

Monergism

Sermons on

**GRACE AND
SALVATION**

REV. JOHN WITHERSPOON

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by Rev. John Witherspoon

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ALL MANKIND BY NATURE UNDER SIN

SERMON 1

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
ROMANS 3:23

THE whole revelation of the will of God to mankind, both in the Old Testament and the New, proceeds upon the supposition that they are sinners; that is to say, transgressors of his law, and liable to the stroke of his justice. This only can give meaning to the doctrine of redemption. None can understand, at least none can relish or embrace it, unless they believe, and are persuaded of this preliminary truth.

What I have now said, appears from many express passages of the holy scriptures; and is particularly evident from the general strain, and from the very structure, of the epistle to the Romans. In it the apostle, who had never been at Rome, gives a full and particular account of the doctrine of Christ; and he lays the foundation for this by a distinct and laboured proof, that all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin. In imitation of his example, I intend to begin my discourses on practical religion, by endeavoring to impress your

minds with a sense of the same truth. This must lead the way to the saving knowledge of the Redeemer; and as he only can build securely, who takes care that every part of the superstructure rest immediately or ultimately upon the foundation, it is as necessary to be remembered by saints, as to be received by sinners.

It may perhaps, on a flight view, appear to be superfluous. 'All mankind,' some will say, 'are ready to acknowledge that they are sinners; and there is great reason to believe they are sincere in this confession.' But, my brethren, a little reflection may convince you, that this general acknowledgment is either very insincere, or very imperfect and defective. It is plainly a light sense of sin that enables the multitude to sleep in security. It is plainly a light sense of sin that betrays men into the commission of it, and emboldens them to continue in it. It is plainly a light sense of sin that blunts the edge of all the threatenings in the word of God, and the admonitions of his providence. Is it not from a light sense of sin, that when the preaching of the gospel is not wholly deserted, its inestimable truths are received without thankfulness, and heard without profit?

For these reasons, I propose, through the assistance of divine grace, to discourse a little on the words of the apostle now read: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:" And, in so doing, shall

1. Endeavor to confirm the truth contained in them, That all mankind are sinners, or transgressors of the law of God, and liable to his righteous judgment. And,
2. Shall make a practical improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place, then, let us endeavor to confirm the truth contained in the text, That all mankind are sinners, or transgressors of the law of God, and liable to his righteous judgment. And here, my brethren, it puts me a little to a stand, in what manner to handle this important subject; whether in the way of reason or affection;

whether in the way of cool and conclusive arguments directed to the judgment, or pointed interrogatories directed to the conscience. Many, nay, innumerable, are the cavils that have been brought by men of corrupt minds against this fundamental truth. The father of lies, indeed, seems to consider it, and justly, as the corner-stone of true religion, which, if he is able to weaken or undermine, it must end in the fall and ruin of the whole fabric. It there be any among you, as possibly there are, infected with the poison of infidelity, all exhortation and warning will be treated by such with disdain, while their objections, however weak, have not been brought into view. On the other hand, there are multitudes of sinners borne away by lust and passion, who are incapable of understanding the force of speculative reasoning, and who have an unhappy tendency to overlook, as what does not concern them, every thing that is treated in that way. I shall be obliged, therefore, to have an eye to both: and oh! that it may please God to enable me so to propose to the judgment, and so to press upon the conscience, this necessary truth, as that some careless persons may be awakened, and brought to an attention to the one thing needful; and that if any have hitherto taken up with imperfect notions of religion, and built their hope upon the sand, they may be persuaded in time to distrust that dangerous situation, and to found it upon the Rock of ages.

For the reason above assigned, it is difficult to determine, what use is to be made of scripture-testimony on such a subject. The charge of guilt upon the sinner, seems to be only preparatory to, and must, as it were, pave the way for the reception of scripture-truths. If the testimony of God in scripture is to be rested on, this one passage is sufficient; but the unbelieving heart is ready to challenge and call in question every such scripture-declaration. I find the worthy author of a well-know catechism, commonly used in the instruction of children, joins together scripture and experience, in the answer to that question, "How do you know, that you are born in a state of sin and misery?" Ans. "God's word tells me so. Besides, I find my heart naturally backward to that which is good, and prone to that which is evil." After this example, and considering, that by the law is the

knowledge of sin, we shall not separate them; the rather, that God is able to make his own word, even in the bare repetition of it, quick and powerful, Heb. 4:12. In the further illustration of this head, therefore, I shall, first briefly lay before you some of the scripture-declarations on this subject; and, secondly, confirm them from experience, the visible state of the world, and the testimony of our own hearts.

First, Allow me to lay before you some of the scripture-declarations on this subject. And that I may avoid handling the subject systematically, and tediously, I join together original and actual sin. Every one who is able to understand what I say, is concerned in both: and indeed they are inseparable the one from the other. The deplorable wickedness in which the world in general is overwhelmed, hath flowed in a continued stream from the first sin of Adam; and the sinfulness of every person's practice has the corruption of his nature as its fruitful source. See the account given of the world, Gen. 6:5. "And God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This you may compare with Gen. 8:21. "And the Lord said, 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."

See also the confession of David, Psal. 51:5. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." In this the Psalmist plainly and clearly teaches the original and universal corruption of our nature. What he asserts concerning himself, must be equally true of all the human race; otherwise, instead of making it a proper part of his confession, it would be an excuse or extenuation of his sin. Nothing can more plainly show the force of this text, than the awkward endeavors used by some to evade or misinterpret it. For example, how mean a subterfuge is it, to pretend, that David declared, he was shapen in iniquity, and conceived by his mother in sin; because he was the issue of some criminal commerce between his father and a maid-servant, or between the wife of Jesse and another man? This is plainly a profane invention, offered without

any manner of proof, or the least insinuation in the history of that great prince. Besides, it is evidently beside his purpose in the psalm referred to, where he is confessing his own sinful nature, and not the sinful deeds of his parents. If there be meaning in words, his intention is, to humble himself before God, not only for his adultery and murder in the matter of Uriah, but as a transgressor from the womb.

To this you may add the testimony of a greater than David, viz. our blessed Lord and Saviour himself, John 3:6. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." For understanding the proof drawn from his text, you may observe, that though the word flesh has various significations in scripture; sometimes, for example, signifying the weakness of our mortal nature, unable to support itself, and liable to a variety of changes, which must at last end in dissolution; yet here it evidently signifies our nature as corrupted by sin. This appears from the opposition of the two clauses: for it is certain, that those who are regenerated, are still liable to all the weakness of mortality. It must therefore bear the same meaning in this place as in Rom. 8:8. "So then they that are in the flesh, cannot please God." It is with a view to this great truth that Job, who pleads with so much warmth his general integrity, yet says, Job 14:3, 4. "And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment, with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

With this agree many other scripture-declarations, some of which I shall mention. Psal. 14:2, 3. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men: to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doth good, no, not one." Ps. 58:3. "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Isaiah 48:8. "Yea, thou heardst not, yea, thou knewest not, yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb." Rom. 3:9, 10, 11, 12.

"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: 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 doth good, no not one." To these, I only add that clear and strong passage, Eph. 2:1, 2, 3. "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all 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 the children of wrath, even as others."

In this summary view of the declarations of scripture upon this subject, I have confined myself to such passages as have an aspect upon the state of our nature in general. And, indeed, as conclusive a proof of its being the doctrine of scripture, may be drawn consequentially as directly. With this view, not to mention many other arguments, I beg your attention to the two following; 1. The tenor of the gospel-message, particularly the extent of the commission, and the language used through the whole: Mark 16:15. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Examine the import of this truth? Whom did the Father love? or to whom did he send the Saviour? To the world, and to every creature. For what end did he love them, and for what purpose did the Redeemer come? To save them from perishing. But why were they in danger of perishing? Doubtless, because they were in sin. In vain, then, do men exercise their ingenuity in explaining away particular passages.—This truth does not rest upon an expression or two, the meaning of which must be ascertained by critical skill, but upon the whole of the gospel. If we do not throw aside the Bible altogether, Christ Jesus came into the world to obtain

forgiveness for the guilty, to save the miserable, and to redeem the slave.

The other argument is drawn from the seals of the covenant of peace; and particularly the initiating seal, both under the Old Testament and the New, of which infants were admitted to be partakers. If they received these seals before the commission of actual guilt, it cannot be but the nature itself must be defiled; especially as baptism is expressly called the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins, Mark 1:4.

Thus I have laid before you what the scripture teaches us on the sinfulness of our nature, including all the posterity of Adam, without exception. I beseech you, therefore, my beloved hearers, to consider the concern you have in it, as a part of the whole. If you have any belief of the truth of the scriptures as the word of God, attempt not to warp or pervert them when speaking contrary to your fond prejudices. Desire not that ministers should speak unto you smooth things, and prophesy deceit; but receive with humility and fear the divine will, however heavy a sentence of condemnation it may carry against yourselves, viz. that you are sinners by nature; that your hearts are estranged and alienated from the love of God; and that, if you die in that condition, you shall not see his face in mercy.

I now proceed to the second branch of this head; which was, to confirm the account given in scripture from experience, that is to say, from the visible state of the world, and the testimony of our own hearts.

Let us then see what evidence is afforded us from the visible state of the world, that all have sinned, &c. And here, my brethren, what an instructive lesson, but at the same time what a humbling and melancholy prospect, opens to our view! There are many remarks which might be profitably made on the state of the world in every age, to shew how much sin hath reigned in the hearts of men, and what desolation it hath wrought in the place of their abode. The great

difficulty is, to range them in proper order, and propose them in a simple and perspicuous manner, that ordinary hearers may understand and profit by them. For this purpose, let us first take a view of mankind in a public or national, and then in a private or personal, capacity.

1. Let us consider mankind in a public or national capacity. In this view, what is the history of past ages but the history of human guilt? If, instead of taking up with the idle and visionary hypotheses of philosophers, we only attend to what men have been in fact, we shall be obliged to say, with the Spirit of God, that "the imagination of the heart of man is only evil from his youth." It is not proper here to omit, or rather it is highly necessary to mention, the impiety and idolatry of the several nations of the world. Excepting the small number of Abraham's family, who were the election of God, and, by a peculiar disposition of Providence, the depositaries of his truths, every other nation upon the face of the globe, not only deserted the worship of the true God, but fell headlong into the most stupid and sottish idolatry. This was not peculiar to those nations who continued in ignorance, and whom the more improved and polished thought proper to distinguish by the name of barbarians, but was at least equally true of those who were most highly civilized. Of the wisest nations, as well as the wisest men, the apostle very justly says in this epistle, ch. 1:22, 23. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; 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."

