and impart everlasting delight to one another, in their ineffable communion! The eternal word is represented as saying, Prov. 8:30. "Then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

(2.) The Redeemer acquired immortal renown among the angels, and the whole celestial host. This we may speak of with abundance of certainty, and with yet clearer comprehension. Doubtless their happiness consists in the vision and contemplation of an infinite God. And therefore the manifestation and exercise of the divine perfections, both in Providence and grace, administer to them matter of continual and increasing delight. There is a beautiful representation of their employment, Is. 6:1, 2, 3. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord fitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain did he fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Now there is no reason to doubt that the work of redemption, in all its parts, in which they themselves have an inferior employment, as ministring spirits, under the dominion of the uncreated angel of the covenant, must be a source of the purest felicity, and a subject of the most elevated praise. In a particular manner, the assumption of our nature into a personal union with the divine. You see how they sing praises at the birth of the Saviour, Luke 2:13, 14. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The humiliation, sufferings and death of God's eternal Son, his victory upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and triumph over principalities and powers, that is to say, the revolted angels, must have often laid these servants of the living God, prostrate in adoration. This is not a matter of conjecture, but clearly revealed; the whole plan of redemption being called a mystery, which the angels desire to penetrate, 1 Peter 1:10, 11, 12. "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow: unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

Realize these great truths to yourselves, my brethren. What think you were the views of the innumerable hosts of cherubim and seraphim, when some of them conducted the ascending Saviour, and others received him, when he entered within the veil! What think you were their views when they beheld the Mediator, God Man, exalted at the right hand of God, and had a new object of adoration, bearing the scars of his sufferings, and known by the print of the nails, and by his bleeding temples? Hebrews 1:6. "And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Or, when they saw the dominion and power with which he was invested as King of kings, and Lord of lords, 1 Peter 3:22. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him."

This renown of the Saviour must have been much greater among them, if it is true what many intelligent divines have supposed, that by the same glorious undertaking by which he redeemed elect sinners, he established and confirmed the obedient angels in a state of holiness and happiness. I shall only further say, that we are

expressly told, the administration of divine grace, or the government and preservation of the church of Christ, is a continued illustration to the spirits above of his Father's wisdom, Eph. 3:10. "To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Agreeably to this we find that, in the book of Revelation, which opens the great scenes of Providence in the Church militant, there are several visions in which the angels are represented as uniting their praises with redeemed sinners, and directing their worship to the same great object. This leads me to observe,

(3.) That the Saviour acquired immortal renown among sinners of mankind. If the angels who were either spectators only, or at most but partial sharers in redeeming grace, do yet hold him in the highest honor, what is, and must be the sense of gratitude which dwells in the heart of a pardoned sinner? Oh, my brethren, how many circumstances concur to bind the heart of the believer in eternal bonds of gratitude to Christ! Who can conceive or express the debt of the sinner to the Saviour! He is redeemed from everlasting destruction, he is saved from wrath through him. Whoever is humbled, through fear of the vengeance of a holy and jealous God, what fervent love will he bear to him, who hath wrought his deliverance, who hath purchased his pardon? If he is filled with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, of his aggravated and inexcusable provocations, with what rapture must he look upon that Saviour, who forgave him graciously, and loved him freely? Who is not moved with that inimitable picture of penitent love, when Mary Magdalene came in as it is related, Luke 7:37, 38. "And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."— And how just and proper that reflection of our Saviour in the 47th verse, "Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same

loveth little." The believer's esteem and gratitude must be greatly increased by considering the unspeakable cost at which his deliverance was bought, the amazing, and affecting sufferings which the Redeemer endured in his room. When he follows the patient and immaculate Saviour, by the eye of saith, from his inward anguish in the garden, to his shameful sufferings on the accursed tree—with what relenting of heart, will he view that blessed head crowned with thorns, that sacred body nailed to the cross?—And when he carries forward his views to the glory and happiness prepared for him, in the Redeemer's presence above, what is the sum of his obligations? What bounds can be set to this conqueror's renown? In what better way can we express this, than by repeating and adopting these animating songs of praise, which are now making a great part of the worship of Heaven, Rev. 5:11, 12, 13, 14. "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever."—And Rev. 7:9, 10, 11.

3. In the last place, the magnificent declaration concerning Christ in the text, implies the stability and perpetuity of his kingdom. The glorious promises made to the house and family of David, have their chief and full accomplishment in Christ the son of David. The earthly kingdom erected in that family, has long ago been destroyed, but the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion shall have no end. This was the promise of the Father to the Messiah, Psalm 89:36, 37. "His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah."

It is one great end of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, to perpetuate the Redeemer's name, "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come," and it is a noble and reviving object of faith, that we know that his kingdom shall stand fast forever. Hell itself may rage, and the princes of this world may combine to shake his glorious throne, but he that fits in heaven shall laugh, the king of Zion shall hold their impotent attempts in derision. He shall maintain his interest in spite of all the efforts of his numerous and inveterate enemies. He hath often done so already, and shall continue to do so, till the end of time. Rev. 17:14.

I proceed now to make some practical application of what hath been said. And,

First, Let us adore the wisdom and the power of Christ,

My brethren, When we consider the simplicity of the gospel, and the scandal of the cross; when we consider the whole system of the doctrine according to godliness, and salvation by grace, how directly contrary it is to the pride of our nature, how many attempts have been, and continue to be made in every age, to suppress it by violence, to blacken it by slander, and to adulterate it by mixture; it is a standing miracle that it has been able to hold its ground. Whoever will reflect either upon the present state, or the past history of the church of Christ, must be obliged to say, that our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I must not omit to say that, we are perhaps as much indebted in this nation, to the goodness of Providence in this respect, as any corner of the earth; and I cannot but be pleased with the choice which our Fathers made, of an emblem and motto for the church of Scotland, a bush burning, but not consumed. Let us rejoice in the saith, that the prince of the kings of the earth, who hath hitherto maintained his truths and interest against all the powers and cunning of earthly policy, will continue to preserve them, and that his name shall endure forever:

his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed."

2. You may learn from what hath been said, the guilt and danger of the enemies of Christ; of all those who set light by the glory of his person, and are unwilling to be indebted to the riches of his grace. I would willingly aspire to the character which the apostle Paul assumes to himself, 2 Cor. 2:17. "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope, 1 Cor. 3:11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There may be a form of godliness; nay, there may be an ostentatious parade of human virtue, but there can be nothing of the spirit and power of true religion, without a clear discovery and sincere confession of our lost and depraved state by nature, without a believing application to the mercy of God, through the blood of the atonement. Think not I beseech you, to frustrate the word of God. The following testimony, comes from the Amen, the true and faithful witness, John 14:6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." If so great honor is put upon the Redeemer by God the Father, and by his holy angels, how unspeakably dangerous must it be, for sinners to despise him. You can never despise this ordinance of God for salvation, but from the greatest ignorance of yourselves. My heart bleeds to think of the delusion of the despisers of the gospel. What views can you have of the immaculate nature and holy law of God, if you trust in yourselves that you are righteous? What experience have you of the stability of these resolutions that have been taken, as in your strength? How weak and defective is that virtue, which is founded only on human prudence, or motives of present conveniency? One believing view of a Saviour on the cross, will have a more powerful influence in mortifying corruptions, than all other arguments whatever. One fervent prayer, urged in the name of Christ, will be more effectual for your preservation, than a thousand merely human resolutions.—Obey this salutary counsel, John 15:4. "Abide in me,

and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

3. From what has been said, let me beseech you to try your title to set down at the Lord's table. This ordinance was expressly instituted for putting honor on the Redeemer's name. He is the sum and substance of it; his death and sufferings, are the immediate subject of it. Have you then, my brethren, a high and inward esteem of his person; a deep sense of gratitude for his mercy; an entire and unshaken reliance on his grace and power? Can you call the Searcher of hearts to witness, that you unfeignedly approve of this way of salvation, by which God is glorified, and the sinner abased? Are you not ashamed to profess it? And while others are ready to despise it, are you willing to glory in it? Does it please you to hear that the Saviour's name shall endure forever? Is it with holy triumph, you reflect, that the glory of his kingdom shall be unchangeable, and his power to eternity itself? If this is your disposition, I hope you will come with acceptance to his table; and I would flatter myself with the pleasing expectation, that many of this day's worshippers, shall be everlasting monuments of their Redeemer's power; that they shall be happy subjects of his grace, and taste of the consolations of his gospel on earth, and be heirs and partakers of his glory in heaven.

4. I would improve this subject, by earnestly beseeching every sinner to embrace this salvation, and enlist himself under the banner of this renowned Saviour. There are no doubt, many within these walls, who are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. O that the Redeemer would glorify his own power in their conviction and their salvation. "Gird on thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty." Are there not some in this assembly, who are sensible they are lying under a load of unforgiven guilt; that they are still slaves to habitual sin? Does not the very sacred action we are going about, fill you with fear, that you are far from the state and temper of God's children? Is not the old nature so strong in you, that you have good reason to suspect you have never yet put on the new? Let me beseech and exhort you, to believe in the name of the Son of God. His merit is of

infinite value; his power is of infinite efficacy. Many notorious sinners have been from age to age, the happy witnesses of both. Nothing in your condition ought to be a discouragement to you from applying to this all-sufficient Saviour, he invites you by me, or rather I invite you by his commission, and in his own terms, Matth. 11:28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Isaiah 55:1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." John 6:37. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." How shall I urge your compliance? is not this name so powerful that you may safely put your trust in it? Are you not desirous that your conversion to God should illustrate it and make it glorious? I shall leave the matter with you after making this remark, that in vain do his enemies oppose him; in vain do sinners despise him. He is getting him a name by the preaching of the gospel. It is still serving its purpose, for the calling and confirmation of the vessels of mercy, for aggravating the guilt, and increasing the condemnation of the obstinate and disobedient, Luke 20:17, 18. "And he beheld them, and said, What is this then, that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

5. In the last place, you may learn from what hath been said, the wisdom of God, in the institution of the Lord's supper, and what ought to be your employment at his table. How wisely fitted is this ordinance to keep up the remembrance of Christ as a Saviour, as a suffering dying Saviour. Perhaps no one circumstance has contributed more to preserve the pure uncorrupted doctrine of the gospel, than the sacrament of the Lord's supper. It sets the truth before our eyes, while the words of the institution repeats it in our ears, 1 Cor. 11:24. "This is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." And verse 25th, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Professing Christians, but of worldly minds,

may be ashamed of the cross; self-righteous persons may put something else in the room of the cross; perverse disputers may oppose it, or keep it out of their writings; and erroneous teachers may keep it out of their sermons; but there is no keeping it out of the sacrament of his supper. Under this auspicious banner, the name of Christ has been spread to the most distant nations, and handed down from the most distant ages, and so it shall continue till he come again, "for as often as ye eat this bread," &c. How then ought ye to be employed, in a thankful and joyful acceptance of salvation through his blood, in the lively exercise of faith in his power, in deriving from his fulness every thing necessary for your support under temptation or trial; and in servent prayer, that his name may be hallowed, his kingdom may come, and his will may be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.—Amen and Amen.

SERMON XX

THE PETITIONS OF THE INSINCERE UNAVAILING

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.
PSALM 66:18

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is not, I think, a more striking light in which we can consider an assembly of professing christians, than as united in their common relation to God, and upon an equal footing, as to outward privileges, but very different, as to their inward character. This difference shall

only be completely manifested in the final decision of their state at the last day. The mixture of saints and sinners must continue till that time, when there shall be an eternal separation of the precious from the vile, of the sheep from the goats. Must then, all things continue in suspense and uncertainty till the great day? Is there no way by which we can judge, at present, what will be the event at that interesting period?

What is now the inward temper, or the spiritual state, and what shall be the eternal condition of every person here present is perfectly known to God, the searcher of all hearts. It cannot be known indeed, with any certainty, by his fellow sinners, but it may be known in a great measure, by every one with regard to himself. It may be known with such a degree of evidence as to deliver him from distressing anxiety, and even to fill him with the most joyful hope and expectation. Is not this sufficient? and ought it not to excite every one of us to a serious and impartial trial of that great question, in which we have no less than an infinite concern. This ought to be our care, in a particular manner, when we have in view to make a near and solemn approach to God, in his sanctuary on earth, because his acceptance of our worship in the body, is an earnest and pledge of his final approbation, as appears from the words of the text, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," and likewise from another passage, John 9:31. "Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

This Psalm was composed, in all probability by the Psalmist David, though some are of a contrary opinion, and attribute it to one of the prophets, after the captivity. The inspired author celebrates the goodness of God in some signal and national deliverance, and towards the close of the Psalm, takes particular notice of the distinguishing kindness of God to himself, as in Psalm 66:16. "Come and hear, all ye that sear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." He then considers the countenance and acceptance he had met with from God, as an evidence of his own sincerity in the

18th and 19th verses, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; but verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." I cannot at this time take in the whole compass of this subject, or consider how the one of these assertions is related to the other; but as the first of them contains an interesting truth of itself, and very proper for the trial of our state—I shall endeavor, through divine assistance, to illustrate it, in the following method,

I. I shall consider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart.

II. What is to be understood by God's not hearing such persons. And,

III. I shall make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

In the first place, then, let us consider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart. And I think it is plain, that these words do not directly point at open, scandalous and profane sinners, who have burst: every bond, and look with disdain and defiance in the face of every reprovor. There are too many of this character, my brethren, who fall under the description of the prophet Jeremiah, ch. 44 ver. 16 and first clause of the 17th, and who practically say, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." To these I shall speak in the application of the subject, as there is no doubt that they regard iniquity in the heart, since they openly and obstinately practice it in the life. But certainly the words of the text do chiefly relate to those whose characters are more doubtful, both to others and to themselves. Many there have been in every age, and there are many amongst us, who maintain their characters before men; but when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, shall be found wanting; but, at the same time, by the power of self-deceit, they are ready to say, they shall have peace, though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. For undeceiving all such persons, and for the trial of others,

that they that are approved may be made manifest, let me beseech your attention to the following particulars.

1. They regard iniquity in their hearts, who practise it secretly, who are under restraint from the world, but are not possessed of an habitual fear of the omniscient God, the searcher of all hearts, and from whose eyes there is no covering of thick darkness where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. Jer. 23:24. "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord; do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." If you remember in what manner I stated the general meaning of the words, you will be sensible that I do not here chiefly point at gross hypocrisy, or those who under the cloak of religion practise all manner of wickedness in their secret retirement. There are many others on whose conduct the judgment of men has a strong, though at the same time an insensible effect: who are perhaps regular and guarded in their visible deportment, but on whom a sense of the continual presence of the invisible God, with whom they have to do, hath not a commanding and habitual influence. It is a dangerous symptom of this, when your repentance is very slight, and you easily forgive yourselves for those sins of which the world is ignorant, or in those that are known, when you remember the shame longer than the sin.

How many unhappy examples of this do we see every day? How many can go very easily under their sins that are known only to God, but are filled with vexation when they have been betrayed into what exposes them to the censure of their fellow-creatures. There are some who seem to be much more affected with the censure of others for trifling errors, than the displeasure of God for heinous sins. Nay, there are to be found some who evidently suffer more uneasiness from the censure of others, even where it is wrong, than from frequent neglects or breaches of the law of God. Now, what signifies the opinion of others, when it is founded on mistake, or malice? I do not mean, my brethren, to extinguish, or bid you endeavor to extinguish, a sense of shame; but let it be subordinate to the fear of God. The distress of a real penitent should arise from the dishonor

he hath done to God. The reproach he hath brought on religion, should wound him more deeply than the shame or fear he hath brought upon himself. Let the shamefulness of every bad action, bear a part in shewing you its abominable nature. But I am bold to affirm, that they are strangers to true penitence, in whom a sense of shame is stronger than a sense of sin.

This attachment to secret sin admits of various degrees. It is sometimes stronger, and sometimes weaker; sometimes general, and sometimes more confined. There are instances in which it appears chiefly by the continuance and influence of some one darling lust, which the sinner cannot give up. This holds its place after others or surrendered; and though it dare not appear openly in the conversation, retains its dominion in the heart, and is indulged under the covert of secrecy. The arguments adduced in its defence, the excuses offered for it by the sinner to his own mind, are very many; but that it is a regarding iniquity in the heart, appears from its being concealed. It would seek no hiding place, if it were not one of the works of darkness.

2. They regard iniquity in the heart, who entertain and indulge the desire of sin, although in the course of providence, they may be restrained from the actual commission of it. I am persuaded the instances are not rare, of men feeding upon sinful desires, even when through want of opportunity, through the fear of man, or through some partial restraint of conscience, they dare not carry them into execution. This will be best illustrated by particular examples; and therefore, I shall just mention the three following—impurity, sensuality, and malice.

Men may indulge themselves in unchaste and lascivious thoughts; they may allow their imaginations to run out upon such subjects, meditate and dwell upon them with delight, drink in with pleasure such discourses or such writings as present them with polluted images, although they are restrained from the commission of gross acts of uncleanness. All who voluntarily indulge themselves in such

mental impurity, who think it enough to abstain from the criminal action, or perhaps maintain some prudent reserve and decency of conversation, but do not make conscience of watching over their inward desires; beyond all question, they regard iniquity in the heart. For this we have the express testimony of our blessed Saviour, Matthew 5:27, 28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Again,

Men may habitually indulge themselves in sensuality of heart, when they have little or no opportunity of giving the rein to sensuality in practice. They may please themselves with the imagination or expectation of worldly greatness, or worldly delights. Such things may be the theme of their meditation, and the objects of their sinful affections, although they shall never come into their possession. Their sensuality of heart may discover itself by impatient complaints of their own state, which has not given them the means of indulgence, or by envious repining at the outward prosperity of others, who are more liberally provided for. Nay, I would say the same thing of those who have the means of gratification, and yet are usually sober, if their restraint is owing to no better principle than the fear of sickness, or the fear of man.

Once more, men may indulge themselves in malice against others, although it be chiefly confined to the secret working of their hearts. Prudence or cowardice may hinder men from doing mischief, even when they are full of inward malice. Envy, that corroding, wasting worm, chiefly preys upon the heart. Men may rejoice at the calamities of others, or indulge resentment of supposed injuries, which is never carried into effect. All such, my brethren, regard iniquity in their heart, and are living in the wilful and deliberate breach of the law of God, which is pure and spiritual, and hath the heart as its principal object. Matth. 5:21, 22. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and, whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that

whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the counsel: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire."

3. They regard iniquity in the heart, who reflect upon past sins with delight, or without sincere humiliation of mind. Perhaps our real disposition, both towards sin and duty, may be as certainly discovered by the state of our minds after, as in the time of action. The strength and suddenness of temptation may betray even a good man into the commission of sin; the backwardness of heart and power of inward corruption, may make duty burdensome, and occasion many defects in the performance: but every real Christian remembers his past sins with unfeigned contrition of spirit, and a deep sense of unworthiness before God; and the discharge of his duty, however difficult it may have been at the time, affords him the utmost pleasure, on reflection. It is otherwise with many: they can remember their sins without sorrow, they can speak of them without shame, and sometimes even with a mixture of boasting and vain-glory. Did you never hear them recall their past follies, and speak of them with such relish, that it seems to be more to renew the pleasure, than to regret the sin. Even supposing such persons to have forsaken the practice of some sins, if they can thus look back upon them with inward complacency, their seeming reformation must be owing to a very different cause from renovation of heart. How opposite the sentiments of Job, who considers his afflictions as a visitation of God for his sins in early life, Job 13:26, "For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." See also the prayer of the Psalmist, Psalm 25:7, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord."

4. They regard iniquity in the heart, who look upon the sins of others with approbation, or indeed, who can behold them without grief. Sin is so abominable a thing, so dishonoring to God, and so destructive

to the souls of men, that no real Christian can witness it without concern. Hence it is so frequently taken notice of in scripture, as the character of a servant of God, that he mourns for the sins of others, Psal. 119:136, 158, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes: because they keep not thy law. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved: because they kept not thy word." See also the language of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. 13:17. "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive." 2 Peter 2:7, 8, "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)." Have we then among us any, my brethren, who can look upon the sins of others with complacency or approbation, who excuse or palliate, who justify or defend them, how different is their temper from that of the scripture saints just now referred to? Whatever outward regularity they may possess or pretend to, it is plain they are of the number of those who regard iniquity in the heart. To some sins their own nature may not prompt them, from others, the fear of man may restrain them; but the holy spirit surely never has reformed them. It is an infallible maxim, that no man can think lightly of sin in others, who has an unfeigned hatred of it in himself.

This will hold with equal or with greater strength, as to those who make the sins of others the subject of their mirth and entertainment. The wise man tells us, Prov. 14:9, "Fools make a mock of sin." And the observation will hold equally true, whether we consider the sin committed, or the danger of the sinner. Is there any thing we should hate more than what is so offensive to God; of which he hath expressed his detestation? And must he not regard iniquity in the heart, who can find pleasure in what should be viewed by every Christian with horror? And what name does he deserve, who can make himself merry with the everlasting perdition of his fellow-creatures? We have the greatest reason to lament the prevalence of sin amongst us, and the boldness of sinners; and little less, to lament

the reception which both sin and sinners meet with among those, of whom better things might have been expected.

5. In the last place, I suspect that they regard sin in the heart, who are backward to bring themselves to the trial, and who are not truly willing, that God himself would search and try them. Sin often lurks secretly, and in disguise. He is a stranger to religion, who does not know this from experience. Hear the language of the Psalmist, Psal. 19:12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Ps. 139:23, 24. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

If any, therefore, are unwilling to be tried, if they are backward to self-examination, it is an evidence of a strong and powerful attachment to sin. It can proceed from nothing but from a secret dread of some disagreeable discovery of the detection of some lust, which they cannot consent to forsake. The force of conscience is such, that some deception is necessary to keep the sinner in peace with himself. Too much light would either debar him from his delights, or poison the enjoyment of them. This is strongly described by our Saviour, John 3:20. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."

We proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was to show what is to be understood by God's not hearing those who regard iniquity in their hearts. This expression of God's not hearing them, may be considered very generally, as signifying that they are not, nor while they continue in that temper can be, the objects of his favor; he will not remember them with the love which he beareth to his chosen. But as the expression is used in some particular and distinct significations in scripture, which will merit our attention, I shall briefly mention the chief of them, which seem to be the four following.

1. He will not hear them when they cry to him for deliverance from affliction. I take this to be at least one thing, if not the main thing, intended by the Psalmist in the passage where the text lies. After giving praise to God for a signal deliverance, he draws this comfortable conclusion from it, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me: he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." It is one of the characters, as well as one of the privileges of the children of God, that they fly to him as their refuge in distress; and he hath given his gracious promise, that he will hear them in mercy, Ps. 91:15. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honor him." Psalm 50:15. "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." But those who regard iniquity in their hearts, have no reason to expect that God will hear them in this sense. They are liable to the calamities of human life; they are liable to the strokes of God's righteous Providence: but they have no title to go to him for relief. Every affliction carries in it the severity of a judge, without any mixture of the mercy of a father. It is true, that wicked men do sometimes cry to God in distress, but not in the spirit of his children; and as we learn from this passage, their prayers do not find acceptance with him.

There are three different objects of desire to a good man, while in affliction: the divine presence to support him under it; the sanctified use of it, for the improvement of the spiritual life; and in due time, compleat deliverance from it. The two first, he that regards iniquity in his heart, will hardly ask; and the last he shall not be able to obtain. The prayer of one unacquainted with God, is little better than the howling of despair and terror, without any mixture of filial confidence. Hosea, 7:14. "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." As to the sanctified use of their sufferings, they neither ask nor receive it; on the contrary, they are commonly made worse by their sufferings, as earthen vessels are but hardened in the fire. And as to deliverance from suffering, they shall never obtain more than perhaps a temporary suspension of

outward strokes, till they fill up the measure of their iniquities, and be ripe for final destruction.

I cannot help, just hinting in this place, that when God visits his children's faults with rods, and their sins with chastisements, till they forsake their sins by true repentance, he will not hear them. If they have departed from the paths of truth and righteousness, if they have taken of the accursed thing between him and them, there cannot be peace, Isaiah 59:1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." The very intention of affliction to the children of God, is to separate them from sin, and it must continue till it produces its effect. What he says of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in general, is but an emblem of the manner in which he will treat every particular person of the true Israel, Isaiah 1:25. "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:"

2. He will not hear them, when they intercede for others. It is in this sense, that the word is used in the gospel according to John 9:31. "Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth." We are expressly taught by the apostle James, that it is the prayer of faith, and the prayer of the righteous that hath power with God, James 5:15, 16. "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." I am sensible, my brethren, that this will seem of very little moment to many, or probably to the greatest part of those, who regard iniquity in their hearts. Not much accustomed to the exercise of prayer for themselves, it will make but a light impression on them, to be told that they will not be heard in their intercession for others. The truth is, many, if they would attend to it, carry their own condemnation in themselves, from this very circumstance. Conscious that they have little interest at the throne of grace, they seldom think of employing it at all. But considering that

there is scarcely any person wholly unrelated to others, and that many have occasion, from time to time, to see those to whom they are united by the most tender ties, lying under the pressure of affliction, it ought to cover them with confusion, that they know not what it is to look to God, as the hearer of prayer, and to lend that help, which they may shortly require. When we see one member of a family lying under the rod, and a profane husband or wife, parent or child, standing by in hopeless distress, and prayerless tears, it is hard to say which of the two is the greater object of compassion.

And what an incitement should it be to those, who are often called to the duty of intercession, either from their office or their character, to walk circumspectly, that they may not mar their confidence in God. Let them guard with double diligence against any thing that is provoking to God. Let them drive to keep clear their interest in his favor, lest they should at once wound their peace and destroy their usefulness; for if they regard iniquity in their heart, the Lord will not hear them.

3. He will not hear them when they draw near to him in worship. This also, is often the meaning of the expression in scripture, Isaiah 1:14, 15. "Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." There are many other passages to the same purpose, particularly that of Solomon, Prov. 15:8. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight." The Psalmist was so sensible of this, that he says, Psalm 5:4, 5, 6, 7. "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy fight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

This ought to make a deep and serious impression on your minds. There are but too many who, though they live in the practice of sin and regard iniquity in their hearts, do yet continue their outward attendance on the ordinances of divine institution, and at stated times lay hold of the seals of God's covenant. Shall they find any acceptance with him? No. He counts it a profane mockery; he counts it a sacrilegious usurpation, Psalm l. 16,17. "But unto the wicked God faith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." Shall they have any comfort in it? No, unless in so far as in righteous judgment he suffers them to be deceived, and they are deceived, and most unhappy they, who lie longest under the delusion, Psalm 50:21. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." Shall they have any benefit by it? No, instead of appeasing his wrath, it provokes his vengeance. Instead of enlightening their minds, it blinds their eyes. Instead of sanctifying their nature, it hardens their hearts. See a description of those who had been long favored with outward privileges, and gloried in them, John 12:39, 40, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." So that nothing is more essential to an acceptable approach to God, in the duties of his worship in general, and particularly to receiving the seals of his covenant, than a thorough and universal separation from all known sin, Job 11:13, 14. "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles."

4. He will not hear them when they cry for mercy at last. Sooner or later the sinner's eyes shall be opened. Sooner or later he shall be convinced of the folly of his miserable choice. Many of those who regard iniquity in their hearts, sleep in security, and flatter themselves with mistaken hopes; but, Gal. 6:7, "Be not deceived: God

is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." From the account given by our Saviour, it would appear that the final sentence shall, in many instances, be matter of surprise as well as terror to the sinner, Matt. 7:22, 23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Nay, perhaps we may say that to some, the day of God's mercy may be over before the close of life; and they may find no place for repentance, though they may seek it carefully, and with tears. Not but that wherever there is true penitence, even at the eleventh hour, forgiveness will be the effect; but we may justly suppose that there may be a despairing cry for mercy, from the apprehensions of impending judgment, without any thorough conviction of sin. The reception that such will meet with, and the reason upon which it is founded, is represented in the strongest language, Prov. 1:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject for your instruction and direction. And, 1. Suffer me to speak a little to those who live in the open habitual practice of gross sin. It grieves me to think, my brethren, that any such should be found or supposed in this worshipping assembly. It distresses me still more, to think that any such should have the presumption to ask, or the art to obtain permission, and the dreadful hardness to sit down at the Lord's table. I shall describe you not by your names, which are known to men, but your characters and hearts, which are open before God. Swearers and profaners of Jehovah's name, despisers of his Sabbaths, scorers of sacred things, neglecters of prayer, sons of

violence, midnight rioters, beastly drunkards, unclean fornicators, takers and holders of unjust gain, liars and slanderers, hard-hearted oppressors, and whosoever liveth under the dominion of known sin. Is the nature of God so holy, is his law so spiritual, is his judgment so severe, that those who but regard iniquity in their hearts, shall inevitably perish; then how shall you escape the damnation of hell? Is memory so unfaithful, as not now to bring your sins to remembrance? Is conscience so feared as not to charge you with the guilt? Can you doubt the being, do you not feel the presence, do you not fear the judgment of God? "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God; for Tophet is ordained of old," &c.

Oh, that it would please God, by his omnipotent grace, to reach your hearts, to shake your confidence, to humble you to the dust. I call God to record, that you have received warning. I know that you may despise it; I am afraid that many will do so. Away to your cups, away to the blessed stage, that dear friend to virtue; away to your merry, social life, drink confusion to your preachers, and pour forth every term of reproach that your little wit can suggest, against these poor priest-ridden creatures, who are afraid of their minister's reproof. Alas, alas! when the king of terrors, on his pale horse, shall make his approach, you will be of another mind, unless perhaps, as it often happens, you meet with a sudden call, an immediate translation from the fire of lust to the fire of hell.

2. Let me intreat you, my dear brethren, from what has been said, to search and try yourselves, whether you regard iniquity in your hearts, or not. This is the rather necessary, as you have in view an immediate and solemn appeal to God, that you are sincere in his covenant. Does the fear of the Lord possess you in secret, as well as in public? Are you willing that it should be so? Is it your daily study, and is it the subject of your daily prayer, to have a deeper and more lively impression of his presence upon your spirits? Is it truly matter of comfort to you, when you are delivered from the fear of human censure, or desire of human approbation? Have you ever got above

both in your experience, and do you not wish to maintain the superiority? If it is so, happy, happy are you indeed; and may the Lord himself lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Do you know what it is to mourn over secret sins, the vanity of your minds, the worldliness of your affections? And do you truly make conscience of keeping the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life? I will not ask because I know you cannot deny, that you have had many sinful thoughts, in breach of every command of God. But are they approved, or abhorred? are they submitted to, or resisted? are they now recollected with pleasure, with indifference, or with shame?

What are your thoughts with regard to the sins of others? Have you ever grieved for them in truth? Do not think that I am leading you to ostentation. I do not ask you whether you have openly testified against them, or honestly reproved them; because, though these are both important and binding duties, they may be more easily counterfeited; and I am not now pressing you to the discharge of your duty to others, but trying your sincerity before God. Have you therefore, mourned in secret for the sins of others? have they ever brought you to your knees? have they added fervor to your prayers? If it be so, I cannot think that you regard iniquity in your own hearts. This is no Pharisaical hypocrisy. It is known only to God. The profane cannot curse you for it, because they do not hear it: and if they were told it, it is probable they would not believe it.

But methinks I hear some serious person say, I have attended to the interrogatories; and though I would fain hope I know something of a sense of duty in all, yet, oh! how miserably defective have I been? Nothing like that deep sense of the presence of God, that humiliation of spirit for sin, that concern for the divine glory, that I ought to have had, that I have sometimes felt for a season, and that I wished to preserve.

Therefore, my brethren, I would once more ask you, can you now sincerely pray that God would search and try your ways, discover every secret sin, convince you of it, humble you for it, and deliver you from it? Is there no reserve, no exception whatever, nothing that you are willing to cover, that you are backward to examine, and disposed to excuse? Is there no doubtful practice, but what you are willing to think of deliberately, to examine impartially, and if it either appears to be sinful, or but remaineth doubtful, to surrender freely? If you can say there is not, then after having pleaded your divorce from every sin, I have only further to rob you of every duty too, and leave you nothing whereof to glory; to call you to renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and make you to say, "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me: surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

3. I shall only now shut up this discourse with giving you a very few directions for your future preservation.

1. Guard against the sin or sins that you may be most liable to, from your natural temper and constitution, which may be said to be your own iniquity, and the sin that most easily besets you. It is lamentable to think what disgraceful blemishes are sometimes to be seen in the conduct of the servants of God. I know this is permitted in Providence, and cannot be wholly prevented. But no watchful Christian will fit still easily under it. If such a sin gives him no rest, he should give it no quarter. Some very bad things are sometimes borne with, under the notion of unavoidable infirmities. Yet they are to the prejudice of your own peace; they are a reproach to your profession, and a dishonour to your master. If you cannot wholly destroy, I beseech you, wound and weaken them. If there is no probability that they will die wholly, but with the body, let it be seen that they are daily losing strength, and dying gradually.

2. Set a particular guard upon those sins that you may be opposed to, in your ordinary calling: in that way, where you go most frequently, the tempter knows he can most easily find you, and he will certainly

be there to meet you. Besides interest often pleads so strongly in behalf of some sins of this kind, and they are so much justified by example, that few can withstand the temptation. But consider, I beseech you, that no honor, profit, or convenience, can possibly counter-balance the loss of God's favor! What a miserable excellency is it indeed, to add a little to our earthly store at the expence of his displeasure, while we ourselves are in his hand, and all that we have is in the most; absolute manner at his disposal.

In the last place, if you desire to be preserved from the dominion of sin, seat yourselves often in the presence of God. He seeth in secret, his eyes do see, his eye lids try the children of men. Ask of him, therefore, that he may not suffer you to deceive yourselves, but lead you in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

SERMON XXI

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST

Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, in the High Church of Edinburgh, on Monday, January 2, 1758.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. - ACTS, 4:12

IT it is not easy to conceive any subject, at once more important in itself, more seasonable in this age, and more suited to the design of the present meeting, than the absolute necessity of salvation through

CHRIST. We live in an age in which (as is often complained) infidelity greatly prevails; but yet in which the cause of truth hath much less to fear from the assaults of its open enemies, than from the treachery of its pretended advocates. The latest infidel writers have carried their own scheme to such perfection or extravagance, that it must discredit the cause in the eye of every Sober judge.* And indeed the gospel can scarcely receive a greater injury, than when any professing attachment to it, condescend to enter the lists with such absurdities, or give ground of suspicion that they stand in need of a serious refutation.

But there is another quarter from which we have much greater reason to apprehend danger, viz. that class of men, who, being nominal Christians, disguise or alter the gospel, in order to defend it. These often endeavor to give such views of Christianity, as will render it palatable to a corrupt worldly mind; and instead of abasing, will sooth and gratify the pride of man. Hence the unnatural mixture often to be seen of modern philosophy with ancient Christianity. Hence the fundamental doctrines of the gospel are softened, concealed, or denied; as, the lost and guilty state of man by nature, his liableness to everlasting misery, and the necessity of that satisfaction and ransom which was paid by our Redeemer when he died upon the cross. Instead of these, are we not many times presented with a character of Christ as a teacher only, and not a Saviour; as one excellently qualified to reform the abuses that had some how or other crept into the world, but the real source of which is hardly confessed, and never willingly brought into view? Is not our blessed Redeemer thereby put on a level, and expressly classed with mortal reformers? Perhaps indeed, a small compliment of superiority is paid him; which, however, there is reason to suspect arises more from a prudent compliance with established faith, than from any inward and cordial esteem.

What could be reasonably expected as the effect of such conduct? No other than we find by experience hath actually taken place, that a cause so ill defended must daily lose ground. The nearer Christianity

is brought to the principles of infidels to solicit their esteem, the less occasion will they see for it at all; and when it is perverted from its original purpose, it can expect no countenance from its real author. The truth is, if there be no more in the gospel than many by their language and writings would lead us to conceive, it is of small consequence whether it be embraced or not; and there can be little merit in a society who have this as the design of their union, to spread and propagate Christian knowledge. But very different are the sentiments expressed by the apostle Peter in the text; where, speaking of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, he says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

I am sensible, there are some of the very persons hinted at above, who endeavor to explain away this text, and give it a very different meaning from that in which you will easily perceive I understand it. They make salvation to refer to the cure recorded in the preceding chapter, wrought upon the lame man! as if the apostle had said, "Neither is there a power of healing in any other," &c. This is but one instance among many of the force and constraint they put upon Scripture, in order to accommodate it to their own sentiments. I shall not waste your time by a tedious refutation of this criticism, as the sense I affix to the words will be sufficiently supported by what shall follow on the subject. They appear to me plainly to affirm, that there is no other way by which sinners of mankind can escape everlasting misery, but through Christ.

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, through divine assistance,

I. After a little illustrating the meaning of the assertion, to establish and confirm its truth from the word of God.

II. To make a few reflections on this scheme, and shew, that it is not only most self-consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts of Scripture, as well as to the visible state of the world; and therefore

that those who, in reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any measure, do thereby betray the cause which they profess to support.

III. I shall make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I return to the first of these.

And as to the meaning of the assertion, the word saving or salvation evidently supposes a state of misery from which our deliverance must be wrought; and therefore no more than the full meaning of the passage is expressed in what follows, That all the posterity of Adam are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; alienated in heart from the love of God, and exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure. That they have not only access to salvation through Christ, but that in this work he hath no rival; it is his, exclusive of all others: so that no man, whatever be his character, or whatever be his hope, shall enter into rest, unless he be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, that all mankind are by nature in a state of guilt and condemnation, is evident from the whole strain of the holy Scriptures. This originally constituted the necessity of a Saviour, and alone illustrates the love and mercy of God in the appearance of his Son in our nature.—Unless this is supposed, the whole dispensations of the grace of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New, lose their beauty, and lose their meaning; nay, and would be justly esteemed foolishness, as they are in fact by all who see not this foundation upon which they are built. As our first parents, and the earth for their sakes, were laid under a curse immediately after the original transgression; so the effects of this apostacy on their posterity are amply declared in Scripture. We have this repeated testimony from God himself concerning the old world, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* And again, "And the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the

ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."†

The rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation also, together with the whole history of Providence contained in the Old Testament, suppose the guilt and impurity of our nature. But the gospel, as it is in all respects a clearer dispensation than the former, so it is most full and express upon this subject. Instead of enumerating many passages, we may consult the epistle of the apostle Paul to the Romans, where there is a distinct and labored illustration of the guilt and apostacy of all mankind; towards the conclusion of which he thus expresses himself: "For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one."* And a little after, "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."† To this I shall only add one passage from the same apostle: "Among whom also we had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath, even as others."‡

That the same Scriptures point out to us one only remedy for this our misery, is equally evident. Christ Jesus was promised to our first parents under the designation of the seed of the woman, who should bruise the head of the serpent. He is afterwards promised to Abraham as his seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; to Jacob as Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be. He is pointed out by Moses as the great prophet that should come into the world. And unless we suppose a typical reference to Christ in the legal washings, sacrifices, and other services, they will appear altogether unworthy of God, and altogether insufficient for the purposes for which they were used. This indeed is affirmed by the apostle to the Hebrews, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."|| In the later

prophets, there are many distinct and particular, many high and magnificent descriptions of the glory of Christ's person, and the greatness of his work. The attention and expectation of every believer is directed to him; and he is styled "the desire of all nations."*

And in the New Testament, at his conception it is said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."† At his entrance on his public ministry, he is thus designated by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."‡ The great design of his appearing in our nature, is declared in many passages of scripture. And as salvation is promised to those who believe, so the condemnation of all unbelievers is necessarily implied as its counter-part, and often expressly affirmed. Thus the apostle John represents our Saviour himself as teaching, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not PERISH, but have everlasting life."|| And when he gave commission to his disciples to preach the gospel, it was in these terms: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned."* The very meaning of the word Gospel is glad tidings; importing not only the great, but the distinguishing happiness of those who hear the message, and comply with the call. The apostles, who spread these glad tidings through the world, considered themselves as bringing salvation to those who before sat in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death. And by the following description given by the apostle Paul of the state of the Ephesians before conversion, may be seen what view he had of the condition of all who knew not God, as well as who believed not the gospel, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."†—From the above summary, I hope it clearly appears, that, according to the Scriptures, there is no salvation in any other than in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

It will, however, be proper, for the further illustration of this subject, to consider a little to what this doctrine stands opposed. And though it is impossible distinctly to enumerate every thing that may in some shape or other be put in Christ's room, or attempt to rob him of his glory as a Saviour; yet, in general, they may all be reduced to the two following heads: 1st, False religions, and uninstituted rites; 2dly, Self-righteousness, or the merit of our own defective obedience to the moral law. It is necessary to consider each of these by itself, and to state the bounds between them: for however little relation they may seem to have one to another, they are often mingled together in our apprehensions, and mutually support and strengthen each other's cause.