I must make even a farther observation, and intreat your attention to it, That the wisest in profession seem to have become the greatest fools. It seems to have been designed in Providence, as a standing and indelible mark of the vanity of human wisdom, that those very nations who were most early in their application to, and most successful in their cultivation of the liberal arts, were the most extravagant and senseless in their theological opinions, and religious rites. I mean, particularly, the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans;

worshipping bulls and calves, serpents and insects, the most stupid of four-footed beasts, and creeping things of the most shocking form. This every one may satisfy himself of, who will look into the histories of these celebrated nations, as they have been transmitted to us by themselves.

Consider, my brethren, the unnatural cruelties of the religious rites of many nations. It was frequent and general with them, to offer up human sacrifices, and make their children pass through the fire; the very reflection on which is sufficient to fill a considerate person with horror. Consider also the scandalous impurity of some of their ceremonies, and the obscene history of the objects of their worship. Strange to think of indeed! yet so it is, that most of the eminent writers of antiquity are employed in describing the drinking and merriment, the scolding and quarrels, the tricks and robberies, and the amorous intrigues of their gods and goddesses.

If we think in a serious manner on these undoubted facts, can we help saying, Oh! the ingratitude of those wretches among us who call themselves freethinkers, who have been taught by revelation only to form rational and consistent notions of the first cause and Creator of all things, and yet reject revelation entirely, and pretend to found them upon human reason! I am sensible there are some who do not think that the idolatry of the heathen world ought to be reckoned among their crimes; but if you will consult the Old Testament, you will find it considered there as the first and most atrocious crime which solicited the vengeance of an offended God. If you consult this epistle to the Romans, you will find it leads the way in the account given of human apostasy. The first of all the ten commands, which were given as a sum of the moral law, is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And indeed, if the first duty of natural religion be a confession and acknowledgment of God our Creator, the first of all sins must be, a contempt of his name, or a profanation of his worship.

But idolatry was not alone. From this, as a fruitful source, flowed every other human vice. What a terrible detail is given us by the historians of every age! On what is it that all the great transactions of the world have still turned? Has it not been on the ambition, cruelty, injustice, oppression, and raging lust and impurity, of men. Whatever number of virtuous persons was among them, they seem to have either lain concealed, or fallen a sacrifice to the envy and malice of others. Since the first murder, of Abel, by his brother Cain, what terrible havoc has been made of man by man! We are so habituated to this, that it makes little impression. We can even peruse, with attention and delight, the narratives of stratagems of war, ferocity in combat, devastation and bloodshed. Who are the persons who have acquired the greatest renown in the present or preceding ages?—Who are the persons who have been the greatest objects of human admiration? Have they not been the most active, and the most successful, destroyers of their fellow-creatures? This circumstance indeed communicates the guilt of individuals to the whole; shows that it belongs to mankind in general; and that the description given by the apostle is not more shocking than true, ch. 1:28, 29, 30, 31, 32. "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: being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 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."

There are to be found upon record instances of such dreadful and aggravated guilt, as it were to be wished they had been, or could have been, buried in oblivion. For this reason. I shall neither mention their names, nor cite the examples; but observe, that the extent and prevalence of wickedness should be considered as a strong proof of the corruption of the whole race; and the particular signal instances

of astonishing or monstrous crimes, as a proof of the excessive depravation of our nature, and what man in his present state is capable of. I know it is pleasing and gratifying to human pride, to talk of the dignity of human nature, and the beauty of moral virtue; and if it be done in such a manner as to make us esteem the only mean of recovering our lost integrity and original glory, I have no objection to it. But if it be spoken of man as he now is without regenerating grace, I am certain it is more agreeable to reason and experience to say, that from the lengths to which some have proceeded, when placed in circumstances of temptation, it is owing to the power of restraining providence, that others have been comparatively somewhat better.

I have seen it observed, with great apparent justice, that probably one end which God had in view when he shortened the period of human life after the deluge, was to set bounds to the progress of human guilt. As it is the nature of vice, to strengthen by habit and increase by time; a race of wicked men living many hundreds of years, would degenerate and harden to a degree not easily conceived. And, indeed, if we examine into the true causes of any little degree of order and peace which we now enjoy, we shall see abundant reason to adore the wisdom of divine Providence, but very little to ascribe much goodness to the human heart.

The most truly excellent characters which are to be found in history, and the most illustrious deeds which those heroes have performed, have for their very foundation the corruption of the human race.

In this remark I have in view the sages and legislators of antiquity, who acquired so much renown by establishing systems of policy and government for different states. What was this else, and indeed what was it called, but taming the savage, and restraining the profligate part of their fellow-creatures? It seems plainly to be the point in view in every human law, to bridle the fury of human inclination, and hinder one man from making a prey of another. This is well described by the apostle Paul, 1 Tim. 1:9, 10. "Knowing this, that the

law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man-slayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to found doctrine." We have, indeed, the testimony of men against themselves in this case. It has been found to hold, without any exception, that the longer men live, they have the greater suspicion of those with whom they live; the greater experience they have of the world, they have the harder thoughts of men in general. In particular, those who have been most conversant in public life, and have obtained most of what is called a knowledge of the world, have always the worst opinion of human nature.

2. Let us now from a general, come to a particular and personal view of our present state. You may be apt to suppose, that though the sinfulness of human nature is too general, yet it is not universal; that though vice and wickedness has appeared conspicuously, and though perhaps wicked men may have obtained the ascendancy in every nation, this will not serve to found a sentence against every man. We might upon this part of the subject observe, that the truth illustrated above will receive confirmation from our most intimate knowledge of one another. Human nature will gain nothing by a close inspection. Take it either in general or particular, its best appearance is when viewed at a distance. The greatest and best characters, when closely examined, have always such blemishes and imperfections attending them, as greatly diminish their lustre. This, indeed, has grown into a proverb, That much familiarity breeds contempt. On this account, we may safely say, that if such is the state of our nature, that no man is able to justify himself, or obtain the entire approbation of his fellow-sinners, much more must "every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God," Rom. 3:19.

But the chief illustration of this part of the subject must be from the testimony which conscience constrains every man to bear against himself. Examine, therefore, my brethren, what reason you have to

be satisfied, that you yourselves, unless your natures have been renewed by the Holy Ghost, are under the dominion of sin; nay, that even such as have been "brought again from the dead" do still feel "a law in their members warring against the law of God in their minds." Remember, then, that you have to do with him "who seeth in secret," and "who searcheth Jerusalem as with candles." It was necessary formerly to take notice of the enormous effects of sin in this life; we must now search a little deeper, and consider the beginning and source of these in the disposition of the heart. It is true, there are probably many here who are justly chargeable with the grossest crimes; such as, impiety, lying, injustice, or uncleanness: and oh! that it may please God, that their sins may find them out, and his word may be quick and powerful to their conviction. But what I have now in view is, to maintain the universal conclusion in the text, not only that many men have been profligates, but that every man is a sinner.

For this purpose, it is of the utmost moment to put you in mind what sin properly is. There are two ways of defence, you know, upon any trial: the one is, to deny the fact; the other to maintain it is no crime. It is of necessity, therefore, in the first place, to ascertain the charge, by an account of the nature of sin. Of this, I do not think there can be produced a juster account than we have in our shorter catechism: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God:" Which is nothing else but a brief illustration of the words of scripture; Sin is the transgression of the law. Let the conscience, then, of every hearer answer to the charge. Have you kept or have you broken the law of God? Have you been obedient subjects to the King of kings? Have you done your own will, or the will of him that made you? However unwilling you may be to put this question home at present, no person shall be able to decline the tribunal, or evade the answer in the day of judgment.

We have one great difficulty to struggle with in the attempt of bringing the guilty to confession, that sin hath blinded the understanding, and perverted the judgment; so that after we have

said, that sin is the transgression of the law, there will remain another question, What is the law, and how far doth it extend? Upon this we must have recourse to the remaining traces that are left upon the conscience; and I see nothing more proper, than to press home that summary which God hath given of his own right and our duty, in the first and great commandment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;" Matth. 22:37. Are you your own? Have you no lord over you? Can you plead any exception to this command? Is not your Maker infinitely perfect, and infinitely amiable? Is he not worthy of your supreme love? If he is not, who is it, or what is it, that you have reason to prefer, or that can produce a better title? Can there be any thing more just than the sentiment expressed by the pious Psalmist, Psal. 73:25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Is there excellence or sweetness in the creature, and is there none or less in the Creator, from whom every inferior nature derives its very existence, and on whom it depends every moment for its preservation?

May I not hope to have some hold of sinners here, in pleading the rights of their Maker? Are your hearts then naturally, and have they been habitually and supremely set upon God? Has it been your first and leading care, to know him, and to serve him, to inquire into his will, that you might do what was acceptable to him? Do you believe, that in his favor only is life, and therefore do you seek your happiness and your comfort in him? Many are apt greatly to mistake upon this subject; nay, it seems to be the leading deception of sinners, to think nothing evil or punishable, but such gross crimes as are disorderly in human society, and obnoxious to human laws. It is scarce possible to make them sensible, how much guilt there is in a total forgetfulness of God; and yet this is the very source of human depravity. The chief thing blameable in our attachment to other things, is their filling the room that is due to God, their being employed in a manner that is dishonorable to God, or, in other words, their being instruments of rebellion against the will of God.

Are there any of you, my brethren, who, by the kindness of Providence, have been kept free from gross, visible, and scandalous offences; who, from a natural coolness of temperament, have been chaste or sober; who, from a principle of honor, have been just or generous; who, from the dictates of prudence, have been regular and decent; but have been unmindful of your duty to God, have been unwilling to think of him, or strangers to delight in him? and are you not sinners in his presence? Have you been preserved by his power, and yet never confessed the obligation? Have you been living daily upon his bounty, and yet seldom or never given him thanks, except in the most indifferent and formal manner, and such worship, as is a much more proper occasion for repentance, than ground of confidence? How, then, shall you be able to stand in the judgment? "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

II. I come now to make some practical improvement of what has been said on this subject. And,

1. From what has been said, you may learn how deeply and surely the foundation of the gospel is laid. It is laid in the actual state of the world, and in that depravity of our nature, which it is impossible to conceal, and which nothing but the greatest obstinacy and perversion of mind can have the courage to deny. I am sensible, that nothing but an inward and personal conviction of guilt and misery wrought by the Spirit of the living God, will bring the sinner to embrace the gospel; yet the necessity of salvation may be evinced in the clearest and most satisfactory manner, by reason and observation. As the visible creation, when attentively, viewed serves to discover the wisdom and omnipotence of God, and is, as it were, an open volume, which men of every tongue may read and admire; so the state of the moral world, as it is called, plainly points out the guilt and apostasy of man, and loudly calls for the interposition of the Saviour. This it is our duty to attend to, not only to stop the mouths of gain-sayers, but to establish the faith of God's children, that it may not be overthrown

or unsettled by the cavils and objections of those who lie in wait to deceive.

2. From what has been said, you may see with what sentiments we should look upon the state of the world, or peruse the history of providence, and what profit we may reap from it. When we see, as at present in our own age and country, what profanity and neglect of God, what contempt or desertion of his worship, prevails among many of every rank; what pride and luxury, what riot and sensuality, what uncleanness and debauchery, what lying, fraud, and perjury; and when we observe how one race of sinners has succeeded another in every age, and that true religion has been generally, as it is still, in a struggling or persecuted state, we ought to be humbled for the sin of our nature, and the share which each of us has contributed to the general guilt. Instead of finding fault with Providence for the permission of sin, we ought to be filled with a holy indignation against ourselves and others, for the perpetration of it. We ought to admire that wisdom and power by which the King of kings sets restraining bounds to the violence of men. Neither ought we to omit adoring his holiness in the awful visitations with which he sometimes overtakes and overwhelms the wicked in their wickedness. When he sends out his fore judgments of war, famine, and pestilence; or when he looks to the earth, and it trembles, as unable to bear all the guilt that is laid upon it; when thunder, lightning, and tempest, seem to threaten the immediate dissolution of the whole fabric; we ought to consider all these as the just punishment of sin, and look forward with fear to that time, when he shall render to every man according to his works, and deserved vengeance shall not be partial, but universal; when it shall not be occasional and temporary, but final, unchangeable and eternal.

3. You may learn from what has been said, the state and danger of those who are chargeable with sins of a heinous and aggravated nature. If all without exception are "under sin; if every mouth must be stopped," &c. what shall be the condition of those who have the shameful pre-eminence of being sinners of the first order, who have

done more than others to provoke the Lord to anger! If those who have lived to themselves, and not to God, shall not be able to stand in the judgment; what shall become of those who have sold themselves to work iniquity, and whose abominable practices are a reproach to reason, as well as a scandal to religion? I may even say further, in the words of the apostle Peter, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1 Pet. 4:18. I do the rather beg your attention to this, that we always find loose livers the warmest advocates for libertine principles. It is the drunkard, the swearer, the impure fornicator, who are so ready to produce in conversation their pretended arguments against the corruption of human nature. I speak to all such within hearing. What benefit will you reap by denying original corruption, when you are justly chargeable with so many actual transgressions? If there are, or even were, any persons in the world without sin, surely you cannot pretend that you are so yourselves. You are ashamed to reveal your hidden scenes to your fellow-sinners, but how shall you conceal them, from the Searcher of all hearts? If you cannot bear to be told your faults by your fellow-creatures, with what speechless confusion shall you stand at last before the judgment-seat of Christ? Let me therefore address you in the words of your Maker by the Psalmist, Psal. 50:21, 22. "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." May it please God effectually to convince you of your sin and danger, and to lead you to his mercy, as revealed in the gospel, for your forgiveness. I conclude with the advice of the Psalmist, Psal. 2:12. "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."

THE SINNER WITHOUT EXCUSE BEFORE GOD

SERMON 2

If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
PSALM 130:3

JUSTICE and mercy are the perfections of the divine nature, in which we as sinners have a peculiar concern. Our world is the great theatre, and the human race the great, or, so far as we know, the only objects of their united exercise. Clear and just apprehensions, therefore, of those attributes, must lie at the foundation of all religion. It is easy to see, that a discovery, both of justice and mercy, is necessary to bring the sinner to repentance. He must see the guilt and misery in which he is involved, and the way by which he may certainly, and by which he can only, obtain a recovery. The same views are equally necessary to every Christian, during his continuance in this imperfect state. They are necessary to that self-denial which ought to be his habitual character, and to that humiliation and penitence which ought to be his frequent employment.

I must, however, observe, that though there are few of the attributes of God more frequently spoken of, perhaps there are few less distinctly understood. Men have either an imperfect knowledge, or weak persuasion of the justice of God, and thence despise his mercy. On the other hand, they are apt to take presumptuous views of his general mercy, and thence despise his justice and severity. This is not peculiar to those, who, upon the whole, are under the dominion of sin. Even the children of God themselves are ready, either to lose their views of the majesty and holiness of God, which should incline

them to serve him with reverence and godly fear; or, on the other hand, by neglecting his mercy, to fall into that state of slavish bondage and illiberal fear, which is equally injurious to the honor of God, and hurtful to their own peace.

On these accounts I have chosen to insist a little on this passage of the Psalmist David, in which we have an united view of divine justice and mercy? "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayst be feared." It is thought by some, that this Psalm was composed in that memorable period of his life, when he was plunged in the deepest guilt, by his adultery and murder in the matter of Uriah; but more commonly, that it was in the time of his persecution, when the imminent dangers to which he was so often exposed, brought his sins strongly to remembrance. Reserving what is here said of the mercy of God to another opportunity, let us now consider the view given us of his justice, in this passage, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" For this purpose I shall,

I. Endeavor to ascertain and explain the meaning of the Psalmist's assertion.

II. Support and confirm it from scripture and experience.

III. In the last place, I shall make a practical improvement of what may be said upon it.

I. Let us then, first, endeavor to ascertain and explain the meaning of the Psalmist's expression, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" These words evidently carry in them the deepest sense of sin, a strong and inward conviction of the impossibility of justifying himself before a pure and holy God, if he should deal with him as in justice he might: "If thou, Lord shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" God is an omniscient being, every where present, to whom all our thoughts and ways, and consequently all our sins, are and must be perfectly known. The

expression, then, cannot mean, that there are any sins unregarded, or not observed of God; because this is impossible. The marking of iniquities here, seems to be an allusion to what passes in human courts, where the judges set down, or put upon record, all that is brought against the criminal, in order to found a sentence of condemnation. In this view, the meaning must be, if God should so mark iniquities, as to proceed to punish us for all of which we were really guilty, there could be no possibility of standing such an impartial trial.

I need not tell you, that the putting the words in the form of a question, "O Lord, who shall stand?" does not imply, that there is any uncertainty in the matter, or that any can be found pure enough to endure such a scrutiny, but rather serves to deny it in the strongest manner. Again, we are not to suppose, that the Psalmist, by putting the question thus in general, "Who shall stand?" designed to turn the accusation from himself, or to extenuate his own sins, by bringing in others equally guilty. This is indeed the practice of many in the world, who seem to think the numbers of those who are chargeable with any sin, an excuse or palliation of the guilt of particular offenders. But the true spirit of repentance leads to very different sentiments: it makes the sinner fix upon his own faults, and point at the sins and plagues of his own heart, without thinking upon the sins of others, unless as they may be an occasion of discovering to him more of the depravation and wickedness of his own nature. So that the genuine import of the Psalmist's expression seems to be, If thou, Lord, shouldst execute the decrees of justice, and punish every thing that is done amiss, the holiest man on earth would not be able to abide the trial; how much less would such a sinner as I be able to stand?

II. I proceed now to support and confirm this truth from scripture and experience. And you will be pleased to observe, that it is the constant doctrine of the Holy Scriptures; it is the uniform language of humility and penitence there. Thus the Psalmist, Psalm 143:2. —"Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no

man living be justified." To the same purpose, see the language of Job, chap. 9:2, 3, 4. "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?" A clear discovery of the infinite majesty of God, the unspotted holiness of his nature, the extent, the purity, and spirituality of his law, will immediately carry home a conviction of this truth, and make us sensible what impure and wretched creatures we are: it will make every one of us cry out with Job, after a discovery of the divine glory and perfection, ch. 40:4, 5. "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, ch. 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." Every true penitent will say, with the Psalmist, Psal. 19:12. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults," Nay, he will consider his daily preservation as an evidence of the divine patience, in the suspension of his sentence, as in Lam. 3:22, 23. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

These, my brethren, are examples of the sentiments and language of the scripture-saints; and if we look a little into their characters, as set before us in the inspired writings, we shall see, that self-abasement is one of the most certain proofs of true religion; that the more any person has made real improvement in holiness, he will think and speak in so much the humbler manner; will more clearly see the evil of sin, and more readily confess its power and influence over his own heart. I know this is very contrary to the spirit that prevails in the world; and particularly opposite to the reigning temper of the present age. I know also, that there are many objections raised against this fundamental truth. But instead of wrangling controversy, in which our understandings are often lost and our passions irritated, rather than subdued; for further enforcing the above truth,

I shall only urge every hearer to a serious and impartial reflection upon his own conduct. This, I am persuaded, will, by the blessing of God, be the most effectual mean of silencing the reasonings of the carnal mind, and forcing the conscience to a confession, both of the equity of the law, and the guilt of disobedience.

For attaining this end, I shall just propose three general subjects of examination: and beg that you may shew fidelity to your own souls, in bringing them to the trial. 1. How many duties have you omitted, which you must be sensible you ought to have performed? 2. How often have you been guilty of express transgressions of the law of God? 3. How many blemishes and imperfections cleave to those very duties which you endeavor to perform in obedience to his will?

1. Then, How many duties have you omitted, which you must be sensible you ought to have performed? In charging you with neglect of duty, I must begin with unthankfulness to, and forgetfulness of God. Let the conscience be ever so much biassed by partiality, or perverted by wrong principles, is it possible to deny the obligation of every creature to acknowledge his dependance upon the author of his being, the preserver of his life, and the source of his mercies? But have you, my brethren, been sensible of this? How unmindful have you been of the Rock that begat you, and the God that formed you? This is the first of all sins, and the fruitful parent of every particular transgression. It was a heavy charge brought against a great prince by the prophet Daniel, ch. 5:23. last clause, "And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Say, ye men of the world, have you indeed acknowledged God, on whom you depend for every breath that you draw, for every moment that you continue in existence? I have often thought, that it was one of the greatest evidences of the depravity of human nature, that an abundant and opulent state on earth should so generally lead to neglect of God. What is this, when interpreted, If I may speak so, but that the greater our Maker's goodness is to us, commonly the less is our gratitude to him?