In the first place, then, All worship of false gods, holding for truth what hath not the stamp of divine authority, and all uncommanded worship, be the object of it what it will, is wholly ineffectual to salvation: nay, so far is any thing of this kind from being sufficient to supplant, or proper to co-operate with what Christ hath done, that it is detestable in the sight of God. Perhaps it may be thought, that this is of small moment, and wholly unworthy of notice; as in these days few or none will so much as pretend, except in jest, to lay any stress upon fabulous deities, or superstitious practices of human invention. But I did not chuse to omit it, because it appears to me a thing peculiarly insisted on in the holy Scriptures, which contain nothing unnecessary. It is also very much the object of the resentment of infidels.* At the same time, many pretended Christians have, by design or inadvertence, spoken too much the language of infidels on this subject, or on subjects nearly related to it.

How much stress the Scriptures lay upon the knowledge of the true God, nay, how pernicious and destructive all false religions are, it were easy to shew at great length; but a few hints will suffice, as it is not a point controverted so much as neglected and forgotten. The very first commandment of the moral law is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the second, which forbids uninstituted worship, hath this strong sanction, for I the Lord thy God am a

jealous God, visiting "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."b— Through the whole Old Testament, the idolatry and false worship of the Heathens is represented as highly criminal in them, and an abomination in the sight of God. It is there considered, not as a small part, but as the first and most provoking of their enormities; and in particular, is assigned as the ground of the utter extirpation of the nations of Canaan. In a perfect consistency with which, in the charge brought against them by the apostle Paul, this is the leading part or ground-work of the whole, "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.—And changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."d

The great end also of the separation of the children of Israel, and their being kept from intercourse with other nations, was, that they might be preserved from idolatry. To the worship of the true God their blessings are promised, and against defection from his service to other gods the heaviest curses are denounced. Thus, after an enumeration of the blessings that should attend them if they kept God's commandments, it is said, "And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words that I command thee this day, to the right-hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them." And when they stood before the Lord, to enter into his covenant, it is said, "For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the nations which ye passed by. And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them. Left there should be among you, man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; left there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." The same thing may be seen running through the whole of the prophetic writings. Almost every judgment of God threatened or inflicted, is ascribed to their idolatry as its cause. I only mention one passage,

not for any thing particular in it, but as a sufficient specimen of the whole. It is a message from God by Ezekiel to the children of Israel: "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself, and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."b

In the very same manner, in the New Testament, embracing the gospel of Christ, and continuing stedfast in the faith, is required as absolutely necessary to salvation; "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The importance of holding the truth without mixture, is plainly declared in the following passage: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."d

It had been easy to have given a much larger proof of this from Scripture; but it is unnecessary; for our enemies themselves confess it, nay object it as a ground of reproach. How many invectives have we from infidel writers against the unpeaceable, unsocial spirit of the Jewish first, and afterwards of the Christian religion? And how often are these contrasted with the mild and associating temper of the Heathen worshippers? Among them it implied no absurdity, that different nations should have different gods, and different forms of worship; nay, they often intermixed, compounded, and mutually adopted each others worship. The Athenians, that wise people, were so prone to receive every foreign rite, that they got this character from an ancient writer (whether by way of encomium indeed, or

satire, is at this distance uncertain) that they were hospitable to the gods. According to the sentiments of modern unbelievers, they would deserve much praise for this; but according to the sentiments of an inspired apostle, "professing themselves wise, they became fools."

In this then it is acknowledged, that the gospel of our salvation essentially differs from every human invention; that it constantly represents itself as THE TRUTH, and all things opposite to it, as false, dishonorable to God, and unprofitable to men. This has been the case in every step of its progress, from its first rise in the comparative obscurity of the original promise, through all the preparatory discoveries of succeeding ages, to its complete manifestation in the fulness of time. And though it has been exposed on this account to the virulent reproaches of men of corrupt minds, it is but so much the more credible, and appears to be from the one only, the living, unchangeable, and true God.

It may be proper here to observe, that it is either the same objection assuming a different form, or one very much like it, when it is alledged against the gospel, That it lays too much stress upon mere belief of the truth. To this some have, perhaps by mistaking the true spring of the objection, given a very wrong and dangerous answer. They deny the fact, that the gospel does lay too much, or any stress at all upon bare belief, separate from goodness of life. The danger of this answer does not lie in its being false, but in its being ambiguous, incomplete, and in a great measure improper. It seems to allow, at least not to deny, that there may be sincere belief, while yet it is not attended with its proper fruits. Thus unbelievers, whose real quarrel is with the alledged importance and efficacy of the truth, are hardened in their indifference and disregard to it; whereas they ought to be taught to consider the principles which are productive of real reformation, as more excellent in themselves, as both necessary and effectual for this purpose.

The gospel does indeed lay great stress upon belief of the truth, not without, but as the only way of producing holiness. Many passages

may be cited from the Old Testament, in which going after false gods, and committing other gross crimes, are represented as inseparable branches of the same character; and worshipping and serving the true God, as a summary description of universal obedience. And many passages may be produced from the New Testament, in which the good effects of the truth, and the misery of departing from it, as necessarily implying an unsanctified state, are declared.^b From all this I conclude, that Christ Jesus, the promise of old made unto the fathers, the hope of Israel, the light of the world, and the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, is the only Saviour of sinners, in opposition to all false religions, and every uninstituted rite; as he himself says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

But, 2dly, Christ is the only Saviour, in opposition to the merit of our own obedience to the moral law. I know, some will be ready to suppose, that though false religion and uninstituted rites may have no positive influence in procuring salvation to those who embrace them, yet they may not hinder their acceptance with God by virtue of their own personal merit and obedience. On this subject there are many things which deserve a more particular and distinct consideration than there is room for at present; such as, 1. That all false religion is not merely unprofitable, but highly criminal in the sight of God. Thus the apostle Paul, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." 2. That all who embrace not the truth as it is in Jesus, must neglect the whole duties of the first table of the moral law, and so their obedience be not only greatly, but essentially defective. 3. That the Scriptures give us no ground to believe, that false principles can produce any virtue but what is spurious. But instead of insisting upon these at present, I shall only attempt to shew, that the Scriptures exclude all human merit, and indeed seem to have it as their express purpose, to stain the pride of all human glory; and therefore that no pretence of this kind can possibly be admitted.

And here I shall wholly pass the sacrifices of atonement under the Mosaic dispensation, because they all pointed at the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross; and therefore, in the account given of the end and destination of this last, we may expect the clearest view of the grounds of our acceptance with God. Now, Christ appears in Scripture, "as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world:" as "giving his life" for his people; as "bearing their sins in his own body on the tree." And indeed every expression is used that could well be imagined to signify a propitiatory sacrifice, an atonement for sin, or the punishment of an innocent person in the room and stead of the guilty. If this was necessary for any, it was necessary for all; and as there is not the least intimation given in Scripture of any distinction, or hint, as if there were any persons with regard to whom it was superfluous. Nothing, therefore, can stand more directly opposed to the design of the gospel, than any plea of merit in man: and none do in fact receive it with more disdain, than those who trust in themselves that they are righteous.

But, for our satisfaction on this point, we need only consult the epistle to the Romans, before referred to, as there is no part of the sacred writing where there is a more full and connected account of the foundation of the gospel. There, after proving that all the world are become guilty before God, the apostle says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."^b And again, "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life." Consonant to this is the doctrine of the same apostle elsewhere: Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own

righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."d

I am not insensible, that great pains have been taken, even by some Christians, to evade the force of these passages of Scripture, which exclude the merit of man's obedience from any share in his justification before God. Particularly, the passages from the epistle to the Romans are evaded, by alledging, that the law, and the works of the law, there, mean only the rites of the Mosaic dispensation. This is not a proper time and place for entering fully into that controversy; and therefore I shall only observe, that, besides the correspondence of the above interpretation with all the other parts of Scripture, it may be sufficiently supported by this one consideration, That the apostle, who is speaking both of Jews and Gentiles, expressly states the opposition with respect to our justification between grace and debt, and excludes every thing that might make it of debt: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." And to the same purpose, a little after, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."b Whatever would make our acceptance with God not free, or not of grace, is here excluded. Now, certainly, as there is a much more plausible plea of merit in favor of works of obedience to the moral, than the ceremonial law; the first are at least as much excluded as the last by the apostle's reasoning.

Thus I have endeavored both to explain and confirm the assertion in the text, That there is no salvation in any other but in Christ. There is, however, one question upon it which I would willingly pass over in silence, but that the omission of it might, to some intelligent hearers, weaken the conclusion, and make them reckon the subject incompletely handled. The question is, Whether an objective revelation and explicit discovery of Christ, and what he hath wrought, is necessary to salvation? or if his undertaking may not be

the ground of acceptance for many who never heard of his name? In support of the last of these it is said, That many of the ancient patriarchs and prophets were far from having distinct views of the person, character, and work of Christ; and if (as all suppose) his undertaking was available for their acceptance, why not of others also? On such a question, no doubt, modesty and caution is highly commendable, and perhaps it were wise in some respects to suspend the determination altogether. But there are cases in which it comes necessarily to be considered: for instance, I do not see how it can be avoided, in speaking of the importance or necessity of propagating the gospel among the nations that know not God.

We may therefore observe, that the only just foundation of our hope in God, either for ourselves or others, especially as sinners, is his promise. The first of these ought to be precisely commensurate to the last. In so far as it is defective, or falls short of this measure, we are chargeable with unbelief; and in so far as it exceeds, with presumption. Now, to whomsoever the true God is revealed in any measure, as merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; however obscurely he points out the meritorious cause of pardon, if they believe his word and accept of his mercy, they shall be saved; as we are told, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." As to any others, if they are in absolute ignorance of the true God, we must say, that there doth not appear, from Scripture, any ground on which to affirm, that the efficacy of Christ's death extends to them: on the contrary, we are expressly told, that they have "no hope." We find indeed in scripture, that the display of divine perfection in the works of creation, and the conduct of Providence, is represented as rendering the heathens inexcusable in their contempt and neglect of God: "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so

that they are "without excuse." Should any desire from these passages to infer, that if any of them made a just and dutiful use of these natural notices of God, he would not frustrate their search, but would lead them to the saving knowledge of himself, I have nothing to object against the general position; but I am afraid it will be difficult to make any other legitimate use of this concession than the apostle has made already, that they are without excuse" in their estrangement from God. One thing more we are authorised from Scripture to say, that their guilt is in proportion to their means of knowledge; that they continue in their natural state, and are not chargeable with the sin of rejecting the gospel which they never heard: "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law."b

I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was, To make a few reflections on this scheme; and shew, that it is not only most self-consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts of scripture, as well as to the visible state of the world; and therefore that those who, in reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any measure, do thereby betray the cause which they profess to support.

We have many proofs of the ingenuity and art of persons under the power of prejudice, in evading the force, or wresting the meaning of particular texts of scripture; and therefore it must serve much for the confirmation of any doctrine, that it is not only supported by express passages, but agreeable to the strain and spirit of the whole. That this is the case with the doctrine in question, I might shew at great length: at present I content myself with the few following reflections. 1st, There is nothing more frequently or more undeniably found in scripture, than a celebration of the rich mercy and free grace of God in Christ Jesus, in such language as will scarce accord with any other plan than that which I have above endeavored to explain and support. It has been a remark frequently made, of the justice of which every serious peruser of the sacred writings will be sensible, that the inspired penmen seem, as it were, to be raised and elevated

above their ordinary pitch when they are on this theme, and that both in the Old and New Testament. Wherever there is a striking passage in the poetic, or prophetic writings, containing sentiments of the most rapturous joy, or most ardent gratitude, there we may be sure is a prophecy of Christ. See the Psalmist David often thus distinguishing himself, particularly in the following passage: "His name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; and all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen."

The apostle Paul also, not only when expressly handling the subject, but even when he accidentally meets with it in the illustration of another argument, seems to fire at the thought, and either expatiates upon it with a profusion of eloquence and energy of expression; or collects as it were, his whole force, and surprises us more, by dispatching it at one single masterly stroke.

Now, I would ask, Why so many encomiums on the mercy and grace of God in pardoning sinners through Christ, if his undertaking had not been absolutely necessary for their recovery? Whence could arise so deep an obligation to gratitude, if our state had not been absolutely deplorable, or if relief could have been obtained from any other quarter? There must surely be a great impropriety in the Scripture-language on this subject, when used by some persons agreeably to their other sentiments. And indeed their being very sparing of this language, avoiding it as much as possible, and dwelling with most pleasure on different themes, is a tacit confession and acknowledgment of this truth.

But, besides the mercy of God to the world in general in sending his Son to redeem us who were sold under sin, we find in scripture many strong declarations of the infinite mercy of God in sending the tidings of salvation to those who were ignorant of them before. This appears from several of the passages formerly cited, and many more

that might be added. I only mention one of the apostle Paul, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." Now, what is meant by this? Were these Gentiles in a way of salvation before? and what benefit did they reap from this intelligence? If it be said, that they were comparatively in a more advantageous situation than before; this when strictly examined, will be found to draw after it all the consequences so disagreeable to the pride of man, for which the other supposition is rejected. Or rather, when their comparative advantages are carried so far as to give any thing like a consistent meaning to the above and other passages of Scripture, it will amount entirely to the same thing. For I hope no Christian will assert, that any person in the world, who hath the exercise of reason, is under a Natural, but only a Moral impossibility, of coming to the knowledge, and doing the will of God. If the first were the case, it would take away all sin; but the last is only such an obstinate disinclination, as is still consistent with guilt and blame.

Another reflection we may make on this subject, That according to the constant tenor of the holy Scripture, not only an offer of mercy for Christ's sake must be made to the sinner, but a change must be wrought on his heart and temper so great, as to be termed a New Creation, and a Second Birth. The first of these is an act of the divine government, the last is a work of divine power. Now, I would beg leave to ask, How and where is this to be expected? It cannot surely proceed from the influence of fabulous deities, or be the effect of idolatrous rites. It is not the work of man, and therefore only of the Spirit of Christ. Should any think fit to presume, that the sanctifying influences of the holy Ghost are bestowed universally, though unknown to the receivers; this again annihilates all the superior advantages of Christians; and, on the very best possible supposition, is an assertion thrown out at random, and altogether destitute of support from the oracles of truth.

A third observation I would make, That this scheme alone makes the foundation of the gospel sufficient to bear the superstructure. Nothing else can sufficiently account for the cost and expence, if I may speak so, that have been laid out in the redemption of man. It is very evident, that both the prophets in the Old Testament, and the apostles in the New, are at great pains to give us a view of the glory and dignity of the PERSON of CHRIST. With what magnificent titles is he adorned? What glorious attributes are ascribed to him? And what mighty works are said to be done by him? All these conspire to teach us, that he is truly and properly God, God over all, blessed for ever. On the other hand, How much is his humiliation and abasement insisted on; the reproach and contempt of his life, the pain and ignominy of his death? And the infinite value of his sufferings, arising from these two united considerations? Nothing can more plainly shew the guilt and misery of man, than that so great a person should be employed in rescuing him, so infinite a price paid for his ransom. If such a propitiation was necessary for the heirs of glory, how hopeless must be the state of those who have no claim to, or interest in, or dependence upon it?

The last observation I am to make at present, is, That the scheme above laid down, is also most agreeable to the visible state of the world, and furnishes the plain and the only sufficient answer to the old objection against the Christian revelation, the want of universality. This assertion to some will appear surprising, as it seems to have been on purpose to avoid or answer this objection, that all the other opinions have been formed. However, they still leave the objection in all its force; nay, it is often supported and strengthened by the reasonings upon them. But, on the principles above laid down, it is capable of the following plain and easy solution. It is of the infinite mercy and free grace of God, that he did not leave all mankind to perish in a state of sin and misery. Where then lies the difficulty in believing, that some only, and not all, are saved, or are furnished with the means of salvation? If all are justly liable to wrath, upon which the whole gospel is built, mercy to a part can never be improbable, or unworthy of God, on account of the ruin

in the rest: so that the objection can only take its rise from doubt or disbelief of that first and fundamental truth.

If a prince had a number of traitors in his power, whose treason was of the most aggravated and inexcusable kind, and we should be informed that he had granted a free pardon to some, and left the rest to suffer the just punishment of their crime; would it be the least objection against his clemency, that it extended only to a select number of the offenders? or would it be any just impeachment of his management, or render the intelligence incredible, supposing the prince to be wise, as well as gracious? The case is precisely the same with God. If it be but granted, that it is Mercy extended to those who escape, this absolutely destroys the force of any objection that can be drawn from the number or circumstances of those that perish.

There is in this respect a beautiful and instructive analogy between the course of divine Providence, and the methods of divine grace; and much in both must be resolved into the wisdom and sovereignty of God. There is an immense variety in the distribution both of natural advantages and spiritual blessings; and it is vain for us to expect that we should be able to assign the whole, or indeed almost any, of the grounds either of the one or the other. But if neither fort is merited, if both are the effects of free undeserved bounty, this cuts off all cause of complaint; and as to the difference which we observe in fact, particularly with regard to the last, we must be content to say, with the apostle Paul, "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

From these observations it will plainly appear, that departing from the principles above laid down, is a very great injury to the cause of truth, and strengthens that of infidelity. If they are sounded upon the word of God, as I hope has been sufficiently proved, then no good can possibly flow from softening or disguising them, in order to lessen their opposition to the pride and prejudices of corrupt minds.

Has such conduct in fact lessened the number of infidels, or reconciled them to the doctrine of Christ? On the contrary, have they not become more numerous, and more bold in their opposition to the gospel, in proportion to the attempts that have been and are made to suit it to their taste? Nay, have they not made use of innumerable passages from Christian writers in support of their own cause? For in all such cases, as Christians speak merely the language of natural religion, or magnify the present powers of the human mind, in order to rear up a self-righteous scheme, they are considered by infidels, and justly, not as defending the gospel with success, but as yielding up the great point in debate, and coming over to their own party.

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject. And, in the

1st place, From what hath been said, you may see the real, the unspeakable moment of propagating Christian knowledge. It is indeed, so far as it is cordially embraced, turning men "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." These words have a deep and interesting meaning, if understood as above, but not otherwise. Let us only suppose those who deny or call in question the absolute necessity of salvation through Christ, employed as missionaries in converting the Heathens: how cold, how ambiguous and inconclusive the arguments with which they would endeavor to press the change! But the view of it given above, must in the strongest manner dispose every serious person to support such a design, and powerfully animate to diligence those who are employed in carrying it into execution.

It is allowed by all, that doing good, and communicating happiness, is the most excellent character; that promoting the interest of our brethren of mankind, is a natural fruit and expression of our love to God, and an imitation of the divine benignity. But what comparison is there between any acts of beneficence that regard only the present life and the welfare of the body, and those that affect the everlasting

interest of an immortal spirit? As far as God's redeeming grace is superior to his providential care, so far must our sincere and successful endeavors to promote the salvation of the soul, excel any relief or help we can give to the wants of the body.

The last of these purposes, however, is often celebrated by infidels, in opposition to the other, which they delight in treating with derision and scorn. But as nothing can be more evident than its comparative excellence, supposing its reality; so there is not the least contrariety between the two designs: so far from it, that they are strongly connected together, and are always best promoted in conjunction. There may be indeed single instances of persons, from ostentation or other false motives, parting with their goods to feed the poor, who have no true love to God or their brethren. But in general, it is certain, that those who have "their treasure in heaven; who love not the world, nor the things of the world;" (which, however hard a saying it may appear, is the real character of every Christian) will more easily communicate of what they possess to those who stand in need. True religion always enlarges the heart, and strengthens the social tie. Every believer must view his poor brethren in several endearing lights, as children of the same heavenly Father, as under the same original guilt, dependent on the same Saviour, and preparing for the same judgment; whereas wicked men, however various their characters, do habitually, by luxury and self-indulgence of some kind or other, feed their pride, increase their wants, and inflame their appetites. This not only gives them a narrow turn of mind, but often wastes their substance; and so necessarily obstructs their liberality, by taking away both the inclination and ability to bestow.

And as those who have a just concern for the everlasting interest of others, will be most disposed to relieve their present distresses; so the bounty of such will always be best directed, and followed with the happiest effects. They never separate the two great ends, of making men happy in this world, and heirs of eternal life; and will therefore have it as their chief care, to promote industry and sobriety in all

whom they take upon them to supply. It is too often seen, that what is dignified with the finest names, and represented as the effect of generosity, humanity, and compassion, is wholly without merit in the giver, pernicious and hurtful to the receiver. How many dissolute livers are not covetous, only because they are under the dominion of a contrary passion? In the mean time, what they bestow, is either entirely thrown away by an indiscriminate profusion; or, as is more commonly the case, it is worse than thrown away, being confined to the most worthless of all wretches, who are their assistants or companions in their crimes. In opposition to this, a real Christian, supremely governed by the love of God, will direct every action to his glory; and while compassion, strengthened by a sense of duty, excites him to deal his bread to the hungry, he will have a still superior solicitude to preserve them from sin. Instead of an injudicious supply of fuel to their lust, which is easy to a slothful, and gratifying to a carnal mind, he will endeavor to fit them, for heaven, by suitable instruction; and rescue them from want and idleness in this world, by lawful industry.

These two great purposes have been jointly promoted by the society in Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge. They have been promoted with a most laudable zeal and diligence, and with a success fully equal to the means the society are possessed or furnished with for carrying them on. The promoting of true religion, loyalty, and industry, in the highlands of Scotland, was the first object of their care: and the importance of encouraging it has been represented in the strongest light on many former occasions of this sort, and is well known. But there is another part of their design, to spread the knowledge of Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, among the unenlightened Heathen nations. On this, the subject of my discourse leads me to speak a little more particularly.

Of the importance of such a design every one who believes the gospel must be sensible. But, except the very restricted efforts of the society, little or nothing has ever been attempted by the British nation. And is not God, in his righteous Providence towards us at present,

manifestly and severely punishing us for this neglect? Are we not engaged in war with a potent and formidable neighbor, in which the supreme Disposer of all events hath visibly written disappointment on every one of our attempts? Did not this war take its rise from the disputed limits of our territories in America? And are not our colonies in that part of the world exposed to the most cruel and merciless depredations? Are not families, which ought to be quiet and peaceable habitations, frequently alarmed in the silence of the night with the cry of war; and the tenderest relations often butchered in each other's presence, and that by a people of a strange language, while the weak mother and helpless infant can only lift a supplicating eye, but cannot ask for mercy? Who then are the instruments of this cruelty? Must we not answer, Those very Indians, a great part of whose territory we possess, and whom, with a contempt equally impolitic and unchristian, we suffer to continue in ignorance of the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent?

Such a particular interpretation of the language of Providence may be thought bold; but there are many circumstances which, in a manner, constrain us to confess its propriety. We have been a nation early and long favored with the light of divine truth, and are therefore bound to communicate it to others. That distant country was a refuge to many of our pious forefathers, when flying from the rage of ecclesiastic tyranny; and the territory either taken from, or ceded to us by these people, has been the great source of wealth and power to this nation. But what seems chiefly to warrant this application is, that the care taken by our enemies to convert the Indians, is the chief, if not the single cause of their superior interest among that people. Their free, independent manner of living, makes the British temper, character, and customs, in all other respects more agreeable to them. But being once converted, not to the Christian faith, but to the Romish superstition, they are inviolably attached to the French interest. And that politic, but fraudulent nation, are able to cover and excuse their own treacherous designs, by the ungovernable and savage barbarity of their Indian allies.

Can there be therefore a more noble, a more important, or more necessary exercise of Christian charity, than enabling the society to carry on their useful and salutary schemes, especially to extend their missions to the Indian tribes? Who that knows the value of immortal souls, can refuse to contribute his share in promoting this excellent design? Who that fears the just judgment and displeasure of God, can refuse to take this step, amongst others, evidently necessary for averting his threatened vengeance? And who that loves his Redeemer's name, but must desire that it should be adored from the rising to the setting sun? The boldness and activity of sinners in spreading every species of corruption, should excite an emulation in believers not to be behind hand in the service of a much better master. Have we not seen much profane zeal discovered in support of the most pernicious and criminal amusements, which consume time, enervate the body, and pollute the mind? And shall there not be a like concern to promote knowledge and holiness in the uncivilized parts of our own country, and to carry the glad tidings of the gospel of peace to those who now sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death? Are there not many to whom the name of a Saviour is precious, "even as ointment poured forth;" who burn with desire, that the riches of divine grace, which can never be exhausted, may be more largely diffused? And will not all such cheerfully and liberally contribute to extend the bounds of their Redeemer's kingdom, in the prospect of that blessed time, when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea? Or of that still more glorious period, when every vessel of mercy, from the east, west, north and south, shall be gathered together, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father?

I shall now conclude my discourse, by preaching this Saviour to all who hear me, and intreating you, in the most earnest manner, to believe in Jesus Christ; "for there is no salvation in any other." This is far from being unnecessary or improper, even in an audience of professing Christians. Wherever there is a national profession of the gospel, there are always many who, though they retain the name of Christians, are strangers to real faith in Christ, or union with God

through him; nay, who in their hearts are enemies to the truth in its simplicity and purity. It is in vain to attempt, by reasoning, to bring men to an acknowledgment of the truth of the Christian doctrine in speculation, unless we also bring them to such a personal conviction of their guilt and wretchedness, as will make them receive the information of Christ's character and work, as glad tidings to their own souls. No other converts receive any benefit themselves by the change; nor are they of any service to Christ and his cause, except so far as they are over-ruled by the sovereign providence of that God who only can "bring good out of evil."

Wherefore, my beloved hearers, be persuaded, from the word of God, which you profess to believe, from the state of the world, which you may see, and of your own hearts, which you may feel, that you are by nature wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. You are so far from having such a conformity to the pure and perfect law of God, in your thoughts, words, and actions, and the principles from which they ought to flow, as can entitle you to his favor, that the imaginations of your hearts are only evil from your youth, and that continually. Whatever imaginary schemes of a virtuous character you may rest or glory in, you are wholly unable to stand the trial of God's impartial judgment. Oh! how hard is it to convince men of sin, even while the earth groans under their guilt? Would but those who are most apt to boast of the dignity of their nature, and the perfection of their virtue, make an exact register of all the thoughts that arise in their minds; there remains still as much of the law of God written upon their hearts, as would judge them out of their own mouths. Instead of being able to bear that such a record should be exposed to public view, they could not even endure themselves to peruse it: for self-flattery is their ruling character, but self-abhorrence would be the effect of this discovery. Ought you not therefore to be ready to acknowledge, that you are altogether as an unclean thing, and unable to stand before God if he enter into judgment? But whether you acknowledge it or not, I bear from God himself this message to you all, that whatever may be your character, formed upon worldly maxims, and animated by ambitious and worldly views, if you are

not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, if you are not clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness, you must for ever perish.

But behold, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. There is a fulness of merit in his obedience and death to procure your pardon. There is no sin of so deep a dye, or so infectious a stain, but his blood is sufficient to wash it out. This is no new doctrine, or modern discovery, to gratify a curious mind. Perhaps you have heard such things so often, that you nauseate and disdain the repetition. But they are the words of eternal life, on which your souls' salvation absolutely depends; and therefore, though this call should come but once more to be rejected, it is yet again within your offer; and as "an ambassador from Christ, as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled unto God." You have heard the danger of all who are without Christ; but I beseech you remember the aggravated guilt, and the superior danger of those who continue obstinate under the gospel. All the mercy that is shown to sinners in the offer, shall inflame the charge against them in the great day, if they are sound impenitent. Mercy and justice are never separated in any part of the gospel plan. They illustrate each other in the contrivance, they shine together on the cross, and they shall be jointly manifest in the day of judgment. Shall not the blood of Christ, which is so powerful in its influence for taking away the guilt of those who trust in it, greatly add to the guilt and danger of those who despise it? "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings," and all of every rank; "be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

SERMON XXII

THE TRIAL OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH BY ITS MORAL INFLUENCE

Preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Air, October 9th, 1759.

Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them. - MATTHEW
7:20

EVERY one who hath any acquaintance with the writings of infidels, must know that there is no topic on which they insist at greater length, or with more plausibility, than the innumerable sects and parties into which the Christian world is divided. With what apparent triumph do they enlarge, on the contradictory tenets, which different persons profess to found upon the same scriptures, their violent opposition one to another, and the great difficulty, or rather impossibility of discovering truth, among so many, who pretend each to have the entire and exclusive possession of it.

Having gone thus far, it is easy and natural to proceed one step farther, and affirm, that the great plurality of every denomination, do not embrace religion in general, or the tenets of their own sect in particular, from rational or personal conviction, but from a blind imitation of others, or an attachment to one or a few distinguished leaders, whose authority is stronger than all other evidence whatever. Thus is religion, at once, supposed true, and yet destroyed; that is to say, it is at one stroke, as it were, annihilated, in almost all who profess it, their opinions, whatever they are in themselves, being no more than implicit faith and party prejudice in those who embrace them.

The same visible state of the world, which gives occasion of triumph to the enemies of religion, gives often, no small uneasiness and anxiety to its friends, particularly to the best and most dispassionate of every party. Serious and conscientious persons, when they reflect upon the divisions that prevail, when they are witnesses to the contention and mutual accusation of different parties, are ready to be overwhelmed with melancholy upon the prospect, as well as involved in doubt and perplexity, as to what course they themselves should hold. It is not uncommon to find persons of every rank, in this situation, not only those of better education, who are able to take an extensive view of the state of things, in this and in preceding ages; but also those of less knowledge and comprehension, when any violent debates happen to fall within the sphere of their own observation.

These reasons have induced me to make choice of the passage now read as the subject of discourse at this time. It contains the rule to which our Saviour appeals in his controversy with the Pharisees, and by which he, once and again, desires that their pretensions may be judged. I apprehend from the context, that it is equally applicable to their characters and their principles, their integrity before God in their offices of teachers of others, and the soundness of their doctrine as to its effects upon those who should receive it. These two things are, indeed, in a great measure connected together, or rather they are mutually involved in one another, though it is possible, and, in some few cases, profitable, to make a distinction between them.

What is further proposed, through the assistance of divine grace, in the prosecution of this subject, is;

I. To show, that the rule here given by our Saviour is the best that could have been given, and that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error.

II. That this is in fact the rule by which all good men, and, indeed, mankind in general, so far as they are sincere, do judge, of religious

principles and pretensions.

III. To conclude with some reflections on the subject for the benefit both of ministers and people.

In the first place then it is proposed to show, That the rule here given by our Saviour is the best that could have been given, and that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error. To lay a foundation for this, it will be necessary to begin by settling, in as precise a manner as possible, the meaning of the rule, and to what cases it can be justly applied. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," saith our Saviour.—That is to say, when any person assumes the character of a divine teacher, and proposes any thing so your belief, as from God, see whether its fruits be really suitable to its pretensions: particularly you are to lay down this as a principle, that, as he is holy in his nature, every thing that proceeds from him must be holy in its tendency, and produce holiness as its fruit. In proportion as you see this effect in him who teaches it, and those who embrace it, so receive it as true, or reject it as false.

By laying down the rule in these terms, I do not mean to deny, that, when a revelation is first proposed as from God, or when the credit of such revelation in general is examined, miracles are a distinct and conclusive proof of a divine commission. I am persuaded that nothing is more vague and indeterminate, and at the same time, a more manifest inverting the natural order of things, than to say with some, We must judge of the truth of a miracle by the nature of the doctrine in support of which it is wrought; and, if this last is worthy of God, we may then admit the honorary testimony of the mighty work in its behalf.—They do not attend to the great ignorance of man in all spiritual and divine things without revelation, and to the boldness of human pride, who speak in this manner. I would rather include this as one of the proper fruits of a divine commission to teach any new doctrine, that signs be given of a superior power accompanying the prophet. Thus we see the Jews made this demand of our Saviour, "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see and

believe thee? What dost thou work?" It is true, in some instances, when, after many miracles, they persisted in asking new signs of their own devising, he condemns their obstinacy and refuses to gratify it. Notwithstanding this, we find him often appealing to his works as an attestation of the truth of his mission: thus he says, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very work's sake."^b And elsewhere, "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen, and hated both me and my Father." Agreeably to this, we find Nicodemus drawing the conclusion, "Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou dost, except God be with him."^d

There is no doubt, however, that this must be inseparably joined with a purity of character, and sanctity of purpose, When these are wanting, it gives the justest ground of suspicion, leads to the strictest examination of miraculous pretensions, and will certainly end in the discovery of such as are false. For this is the very excellence of the rule laid down by our Saviour, that, though reason may be very unfit to pass an independent judgment upon truth and error, conscience may, with little danger of mistake, reject what is evil, and yield its approbation to what is good.

But what I have chiefly in view is, that supposing the truth of the gospel in general, particular opinions and practices must be tried in this manner. As the gospel is, allowed on all hands to be a doctrine according to godliness, when differences arise, and each opposite side pretends to have the letter of the law in its favor, the great rule of decision is, which doth most immediately and most certainly, promote piety and holiness in all manner of conversation. In this way every doctrinal opinion, every form of government, and every rite and practice in worship, may be brought to the test, and tried by its fruits.

As opinions, so characters, must be tried in the same manner. The truth of this, though deserving particular mention, is included in, or is but a part and branch of the other. To pass a judgment on particular characters is of very small moment, or rather, a peremptory decision of this kind is both unnecessary and improper, unless when it is of weight in a cause. It is only prophets and teachers that fall to be singly, or personally tried, because they are supposed to exhibit, in their own practice, an example of the force and influence of their principles. If on them they have no effect that is good, there is not the least pretence for insisting that others should embrace them.

Nothing farther seems necessary by way of explication of this rule, save to observe from the context, that fair and plausible pretences, either of opinions or characters, must be examined with particular care, as being most ready to deceive; and the trial must be more by facts than by reasoning, as is implied in the very language used in the text, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

The excellency of this rule may be comprehended under the two following particulars, 1st, Its certainty. 2dly, Its perspicuity.

The first of these will admit of little dispute. As God is infinitely holy in his own nature, every discovery that he has made to any of his creatures, must carry this impression upon it, and have a tendency to promote holiness in them. And, as this is manifestly the design of the sacred oracles, and that system of divine truth which they contain, every thing by way of opinion, or practice, that pretends to derive its authority from them, may lawfully be tried by this rule, Will it make us more holy than before?

It is of moment here to observe, that this rule hath a deep and solid foundation. It proceeds upon the supposition, that all natural are inferior to moral qualities; that even the noblest intellectual abilities are only so far valuable, as they are subservient to moral perfection; or in other words, that truth is in order to goodness. It is not (as has

been often said) in his Almighty power, his infinite wisdom, or the immensity of his being, that the glory of God chiefly consists, but in his immaculate holiness and spotless purity. Each part of the divine character, indeed, derives a lustre from the other. It is the union of greatness and goodness, that makes him truly God. His moral excellence becomes infinite in value and efficacy by residing in an infinite object. But if it were possible to separate his natural perfection from his moral excellence, or could we suppose them joined to malignity of disposition, he would be the proper object (let us speak it with reverence) not of supreme love, but of infinite detestation.

This is more than sufficient to support the order in which things are represented above, and show, that its moral influence is the proper touchstone and trial of religious truth. These doctrines only come from God, which tend to form us after the divine image. Thus far, perhaps, all will allow it to be true; at least the assertion is common. But be pleased to observe, that this necessarily supposes the sure and infallible efficacy of real truth in promoting holiness, and the insufficiency of error and falsehood for this purpose. If these were not both alike certain, the rule would be equivocal and absurd. If men by believing lies could attain to unfeigned goodness and true holiness, then their moral effect could not in the least serve to distinguish between truth and error. It is no less plain that if so absurd a supposition is admitted but for a moment, the value truth is wholly destroyed, and no wise man will employ his time and pains in endeavoring to discover, to communicate, or to defend it.

The other particular comprehended under the excellence of this rule, is its perspicuity; That, it is not only sure and infallible in itself, but capable of an easy application by those who have occasion to use it. Here, if any where, there is room for doubt and disputation. Here, it may be alledged, all the confusion and uncertainty returns, which was before complained of, and for which a remedy was required. Men will still differ in their opinions as to what is true goodness. Besides, they will still debate the sincerity of many pretensions, and

the reality of many appearances; and, as art and hypocrisy will always be used on the one hand, delusion must be the unavoidable consequence on the other.

This, however, is no more than the necessary consequence of human imperfection. It cannot be denied, and it may, without any hesitation, be confessed, that men are liable to err, and that many have erred in the application of this rule. But, who can from thence justly infer, that it is not of sufficient clearness, to direct those who will honestly make use of it, and to lay the error of those who are misled entirely at their own door?

It pleased God to write his law upon the heart of man at first. And the great lines of duty, however obscured by our original apostacy, are still so visible, as to afford an opportunity of judging, what conduct and practice is, or is not agreeable to its dictates. It will be sound from experience, that men are able to determine on this point, with far greater certainty, than on any other subject of religion: that is to say, they can perceive the excellency of the end, when they are in much doubt about the means, in themselves, or separately considered.

Such authority hath natural conscience still in man, that it renders those who, in their own conduct, despise its reproofs, inexcusable in the sight of God. But it is of importance in the present argument to observe, that every one is able to pass a far surer judgment on the moral character of another, than his own. The pollution of the heart brings a corrupt bias on the judgment, in a man's own case, and makes him palliate and defend those sins, to which he is strongly inclined, or of which he hath been already guilty: whereas in determining the characters of others, this bias is less sensibly felt. This is perhaps the true and only reason why any deference is paid to virtue as praise-worthy, by those who are enemies to it in their hearts, or any public honor and respect given to the service of God in the world, where so great a majority are evidently in the interests of another master.

One singular excellence of this rule is, its being the most universally intelligible. It is level to the capacity of men of all degrees of understanding. There is little difference, if any, in this respect, between the wise and the unwise, the learned and the ignorant. Perhaps this circumstance alone ought to give it, in justice, the preference, to every other test of religious truth. Religion is the concern of all alike, and therefore, what relates to it should be open to all. It was the character, and the glory of the gospel, at its first publication, that it was preached to the poor. And by this it is still distinguished, not only from many or most false religions, but especially from those philosophical speculations, in which the enemies of all religion place their chief strength. When we peruse a system or theory of moral virtue, the principles of which are very refined, or the reasoning upon it abstracted and above the comprehension of the vulgar, it may be ingenious, but it carries in itself a demonstration, that, because it is unfit, it could never be intended for general use.

Here then, lies the great advantage of the rule laid down by our Saviour. The bulk of mankind, those of lower rank, and even those among them of weakest or least cultivated understanding, are able to judge of the effects of principles, or to see the beauty of an excellent character, when they are not able to examine a doctrine, or apprehend the reasoning upon which it is sounded.—The dictates of conscience are often immediate and clear, when the deductions of reason are long and involved. To make intricate researches in theory, requires great natural abilities, which are the portion of very few: but to judge of a visible character requires only an impartial sense of right and wrong. Of this the plain man is as susceptible as the most acute by nature, or the most enlightened by education. In God Almighty, infinite knowledge and infinite holiness are united, and, we have reason to think, that in their perfection they are inseparable. But we know, by experience, that they do not bear an exact proportion to one another in inferior natures, at least, among sinful creatures. There may be, and there often is great virtue and goodness in a mean capacity, and great depravity in persons of eminent ability.