But I would speak to those whose consciences are more enlightened, and who have not wholly forgotten the Lord. Are not you also chargeable with manifold omissions! What sense of gratitude have you retained, and expressed, for innumerable mercies, spiritual and temporal, to yourselves, and to your families? How unequal the payment of gratitude to the debt of obligation! What use have you made of them in God's service? What advantage have you reaped, for your own sanctification, from the bounty of Providence, from the strokes of Providence, from the ordinances of divine institution, from the truths of the everlasting gospel, from seasons of instruction, and opportunities of worship, from edifying examples, from faithful admonitions? What have you done for the good of others? How often have you relieved the necessitous, comforted the distressed, instructed the ignorant, admonished the negligent, punished or restrained the profane? I hope I speak to many who have not been wholly negligent in improving their time and talents; yet surely there is just ground of humiliation to the best, that even under a conviction of duty, they have so imperfectly discharged it; and probably the very persons who have done most, will be most sincerely grieved that they have not done more.

Alas! my brethren, it is a great mistake to think lightly of sins of omission. How much do I pity the condition of those thoughtless persons, who, forgetting that they were made to serve God, seem to live for no other purpose than to enjoy themselves! And oh the miserable delusion of those sinners who set their minds at ease by the filly excuse, That they do harm to none but themselves! Let them hear and tremble at the tenor of the sentence in the great day, Matth. 25:30. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is the first duty of natural religion, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name;" and it is the sum of all the duties of the gospel, 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

2. Consider in how many instances you have been guilty of express transgressions of the law of God, his law written upon your hearts, and repeated in his own word. If you know any thing at all of the law of God in its spirituality and extent, you must be deeply convinced of your innumerable transgressions, in thought, in word, and indeed. (1.) How many are the sins of your thoughts? Sin is seated in the heart: it hath its throne and dominion there. Every enormity in the life takes its rise from the impurity of the heart. None will think light of sins of the heart, who have any acquaintance with the word of God. Let them but reflect upon the account given of the guilt of the old world, 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." Let them reflect upon the saying of the wise man, Prov. 4:23. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life;" or on the distinguishing character of God, Jer. 17:10. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

How many thoughts are there in your hearts admitted and entertained, dishonorable to God, unthankful for his mercies, impatient under his providence? How many thoughts envious, malicious, spiteful, towards your neighbor? How many wanton, lascivious thoughts, and irregular desires? How many covetous, worldly, vain, ambitious thoughts? Let me beseech you also to consider, that these are not sins that we fall into seldom, or by occasional temptation, but multitudes break in upon us every day, and in a manner every hour. What an infinite number, then, must we be chargeable with in twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years! If so many are the sins of a single day, what must be the guilt of a whole life? What reason to cry out, with the prophet to Jerusalem, "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within us?"

(2.) Let me beseech you to consider the sins of the tongue. Here I shall not insist much on the grosser sins of the tongue, lying, slandering, backbiting; of these, though few will be sensible they are

guilty themselves, all are abundantly ready to complain, as reigning in the world in general. Neither shall I insist on impure conversation, filthy and lascivious expressions, or allusions to obscenity; though I am afraid many here present are far from being innocent of the charge. But besides these, the sins of the tongue are so many, that the most watchful Christian cannot say he is guiltless. Even the meek Moses was provoked to speak "unadvisedly with his lips." The apostle James has given us a very strong description, both of the general prevalence, and mischievous influence, of the sins of the tongue, James 3:2–8. "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, withersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." And that none may presume, after all, to think these sins of the tongue inconsiderable, let us remember what our Saviour tells us, Matth. 12:36, 37. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

(3.) Now, to these sins of heart and conversation, let us add the consideration of all the sins of our actions, by which we either offend God, ourselves, or are the means, by a doubtful or suspicious example, of inducing others to offend him: all the acts of insobriety and intemperance with regard to ourselves; of injustice, treachery, or oppression, with regard to others. Let us consider those sins to which we are led by our respective callings and employments, or by our

respective ages or tempers, or by our situation, and the society with which we stand connected. The lightness and frothiness of some, the founness and moroseness of others, the inconsiderateness and folly of youth, the plotting and ambitious projects of riper years, the peevishness and covetousness of old age, and the vanity and selfishness we carry with us through the several stages and periods of life. These things are most, if not all of them, sins in themselves, and do infallibly betray us into a great number of others. If we consider all this with any measure of attention, can we refuse to adopt the language of the holy scripture, that our sins are more in number than the hairs upon our heads, or than the sand that is upon the sea-shore? In fine, if we consider the sins we are guilty of, according to our conditions and relations in the world, as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, we shall find the account so prodigiously swelled, that we shall have more than reason to cry out with the Psalmist, "Lord, if thou shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

3. Consider the sins that cleave to your religious duties, and every thing you do in obedience to the will of God. The purest worshipper on earth must ask forgiveness for the sins even of his holy things. I am not here to insist upon the hypocritical performances of many professing Christians, done merely, or chiefly, to be seen of men, or spread, as a covering, over their hidden and shameful deeds; nor am I to mention that religious zeal which arises from strife, contention, and vain-glory, and which chiefly aims at the support of party names; because these are directly and eminently sinful: they are an abomination in the sight of God. But, my brethren, even in those performances which you go about with some measure of sincerity, how many defects are to be sound? Oh! how much negligence, coldness, and formality, in worship! how many wandering, vain, idle, and worldly thoughts, in your hearts, when your bodies are in the house of God! Consider only the infinite glory and majesty of God, in whose sight the heavens themselves are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly; and say whether you have ever prayed at all

with becoming reverence of spirit. Consider only the unspeakable condescension of that God to his creatures, and the unsearchable riches of his grace to the sinner; and say, whether your hearts have ever been suitably affected with his love.

It is our duty, my brethren, to consider, how far we have been from preaching the word of God with proper impressions of the majesty of him in whose name we speak; how far we have done it with simplicity and dignity, neither fearing the censure, nor courting the applause, of our fellow-sinners; how far we have done it with that tenderness and affection, with that holy fervor and importunity, which the value of those precious souls to whom we speak manifestly demands. And is it not your business to consider, how seldom you hear with that attention, reverence, humility, and love, with which the sacred and important truths of the everlasting gospel ought to be received; how many hear much more as judges than as learners, as critics rather than as sinners; and content themselves with marking the weakness of an indifferent, or praising the abilities of an animated speaker? And how many run with itching ears from one congregation to another, or even from one party or profession to another, not that they may be edified, but that curiosity and fancy may be gratified? How many lost ordinances, how many mispent sabbaths, have we to lament before God?

When we come to the second table of the law, how many sinful motives mix their influence in the duties we perform to our neighbors? how many acts of justice owe their being, in part at least, to fear of reproach? how many works of charity owe their splendor to a desire of applause, as well as to a better principle? I should never have done, were I to go through all the great duties of the Christian life, and observe the sinful defects that cleave to them. I believe I may say with great truth, that would we but deal faithfully, there would be nothing more necessary to our humiliation, than a strict examination of our duties themselves. This would oblige us to confess, that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God;" that we must not plead for reward, but forgiveness; that no merit of

our own, but infinite mercy alone, must be the foundation of our hope.

III. I come now to make some practical application of the subject, for your instruction and direction. And,

1. How great is the deceitfulness of sin! how astonishing the blindness of sinners! How easy and obvious is the consideration of our sins, in the order in which I have endeavored to set them before you! Sins of omission, on the one hand, and of commission, on the other; and duties faulty in both respects, viz. by essential qualities neglected, and sins mixed with the performances: sins in thought, in word, and indeed, against God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Yet, alas! how many are there in a great measure ignorant of the sins they are chargeable with, and therefore sleeping in security! Think, my beloved hearers, on your condition. To know your danger, is the first step to deliverance. Is not the law of obedience clear, written upon all the Creator's works? Is it not engraven upon the conscience? and is it not often repeated and enforced by the dispensations of Providence? Would there be so much of divine judgment, if there was no offence? Every natural evil proclaims the sin of man. An inclement season, an injurious world, and a frail, dying body, conspire in pointing out our sinful state. And yet, after all, how blind is the sinner to the discovery, how deaf to the friendly warning, how regardless of the approaching trial! Awake, I beseech you, while there may be peace, and look upon your danger, while there is yet given you time and opportunity to fly from it.

2. If the holiest cannot stand before God, if no flesh living can be justified in his sight, how fearful must be the state of those who are lying under the guilt of atrocious, aggravated, and repeated crimes! Though great profligates often desert the ordinances of God, that they may sin at greater ease, and meet with less resistance; yet, in so numerous an assembly as this, there is reason to suppose there are not a few of the chief of sinners; the rather, that while some desert the ordinances, that they may have ease from within, others attend

them as a cover, that they may blind their neighbors, and meet with less suspicion or disturbance from without. How, then, can murderers, fornicators, swearers, drunkards, thieves, and retainers of unjust gain, hear what hath been said on this subject without trembling for themselves! Hear for your souls sake; hear for eternity's sake; hear, I beseech you, for Christ's sake. O that the Spirit of God may carry home the truth, and make it "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword," Heb. 4:12. It is an easy thing for you now to dissemble the sins which men would punish, and even to boast of the sins which men must tolerate; but hear and remember the two following passages: Heb. 4:13. "All things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do;" and Heb. 10:31. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

3. In the last place, If any christian desires to keep his conscience tender and faithful, to have a deep growing and humbling sense of his own sinfulness; if he would bar the gate against the entrance of pride, or banish it after it has obtained admission; if he desires to walk humbly and watchfully—let him live as in the presence of God, let him often place himself at his awful tribunal. It is easy to justify ourselves before men, who have so little to require, and from whom so much may be concealed. The truth is, it is not a great matter to be able to set the world at defiance. But to look up to that God who sitteth upon the throne of his holiness, is of infinitely greater moment, and of infinitely greater difficulty. He trieth the reins and the heart. He abhorreth evil. You see how Job defended himself against the accusations of his friends, held fast his integrity, and would not let it go; but no sooner did God speak to him in the greatness of his power, than he confessed his vileness, and laid his hand upon his mouth. In the same manner, he that would guard against the impositions of a deceitful heart, that would not be abused by flattering friends, or led astray by a mistaken world; that would rather walk in the path of penitence than security; let him live as in the presence of God. And happy, happy they, who take confusion of face to themselves now, and seek for mercy through the blood of the atonement, in comparison of those who justify themselves now, but

shall stand at last with unutterable confusion before the supreme judge, ready to pronounce the irreversible sentence.

HOPE OF FORGIVENESS WITH GOD

SERMON 3

But there is forgiveness with thee; that thou mayest be feared.

PSALM 130:4

AFTER considering our own miserable and guilty state, and how little any plea which we can offer will avail before the holiness and justice of God, it is proper to turn our eyes to his mercy, as the only foundation of our hope and peace. This is of the utmost necessity to every penitent. When a sense of sin hath truly taken hold of the conscience, it is so intolerable, that no man can continue long in that condition. When the waves and billows of divine wrath are going over him, he must either fasten upon some ground of hope, or suffer shipwreck upon the rocks of despair. There are indeed, alas that we should be so liable to delusion! many ways of weakening the force of conviction, and obtaining a temporary, imperfect, or false peace. But the only safe and stable ground of hope is the divine mercy. And happy the sinner who obtains such discoveries of its extent and efficacy, as to make him cleave to it with undivided affection, and rest upon it as the anchor of his soul, from which he is resolved never to depart.

Believe it, Christians, the more the sinner looks into his own state, the more real and thorough his acquaintance with his own heart is,

the more he finds, that not the least ray of hope can arise from that quarter. This is precisely the import of the Psalmist's declaration in this passage, taking the one branch of it in connexion with the other; as if he had said, When I consider how great and multiplied my transgressions have been, I must stand speechless, and without excuse, before thy holy tribunal, and justify thee, although thou shouldst condemn me. But Lord, thou art a God of infinite mercy. This I fix upon as the foundation of my hope. I see nothing in myself to plead. Thy law accuses me. My own conscience passes sentence upon me. I am not able to support the view of thy justice and holiness. Whither can I fly, but to thy mercy? Here I desire to take refuge, and to my unspeakable consolation there is forgiveness with thee; so that thou mayest and oughtest to be feared. In discoursing further on this subject, which I intend to do in a manner entirely practical, I propose, in a dependance on divine grace, to follow this method.

I. I shall give a brief view of the discoveries which God hath made of his mercy, as the foundation of the sinner's hope; or, in other words, shew what reason we have to believe, that there is forgiveness with him.

II. I shall point out the connexion between the mercy of God and his fear; or explain the import of this expression, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

III. I shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

1. First, then, let us attempt to give a brief view of the discoveries which God hath made of his mercy, as the foundation of the sinner's hope; or, in other words, shew what reason we have to believe, that there is forgiveness with him. For this purpose I observe, first of all, that the patience and forbearance of God towards sinners, in the course of his providence, is the effect of his mercy. Even this affords some faint hope, that there may be forgiveness with him. See the reasoning or the expostulation of Jonah on the respite of the

destruction of Nineveh, Jonah 4:2. "And he prayed unto the Lord and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." The sentence being suspended, there is time given to apply for pardon, and space for the exercise of repentance, with a peradventure, or who can tell, whether he may not be gracious. We may add to this, his continual benignity and kindness to all his creatures, not excepting the evil, the unthankful, and the unholy. The native tendency of both these is to lead the guilty to repentance, as we are told, Rom. 2:4. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" But though this ought to be mentioned, I am very sensible, how insufficient it is of itself to give consolation to a wounded spirit. Taking in the whole plan of providence, there are so many tokens of our Creator's displeasure, so much to be seen of the justice and holiness, as well as of the goodness of God, that it must leave the sinner still under a dreadful uncertainty in a matter of such infinite concern. Torn by the suspicion which is inseparable from guilt, he is full of restless anxiety; and knowing that he must shortly appear before God in an unembodied state, he is often putting this question to himself, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? How shall I be able to stand in the judgment? And therefore,

2. God hath revealed himself in his word, as merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and slow to anger. This was the great truth on which the sinner's hope depended ever since the apostasy of our first parents. Never since that time could any man produce his title to divine favor in his own obedience: and therefore the mercy of God early intimated in the first promise, continued to make, if I may speak so, the leading part of the divine character in all the discoveries he made of himself. Thus, at the giving of the law, 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, 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 to the fourth generation." To the same purpose the Psalmist David, Psal. 103:8. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." Hear also the prophet Micah; Micah 7:18. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity; and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."

I do not here stay to consider what hints were given in the ancient dispensation, of the atonement which was afterwards to be made by the incarnation of the Saviour. Doubtless there was some respect to this in the very first promise of the seed of the woman, and also in the promise to Abraham, that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed. The same thing was prefigured by the sacrifices, and shadowed out by many different rites of the Mosaic œconomy. It must, however, be allowed, that the faithful in those ages saw it only obscurely, and of consequence understood it very imperfectly. But it was on the revealed mercy of God, which they were obliged to seek in the way appointed by himself, that they placed their entire dependance.

I cannot help observing to you, how very encouraging the assurances of pardon are through many passages of the Old Testament; how very gracious the invitations to the sinner, as if they had been contrived on purpose to remove the jealousy which the guilty are too apt to entertain; 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." Isa. 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." 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." Is this the word of God? Are these passages written for our benefit? Is there any thing more plain, than that God is merciful and gracious; nay that he delighteth in mercy? How great encouragement is this to the exercise of repentance? In this very view, indeed, it is urged by the prophet in the 6th and 7th verses of the last cited chapter; "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. 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."

I shall only add, that as the scripture every where bears testimony to the readiness of God to pardon returning sinners, so there are also many passages in which he declares his readiness to pardon the failings which continue to cleave to his own people, and treat them with the utmost tenderness and grace: Psal. 103:13. "Like a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Isa. 40:11. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Mal. 3:17. "And they shall be mine, faith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

3. But that nothing may be wanting for the complete illustration of this truth, observe that it appears in the clearest manner, from the gospel of Christ, that there is forgiveness with God. In the fulness of time, God sent his own son in our nature, to be a victim and sacrifice for our offences, to bear our sins in his own body on the tree. In this astonishing event, indeed, the love and mercy of God shines with the brightest lustre: 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." In this great transaction, we have not only an assurance of obtaining, but see the price paid for the purchase of our pardon: 1 Pet. 1:18. "For ye were not redeemed with

corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." Instead of finding the justice of God stand in the way of our reconciliation and peace, justice being fully satisfied, seals the pardon, and adds to the comfort of the sinner. In the infinite value of this atonement, we may see the extent of the divine mercy. In the infinite power of this Saviour, we may see the perfect security of those who put their trust in him. Salvation, in all its parts, is offered to the chief of sinners: so that, as the apostle expresses it, Heb. 6:18. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed; which was, to point out the connexion between the mercy of God and his fear, or explain the import of this expression, "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." The import of this expression must be a little different, as we understand the word fear, which is sometimes taken in a larger, and sometimes in a more limited sense. Sometimes, as being so eminent a part, it is made use of to signify the whole of religion; sometimes it signifies that awe and veneration of the sacred majesty of God with which every one of his servants ought to be habitually possessed. I shall briefly consider it in both these views, there not being the least opposition between them, and both carrying in them the most important and salutary instruction.

If we take the fear of God in the text to signify the whole of that duty and obedience we owe to him, then the connexion between forgiveness with God and his being seared, appears from these two considerations.

1. A discovery of the mercy of God is absolutely necessary to his being loved and served by those who have once been sinners. Despair of mercy drives the sinner from God, presents him only as the object of terror and aversion; and, instead of having the least influence in bringing us to obedience, confirms the guilty in his rebellious

opposition to his Maker. This must be manifest to every hearer. There can be no religion at all, either in inclination or performance, if there be no forgiveness with God. How should any so much as attempt what they believe to be an unprofitable labor?

Though this is a truth which none will deny, I am afraid it is a truth not sufficiently attended to either in its certainty or influence. It tends greatly to illustrate the whole plan of salvation, by the riches of divine grace, or the free, unmerited, unsolicited, love of God. How much does it add to the beauty and meaning of several passages of scripture! as 1 John 4:10. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Rom. 5:8. "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And the 10th verse of the same chapter, "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Guilt is of a suspicious nature. It is even observed in offences committed by one man against another, that he who hath done the injury is always hardest to be reconciled. The same thing appears very plainly in the disposition of sinners towards God. A gloomy fear, a despondent terror, greatly hinders their return to him; nor can they ever take one step towards him, till, by the display of his mercy, this insuperable obstruction is removed.

2. As a discovery of the mercy of God is absolutely necessary to our serving him at all, so it is, perhaps, of all others the most powerful motive to induce us to serve him in sincerity. Nothing whatever more illustrates the divine glory. It presents him as the proper object of worship, of confidence, and of love. When a sinner is once burdened with a sense of guilt, sees the demerit of his transgressions, and feels the justice of his own sentence, what an inconceivable relief must it give him to see the divine mercy! and how infinitely amiable must this God of mercy appear in his eyes! Others may reason at their ease upon the subject, he is transported with unspeakable joy on the prospect. His heart is immediately taken captive: he feels its constraining power, and yields himself willingly to every demand of

duty and gratitude. See, to this purpose, the expressions of the prophet Hosea, ch. 11:4. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love, and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." The same thing is every where in the New Testament represented as the great commanding principle of obedience, 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." 1 John 4:16. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." And verse 19, of the same chapter, "We love him, because he first loved us."

But further, even taking fear in a more limited sense, as signifying a holy reverence and dread of the power and majesty of God, there being forgiveness with him, is so far from weakening, that it strengthens this fear; and that on the two following accounts.

1. The infinite obligations we lie under to divine mercy, must serve to improve our sense of the evil of sin, as committed against so good and so gracious a God, and to increase our abhorrence of it. The mercy of God to the guilty; at the same time that it brings unspeakable consolation, as delivering them from the wrath to come, serves to humble them, by a view of their own unworthy and undutiful conduct. When an awakened convinced soul, under the apprehension of eternity approaching, begins to contemplate the mercy of God as the ground of forgiveness, he immediately thinks upon this mercy, as having all along spared him in the midst of his provocations. What a wonder of mercy is it, does he say to himself, that I was not immediately cut off in my wickedness, at such a time, or at such a time, which now return full upon his memory! He cannot easily separate the remembrance of past crimes from the mercy that with-held immediate vengeance. And surely nothing will serve more to make the sinner tremble and stand astonished at his own guilt, than reflection on that forbearance of a patient God, which did not doom him to instant and deserved destruction, but spared him to hear the glad tidings of peace.