From these considerations it is plain, that this rule of trying a doctrine by its effects, as a tree by its fruits, may be applied by the meanest as well as the greatest, and with as little danger of mistake. Perhaps it might have been safely affirmed with less danger of mistake. Great intellectual abilities, and great natural advantages of every kind, are very ready to swell the mind with pride and self-conceit, than which no disposition is in itself more odious in the sight of God, or more unfavorable to the discovery of truth. This seems to be confirmed by experience, and it is plainly the view given us of our present state in the holy Scriptures. Thus the apostle Paul says, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." For the very same thing we find our blessed Redeemer adoring the depth and sovereignty of divine Providence, in the following terms, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."b

Mistakes, however, after all there will be, and some differences even among the best; but, from this very circumstance, I derive another great excellence of the above rule laid down, that, it is not only the test of truth for a man's self, but the measure of forbearance with regard to others. By carefully examining their fruits, men may not only be directed what to embrace, and what capital and fundamental errors wholly to reject, but also in what particulars to exercise mutual forbearance, and, though smaller differences still subsist, to receive one another to the glory of God. If in any person or persons, of whatever party, you perceive the spirit of true and undefiled religion, they are accepted of God, and should not be condemned by you. This ought not, in justice, to induce you to approve or embrace

every one of their principles, or every part of their practice, of which perhaps you have seen or felt the bad tendency; yet should it engage you to love them with unfeigned affection as sincere, though, in some measure, mistaken servants of our common Lord.

I hope it appears from the preceding observations, that this rule, of trying every principle or profession by its fruits, is the best that could have been given. It is certain and infallible in itself, and we are less liable to mistake in the use of it, than of any other. There seems, indeed, to be an exact analogy between this rule in religious matters, and reason in our common and civil concerns. Reason is the best guide and director of human life. There is certainly an essential difference between wisdom and folly, in the nature of things. They are also sensibly opposite to one another in their extremes. Innumerable actions, however, there are, or modes of action, of a more doubtful and disputable nature, as to the wisdom or weakness of which, hardly any two men would be entirely of the same opinion. Let the enemy of religion make the application, who denies its reality, because all good men are not of the same mind; or because there are different parties and professions, who oppose one another in some opinions and practices. He acts just the same part, as he, who seeing the differences of judgment among men, upon almost every subject that falls under their deliberation, should renounce the use of reason, or deny that there is in nature, any such thing.

We now proceed to the second thing proposed, to show, That the rule above explained and defended, is that by which, in fact, all serious persons, and indeed, mankind in general, so far as they are sincere, do judge of religious principles and pretensions.

By serious persons, I understand all those who are truly religious, in opposition to those who have only a nominal and customary profession. If we would speak with precision, or reason in a just and conclusive manner, we must keep this distinction constantly in view. Nothing does more harm to any cause, than a treacherous friend, or bosom enemy: and nothing does more hurt to the interest of religion,

than its being loaded with a great number, who, for many obvious reasons, assume the form, while they are strangers to the power of it. The fallacy of almost all the reasonings of infidels lies here. They consider religion as answerable for all the hypocrisy of those who profess it, and all the wickedness of those who have not renounced the profession; as if in order to its being true, it must be impossible for any to counterfeit it. If that were the case, no thanks would be due to impartial enquiry. All color of objection being taken away, the assent would not be yielded, but compelled. This, doubtless, the presumptuous wisdom of man ordinarily dictates, but according to the superior wisdom of God "offences must come" and "heresies also, that they that are approved may be made manifest."

Supposing, therefore, the important distinction between real and nominal Christians, ail of the first character, of every age, and of every party, are so far from being under the influence of implicit faith, that they try the truth by its fruits, and adhere to it for its effects. There is something more in the case of every good man, than barely a rational persuasion of the truth of religion in general, from the arguments adduced to support it. The truths of the gospel give him such a view of himself, and his own state, as experience shews him to be true. In the gospel he finds a remedy proposed for his guilt and misery, which, besides all the other evidences of its divine original, is exactly suited to his felt condition. Add to both these, that he immediately experiences its happy effect, not only in laying the best foundation for his peace, but in operating a thorough change in his heart and life. Thus hath every real Christian, an inward and experimental proof of the truth of the gospel, not contrary, but superior to, stronger and more stable than any speculative reasoning. In this sense we are to understand the words of the apostle John, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." This is common to all real believers of whatever denomination, who not only are perfectly agreed in the essentials of religion, but much more agreed in every thing material, than they themselves either clearly apprehend, or are willing to confess.

So far every good man must be acquitted from the charge of implicit faith; we may adopt concerning all such the words of our Saviour to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."—It is no less plain, that in every thing that is supposed to make a part of, or that hath any connexion with religion, they may judge by the same rule. In all these modes of opinion in lesser matters, in all these circumstances which serve to distinguish one sect from another, though they may determine in different, nay, in opposite ways, yet they all proceed upon the same general rule, viz. the influence which such disputed point has, as a means, upon the substance and end of all religion. This appears from the reasoning on each side, in all religious disputes. This principle as common to both is often expressly mentioned, and always manifestly implied that those doctrines, or that way of expressing doctrines, and those practices, which are in fact most conducive to holiness, are, and for that very reason must be, most agreeable to the will of God.

But what I have chiefly in view is, to show, that this appears from the very fact usually brought to prove that the religion of almost all mankind is no better than implicit faith. The fact I mean is, that the bulk of mankind is greatly swayed in the choice of opinion, by the authority and example of others. This, indeed, does not hold so generally as is commonly supposed. We have seen above, that it doth not hold, with regard to the substance of religion, in any good man; for in this he will call no man master on earth. But even when it does hold, it is, perhaps, not so blameable as many are apt to imagine. Let it be admitted then, that, in many instances, it is the authority and example of men, more than any other reason that determines the judgment. Let it be admitted, that this is the case with the bulk of mankind, and even in some measure with the best. I must be allowed to ask, what is it that procures these persons such authority? What is it that first begins, establishes, or perpetuates their influence? Nothing else, but the real or apparent sanctity of their character. In vain will a profligate, or one manifestly destitute of personal worth, set himself at the head of a party, or attempt to draw away disciples

after him. It is the supposed piety and probity of the person, that gives weight to his example, and force to his precepts. This weighs more with the sober serious part of mankind, and, indeed, with mankind in general, than the greatest intellectual abilities, and otherwise most admired talents. Whoever has acquired a great reputation for piety and sincerity, will, with little art, or rather no art at all, nay, without so much as intending it, bring his principles and practice into repute. At the same time, one of a contrary character, with all the powers of eloquence, and every other outward advantage, shall fail in attempting to persuade.

Now what is this, but that mankind proceed mainly in their judgment, upon the very rule which I have endeavored to show is the best they could have chosen. They try principles by their effects, as a tree by its fruits. Wherever they see the best man, they conclude that he must be actuated by the most excellent as well as the most powerful principles. The multitude, or lower class of mankind, are usually the scorn of half-thinkers and superficial reasoners, for this attachment to persons. But were a comparison faithfully made between the several motives of choice in different classes, there would be no great cause of triumph. When we consider how unfit the plurality of mankind are to judge in an intricate debate, darkened, perhaps, by the art and subtilty of those who handle it, we shall find they are little, if at all, to blame. In one view, no doubt, they may be said to be actuated by implicit faith, but in truth, and at bottom, they are following the wisest and most salutary of all moral maxims.

A survey of the history, either of religion in general, or of the Christian religion in particular, would set this matter in the clearest light. But little of this kind can come within the limits of a single discourse. I shall not therefore stay to mention the retired manner of life, and pretended sanctity of the inventors of the heathen idolatry, though it may be applied to this subject; and would serve to shew the universal sense, and general expectation of mankind. There is a saying of an eminent and violent enemy of the Christian faith, "That gravity is of the very essence of imposture." This is nothing else but a

perverted view, and malicious representation of the general truth, that apparent sanctity is necessary to establish any sacred authority. But is there any thing more unquestionable, or that hath been more frequently observed, than that the victory of truth over error, in the first ages of Christianity, was much more owing to the shining piety of the primitive Christians in general, together with the patience and constancy of the martyrs, than to any other means. Reason may convince the understanding, but example seizes and keeps possession of the heart. It was the eminent piety and usefulness of the saints in former ages, which attracted such veneration and love from the multitude, as soon proceeded to a criminal excess. Not content with imitating the amiable example of those whom they held in such esteem, by a natural association they affixed a sanctity to relics, and this produced a variety of superstitious practices. I cannot also help being of opinion, that it was the severe and mortified lives of many of the retired devotees in the Romish church, that kept that corrupt body in credit for some ages longer than it could have otherwise continued.

On the other hand, who does not know, that the most formidable and successful attacks made by the reformers on that mother of abominations, were their exposing the corrupt and dissolute lives of her priests and members. This they were at no small pains to do, both in a grave and in an ironical strain. As the covetousness and ambition of many, and the licentious debauchery of others of the clergy, first brought the doctrines into suspicion, so those examples when held up to light, made a far greater number of converts, than any absurdities in belief, how gross and palpable soever. The truth is, we find all parties greedily lay hold of this weapon whenever it is presented to them, and use it with great confidence against their adversaries; and in so doing they discover a conviction, that principles are never so powerfully supported as by the good, nor so effectually disparaged as by the bad characters of those who profess them.

If we leave the history-of former ages, and examine the state of the present, the same truth will still be the result of our enquiry, and appear with increasing evidence. Different parties and denominations prevail in different places: and wherever any party or denomination greatly prevails, the effect may easily be traced up to its cause; and will appear, by no very distant tradition, to have been owing to the eminent piety of some one or more of that profession in a former period, or, which is much the same, to the comparatively odious and vicious characters of those who opposed them.

It is no just objection to the account here given, that we find instances in which principles seem to give a sanction to characters, instead of receiving support from them. There are, no doubt, cases in which a man's being known to embrace certain principles, will be alone sufficient to make him odious, however blameless, or even praise-worthy his conduct be, in every other respect. At the same time, perhaps, the failings of another shall be either wholly pardoned, or greatly extenuated, if he espouse, but especially, if he is active in vindicating the principles which are held sacred. But this is no more than the natural and necessary consequence of any set of principles being once firmly established. They acquire their credit at first, in the way I have already mentioned; but when that credit is high, it will bring a suspicion upon every thing that opposes it, however specious and promising in outward appearance. There is nothing surprising here, nor, indeed, any thing but what is perfectly natural; for, as one or a few instances commonly do not, so in reason they ought not to shake the reputation of truths, which have been established by long experience of their worth and efficacy. Neither must it be forgotten, that when examples seem to stand in opposition one to another, and to lead to different conclusions, it is not from one or two that a judgment can be passed, but from many, and these compared and examined with great diligence and care.

I conclude the illustration of this head with remarking, that the principle above laid down will explain, in a clear and satisfying manner, two appearances in the moral world, which seem directly to

contradict one another. By what happens sometimes in religion, we shall be apt to conclude, that there is in human nature a proneness to change, or a love of novelty purely on its own account. Accordingly we find this laid to the charge of mankind by several authors. And it cannot be denied, that some men, or sects, often introduce new practices which acquire great reputation, and almost universal acceptance. By other examples, however, we are taught to ascribe to human nature a strong attachment to old opinions, and hatred of all innovation. What is remarkable is, that both these take place chiefly in little circumstances, and things of small moment; new inventions being sometimes gone into with a zeal, and old customs adhered to with an obstinacy, which the intrinsic value of the things contended for does not seem to merit on either side. To ascribe this to the different dispositions of individuals will not be a satisfactory solution, for we see sometimes examples of both in the same persons. But, by searching a little deeper, we shall unravel this difficulty, and discover, that though the love of novelty, or a veneration for antiquity, may be sometimes the immediate principle of action, there is another ultimate principle which is the cause of both, and in different circumstances, produces either the one or the other. This principle is no other than that admiration of real or supposed worth, which has been illustrated above. Whoever hath acquired a great reputation for piety and holiness, may easily introduce any indifferent practice, though not common before, especially if it be considered as an evidence or expression of his piety. On this supposition, his differing from, or doing more than others, will be taken notice of to his praise. But he may much more easily introduce a new, than depart from an old custom. The reason is plain; for ancient customs having been established on the ground already assigned, men are usually very tenacious of them, and it requires so small degree of credit and character, either to change or to abolish them.

We now proceed to make some practical improvement of what has been said.

In the first place, from what has been said upon this subject, we may derive one of the plainest and most satisfying proofs of the truth of the gospel. A proof, level to the meanest capacity, and therefore proper to preserve ordinary Christians from being shaken by the bold and insolent attacks now made on religion by some of the lowest rank. A proof, at the same time, not only deserving the attention of the most intelligent, but which of all others, is certainly the most decisive. Let us try it by its fruits. Let us compare the temper and character of real Christians, with those of infidels, and see which of them best merits the approbation of an honest and impartial judge. Let us take in every circumstance that will contribute to make the comparison just and fair, and see what will be the result. I say this, because I can by no means allow, that great multitudes though born in a country where Christianity is professed, ought to be considered as Christians, when they are open and violent enemies to the gospel in all its parts. They ought rather to be thrown into the scale of infidelity. But, since most of them have formed no fixed principles at all, because they have never thought upon the subject, we shall leave them entirely out of the question.

Is then the character and practice of infidels in general, once to be compared with that of such Christians as believe upon personal conviction? However much the natural sense of right and wrong may be obscured and perverted in some, I should think there are very few who will not manifestly perceive to whom the preference is due. In which of the two do you find the most regular and fervent piety towards God? Here, perhaps, it will be said, This is what no man expects to find in unbelievers, it is no part of their plan, and therefore ought not to be included in the comparison. But as the general sense of mankind does not require it, so I can never suffer that our duty to God should be erased out of the moral law. Besides, the general pretence now, is not atheism but theism. The question is therefore altogether pertinent; and persons of this character are self-condemned, who, by their total neglect of all religious worship, are as much chargeable with impiety as infidelity.—In which of the two is to be found the greatest integrity and uprightness in their commerce

between man and man, the most unfeigned good-will, and most active beneficence to others? Is it the unbeliever or the Christian, who clothes the naked and deals his bread to the hungry? Ask the many and noble ancient structures raised for the relief of the diseased and the poor, to whom they owe their establishment and support?—Which of these two classes of men are most remarkable for self-government? How often is the unexperienced youth initiated in debauchery of all kinds, by these very friends of mankind, who charitably declaim against priestcraft and delusion, and happily eradicate the prejudices of education, by treating religion and all religious persons with derision and scorn? With what fatal success has the infidel often seduced the unwary virgin unto the destructive paths of lust, by first loosening the obligation of religion, and then justifying the indulgence of every natural desire? We shall carry the comparison no further in this place; but I must beg of every one who hath had the happiness to be acquainted with an eminently pious, humble, active, useful Christian, to say, whether he can admit it as possible, under the administration of a wise and good God, that such a person is governed by a fable invented by designing villains, while the infidel alone is in possession of the truth, which is pure in its nature, and must be proved by its fruits.

In the 2d place, since not only religion in general, but every particular doctrine of religion ought to be tried by its fruits, let neither ministers nor people, ever lose view of this great rule in the doctrines which they teach on the one hand, or embrace on the other. Let us also particularly remember, that no credit is to be given to any high professions or bold pretences, but as they are confirmed by the fact. I observe here, with much pleasure, what advantage the fundamental Scripture doctrines, which have been long the glory and happiness of this church, will derive from a fair and full enquiry into their influence and effects. The doctrines I mean are, the lost state of man by nature; salvation by the free grace of God; justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; and sanctification be the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit. These were the doctrines of the reformation, when their excellence was put beyond all doubt or

question, by their powerful and valuable effects. Many adversaries indeed, soon rose up to contradict or to corrupt them; and it is much to be lamented that they are, at present, by many, so boldly and so violently opposed in this once happy island. But we may venture to affirm, that when the doctrine of the cross retained its purity and simplicity then was true religion, including every moral virtue, seen to grow from it as its fruit. On the other hand when and wherever it has been run down, and a pretended moral doctrine has been introduced, to the prejudice and subversion of the grace of God, it hath been always followed by a deluge of profaneness and immorality in practice. It is easy and common to disguise the truth by misrepresentation, or to vilify it by opprobrious titles, It is easy to pretend a warm zeal for the great doctrines of morality, and frequently to repeat, in a pulpit, the necessity of holiness in general; but all impartial persons ought, and the world in general will judge, more by works than by words. Let us suppose, for example, the old objection revived against a minister who preaches the doctrine of grace, that it loosens the obligations to holiness of life. The objection is, of all others, the most specious: yet, if that minister discharges his duty with zeal and diligence, watches over his people's souls, reproof, rebuking, exhorting with all long suffering and doctrine; is strict and holy in his own conversation, abhorring and flying from the society of the ungodly; and if the effect of his ministry be to turn many sinners from the error of their ways, and to make an intelligent, serious, regular people, the accusation will not be received: and who will say that it ought? On the other hand, is any minister more covetous of the fleece, than diligent for the welfare of the flock; cold and heartless in his sacred work, but loud and noisy in promiscuous and foolish conversation; careless or partial in the exercise of discipline; covering or palliating the sins of the great, because they may promote him; making friends and companions of profane persons; though this man's zeal should burn like a flame against Antinomianism, and though his own unvaried strain should be the necessity of holiness, I would never take him to be any of its real friends.

Let us not, my brethern, deceive ourselves, or attempt to deceive others by plausible pretences. Let us all be zealous for good works; not the name, but the thing. Let us not expect to promote them by a little cold reasoning, or affected flowery declamation; but by the simplicity of the gospel; by the doctrine of the cross, which will not only tell men that they ought to be holy, but effectually bring them to that happy state. The leading principle of true holiness, according to the gospel, is a deep and grateful sense of redeeming love. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

In the 3d place, from what has been said on this subject you may see, in a very strong light, how necessary it is, that ministers should be, not only really but visibly and eminently holy; and with how much care they are bound to avoid every appearance of evil. There are some ministers who strongly plead for liberty and freedom, and loudly complain of the malice, uncharitableness, and censoriousness of the world. They seem as if they desired, nay, which is still more foolish, expected, that no part of their conduct should be attended to, or any inference drawn from it with respect to their character. This will never be the case till they are invisible. It appears, from what hath been said in the preceding discourse, that it is the right and the duty of every man to try a minister by his fruits. Ignorance indeed, may sometimes be guilty of mistakes to our prejudice, and malice or envy may go too far; yet this is only what we ought to lay our account with, and it should excite us, not to a contempt of the judgment of others, but to greater strictness and circumspection, that "they may be ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ."

It is very hurtful in this as in many other cases, when a man views things only on one side. Some are apt to impute so much to the malice and uncharitableness of the world, that they seldom or never think themselves truly guilty of any offence or miscarriage. I am persuaded many are in a manner blinded to the errors of their own

conduct, by this very circumstance. Or, if they cannot but be sensible that they have been guilty of something that was wrong, when the fault is aggravated by report, they seem to think that this atones for any thing really blameworthy, and so are hardened both against confession and repentance. To speak without prejudice, it is more than probable, that we are as much chargeable with unguarded and offensive conduct, on the one hand, as the world with precipitate or partial judgment on the other. It hath been sometimes observed, that the multitude or common people are but poor judges of a man's ability or learning, but they are very good judges of his life. There is a great deal of truth in this observation; and to support it I add, that even a hypocritical pretence is extremely hard to maintain, and so often betrays itself by little circumstances, that there are very few whose real character is not better understood by the world than by themselves. The chief exception I know to this is the case of violent party disputes. The injustice done to characters on each side there, is very great. If you take a man's character from one to whom he stands in party opposition, you must conceive him not a man but a monster. But (setting this aside, which does not fall within the compass of our present subject) in general, it is surely much more becoming, and it is infinitely more safe for us to suspect ourselves, than to complain of hard measure from the world. Let us therefore, by doubling our diligence in every personal and ministerial duty, endeavor to "make our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."

In the 4th place I must now take the liberty, in fidelity to the trust committed to me, to be a little more particular in the application of this subject, and to enquire, whether ministers are not, in a good measure, chargeable with the low state to which religion is at present reduced. May I not say without offence, that an eminent, holy, diligent, and successful gospel ministry was once the glory and blessing of this part of the united kingdom! But how are we since fallen asleep! "How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! That there is a difference is plain; and that this difference does not lie in inferior abilities or a less proportion of

learning, is equally certain. I am sensible, that this is a part of my subject which would require to be touched with a very tender and delicate hand, and that, perhaps, I run as great a hazard to inflame and exasperate the sore, as to bring any effectual cure. This is, indeed, itself, one strong symptom of our disease, that we cannot endure plain dealing; and there is not a single circumstance, in which there is a greater difference between this and the preceding age. What in former times would have been reckoned (to speak in their language) no more than plainness and ministerial freedom, would now be called the most slanderous invective and unpardonable abuse. Instead, therefore, of taking upon me to say who are chiefly to be blamed as the criminal causes of it, I shall only affirm and lament the melancholy effect, that we have in many places of this church a despised, forsaken, useless ministry; that many of the people have gone from mountain to mountain, and forgotten their resting place, while a still greater number is fast asleep in ignorance, security, and sloth. Where is that union, that mutual esteem and affection, which once subsisted between ministers and their people. It must be acknowledged, that their influence and authority is now in a great measure lost, and therefore I may safely conclude that their usefulness is gone. That the fault is all on one side, is neither a modest nor a probable supposition. Should we throw the blame off ourselves, what a terrible load must we thereby lay upon others? we must suppose and say, that under a blameness ministry, under the best and purest of instruction, one part of the nation is sunk in brutality and sloth, and the other rent in pieces by division, and religion lost in the fury of contending parties.

We may say so, my brethren, and some do say what amounts to the same thing, but it is not credible. I do therefore, in the most earnest manner beseech every minister in this audience, seriously to think, how far he hath given just cause to his people to despise his person, or desert his ministrations. Let us not so insist upon the ignorance, prejudices, and weakness of the giddy multitude, as if a failure on our part was impossible. We may be sometimes blamed in the wrong place; but we have, perhaps, as much respect in general, as we really

deserve. Do not think it is sufficient that you are free from gross crimes, such as blasphemy, riot, and unclean lust. Blessed be God, nothing of this kind would yet be suffered among us without censure. But there are many other things, which, either separately or together, render a minister justly contemptible, on which no law, either civil or ecclesiastic can lay hold. If one set apart to the service of Christ in the gospel, manifestly shows his duty to be a burden, and does no more work than is barely sufficient to screen him from, censure; if he reckons it a piece of improvement how seldom or how short he can preach, and makes his boast how many omissions he has brought a patient and an injured people to endure without complaint; while at the same time, he cannot speak with temper of those who are willing to do more than himself; however impossible it may be to ascertain his faults by a libel, he justly merits the detestation of every faithful minister, and every real Christian.

The things here in view, though they are easily seen are difficult to describe; and, therefore, I shall not attempt to be more particular. But I cannot forbear warning you against, and pointing out the evil of two pieces of dishonesty, which may possibly be sound united so gravity and decency in other respects. One of them is common in our neighbor kingdom, and may possibly have taken place among us, though I cannot affirm it. The other, I am certain, hath many times taken place in the church of Scotland. The first is a minister's subscribing articles of doctrine, which he does not believe. This is so direct a violation of sincerity, that it is astonishing to think, how men can set their minds at ease in the prospect, or keep them in peace after the deliberate commission of it. The very excuses and evasions, that are offered in defence of it, are a disgrace to reason as well as a scandal to religion. What success can be expected from that man's ministry, who begins it with an act of such complicated guilt. How can he take upon him to reprove others for sin, or to train them up in virtue and true goodness, while himself is chargeable with direct, premeditated, and perpetual perjury. I know nothing so nearly resembling it, as those cases in trade, in which men make false entries, and at once screen and aggravate their fraud, by swearing, or

causing others to swear contrary to truth. This is justly reputed scandalous even in the world, and yet I know no circumstance in which they differ, that does not tend to show it to be less criminal than the other. We are not yet so much hardened in this sin as many in our neighbor church, for I have never found any among us so bold as to profess and defend it. But, if no such thing is at all admitted among us, Why is there so heavy a suspicion of it? Why do so many complain, that the great and operative doctrines of the gospel are withdrawn, and an unsubstantial theory of virtue substituted in their place? Or why are not such complaints put to silence, since it may be so easily done? Appearances are certainly such as will warrant me in mentioning it upon this occasion: and I have particularly chosen to introduce it upon this subject, that I may attack it not as an error, but as a fraud; not as a mistake in judgment, but an instance of gross dishonesty and insincerity of heart. Supposing, therefore, that there may possibly be truth in the charge against some of us, I must beg every minister, but especially those young persons who have an eye to that sacred office to remember, that God will not be mocked, though the world may be deceived. In his sight, no gravity of deportment, no pretence to freedom of enquiry, a thing excellent in itself, no regular exercise of the right of private judgment, will warrant or excuse such a lie for gain, as solemnly to subscribe what they do not believe.

The other particular I proposed to mention is the solemn attestation of men's characters, not only in general, but for particular qualities, without any satisfying knowledge whether the thing affirmed is true or false. This hath been often done in the church of Scotland, not by particular persons, with whom we might renounce relation, but by consent of many, gravely and deliberately in constituted courts. Can we avoid making the following obvious but melancholy reflection. How great is the blindness of men to those sins which are introduced by degrees and countenanced by prevailing fashion? Should we be told by an historian of credit, that, in one of the dark and corrupt ages of popery, it was common for a body of ministers, when desired, to give a signed attestation to particular persons, that they were strict

observers of the sabbath, and worshipped God regularly in their families, while the persons attesting knew nothing of the matter, and, in fact, with regard to some of them, it was absolutely false—Would there be a dissenting voice in affirming, that such men must have been lost to all sense of integrity, and utterly unworthy of regard? What shall we say, if the same thing is done among us every day, and defended by no better argument than the judgment of charity, which believeth all things? Charity teaches us to believe no ill of another without satisfying evidence, and forbids us to spread it, although it be true, without apparent necessity. But will charity either justify or excuse us, in solemnly affirming a positive fact, the existence of which is uncertain in itself, and to us unknown. I do not take upon me to say that all are bad men who are guilty, by act or consent, of this practice, because I do not know how far the plea of ignorance or mistake may go; but this may be safely said that they do in a public capacity, what, if they were to do in a private capacity between man and man, would render them contemptible, or infamous, or both.

These two particulars have often brought reproach upon the church of Scotland, to which it is very difficult to make a proper reply. Would to God the occasion given for it were wholly taken away. In the mean time, every one who has a just regard to the glory of God, or the success of his own work, will endeavour to maintain such a uniformity of character, as will bear that examination, to which it ought in justice, and must of necessity be exposed.

In the last place, I must beg leave to speak a few words to the people in general, on the subject of this discourse. You may learn, my brethren, from the preceding discourse, by what rule you ought to judge, in all religious controversies, where a determination is necessary. Try all principles by their effects, and every person's pretences by his conduct. Examine, as far as you have proper evidence, who have real and vital religion most at heart, and what means do effectually promote it. Believe not every profession, but see which is most consistent in all its parts. Have patience, in difficult cases, till the tree have time to bring its fruits to maturity. Time will

often write a clear and legible character, on what was very dark and dubious at first.

It is probable some will be ready to say, there is no small doubtfulness in this rule itself. There may be sound good men of many different parties, how then shall we judge between them? I answer, wherever there is true religion, these persons are to be considered as the servants of God, and his grace in them is to be confessed without reluctance, and adored with thankfulness. There will, nevertheless, be still sufficient means to distinguish between one profession and another, which hath the greatest influence in making men truly good. There may be, here and there, a good man under very great disadvantages. This may serve to keep us from a bigotted narrowness of mind, and uncharitable condemnation of others. But it will never occasion, in any prudent person, a departure from these principles, and that dispensation of ordinances, which he sees to be best for building him up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation. The truth is, one great design of this discourse was to teach men to distinguish between the upright and the worthless of all sects. Turn your zeal from parties to persons. Do not reproach or oppose men merely because they are of this or the other persuasion. But wherever there is a wicked or a worldly man in the office of a minister, avoid the wolf in sheep's clothing for your own sake, and, if possible, drag off his disguise, that others may not be his prey. What doth it signify what party a man is of, if the foundations are destroyed, and truth and holiness, these inseparable companions, are trampled under foot? When shall the time come, when the sincere lovers of Christ, of every denomination, shall join together in opposition to his open enemies and treacherous friends? There is a wonderful, though a natural union, among all worldly men, against the spirit and power of true religion wherever it appears. I am sorry to add, that this is one of the instances in which the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. Many will not meet together on earth for the worship of God, who shall have but one temple at last, where all from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, shall

meet, and join in their Creator's and Redeemer's praise. The terms of admission in to, and of exclusion from this happy dwelling, are recorded in the following remarkable terms, with which I shall conclude this discourse, as indeed they are the sum of all that has been said in it, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

SERMON XXIII

The CHARGE of SEDITION and FACTION against good MEN, especially faithful MINISTERS, considered and accounted for

Preached in the Abbey Church of Paisley, on Thursday, September 7th, 1758, at the Ordination of Mr. ARCHIBALD DAVIDSON, as one of the Ministers of that Church. To which is subjoined, the charge to the Minister, and the Exhortation to the People. Published at the desire of those who heard it.

These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also. - ACTS 17:6. last clause

MY BRETHREN,

YOU have had, of late, frequent opportunities of hearing discourses on the ministerial character and office. These subjects, indeed, have,

on occasions of this and a similar nature, been so often and so well handled, that it is hard to say any thing on them, which shall not be either bare repetition, or an alteration very much for the worse. I have therefore made choice at this time of a subject somewhat different, but the usefulness of which, both to ministers and people may be easily discerned.

A great part of the sacred volume consists of history. And, as the knowledge of past events, and the history of mankind in general, is an improving study; so there is no object of study more pleasant or more profitable, than that extensive view of the great plan of Providence which is exhibited to us in the word of God. There we have access to observe the power, the wisdom, and the grace of the various revelations of the divine will, given in successive ages, their correspondence one to another, and how well each is suited to the season, and other circumstances of its discovery. Above all, it is useful and delightful to observe, the perfect union and harmony of the whole, and the several striking and distinguishing characters that are to be sound on all the works of the one, eternal and unchangeable God.

This uniformity is in nothing more remarkable, than in the sufferings of good men, and their causes. True religion being the same in substance in every age, we may expect to find a very strong likeness in all the real servants of God, however distant the periods in which they make their appearance. A conformity of state also may be expected, as well as a similarity of character. They have the same end in view, they tread in the same path, and therefore must meet with resistance from the same enemies. There was from the beginning, and there will be to the end of the world, a strife and conflict between the righteous and the wicked, between "the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent." And, in particular, it is natural to suppose, that slander and calumny will be always one of the weapons used by the enemies of the truth. We have no reason then to be surprised, that every good man should have occasion to say with the Psalmist

David, and with a greater than he, the Son of David, "They laid to my charge things that I knew not."

This was the case with the apostle Paul and his companion, in the passage of history of which my text is a part, But the nature of the accusation here brought against them seems to be singular, and to merit particular attention. They were the servants and the ministers of the Prince of peace. Their office was to preach and publish the gospel of peace. Their doctrine was full of meekness and love. They discovered the love of God to men; and, after the example of their master, they charged men to love one another. They were mean in their outward appearance, and neither possessed, nor claimed any earthly dominion. In one word, they had nothing about them that one would think could give jealousy to the civil power, that could seem formidable or dangerous to any character or class of men. Yet here they are charged as seditious, as disturbers to the public peace, as enemies to the government. "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.—These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, That there is another king, one Jesus." What sort of an accusation is this? not only false but improbable. Does not the arch-enemy, the accuser of the brethren, seem to have failed in his usual skill? Is there the least prospect of success in so groundless a charge?

But what shall we say, if, upon an accurate examination it be found, that the same charge hath been brought against the servants of God in every age? That none hath been advanced with greater boldness, and none with greater success? Nay, perhaps, that it is the single standing charge, from which their enemies have never departed since the beginning of the world, and which, of all others, hath been most readily and most universally believed. In other instances, the reproaches thrown upon the children of God have been opposite, and mutually destructive of each other. Christ himself, when his zeal in his Father's business made him forget to eat bread, was said to be beside himself, and mad. At other times he was called a cunning deceiver and master of the curious arts. But in this, his enemies, and

those of his people, have never varied. And their success has been equal to their malice. They crucified him as an enemy to Cæsar, with the title of usurpation written over him; and they have compelled all his disciples after him, to bear his cross, and to groan under the weight of the same unjust and slanderous charge.

There are few subjects more worthy of the serious attention of those who firmly believe the word of God. None which will afford greater occasion to adore the mysterious depth of divine Providence, or furnish more instructive lessons to such as desire to hold on with steadiness in the paths of true religion. Above all, this subject may be useful to ministers of the gospel. It will contribute to ascertain the character which they ought to bear; to direct them in their duty; to prepare them for, and fortify them against the trials which it is impossible they can avoid.

In discoursing further upon this subject it is proposed, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. By a short historical deduction, chiefly from the holy Scriptures, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.

II. To enquire, and endeavor to point out, what it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

In the last place, To make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I return to the first of these, viz.

I. By a short historical deduction, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.—It would not be difficult to point out something of this spirit prevailing in the world, from the life of almost every good man, whose name stands upon record,

however short and general the account be, that is given of many of them in Scripture. But, as much of what might properly enough fall under this head, will be necessary in the illustration of the second; to prevent confusion and repetition, I shall content myself with some leading instances, in very different ages, from the earliest to the latest times.

The first I shall mention is, a passage as extraordinary in its nature, and as singular in its circumstances, as any that history affords. It is the meeting of Ahab and Elijah, in the time of a great famine in the land of Israel. Ahab, that profane prince, had by his apostacy and idolatry, brought down the judgment of a righteous God, both on his kingdom and on his house. We are told, "That he did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him." He had persecuted the worshippers of the true God with unrelenting violence; and, as it was natural to expect, he hated with uncommon rancor, and distinguished by uncommon severity, all the prophets who continued stedfast in the cause of truth. As many of them as he could lay hold of, he had put to death. He had hunted for Elijah, not only through all the kingdom of Israel, but through the neighboring nations, as we find related by Obadiah his principal servant, "As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there: he took an oath of the kingdom and nation that they sound thee not." After all this severity on his part, when Elijah, by the command of God went out to meet him, see the form of his salutation; "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" To this the prophet makes the following strong and just reply, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, have troubled Israel, in that thou hast forsaken the commandments of the Lord; and thou hast followed Baalim."

Another instance similar to the former may be sound in Jehoshaphat and Ahab's consultation before going out to battle. "And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides,

that we may enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man (Micaiah the son of Imlah) by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Here, you see, Micaiah was the object of hatred and aversion, because he denounced the judgment of God against the king's wickedness. That vengeance which he himself not only merited, but solicited by his crimes, was attributed to malice in the prophet.

See an instance of a general accusation of this kind against all the worshippers of the true God, by Haman in the book of Esther. "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them."

The prophet Jeremiah met with the same treatment at different times. Neither prince, nor priests, nor prophets, were able to bear without resentment, the threatenings which he denounced in the name of God. "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets, and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant, and all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.—Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy so die, for he hath prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears."c We find him afterwards expressly accused of treachery on the same account. "And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans."

The prophet Amos is another instance, precisely parallel to the last. Because of his fidelity to God, he was invidiously represented as an enemy to the king. "Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words."

Our blessed Lord and Saviour fell under the same accusation. However plain and artless his carriage, he is called a deceiver of the people. "There was much murmuring among the people concerning him, for some said, he is a good man: others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people." His enemies endeavored to embroil him with the civil government by this insidious question, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?" And that which brought him at last to the cross was the same pretended crime. "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar."b

I shall close this view of the Scripture history, with the passage of which my text is a part. The whole crime of the apostle Paul, and his companion, was preaching the doctrine of the cross of Christ, his great and darling theme. We are told, he "opened" and "alleged, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead." Then the Jews, to whom this doctrine always was a stumbling-block, were "moved with envy," and endeavored to inflame the resentment of the idolatrous multitude: they took for their associates the most wicked and profligate, Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort:" They "set all the city in an uproar:" And as, no doubt, the friends of Paul and Silas would endeavor to protect: them from the injurious assault, their enemies very gravely charge them as the authors of the confusion, both there and elsewhere. "They that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also."

Having produced these instances from the holy Scriptures, which are liable to no exception, I shall say but little on the subsequent periods

of the church. Only in general, the same spirit will be found to have prevailed in every age. Whoever will take the pains to look into the history of the church before the reformation, cannot fail to observe, that when any one, either among the clergy or laity, was bold enough to reprove the errors in doctrine, or the ambition, luxury, and worldly lives of his cotemporaries, he was immediately branded as a factious and disorderly person, and often severely punished as an enemy to the peace of the church.

That this was the case with the first reformers, both at home and abroad, is too well known to need any proof. And we have had still more recent examples of it in both parts of the united kingdom. The noble struggle which many in England made, about an hundred years ago, for their liberties sacred and civil, still bears the name of the grand rebellion. And it is remarkable, that, however just a title they had to stand up for their rights as men and Christians, yet their doing so at that time, was in a great measure owing to the fury and violence of their enemies, who were, in every respect, the aggressors. A very judicious historian says on this subject, "That which, upon the whole, was the great cause of the parliament's strength and the king's ruin, was, that the debauched rabble through the land, took all that were called Puritans for their enemies; so that if a man did but pray in his family, or were but heard repeat a sermon, or sing a psalm, they presently cried out, Rebels, roundheads, and all their money and goods that were portable, proved guilty, how innocent soever they were themselves. This it was that filled the armies and garrisons of the parliament with sober pious men. Thousands had no mind to meddle with the wars, but greatly desired to live peaceably at home, when the rage of soldiers and drunkards would not suffer them."

And in Scotland, after the restoration, though there was no struggle for civil liberty, all who chose to obey God rather than man, either in the substance or circumstances of religious duties, were charged with treason, and suffered as rebels. They were expelled from the church; yet censured as schismatics. They were harrassed, fined and imprisoned, when living in peace, without any fault but "concerning

the law of their God;" and yet complained of as troublesome. They were banished, excommunicated, and denied the common benefits of life; and yet, when the extreme rigor of their oppressors compelled them to take up arms in self-defence, they were condemned in form of law for resisting that government which had denied them its protection.

I forbear to add any more particular examples; but from the deduction above given, it will plainly appear, that worldly men have been always disposed, first to oppress the children of God, and then to complain of injury from them, that by slander they might vindicate their oppression. Their slander too, hath still run in the same strain; troublers of Israel, deceivers of the people, enemies to Cæsar, and turners of the world upside down, have been the opprobrious titles generally given to the most upright and most faithful men, in every age and country.

We proceed now,

II. In the second place, To enquire, what it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

That there must be something of this kind is very evident. So uniform an effect, could not take place without an adequate cause. And, to a serious and attentive observer, I am persuaded it is not difficult to discern. The general cause of this effect is, that, in an equivocal sense, the charge is just. True religion does, indeed, give trouble and uneasiness to wicked men, while they continue such; and it cannot be supposed, but they will deeply resent it. In order to illustrate this a little more fully, I beg your attention to the three following observations.

1. The example of the servants of God, is a continual and sensible reproach, to the contrary conduct of the men of the world. Nothing can preserve peace to any man, but some measure of self-

satisfaction. As a deceived heart turns the wicked aside, so the continuance of self-deceit is necessary to his tasting those pleasures of sin in which his mistaken happiness is placed. To reproach his conduct, therefore, is to disturb his dream, and to wound his peace. And as pride, however finely disguised, has the dominion in every unrenewed heart, how offensive must every species of reproof be, to men of this character? Now, is not the example of every good man, a severe and sensible, though silent, reproof to the wicked? With whatever specious arguments men may sometimes plead for sin, with whatever false pretences they may often excuse and palliate it to their own minds, when it is brought into one view with true religion, it is not able to bear the comparison. The example of good men to the wicked is, like the sun upon a weak eye, distressing and painful. It is excellent in itself, but it is offensive to them. If I may speak so, it flashes light upon the conscience, rouses it from a state of insensible security, points its arrows, and sharpens its sting. What else was it that produced the first act of violence that stands upon record, the murder of Abel by his brother Cain? Of this the apostle John speaks in the following terms, "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore, slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

And, as every worldly man's own conscience is thus made troublesome to him by the example of the children of God: so it tends to set sinners at variance with one another, and exposes the conduct of each to the censure of the rest. Sin, however universally practised, is yet generally shameful. Conscience though bribed, and comparatively blind in a man's own case, is often just and impartial, at least under far less bias, in the case of others. It is in this way, and in this way alone, that the public honor and credit of religion is preserved, amidst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. Must not then, the example of a strict and conscientious person, set in the strongest light the faults of those who act: a contrary part, so often as they happen to fall under observation together. Nay, does it not open the eyes of the world upon many lesser blemishes which would otherways escape its notice? The

degree of shame that attends any practice, is always in proportion to the sense which the bulk of mankind have of the evil of it. And this sense cannot, by any means, be more strengthened, than by an example of what is good; as deformity never appears so shocking as when compared with perfect beauty. Thus, a truly pious man is, by every instance of his visible conduct, exposing to reproach some one or other, and by consequence provoking their resentment.

It is for this reason that men discover such a proneness to disparage every profession of piety superior to their own. How common is it to ascribe every such appearance to weakness or hypocrisy. In the generality of wicked men this is not so properly malice as self-defence. If they should allow the excellence of such a character, it would be condemning themselves out of their own mouths. Their inward reflection, in all probability, is perfectly similar to that of the Pharisees, when Christ asked them, Whether the baptism of John was from heaven, or of men? "They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven, he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?" In the same manner, should any confess the excellence of a conduct opposite to their own, it would be impossible to avoid saying to them, Why do ye then so sin against light?

Every one will see, that this must necessarily hold most strongly in the case of those whose office, or whose work, is of a public nature. They are like a city set on an hill. As their character is most conspicuous, it is, by necessary Consequence, most useful to the good, and most provoking to the wicked. Faithful ministers of Christ, for instance, are the lights of the world, and, by their piety and diligence, are a standing reproach to the world lying in wickedness. But, in a particular manner, they must be the objects of the hatred and resentment of those of their own order, who will not follow their steps. This is an evident consequence of the principle above laid down. As their character suffers most by the comparison, their passions must necessarily be most inflamed. Let a minister of Christ he ever so guarded in his speech, ever so inoffensive in his carriage, ever so distant in reality from injuring others; if he is more frequent

or more affectionate in preaching, if he is more assiduous in the duties of his function, this must naturally excite the resentment of the lazy, slothful part of his profession. This of itself, is injury enough to those who love then, worldly ease, and have more pleasure in the possession of their benefice, than the exercise of their office. Is this surprising? Not in the least. His conduct does indeed molest their quiet: it either forces them to greater diligence, or holds up their real character to light, and exposes them to contempt and scorn.

In order at once to confirm and illustrate this truth, be pleased, my brethren, to observe, that the force and malignity of envy in defaming of characters, is always in proportion to the nearness of the person to whom the character belongs. Distance, either of time or place, greatly abates, if not wholly extinguishes it. Suppose the character of a person drawn, who lived many ages ago, or even at present in a very distant country; suppose him represented as eminent in virtue of every kind, as remarkably diligent, as indefatigably active in doing good; there are few who shew any disposition to call in question the fact, or impute it to sinister motives. But let the same be the apparent character of any man among his cotemporaries, and how many are immediately up in arms against him? How implicitly do they believe, and with what pleasure do they spread every idle calumny to his prejudice? How is his piety immediately converted into hypocrisy, his zeal into faction and ill nature, his fervor and diligence into affectation and love of popularity; and, in a word, every valuable quality into that vice, by which it is most commonly or most artfully counterfeited.

That this difference of judgment is entirely owing to the reason I have assigned, will further appear, if you consider, that so soon as a connexion of the fame nature happens, by any accidental circumstance to be established, the fame invidious resentment immediately takes place against the most distant characters. What inveterate prejudice do infidels generally show, against the characters of the Scripture saints, and those of the fathers of the Christian church, because the establishment of such characters does

necessarily and manifestly infer the overthrow of the cause in which they are embarked. In the mean time, the wife men of the heathen nations are suffered to possess, without contradiction, all the reputation which their countrymen in after-ages have thought fit to bestow upon them. Nay, sometimes to serve a certain purpose, their character is increased and magnified beyond all reasonable bounds. —What pains have been taken by those Christians, who patronize the modern inventions and improvements in theology, to undermine the characters of the most eminent champions of the ancient faith? What would some persons teach us to believe of Athanasius and Augustine in earlier, Calvin, Luther and Melancthon in later times? Not that we have not well attested evidence of their piety and integrity, but that, being of different sentiments from their accusers, the excellence of their character is too good a support to their cause.

2. Another reason why the servants of God are represented as troublesome is, because they will not, and dare not comply with the sinful commandments of men. In matters merely civil, good men are the most regular citizens and the most obedient subjects. But, as they have a Master in heaven, no earthly power can constrain them to deny his name or desert his cause. The reply of Peter and John to the Jewish rulers when they were commanded "Not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus," was in the following terms, "Whether it be right in the fight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." With what invincible constancy and resolution did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? The case of Daniel was perfectly similar, whom even the king's commandment could not restrain from prayer to God.

When good men are unhappily brought into these circumstances, their conduct is an apparent contradiction to authority. How ready are lordly and oppressive tyrants to style it obstinacy and pride? And when are there wanting slavish and submissive flatterers near every inferior tribunal, to aggravate the crime, and to cry, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend?" It is not to be imagined,

indeed, but such as are strangers to true religion, must be greatly provoked at those who will not comply implicitly with their commands. There is a remarkable passage in a letter of Pliny the younger, to the emperor Trajan, which plainly points out the sentiments entertained by many on this subject. He was a man in other matters abundantly humane, and yet hear his own account of his treatment of the Christians when brought to his tribunal. "I asked them if they were Christians; if they confessed, I asked them again threatening punishment. If they persisted, I commanded them to be executed; for I did not at all doubt but, whatever their confession was, their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished."

There is a love of dominion natural to all men, which is under no controul or restraint in those who are void of religion. This must naturally dispose them to carry on their schemes, and to insist on having them universally complied with. It frets and provokes them, therefore, to find any who will not be subservient to their pleasures. A refusal to obey, on a principle of conscience, is expressly setting bounds to their authority, and saying, Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further. How few are able to bear this with patience, the history of the world in every age is one continued proof.

Such refusals also, do always reflect some dishonor upon the measures to which they stand in opposition. Whatever any person refuses to do, he, as far as in him lies, represents as wrong and sinful; and, in some respects, unworthy or unfit to be done. Thus it comes to be considered not only as withdrawing his own allegiance, but as corrupting and seducing others. And no doubt, it tends to draw the attention of the world to the disputed command, and makes some, perhaps, fist and examine what they had before blindly gone into without suspicion.—Hence it naturally follows, that whenever such interference happens between human and divine authority, good men must be considered as disorderly and troublesome; and those of them of all others most troublesome, who with the greatest

constancy adhere to their duty, or who, with the greatest honesty and boldness, resist and oppose corrupt measures.

It is less surprising to find instances of this between heathen and Christian, between the professing servants and open enemies of the true God. But it is astonishing to think, how often the same thing has happened between Christian and Christian, who ought to have been better acquainted with the rights of conscience, the measures of submission, and the duty of forbearance. Not only all the persecutions, but many, if not most, of the schisms and divisions that have fallen out in the Christian church, have arisen from the rigorous impositions of usurped authority. Unjust authority is the very essence of popery. The church of Rome has expressly claimed a power of making laws to bind the conscience, distinct from the laws of God; and severely punishes all who call this authority in question. Nor hath this been confined to them: protestant churches, though their separation is sounded upon the very contrary principle, have yet often in practice acted in the same arbitrary manner. They insist upon obedience to all their appointments, however sinful in the judgment of the subject: and, as a good man will not comply in such cases, how often doth it happen, that, after they have expelled him from their society, stript him of his office, and robbed him of his maintenance, they also cast out his name as evil, loudly charge him as seditious and troublesome, and the author of all that confusion which their own tyranny occasions.

3. One other reason why the servants of God are accused as troublesome, is, because they are, in many instances, obliged, to bear testimony against the sins of others, and openly to reprove them. Reproof is plainly, of all others, the greatest offence and provocation of the proud, and draws down their heaviest resentment: and yet it is often unavoidable. There are some cases in which every Christian without exception, must feel the constraint of this divine law. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him."—Some sins are so flagrant in their nature that, even to witness them with silence, would imply some participation of the guilt. In

such cases it is the glory of the poorest and meanest servant of God, to resent the dishonor that is done to his name, and reprove the most exalted sinner.

But this duty, and the odium arising from it, falls most frequently to the share of the prophets and ministers of God, who have received a commission to speak in his name and to plead his cause. The faithful discharge of their duty, includes in it plainness and boldness in reproving sin of every kind. They must assert and maintain the truth, and point out the errors opposite to it, with all their guilty fruits, and all their dreadful consequences. How offensive this to human pride? It must certainly either convince or provoke, reform or inflame. When righteous Lot says, in the mildest terms, to the lustful Sodomites, "I pray you brethren, do not so wickedly," how fierce is the answer? "And they said, stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge."

How many martyrs to truth have there been since the world began? without mentioning those in the Old Testament, you see John the Baptist lost his life by reproving the incestuous adultery of Herod and Herodias. Our blessed Saviour gives the following account of the hatred of the world to him, and the contrary reception it gave to his temporising brethren, "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." By consulting the history of the gospel you will find, that what gave rise to the conspiracy of the Scribes and Pharisees against him, was his dragging off the mask under which they lay concealed, and discovering the errors of their doctrine, and the licentiousness of their practice. When they "perceived that he spake against them,—they took counsel against him to put him to death;" and accomplished it so soon as they could do it with safety. But there cannot be a better example, or indeed, a more lively and well drawn picture of the effect of plain and just reproof, than in the case of Stephen, when pleading his cause before the Jewish rulers. "Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have

not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the just One; of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers.—When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." It is plainly for this reason that the apostles, in their prayers for assistance, do almost constantly ask, that they may be endued with a proper degree of boldness and resolution, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word."b Many other prayers are to be found in the apostolic writings which run in the same strain.

It is very natural for every one at this distance, to imagine, that he could have been in no danger of making such an obstinate resistance to the truth, or persecuting, with such implacable enmity, those who espoused it. But, my brethren, all worldly men, in every age, have still the same abhorrence of the faithful servants of God; the same impatience of reproof, when it touches themselves. Our Saviour draws their character with great beauty, in speaking to the Pharisees; "Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous; and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." It is very delicately hinted in this last verse, that they were of the same nature, that they grew, as it were, upon the same stock, and therefore it might be expected that they would bring forth the same fruit. I cannot but here mention a remark of a very eminent writer upon this passage; "That all nations partake much of this disposition of the Jews, to honor the dead saints, and persecute the living."b

I have taken notice above, that in every period of the church, the most faithful of the servants and ministers of God, have, in fact, been counted troublesome by corrupt and worldly men. The same passages of history constantly shew, that this has arisen chiefly from their attempts to stem the tide of prevailing vice; from their boldness

and faithfulness in reproofing fashionable crimes. In the twelfth century, Arnulphus, a devout man, and excellent preacher, speaks thus to the clergy: "I know that you seek my life, and will shortly kill me: But why? I speak the truth to you, I reprehend your pride and haughtiness, avarice and luxury: therefore I please you not." And in the fourteenth century, an ancient writer speaks of the court of Rome in the following terms: "For what can you conceive will happen where virtue was long ago extinct and buried? There surely truth is the highest crime, and of itself sufficient to procure the hatred of many. For how can we expect but that should happen, where a true word cannot be spoken without a great reproach, where the worst of men are promoted,—where simplicity is esteemed madness,—where good men are rendered ridiculous, insomuch that now scarce any of them doth appear but to be laughed at. These few things truth itself hath dared to speak, whence you may gather what you are to think of many others, which fear doth force me to conceal." It is unnecessary to cite many passages to this purpose; I shall therefore conclude this head with the following just reflection of the pious, diligent, and catholic Mr. Baxter; "I see there is no help for it, but we must offend wicked men. It is impossible to avoid it, but either by our silence or their patience. Silent we cannot be, because the word of God commands us to speak; and patient they cannot be, because sin has the dominion in their hearts."

We now proceed, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

In the first place, You may learn from what has been said upon this subject, the just and proper answer to an objection against the gospel, much insisted on by its enemies, viz. That it has introduced persecution for conscience sake, with which the world was in a great measure unacquainted before. There are few subjects, on which infidels enlarge with greater pleasure, than the cruel hatred and animosity that has prevailed; the bloody wars that have been carried on; nay, the savage and inhuman massacres that have been perpetrated on a religious account, since the publication of the

gospel. I think this objection is but seldom answered as it might be. It is usually indeed, and justly observed, that whatever may have been done by those professing the gospel, there is no countenance given in it to such a spirit and practice. But the objection is not wholly removed, while infidels are allowed still to contend, as if it served their own cause, that persecution has been its constant attendant and inseparable effect. We ought therefore, to wrest this argument out of their hands, and first to produce this fact as an accomplishment of our Saviour's prediction; "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Having gone thus far, we have reason to contend that the disciples of Christ have always suffered, and never inflicted the injury, though they have often been obliged to bear the blame. The multitude of heathen religions, though not always, yet did generally agree together: and well they might, for they were all from the same author. None of them, however, could agree with the gospel: for this plain reason, that "no lie is of the truth." But from what quarter did the violence proceed? Did not the dreadful persecutions against the Christians, in the three first centuries, proceed from the heathens? Did the Christians commit any other crime against them, than pointing out the sin and danger of their idolatrous worship, and immoral practices? Was not this alone sufficient to raise a cry against them, as turning the world upside down? And in all the subsequent persecutions among professing Christians, was it any thing else than the proud, violent, and worldly spirit of those who made a gain of godliness, oppressing the few real believers of every denomination? There is an antichristian spirit in every church, that shews itself in persecution, in a greater or lesser degree. But there can be nothing more unjust, than to attribute the persecution of Christ's disciples by his enemies and theirs, to the spirit of his religion.

Is it then boldly affirmed by some, that the Christian is the only religion in the world that leads to persecution? I answer, on the contrary, It is the only religion that has suffered persecution from all its numerous enemies; and at the same time, it is the only religion in the world that requires, and points out the obligation, of mutual forbearance, and makes the just and proper division between the things that are Cæsar's, and the things that are God's. That it is often blamed as persecuting others, is a proof and illustration of this truth. For all is of a piece, and the false accusation arises from the source which I have opened up above, and confirmed by examples produced from history. To these I shall now only add one observation, which comes in with peculiar propriety here; That innumerable instances may be given, in which those very persons who were ready to lift the secular arm against good men, have loudly complained of the exercise of discipline, and the censures of the church upon their crimes. These they often style persecution, and always affirm to flow from a persecuting spirit. But as they are often necessary, so even when they are unjustly applied, it is plain from their very nature, that if they be groundless, they must be perfectly harmless.

Thus the state of the world is so far from being an objection against, that it is a proof of the truth of the gospel. True Christians have suffered from every quarter; from within and from without; from open enemies and from false brethren. They have been first persecuted, and then slandered as persecuting others; nay, obliged to bear the odium of that very oppression under which they groaned. Of all this they are fairly fore-warned by their Saviour, who says, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." They are exposed to injurious treatment from many, and may expect to suffer without cause. None however make so cruel a havoc, as those wolves who put on sheep's clothing; and yet, of all their cruelty, the poor suffering sheep must bear the blame.

2. From what hath been said, you may see the guilt and danger of those who falsely accuse the children of God. Perhaps you may be ready wholly to refuse the charge, and to say, Where is the necessity,

where is the propriety of this at present? Have we not all civil and religious liberty? and are not religion and its ministers in esteem and repute? I answer, It is never unnecessary. The fault I complain of is no part of the peculiar degeneracy of this age. It is not confined to any one age, country, or profession, but is common to them all: and we would but deceive ourselves, should we fondly fancy we are exempted from it. Nay, our present state as a church and nation, seems to render such a warning peculiarly seasonable. We have long enjoyed outward peace. In every other country this has introduced a worldly spirit, ambition, luxury, and sloth. And is there no vestige of these characters among us now? Who will pretend it? Are there not some who cannot endure such strictness as is inconsistent with conformity to the gay and fashionable world? Do not all such incline to charge every profession of piety with hypocrisy? Do they not consider every faithful reprove, as an enemy to their peace? Do they not hear with secret pleasure, and spread with apparent triumph, every report, to the prejudice of such troublers of Israel?

This then is the character; and as many of you as conscience charges with the guilt, may see your danger. You may see whose cause you plead, and whose reward you shall share. What inward enmity do you discover against the spirit and power of true religion? You are of the number of those who "Hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." You are of the number of those who say "to the seers, see not, and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, and prophesy deceit." You will not "endure found doctrine," but love and follow only that which will exercise and amuse your imagination and fancy, sooth and gratify your pride and vanity, or make and keep you at peace with yourselves. You are asleep in security, and will avoid every thing that may tend to disturb or interrupt your dangerous repose. And how hurtful is your conduct to others? You blast the characters and lessen the usefulness of the ministers of Christ. You bring an evil report upon the truth, by rendering them odious or contemptible who bear it,—And if we, my brethren, who are ministers of the gospel, imitate this example in any measure, if we

discover a suspicion and jealousy, or an aversion and hatred, at all who are more diligent than ourselves, what dishonor must fall upon our profession, what a hindrance is it to the edification of others, and what guilt do we bring upon our own souls.

3. If this has been the constant lot of all the servants of God, to be accused as seditious and troublesome, let every cautious person beware of being misled by the persecuting cry. I ask any man who is conversant in the world, if he hath not, in many instances, been insensibly taught to form a hateful idea, or to entertain a despicable opinion of many ministers, without the least personal knowledge, the least satisfying evidence or proof. What is the reason? Why, he hath been told, that they are proud, hypocritical, factious, censorious, troublesome men. Well, the thing is possible, no doubt. But, in the mean time, it is far from being certain; and this sort of character industriously propagated, is no evidence of it at all, or rather is a presumption of the contrary. You see, from the instances produced above, that this is a reproach perpetually thrown upon the most upright and faithful of the servants of God; that it may very naturally arise from their fidelity itself; and that it cannot be avoided by those who resist the corrupt measures, who reprove the public vices, or who shame the criminal laziness, and negligence of others. An ignorant, vicious, worthless minister, is envied by no body. He is therefore quite safe from all the poisoned arrows which fly from that quarter. He is rather a soil to many, to set off and illustrate their own comparative excellence. He is therefore often pardoned, pitied, and protected. Whereas a faithful minister, who openly dares to bear witness against the apostacy of others, is traduced and slandered, loaded with imaginary crimes, and often falls a martyr to the sinking cause of truth and righteousness.

4. Since the world is so prone to receive the accusation of faction against the children of God, let them be careful to give no real ground for it. Unjust calumny has sometimes the contrary effect. When men find, that it is impossible to please a capricious world, or wholly to escape slander, they are apt to give up all solicitude upon that head,

and take no farther pains to avoid suspected appearances. This I take to be, precisely, what the Scripture calls being "overcome of evil." But how much better is it "to overcome evil with good?" Let us, as often as possible, confute the accusation by an unblameable carriage; and when we must suffer, let us be careful that we suffer, not as evil doers, but for well doing. For this purpose I would humbly offer to ministers the two following directions, which I esteem of great moment.

(1.) Let all our zeal for the glory of God be conducted not only with steadiness, but with meekness. Let us ever remember, that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Let our language be always strictly guarded, and free from expressions of rage and fury. If we are faithful to our duty, it will sufficiently provoke sinners, we need not add to it by any mixture of human passion. What noble and effectual principles are we furnished with in Scripture, for avoiding every dangerous extreme? Love to God, and love to man, make up the sum of practical religion. These are the immediate fruits of faith, and all the truths of the gospel tend to strengthen and improve them. And as love to God produces indignation against sin, resolution and boldness in opposing it; so, love to man will naturally produce the deepest compassion for the miserable state of every enemy of God, and prevent firmness from degenerating into violence.

(2.) The other direction I would offer upon this subject is, that ministers take care to avoid officiously intermeddling in civil matters. A minister should be separated and set apart for his own work; he should be consecrated to his office. It is little glory to him to be eminently skilled in any other science, except such as may be handmaids to theology, and are by him habitually turned into a divine channel. Ministers giving themselves to worldly employments, have been commonly of bad same; and where there is a sufficient provision made for their maintenance, seems to be an unjust alienation of their time and talents. But it is still more sinful and dangerous, for them to desire or claim the direction of such matters as fall within the province of the civil magistrate. When our blessed

Saviour says, "My kingdom is not of this world," he plainly intimates to his disciples that they have no title to intermeddle with state affairs. Nay, he expressly warns them against a lordly and arbitrary dominion, even in their own proper sphere. "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." I cannot help mentioning here, that this is one of the things, for which our worthy ancestors of the church of Scotland (now despised by many) deserve the highest commendation. It was an invariable principle with them, to be against the civil power and places of kirkmen. And surely, if ministers confine themselves entirely to their own proper duty, they will be much less liable to exception than otherwise. They may then, warrantably use the greatest fidelity in reproving, and the greatest strictness in discipline; and though the wicked slander and oppose them, the good will defend them, and God will support them.

5. In the last place, Since the charge of faction and sedition has been always brought against faithful ministers, let us learn to bear it with patience, and never dissemble the truth, or depart, in any measure, from our duty, in order to avoid it. A person of a generous mind feels a wound in his reputation more deeply, than almost any other injury. We are still apt fondly to flatter ourselves, that as religion is truly amiable in itself, and ought to make no enemies, that therefore we shall have none.—Some are very apt to omit, or slightly to perform, several parts of their duty, through that "fear of man that bringeth a snare." They are unwilling to forego the hope, that by certain prudent compliances they will conciliate and preserve the favor of every man and every party. But the expectation is wholly vain. The experience of many ages hath proved it so. Let us therefore bear with patience the false accusation. It hath been the lot of the best and worthiest men in every age. It was the lot of our blessed master, and shall we refuse to bear his cross? Is it not "enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant that he be as his Lord?" The triumph of sinners is but very short. In a little time all earthly relations shall be

dissolved. Then high and low, magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. He shall "render to every one according to his deeds." There the great and noble shall find no partial favour; there the poor and mean shall not escape observation; and there the lying slanderer shall be put to eternal silence. He shall openly acknowledge every faithful servant, and "bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon day."

SERMON XXIV

PRAYER for NATIONAL PROSPERITY and for the REVIVAL of RELIGION inseparably connected

Preached on Thursday, February 16, 1758, being the day appointed in Scotland for the late Public Fast.

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD: Awake as in the ancient days in the generations of old. Art not thou it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon. ISAIAH, 51:9

MY BRETHREN,

WE are this day called by our sovereign to the duty of solemn fasting and humiliation, and to earnest prayer for the blessing of God on his councils and arms. Religion and humanity conspire in urging us to a hearty compliance, especially while public affairs wear so threatening an aspect. It ought also to awaken the attention, and increase the seriousness of every particular worshipping assembly, that they are

joining with so many others in intreating deliverance from these national calamities, in which all are equally concerned.

We have often, for some years past, professed to humble ourselves in the sight of God, and have done it, alas! with a shameful coldness and indifference, or with an hypocrisy still more criminal. But it is remarkable, that such is the situation of affairs at present, as hath given an alarm even to some of the most insensible, and constrained them to consider this duty as now somewhat more than a form. There has been for some time past, such a continuance and increase of public judgments, such a series of abortive projects, and broken disconcerted schemes, as makes the most obstinate and inconsiderate stand and pause, and seriously ask, Is there not a cause?

Our setting apart this day, and applying ourselves to the duty of fasting and prayer, implies a confession of the power and providence of God.

It implies, that we believe in him, as the Almighty Creator, and righteous Governor of the world; the supreme Disposer of every went, and sovereign Arbiter of the fate of nations. How were it to be wished, that there was a just sense of this truth on the minds of all of every rank! And that, in all who are in any measure sincere on this occasion, the impression may not be transient and partial, but lasting and effectual! It should excite us to a holy jealousy over ourselves, that we have so often essayed the like duty without any apparent success. "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" The fault, doubtless, lies in ourselves. Our fasts have not been such as God has chosen, and therefore he hath refused to hear our prayers.

In general, no doubt the evidence and the effect of an acceptable fast, is repentance compleated by reformation. Where this is wanting, we are justly liable to the charge brought by the prophet Isaiah against the children of Israel, "Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of

assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth, they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are "full of blood." There is no question but the unrestrained flood of impiety which has overspread this nation, solicits divine vengeance, and prevents the efficacy even of the sincere prayers that are offered up for deliverance and mercy. But as, with respect to particular persons, every error or defect in practice is the consequence of an erroneous or defective principle, as every vicious action proceeds from an impure heart; so, in a national capacity, I am persuaded that our fasting and prayer has been fundamentally wrong, or essentially defective in itself, and therefore, has been followed by little or no sensible fruit; or rather that impiety, which it should have removed, it hath only contributed to increase.

For this reason my intention at this time is to point out to you what is the just and proper object of prayer for divine aid in a time of public calamity, as well as the great encouragement to its exercise. For this there is a proper foundation in the passage of Scripture just read in your hearing. In the former part of the chapter, the prophet had pronounced many gracious promises, of inward and spiritual prosperity, and of outward protection and security to the church, though surrounded and threatened, by enemies to her interests in both respects. He then changes the form of his discourse, personates believers, and in their name, as one of them, addresses to God the prayer in the text, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord: awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old: art not thou it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?"

The beauty and strength of this language, the justness and force of the figures here used, it is almost impossible to overlook. The prophet prays for such a display of divine power and mercy as might be signal and sensible. "Awake, awake, put on strength," that is, exert thy power, discover thy glory in such a manner, as that thy present

forbearance may be like the vigor of a waking man, compared to the defenceless and inactive state of one that is fast asleep. "O arm of the Lord." This expression, the arm of the Lord, with the addition of making bare his holy arm, is frequently used in Scripture; and it is so strong, and at the same time, so intelligible a figure, that it is impossible to amplify or explain, without weakening it. In the last part of the verse, he animates his own faith, and enforces his request, by calling to remembrance past transactions, and former displays of the power and grace of an unchangeable God. By Rahab and the dragon we are to understand Egypt and her king, as appears by comparing other passages of Scripture, particularly by Ps. 86:4. and Ezek. 29:3. the last of which runs thus: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers: which hath said, my river is mine own, and I have made it for myself."

In discoursing on this subject, what I propose, through the assistance of divine grace, is,

I. To point out to you the import of this prayer in the first part of this passage, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."

II. To consider the encouragement included in the last part of it, "Awake as in ancient days, in the generations of old: art not thou it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?"

III. To apply the subject to our present situation.

And we are to consider,

I. The meaning and import of the prayer: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." And in this I have no hope either of instructing or persuading any but those who have some measure of real religion, who do unfeignedly believe, and will, when called upon, recollect the constant superintendency of Divine Providence. These only will be sensible that, as every event is directed and over-ruled by the Almighty, so there are righteous, wise and gracious purposes to

be served by them. All men it is true, are ready to complain under distress. The most wicked and profligate, "when the waters are gone into their soul," when they feel their misery, will cry for relief. And, as they will turn them on every hand, and lay hold on every twig that may afford the least prospect of saving them from sinking, so the terror of divine power, with which public calamity is sometimes accompanied, will even make them cry unto God. But there is a great difference, between this complaint of the miserable, and the prayer of faith, which proceeds upon just views of the nature and government of God, and is assured of success. It may sometimes please God to make use of desolating judgments or alarming public strokes to awaken a secure thoughtless generation; but dutiful, acceptable and successful prayer for their removal, can only be the work of his own children.

Perhaps it may be thought unnecessary to direct persons of this character to the proper object of their prayers, as they must be supposed habitually to flow from right principles, and to point at just and warrantable ends. But it is certain, that, when wickedness and profaneness greatly and universally prevail in any nation, the real servants of God are not only few in number, but even this little flock, always receives some degree of infection. This we are taught to expect by our blessed Saviour, who says, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." They may both be negligent and defective in their duty, restraining prayer before God, and may be in a great measure unmindful of the great and principal views with which they ought to offer up their intercessory requests. But, hoping that all such among you as are justly liable to this charge, will discern the light, and feel the force of divine truth, it is my desire to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

And, in general, such a petition as this, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the lord," suggests to us, that our prayers for divine interposition and deliverance from public calamities should be supremely directed to the glory of God. This, as it is, upon the whole, the leading purpose of every real believer, so it ought to hallow every

single action, and purify every particular desire. Therefore our prayers must be conceived in such a manner, and our desires after deliverance must be so qualified, that the supreme honor due to God may be preserved inviolate, that duty may maintain its precedency before interest, and sin may be still more feared and avoided than suffering. The great end both of personal affliction, and national correction, is to weaken our attachment to present and temporal enjoyment, by staining its glory, and convincing us of its vanity. If then our chief or only aim, in asking deliverance from outward calamity, is that we may again recover the ease and quiet of security, and the pleasure of plenty, though we may seem to honor God by imploring his aid, yet is our homage really given to a sensual idol.

That this is neither impossible nor unfrequent, is plain from the history of the children of Israel. They often applied to God in their straits: "When he flew them, then they sought him, they returned and enquired early after God." But this sort of seeking, merely for present relief, or temporal mercies, was far from being acceptable to him. We are told, that it was tempting God, thus "to ask meat for their lust."^b In opposition to this, let us look into the grounds assigned in Scripture for God's granting deliverance, and thence learn with what views we ought to implore it. The Psalmist says, "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known." And the prophet Ezekiel, "But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the Heathen among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known to them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt."

But in order to illustrate this a little further, observe, that a just regard to the glory of God, in our prayers, implies the two following things. In the first place, That we expect deliverance from God alone, desire that it may be attended with such circumstances as his hand and power may be seen in it, and are willing to acknowledge him as the supreme and only Author of it. This is plainly included in the words of the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." As if he had said, In thee alone is our hope; "cursed be the

man that maketh flesh his arm." A profane irreligious people are always prone, in undertaking any enterprize, to put their trust in human prowess, to glory and boast in the greatness of their strength. And when they are disappointed in their expectations, they are ready to dwell so much upon second causes, that they entirely overlook, or are with great difficulty brought to acknowledge the supreme agency of God. We may, however be sensible, by his taking to himself so often, in Scripture, the title of the Lord of hosts, "great in might and strong in battle," that such conduct is robbing him of the glory that is justly his due. Many are the warnings we have in the word of God not to place too much confidence in any human means of safety. "Put not your trust in princes (says the Psalmist) nor in the son of man in whom there is no help. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety, neither can he deliver any by his great strength."^b And there is no Scripture truth more frequently, or more sensibly confirmed in the course of providence. How often do we find, both in former and later ages, the events of war diametrically opposite to the greatest human probability, and the most confident human expectation?

Now prayer for divine interposition should always be made under a deep impression of this truth. And indeed we shall never come to importunity and fervency in prayer for such a mercy, till we are somewhat affected with it. All the honor that is given to man is taken from God. All trust and dependance on human means as such, or on their own account, divides and weakens our reliance on God. But when he is considered as the single and only source of relief, we apply with that ardor and earnestness which necessity and extremity suggest. This doth not hinder the diligent use and application of outward means, but keeps them in their proper place, induces us to ask the divine blessing upon them, and prevents us from provoking the divine jealousy by idolizing and trusting in them.

It ought also to be our desire, that the glory of divine power may visibly shine in our deliverance; not only that his hand may do it, but

that his hand may be seen in it, and, if possible, to the conviction of all. Nothing is more impious, and nothing more provoking to God, than when men arrogate to themselves the honor of what they have done by his help, or acquired by the bounty of his providence. Here the language of the proud monarch of the east, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of MY power, and for the honor of MY majesty?" But mark the unexpected change by the more powerful word of the King of kings. "When the word was in the king's mouth there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee."b How often in Scripture is the destruction and punishment of kings and princes ascribed to their self-sufficiency, insolence and pride? Thus in that remarkable prophecy against the king of Babylon: For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee, shall narrowly look upon thee and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms? That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?" How strongly does this prove, that in order to pray acceptably for the interposition of divine Providence, we should be willing that God alone should have the honor entire and undivided. "That the lofty looks of man should be humbled, and the haughtiness of man should be bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted in that day."d Was it not thus that the ancient warriors of the holy nation sought and prospered? In confidence of divine aid, or resigned to the divine will, they went out and played the men for their people and the cities of their God. And when they had done so, they acknowledged that his right hand and his holy arm had gotten HIM the victory. See the song of Moses on his victory over the Egyptians. "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against

thee: Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble."

I cannot conclude this branch of the subject without observing, that we have had in the course of Providence a very recent instance, both of a singular appearance of the hand of God in defence of a righteous cause, and a modest ascription of it to the power of the Highest. That prince, who appears now to be the chief outward support of the protestant cause in Europe, has been enabled literally (according to the ancient promise) "with five to chase a hundred, and with a hundred to put ten thousand to flight." The greatest earthly potentates had combined against him and conspired his ruin. Assured of victory, they were forging chains for his followers, and dividing his inheritance by lot. But in the name of the Lord he set up his standard. The Lord turned the counsels of his enemies into confusion. His victories have been numerous, extraordinary and important. And he hath all along avoided boasting and vain-glory, and piously acknowledged that "Salvation belongeth unto God."

In the second place, in applying to God for an extraordinary interposition of his providence, we ought also to pray for a dispensation of his grace and mercy. When we pray that the arm of the Lord may awake and put on strength, it should be that a revival of religion may accompany temporal relief, and that by a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit many sinners may be delivered from the worst of bondage, and brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God. As this should be in itself the object of our desire, so it should be inseparably joined with the other, and their mutual connexion still kept in view. Temporal mercies to a nation, as well as to particular persons, ought always to be made subservient to the promoting of truth and righteousness. It is remarkable, that these two things are always joined in Scripture. And, indeed, if temporal mercies be considered in the light I formerly mentioned, it is impossible that they can be asunder. Let any one consult the intercessory prayers in which deliverance from external calamity is intreated, the prophecies in which it is promised, or the songs of praise in which it is

celebrated, and he will find, that the purity and spiritual prosperity of God's heritage is still kept in view. They are considered as involved in one another, and the one, as only valuable, because leading to the other. Instead of enumerating many passages, I shall only mention one of the prophet Isaiah. "And I will turn mine hand upon thee, and purely purge away all thy dross and take away all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: Afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness."

And, my brethren, is not the arm of the Lord and the glory of his power particularly displayed, when the influence and dominion of error is destroyed, and the obstinacy and rebellion of sinners is subdued? This is a more extraordinary, as well as a more excellent effect of power, than producing the greatest changes in our outward state and condition. It seems to be on this account that, in Scripture, the Saviour of sinners, the king of Zion, is so often represented as glorious in his person, and great in his power, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty: with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things." These and a multitude of other passages plainly show that the conversion of sinners, and defeating the powers of the princes of darkness, require an exertion, and is a signal display of the strength of the divine arms.

But as it is a matter of the utmost importance and propriety at present, I must beg your patience, while I endeavor a little to illustrate the necessity of joining earnest intercession for the revival of religion and the glory of Christ's kingdom, with our prayers for a recovery of national prosperity.

For illustrating this let us attend to the three following particulars.

1. We have no warrant to ask the last of these without the first.
2. We have no reason to expect that it will be separately bestowed.
3. If it should, in any degree, it would not be a blessing but a curse.

First, we have no warrant to ask national prosperity without a revival of religion. Our prayers are then only warrantable when we adjust and proportion our esteem of the mercies of God to their real worth, and desire them for their proper ends. Now, a love to one's country, and a desire of its outward welfare, is, no doubt, an excellent and an amiable disposition. But it is much more so to be concerned for their everlasting interest. Why doth the love of our country merit any praise, but because it is a disposition and tendency to communicate happiness? But what is temporal to eternal happiness? What is a fruitful field to a renewed heart? Peace at home to peace with God? Security from an earthly oppressor, to deliverance from the wrath to come? A compassionate heart bleeds for the misery of his fellow-creatures in poverty or bondage; but a sanctified heart is still more deeply affected with the ignorance and guilt of others, and their endless consequences. Now is it a warrantable manner of offering up our desires to God, to admire or ask a share in the bounty of his providence, while we despise and trample upon the riches of his grace?

But that such prayers are unwarrantable, doth not only appear from the unjust preference given to lesser before greater mercies, but from their being a total perversion of our desires from the great point in which they ought to centre. The gifts of God are intended to lead us to the giver; the events of his providence to be subservient to the methods of his grace. When, therefore, we ask temporal prosperity, without an equal, or rather superior solicitude for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, we are alienating his mercies from their proper use, turning them into weapons of

rebellion against him, and cherishing that love of the world which is destructive of the love of God.

Secondly, As all such desires are unwarrantable and disorderly, so we have no reason to expect that they shall be granted. Let us recall to mind this important truth, that God is the supreme Disposer of all events. Every prosperous event is the effect of his bounty. Every calamity is the rod of his anger, and carries his commission. Are there not then wise ends to be served by every thing appointed by him? Affliction springeth not out of the dust. National calamity is not the rigor of an arbitrary tyrant, but the wise chastisement of a gracious father, or the punishment of a righteous judge. "He ruleth the nations sitting upon the throne of his holiness;" and unless when he hath a mind to "make a full end," of a people ripe for destruction, gives them for a season into the hands of their enemies to bring about their reformation. If then public calamity bears a commission for this purpose from him whose work is perfect, what reason is there to expect, that it will be removed before it hath attained its end? Will he not repeat the stroke, and increase its severity, till it procure submission? It is true, we cannot precisely say how far the forbearance of God may go, or how long his patience may endure. There may be a remission, or suspension of the final stroke, for their farther trial. But it is certain that when there is no returning to God by repentance, there can be no reasonable ground to hope that his displeasure will cease, or its effects be removed.

Thirdly, Though temporal deliverance were granted to a nation, in any measure, without a dispensation of the Spirit and revival of religion, it would be no blessing but a curse, and could not be of any long duration. It would be giving them up to themselves, to fill up the measure of their iniquities, that, when the appointed time of vengeance should come, their destruction might be more terrible and signal. It is remarkable, that this is found among the judgments of God, and reckoned one of the most dreadful, when he ceases to strive with a people, and gives them up to themselves. Thus he says, by the Psalmist, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, Israel

would have none of me, so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels." So also faith the prophet Hosea, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."^b The consequence of this is the continuance and increase of all manner of wickedness. Then spiritual judgments come in the room of temporal, which, though they are less sensible, are but so much the more fatal. Blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and an obstinate contempt of instruction, are the usual consequences of unsanctified prosperity. In such circumstances a nation may exult, and bless themselves in their abundant wealth; nay, they may be the envy of their foolish and short-sighted neighbors; but to the eye of faith their condition is most wretched and deplorable. To what a pitch of impiety they may proceed when all restraints are withdrawn, some nations recorded in history are a standing and melancholy proof. And the sudden desolation sometimes inflicted, after long forbearance, by the Lord of nature, on cities and kingdoms, by fire from heaven, by earthquakes, pestilence, or the sword, is a fearful presage of the fate of all, who, in the day of recompence, shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

All these things are plainly founded on the word of God, and manifest consequences of the divine government. They will, however, make very little impression on a thoughtless and secure generation, plunged in sensuality and lust; and least of all on those, who have expressly lifted themselves under the banner of infidelity, and learned to be profane upon principle. This is one of the worst symptoms of our present condition; the greater our guilt, and, therefore, the nearer the danger. Nothing was less looked for by the Babylonian monarch, in the height of his riotous midnight feast, than his kingdom's being taken from him. And yet how speedily was it accomplished, and in how short a time was this superb and opulent city, the "beauty of the Chaldees excellency," turned into a ruinous heap?

I proceed now to the second general head, which was:

II. To consider a little the encouragement to prayer, contained in the last part of the text: "Awake as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old," &c.

In this the prophet animates his faith, and encourages his own dependance and that of others upon the promises of God, by celebrating the greatness of his power, as manifested in former memorable deliverances granted to his chosen people. He continues his address to the arm of the Lord: and, instead of an enumeration of the mighty acts of this arm in ancient days, and the generations of old, he fixes upon one signal and leading display of divine majesty and power, in the destruction of the Egyptians, and the deliverance of Israel from that subjection and bondage in which they were formerly held by that people. This is done with the highest propriety; for the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage was most remarkable and extraordinary in its circumstances, and the hand of God did most eminently appear in it. Thus the prophet says, in the verse immediately following the text: "Art not thou it, which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the deeps of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" From this appearance in behalf of Israel, God often takes his designation: this chiefly constituted the special relation between him and the people of Israel; and on this their obligation to obedience is founded in the preface or introduction to the moral law; "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." And indeed this deliverance is often considered and justly, as typical of the still more important deliverance of the elect of God from sin and misery.