Thus the unspeakable grace of God in the gospel opens the springs of penitential sorrow, and makes them flow more sweetly indeed, but more freely, and more copiously than before. You may observe the strong picture of penitence and love, which is drawn with inimitable beauty by the evangelist Luke, ch. 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." Was it not in grace and mercy that the suffering Saviour looked upon Peter, which immediately confounded him? Luke 22:61, 62. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." What is it else that is represented by the prophet as having so strong an effect upon the believer in producing penitential sorrow, but the love of our Redeemer? Zech. 12:10. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

2. Forgiveness with God tends to increase our fear and reverence of him, from the manner in which, and the condition on which it is bestowed. Every circumstance in this dispensation of divine mercy is calculated to abase the sinner, and leave him nothing whereof to glory before God. Forgiveness is always declared to be an act of sovereign grace, Is. 43:25. "I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." We are many times cautioned against imputing to ourselves, or our own merit, what is merely the effect of divine mercy. If the scripture is read with care, there will be observed many passages which carry this instruction in them, to beware of taking merit to ourselves from the divine goodness, or any effect or expression of it: Deut. 9:4, 5.

"Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hast cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Ezek. 36:21, 22. "But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went."

It is probably also with this view, if we may presume to offer an opinion on so deep a subject, that the objects of special mercy are sometimes chosen from among the most criminal, even the chief of sinners. Does not this forbid, in the strongest terms, every man to harbor the least thought, as if by his own righteousness, or being comparatively less wicked than others, he had been entitled to the divine favor: Rom. 9:15–18. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

But the circumstance on which we are called chiefly to fix our attention, is, that forgiveness is bestowed only through the blood of Christ. It is freely and graciously bestowed upon the sinner, but was dearly and hardly purchased by the surety. This is no new or unusual subject in this congregation. But Oh! my brethren, that we could in some measure apprehend its infinite importance. Think, I beseech

you, on the holiness and justice of God, as they shine in the sufferings and cross of Christ: that a righteous God required full satisfaction for sin; that "the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all;" that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief." Are not the majesty and purity of God set forth in this transaction, in the most clear and legible, nay in the most awful and terrible characters? For they are written in blood. Is the Lord to be praised for his mercy? and is he not also to be feared for his justice? May we not, or rather must we not, say, "If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If God saw it necessary to lay such a load of wrath upon the Holy One, when standing in the room of sinners, what shall be the condition of the impenitent transgressors, who shall lie under it forever? We may well adopt the words of Moses to the children of Israel, Deut. 28:58, 59. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayst fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and fore sicknesses, and of long continuance."

Do you not now, my brethren, see much propriety, as well as instruction, in this language. "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayst be feared?" The expression indeed is not singular in the holy Scripture, even in the sense now illustrated. It is certainly on the same subject the Psalmist is speaking, when he says, Ps. 40:3. "And he hath put a new son in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." As also the prophet Hosea, ch. 3:5. "Afterwards 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."

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

1. From what hath been said, you may learn, that none can understand, embrace, or esteem the mercy of God, but those who are

convinced of their sin and misery.—Mercy can be of benefit only to the guilty; mercy can be bestowed only on the guilty; and therefore all that can be said in illustration of the divine mercy, all that can be said in commendation of the divine mercy, will be esteemed as idle tales by those who do not know themselves to be guilty. Hence the negligence and unconcern with which the gospel is received. Very many of those to whom it is addressed are insensible of their danger. The employments of the world ingross their time; the enjoyments of the world possess their affections: an eternal, unchangeable state is supposed at too great a distance to require their attention. I beseech you, my brethren, to consider, that the time of your trial is wasting apace. Let the commencement of another season* put you in mind of its speedy passage, and persuade you to look forward to the day of death or judgment, when all offers of mercy, and exhortations to repentance, shall cease, and when, though there may be forgiveness with God to all the proper objects of it in his extensive dominion, yet there shall be no forgiveness for you.

2. From what hath been said you may observe, that the publication of divine mercy, that the illustration of the riches of divine grace in the gospel, hath not the least tendency to lessen our sense of the evil of sin, or the obligation we lie under to obedience: on the contrary, it serves greatly to improve both the one and the other. When we endeavor to bring consolation to the broken in heart; when we set before them the tender mercies of our God, and the infinite compassion of the Saviour; when we press them to hearken to the invitations of the gospel; when we encourage them to rest their salvation upon it, and to be at peace; this only serves to excite their indignation against sin, and persuade them to fly from it, to bring them to the obedience of children, and shed abroad the love of God in their hearts.

3. From what hath been said, you may see the difference between a real and scriptural discovery of forgiveness with God, and that careless security which arises from a presumptuous reliance on his general mercy. The one prevents conviction, the other produces it.

The general and common plea of God's mercy, keeps the sinner at ease as he is; but a real and scriptural discovery of forgiveness with God, heals the broken in heart, and at the same time increases their sense of the evil of sin, and their abhorrence of every approach to it.

Presumption, and such views of God's mercy as are taken by the secure, arise entirely from the extenuation of sin. The language of their hearts is, "Surely this is not so great a matter, but God's mercy will forgive it." If you will either seriously examine yourselves, or observe, with some attention, the discourse of careless worldly persons, you will perceive this very clearly. They comfort themselves with the thoughts of their little comparative guilt, rather than of the certainty and greatness of divine mercy. "I may perhaps," says one of them, "have been guilty of such or such sins: but I am sure I never did so or so," or perhaps as some others who immediately occur to their minds as greater sinners than themselves. I cannot help mentioning to you the saying of a prince of our own country towards the close of life, who had been a remarkable libertine in his younger years: "I cannot think," says he* "that God will be so hard as to damn a man for taking a little pleasure out of the common road."

In opposition to this, the true penitent sees more than ever his inexcusable guilt as a sinner, but hopes for forgiveness from God, as the effect of his own infinite grace, and the accomplishment of his promise in the gospel. He gives the whole glory of it to him; and never thinks of diminishing the lustre of his transcendent mercy, by covering or extenuating the offence. Hence secure persons are easily satisfied, while true penitents make supplication with strong crying and tears. They are often reconsidering the promise, and frequently questioning the ground on which their dependance has been placed. Hence also secure persons seek ease to themselves from the remonstrances of conscience, by stifling conviction, and offering excuses; but true penitents, by giving full force to the accusation, and pleading the benefit of the remission. To say all in a word, the one struggles hard to be found innocent, the other to obtain mercy.

4. From what hath been said, you may see of how much moment it is to the Christian to keep clear views of the mercy of God, as well as of his own interest in it. The moment he loses the comfortable sense of peace with God, his chariot-wheels are troubled, and he drives heavily. It makes his duty burdensome, and his trials insupportable. And no wonder, since he is not so far lest of God as to return to the security of sinners; and at the same time the source of his inward consolation is like a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed. For what end are the promises of God contained in scripture? why are they put into your hands? why are they repeated in your ears? Why, but for preserving you in that peace which the world cannot give, and which, blessed be God, it cannot take away. Hear what your Saviour says John 16:33. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

5. In the last place, You may see from what hath been said, in what way you may most effectually, and most certainly, preserve your peace with God, viz. By the frequent exercise of penitence and confession. This will shew you the necessity of forgiveness from God. This will constrain you daily to seek for forgiveness from God. Beware of seeking or preserving peace by the extenuation of sin, or by, stifling conviction. This may well lead you to sloth and security for a season, which lays the foundation of the bitterest repentance of all; but will never give you the comfort of God's children. He that shutteth his eyes upon his own sins, shall never see the glory of divine mercy. Serious, voluntary, deliberate humiliation, is the true way of promoting both that steadiness in duty, and that peace with God, which ought to be the Christian's supreme desire. Whatever destroys self-sufficiency promotes the growth of true piety. The gospel is particularly directed to those that see their necessity. It brings comfort to the mourner, help to the miserable, and mercy to the guilty. It is a great mistake, to think, that the contrition and penitence of the children of God is hurtful to their comfort, for it is the very foundation of it; according to that refreshing promise, with which I shall conclude, Is. 61:1, 2, 3. "The spirit of the Lord God is

upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn: to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."

THE NATURE OF FAITH

SERMON 4

And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. 1 JOHN 3:23

ACTION SERMON.

WE propose, in a little, to draw near to God in the most solemn act of Christian worship. With what humble solicitude ought we to enquire, whether we are truly intitled to this great privilege, or may hope for acceptance in this important duty. It is the most explicit, and the most public profession we can make of faith in the Redeemer's blood; and therefore none can do it in a proper manner, but those who have indeed believed in the Redeemer's name.

Faith in Christ is the great foundation of our peace with God. It is the great principle of our sanctification. It is the great distinction

between the heirs of glory and the heirs of hell: "For he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." And therefore no subject can be of more importance in general, or more suited to our present employment, than what is presented to us in the words of the text: This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

In the context the apostle is speaking of the Christian's confidence or persuasion of his relation to God, ver. 20, 21, 22. "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask we receive of him; because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Having thus mentioned the commandments, he points out in the words now read, the great commandments of the gospel, in their order, 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. My purpose at this time is, to confine myself to the first of these; and open, in as comprehensive and practical a manner as I am able, what it is to believe on the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God; and having done so, to make some practical improvement of the subject; particularly, by pressing every hearer, in the most earnest manner, to obey this commandment of God.

I. In the first place, then, I am to explain what it is to believe on the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Many have been the controversies raised and agitated on this subject, most of them unprofitable, and some of them very hurtful, as tending to disquiet and perplex the minds of serious persons, and sometimes even to furnish an objection to the enemies of the gospel. I shall therefore avoid every thing of this kind, as in general undesirable, and at this time highly unseasonable; and endeavor to lay it down in such a manner as I hope may be understood by the meanest real Christian,

and may afford to every exercised soul inward consolation and peace with God.

For this purpose, I hope it will be sufficient to observe, that faith may be considered in two views; its object, and its actings: 1st, The object of faith; that is to say, the truths to be believed: 2dly, The actings of faith; or what it is to believe these to the saving of the soul. As to the object of faith, it is thus expressed in our text, This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus, the Saviour, then, is the object of faith. This, in its full extent, includes every thing that is revealed in the holy scriptures, with respect to his person, character, and work. It may indeed be said to include the whole revealed will of God; because every part of this will has a more remote or immediate reference to him. Christ Jesus is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending," of the will of God as revealed for our salvation. But as every thing else was only introductory and preparatory to his atonement, or consequent upon it, I shall chiefly direct your attention to him as a Saviour from guilt and pollution. This the name of Jesus immediately imports: Matth. 1:21. "And thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." In this view, I think the object of faith may be summed up in the following particulars.