Now let us consider a little the effect of such a view upon the mind, and its influence in prayer. This, I think may be included in the two following particulars:

First, it satisfies us of the power of God, and his ability to save. There can be no prayer addressed to God for relief and deliverance in an acceptable manner, but what proceeds upon a confidence in his

power. And there is in men, for the most part, on this subject a very imperfect and wavering persuasion. Nay, there, is often a greater degree of unbelief, than they themselves are sensible of, or distinctly apprehend. They are often so held captive by sense, and their attention so much taken up and engrossed by outward means and instruments, that they are backward to believe, or rely even on an almighty, because an invisible power. This was the case often with the children of Israel, even after repeated proofs of the strength of the divine arm, Thus says the Psalmist: "How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert? Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy." Against this unhappy tendency, God, by the prophet, warns his people, a few verses after the text: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you; who art thou, that thou should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass? And forgetteth the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth? And hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?" And indeed nothing can be more supporting under such fears, than to remember the instances in which God hath formerly made his power known. It is, as it were, realizing the divine perfections, and making us to see him who is invisible. In this very way does the Psalmist recover from a disconsolate state, and dark discouraging views of divine providence. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious; hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old, I will meditate also of all thy works and talk of thy doings."b

In the second place, the same view serves to ascertain us of the mercy of God, and his readiness to help us in distress. It is not enough that we have ever so unshaken a persuasion of the power of God, unless we have some ground to believe that it shall appear in our behalf.

Now former instances of extraordinary providential deliverance not only afford a proof of divine power, but shew us in what cases we have reason to expect that it shall be exerted. That part of the providence of God which is already open to our view, enables us, from analogy, to infer what shall be his subsequent conduct; at least so far as to direct and encourage us in our own duty. We know for example, that he is a refuge in times of trouble to those that are in distress: and that in extremity, when all human help fails, then is deliverance more to the glory of God. By this very argument does Jehoshaphat conclude and enforce his prayer. "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee."

We know also that his faithfulness is engaged to hear those, who, refusing to lean on any broken reed, or trusting any refuge of lies, place their confidence in him alone; and that the glory of God is immediately and chiefly concerned, in the support and preservation of his own people. They see that he hath, in all ages, counted this his own cause; and therefore they say with the Psalmist; "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou Lord hast not forsaken them that seek thee." In fine, former instances of extraordinary deliverance point out the great end and design of such interpositions. That they are for promoting of truth and righteousness, and to make those who are the objects of them, chearful and willing servants to God; not only partakers of the bounty of his providence, but monuments of the riches of his grace. "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah. We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation, that keepeth the truth may enter in. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting and destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise." From all which it appears that, in prayer properly warranted, and rightly directed, it must give unspeakable confidence and hope, to survey the remarkable instances of divine

providence, and thence take encouragement to commit our cause to, and rest our hope on, the same unchangeable God.

I conclude this head with observing, That in the expression of the prophet, "Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon," he hath a particular view to the eternity and immutability of God. "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." If he hath done great and marvellous things in the most distant ages, "his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear;" his strength is not impaired by exercise, nor his fulness wasted by communication. Such an argument would not hold with regard to man, whose power is so exceeding mutable, and his strength so exceeding liable to decay. It is recorded in history, that an old Roman, Milo, who in his youth was a prodigy of strength, happened to live to old age; and that he used often to weep when he looked on his arms, his once nervous and vigorous arms, and saw the wrinkled and decayed sinews, and the weak, feeble state to which they were reduced by time. But this is not, cannot be the case with the arm of the Lord. His strength and stability, particularly as opposed to created weakness and frailty, is often declared in Scripture. Thus in the following sublime passage of the prophet Isaiah. "And the voice said, Cry. And he said what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word our God shall stand forever."

I proceed now in the last place to apply the truths you have heard on this subject to our own present situation, as to public affairs.

And first. Is not our state, both as a nation, and as a church, exceedingly fallen and low: and have we not the greatest need to address this prayer in the text, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord?" May we not take our low and fallen state as a nation from the universal confession of all without exception, however opposed in sentiments or interest? Every class and

denomination of men among us, every party and faction, however unwilling each may be to acknowledge its own share of the guilt, and however prone to load its adversaries with the blame of procuring it, is yet willing to acknowledge that we are at present in a distressed, and in a contemptible state.

And indeed the thing itself speaks. We have of late suffered under a variety of public strokes. We have not only had, for some time past, repeated threatenings of scarcity and dearth, but vast multitudes have been afflicted with famine in its rigor, which is one of God's "sore judgments." Through the mercy of God this is alleviated in some measure at present, but far from being entirely removed. We have also been long engaged in war with a powerful and politic enemy. And has not the providence of God sensibly frowned on us, and visibly frustrated almost every one of our attempts? This hath been the case to a degree hardly known in any former instance. We have "turned our backs saint-hearted before our enemies," in almost every encounter; and the greater and more formidable our preparations for any enterprize, the more pitiful the issue, and the more shameful our defeat and disappointment. Has there not been an obstructed trade, a loss of territory, a loss of honor, and expence of treasure? Is not this nation, once in a manner the arbitress of the fate of Europe, now become the scorn and derision of her neighbours and all that are round about her? What weak and divided councils among those that preside? Instead of any genuine public spirit, a proud and factious endeavor to disgrace each other's measures, and wrest the ensigns of government out of each other's hands. How numerous and expensive, but how useless and inactive, have been our fleets and armies? And how deplorable is the condition of our colonies abroad? They are the chief theatre of the war, because, indeed, they are the subject of the contest. And surely it is affecting to think of the unnatural barbarity and cruelty that there is often exercised, when no age or sex is spared. It is true, the distance of the place may probably make us less sensible of their misery. But if it please God to suffer our enemies to continue their progress, it is hard

to say how far the desolation may extend, or how universal it may prove.

Are we not also in a very low and fallen state as a church, or a nation, still retaining some profession and form of religion? This will be found to correspond with the other, as the cause with the effect. How have all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, corrupted their ways? How gross and prevalent is infidelity, undermining the principles of natural, with the same zeal and eagerness, with which it formerly endeavored to weaken the foundations of revealed religion? How many of high rank have wholly deserted the house and worship of God, nay, openly and boldly treat his service and servants with contempt? How often do we observe such, with a criminal and insolent self-contradiction, trample upon the very laws against profaneness which they contribute to make? And, with how much zeal and diligence does the lower part of the nation emulate the higher, in that which is the reproach of both? So great is the prevalence of irreligion, contempt of God, sensuality and pride, that many of the grossest crimes are not only practised but professed, not only frequent but open, not only persisted in but gloried in and boasted of: insomuch, that it requires no small degree of fortitude and resolution, stedfastly to adhere to the principles and character of a disciple of Christ, in opposition to the spirit and strain of fashionable conversation.

It is not, indeed, to be wondered at, that not only this nation, but the protestant states of Europe in general should be brought under the rod, as they have so shamefully departed from that purity of faith and strictness of morals which was the glory of the reformation. How many have of late been ashamed of the cross of Christ, and the doctrine of the grace of God? And what hath been substituted in their room? A pliant and fashionable scheme of religion, a fine theory of virtue and morality. A beautiful but unsubstantial idol, raised by human pride, adorned and dressed by human art, and supported by the wisdom of words. And hath it not, in this, as in every preceding age, in this, as in every other christian country, whenever it gained

any credit, been the fore-runner and brought last at its heels a deluge of profaneness and immorality in practice? Can any of these things be called in question? And are not they, as well as many more which might easily be enumerated, the melancholy proofs of our degenerate and corrupt character?

In the second place. From what hath been find you may see what wrong measures we have hitherto taken for removing these evils, so far as we have been sensible of them. Our gracious sovereign hath, indeed, been pleased to point out our duty, by calling us annually to fasting and humiliation. But with the far greater number it hath been no more than an unmeaning and lifeless form: and they have continued still in the same forgetfulness and contempt of God. You have heard above that nothing is more contrary to the genuine spirit of intercessory prayer in public calamity, than putting trust in an arm of flesh. And yet, is there any thing with which this nation is at present more justly chargeable? Nothing is more apparent from the very face of our common channels of intelligence. In the case of disappointments, on the one hand, are we not ungovernable and head-strong in our resentment against men? and equally foolish and sanguine on the other, in our hopes of those who are substituted in their place? We give pompous details of armaments, and prophesy, nay, even in a manner describe their victories, long before the season of action; and incautiously celebrate the characters of leaders, while they are only putting on the harness, and going into the field. What proud and arrogant sentiments do we often express on the subject of our national courage, and ancient British fire, as it is called? In short, we seem to have got entirely into that vain-glorious, ostentatious system, with which we used to upbraid our neighbor and rival nation; and they seem to have given it up in our favor, and to have adopted the wiser and more profitable method, of putting deeds for words.

And how negligent have we been of promoting, or praying for the interest of religion? You have heard, that when the arm of the Lord puts on strength, it must be to appoint salvation for walls and

bulwarks to a people. But how few discover any concern upon this subject? The want of public spirit, in those who retain any sense of religion, is an evidence of its low and languishing state. When it is lively, it will always be communicative. Love to God and love to man, the two great branches of practical religion, necessarily imply a concern for its progress. And yet, so rare is any thing of this kind, that when it appears as a sort of prodigy, it is looked upon, by most, as romance and extravagance. Let experience tell, if this is not often the case. When any one appears, in imitation of the Scripture saints, to grieve for the sins of others, or discovers any more than ordinary concern for their reformation, are not all his endeavors immediately resisted and resented as troublesome, or branded with every name of contempt, as visionary frenzy and enthusiasm?

In the third place. From what hath been said on this subject, you may learn what ought to be the great aim of every serious and sensible Christian among us, at present in his intercession at the throne of grace, viz. That the power of the Almighty may appear in behalf of this nation, in such a manner, as all may be obliged to say, "This is the doing of the Lord." That, as he useth to do on extraordinary occasions, he may raise up instruments for this purpose, who may be as polished shafts in his own hand, and may have a single eye to his own glory. That not for our sakes, who have deserved to be cast off for ever, but for his own name's sake, he would support those who still adhere to the protestant cause. And, in a particular manner, for this end, that he would discover his power and glory in an eminent and remarkable revival of religion among all ranks. That our blessed Redeemer, the king of Zion, who reigns to all generations, who hath ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, would send forth his Spirit in a large and plentiful measure. That his work and power may appear in all his gracious influences, convincing and converting sinners, sanctifying, quickening and comforting believers. That this may be a common blessing on all corners of the land, on persons of every class and denomination, of every rank and degree, from the highest to the lowest, of every station and office, civil and sacred. Above all, that he would "cloath his priests with salvation, that his

saints may shout aloud for joy." O when shall the time come, when "the Lord of hosts shall be for a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people;" when, instead of fine schemes spun for the honor of their makers, those who are called ministers of Christ, shall preach the gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven?" When the truth of God, by its simplicity, majesty, force, and efficacy, shall make its way into the hearts of the most obstinate, and Satan's kingdom fall as lightning before it. Plead, my beloved hearers, that protestants in general may be brought back to their first faith and their first love; that the unhappy divisions among us may be abolished; and that the bond and centre of union may be Christ crucified, the only author of salvation: that men may be no longer ranked in parties and marshalled under names, but the great and only strife may be, who shall love our Redeemer most, and who shall serve him with the greatest zeal.

And in this critical conjuncture, when the bloody sword is threatening so many nations, and when there is so general a combination of anti-christian powers, be earnest in prayer, that it may please God to subvert their schemes, and turn their counsels into foolishness; and that he, with whom is terrible majesty, may consume "the man of sin with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy him with the brightness of his coming."—Pray for our gracious sovereign king George, under whose mild and legal government, we have long enjoyed as much happiness as our national guilt would allow; that God, by whom "kings reign and princes decree justice," would give him a wife understanding heart in his fear, protect his person, direct his councils, and prosper his arms: and long preserve his numerous issue, as happy pledges of the security of our civil and religious liberty. Let us also, while we give thanks to God for raising up an eminent prince in Germany as the head of the reformed interest, and signally supporting him hitherto, pray, that he may continue his protection to him, encourage his heart, and strengthen his hands, and fight his battles. In fine, let us pray for the speedy accomplishment of the prophecy, whoever shall be the instrument of

it, of the downfall of Antichrist, when the cry shall be heard, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and shall arise no more."

In the last place. For our encouragement in this duty, let us remember, that we serve an unchangeable God, the rock of ages. We pray for the appearance of the arm of the Lord "as in ancient days, in the generations of old," when it "cut Rahab and wounded the dragon." Review the history of his conduct to the church and people of Israel, how, with a mighty hand and out-stretched arm, he delivered them from bondage, and humbled their proud oppressors. And remember how often, in succeeding ages, he has appeared in behalf of his own people, and supported his own cause when at the very lowest, and as it were in an expiring state. How low was the interest of Zion at the reformation, when all the kings of the earth served the "scarlet whore," and "were drunk with the wine of the wrath of her fornication?" How thick the darkness that overspread the nations, and how universal the dominion of error? And yet, in opposition to all the cunning of earthly policy, in opposition to all the fury of persecuting cruelty, he enabled a few plain men, lovers of the truth, to assert, to defend and to spread it.

The most remarkable times of the revival of religion, in this part of the united kingdom, immediately succeeded times of the greatest apostacy, when truth seemed to be fallen in the streets, and equity could not enter. This was the case immediately before the year 1638. Corruption in doctrine, loosness in practice, and slavish submission in politics, had overspread the church of Scotland. And yet, in a little time, she appeared in greater purity, and in greater dignity, than ever she had done before, or perhaps than ever she hath done since, that period. In the same manner, immediately before the happy revolution, how desperate in appearance was the situation of this church? When all the best, as well as many of the noblest persons in the nation, were chased as fugitives from their dwellings, and considered as unworthy of an abode on earth! When many of our worthy ancestors fell in battle, died on a scaffold, or were murdered in the fields by the unrelenting rage of ecclesiastic tyranny. And

when worshipping the Lord God of our fathers, according to his own word, was a capital crime! Yet our captivity was brought back, and "we were as men that dreamed," so unexpected was the mercy.

Let no Christian therefore give way to desponding thoughts. Though infidelity unresisted spreads its poison, though profaneness and enmity to religion and seriousness every where abound, though there are few to support the interest of truth and righteousness, though we have seen a new thing on the earth, a minister of Christ leaving the pulpit for the stage, let us not be discouraged. We plead the cause that shall finally prevail. Religion shall rise from its ruins; and its oppressed state at present should not only excite us to pray, but encourage us to hope for its speedy revival. While every one is diligent in his own sphere, and in his proper duty, and earnestly pleading for the revelation of the arm of the Lord, let us recollect his favor and protection to the church in every time of need, and his faithfulness which is to all generations. Let us say with the Psalmist, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, confider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death."

SERMON XXV

SEASONABLE ADVICE TO YOUNG PERSONS

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the

seat of the scornful. PSALM 1:1

THERE is an old and beaten observation, that human nature, in all ages, is the same. To this I add, or rather offer, by way of illustration of it, that sin, which bears so much sway in human characters and actions, has been the same, in its operation and influence, in all ages, since the fall of Adam. For this reason the characters drawn in the holy scriptures, and particularly the observations on human life, contained in the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, and book of Ecclesiastes, are as perfectly adapted to the present age, as if they were but of yesterday's date.

As the ten commandments, which are the sum of the moral law, consist mostly of prohibitions, the Psalmist, in this passage, draws the character of the good man in a negative form, by its opposition to the bad. At the same time, the danger to which the unwary are exposed, the enticing and deceitful nature of sin, and its monstrous enormity, when arrived at its full height, are couched in the most admirable manner: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly;—nor standeth in the way of sinners;—nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

It is not agreed among interpreters, who was the author of this Psalm; and, indeed, it is a matter more of curiosity than moment, very critically to inquire. Some think it was the Psalmist David, because of the high esteem expressed in it for the law of God, a thing which so remarkably distinguishes his other writings. Others refer it to a later period; and suppose that Ezra, or some other after the captivity, who collected the sacred hymns of different authors into one volume, prefixed this as a sort of argument or preface to the whole. It is, indeed, a summary of all that follow. It plainly contains a character both of good men and bad; the usual course of divine Providence towards each of these classes, as well as the final issue of their conduct, in the everlasting happiness of the one, and the everlasting misery of the other.

Even the most cursory reader must observe, that there is a gradation in the expressions of the text, which rise one above another in their strength and energy: nay, it is the opinion of many, that they are chosen with peculiar art, and contain a double, if not a threefold gradation.

1. In the character, beginning with the ungodly, who are without proper impressions of religion, and habitually governed by other principles than the fear of God. Next, sinners, or those who are more openly flagitious, and visibly guilty of gross crimes. And finally, the scornful, who set reproof at defiance, and treat every thing serious and sacred with contempt and disdain.

2. In the communication of others with them, walking; which seems to imply occasional, unforeseen, and transient intercourse;—standing, which seems to indicate a greater degree of approbation and voluntary compliance with their example;—and sitting, which signifies being fixed and settled in an evil course, and refusing to depart from it.—To this some add the other expressions, the counsel, the way, and the seat; on which I forbear to insist, but proceed to observe,

That we have, in this passage, a most useful and instructive lesson of great moment in every place and age; and peculiarly suited, on several accounts, to the present circumstances of this congregation. It is, therefore my resolution to discourse a little, through the assistance of divine grace, on the three distinct branches into which it may be naturally divided.

I. The infectious nature of sin, or the danger of "walking in the counsel of the ungodly."

II. The deceitful and hardening nature of sin, which insensibly leads from "walking in the counsel of the ungodly," to "standing in the way of sinners."

III. The finishing stage of wickedness, the most criminal and most pernicious character, viz, of the scornful, who are bold enough to treat things serious and sacred with derision.

Having done this, I shall make some application of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

In the first place, let us consider the infectious nature of sin, or the danger of walking in the counsel of the ungodly. That the society of bad men is highly dangerous to all, but especially to young persons, is indeed a truth which no sober man will deny, and which hath been often set in the strongest light by religious and moral writers: it may therefore seem unnecessary to insist upon it. But, my brethren, I am persuaded, that it fares often with known and common truths, as with common mercies, they are despised for their cheapness. Though their certainty be readily allowed, their use and application is, notwithstanding, or, perhaps, for that very reasons, in a great measure neglected. How seldom is it that men make the distinction with care, and act upon it with prudence and resolution; either in their own conduct, or in the disposal of their children? Bear with me, therefore, while I endeavor to impress your minds with a sense of your obligation to depart from the society of evil-doers, and to preserve, with the utmost solicitude, all young persons under your care, from the mortal contagion.

For the importance and necessity of this, you have the concurrent testimony of wise and good men, in every age and nation; experience hath taught it to the most barbarous, as well as most improved and polished people. There is no nation of which history hath preserved us any account, but, in their proverbial sayings, which are the product of time, We find a warning against the infection of corrupt society. What dying parent, in his last or parting adieu to his children, ever omitted to caution them against the society of bad men? nay, doth not daily experience prove this, beyond dispute, to every one who hath the least degree either of memory or reflection? Is there among you any person, who has arrived at the unhappy

distinction of being known for a profligate? Whenever this happens, those about him are able to mark the progress of his corruption, and can even point out the persons, or societies, where he was first taught the rudiments of vice, and initiated in the principles of licentiousness and riot. I am none of those who either deny or conceal the original; inherent, universal corruption of human nature; and yet I scruple not to affirm, that example, instruction, and assistance, are necessary to our improvement even in vice. Without this, no single person is capable of arriving at that degree of depravity which we have sometimes occasion to observe.

Whoever would examine into the reasons, and impress his mind with a sense of the danger of corrupt society, especially to youth, may just reflect upon the following particulars.

1. We are all by nature prone to sin. It is the growth of the soil, as weeds of the cursed ground. If weeds can hardly be restrained by the utmost diligence and care of the husbandman, what an enormous product might he expect if he would directly apply himself to their encouragement and cultivation? Just so, if by the utmost care and attention, parents can hardly restrain the irregularities of their children, and form them to true piety and goodness; what wickedness may they not arrive at, if they are delivered over to schools of profanity, and suffered to form their sentiments and manners, from those who have long walked in the ways of their own hearts, and in the fight of their own eyes," without "fearing God, or regarding man?"

2. Young persons are ignorant and unsuspecting; strangers to the world, they are alike ignorant of the characters of men, and the effects of vicious courses. What a prey must such be to the artful and insinuating language of those, who, enslaved by habit, and wearing the chains of vice, find their chief remaining pleasure in seducing others into the same miserable state? Justly is the great enemy of mankind called the deceiver, because he betrayed our first parents into rebellion by a lie; and in the same way he and all his servants

continue to paint and varnish over sin with false colours, that it may be embraced without reluctance, by those who know not that afterwards "it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Need I tell you in what a decent garb sin is often clothed; and what honorable names it often assumes in the world, to gain the easier admission? Sensuality and intemperance is social affection, and good fellowship: filthy obscene conversation is but harmless mirth and freedom; anger and resentment are but honor, resolution, and dignity of mind. In short, the whole tenor and strain of fashionable conversation is often little else than a strong illusion put upon the mind, to pervert the dictates of reason, and evade the reproofs of conscience. How dangerous such intercourse to young unwary minds, who are often deeply penetrated with the poison, before they so much as suspect the design of its being administered? It requires no common degree of fortitude and resolution, as well as no small measure of spiritual wisdom, to resist the importunity of sinners, and unravel the subtilty with which they lie in wait to deceive.

3. Vice is usually baited with pleasure, of which young persons are peculiarly sensible: their affections of every kind are in the most lively and vigorous state. One of the first and most important lessons, which parents and guardians must teach them, is moderation and restraint; whereas the immediate effect of associating with the profane, is not only to strengthen their passions by indulgence, but to instruct them how to plead in their defence; and above all, to inspire them with an abhorrence of confinement and rule. From these unhappy attachments, these most pernicious friendships it is, that instruction, however excellent, is unwillingly listened to; and the most wise and gentle government is esteemed harsh and severe. It has been sometimes observed, that persons strictly and piously educated, when they have come into the world, have run headlong into the most vicious and abandoned course of life. This has been commonly ascribed to the rigor of their former confinement, and an advice grafted upon it, that parents should be less severe to their children, lest they should more than compensate this early restraint, by the liberties which they afterwards assume.

But though I willingly admit, that every parent should temper his authority with gentleness and love; yet I am far from thinking the effect, just now mentioned, is ascribed to its proper cause; it is not owing so much to the rigor of parental authority, as to young persons getting into the society of men without principle, and there secretly imbibing these vicious desires, which afterwards they rejoice in an opportunity of gratifying to the full. However strict and severe any person's education may be, if he comes to maturity of age, before he contracts an intimacy with those who justify the commission of sin, conscience will have acquired so great authority, that all solicitation to gross wickedness will be received with abhorrence. This opinion is supported by a fact, which I imagine I have observed, that the children of pious parents, who are betrayed into vicious courses, are almost always such as have been most early removed from their immediate inspection.

4. The danger of corrupt society to young persons appears, from their being exposed to ridicule and scorn, which is of all other trials hardest for them to bear. I shall have occasion, on the third general head, to speak more fully on this subject; but in the mean time, it is certain, that a sense of shame is strong in young persons in general, and that ridicule is the usual weapon by which adepts in vice assault the cause of truth and piety; by which indeed they commonly endeavor to destroy all regard to decency and order. It is lamentable to think how often persons of excellent capacity and admirable dispositions, have been led astray by the abuse of this most amiable quality, a sense of shame.

From all these considerations, we need not be surprised at the frequent and strong cautions given in the word of God, upon this subject: Prov. 13:20. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."—Chap, 28:7. "Whoso keepeth the law, is a wise son; but he that is a companion of riotous men, shameth his father." But there is nothing more moving than that earnest and pathetic exhortation; Chap. 4:14, 15. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it:

pass not by it: turn from it and pass away." The wise man's insisting upon his important counsel, and the reiteration of the expressions, serve to convey in the strongest manner, a sense of the certain ruin of those who neglect to observe it.

II. Let us now proceed to consider the hardening nature of sin, which leads from "walking in the counsel of the ungodly, to standing in the way of sinners." Upon this, as on the former particular, I may observe, it is a known and beaten subject, on which it is easy to say things strong, but difficult to say any thing new. There are several just remarks upon it, or striking similitudes, which have been handed down from the earliest ages; and were probably the first fruits of human experience. The little that I am at present to repeat or add, shall be divided into two parts: 1. The gradual and insensible progress of sin, which leads the sinner on from one step to another, till he is irrecoverably lost. 2. The strength and power of inveterate habit.

1. The insensible progress of sin. It is wonderful by what artful methods, what plausible pretences, and what slow degrees, sin makes its first approaches. Let some of those persons who are now lost to all sense of duty, or of shame, reflect, if possible, with what horror they would once have thought of the practices, which at present they are not able to forsake. Every sin, how small soever, opens a passage for the admission of multitudes of others; breaks the restraint of conscience; habituates and emboldens the sinner. The ancients were wont to say, That the way of sin is down-hill: every step a man takes on this declivity, accelerates his motion, so that it becomes more and more difficult, and at last impossible, to stop his course. This is what the apostle Paul had in his view, when he gave this excellent precept to the Christian Hebrews; Heb. 3:13. "But exhort one another daily, while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." We may say of sin, in general, what Solomon says of strife; "The beginning of it is like the letting out of water." If you watch against the beginning of sin, you may hope to prevail; but if you once grant it indulgence, it will

establish and increase its own power. To attempt then to stop its progress, is like endeavoring to gather together a flood of water, after you have, with your own hands, opened the sluices which have caused it to overflow.

2. To the insensible progress of sin, add the strength and power of inveterate habit. This is represented to us in the strongest terms in scripture, where the changing of an inveterate habit is compared to a natural impossibility: Jer. 13:23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

As we may receive many useful moral lessons from the visible creation and the course of nature; so this in particular, of the force of habit, is, if I may speak so, written in the most legible characters, and repeated in every page of both. A stone, which has long continued in one place, makes itself a bed, and is with great difficulty removed: a plant or tree that has long been confined to one position, or made to grow in a particular shape, will seldom ever receive any other. This is also the case with our own bodily frame. Particular postures or motions to which we have been early habituated, can scarcely be altered by the utmost attention, and the strongest inclination of the will: the obstinacy is still greater in all habits where desire and affection have place. It is easy to see every day, the violent attachment men have to employments and pleasures, however trifling in themselves, to which they have been long accustomed. But it is greatest of all in sinful habits, because in them the force of custom is added to the original strength of natural corruption.

Both the above particulars may be illustrated, by observing, how much habit and example together operate to the improvement and perfection of guilt, in large and populous cities. There we may often find so astonishing a degree of wickedness of every sort, as it is mortifying to think that human nature should be capable of: there we may find persons who will perpetrate calmly and sedately, what would surprize a less knowing sinner so much as to hear of. And

what pity is it, that there should be found some, who, during their occasional residence in places of great resort, lay down their innocence, instead of their rusticity? and bring home no other accomplishment but an insolence and boldness of countenance in the commission of sin? That instructed in the principles, as well as habituated to the practice of impiety, they are not content with doing evil, but discover an incredible industry and assiduity in deceiving and seducing others? And shall I not add, what pity is it, that some, instead of improving and adorning their minds by application to study, or storing them with useful knowledge, do more than lose their time, by drinking in the poison of infidel writings? Instead of fitting themselves to discharge the duties of public or private life, with propriety and dignity, they only acquire the unhappy talent of setting their minds at ease in the commission of sin, and make large additions to their own natural depravity of heart.

III. Let us consider the finishing stage of wickedness, the most criminal and the most pernicious character, viz. that of the scornful, who are bold enough to treat things serious and sacred, with derision.

This part of the subject, my brethren, merits your particular attention, and naturally divides itself into these two branches: First, The sin and danger of it to the persons who are guilty of it. Secondly, The unhappy influence it hath in polluting others.

1. The sin and danger of it to the guilty persons. Whoever will consider the state of mind from which such derision must flow, will immediately perceive that it implies the highest degree of profaneness and impiety. It is such an audacious attack upon the majesty of the living God, as must strike every thinking person with astonishment and horror. One of the first principles of all religion is reverence for the Deity, and for every thing that hath a visible relation to him. This we find written upon the conscience, in general, even of the most blinded heathens. The common and trivial use of the name of God is prohibited under the severest sanctions in the

oracles of truth. We find also some instances there, of mere irreverence being punished in a very terrible manner. The angelic hosts, though perfectly pure and holy, are yet represented as deeply penetrated with a sense of the extreme disproportion between uncreated excellence, and created weakness, and filled with the highest veneration of him who only is HOLY: Isaiah 6:1, 2, 3. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings, with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." It may seem unnecessary or improper to add, and yet it gives me pleasure that I can do it with truth, the same thing has evidently distinguished some of the best and greatest men on earth. We are well informed, that some of the greatest inquirers into nature, as they grew in years, and increased in the knowledge of the works of God, did also visibly grow in an awe and reverence of their almighty Maker. Of one in particular, it is said, that he never mentioned the name of God without a sensible pause in his discourse. After this, what can we think of any poor creature, whose breath is in his nostrils, being guilty of contempt and scorn of the name, attributes, works or worship of God!

There is a remarkable difference between sins of this kind and many other sins which are, notwithstanding, very heinous and aggravated in the sight of God. Into many other sins of a very gross nature, a man may be hurried by the violence of passion, or betrayed by the suddenness of temptation; but, if I mistake not, scorn of things sacred must always be a deliberate crime: the sin cannot be committed without a good deal of composure and presence of mind: reason is not over-borne, as in other cases, by appetite; but reason itself (if the perverted gift of God in such persons may be called so) is principal in the guilt. A scorner is never tempted, properly speaking, but by these acts and exercises of religion, which should excite the veneration of all, and do excite the veneration of many, not excepting some of the most profligate.

Contempt of things sacred is an entire victory over conscience. In many cases men sin with some reluctance: it is not so much their choice, as they are over-borne by the strength of corruption, and vitiate the peace of their minds, to gratify the demands of lust: hence remorse often succeeds the indulgence; and though real reformation does not take place, yet it lays the sinner under frequent and considerable restraints. But in treating things sacred with scorn, the mind is wholly at ease; and finds its pleasure in the very impiety itself. The truth is, so entire is the victory over conscience, that nothing but settled atheism and infidelity can be guilty of it, according to that just: expression of the psalmist, Psalm 10:13. "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require it."

It is also an entire victory over shame: this is commonly the last restraint that sinners overthrow. Many are confined and kept in awe by the fear of man, long after they have cast off the fear of God. From the shamefulness of sin, religion preserves some degree of credit, even where a great plurality is in the opposite interest. For this reason the prophet Jeremiah mentions it as a great aggravation of the sins of his countrymen, that they were lost to all sense of shame: Jer. 6:15. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush; therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord." But is it not evident, that scorers are destitute of shame? They have, indeed, not only extinguished it in themselves, but the manifest design of their conversation is to destroy it in the minds of others.

I need add nothing further to shew the guilt and danger of persons of this character, but putting you in mind of the rank which it holds in several catalogues of crying sins in the holy scriptures, and the awful judgments of God which are denounced against it. The prophet Ezekiel, in enumerating the sins of Jerusalem, among many enormities, hath this; Ezek. 22:8. "Thou hast despised mine holy things, and profaned my Sabbaths." And the prophet Isaiah, Isa.

28:14, 21, 22. "Now, therefore, hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.—For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now, therefore, be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for, I have heard from the Lord God of hosts, a consumption even determined upon the whole earth." See also the state of things in Jerusalem, immediately before the Babylonish captivity: 2 Chron. 36:16. "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

2. How unhappy is the influence of this character upon others! As it is highly criminal, it is pernicious in the same proportion. Considered only as an example, it must have dangerous effects: many sins shun the light; and are, by those that commit them, concealed with the utmost care. When that is the case, whatever they may be to the guilty person, they are far from being so dangerous to the public, as those crimes that are not only often visible, but done on purpose to be seen. Now scoffers at things sacred must always be an example, as the crime cannot be committed alone; and, indeed, they often aspire at a kind of character for despising religion, and would be greatly mortified, were their accomplishments of this kind hidden from the world.

Neither is it merely a common example: scoffers are not only barely sinners; they are advocates for sin: it is their constant study to break the restraints of conscience, and weaken every moral obligation in others, as well as in themselves. This too they endeavor to effect in the most agreeable manner: contempt of religion makes a part of their social mirth; and these two things are soon looked upon by the unwary youth as so inseparable, that the one is quite tasteless and insipid, unless it is seasoned by the other.

It deserves particular consideration on this subject, that scoffing at things sacred is apt to give natural modesty, and the sense of shame

in young persons, a wrong and contrary turn. Modesty is the strongest natural fence to virtue. We find notwithstanding, very frequently, that persons of great natural modesty have not courage sufficient to profess or practise what conscience dictates to be their duty. How unhappy is it when so excellent a preservative from vice is thus quite perverted, and has an opposite effect! All history is full of the powerful effects of a sense of shame, both in doing good and evil. It breaks the-strongest of all natural attachments: it is not to be overcome by the severest laws, though fortified with the most terrible sanctions. Now, as it needs no proof, that scoffing at sacred things tends to pervert the sense of shame, it must have the greatest and most immediate effect in bringing on a general dissolution of manners.

The malignant influence of profane scorn is not confined to young persons, there being very few of any character who are not hurt by it in a most sensible manner. Would you be convinced of this? How rarely do we find any possessed of a determined courage and resolution in opposing fashionable crimes! How unwilling are the best to suffer shame for adhering to their duty! What a variety of efforts will be made to escape it! Contempt is disagreeable at any rate; and it is intolerable to pride, some remains of which, capable of being irritated, are to be found in the very best men on earth. For this reason, the most established Christians do carefully shun all unnecessary society with wicked men, knowing how difficult it is to avoid sin in one shape or other. "If such is the case with the best, how dangerous must the society of scorers be to all who are able to bear them; but especially to those who have pleasure in them!"

It will not be improper here to observe, that one great reason why scorn and ridicule is so hurtful to religion, is, that it attacks things sacred through the medium of human weakness. True piety and virtue is in itself so venerable an object, that it is not possible to render it ridiculous, but by misrepresentation: however, as it is always, in this world, attended with human infirmity, this affords a handle to profane persons to load it with reproach. Their success in

this unhappy design, is no greater than may naturally be expected; few are able to distinguish between a person and his cause, nor indeed, is it possible to attack the one without wounding the other. It evidently appears, that it is impossible to treat religious persons in general, or the expressions, forms and rites, commonly appropriated to religious worship, with scorn; and not, at the same time, bring religion itself into contempt.

I do not mean by this to plead for approbation, or even indulgence, to any indecency, by which folly or vanity may abuse or disgrace the worship of God: far from it. I think every thing of that kind ought to be reprov'd with severity, and oppos'd with resolution: but I contend, that it is infinitely more proper to treat it with abhorrence and detestation, than with scorn. Whoever will give himself this liberty, may easily find an opportunity, from the weakness inseparable from humanity, to throw off that reverence for God and his service, which it ought to be his chief solicitude to preserve and improve. There are many whole visible weakness is to be lamented; and, perhaps, there is no human character at all so perfectly decent in every respect, but, by imitation and a little aggravation, it may be rendered ridiculous.

Let it also be considered, that it requires far less comprehension of mind to expose the folly and weakness of others, or even to invent plausible falsehoods, and misrepresent them, than to reason with justness and propriety on the most common subjects: A very small degree of ability is sufficient to accomplish a scoffer, who is not restrained by any sense of duty. Nor is this to be wondered at; for there is always a sufficient number to whose understandings the most vile and miserable performance is perfectly adapted.

In support of all this, I could adduce many examples, abundantly known and familiar: but, for certain reasons, I shall only mention a very celebrated instance from antiquity. Socrates was certainly the wisest and the best man of all the heathens, whose characters have been transmitted to us. His behavior was such, as not only deserved,

but seemed fit to command the esteem and veneration of all who knew him: yet was this worthy man successfully turned into ridicule, by a person, whose writings, which have come down to us, are to the last degree mean and contemptible. Nor was the effect merely transient; for in the opinion of many, this contempt paved the way for the hatred which his enemies soon raised against him, and which brought him to his death.

I proceed now, in the last place, to make some improvement of what has been said: and I think I can discover in the aspect of the audience, that you already suppose I have been led to the choice of this subject, by the late atrocious and flagrant offence, committed in the near neighborhood of where I now stand; and which hath affected every thinking and well-disposed person in the place, with a mixture of indignation and concern. That this is indeed the case, I have no intention either to deny or conceal. Many, I know, are of opinion, that fidelity to my charge calls for something of this nature on the present occasion; if to others the particular discussion and application of this subject should need any apology, there are two things, for which I hope to have the testimony of all my ordinary hearers. 1. That I have never omitted to mention with all freedom and plainness, the sins and duties of every rank and class of men, as the subject led to it, or the occasion seemed to require it. 2. That in doing this, I have generally avoided bringing in particular accidents that have fallen out in the place; being much of opinion, that the less personal any thing of that nature is, it is the more likely to be useful. But though I continue in the same opinion in general, there are some things so flagrant and atrocious in their nature, so dangerous and hurtful in their effects, that bare silence concerning them would carry in it an imputation of unfaithfulness or partiality in a minister of Christ. And as in the present case, the scandal seems loudly to call for some public notice of it, so it is impossible to make the persons more known than they are already by their own folly. If it could make them any more ashamed, it would be an unspeakable benefit both to the public and themselves.

With a view therefore to the scandal just now hinted at, suffer me to apply the truths above illustrated, by giving you some advice and direction, under the three following characters, one or more of which will include every person who now hears me.

1. To those who are young: in that lovely, precious, dangerous season of life; of all others the fittest for learning what is good, and unhappily prone to learn or imitate what is evil. My dear children, this is not the first of many times I have addressed instruction particularly to you, and I pray that God may open your hearts to receive it. Let me beseech you, first of all, to learn this important lesson, to distrust yourselves: be sensible of your inexperience, and be persuaded of your danger from the admonitions of others. The greatest evidence you can give of real knowledge, is to be sensible of your ignorance; and of true wisdom, to be willing to learn: the solicitude and concern of your parents or other relations, to preserve you from the destructive paths of vice, is from their certain knowledge of what you are now unwilling to believe. Above all things, shun, as the pestilence, the society of profane scorers. Lost to all sense of piety, seared in their consciences, and enslaved to their lusts, they will do all in their power to destroy a rising sense of religion in your minds: "While they promise you liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption." Think upon eternity approaching: no man can foresee or foretell to you now, whether your time on earth shall be long or short; whether you shall have much prosperity, or many trials in the present world; but as the blessing of God is the best ingredient in all temporal mercies, so being at peace with him is the best support under suffering, and the only preparation for death.

But as all the delusive arguments in favor of sin are drawn from this present life, suffer me to plead the cause of piety and truth in this respect. Be assured that true religion is the way to health, peace, opulence and public esteem. Hear the wisest of mere men: Prov. 3:16, 17. "Length of days is in Wisdom's right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all

her paths are peace." Do not look only on those libertines who are in the beginning or middle of their course, whose spirits are lively, and their vigor yet unimpaired: look on the few older practitioners. These were the good fellows and social spirits of a former period: their companions were cut off in the middle of their days, and they remain as beacons for your instruction and warning. Do you see them sullen in their deportment, mean in their attire, and despised by the world itself; their faces bloated with intemperance, and their miserable offspring pale with hunger, or crippled by neglect? these are the terrible fruits of midnight rioting. They were once as merry in their cups, as ready with their jests, and as great despisers of Sabbaths, and sermons, of whining and praying, as any of their more sprightly successors, who are in the high road to the same despicable end.

My dear friends, when you perceive any one furring up your aversion to parental authority, and teaching you to despise the troublesome admonitions of ministers and mothers, know that he is enticing you to the ruin of soul, body and estate. Hear again the wise man, or rather the Spirit of God speaking by him: Prov. 23:19, &c. "Hear then, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way: be not amongst wine bibbers, amongst riotous eaters of flesh; for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." Prov. 30:17. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

Do you indeed think, that any of your loose companions, with all their professions of friendship and attachment, have the same concern for your true interest that a parent has; or the same judgment to discern it? You may esteem it as a favor when you are assisted in the indulgence of your pleasures, and your irregular courses are concealed from the knowledge of your relations; but it is in truth the greatest injury that can possibly be done you: it is often distressing to those of riper years and more experience, to observe how difficult it is to persuade young persons of easy tempers and

warm affections, of the danger of associating with profligates. We reckon it hard that you will not believe that they are worthless, upon our testimony; but must learn it from your own fatal experience. Believe it, there is no true friendship but what is founded on the principles of piety and virtue: and if you confide in those of a different character, you will sooner or later be rewarded with treachery and falsehood: and indeed, the sooner the better; for their friendship is infinitely more hurtful than any effects of their displeasure. Again therefore, let me beseech the younger part of my audience, who have not yet themselves thrown off all regard to decency, to give up all friendship with, and avoid the society, of those who have. It is usually a hard sacrifice, I confess; but necessary to your preservation from the most destructive courses. What signifies the scorn or resentment of a few hardened wretches, compared to the peace of your own minds, the heart-felt pleasure you will give to every real friend, your comfort and happiness in this life, and the well grounded hope of a blessed immortality?

2. Let me shortly address myself to parents, or others who are intrusted with the education of youth. And, oh that I could make you sensible of the importance and difficulty of your charge! There are many directions, which might be given you with respect to education in general; but I choose to confine my thoughts at present to what is suggested by the occasion and subject of this discourse. Let it therefore be your care, to preserve your children, as much as possible, from the company and conversation of profane persons, especially those who are tainted with infidelity: and who, as its natural consequence, treat the exercises of piety with contempt and scorn. To suffer this, when you can hinder it, is treating their souls in the same manner, as you would do their bodies, if you placed doses of sweetened poison in every corner of the house. You will daily perceive how children are formed by imitation, in their temper and manners: they must bear a resemblance to those from whom they receive their first impressions: but if this is the case in general, how much more must they embrace the principles, and imitate the practice of their companions in pleasure?

This caution is so necessary, that where counsel and intreaty are not sufficient to procure compliance, authority ought to be interposed. Mere authority indeed will be very ineffectual; and therefore, I must particularly recommend to you an early attention to your children's opinion and judgment: they soon form a judgment, and will give early marks of approbation and aversion of persons and characters. Do your utmost to make them esteem religion, as the greatest happiness to every person, and the most amiable part of every character. Make them sensible, from your conduct, that it is not only your sincere choice, but greatest delight. It is very fatal to them, when they are led to look upon it as a burden and constraint. Habituate them early to consider all other qualities as good for nothing, when piety is wanting; and a person of a truly Christian conversation as worthy of the highest esteem, whatever be his station or circumstances in other respects. Remember it makes a part of the character of a good man, as drawn by the Psalmist David; Psa. 15:4. "In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honoreth them that fear the Lord." I am persuaded, that many, who truly fear God themselves, are inadvertently guilty of a great mistake in this particular: they discover unhappily too much of their admiration or envy of the natural advantages of others, independent of their moral character. Dress, furniture and wealth, are looked upon as distinguishing advantages; and children are often suffered to indulge themselves in mockery and derision; even where deformity, poverty, awkwardness, and things perfectly innocent in themselves, are the only objects of their scorn. Intellectual abilities also, comprehension of mind, and sprightliness of fancy, are commonly much the objects of esteem; and young persons are insensibly led to admire these natural qualities, without at all considering to what purposes they are applied. This must necessarily have a fatal effect; and therefore parents should endeavor, as much as possible, to preserve upon their own minds, and inspire their children with an esteem of true piety, and a horror and aversion at a vicious character, whatever advantage may happen to accompany it.

If due care is taken betimes in this respect, I am persuaded it will, in a great measure, prevent the danger arising from the example or solicitation of the patrons of impiety. Their chief success depends on their real character's lying concealed, till it is safe and proper to avow it. They instill the principles of irreligion, as a wife man would do the most sacred truths, by little and little, as their disciples are able to bear them, and always do it under the disguise of pleasure. There is nothing more different than the conversation and carriage of a libertine, in the presence of those of whom he stands in awe, and among his select companions; and even these last are but gradually initiated into the concluding and horrid mysteries of profanity and blasphemy. Young minds therefore should be early formed to such a taste, as to look for piety and virtue, before they will give their approbation or affection to any human accomplishments. Were this the case, they would not be so often betrayed by specious appearances, and drawn in, by degrees, first, to suffer; then, to imitate; and, at last, to delight in the most vicious practices.

While I am giving you these directions, I cannot help observing, that you may see the great necessity of wisdom and prudence in the religious education of children. Apply yourselves to it with diligence. It is an extensive and difficult, but, at the same time, a noble, useful, delightful study. "And if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."

I shall now close this discourse with a few words to professing Christians in general.

My brethren, when vice rears up its head, and appears with insolence and boldness, as it will certainly affect every good man with concern, so it is of great importance what treatment it meets with from the public. If it passes without notice, we may conclude, that corruption hath deeply infected the whole mass. If men are afraid or ashamed to express their indignation at it, we may conclude the conspiracy is formidable; and that the interest of truth and piety is greatly on the decline. There are many, who in cases of gross scandal, rather choose

to keep themselves at ease, by forbearance and indulgence to the guilty, than run the hazard of provoking their resentment by an honest declaration of their real sentiments. Nor is it seldom to be observed, that the very persons who do least in their own sphere, for stemming the tide of profanity, are the first and loudest in complaining of the negligence of magistrates or pastors, in inflicting public punishments or censures.

Whilst, therefore, I am endeavoring, in some measure, to discharge my own duty, I must also put you in mind of yours. It is evidently the duty of all who profess to fear God, to abstain from the society of those who are grossly profane, without discovering any sense of penitence or sorrow. The truth is, I ought rather to make this a mark of true religion, and affirm, that all good men will do so; than inform them that they should. There must be a likeness of disposition among familiar friends. Had you that abhorrence of impiety that you ought to have, you would count the society of impious persons a stain and reproach to your own characters. Of this I am able to give a very strong, and, at the same time, a plain and familiar proof. Were any person known to be guilty of theft and dishonesty, or any fault that is odious and disgraceful in the world, every one would reckon his intimate companions almost, if not to the same degree, abandoned as himself. The same thing will certainly hold as to profanity or licentiousness; though indeed it carries in it a melancholy proof, that sins against piety or purity are far from being held in the same abhorrence, as what endangers our substance or temporal interest. I must however, here beg of you, to attend to a singular and very strong passage of the epistle to the Romans. The apostle Paul closes his description of the profane world in the following terms: Rom. 1:32. "Who knowing the judgment of God, (that they which commit such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." I have looked into the original, and find the words justly translated; and you see, from the construction of the sentence, the apostle represents having pleasure in sensual and wicked men, as implying a depravity of character superior even to that of sensuality itself.

But as associating with the profane is a mark of profanity, so every degree of countenance given to them, by persons of entire character, is a sensible injury to the public. It serves to put honor upon vice, and in part to deliver it from that just reproach which ought to be the punishment of the guilty, and a warning to others not to tread in their steps. I have, on several occasions, observed that the present period or state of things, in this place and congregation, demands the greatest concern for the public interest of religion. Growing in numbers, and growing, I hope, in wealth, as the effect of your own and your fathers industry, you are in danger of the introduction of a worldly spirit by the rising generation. This every good man ought, with the utmost prudence and resolution, to oppose; particularly by doing all in his power to preserve the honor and respect due to true religion, and treating with contempt every open enemy to that important interest. I sincerely wish you improved, and possessed of every accomplishment that is truly valuable; but beware of that false politeness, which consists in little else than an opposition to religion and sobriety. And, indeed I am afraid we shall not soon attain to any other; at least, not by the help of those, who as they set religion at defiance, so are equally strangers to that elegance, and sense of decency which distinguishes persons of higher rank.

The late riotous meeting was without doubt the most audacious thing of the kind that ever was attempted in this place; and therefore calls for an open and vigorous testimony against it, by every person in his sphere. Regard for the glory of God, love to the souls of men, and solicitude for the rising generation, conspire in requiring you to exert yourselves in such a cause; and shall I not add, compassion to the persons themselves? Their worst enemies are those who treat them with indulgence, so long as they continue to justify or to palliate their offence. Nothing serves to harden sinners more, than when no notice is taken of their crimes; and they find themselves just as generally, and as well received, as if they had done no evil. On the other hand, when they perceive the deep concern of others on their account, it is an excellent mean of bringing them to serious reflection, and inducing them to tremble at themselves. Wherefore, my beloved

hearers, let me beseech you to preserve your horror of sin, notwithstanding the boldness of sinners. Do every thing in your power to reclaim the offenders. Be earnest in your supplications to almighty GOD, that he would snatch them as brands from the burning, and raise them up as trophies of his victorious grace. But while they continue in their enmity to God, forget not, on your own account, the apostolic counsel; "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

SERMON XXVI

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY IN DECLARING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

A Farewell Discourse delivered at Paisley, May, 1768.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men: for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God, - ACTS 20:26, 27

MY BRETHREN,

THESE words are a part of the apostle Paul's discourse to the elders of Ephesus, when taking leave of them, under a firm persuasion, or rather a certain knowledge, that he would never again see them in the body. My present situation, of which none of you is ignorant, has determined me to the choice of this passage, as a very proper subject, from which I may conclude the exercise of my ministry among you. I had once occasion, on leaving another charge, to have taken a formal farewell of a very affectionate people, but had not courage to attempt it. The circumstances attending the removal, which, if Providence prevent not, seems now to be at hand, are such as do not lessen, but greatly increase the difficulty of speaking from such a subject. And yet, in another view, they seemed to urge it so strongly, and to present such an opportunity of being useful, as I durst not wholly decline. Every Christian ought to be an observer of providence. Nothing will more effectually promote his holiness and comfort. And both a minister and his people ought to improve the aspect of providence, when it hath any thing peculiar in it, to their mutual benefit.

Let me therefore, intreat you to attend to the following discourse, with patience and composure. This request I the rather hope you will

comply with, as there is nothing intended that is personal, further than must necessarily arise from the subject itself, or be unavoidably suggested by your own thoughts. I bless God that I have no complaint to make of want of duty, or affection upon your vde; neither is it any part of my purpose to justify my own conduct, during the time that I have had the honor and happiness of being intrusted with the ministry of the gospel in this place. I shall therefore only say, that whether I have been able to deliver my own soul, by fidelity in duty, and by purity of principle, I am certain, that fiery much has been laid to the charge of many of yours. Least of all do I intend to endeavor to satisfy you of the motives which have induced me to accept of a call to a distant part of the world, and, in some degree, a different employment in the church of Christ. For this, I know that an account must be given, in due time, to a much greater Judge, with whose approbation either the applause or censure of men are not worthy to be laid in the balance. The single purpose, therefore, of the following discourse, shall be to give you such a comprehensive view of the truths of the everlasting gospel,—of the importance and difficulty of a minister's work; as may direct you in the choice of another pastor,—increase your esteem of such as are faithful,—and excite you to guard against every thing that may either discourage them in their work, or prevent their success.

The apostle Paul had planted the church of Ephesus, and he had spent a part of his time there, very considerable, if we consider the extent of his commission, and his many apostolic journies to different parts of the world. In the whole of his discourse, to the elders of that church, whom he had sent for in his passage to Jerusalem, we see the greatest tenderness and affection, and an earnest concern, to engrave upon their hearts the truths which he had taught them while residing there. And, in the words of the text, you see the foundation on which he takes them to record, that he was free from the blood of all men; for, says he, I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. I omit every thing that might be occasionally introduced from the text, or context, such as ministers being chargeable with the blood of those who perish by

their neglect, and the doctrine of the gospel being the counsel of God, that I may fix your attention, where certainly the emphasis of this declaration lies, viz. That he had declared to them all the counsel of God, and that he had not shunned to do so, or that he had not been deterred, by any difficulties, from the faithful discharge of his trust. Therefore, in discoursing further, on this subject, I will endeavor, through divine assistance,

I. To consider the fidelity of a minister, as consisting in a full and complete declaration of the counsel of God.

II. To consider the difficulties which may lie in his way, or tempt him to shun any part of his work.

III. To make a particular improvement of the subject, by giving you my parting advices, in the spirit of this passage, and in a way, to the best of my judgment, suited to your situation.

First then, Let us consider the fidelity of a minister, as consisting in a full and complete declaration of the counsel of God. This is a circumstance which the apostle seems to have laid particular stress upon, in his discourse to the elders of Ephesus, as he not only rests his solemn appeal to themselves, in this passage, upon it, but had mentioned it before, verses, 20, 21. "And how I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." It is, indeed, a circumstance of the utmost moment, as ministers may be supposed much more ready to fall short in this respect than in any other. It is probable that many more are chargeable with concealing truth, than affirming falsehood; with neglecting duty, than committing crimes; with not building the house, than wilfully pulling it down. Agreeably to this, we find the charge of the prophet, against unfaithful shepherds, is chiefly or only for neglect of duty, Ezek. 34:2, 3, 4. "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, thus faith the

Lord God unto the shepherds, wo be to the shepherds of Israel, that do feed themselves: should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye cloth you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock: the diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye fought that which was lost, but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." But that you may have as comprehensive a view as possible, of the character of a faithful minister, given in the text, observe, that integrity in declaring all the counsel of God, implies the following particulars.

1. Declaring all the truths of God, without any exceptions. The revealed will of God is of great extent and compass. It takes in all that we are to believe concerning God, and all the duty which God requires of man. It gives us an account of the original, and of the fallen state of man; of the early purpose of divine mercy, and the steps that were taken, from age to age, in carrying it into execution; of the person, undertaking, and sufferings of the Saviour; of his laws as a teacher, and his dominion as a king. Together with all this, we have a history of Providence, and many special examples, instructions, and warnings of the most particular kind. Now, my brethren, he who would declare all the counsel of God, must pay a due regard to every part, and, as far as time and health is given him, endeavor to make his people acquainted with the whole. This, to be sure, cannot be done all at once, and at the same time. Doubtless there are some truths of more importance than others. As the foundation must be laid before the structure can be raised, and the foundation and the corner stones are of more moment than the finishings of the surface: yet there is a mutual subserviency of every one in its place to another, and not the least can be wholly omitted without a real injury to those that are retained.

There is a preciousness in every truth that hath the stamp of divine authority upon it; and, therefore, to neglect any of them, and count them trifling, or of little moment, argues a want of reverence for the

word of God. The holy scriptures, as they are full and complete, containing every thing that is necessary; so they are perfect and faultless, containing nothing that is unnecessary. Serious persons have often borne testimony to the great utility of such parts of the sacred oracles, as are commonly treated with most indifference. Nay, I cannot help thinking, that the veneration due to God, who doth nothing in vain, obliges us to believe the utility even of those passages whose purpose we ourselves may not as yet have clearly perceived.

They are therefore greatly to be blamed who are at no pains to make known the counsel of God, in its full extent; but how much more those who satisfy themselves with insisting upon some things, which may be most agreeable to their own taste and disposition, to the entire neglect of others that are perhaps of equal or of greater moment? We see this happen too frequently, that things which fill almost every page in the holy scriptures can scarce obtain a place in many sermons. We see some industriously avoid the truths of the everlasting gospel, and others the duties of the moral law. The evil of this is the greater, that there is such a relation between the several parts of God's revealed will, that if any one is left out, every view given of the rest must be not only partial but unjust. He who truly understands the scriptures, will soon perceive, that there is such an inseparable connexion between one truth and another, that you can hardly admit one without admitting or rejecting the whole; and that none of them can be withdrawn, or concealed, without a manifest injury to the beauty and fulness of the general system.

But, of all others, the most wonderful set of men are those, who are for concealing some of the truths of God, lest they should be abused. The sovereignty of God, his eternal purpose and the freeness of his grace, are often passed by, under this ridiculous pretence. I would despise the wisdom of such persons; it is arrogance; it is impiety. I do not know any truth that cannot be abused by perverse and corrupt minds, or that has not, in many instances, been abused. But is this a reason for concealing them? No. I would preach them openly; I

would preach them fully; I would endeavor to guard them against the abuse; and let sinners know, that, if they wrest the good word of God, they do it to their own destruction. Oh! that there were more subjection of mind to the wisdom of God: more of a deep and inward conviction, that whatever he hath appointed, is, for that very reason, wisest and best. There would not then be so many attempts to explain away what is clearly contained in the New Testament; but we should join, from the heart, with the apostle Paul in saying, Rom. 11:33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out?"

2. Integrity of declaring all the counsel of God, implies preaching the truths of the gospel in their full and just proportion. Under the former particular, I have shewn the necessity of doing justice to every truth; let us now add the duty of giving their full room and place to important and fundamental truths. In order to make a just portrait of a human body, it is necessary, not only to have all the parts, but to have every one in the true proportion it bears to another. If one member is swelled to an unnatural or monstrous bulk, and others are shrunk or shrivelled away almost to nothing, it will make the most unseemly figure. Agreeably to this, he, who would faithfully declare the counsel of God, must have a particular eye to the great and leading truths of the gospel, on which the rest depend, and from which they derive their force and meaning.

If we look into the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, we shall find certain leading truths, which are of so great moment, that they ought hardly ever to be out of view; such as the lost state of man by nature; the absolute necessity of salvation through Christ; the suffering of the Saviour in the sinner's room; and free forgiveness through the blood of the atonement; the necessity of regeneration; and the gift of the Holy Ghost, to enlighten, sanctify and comfort his people. These truths are of such unspeakable moment, in divine revelation, that they ought to be clearly explained, strongly inculcated, and frequently repeated; they are the doctrines of the

reformation; they make the substance of all the Protestant confessions; they are the glory of the Protestant churches; and have been sealed by the blood of thousands of suffering martyrs. And, indeed, it comforts me, under the neglect with which they are treated, at present, by many worldly persons in a state of outward ease and security to the church, that, if ever it please God, for our sins, to throw us into the furnace, they will then discover their honor, they will recover their lustre, because they will certainly manifest their influence.

How shall I make you more sensible, what it is to give their full room to these important truths, than by putting you in mind of the regard that was paid to them by the apostles of our Lord, who received their commission immediately from himself, and were not only the first, but the best and most successful ministers that ever were employed in the church of Christ? What a multitude of passages might I cite to this purpose? Acts 4:12. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." 1 Cor. 3:11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Phil. 3:7, 8, 9. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith?" Without citing any more passages, I shall only observe, that though the apostles introduced a great variety of truths in their writings occasionally, such was, in their opinion, the importance of the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ, that they denominated the gospel by it. Preaching Christ, and preaching the cross of Christ, was, with them, the same thing as preaching the whole. I do not think the apostle Paul was defective, in giving particular instructions, upon every subject, to those churches which he either planted or watered; yet he says to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 2:2. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save

Jesus Christ, and him crucified;" intimating that such was his attachment to that great truth, that it would occupy, in a manner, the whole of his time and labor; or rather, that it had such an intimate connexion with every other part of the will of God, that, be the subject what it would, this could hardly be entirely out of view.

He, who would declare the whole counsel of God, must still place these great and operative doctrines in a conspicuous point of view; he must not pass them over slightly; he must not even speak of them coldly, but in such a manner, as to show, that he knows their truth, and feels their moment. What an inconsistency for a Christian minister, to speak of the Lord Redeemer in such a style, as naturally leads the hearers to put him upon a level with Socrates or Plato, or other uninspired teachers, who never pretended to be saviours? What poison to the souls of men, for any to speak, as if they were speaking to Adam before the fall, and to sing those sinners asleep in security, whom they should endeavor to alarm, that they may be persuaded to flee from the wrath to come. What betraying of their trust, to entertain their people with an affected display of their own talents, or idle speculations, to amuse the fancy, when they should be building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation? The very manner of preaching may be opposite to the doctrine of the cross, which hath so much humility and self-denial in it, as will inspire, and give a color, if I may speak so, to every word that is spoken by him that firmly believes it. On the whole, no other truth or duty will be neglected by a faithful minister: but the oftener he stands, as it were, in the centre of the plan, the more frequently he contemplates the cross of Christ, in which all the lines of divine truth are united, the more clearly will he see them, and the better will he be able to judge at what time and place to introduce them.

This leads me to observe, in the

3d Place, that to declare all the counsel of God, is to preach all the truths of God in their proper order and connexion. To allude to the similitude formerly used of making a portrait of a human body, every

member must not only be in its just proportion, but in its proper place. In teaching every science, there is a certain order that must be observed, otherwise the labor will be in a great measure lost; but it holds in nothing more strongly, than in teaching religion, and opening the truths of the gospel. I might confirm this by many examples, or rather, indeed, by going through the whole system of divine truth, but shall only make a remark or two, for illustrating the observation. The necessity of salvation by Christ, is founded upon the lost state of man by nature. Unless the one is first established, the beauty and meaning of the other will wholly disappear; unless we are now in a corrupt and guilty state; unless man has indeed, lost the knowledge of the true God, the kindness of God to his peculiar people, the promises in the prophetic writings of light to the Gentiles, and the riches of divine grace in the gospel, spoken of in such magnificent terms, must all appear inconsiderable, and unworthy of regard. Unless you can convince men of their sins, and make them sensible of the holiness and justice of God, in vain will you preach the gospel to them; in vain will you call it "glad tidings of great joy to all people;" they do not understand the terms, they will deride the message, and spurn the offered mercy.

If you preach the free forgiveness of sin through Christ, without, at the same time, shewing the necessity of regeneration and sanctification by his Spirit, it will either not be embraced at all, or it will be turned into licentiousness. And, if you preach the duties of the law, without, at the same time, displaying the grace of the gospel, and the vital influence that flows from the head to the members, you will either build up men in a destructive system of Pharisaical religion and self-righteousness, or bring them under the Egyptian bondage, of making brick, though they are not furnished with straw. The privileges and duties of the gospel stand in an inseparable connexion; if you take away the first, you starve and mortify the last. Hear what our Lord himself says. John 15:4, 5. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit, of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same "bringeth

forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." I say the same thing of not enforcing the duties of the gospel with the great and powerful motives drawn from its truths. You see in what a convincing and affecting manner the apostle Paul speaks of his own conduct, and that of the other apostles, 2 Cor. 5:14, 15. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live into themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." It is, doubtless, lawful, nay, it is for the glory of God, to make occasional mention of every argument against sin, drawn from nature, reason, and experience, to shew that, "the law is holy, the commandment holy, just, and good." But let us not hope to make conscientious, active, fruitful Christians, any other way, than by teaching them to live the life that they live in the flesh, a life of faith on the "Son of God, who loved them, and gave himself for them."

All who know the grace of God in truth, will desire to have this connexion between one truth and another, and the influence of truth on duty inviolably preserved. It is, indeed, common with some to alledge, that the friends of the gospel, those who are attached to the doctrine of redemption, are enemies to the law, and that they do not love to hear their duty preached to them. I look upon this as an unjust and detestable slander, and commonly spread by those who know nothing of the subserviency of the law to the gospel, or rather who understand very little either of the one or the other. If a minister preaches the holiness of God's nature, with whom evil cannot dwell; if he preaches the duties of the moral law, in all the force of its unchangeable obligation, and all the terror of its awful sanction, in order to convince his hearers, that they are liable to wrath, I know no found Christian who will find fault with it: nay, I am persuaded, that ministers, who love the doctrine of salvation by grace, do often preach the moral law in such terms, that many legal persons are ready to tremble at the hearing of it; for they willingly use the words of the apostle Paul, Gal. 3:10. "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that

continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But if serious persons hear the duties of the law, preached as the grounds of their acceptance, and the foundation of their peace with God, it is no wonder that they say, after an approved example, "if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Again, if a minister preach the duties of the gospel, explain them in all their extent, and press them by arguments drawn from the New Testament, as the fruits of faith, as the evidences of their change, as a debt of gratitude to their Redeemer, as the marks of their relation to him, and necessary to fit them for his presence, I believe it will not be unacceptable to any of his people. On the contrary, they do usually both approve and delight in these sermons which are most searching to the conscience, and most clear and explicit in the trial of their state. Titus 3:8. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men." It is our duty to shew, not only that professing Christians ought to be holy, but that they must be holy; and that if they live and die the slaves of any known sin, Christ, and all that he hath done, shall profit them nothing, but only aggravate their condemnation. I will bear this testimony to my own hearers, that, as it was always a principle with me, to preach the doctrines of redemption where they are, and not to attempt to find them where they are not, by a boundless allegorical interpretation; so these sermons, which have been wholly employed in explaining and enforcing particular duties, opening their principles, distinguishing them from their counterfeits, and pressing them upon the conscience, have met with as much approbation, and been heard with as little suspicion as any whatever. But if any minister had preached in such a manner, as to set the doctrine of salvation altogether aside, and to suppose that we could obey in our own strength, or that God was indebted to us for our works, instead of our being indebted to him, both for strength to perform them, and mercy to accept them, I believe it would not have passed without censure;

and I sincerely pray, that the time may never come, when it will, in any corner of this church, but especially from the pulpit in which I now stand.

The delusion and absurdity that finds place with many, deserves the greatest pity. It is not uncommon to hear certain persons pouring out the bitterest invectives in pulpit and conversation against others, as enemies to morality, as turning the grace of God into licentiousness, as not only neglecting, but even opposing the obligation of his law. In the mean while, if you hear the first, you shall rarely meet with any thing but what is quite loose and general, a declamation on the beauty of virtue, and the necessity of holiness, or a very imperfect sketch of the offices due from man to man in the common intercourse of social life. And, if you hear the other, it is probable you may hear many of the hard sayings of the gospel, not only the necessity of doing justice, and loving mercy, with the certain damnation of those who hold unjust gain without restitution; but the necessity of loving God above all created comforts, habitually directing every part of our conduct to his glory, and being sincerely and without reserve, submissive to his providence. You may also, probably, hear the duties of every relation descended to with a particularity, and the neglect or breach of them reprov'd with a severity, that is no where else to be found. Now, I desire to know which of these are the greatest friends to morality. So strong is the deception, that I have known several of the hearers of the most boasted moral preachers, who could not avoid betraying, by their discourse, that they considered the exercises of piety, as no part of morality, and very consistently, indeed, with these principles, treated them with the most absolute neglect.

I have little hope of the conviction, but would gladly, if possible, stop the mouths of gainsayers on this subject. Is it not usual to mark out the friends of salvation by grace, under the title of extraordinary strict, and eminent professors; generally, indeed, with a view to challenge the sincerity of that profession, and load it with obloquy and reproach? But consider, I pray you, with what propriety you give

them the name of professors? what is it that they profess? It is, that they are nothing in themselves and deserve nothing at the hand of God but wrath for their sins; that they have no hope of acceptance, but by the free grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ; that they can do nothing of themselves that is good, but by the grace of God, are what they are; so that there is no room left for them to glory. Is not this their faith and persuasion? Why are they then called professors? You are the professors, who make your boast of the law, and glory in the excellence and perfection of human virtue. Shew us then your faith by your works; justify your profession by your practice; boasting will bring you little credit. But let us see who have the most sober, honest, holy, heavenly lives; these are certainly actuated by the best principles.

But, I must, in part, retract what I have said; for, after all, the servants of Christ are indeed professors. They have taken on the holy profession of the gospel: and, in fact, any instance of irregular conduct in them is more observed, more deeply reproached, and gives greater offence than the very same in persons of a different character. When they depart from their duty, and from strictness of conversation, I give them freely up to the censures of their enemies; they have richly deserved them, and therefore they ought to bear them. In the mean time, let me put those in mind, who, in the midst of their triumph, stigmatize them with the name of professors, that they do them, or rather their profession, more honor than they are aware of; for they show that they themselves are sensible that such principles ought to have produced holiness in the conversation. So far as they reproach the sinner, or the detected hypocrite, they do what is right, and it can scarcely be over done. But, when they take occasion to bring a reproach on the profession itself, their very success is a condemnation of themselves; for that the gross crimes of their own admirers, are less offensive, is just because their profession is less holy. Nothing would give me greater pain, than to understand that my doctrine were to the taste of midnight rioters, swearers, and Sabbath breakers; and, if any such are found among the admirers of

moral preaching, their teachers could not do themselves a greater honor, than by renouncing the connexion.

4th. Fidelity in declaring the whole counsel of God, implies preaching every truth in its proper season. "There is as Solomon tells us, a time for every thing under the sun;" and, where the truths of the gospel are taught in their season, it gives them a particular lustre, as well as an uncommon force. That you may understand what I mean by preaching the truths of religion in their season, you may observe, that, besides giving with assiduity and care, the necessary instructions for every particular duty incumbent on persons, families or congregations, the season may vary, and the propriety and necessity of insisting upon some truths, may arise from two circumstances;—the state of religion among a people;—and the aspect of Providence towards them.

1st. It may arise from the state of religion among a people. Surely it is the duty of a minister to suit his instructions to the present and most pressing necessities of his hearers; not to foster their prejudices, but, with care and judgment, to correct them; not to pardon or overlook their prevailing errors, but to rectify them; not to bear with epidemic sins, but with boldness and severity, to reprove them. It will be seen, on the following head, that some of the greatest difficulties that lie in the way of ministers, and the strongest temptations to unfaithfulness, come from this quarter. At present I shall only shortly illustrate the observation, and support it by the practice of the apostles. We see, that, in speaking either to persons or churches, they took care to have a particular eye to their state and character, and adapted their instructions, and even their expressions, to these circumstances with the utmost fidelity, and the greatest skill. Neither is there any way by which we can so well enter into the meaning of the scriptures, or perceive their beauty, as by considering the conditions and characters of those to whom the several parts of them are immediately addressed. We shall also see a mixture of zeal and prudence in the holy apostles, when acting under the direction of the Spirit of God. What an admirable example have we of propriety and

fidelity in the apostle Paul's discourse to Felix, the Roman governor, when he desired to hear him concerning the faith of Christ? We are told, Acts 24:25. that he took occasion to "reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." In speaking to one, who had, probably, no other intention, in desiring to hear him, than to gratify his curiosity, by obtaining a distinct account of the wonderful history of Christ, he thought proper to apply to all those principles of natural conscience which might be supposed, yet to retain some power over him. And if (as many judicious interpreters think) instead of temperance, we should read continence, it was a bold and severe, yet well-timed reproof to him and Drusilla, who were then living in adultery. We cannot help also being, struck with the unshaken boldness of the Apostle, who could speak with so much freedom to the governor, in whose hands he was then as a prisoner, and before whom he expected soon to stand, and receive sentence from him as a judge.

You may also observe the apostle Paul's attention to, and concern for the particular state of the churches to which he wrote his epistles. The church of Corinth seems to have been greatly infested with divisions and contentions, and these unhappily inflamed by ambitious and factious teachers, under whom they were marshalled as so many leaders, and to whose name and interest they seem to have been more devoted, than even to those of their Master, 1 Cor. 3:3, 4. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For, while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" Against this the apostle writes with the greatest zeal and warmth, and, at the same time, with the greatest prudence. He shews how inconsistent it was with the spirit of the gospel, and how derogatory to the honor of Christ. He endeavors to make them sensible that the most able and faithful ministers were no more than instruments in his hand, and owed their success entirely to the blessing of God accompanying their labors, as in the same chapter, ver. 5, 6, 7. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." What deserves particular notice, is, that, in all probability, the mention of himself and Apollos here, was merely hypothetical, or to serve by way of example. The real heads of the parties in the Corinthian church, were other teachers than either Paul or Apollos, whom he did not chuse to name, but stated his argument in this less offensive and more convincing form. The truth is, there is no disorder in a church, that is harder to deal with, than a spirit of contention. Other sins may be reprov'd with severity, and you will be supposed to be in the exercise of your duty when doing so; but this will not allow itself to be reprov'd, because it will not confess itself to be a crime, and is therefore often exasperated by the attempts to heal it. You may see sometimes a man of strife cover all under a flaming profession of religion, and yet conduct it in such a manner, that we may say of him, as the servants of Nabal said of their master, "he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him."

I might produce many other examples from the holy Scriptures; but these are sufficient, to shew that it is the duty of a minister to suit himself to the state of religion among his people, by with-holding nothing that is profitable, but particularly insisting on what is most needful. If any of the truths of the gospel are in danger of being neglected, if they are undermined by secret, or assaulted by open enemies, it is the duty of a minister to make frequent mention of them, lest they should be forgotten; and to support and confirm them, that they may obtain acceptance. If any duty is in danger of falling into disesteem, and a false shame makes many decline the practice, a faithful minister should stand forth an open and zealous advocate for its continuance. If any particular sin, or sins, prevail remarkably in a place, and appear to be gaining ground, it is the duty of a minister to beware of yielding to the stream, or seeking his own quiet by silence; on the contrary, he ought to double his diligence, and make the most resolute and vigorous opposition to the incroaching evil. Of all this, I suppose, you will clearly perceive both

the meaning and the justice. These circumstances are the intimations of Providence, and point out, in the most significant manner, not only what is a part of a minister's work in general, but also what is the immediate will of God as to his present duty.

2dly. The proper season of insisting on particular truths may arise from the aspect of providence towards the church in general, or a congregation, family, or person in particular. You see the apostles constantly make use of the state of the church in their time, the number and violence of its enemies, to excite the servants of Christ to vigilance, to exhort them to constancy, and to exercise them to patience. They also seem particularly attentive to teach their converts to make use of the consolations of the gospel with this view, Rom. 8:18. "For I reckon, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"—and the same chapter, verses 35, 36, 37. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." Impending calamities of such an alarming nature that they speak, as it were, of themselves, and afford the noblest opportunities of awakening the attention, and moving the affections, of bringing the careless to conviction, and stirring up the holy to watchfulness. In times of public danger too the self-seeking minister throws off the mask, and deserts the cause, while the faithful who remain, are necessarily animated with uncommon zeal.

But a different aspect of Providence calls also for instruction in season. In times of public quiet and security, there is the greatest reason to dread, and, by consequence, to guard against indifference and formality in religion, on the one hand, or unnecessary contention about it on the other. When the profession of the gospel is at any rate safe, and in some degree profitable, the church is always incumbered with a dead weight of customary Christians, who receive their religion from their fathers, and continue to tread, as it were, in

the beaten path. It is no easy matter to shake their security, when every outward circumstance conspires to increase it. And as the spiritual slumber takes hold, in some measure, even of those who are alive unto God, it is no trifling task to exercise discipline, at once with prudence and with firmness, and to preserve the life and power of religion, when every thing is stiffening into form. It is very easy, indeed, when there is a hard conflict between health and corruption, in the body of Christ, that is to say, in his visible church, for one, or a few members, to pour out complaints against those who govern it; to lay to the charge of ministers those abuses which are the grief of their hearts; and, all at once, to set about making a new model according to their own fancy. But I apprehend it is a much better, though a more difficult duty, to obey the Redeemer's counsel, to "be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die." Alas! how often do the new disorders that break out in separating societies, betray the naughty materials of which they are composed. They are much in the same way as the fool who ran away from his own shadow, but run where he would, it was as soon there as he. They run away from the corruption of human nature, and they shall never be quit of it, because they carry it with them.

There is one other temptation which I shall briefly mention, as almost inseparable from a state of outward quiet in the church of Christ. Those, if I may speak so, who keep their garments clean, as to the sins, are scarcely able to bear up under the trials of the times. When they see one attempt after another, for the revival of truth and righteousness, defeated by the strength of corruption, they are in danger of impatience and fretfulness against Providence, and sometimes are even tempted to call in question the reality of religion altogether; as if it did not meet with that support and countenance, from the great Ruler, which they think is its due. But the most common danger is, that of falling into a despondent neglect of duty, of not doing what they ought, because it has not hitherto had the affect which they desire. In such a case, no doubt, it is the duty of ministers to fortify them, by giving proper views of the wisdom and sovereignty of Providence; by shewing the paths of God towards his

church, in ancient times; and that these have, in every age, been the complaints and fears of good men, from the weakness of their faith, and the imperfection of their knowledge. It was the complaint of the Psalmist, Psal. 79:4. "We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us." But it led him to prayer for the revival of religion, as well as the prosperity of his country, verse 5. "How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry forever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire?" and, in the 8th and 9th verses, "O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins for thy name's sake."

But the course of Providence, towards the church in general, is not only to be observed and improved, but whatever is remarkable or singular, in particular congregations. I shall not dwell upon examples of this, because it is my purpose to put it into practice, and by that means, to illustrate it in the application of this discourse. Let it suffice to say, that those truths, or exhortations, which are founded on the visible state of Providence, carry a degree of evidence and weight with them, that is peculiar to themselves. Known characters and scenes illustrate the description, facilitate the application, and increase the conviction. I do not mean the exposing of particular persons, by the introduction of single and recent facts. But if a minister is able with judgment and propriety, to reflect light upon divine truth, by pointing out the evil consequences of sin in general, the causes of the prevalence of one sin more than another, and the insensible changes that are produced in the manners of men, by the change of their outward condition, it is certainly his duty; and when the state of his own people furnishes the opportunity, if he would speak the word in season, he ought not to let it pass.

To these observations I only add, that, in the whole course of private parochial duties, a faithful minister will speak the truths of God in their proper season. If in family visitation, or private and personal admonition, he hath not a particular view, either to their character,

as far as it is known, or their state in providence, however excellent or important his instructions may be, in other respects, he declareth not the whole counsel of God. But if he is truly actuated by a desire of being useful, and keeps this circumstance in his eye, with what readiness will he communicate instruction to the ignorant, consolation to the distrest, an I reproof to the obstinate? He will recommend to the rich, humility and liberality; to all who are in poverty patience and industry; to parents, assiduity in teaching and government; to children, obedience, attention, and subjection; and to servants, integrity and faithfulness in their trust; or, in the language of the Holy Ghost, as a wise servant, "he will give to every one his portion of meat in due season."

5. In the last place, declaring the whole counsel of God, implies preaching the truths of the gospel, honestly and boldly, without respect of persons. I am persuaded the apostle Paul, who was himself so remarkable for an undaunted courage in his Master's cause, had this, amongst other things, in view, when he says, he had not shunned to declare the counsel of God. There are few temptations more dangerous to a minister, than the fear of man. Such is the malignant enmity of the wicked against the good, that he may suffer injury from them in his name, his substance, and even this person. Against his danger our Saviour has warned his disciples in the following passage, Luke 12:4. "And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you fear him." It is remarkable, that in the prayers recorded in scripture, as offered up by the apostles, for divine assistance in their sacred office, as well as those passages in which they ask the prayers and intercession of their fellow Christians, this circumstance is almost never forgotten. Boldness and resolution was what they saw they should always stand in need of, Acts 4:29. "And now, Lord, behold their threatnings, and grant unto thy servants, that, with all boldness, they may speak thy word." Eph. 6:18, 19. "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication, in the spirit, and watching

thereunto, with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel.

The trials of the apostles were indeed in this respect uncommonly severe; but, even setting aside the case of open persecution, there is great reason for ministers to guard against that fear of man, which bringeth a snare. As their hearers are of all different ranks and degrees, they ought, with the utmost impartiality, to preach the duties incumbent upon, and reprove the sins that cleave to men of every station. As they speak in the name of God, and carry a message from the King of kings, they ought to do it with the dignity that becomes an ambassador from him. They ought not to be dismayed at the presence of the most high and mighty of their fellow sinners, when they remember the continual presence of him before whom "mean men are vanity, and great men are a lie." I know, my brethren, that there is a respect and deference due to men, according to their station, and that a conscientious Christian will give them the subjection that belongs to their rank, and authority in civil life, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." But this does not hinder him, who watches for their souls, to give them faithful warning, and, where it is necessary to debar them from the seals of God's covenant, lest they should at once profane his ordinance, and ruin their own souls.

I say, and I pray you to attend to it, ruin their own souls; because I know not a greater injury that can be done to the great, than that constant adulation that is paid to them, and that indulgence to their faults, which, by weakening the reproofs of conscience, tends to hinder their repentance and reformation. I take this opportunity to say, that if eternity is of any moment the great are not to be envied, but pitied. Some are hindered by interest, and some by fear, from dealing plainly and faithfully with them; and it is wonderful to think how much the opinions and conduct of others blinds them as to the state of their own souls. It is recorded, to the honor of an ancient bishop, that for an act of cruelty he debarred the emperor himself

from the Lord's table. I know there are many who would pronounce this, immediately, the act of an ambitious and assuming priest; but it will always be, in my eyes, a revered example of honesty and faithfulness in a minister of Christ.