1. That we are, by nature, in a state of sin, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his law, and liable to his wrath. If this were not the case, a Saviour would not be necessary; salvation would be a word without force, and even without meaning. It is accordingly found in experience, that till there be a conviction of this truth upon the conscience, the tidings of a Saviour are always treated with neglect or disdain. Nothing can be stronger than the language of scripture on this subject in many passages; particularly, Matth. 18:2. "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." Luke 5:31, 32. "And Jesus answering, said unto them, they that are whole, need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." I shall also read to you the

account of our natural state, and the end of Christ's coming, given by the apostle Paul, Eph. 2:1–5. "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all 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 the children of wrath, even as others. 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)." I forbear to mention the proof of this from the history of the world, from the marks of God's displeasure against sin in the course of providence, and from the testimony of conscience, as I have illustrated them at considerable length in other discourses. Let it suffice at present to say, that the first truth which is the object of faith, is the guilt and misery of our nature.

2. The next part of the object of faith is, that there is no way of recovery from this state but by Christ: 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." If there were any other, it would not be the command of God that we should believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ. After men are in some measure sensible that they are guilty, it is often difficult to convince them that they are helpless. There is something so mortifying in this consideration, and so humbling to our pride, that it is with great unwillingness we yield to it. Nay, after we have seemed to confess it, we are often ready to retract it. The sinner has always a proneness to seek some resource in himself. Hence the disposition to extenuate his guilt; and if he cannot plead absolute, to place some dependance upon comparative innocence. Hence the disposition to magnify human merit, as if, by the value of some good deeds, we could balance or cancel the guilt of our disobedience. Hence the endless variety of human inventions, of costly sacrifices and voluntary penance. Micah 6:6, 7. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and

bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The truth is, till the sinner is stript of every plea, and found to be without excuse, he will still refuse to be indebted to the grace of his Redeemer. But hear ye the Spirit of God, Rev. 3:17, 18. "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. 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."

3. This leads me to the third part of the object of faith, viz. That the pardon of sin, and peace with an offended God, is freely offered to the chief of sinners through Christ. The two preceding truths are preparatory to this, and serve to point out its necessity and moment. This is the gracious message which was brought into the world by the gospel; and from which it derives its name, importing glad tidings. What we are particularly to attend to here is, (1.) that Christ Jesus was substituted in the room of sinners, and suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; that the holiness and justice of God required an expiation of sin, which was made by this immaculate victim: Isa. 53:5, 6. "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." Rom. 3:25. "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." (2.) Another thing also to be observed, is the constitution of the sufferer's person. It was no less than the eternal and only begotten Son of God. This is a circumstance of the utmost moment, and on which the greatest

stress is manifestly laid in scripture. It is included in the words of the text: "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." It is also constantly found in the early Confessions of Faith; John 1:49. "Nathaniel answered and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." Matth. 16:16. "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Acts 8:37. "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Unless this is attended to, we shall neither be sufficiently sensible of the evil of sin, which required such an atonement, nor of the love of God which provided it, nor of the power of the Saviour to execute it; nor can we have such encouragement to put our trust in it.

From these two circumstances you may be directed to contemplate the leading and principal object of faith, viz. the only begotten Son of God dying in our room, and purchasing our pardon. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, having finished his work, invites weary and heavy-laden sinners to come unto him; and assures them that the highest demands of the law are answered, that their debt is fully paid, and nothing is now to be laid to their charge: Rom. 8:33, 34. "Who shall lay anything to the charge or 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." 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."

4. In the last place, The object of faith is the power of Christ to renew our natures, to deliver us from the bondage of corruption, and bring us into the glorious liberty of God's children. We must never separate the Redeemer's merit and his power. Conviction is imperfect unless we see our slavery, as well as misery, and unfeignedly desire deliverance from both. Neither do we properly apprehend the extent of Christ's undertaking, unless we view him exalted as a prince and a

Saviour to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. There are two things equally essential to the gospel upon this particular.

(1.) The necessity of being sanctified. Salvation in sin is not promised; salvation or happiness in sin is not possible; and therefore all who hope for salvation through Christ, must be renewed in the spirit of their minds. Thenceforth they must not serve sin: 2 Cor. 5:17. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." If the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness of men, it must still abide on the children of disobedience.

(2.) The other thing to be observed is, that the sanctification of the believer is the purchase of Christ's blood, and the work of his Spirit. This is plain through the whole of the scriptures both of the Old Testament and the New. Ezek. 36:25, 26, 27. "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. A new heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." 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." Nothing can be stronger than the language used on this subject: "His grace is sufficient for us; his strength is made perfect in weakness. "By the grace of God," says the Apostle, "I am what I am." And again, "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Nay, he is said "to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." All this shows, that there is no room left for the sinner to glory; but that the whole of his loss by the fall, both his integrity and his happiness, may be recovered, and can only be recovered through Christ. This is the sum of evangelical truth, this is the source of evangelical holiness: Gal. 2:16.—20. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the

works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ; that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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."

I proceed now, in the second place, to consider the actings of faith, or what is implied in believing these truths to the saving of the soul. And I cannot help observing to you, that it is but in compliance with common custom, or at least with the present state of things, that I say much upon this part of the subject. I am persuaded it is of much more consequence, and much more proper, to direct you to the object of faith in God's revealed will, to explain it in all its extent, and to press it with all the evidence that attends it, than to examine curiously into, and distinguish nicely upon the nature of faith, as it is an act of the human mind. I do not find, that the scripture says much upon the act of believing; but it is in a manner wholly employed in telling us what we ought to believe, both with regard to our apostasy and recovery. We do indeed read in scripture of believing with all the heart. We read also of a temporary faith in the stony-ground hearers; and of the strength and weakness of faith. But all this seems, at least chiefly, to relate to the firmness or uncertainty of our persuasion of, or assent to the truths which are addressed to us in the name of God. The simplest view of faith seems to be receiving "the record which God hath given us of his Son." Agreeably to this, the reverse of faith in scripture is doubting: Matth. 14:31. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Matth. 21:21. "Jesus answered and said unto them, verily I say unto you, If ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall

say unto this mountain, "Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done."

But, my brethren, since there have been questions upon this subject, and since it is certain from experience that there is a deceitfulness in the human heart, and a supposed faith, which yet is vain and fruitless, I shall observe, that the actings of faith may be resolved into the three following particulars, or that the faith of God's elect will discover itself by the three following effects.

1. A firm assent of the understanding to what is revealed of Christ in scripture; particularly as summed up in the preceding part of this discourse: That you believe the lost and helpless state of man by nature and practice: That Christ is able to save to the uttermost; and that he hath made effectual provision, both for expiating your guilt and purifying your hearts. Perhaps you will think this is easy, and be ready to say, that you have from your youth given, and that you do at this moment give, entire credit to the whole. But, my brethren, there is more here than you are aware of: there is a great difference between a common and traditionary belief, which was never tried, and that inward and personal conviction which dwells in the heart, and therefore will govern the life. If any man believe, that all the posterity of Adam are in a state of guilt and misery, one would think it unavoidable that he must perceive his own danger as a part of the whole; and yet I am persuaded, it is usually a personal conviction of guilt and danger by the law upon the conscience that first opens the sinners eyes upon the general truth; and then his own interest makes it bulk in his apprehension, and raises in him an earnest solicitude, both to examine into the cause of the disease, and to ask after the method of cure.

There is another way of considering the assent of the understanding to divine truth. The testimony of faith is opposed to the testimony of sense. Faith tells us, that our only happiness is in the favor of God, and that this can only be obtained through Christ; that eternity is coming on; and that there is no time to be lost. Sense, on the other

hand, tells us, that the world is good, that its delights are pleasant, and that our comfort is here; not forgetting to represent the service of God as a burden and drudgery. In the mean time, the corrupt principle within, assents to the delusion, and assists in blinding the mind; adding, that whatever may be in religion, the danger may be warded off by a late repentance. It is not enough then to give a cold and general assent to the truths of religion when they are not contradicted, but to believe the testimony of faith, in opposition to the suggestions of sense; or, in other words, to walk by faith, and not by sight. That this may be brought to the test, I observe,

2. That faith implies the consent and approbation of the heart to every truth with regard to Christ's person and character, and salvation through his blood. To every believer, the plan of redemption by the Mediator of the new covenant, appears not only true, but wise, reasonable, gracious, and necessary. This, my brethren, particularly distinguishes true faith, not only from unbelief and security, but from an empty and barren profession. The careless despise the truth, the believer adores it; the half Christian is ashamed of it, the believer glories in it: "God forbid," says the apostle, Gal. 6:14. "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 2:7. "Unto you therefore which believe, he his precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner."

I believe indeed it is usually a deep and heart-felt conviction of danger, which first persuades the sinner of the truth, and makes the trembling penitent a willing believer. But because there may be sometimes a belief of that truth, which we do not esteem, nay, even a jealousy and suspicion of the truth of what we inwardly hate, I have added, that faith implies the consent and approbation of the heart. The whole doctrine of redemption appears to the believer most admirably calculated to promote the glory of God, and secure the salvation of sinners. Even what bears hardest upon man, taking away the foundation of self-righteousness and self-dependance, appears to him perfectly reasonable: he not only submits to it, but embraces and

closes with it. He sees the law to be holy; he confesses the threatening to be just; and he is not only content, but thankful, that his present deliverance and future security depend, not on himself, but on the Redeemer. He is willing to be only and eternally indebted to the unmerited mercy and sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Thus you see the doctrine of salvation is represented in scripture under the form of a blessing to be received, as well as a truth to be believed: Is. 55:1, 2, 3. "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. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Matth. 11:28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And indeed the inspired writers always speak of it in such terms as shew themselves not only satisfied of the truth, but deeply penetrated with a sense of the greatness of the mercy; 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, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

3. In the last place, faith implies such a personal application of the truths of the gospel as produceth repose of conscience, dependance and reliance on the Saviour. This my brethren, is the point first in view, and the termination of the whole; and I cannot help thinking, that it is so essential to faith, that faith and trust are often put reciprocally for one another in the New Testament; as in Eph. 1:12, 13. "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise."