II. I proceed, now, to the second thing proposed, which was to consider the difficulties which may lie in a minister's way, and tempt him to shun any part of his work. These are very various, and not easy either to enumerate or describe. What hath generally made the greatest impression upon me, either from experience or observation, I shall dwell upon a little: it may be reduced to the three following heads, — Sloth or worldliness in ourselves, — the prejudices of our people, — and the opposition of our enemies.

1. Sloth or worldliness in ministers, themselves, may tempt them to shun some part of their work. You will see, from the preceding observations, that the work of a minister is both extensive and difficult. It requires the greatest intention of mind, the application, so to Speak, of the whole man. It requires judgment to lay down the plan, diligence and perseverance to carry it into execution. Now slothfulness, and a love of ease or pleasure, to which we have all too great a bias, must be a very dangerous temptation; to evade some part of the duty, or slur it over in a slight or careless manner. There is a very great difference between doing our work in some fort, or so as to avoid punishment from our superiors, especially at a time when the reins of government are not held very hard, and doing it with that zeal and application which a concern for the glory of God, and love to the souls of men, should habitually inspire. We have all reason to be ashamed, that the important objects we have in view, and the interesting subjects we have to treat of, do not put an edge upon our spirits, and deliver us from that lazy unconcerned manner, which is equally dishonorable to God, and hurtful to the souls of men. I take the liberty to observe, that slothfulness is very incident to persons of considerable abilities; instead of being excited to improve their talents, they are inclined to trust to them. Finding, by experience, that they can do tolerably with but little pains, they soon come to

content themselves with next to none. Perhaps I might apply here the common observation, that as few know their own weakness, so as few know their own strength, or what they might do by the conscientious improvement of their natural powers. We have seen many examples of persons of weak capacity, who, by the help of piety and diligence, have done every part of their ministerial duty, in a manner far superior to those of much greater talents, whose heart did not lie to their work.

The danger of sloth, as a temptation, will appear, in the strongest light, from what has been said, on the fidelity of a minister in declaring all the counsel of God. He may not only deal with a flaccid hand, and do his work imperfectly; but, as it consists of very different parts, he may chuse the easier, and leave the harder. He may apply chiefly to what is most pleasant to himself, or what gives him the greatest opportunity to shine in the eyes of others, while he neglects those parts that are more burdensome to the flesh. The danger of this is the greater, that those parts of a minister's work, to which a slothful mind is usually most reluctant, are also those, the neglect of which can be most easily palliated or concealed. And, indeed, it is wonderful to think what ingenious excuses men will invent for the neglect of those duties which they have no inclination to perform. I have often heard ministers endeavor to prove, that visitation of families, which doubtless is a very fatiguing, was also a very unprofitable and unnecessary piece of service, than which, I think, there never was any thing more manifestly false. It is not only, when executed with fidelity, of great immediate use, in itself, but, by giving a minister a thorough knowledge of his people, enables him to perform every other part of his work with the greater propriety and success. A minister ought to be like a servant, wholly at his master's disposal, who has no choice as to his work, but is ready to obey what God, in his Providence, shall see fit to command him.

I joined worldliness with sloth, because they are near of kin, and commonly co-operate one with another. It is not my intention, in any part of this reasoning, to point out those who are wholly unfaithful,

and mean no more but to shear the fleece, without caring for the flock; but to shew how those sinful dispositions, which, in part, take place in every one of us, if they be suffered to gather strength, may obstruct us in our duty. Too many worldly cares, or too much indulgence of worldly pleasure, must be a very dangerous temptation to those who are intrusted with the care of souls. The apostle Paul says of himself, that he was "separated to the gospel of God," so is every minister of Christ: A prudent attention to his necessary provision, indeed, and ordering his affairs with discretion, is not only lawful, but highly useful and expedient; as it frees him from anxiety, and gives him greater liberty of mind for prosecuting the ends of his calling. But for one, appointed to labor in holy things, to be either sordidly covetous, or from interested ambitious views to follow worldly occupations, is certainly either a sacrilegious breach of trust, or an unreasonable and offensive distrust of God.

2. Another very great difficulty, which often lies in the way of a minister, arises from the prejudices of his people. It would be idle to suppose, that ever we shall find a people, among whom there are no mistaken notions, or unjust prepossessions, which it is our duty, with prudence, but at the same time with honesty, to withstand. As no congregation can expect to meet with a perfect minister; so no minister should expect to meet with a faultless congregation. If there were any such, there would be little need of a minister at all. You are to observe, that I do not here chiefly intend that bias and propensity to sin, which is natural to us all, which reigns in the wicked, and struggles for indulgence in the good; and which, therefore, calls for "doctrine, reproof, and correction, and instruction, in righteousness." Though I must observe, that even with regard to this, when any sin is common and prevalent in a place, when it has long kept possession, and has been generally overlooked; if a minister sees it his duty to reprove it with severity, and especially if he will not tolerate it without censure, he may expect no little difficulty and opposition. There are many who will complain of him as too rigid, and impute to ill-nature, and indiscretion, what arises from the dictates of conscience, and a sense of duty. By bearing open

testimony against the introduction of fashionable amusements, or conformity to the world, he will often incur not only the hatred of the profligate, but the disapprobation of those prudent compilers, who are at once ashamed to approve, and unwilling to oppose any sinful relaxation.

But what I had chiefly in view, was, to mention these prejudices that may prevail, with regard to religion; and which may be of such a nature, as a minister may be under a necessity not only of refusing to comply with, but of opposing in the most direct and positive manner. If any error or mistake, of consequence, prevail, either among his people in general, or any part of them, either among the high or the low, the learned or the vulgar, he must endeavor to destroy it. There may be indeed prejudices of so trifling a nature, that, though he will never approve them, it is better entirely to overlook them; or in things that are merely indifferent, though unnecessary, according to the apostolic example, of "becoming all things to all men," it may be his duty sometimes to comply with them. But this is not the case with any thing that affects the substance of religion, as to all which, if he attempt to please men, he is not the servant of Christ. Now, how great a difficulty must often arise from such circumstances? he is unwilling to lose his place in the esteem and affection of his people, in general, but especially of those whom he reckons to be the disciples and friends of Christ. Yet this he must sometimes forfeit for a season, unless he will sin against God, and thereby destroy his own peace. The best way for a minister to support himself, in such a situation, is, to remember, that as to his integrity before God, and the comfort of his own mind, the less regard he pays to the judgment of men, so much the better; if God be for him, it signifies little who be against him. And as to his usefulness, he may safely commit it to God in his providence, who will certainly take care of it. Since he will not have it preserved by sinful compliance, he can easily restore it after it hath been a short time suspended, for conscientious opposition. The truth is, an unsteady person, shaken by the breath of popular opinion, is unworthy of filling the station of a minister of Christ. As he should not be terrified by the threatenings of the great, neither

should he be overcome by the clamors of the multitude. And if neither humor nor interest, but conscience, has indeed been his guide, he may rest assured that God, infinitely wise, will "bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon day."

My brethren, I thank God, that I speak this from a conviction of the general truth, more than from having suffered much in this respect in my own experience. I shall mention to you, however, one example, that I may illustrate the remark, and, at the same time, further discharge my own duty. It hath always seemed to me of great moment, to preserve just views of the sacraments, which are the seals of God's covenant, and the appointed means of the confirmation and comfort of his own people. Without mentioning, however, the sacrament of the Lord's supper, I have found the greatest difficulty in preserving the sacrament of baptism from profanation, and from that comparative disregard under which it now lieth. This arises not only from the laxness of discipline in general, but from some mistakes and prejudices on the subject of religion. It appears to me a thing undeniable, that both sacraments are the seals of the same covenant, require the same terms of admission, and operate to the benefit of the receivers upon the very same principles; that is to say, according to the excellent words of our Catechism, "Not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of God, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them." The only difference is, that, in the Lord's supper, every believer acts for himself personally; in the sacrament of baptism, when administered to infants, the parent acts as a representative, and sponsor for his seed. None, therefore, ought to be admitted to baptism, more than to the Lord's supper, who have not a credible profession of faith in Christ and, in the judgment of charity, or rather the judgment of men, may be supposed real Christians. Yet, is it not certain, that many, who are justly excluded from the Lord's table, and some who never asked admission to it, do insist on presenting their children to baptism, and are pleaded for by not a few of better character, who cry out against

the refusal, as an injury to the child, besides other bad consequences sometimes pretended?

The chief complaint is, that it is a pity the child should suffer for the fault of the father. This is the very error and prejudice in religion, which I think it my duty to oppose. It arises from a remaining degree of Popish superstition, to look upon the sacraments as spells, or charms, which have some effect independent of the exercise of faith in the receiver. The sacraments, my brethren, are not grace, but the means of it; they are not faith, but are appointed for the confirmation and growth of it. They belong to believers alone. They are seals of God's covenant; but they cannot seal that which was never made. It is just as if a man, who wanted to make a purchase from me, whose terms I had utterly rejected, and refused to give him my possession, should, notwithstanding, persist in writing out his contract, and signing it. Would this be of any effect? A contract is a sure title to the bargain, where the consent of both parties is ascertained; but where one of these is wanting, it is absolutely void, and of no effect. Infants cannot receive the sacraments, by exercising faith themselves; they have no right to receive the sign at all, but as they are the seed of believing parents by profession. Neither do they receive any real benefit from it, but when they are the seed of those who believe sincerely. If it be allowed, that an unbeliever, who receives the bread and wine at the Lord's table, receives no benefit to his own soul, how can it be imagined, or supposed, that an unbelieving parent, in baptism, can first receive, and then convey benefit to his new born child? His coming there at all, in such a state, is a presumptuous profanation of a holy institution. Now, though I can conceive easily, and do believe firmly, that many blessings are conveyed to children by an act of duty in their parents, I can neither conceive nor believe, that they can receive any advantage from an act of profanity and disobedience.

The children of wicked parents, then, can receive no benefit by baptism, but what they would have whether they were baptized or not, viz. that they are brought up among professing Christians, and

by that means have some opportunities of knowing the truths of the gospel. And I cannot help thinking, it would, in the course of providence, be an inducement to them to attend more seriously to what they are taught, if they considered themselves as no members of the visible church, till they understood the terms of admission, and desired it as their own choice. The case is very different with the children of real believers; they have a right to all the promises that are made to the seed of believers, as such, by that God who "sheweth mercy to thousands of generations of them that keep his commandments." Some, I believe many, think that they are doing honor to the sacrament of baptism, by representing the rite itself as of so great necessity; but it is precisely that sort of honor that the Papists do to it, by causing midwives and physicians instantly to baptize the children that are in a weak state, or by running to the beds of the sick, with a little of the consecrated wafer, and putting it in the mouth of a person either wholly insensible, or, perhaps, already dead. Our fathers, in the purer times of this church, whose institutions and practise, the longer I live, I do the more esteem and revere, in the most absolute manner, prohibited all private baptism. Their great reason for this was to prevent the very abuse I have been speaking of, viz. the superstitious notion of the necessity of the outward rite to salvation, without a due attention to the manner of receiving it. And, indeed, it was their only reason; for they, who were so great enemies to the consecration of places, and the holiness of stones or timber, could never think that baptism, administered according to Christ's appointment, was invalid for being done in a private house, and not in a church, or in the presence of a small, rather than a numerous assembly.

These things, by brethren, which I have often mentioned occasionally, I have now repeated, and will add to them, that I think there is something very incongruous, at least unsuitable, in admitting any parent to present his child in baptism, whatever be his character in other respects, who has never asked admission to the Lord's table. Consider, that in the administration of baptism, the parent is constantly taken bound to command his children, so soon

as they come to years, to renew their baptismal engagement in their own persons. Now, what consistency is there, in allowing a man to pledge his faith solemnly to God and his church, that he will command his child to do that which he habitually neglects to do himself. The pretence of fear, and unpreparedness for the Lord's table, is a condemnation of those who offer it, because it shews, that they suppose the one sacrament requires a different character or easier terms of admission than the other. After all, the above prejudices seem to me so deeply rooted with many, that they will not probably be soon destroyed; but I think it is the duty of every minister, in that, and all such cases, to speak his mind plainly, and, to the utmost of his power, to act consistently and uniformly, though he should suffer by the slanders both of the ignorant and profane.

3. The last difficulty which I shall mention, as lying in the way of ministers, is the opposition of their enemies. No faithful minister can expect to be without enemies. In a private character, and retired way of life, a man may, by very great prudence, and particularly by silence and forbearance, in a great measure, escape the resentment or injuries of violent men. And to be as little embroiled with others as possible, is both our interest and our duty. "If it be possible," says the Apostle, "and as much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men." But it is certain, from long and invariable experience, that there is such enmity and rancor in the hearts of wicked men against all who are in good earnest about religion, that they may lay their account with continual opposition, and continual slander. This our Saviour teaches his disciples to expect, and shews them, that it is the necessary consequence of their relation to him, John, 15:18, 19, 20, 21. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than the Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent

me."—The apostle Paul also bears his testimony to the same truth, 2 Tim. 3:12. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

But, if wicked men are injurious to the children of God in general, their malice must be particularly whetted against a minister, so far as he does his duty. He is placed in a public station, and is obliged to be active in his Master's cause. Time-serving or neutrality, as to the interest of religion, is commendable in none, but it is unpardonable in him. He must bear testimony openly and resolutely against vice and wickedness. And reproof, when administered with severity, is certain of making either a friend or an enemy. A faithful minister will not suffer Satan's kingdom to be at peace; and, therefore, it is no wonder, that, when they are gnawing their tongues with pain, they should pour out their venom against him, who gives them so much disturbance. The effect of reproof, in kindling the rage and malice of the guilty, was never better described than in the account of the trial and martyrdom of Stephen, particularly Acts 7:54. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth."

There are many ways by which the enmity and opposition of wicked men to the truth may prove a temptation to a minister: a few of which I shall mention, as I hope the distinct knowledge of them may be profitable to you in the way of caution: 1st, As one of their chief weapons is contempt and derision, he may be in danger of concealing or perverting truth, in some degree, in order to avoid it. When the gospel of Christ was first published, the doctrine of the cross, we are told, was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The same truth, in its simplicity, is still treated with scorn by profane and worldly men. All that relates to it is considered as weakness and absurdity; and the minister, who insists upon it, must lose his character with many for capacity and judgment. Is not this known to be true in daily experience? Are not such immediately stigmatized as weak and babbling creatures? Now, it is not altogether an easy sacrifice for a minister, to be indifferent as to the opinion

formed of his parts and sufficiency, to wait till time shall do him justice, or to be altogether unconcerned whether it ever do him justice or not. It is no trifling thing to become a fool in the eye of the world for Christ's sake, and not to be ashamed of his cross. It may make many avoid such subjects, at least, more than they ought, or, perhaps, attempt to give them a polite or modish dress, which, of all others, is the most unsuitable to them; or it may make others go to the opposite extreme, who, because they find that such truths will be despised, are at no pains to avoid adding to the offence, by a filly and contemptible, or a crude and indigested manner of handling them. I know not, indeed, a more difficult thing, nor do I know any thing more noble in a minister, than to "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils," to be truly superior to the applause or censure of either one class or another of his hearers, and therefore to avoid a vain display of human art; but, at the same time, from a sense of duty to God, and veneration for his truths, to be at all due pains to treat them properly, so as they may appear with light and evidence to the understanding, and come home with force upon the conscience. Such a man will bring forth the doctrines of the gospel in their own unadorned majesty and native simplicity; he will not consider himself as preaching before his hearers as critics; for what are they to him in this view? but he will consider himself as preaching to them as sinners, and pleading with them as immortal creatures, tottering upon the very brink of eternal perdition.

2dly. The opposition of enemies may tempt men of little courage to sinful silence for their own quiet. When vice is prevalent, it is also commonly insolent and resentful. Now, the hatred or ill-will of no person is desirable; and there are a thousand ways in which any person of a revengeful spirit may be hurtful. There are also very few so unconnected, but that they have many friends, whose hatred is to be encountered as well as their own. The influence of this is but too much seen in every place. Offenders are often screened from reproof or censure, through fear of provoking them or their relations. Neither is it at all difficult to find palliating arguments, drawn from prudence, or other considerations, to make us think it is necessary to

forbear. I believe this is very much the fault of the present age, and the greater and more general the relaxation of discipline in any age or place, the more difficult and dangerous it is for any one to step forth and assert its dignity and obligation. And yet I cannot help thinking, the great excellence of discipline, is its impartiality, not to respect persons in judgment. How can we defend ourselves, if we make one law for one, and another for another; if we censure the small, and forgive the great?

3dly. Ministers of weak minds may be apt to sink under the opposition of the wicked. It is said of Lot, dwelling in Sodom, that he was, 2 Peter 2:7, 8. "—Vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." It certainly needs no small measure of fortitude and holy resolution, to persist in the discharge of our duty, notwithstanding the obstinacy of sinners, and to seek our comfort, under continual obloquy, from the approbation of him, that judgeth righteously. At the same time, I must say, that the friendship of wicked men is much more dangerous than their enmity; for the first brings with it the danger of seduction, and the last only exposes us to suffering, which, though itself is a species of temptation, as I shall immediately shew, is much less powerful than the other.

4thly. The opposition of wicked men may prove a temptation, as it may bring forth the remains of corruption that are in the hearts of good men, and make them sin, by imprudence or passion, if not by resentment. I have no where supposed that ministers are faultless in their conduct; they may, no doubt, err considerably in many circumstances, even when their intention, upon the whole, is just and laudable. We see many examples of great imprudence, which we need not wonder at, when we consider the difficulties with which they are every where surrounded, and the enemies that wait for their halting. If we consider that Moses, the meekest man on earth, spoke unadvisedly with his lips upon great provocation, we shall perceive it is but a part of the weakness of humanity, when we see others fall

into the same snare. But, as to lasting resentment, he deserveth not the name of a Christian, much less of a minister, who will continue to harbor it in his breast; he must love his enemies; he must bless them that curse him, and pray for them that despitefully use him, and persecute him. This is not merely a thing amiable and excellent, but of the most absolute necessity; for our Saviour says expressly, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses." And, blessed be God, there is nothing difficult or burdensome in this part of a Christian's duty. There is no such victory over evil, as overcoming it with good. There is no such consolation under the injuries of sinners, as requiting them by prayer. It composeth the spirit; it puriseth the heart, and authorizes the believer to put his trust in God, and say with the Psalmist, Psal. 27:1. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

III. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of this subject; particularly, by giving you my parting advices in the spirit of this passage, and to the best of my judgment, in a manner suited to your situation. But, before I do this, in the

1st Place, Let me beseech every sinner in this assembly, to hearken to the message of the gospel, and to believe in the name of the Son of God, "that, believing, they may have life through his name." This is the substance of the counsel of God, "that Christ died on the cross to save sinners, and that there is no salvation in any other." You are blessed who hear the joyful sound, but infinitely more blessed, if you lay it to heart, and, renouncing every other claim, rest your dependance upon this Saviour, What ignorance doth it shew, if you trust in yourselves, that you are righteous? Will you be able to stand before God in judgment? It is to him you must answer, and from him you must receive your sentence. You may easily, indeed, stifle these reflections for a time, and bury every apprehension, in the hurry of worldly business, or the intoxication of worldly pleasure; but all these things are coming quickly to an end. After a few more turns in this vain world, the body must be laid in the dust, and the spirit must

go to its own place; that is to say, either the mansions of glory, or the place of torment. I say these things to you, my brethren, with all plainness. They need no additional force of language to give them weight. It is an amazing proof of the deceitfulness of sin, that we are ever able to forget them. It is wonderful, indeed, that sinners are able to sleep in quiet, and to indulge themselves in worldly pleasure, while they are suspended by nothing but the frail thread of life over the bottomless pit. Gladly would I make use of every circumstance that could have any effect in carrying home these truths upon the consciences of all here present.

If that of my being now speaking to you, for the last time, in all probability, while in the body, can be of any use, I pray, let it not be forgotten. But is it not strange, that a circumstance of this nature should excite so much curiosity and attention, and things that happen every day, of the same or a like nature, should be so little improved? It is not, indeed, every day that a minister is removed from his charge; but there are not many days, in which some of his people are not removed from this state of trial. Many are hearing a farewell sermon, though not to the minister, yet to themselves, when they little think of it. I would, therefore, earnestly beseech all who are, or have reason to suspect themselves to be in an unreconciled state, to turn from their transgressions, that they may live; to lay hold of the mercy of God through Christ, for their pardon; and live, by faith, on his promised strength, for their sanctification.

2dly, Notwithstanding this general address, I have a few words to say to the loose and profligate. I am sorry to think, that, in a place like this, of no very great extent, there should be so many daring sinners, who let every thing sacred at defiance. It hath been observed, and I believe with truth, that the profane among us carry it with a greater degree of hardness and insolence, than in places of superior note, and where, probably, they are in much greater numbers. I believe it may be, in part, owing to this circumstance, that they are better known; so that they must either be open profligates, or not profligates at all. There is no medium; the shame cannot be avoided:

and, therefore, it must be overcome; since they will not be restrained, and cannot be concealed, it lays them under an unhappy necessity of keeping profanity in countenance. Perhaps also another reason may be, that, not being tied by any principle of conscience, they are also destitute of that sense of decency which has a considerable influence on the outward conduct of those of higher rank. But, whatever be the reason, their state is to be pitied. Let me beseech all such, to consider the terrible effects of vice which are every day to be seen. Remember, I pray you, how many have fallen a sacrifice to drunkenness and lust! Can you say deliberately, in a sober moment, that there is any profit in your choice? Is there any pleasure in reflecting on scenes of riot and dissipation? I know not whether to recal to your memory those whom death has taken away, or point out to your observation those who are suffered to remain. What a melancholy sight is an old worn-out sinner, who has broken his constitution, tainted his character, and wasted his substance! You let us see well enough in what manner you chuse to live; but I would gladly know in what manner you chuse, or indeed, in what manner you expect to die. You cannot live always. Some of you cannot live long. Suppose you had time given you for reflection on a death bed, or children to whom you would leave a few words of advice. Could you say to them, "O! my dear children, the many delightful nights that I have spent in roaring, and swearing, and obscene jesting! O the delicious hours that I have spent in brothels among harlots! It gives me pleasure to think that you will follow so good an example, and revive the memory of your Father's conduct. Guard against every thing that may tempt you to forsake it. Beware of those cunning priests that would seduce you to religion?" Are such sentiments, my brethren, to the last degree, insupportable? Are they almost improper to describe? What then must be the life that lays an evident foundation for them? Why are you so impatient of the reproofs or admonitions of those who bleed inwardly for your folly? It is not inclination, but duty, that prompts us. No man would provoke your rage and violence, if he could avoid it. Think then, I beseech you, on your condition, and pray that God, for Christ's sake, may grant you repentance unto life. — The wicked having received warning,

I must now endeavor to execute what I chiefly intended in the close of this discourse, by giving you some advices, as a people making profession of faith in Christ, and obedience to him. They will all, or most of them, consist of what I have frequently taken notice of occasionally, and have now only selected as matters of general moment.

1. Let me beseech you to do your utmost to understand the gospel well; but let it be always accompanied with practice, and applied to promote the power of the spiritual life. I would have your taste exercised to discern good and evil. Endeavor, by reading, hearing, and meditation, and you may add mutual converse, to understand the doctrine of salvation, by grace, in all its parts. Learn to know the meaning of forgiveness being free, viz. that the sinner is justly liable to wrath; that Christ hath purchased, and God, of his infinite, unmerited mercy, has offered a full pardon to the chief of sinners, and grace to form them for his own service; that it is their duty to accept of it; that it is their interest to rely upon it; and that it is at their peril if they despise it. That for a sinner to think he must first do some things that are good, in order to found his title to this very mercy, is injurious to the riches of divine grace, and the way to retard, if not to prevent his reformation. The renewing of his nature is a part of Christ's purchase; and, therefore, not to be performed by him as a condition, but accepted as a promise; nor does he truly receive Christ for salvation, unless he receive and submit to him in all the characters with which he is invested, as sent of God, viz. Prophet, Priest, and King. Holiness, or new obedience, is the fruit of faith. A real believer keeps the commandments of God by the strength of that grace that is treasured up in Christ, and watchfully observes his temper and practice, as the evidence of his change, and tending to shew that he is indeed an habitation of God through the Spirit. To have evangelical principles, is, by no means, to neglect the commandments of God; but to deny our own righteousness and strength, and obey, without glorying in that obedience. And that this is the just and scriptural view of the matter, I think, is undeniable, on this single account, "that it is God that worketh in us to will, and to

do of his good pleasure." If every thing that is good in us is the work of God, it is absurd to represent it as the condition of his favor; for it is the effect of his grace. By setting the thing in this light, we shall perceive, that the freeness of salvation, is not, in the least degree, giving liberty to sin, or taking away the necessity of holiness. Is it not just as necessary, if it must be received as a gift, as if it were to be performed as a condition? Is it not just as necessary when incorporated with faith, as when divided from it?

This system of gospel truth, my brethren, I would have you to understand, so as both to discern and disapprove what is contrary to it; but I would have you to understand it, in order to produce union with God, habitual and chearful obedience to his laws. In recommending the connexion between faith and practice, I mean to guard you against two things distant from one another. The one is habitual untenderness of conscience. There are certainly some who are either real, or at least pretended friends to the doctrine of the gospel, on whose hearts it never yet hath taken hold. They plainly and habitually live in the practice of sin, and therefore are of those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. I am indeed of opinion, that they never had any other than a customary traditionary belief. They are found because it is the mode where they live to be sound, and not from any inward personal conviction. In the mean time, they are a reproach to their profession, and cannot be treated with too great severity, by those who wish well to the gospel.

The other mistake I would guard you against is, a speculative religion. It is good to be well instructed in doctrinal truths; but there is often a danger of going too much into controversy. We have seen many instances of ordinary Christians, who, when they had attained a considerable degree of knowledge, and were able to speak with fulness and propriety, on religious subjects, gave themselves up to a litigious and wrangling disposition, which was soon followed by a barren, and sometimes an offensive practice. The same thing also frequently leads to innumerable little parties and factions, into which Christians, I mean real Christians, are divided, which very much

hinder their own profit, and grieve the hearts of those who are one with them in Christ. Therefore let it be your care to apply the truths of the gospel for your own sanctification and comfort. After you have believed them, be still more careful to live upon them, than even to defend them. Divisions should never be made without absolute necessity; and when they are made, they should be as soon as possible forgotten, that having escaped sin we may apply ourselves to duty; for controversy, be the subject what it will, I think, is not very favorable to the power of godliness.

2. Desire a faithful minister, do your utmost to obtain him; and then let it be your habitual study to profit by him. You have reason to be very thankful that your situation, in providence, is such as you may expect a minister who is a hearty friend to the gospel, and, at the same time, one who is agreeable to your own choice. Let me exhort you, as far as you are consulted in that matter, to make the choice with much calmness and prudence; to look for one, not only sound in his principles, but of thorough knowledge and capacity, always preferring solid before specious parts. After having made the choice, endeavor to strengthen his hands, and encourage his heart, in the Lord, by a careful attendance on his ministry, and by a dutiful submission to instruction and reproof. You ought not to wish for one who will flatter you, nor ought you to lay such a temptation in a minister's way, as to shew that you are pleased with being flattered. The best testimony that you can give to a minister is, to learn from him, and to obey him. This is infinitely better than noisy praise and admiration, according to the excellent remark; of bishop Burnet, 'That it is not the best sermon that makes the hearers go away talking to one another, and praising the speaker; but that which makes them go away thoughtful and serious, and hastening to be alone.' Has a minister any evidently profane persons among his hearers; if he cannot preach them from sin to God, it were much more for his credit to preach so as that they are not able to hear him, but flee away for ease to their conscience, than to have them continue in wickedness, and yet praise him every day, for an admirable speaker, or an able man.

If you would truly profit by ordinances, after you have a fixed pastor, I think it is of moment to forget, as much as possible, the persons of men, and consider them as no more than instruments in the hand of God, for your daily instruction and comfort. The more you remember the appointment of God, and wait upon his ordinances, in the faith of his presence, and the expectation of his blessing, the more you are likely to receive both sensible and lasting benefit. I must therefore take the liberty to observe, that we have amongst us a set of wandering unsettled hearers, who run about from one congregation to another, and even from one profession to another, and are scarcely ever to be seen a whole day in one place. If they be but deliberating where to fix, we may say of them, that they are ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth. But the probability is, that they have itching and curious ears, and go about not to serve God, but to hear men. If I am able, at all, to judge, either by reflection or observation, those are most likely to profit, who, having deliberately made their choice, sit habitually and regularly under one minister. By these means they enter into his views; and as he will naturally endeavor, if any thing was wanting at one time, to complete his scheme by supplying it at another, they will thereby have a more comprehensive view of the whole counsel of God. At the same time, not having the charm of novelty to enchant them, they will have nothing to do but to reap instruction. On the other hand, by hearing separate, detached, and independent discourses, men may please their fancy more, but they will improve their understanding less. It is also plain, that as every minister will endeavor, not only to follow an order in his discourses on one subject, but to have a respect to the connexion, and relation of the subjects themselves, the more accurate and exact he is, in suiting one part to the illustration of another, the less he will be understood by these desultory hearers, who take only a single branch, without being able to perceive its subserviency to the general design. I have many times known exceptions taken at ministers, for some parts of a discourse, by such persons, when, if they had heard the whole upon the same or corresponding subjects, they would have perceived there was no place for their objections. The great purpose, my brethren, of a

serious and judicious people, in attending on ordinances, should neither be to please themselves, nor to criticise their teachers; but to hear the word of God, that they may do it. On this account it is, that humble and regular Christians are getting real advantage to their souls, while some are only watching the opinions, or others only passing judgment on the ability, perhaps no more than the style, and outward manner of the speaker.

3. I must give you another advice, as a professing people, to guard against the introduction of a worldly spirit. I have often observed to you, that every situation a person or people can be in has its peculiar temptations, as well as trials. This place, engaged in commerce and traffic, growing in numbers, and I suppose growing in wealth, is in great danger of a worldly spirit, and of importing, if I may speak so, fashionable vices, instead of real improvements. While I say this, I would not be understood as being against a liberal education, and elegant manner of life, or any thing that is truly becoming in an advanced rank. There is no more religion in being fordid, than in being sumptuous. But I think the spirit of the gospel is such, that it will dispose a truly pious person to be rather late than early in adopting new ornaments; rather sparing than excessive in dress, furniture and equipage; and careful not to be conformed to that vanity of the world which we renounced at baptism. Let men defend one practice after another, as they please, I shall always expect to see something which a careless worldly person will do, but which a good man will not do.

However, not to keep entirely in generals, I must once more give my public testimony against what was lately attempted to be brought in here, equally contrary to the law of the land, and the precepts of the gospel, the pernicious entertainments of the stage. The best and wisest men in all ages have born witness against them, as the great means of corrupting the morals of a people; and I am certain, they must be of all others most hurtful to the inhabitants of this place, the far greatest part of whom live by daily labor. I look upon it as the indispensable duty both of magistrates and ministers, to do all in

their power, to prevent the introduction of what may betray the young and unsuspecting into the destructive paths of vice, or the lower class of mankind into an idle and dissolute life. Much good of this kind may be done in matters of outward order, by a firm and resolute behaviour in those who are in place and authority. I must also here take particular notice of the duty of sabbath sanctification. I do hereby warn you against that most pernicious refinement of gadding abroad, paying private visits, upon the Lord's day. Whoever knows any thing of the obligation of family government and instruction, must be sensible that to receive promiscuous company on that day, is to render it utterly impracticable. Besides, the vain and unprofitable, and sometimes sinful conversation, that prevails in such cases, must greatly weaken, or entirely obliterate any serious impressions, made upon your mind, during the service of the sanctuary. Christians, is not the rest of the sabbath, from worldly cares and pursuits, a consolation to your own souls, as well as a happy opportunity of doing service to the souls of others? why then will you suffer yourselves to be robbed of it, by the impertinent intrusions of idle or ill disposed persons? Let your houses be sacred on that day, as well as your churches; and endeavour to prepare your minds, and those others members of your families, for an eternal sabbath in the world to come. This leads me, in the

4th Place, to exhort you to be careful and conscientious in family government, and instruction. How inexcusable are those parents and masters, who suffer their children and servants to perish for lack of knowledge? What unspeakable advantages do you enjoy, having all the force of natural affection, as well as natural authority, to give your instructions weight? How many have remembered, with pious gratitude, through a whole life, the benefit they have received from family instruction and example? I know I speak to many who are accountable to God for this mercy; how shall you answer it then, if you do not give the same advantage to your own families; And how shall they answer to God, think you, who have banished the worship of God from the families in which they found it? One would think, the lifeless walls and furniture of your chambers might be awakening

monitors. There is the greatest mutual influence between family and personal religion. Personal religion is the foundation of all family and relative duties. It would be speaking to the deaf to persuade any to watch over the souls of others, who have no concern for their own. But wherever there is a deep impression of the importance of eternity for ourselves, this will naturally and necessarily set before us its importance with respect to all that are dear to us. On the other hand, for the same reason, family religion is one of the best and surest evidences of the reality and the strength of Personal religion. It is sometimes observed, that some very pious persons are extremely defective in this particular, and take little care of the instruction, and still less of the government, of their children. If they are truly pious, it is a very great blemish upon their piety. However, for my own part, I confess I do very much suspect the sincerity of religion, in those who are remarkably negligent in this particular, let them profess as much as they will. I know that pious persons, from the weakness of their judgment, will be guilty of great imprudence in the manner of family instruction, and from an absolute incapacity, may not be able to preserve their authority; but I cannot easily reconcile with true piety, the absolute neglect of either the one or the other.

I must add, that I take family religion, and the careful discharge of relative duties, to be an excellent mean of the growth of religion in a man's own soul. How can any person bend his knees in prayer every day with his family, but it must be a powerful restraint upon him from the indulgence of any sin which is visible to them? Will such a person, think you, dare to indulge himself in anger, or chuse to be seen by them, when he comes home staggering with drunkenness, unfit to perform any duty, or ready to sin still more by the manner of performance? When I figure to myself a master of a family, who had come home sotted like a beast, and half-supported to his house, rising in the morning, I am not able to conceive how he can bear the looks of those members of his family who had been witnesses of his shame. But besides being a restraint from gross crimes, I cannot help saying, that, speaking of the things of God, with the concern of a parent, of the humanity of a master, must give a solemnity of spirit,

and a sense of their moment, even greater than before. A man cannot speak to purpose, without feeling what he says; and the new impression will certainly leave behind it a lasting effect. Let me, therefore, my beloved hearers, earnestly recommend to you the faithful discharge and careful management of family duties, as you regard the glory of God, the interest of his church, the advantage of your posterity, and your own final acceptance in the day of judgment.

5. Let religion be incorporated with your lawful employments, and improved by an attention to the whole course of Providence to you and yours. Nothing is more hurtful to religion, than to confine it to particular times and places: I should have rather said, there is not a greater mistake in religion, than to imagine that it can be so confined. True religion will shew its influence in every part of your conduct. It is like the sap of a living tree, which penetrates to the most distant boughs. In your ordinary calling, see that you undertake nothing but what is lawful in its end, and endeavor to accomplish nothing by any but by lawful means, that you may have always the comfort of a conscience void of offence. Nay, you should even do more; you should endeavor to act so single and sincere a part, as to be beyond the imputation of fraud, that all who know you may put the most unbounded confidence in your integrity. There are many other calumnies which we may naturally expect from a malicious world; and it ought to trouble us very little to hear them: but it must be extremely distressing to a good man to be but suspected of dishonesty. Oh, my brethren! how often hath it grieved me to see, that many persons, formerly of a decent character, when they lost their substance, lost their religion with it; and, indeed, to consider how few, when they were reduced in their circumstances, could satisfy the public that they had acted fairly.

Let it be your care, I beseech you, to remember, that it is God that giveth you power to get wealth; and what thanks are due to him, if he hath given you abundance, especially if he hath given you withal a heart to bestow. Be diligent in your business, from a principle of conscience; and make it the daily subject of your prayer to God, that

he would either keep you from the shame of poverty, or, at least, from the sin of it. Take notice of every step of his providence, whether of mercy or trial. Let the aspect of providence direct your exercise, and quicken your affections in religious duties; and take such views of the fullness of an all-sufficient God, in acts of worship, as may prepare you for every event of providence, whether prosperous or adverse.

Thus, my brethren, I have now finished what I proposed, in the way of advices; and, for what I have to say with regard to the present dispensation of providence, that puts an end to my ministry among you, I shall bring it within very narrow bounds. It were easy, by saying a few words, to move the concern both of speaker and hearers: this I have hitherto chosen to avoid; and, therefore, shall only say, that I am deeply sensible of the affection and duty of the congregation that attended my ministry, and others under my charge. I cannot express my sense of it better, than in the words of the late eminently pious Doctor Finlay, my immediate predecessor in this new office, who, on his death-bed, said to those about him, 'I owe a long catalogue of debts to my friends, which will not be put to my charge; but I hope God will discharge them for me.' I cannot now do any thing better for you, than again to beseech you, to remember and put in practice the directions I have given you, and, I am persuaded, that it shall go well with you. The only further request I have to make to you is, that you would give to me, and my family, an interest in your prayers. Intreat of God, that we may be preserved from perils and dangers, and carried to the place of our destination in safety; and that I may be assisted of him in every future duty, and not fall under the terrible reproach, of agreeing to make so distant a removal, and then being sound unfit for the important task.—I conclude with the words of the apostle Jude, 24, 25. "Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever." Amen.

SERMON XXVII

MINISTERIAL CHARACTER AND DUTY

We also believe, and therefore speak. - 2 COR. 4:13

TO understand what ought to be the character, and what principles should animate the conduct of a minister of the Gospel, cannot be without profit, even to a private Christian. It will teach him whom to prefer, when he is called, in providence, to make a choice. It will teach him to hold such in reputation for their office sake, and to improve the privilege of a regular gospel ministry, if he himself is favored with it. And I think it must incline him to make daily supplication to the Lord of the harvest, to send forth faithful laborers into his harvest.

But though there were no such general advantage to be derived from it, my particular charge, and the very aspect of this audience, would easily justify me in making this, for once, the immediate subject of discourse.

Now, if we would know the character of a faithful minister, we cannot better, or more immediately reach our purpose, than by looking into the character, and observing the conduct, and springs of action, of the apostles of our Lord, who received their commissions immediately from himself, and were not only the first, but the best and most successful ministers, that ever were employed in the church of Christ.

The Apostle Paul, whose call was so singular, and whose labors were so distinguished, has, in his epistles to the several churches, planted or watered by him, given us a great light into the chief aims he had in the exercise of the ministry. In this chapter, and the preceding part of this epistle, he shews the Corinthians, with what visible faithfulness and sincerity he had acted, and what diligence he had used in promoting their eternal happiness.

To save time, I forbear going through the connexion of his discourse, and only observe, that in the words of our text, he shows what kept him faithful and influenced him to so much diligence in the work to which he was called, by alluding to an expression in the 116th Psalm. It is written, I have believed, therefore have I spoken. We also believe, and therefore speak. In this he intimates, that our inward persuasion of the great truths of the everlasting Gospel, could not but have a powerful influence upon him and others, to press the important message, and watch over the souls of those committed to their charge.

In discoursing further at this time, I intend to confine myself to this single truth, which may be easily deduced from the text: That one of the most essentially necessary, and the most extensively useful qualifications of a good minister, is, that he be a good man, that he have a firm belief of that Gospel he is called to preach, and a lively sense of religion upon his own heart. After I shall have explained and confirmed this observation, I will conclude with some practical reflections.

Though I have mentioned real religion as one of the most essentially necessary qualifications, I am not ignorant, that taking the words in a strict sense, gifts are more necessary to the being of a ministry, than even grace itself. To make the efficacy of the ordinances to depend upon the inward state of the administrator, is a Popish error, and is expressly guarded against by the Assembly of Divines, in our shorter Catechism, in the following words: The sacraments, and it is equally true of every other ordinance, become effectual to salvation,

not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them, that by faith receive them.

But some degree of capacity is evidently necessary in the most absolute sense. A man who is altogether void of knowledge and utterance, or who is deaf and dumb, may be a saint, but cannot be a minister. This concession, however, takes nothing from the force of the observation, that real religion is of the greatest importance, and most absolutely necessary to the faithful discharge of a minister's sacred trust. That I may set this in as clear and strong a light as I am able, let me intreat your attention to the following observation.

I. Real religion in a minister will make him knowing, and able for his work. It is necessary for any one who intends himself for the office of the ministry, by diligent study, and the use of those means, with which God in his providence hath furnished him, to improve his understanding and acquire a stock of knowledge, that he may be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the way of truth. In this he can have no such incitement as concern for his Master's glory. Nay, he that is truly religious, is taught of God, the best of masters, and will have some of his most profitable lessons from his own experience.

Let me the rather intreat your attention to this, that those who are most apt to disparage piety, are also apt to speak in terms of high approbation on the subject of literature and science.—Observe, therefore, that true religion serves both to give a man that knowledge which is necessary to a minister, and to direct and turn into its proper channel the knowledge which he may otherwise acquire. It is an approved maxim in every science, that practical and experimental knowledge far exceeds that which is merely speculative; at least, though the last may make the prettiest show, the first is by much to be preferred for use. Any wise man, if he was to go a dangerous voyage, would readily prefer as his pilot, one who had much experience, and had failed often that way himself, to one, who had

studied navigation in the most perfect manner ashore. So, my brethren, every man who regards his soul would choose for his spiritual guide, one, who appears to have the wisdom to save his own, and would expect by him to be best directed how to avoid the rocks and shelves in his passage, through this dangerous and tempestuous ocean of life.

But if this maxim holds true in other science, it holds yet more strongly in Religion, which cannot be truly known unless it be felt. There is an inseparable connexion between faith and practice, truth and duty; and therefore he that is a stranger to the one, is ignorant of the other. I am not insensible that a bad man may espouse, and plead for a great part of the system of divine truth; but as he cannot cordially embrace it, so I am inclined to think that he never truly understands it. The Apostle Paul declares, that it is only by the Spirit of God which is given to every real Christian, and more especially to every faithful Minister, that a man is enabled to treat rightly of divine things, "Now we have received, not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God; which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." As the real Christian from that character is best disposed to seek after, so he is by the same means best fitted to improve and apply his knowledge of spiritual things. This will appear, if we consider what ought to be the great work of a minister. He hath to do chiefly with the hearts and consciences of his people. His business is to convince the ungodly; to awaken the secure; to enlighten the ignorant; to direct and strengthen the weak in the faith, and in general as a wise physician, to administer the medicine proper to the various conditions and disorders of his hearers. Now it must, at first sight, appear, that he who is a stranger to the power of godliness, and knows nothing of the spiritual life himself, must be utterly unfit for discerning how it thrives, or assisting and promoting it in others.

That man must surely be most powerful in searching, and most skilful in guiding the consciences of others, who has been accustomed to examine and direct his own.

I only farther observe upon this particular, that true religion will purify, and direct into its proper channel, the knowledge he may otherwise acquire. It is a great mistake to think, sound learning is an enemy to religion, and to suppose that an ignorant ministry is the best or safest. There is no branch of human knowledge of which a Divine may not be the better, or which a good man will not improve to the glory of God and the good of others; though some of them are more important than others; and it is necessary to give to any of them, only such proportion of our time, as is consistent with our great and principal aim. Now true religion is the great preservative against mistake or abuse of any kind on this subject. A bad man is apt to study, merely to gratify his own fancy; and there is a false luxury and delicacy in feeding the mind as well as the body. A bad man is also exceedingly prone to intellectual pride and self-sufficiency; than which, there is not a vice more dangerous in itself, or more contrary to the character of a Minister of the New Testament. But he who is sanctified by divine grace, as he has every motive to diligence in acquiring knowledge, so the single purpose to which he will wish to apply it, is to serve God in the Gospel of his Son.

II. Real religion in a minister will make him happy and chearful, ready and willing to do his duty. There is a great difference between the prompt, and speedy obedience of a servant who loves his master and his work, and the reluctant labor of him who only deceives him, that he may eat of his bread. A truly pious man undertakes the office of the ministry from love to God, with a view to promote his glory, and what he hath counted his interest in the world: viz. the welfare of the souls of men. An unholy minister undertakes this employment only as a trade to earn by, and has it at least as his highest aim to promote his own worldly advantage. It is easy to see in what a different manner these different persons will act, and in what

different light they will view the sacred duties of their function. He who truly believes the Gospel and loves its Author, will reckon it his highest honor when he is called to recommend it to the belief of others. He will be apt to teach, and will find a pleasure in carrying his message, besides the reward he expects from him who employs him, and will undergo with cheerfulness every fatigue he is subjected to, in the execution of his office. On the other hand, he who is actuated by a contrary principle, though he is obliged, that he may raise his wages, in some sort to do his duty; yet how heavily must it go on, how tedious and burthensome must it be, both in preparation and performance? He will count his service at the altar, and his work among his people, as a toil and drudgery, and reckon all that redeemed time that he can save for himself, from the duties of his office.

Perhaps it may be thought that there lies a strong objection against this observation from experience; as it appears that such ministers as have least of religion, commonly go most lightly under the charge, and are far from feeling any burthen in what is committed to them; whereas the most pious and faithful ministers seem to have a weight upon their spirits, and such a concern for the salvation of their people, as cannot but take much from their cheerfulness in the work to which they are called. In answer to this, observe, that an unfaithful minister is not easy and cheerful because his work is agreeable to him, but because he takes as little of it as may be, and seeks his pleasure more than his duty. Certain it is, that the work of the ministry must be irksome and uneasy to him that believes not, except so far as he makes it subservient to ambition, and displays his own talents when he should be feeding his people's souls. This I confess, which the apostle justly calls preaching ourselves, may be abundantly gratifying to the most corrupt heart. On the other hand, that concern for his people which is upon the heart of every faithful pastor, is far from being inconsistent with the most solid peace and desirable pleasure arising from the discharge of his duty. It is like the exercise of pity and compassion to the distressed, in him, who is acting for their relief, which, though in some sense painful, is yet accompanied

with the approbation of God, and conscience, as flowing from a rightly disposed mind, and therefore to be cherished and cultivated rather than suppressed. There is a time for every good man to mourn, and a time to rejoice, and perhaps the one is even more salutary than the other; for we are told, that God will appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

III. Real religion in a minister will make him faithful, and impartial, in the discharge of his trust. The God in whose presence we stand, and in whose name we speak, is no respecter of persons, and neither should we be in doing his work. There is commonly a great variety of persons, of different stations and of different characters, committed to the inspection of a minister; the pleasing or displeasing of whom, has a considerable influence on his worldly ease and interest. This is a great temptation to be unfaithful, and often leads to speak unto them smooth things, and prophesy deceit; or at least, not to deal with all that freedom and impartiality, that his duty to God requires. In every unregenerate man, worldly interest in one shape or another, either vanity or gain, is the supreme motive of action: and therefore, as most men are impatient of reproof, it cannot be supposed, that an unsanctified minister will venture to provoke their displeasure, or to gall them with unacceptable truths. The favor of the great, or the applause of the multitude, he certainly will seek, more than the edification of any. On the other hand, he who truly fears God, and believes what he teaches, will act with faithfulness and boldness. He will remember that if he seeks to please men, he cannot be the servant of Christ. He will therefore no farther obtain, and indeed no farther wish to obtain their favor, than as a diligent discharge of his duty approves him to their consciences in the sight of God; or forces the approbation of the impartial, notwithstanding the resentment of particular offenders. It is only the fear of God, can deliver us from the fear of man. I do not pretend that all who fear God, are wholly delivered from it: but surely, bad men, must be far more under the government of this sinful principle. The one may fail occasionally,

the other is corrupted wholly. There are two reasons which incline me particularly to insist on that faithfulness, which can only flow from true piety.

1. That preaching, in order to be useful, must be very particular, and close, in the application. General truths and abstract reasoning have little or no influence upon the hearers, as the ignorant cannot, and the wise will not apply them to themselves.

2. The other reason is, that private admonition, and Personal reproof, are a great part of a minister's duty, and a duty that cannot be performed by any man, who hath not a steady regard to the presence and command of that God, who hath set him to watch for the souls of his people, as one that must give an account.

IV. Real religion in a minister, will make him active, and laborious in his work. Diligence is absolutely necessary to the right discharge of the pastoral duties, whether public or private. It requires no small attention and labor, to seek out fit and acceptable words, as the preacher expresses it, to stir up the attention of the inconsiderate, to awaken secure, and convince obstinate sinners, to unmask the covered hearts of hypocrites, to set right the erring, and encourage the fearful. An unbelieving minister must be careless and slothful. As he is unconcerned about the success of his work, he cannot have any great concern about the manner of performance. But he, who believes the unspeakable importance of what he is employed about, both to himself and to his people, cannot fail to be diligent. He knows that he himself must answer to God, for the care he has taken of the souls committed to his charge; and that if he does not faithfully warn the wicked to turn from their ways, their blood will be required at his hand.

Oh! my brethren, what a striking consideration is this, to suppose ourselves interrogated by the Supreme Judge, concerning every sinner under our charge? Did you earnestly warn this unhappy soul, by earnest exhortations in public, and by serious affectionate

expostulations in private, to consider his ways? It is an easy thing, by a partial, or cursory performance of our duty, to screen ourselves from the censure of our fellow-men; but to stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and answer there for our diligence, is a more awful trial.

Will not also a concern for his people's interest, animate a pious minister to diligence? If he is truly pious, as he loves God, he loves his brother also. The Apostle Paul says, Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. If a man in good earnest believes that everlasting misery must be the portion of all who die in an unrenewed state, what pains will he not take, to prevent sinners from going to that place of torment?

One who could see a fellow-creature, in the rage of a fever, rushing to the brink of a precipice, and not restrain him, would fall under lasting infamy. Must not the same compassion move the heart of a serious person, who sees his fellow-sinners going blind-fold to the pit of perdition?

It is their not believing these things, that makes them so fearless in sinning; if you truly believe them, will you not make an effort to alarm them? There are no motives like these to diligence—he that believes will certainly speak.

V. In the last place, real religion will make a minister successful in his work. This it does, both as it fits him for doing his duty to his people, which has been illustrated above, and as it adds to his precepts the force of his example. First, it makes him successful as it fits him for his duty. It is true indeed, that God only can give the blessing upon a minister's labors, and that he can save by many, or by few, by the weakest, as well as by the ablest instrument: yet we see from experience, that in all ordinary cases, he proportions the success, to the propriety, or sufficiency of the means. Neither is there any surer mark that God intends effectual benefit to any part of the world, or the church, than when he raises and commissions men,

eminently qualified, to plead his cause. Therefore, real piety, even in this respect, contributes to a minister's success. If diligence in all other things produces success, it must be so also in the ministry. If he that lays out his ground with the greatest judgment, prepares and dresses it with the greatest care, has the most plentiful crop: if the shepherd that waits most diligently upon his flock, feeds them in the best pasture, and leads them to the safest shelter, has the most increase; then that minister, who does his duty most wisely, and most powerfully, will also see most of the fruit of his labors.

But real, and unaffected, yet visible seriousness, has also its own proper additional influence on a minister's success. An apparent and visible impression upon the speaker's mind, of what he says, gives it an inexpressible weight with the hearers. There is a piercing heat, a penetrating, force, in that which flows from the heart, which distinguishes it not only from the coldness of indifference, but also, from the false fire of enthusiasm or vain glory. Besides all this, the example of a pious minister, is a constant instruction to his people. It ratifies his doctrine, while he not only charges them to do what he says, but to be what he is. This will receive much illustration from its country.

A minister who has a careless, untender walk, defeats, by his life, the intent of his preaching. Though in reason, it cannot justify any one in disobeying wholesome instructions, that the instructor despises them himself; yet it is one of the most common excuses men make for themselves, and few excuses seem to set their consciences more at ease. Loose and careless persons think themselves quite at liberty to despise the reproofs of their pallor, if, while he teaches others, he teaches not himself.

Nay, not only is it thus with the profane, but even those who have the greatest regard for religion, are not so much affected with the same truths, when spoken by one they think indifferent about them, as when spoken by one who seems to feel what he speaks, and who lives as he teaches.

Experience greatly confirms the whole of this reasoning—for wherever an eminently pious minister has lived, and labored long, there is commonly to be found the most knowing, serious, sober-minded, and judicious people; nay, the very memory of such a minister, is often long continued, after he is gone, and his example is proposed by his hearers, to their children's children.

From all these considerations, I conclude, that the most important qualification of a good minister, is to be a believing preacher, and that if he saves his own soul, he will be the probable mean of saving them that hear him.

I proceed now, to make some improvement of the subject.

Reverend fathers and brethren,

As we would wish our people to do, let us take heed how we hear, and make a faithful application to ourselves, of what hath been said upon the subject. Let it engage us to a serious examination of ourselves, lest while we preach the Gospel to others, we ourselves should be reprobates. This ought to be the subject of our frequent and serious thoughts, for several reasons. We are in danger of thinking ourselves too easily safe, by comparing that outward regularity, to which our office itself, even from secular motives, obliges us, with the licentious extravagance of profane sinners. We are in danger of mistaking our frequent thinking and speaking of the things of God, in the way of our calling, for an evidence of true religion in ourselves. We may also, perhaps, mistake those gifts with which God hath furnished us, for the benefit of his own people, as the fruits of the spirit, and of gracious dispositions in our hearts. A minister is as much liable to self-deceit as others, and in some respects, more so. We have therefore much need, often to make trial of our state, as well as to give all diligence, to make our calling and election sure.

But let us beware of imagining, that this discourse is only applicable to such, as have no real faith in Christ. God forbid that there were

any minister among us, a complete unbeliever, counting the Gospel a fable. But faith, and every other gracious disposition grafted upon it, are capable of many degrees of improvement and strength; and in proportion to the strength of our faith, and the impression we have of divine things, will be our diligence, and consequently our success, in the work of the ministry. Let us therefore impress our minds, with a more and more lively sense of the important truths which we teach and hear. Let us not starve ourselves, while we are feeding others: but study to arrive at a greater degree of love to God, and delight in him, a greater conformity to his blessed image, in purity of heart, and integrity of life. Let us in a special manner, study to attain to more and more intimate communion with God in secret, which is the sign of our dependance upon him, and the very exercise of love to him, which is the mean of constancy, and the source of joy in religion.

Above all, let us set our affections upon the things that are above, where our Redeemer sits at his Father's right hand. As our profession is to be pilgrims and strangers in the earth, to live by faith, and not by sight, let us study to raise our hopes of, and desire after, the heavenly inheritance. By this we shall not only believe, but know and feel the value of true religion, which cannot fail to make us diligent in seeking the good of others.

Oh! my brethren, what reason have we to be inwardly ashamed at the weakness of our faith, and the coldness of our love, as they show themselves, by our indifference in the duties of our office? We are often ready, both to complain, and wonder that our hearers are so little affected with the most awful considerations, that they can hear with indifference of everlasting happiness, and set without fear under the denunciations of eternal wrath: that we cannot persuade them, it is of importance to think what shall become of them forever. But is it not also to be wondered at, that we ourselves can often speak of these things with so little emotion? Can we ever be sufficiently affected with the danger of our hearers, when we consider, that we must either save them by convincing and converting them now, or deliver our own souls, by witnessing, justifying, and perhaps

pleading for their condemnation at the last day? However plain and simple these truths are, of the final judgment of ministers and people, they are quite unfathomable in their meaning and importance to both. It is strange that we can think of them without the deepest concern, or even speak of them without tears.

Let us pray that the Lord would increase our faith, that believing we may speak, and that our speech may be with such efficacy, by the blessing of God, as many sinners may be thereby brought to everlasting life; that we may approve ourselves to him that sent us; and that when Christ the chief shepherd shall appear, we may receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

SERMON XXVIII

THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL ENTIRELY OF GOD

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. - 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5, 6, 7

MY BRETHREN,

I HAVE been led to the choice of this subject, by that dispensation of Providence, which, though contrary to all human probability, hath brought me to this new charge of presiding over the instruction of

youth, in the liberal arts. I find also that in the course of my attendance on it, I shall have frequent opportunities of preaching the glorious gospel of the blessed God to you, of this congregation, and neighborhood. Let me therefore beg your attention to the instructive passage which I have just now read, that both teachers and scholars, ministers and hearers, may preserve a just sense of their relation to one another, and the common relation we all stand in to God. And particularly that in the discharge of our mutual duty of preaching and hearing, we may preserve on our minds, a deep sense of our dependance on superior strength, and may look for a blessing from the Father of lights, from whom alone it can possibly flow.

The text of itself and independent of its connexion, is so full of useful matter, that I am unwilling to spend your time by a long deduction of the particular circumstances of the church of Corinth, which led the apostle to express himself in the language contained in it. Let it suffice therefore to observe, that a spirit of pride and faction prevailed very much in that church, which had rent them into parties, denominated from this, or the other principal teacher who was, or had been among them. Thus in the 12th verse of the first chapter, "Now this I say that every one of you saith I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ," and in the verse immediately preceding the text, "For while one saith I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" Possibly the converts from among the Jews counted themselves the disciples of Peter, and held him in the highest esteem, while those of the Gentiles supported the name and credit of the apostle Paul, who first planted the christian faith among the idolatrous heathens, and perhaps others who were much addicted to learning and philosophy, admired, and extolled the eloquence of Apollos. And yet after all, perhaps the fierce and unchristian contentions that prevailed in that church, were not owing to their divided attachment to particular apostles, but to the ambitious and corrupt teachers, which were among themselves. If this was the case, the apostle Paul only mentioned himself, Apollos and Cephas, by way of supposition, instead of naming the guilty heads of the contending parties, that the

reproof being administered with so much prudence and delicacy, might be carried home with the greater evidence and force. This interpretation receives a good deal of countenance from what we find in chap. 4:6. "And these things brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself, and to Apollos, for your sake; that ye might learn in us, not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another."

Such a division and factious temper does infinite mischief wherever it prevails. It proceeds from people's being much under the power of a carnal mind, and exceedingly increases carnality by that envy, strife, and dissimulation, which it always produces. But the chief way in which it hinders the success of the gospel is, by leading men into the fatal mistake of seeking or expecting to find in ministers what can only be had in God, or ascribing to instruments and servants, what is due only to their Lord and master. Would you perceive the greatness of this sin? It is sacrilegiously robbing God of his own honor and glory, in order to invest a weak sinful creature with the sacred spoils.

I only add one other preliminary remark. You may see the perfect consistency and propriety of the apostle's conduct, according to the different circumstances in which he was engaged. For this purpose we must compare his expressions here, with those used by him when attempts were made to lessen his character, and detract from the dignity of his office, as an apostle of Christ. On these occasions he shews, that he knows very well what belonged to his station in the church, and is so far from speaking of himself in affected strains of humility, that he freely vindicates his own conduct, and magnifies the honorable trust that was committed to him by his Saviour, chap. 9. verse 1, 2. "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." Thus the apostle speaks in vindication of his authority, when unjustly attacked. But when the question is changed, and some are disposed to extol him or any other,

to the prejudice of his Lord and master, he changes his stile too, and speaks in the humblest manner of himself, and any thing he had contributed or could contribute to the success of the gospel. As a faithful servant he could not endure that any should put him in his master's place, and reject with indignation all that false honor which flowed only from the mistakes and weakness of his fellow christians.

In this as in many other instances, the occasional directions given to the different christian churches, in the early ages carry the most important and useful admonitions to us who live in the latter days. From the passage before us, we learn that ministers should consider themselves, and be considered by their people, as entirely subordinate to God, and expect assistance in their labors, and success in their endeavors, only from himself. What I further propose, in dependence on divine grace, is first to illustrate and support the proposition just now laid down, and then to make a practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

I. First then, I am to illustrate and support this proposition, That ministers ought to consider themselves, and to be considered by their people, as entirely subordinate to God, and expect assistance in their labors, and success in their endeavors, only from himself. In the course of this illustration, it is my intention, at once, to point out the meaning and import of the proposition, and to establish its truth from scripture and experience. For this purpose I beg your attention to the following observations.

1. The success of the gospel depends wholly upon God, and to him alone must the glory of it be ascribed, as it is he, who not only sends and employs, but who furnishes and qualifies all, whom he employs for promoting his service. He not only gives the commission to undertake, but he imparts the ability to discharge the trust. This truth is manifestly included in the apostle's words, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" He considers himself and others, only

as ministers, that is, as servants subject to the direction and authority of Christ their Lord and master, unto whom they are to be instrumental in carrying on the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of believers. This similitude however of itself, does not fully come up to the truth the apostle would inculcate. A man who is but a servant, and does every thing by the authority, and under the direction of his master, may yet have real and just ground, for valuing himself upon what he performs; in case, for instance he is possessed of uncommon talents, and an extraordinary capacity, to do his work to the best advantage, on this supposition, he is a treasure to his master, the success of whose direction may in a great measure be ascribed to the servant's skill and ability in the execution. But to exclude every pretence of this sort, the apostle subjoins what brings the allusion fully up to his purpose; "even as the Lord gave to every man." Ministers are not only servants, but their very capacity and ability to serve God are received from himself, who divides to every man severally, as he will. From this it is evident, that the glory and honor of the whole work, and the success of every particular servant employed in it, is entirely owing to Christ their great Lord and master, 1 Cor. 4:7. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive! now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"

Let us, my brethren, consider and dwell upon this truth a little, for it is full of instruction, both to ministers and people. That we may view it with the greater clearness and precision, let me observe, that there are two distinct kinds of qualities, which are each in their place, of great importance on the work of the ministry. (1.) The endowments of the mind, whether original and natural, or acquired by industry; these last being only the former improved and perfected by education and exercise. (2.) Holy dispositions, which are of the utmost importance and necessity, to turn the other into their proper channel, and to give them force and influence in the application. Now both these are equally and entirely the gift of God, the first being indeed in scripture most commonly, in all their extent and

diversity, called gifts; but the others are the effect of the gracious and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost.

(1.) All the endowments of mind, which fit a man for common or special service, are the gift of God. Whatever capacity of talents, whatever natural advantages of any kind, ministers enjoy, it is plain, that they received them from God, and depend upon him for the continuance and use of them. He only endows them with knowledge and comprehension, to understand his sacred truths: He only endows them with the talent of speaking well, and enables them to communicate their knowledge to others, in an agreeable and acceptable manner, Exod. 4:11, 12. "And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say," There is something very noble, as well as instructive in these passages of scripture, which represent even the skill of the tradesmen to be employed in adorning the visible sanctuary, as the gift of God, and the inspiration of his spirit. Exod. 31:1, 2, 3, 4. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, see, I have called by name, Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass." And again, Exod. 36:1. "Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding, to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the Lord had commanded."

Further, as it is the inspiration of the Almighty, that giveth understanding both in a general and comparative view, so the improvement of natural parts by acquired learning, is no less to be ascribed to him. As he gives the disposition and ability, so it is he who by the course of his providence furnishes the means, and presents the opportunity of making progress. Let human efforts be what they will, if God do not smile upon them, they will infallibly be

blasted. An all seeing and sovereign God has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation, and every person who will seriously reflect, may be sensible how all his purposes have been controuled and over-ruled by the invisible direction of the great Disposer of every event, who hath pointed out the paths in which he was to walk.

(2.) Let us also remember, that it is God who endows his ministers with their brightest ornaments, viz. holy and gracious dispositions, which serve to turn their other talents into the proper channel, and to give them force and influence in the application. I am sensible, my brethren, that gifts may be considered as more assistant to the being of the ministry, than even grace itself. We justly renounce the popish doctrine, that the efficacy of the sacraments, or other ordinances, depends upon the intention or inward state of the administrator. In opposition to this the Assembly's Shorter Catechism says justly, "the sacraments, (and it is equally true of every other ordinance) become effectual to salvation, not from any virtue in them, nor in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his spirit in them, that by faith receive them." A hypocrite cannot be a faithful, but he may be in some degree a successful minister. I am persuaded there are not a few now in heaven, who were converted and edified by the ministry of those who have taken up their abode in the place of torment; an awful reflection this indeed, to those who are intruded with the office of the ministry. It brings to my mind a saying of an eminent and pious writer. Ministers are in as great danger of deceiving themselves as others, and in some respects greater, for they may be apt to mistake their readiness in thinking and speaking of holy things, and those gifts which God bestows upon them, for the benefit of his chosen, for the fruit and evidence of gracious dispositions in their own hearts.

But notwithstanding all this, it is beyond all controversy, that one of the most essential qualifications of a good minister is, that he be a good man. It is a very difficult, as well as it is a very dreadful thing, to preach an unknown Saviour. But where the love of Christ dwells and

reigns in the heart, it gives such attachment to his cause, so much love to his people, so much clearness and comprehension in understanding his truths, so great willingness, or rather desire to communicate them, as cannot fail to have the greatest influence on a minister's diligence, and at the same time gives reason to hope that he will speak from faith to faith. Thus the apostle expresses himself, 2 Cor. 4:13. "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I have believed, therefore have I spoken: we also believe, and therefore speak."

Now to whom is a minister indebted for his holy dispositions? Who implanted in him that love to Christ, which inspires him with zeal and fidelity in his service? Take the answer in the words of the apostle, 2. Cor. 4:5, 6. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." It was the power of God that brought him again from the dead, and it is by the spirit of God dwelling in him, that he is daily sanctified and enabled to adorn the doctrine of God, his Saviour, in all things. So that the fire of his ministrations, and the light of his example, and the joint influence of both, are to be ultimately referred, and will by him be most willingly and thankfully attributed to the power and grace of God, his Redeemer, of whose fulness we all have received, and grace for grace.

2. But in the second place, the success of the gospel depends entirely on God, as it is he who gives efficacy to the instructions, even of the most eminent and best qualified ministers, by the immediate supernatural operation of his spirit and grace. Let us suppose a minister endued with the finest natural parts, and these improved and cultivated, by all the advantages of human learning. Let him have the most acute and penetrating genius, the most lively imagination, the most solid judgment, the most charming and persuasive eloquence; in fine, let him have what alone is of more value than all these, an eminently pious and devout heart. With so

many advantages he shall not be able to make one sincere convert, unless almighty God be pleased to open the way by his divine grace into the hearts and consciences of the sinner. It is not then merely by furnishing the proper means and by the disposition of his providence, giving them an opportunity of exerting their influence, that God promotes the success of the gospel, but by an immediate and powerful agency, distinct from, and superior to every second cause.

I have endeavoured to express this with the greatest fulness, and the greatest clearness, as a truth of the utmost importance. While we believe the use and necessity of means and second causes, we ought never to separate them from, or forget their subordination to God. There can hardly be a nobler illustration of this truth, than the apostle has given us in the text, by a natural similitude. "I have planted," says he, "Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." His expressions are taken from husbandry, or gardening, which is a particular branch of it. By an allusion to these arts, he explains his subject in a manner level to the capacity of every thinking person. The husbandman or gardener may manure, dig up and mellow the soil; he may sow his seed, and dress his field with the greatest diligence and care: but what a little way has he gone, or rather indeed he hath not so much as begun the great process of growth and vegetation, that daily miracle, may I not call it, before our eyes. How many things must necessarily concur, which are beyond the reach of his power? the enlivening heat of the sun, the refreshing dews and rain from the bottles of heaven, are wholly under the direction and disposal of the omnipotent Jehovah. Cannot he, when he will, make the heavens over your heads as brass, and the earth under your feet as iron? Nay, not only so, but the power of growing in the seed, by striking out its roots, and opening its bud, and the natural disposition in the earth to nourish it, are derived not from any virtue inherent in the things themselves, but only from that almighty word, "Let the earth bring forth every tree bearing fruit, and every herb bearing seed after its kind." Just so in that spiritual husbandry, of which the apostle is speaking, ministers may sow the good seed of

the word of God, but it is his own prerogative to give it a regenerating and sanctifying efficacy, and make it productive of faith in the heart, and good works in the life. Ministers may continue to water the seed already sown, with suitable instructions and exhortations, and the diligent use of all those means which God hath appointed for the establishment and growth of believers: but it is only the influence of his own spirit that makes these means productive of the desired effect. Therefore the apostle concludes, in language drawn from the similitude, "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

This important truth, my brethren, is capable of a very full and clear proof from the sacred oracles. Every thing we find recorded there, concerning the mission of the prophets, and the success of their message, carries this truth as it were in its bosom. Nay, the great prophet of the church gives us this very view of his own ministry as the Son of man. John 6:44, 45, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." You see that, to the commission which our Lord gives to his apostles, is annexed a promise of his presence and power to accompany their ministrations. Math. 28:19, 20. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen."

But instead of multiplying passages of scripture, I shall direct you to one, which will set this part of my argument in the clearest light. It is that passage which gives an account of the conversion of Lydia, recorded Acts 16:14. "And a certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul." Now if we attend to the circumstances of this conversion, we shall find that if any thing could have been effectually

done without the direct and immediate concurrence of the grace of God, it might have been expected here. The case was every way promising. The hearer was one who had renounced idolatry, and embraced the worship of the true God. She was, it is not improbable, a devout woman, so far as her knowledge reached; and wanted only to be instructed in the faith of Christ. Here was for a preacher the great apostle of the Gentiles. I need say no more to shew how well qualified he was to do his part; and yet we find that even in this most favorable case, the immediate concurrence of divine grace was necessary to complete the work. The Lord must by his own good Spirit open the heart of Lydia, else even the apostle Paul, with all his divine accomplishments, and a heart glowing with the warmest zeal for the glory of Christ, and the salvation of souls, will be but an unsuccessful preacher.

I need not make use of any separate arguments to convince you, that this holds equally true of the growth and comfort of believers, as of the conversion of sinners. Whether ministers are employed in planting or watering, the instrument is nothing; success flows only from God. Let me therefore request and beseech you to hear and adore the striking truth, a Paul or Apollos in the pulpit will be altogether unsuccessful without the almighty power and grace of God. The most clear and distinct illustration of divine truths, without inward and spiritual illumination, will leave the hearer in ignorance, or lead him into error. The most awful denunciations of a son of thunder, without divine power, will leave the sinner hardened, or even increase the searedness of conscience. The most melting and tender application to the affections, without divine energy, will be treated with contempt and scorn. In one word, the most lively administration of ordinances, without the blessing from above, will be but in the language of the prophet, as a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts.

My brethren you may not only be convinced of this truth, because it is recorded in the word of God, but may see it daily exemplified in every part of the visible church. You may see the same ordinances

acceptable, delightful, and profitable to some; deserted, despised and resisted by others. Under the very same administration, you may see some effectually persuaded to turn to the living God, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the holy Ghost, and daily multiplied: some on the other hand caring for none of these things, but sleeping in security, nay some whose corruptions are irritated, swelling with rage, contradicting and blaspheming, all which is well described by the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. 2:15, 16. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other, the savor of life unto life; and who is sufficient for these things?"

3. The third and last observation I am to make for the illustration of this truth is, that success in the Gospel depends wholly upon God, as he exercises much of his own sovereignty in the manner of bestowing it. He takes care, if I may speak so, to shew that it is from himself, by the measure in which he proportions the success to the nature and sufficiency of the means he sees proper to employ. All is from God, as you have already heard, because the disposing and commissioning his ministers is originally his own work—again, because however well qualified they may be, his own almighty agency is necessary to give them success. But when there is a regular proportion always observed, between the means and the end, men are ready to overlook, or forget the great and first cause of all. For this reason he sees it often meet to manifest his sovereignty, in order to command our attention, by working without means, or by the weakest means, or even contrary to means, and blasting the effect of those that were most excellent and promising in human judgment. Just as the beautiful and regular order of the natural world, the mutual dependance of one part upon, and its subserviency to another, is a proof of the wisdom and omnipotence of the Creator. Yet he sees it necessary sometimes, to interpose, in an extraordinary way, and to controul the course of nature, to shew that it is absolutely at his command.

Remember, however, my brethren, that in carrying on the work of the gospel, God usually proportions the success to the propriety and sufficiency of the means. When he has much work to do, he commonly raises up some persons eminently qualified; he draws from his quiver some polished shafts, to pierce the ranks of opposing hosts. Yet he often presents to our view such circumstances as serve to show the dependance of all means upon himself. When the gospel was first preached, the apostles were indeed fully fitted and furnished for their work; but it was by a miracle. They were originally poor illiterate fishermen, quite unequal in themselves to the astonishing undertaking, of producing a revolution in the state of religion, and the sentiments of mankind over the whole earth. Such persons seem to have been employed for this wise purpose, "that our faith might not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." I have often considered this matter with a mixture of reverence and admiration.

That proper respect might still be had to the qualifications of ministers, and that none might be justified in pouring contempt on human science, the apostle Paul, a man of eminent learning and ability, was the most active, useful and successful of all the apostles; and one third part at least, of the whole canon of the New Testament, was written by him. At the same time there were such circumstances in his calling and conversion, as made him one of the most illustrious monuments of the sovereignty and riches of divine grace, that any age has produced.

In the same manner, we see every day the clearest proofs of the power, wisdom, and sovereignty of God. We see that he many times gives extraordinary and sensible assistance to those whom he employs in his own work. So that they both perceive and confess that it is not they, but the grace of God, that is with them. Sometimes those of very moderate, or even of the weakest natural abilities, have an unction from the holy one, and by their piety and diligence become workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. This may be considered as an accomplishment of what

Isaiah says of himself, Isaiah 50:4. "And the Lord God, hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." See also the expression of the Psalmist, Psal. 25:14. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: and he will shew them is covenant." Our Lord promises to his disciples extraordinary assistance, in time of extraordinary trials and suffering, Luke 21:14, 15. "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before, what ye shall answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay, nor resist." And to name one more passage, it is prophesied by Isaiah of the gospel times, chapter 32:4. "The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly."

In a former part of this discourse, I have admitted that gifts may be considered as more necessary to the being of the ministry, than even grace itself. Yet certainly true religion in the heart, is of far greater importance to the success and efficacy of the ministry, than eminence or gifts. It seems often the very purpose of divine providence, to pour contempt upon unsanctified talents. The humble pastor of meaner rank, who loves his master, his work, and his people, shall often have many seals of his ministry, while the person of superior parts is urged by ambitious views into the unprofitable paths of worldly honors, or instigated by unmortified passion, to mar the success of his ministry, by launching out into the tempestuous ocean of political contest and faction. But besides the unfruitfulness of unsanctified talents, there are also many proofs of the sovereignty of God, in refusing his blessing, and making the best ministers in a great measure unprofitable to a people, in righteous judgment for their past sins. Even Isaiah could say, chap. 53:1, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Our blessed Lord himself upbraided many of the cities where his mighty works were done, because of their unbelief, and indeed upon many of his hearers his ministry, instead of a saving, had a hardening effect, John 3:19. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds

were evil." The same thing is elsewhere resolved into the lively and righteous judgment of God. John 12:39, 40. "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, he hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And in the

First place, a deep and lively impression of the truth I have endeavored to illustrate and support, will be to those who preach the gospel, an excellent preservative from many temptations. It will preserve them from trusting in themselves, it will keep them still looking upward, and engage them to maintain a continual intercourse with the Father of lights, and the author of every good and perfect gift. It will also, particularly be an excellent mean of preserving them from the dangerous extremes of ostentation and sloth. Oh, how unbecoming a minister, is a vain-glorious display of human art, burning incense to his own vanity, and preaching himself, when he is called to preach Christ Jesus the Lord? It is no wonder that God should in his providence, pour disgrace and disappointment on that ministry, that is carried on in such a manner, as to aim more at promoting the credit of the servant, than the honor of the master. On the other hand, with what countenance can they look up to God for a blessing, who have been at no pains to qualify themselves for his service. As ostentation provokes the divine jealousy, so negligence is disobedience, presumption, and precisely what the scripture calls tempting God. I would never desire to be considered, as one who would encourage men, to rush into a pulpit unprepared, and disgrace their honorable calling, by rude, undigested, disorderly effusions, or such mean, slovenly, indecent language, as lays the hearers under the strongest temptation, to treat it with an insolence of indignation and contempt. Let me commend this, to the attention of such young persons, as may have an eye to the sacred office. My dear fellow students, how happy they, who can

unite together, the simplicity of the gospel, and the dignity of the pulpit; who are on the one hand, not ashamed of the cross, and the ignominy that attends it; and on the other, as devoted servants, are resolved to comply with the counsel given by the apostle Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim. 4:15, 16. "Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear unto all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

2. A deep impression of the truth I have endeavored to illustrate, will be an excellent preservative to the hearers of the gospel, from many temptations, which often render their attendance on ordinances, as fruitless or pernicious. It will purify their views and motives, in attending on ordinances. It will deliver them from a sinful and unreasonable attachment to men, and carry them more immediately into the presence of the living God: it will save them from that giddy, unsettled disposition, of running with unbounded curiosity, from one to another, not that they may be built up in holiness and comfort, but that their imagination and fancy may be gratified. It will preserve them from hearing the gospel, merely as critics, in order to pass their judgment on the soundness or ability of their teachers, which, with whatever pride or self-sufficiency it may be done, is as empty and unprofitable a manner of hearing, as any that can be named. It will settle their esteem of, and attachment to their pastors, upon the best, and most immoveable foundation. They will then love them for their work's sake, they will love them for their master's sake, they will love them for their own soul's sake, and for their subserviency to their daily edification. It will carry them to the throne of grace, and incline them to make continual and fervent supplication to God, for his assistance and countenance to his ministers, in his own work; and this will bring them to his house, in the best and happiest temper for hearing with profit: in one word, it will make them, in a great measure, lose view of the creature, and hear the gospel, not "as the word of man, but as it is indeed, and in truth, the word of God."

3. Let me intreat the prayers of this congregation, for the ministers of the gospel in general, and for us, who minister among you in holy things, that we may be abundantly qualified, for the discharge of our important trust in all its parts. The apostle Paul, though extraordinarily called, though singularly qualified, and eminently assisted, never fails to ask the prayers and intercession of the faithful, in his behalf, Eph. 6:19. "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." After this approved example, I hope you will forgive me, if I put in a particular claim in my own behalf, for your interest at the throne of grace. I make no merit at all, of having left country, and kindred, and connexions of the dearest kind, in order to serve the interest of the church of Christ, in this part of the globe: for I consider with pleasure, the oneness of his body, and the extent of the catholic church, that there shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and set down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their father. Could we but think as we ought, of the great removal, which we are making from time to time, into an eternal state; the removal of our bodies, and the change of our scene of service from Europe to America, would appear altogether unworthy of notice. But when I consider the respect and affection, so much above my desert, that have been shewn to me, since my arrival in this place, and the testimonies of joy and satisfaction, which have been given by all ranks, I am filled with the greatest concern: I say I am filled with the greatest concern, because it plainly implies an expectation of duty and service from me, which I fear I shall be ill able to perform. Let me therefore, on so just a foundation, not solicit only, but demand an interest in your prayers. Pray that an all-sufficient God, may give strength from above, and may pour down his blessing on the public institution in this place, which upon the best information, I think I may say has been founded in faith; and therefore, why should not we continue to serve it in hope? Pray that success may attend the ministry of the gospel in this place; and that if it please God, the esteem and affection shewn to me, by all to whom I stand now related, may not be less than it is, for I have not the least reason to desire, nor indeed

the courage to hope, that it can possibly be greater. Once more, pray that my beloved charge, whom I left in Scotland, and will never forget, may, by the special conduct of divine Providence, be supplied with a faithful pastor, who may feed them with knowledge and understanding.

4. In the last place, suffer me to conclude, by addressing a few words to those in this assembly, who are, or who have reason to suspect themselves to be in a state of distance from God. I know that he himself only can change your hearts. Yet he hath given it in charge to his ministers, that you should receive warning. And be assured, that if you despise the message, if you trample upon the divine mercy, and resist the Spirit of God, when pleading with you in his word, or striving and bearing witness against you in your consciences; your everlasting perdition will lie entirely at your own door. God will be just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth. Consider, I beseech you, that there is certainly, to all of us here present, one thing that is needful. It signifies very little, whether you pass the little uncertain time that you shall yet be in the body, in abundance or in penury, in honor or in shame, compared to what shall become of you forever. Lay these things to heart, then, in this day of your merciful visitation. There is but one way to escape: "Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that believing you may have life through his name."

MONERGISM BOOKS

28 Sermons on the Christian Life by Rev John Witherspoon,
Copyright © 2022

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced,

transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions June 2022 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068