I do not mean to say, that divine faith is a belief that Christ died for me in particular. I know the strong objections which lie against that form of expression. The object of faith is, that Christ died for lost sinners of the race of Adam. But as it can hardly be supposed, that any give their assent to this truth till they are convinced that they themselves are sinners, so, if they believe that there is no salvation in any other, and that he is able to save to the uttermost, it seems to follow of necessity, that they will rest and rely "upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel." This is certainly the view given us of the matter in the holy scripture: Rom. 5:1. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Heb. 6:18. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Faith and despair are inconsistent. Faith and hope are inseparable. The glory of the Redeemer's person, the perfection of his atonement, and his ability to save, are all set before us in the gospel; and if we cannot rely upon him, if we cannot trust our salvation in his hands, it certainly arises from some doubt or disapprobation of these interesting truths. If you doubt of the truth, it is no wonder that you distrust the promise; but if you are truly and inwardly satisfied of Christ's power and mercy, you will close with him, as your Saviour, and say unto him, in the words of Thomas, when his doubts were removed, "My Lord, and my God."—Thus I have shortly given you a view of the actings of faith: which may all be reduced to what I have endeavored to illustrate; the assent of the understanding, the approbation of the heart, and these jointly producing repose of conscience and peace with God.

II. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said on this important subject. And, in the

First place, Hence learn the absolute necessity of self-denial, and how much it ought to prevail in the temper of a Christian. In explaining to you the object of faith, I have endeavored to lay before

you the nature of the gospel-message, and the substance of the truth as it is in Jesus, viz. the lost and helpless state of man by nature, forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and sanctification as the work of his Spirit. If this view is just, then religion must be begun, preferred, improved, and perfected, by union with Christ. If this view is just, then all self-righteousness and self-dependance is a denial of Christ. And indeed, such is the life of a believer, if the conduct of the great apostle of the Gentiles may be taken for an example: Phil. 4:13. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

2. Hence also learn the necessity of a new nature, in order to a new life. If the old nature is indeed in ruins, it will be lost labor to begin to build without a new foundation. And if the foundation is ill laid, however beautiful the superstructure, the fabric cannot be lasting. The not attending to this is visibly the cause of many miscarriages. Men often resolve upon some amendment of life, from prudence, conveniency, or even from imperfect convictions, and some apprehension of eternity itself. But though these resolutions are formed with seeming sincerity, inherent corruption soon becomes too strong for such feeble opposition. Remember therefore our Saviour's caution, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt." If you desire to live a life of holiness or virtue, apply to God through Christ, for the pardon of your sins, and peace with him. Entreat of him also, in the same prevailing name, that by his grace he would implant in you "a new heart, and a new spirit, that you may walk in his ways, and observe his judgments to do them."

3. Learn also how injurious they are to the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, who slander it as unfriendly to holiness of life. So far from being unfavorable to holiness, it makes the most effectual provision for it. Obedience to the whole law of God, is embraced by every believer as his choice, and promised as his duty; only he expects to derive strength from his Redeemer to enable him to discharge it. I desire to bear witness, and so will every faithful minister of the New Testament, that Christ came not to destroy the

law, but to fulfil it. He hath not only lest it in its full force upon the conscience, but he hath added to its obligation. The awful sanction of the law shall take place upon every impenitent sinner. It is well represented by the flying roll, in the prophecies of Zechariah, chap. 5:3, 4. "Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth, shall be cut off as on this side, according to it; and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off as on that side, according to it. I will bring it forth, faith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name; and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof." See also the superadded sanction of the gospel, Heb. 10:28, 29, "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?" Hear it, my brethren, hear it for your souls' sake, any known sin allowed in the heart or conversation, is as inconsistent with salvation under the covenant of grace as under the covenant of works; or rather to speak more properly, as many as continue in the practice of sin are condemned already, and remain under the power of that ministration of death. To delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man, is the fruit of faith, the character of the new nature, and necessary to fit you for the divine presence.

4. Suffer me to say a few words, for the reproof and conviction of those who are living in contempt of the gospel. Alas! how many are there who turn a deaf ear to the most earnest and pressing invitations addressed to them in the word of God, and enforced by his providence! There are two sorts of despisers of the gospel. (1.) Those who are open and avowed enemies to the doctrine of the gospel, who desert it, despise it, or slander it. Too many there are of this character in the present age, to whom the cross of Christ is foolishness. O! how deplorable is their folly! and how aggravated

their guilt! If this is the divine commandment, That we should believe in the name of the Son of God; and if there is truth in the divine word, "That there is no salvation in any other;" miserable indeed must be the state of those who are found thus fighting against God. Will it be a light thing to be found despisers of all that grace and love manifested in the gospel? How heavy is the threatening, in our Saviour's own words, against those who despise the precious corner stone and tried foundation, which is laid in Zion, Matth. 21:44. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (2.) They are despisers of the gospel who, professing belief in the doctrine of Christ, continue to live in unrighteousness. He came to turn you from all your transgressions, as well as to deliver you from condemnation. His power is particularly illustrated in bringing sinners "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The end of his coming is lost to all those who continue in sin. If they are called by his name, they are a scandal to it; if they form any hopes from his sufferings, they will be disappointed; if they advance any claim to his mercy, it will be rejected; if they plead relation to him, he will openly renounce them: Matth. 7:21, 22, 23. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 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."

5. In the last place, Suffer me, in the most earnest manner, to beseech every sinner in this assembly, to believe in the name of the Son of God. I say, every sinner, because those only who are sensible that they are sinners, will be obedient to the call.

Are you not therefore sensible of your guilt and danger? Are your understandings so blinded? Is natural conscience itself so feared, that you do not see how much you stand in need of a Saviour? Remember, that if there be any truth in the whole compass of natural

and revealed religion that cannot be spoken against, it is this, That God "is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity;" and that, for this reason, "he will render to every man according to his works." It is a truth engraven upon the conscience, and ratified by the course of providence; the Heathens discovered it through the thickest darkness; and the guilty confess it by their daily fears. What a harvest of converts would I bring in, even in this assembly, if I could but lead to the Saviour every one that believes, in some measure, in a judgment to come! What an astonishing disorder is brought into our nature by sin? What a marvellous delusion is upon the mind, and what inconsistency is there in the conduct of sinners! It is hard to say, which of the two is most amazing; their backwardness to receive the truth, or their unwillingness to obey it; their inattention to evidence on the one hand, or their forgetfulness of what they do believe, upon the other. Is there any person within these walls, who doubts that he is to die; or who does not believe, that he must be judged after death? Are you then ready for the trial? Have you served your Maker? Have you loved him above all? Have you lived to his glory? Have you sought and placed your happiness in his favor? Or are you sensible that iniquities have prevailed against you? Have they now taken hold upon you, so that you cannot lift your eyes? Behold, I preach peace to you by Jesus Christ. Believe in his name and merits for your pardon: rely on his grace and Spirit for your your reformation; and return to God, through him, as your unchangeable portion. This is the tenor of the gospel: Luke 24:46, 47. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

CHRIST'S DEATH A PROPER ATONEMENT FOR SIN

SERMON 5

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 JOHN 2:2

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

TO as many as have any belief of eternity, it must be a matter of unspeakable moment to know, how they may have confidence towards God. This enquiry becomes, if possible, still more serious, when we consider man as in a lapsed and corrupt state by nature, as guilty, and obnoxious to his Maker's righteous judgment. Then it becomes necessary, not only to preserve the favor, not only to avoid the displeasure, but to seek for some shelter or covering from the wrath of God.

This is the account given us of our condition in scripture; which, as it is a truth of the utmost importance, lying at the foundation of all religion, I have often endeavored both to explain and enforce. And happy, happy they who have heard with application; happy they whose eyes have been opened on their danger as sinners; who have seen and felt the evil of sin, as a departure from, and rebellion against a most holy, righteous and gracious God. Happy they, who, rejecting the vain reasonings of the carnal mind, and the cob-web-defences of the short-sighted creature, have been laid prostrate as guilty and helpless, before the sovereign and almighty Creator. All mankind, in the several ages of the world, have in general discovered such a jealousy of their condition, and have so far felt the reproof and

condemnation of natural conscience, that their attempts and inventions have been innumerable to appease the offended Deity.

But blessed be the name of God, we are not left to any uncertainty as to this important question. We may cheerfully apply our minds to it and receive unspeakable consolation "through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us." The way to life and peace is fully explained in the glorious gospel of the Son of God. We are indeed, by nature, guilty sinners, enemies to God in our minds, and by wicked works; but there is a gracious provision made for our recovery in the mediation of Christ. This is the strong hold and refuge of the sinner; it is the foundation stone and confidence of the believer. In the 8th and 9th verses of the preceding chapter, the apostle John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And in the verse preceding the text, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."—He then teaches the Christian to live by faith in the Saviour's blood: And he is the propitiation for our sins. And that he might further illustrate the extent and efficacy of the great atonement, he adds, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. In further discoursing on this subject, I propose, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To consider Christ as the propitiation for sin, or what is implied in his being so called.

II. To consider the extent of this propitiation, or its being for the sins of the whole world. And,

III. To make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. First, then, Let us consider Christ as the propitiation for sin, or what is implied in his being so called.—We find our Saviour designed

as a propitiation in several other passages of scripture; as in this epistle, chap. 4:10. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" and Rom. 3:25. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." It is the opinion of many learned men, that Christ is called a propitiation, or the propitiation, in allusion to the mercy-seat above the ark, which was set up at first in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple in the most holy place. To confirm this, it is observed, that the original word here used is the same which the Greek translators of the Old Testament always use to denote the mercy-seat, and which the apostle to the Hebrews uses when speaking of the same subject, Heb. 9:5. "And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat: of which we cannot now speak particularly." But I apprehend there is some inversion of the order of things in this remark: for Christ is not called a propitiation in allusion to the mercy-seat, which, independent of him, could ill bear that denomination; but the mercy-seat hath this title given to it because it was an eminent type of Christ. It beautifully indeed represented the benefit which we derive from him as our propitiation. For as God, by the Shechinah, or symbol of his presence, dwelt of old upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubims, and was from that place propitious to his people; so now God dwells in Christ, and by him reconciles sinners to himself: 2 Cor. 5:19. "To wit, That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." In that ancient dispensation, every worshipper was to look toward the mercy-seat; and it was from thence that God accepted them, and gave intimations of their acceptance: so it is through Christ, or in his name, that we have now access to God; and it is in him that he sheweth us favor, and maketh us accepted; Eph. 1:6. "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." It was from the mercy-seat that God spake to his people by the intervention of the high-priest, and by Urim and Thummim; so it is by his Son that God now speaks to us, and shews us the way of salvation: Matth. 17:5. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

But the true and proper meaning of Christ's being a propitiation, is to be taken from the sacrifices in general, and particularly points at his undertaking the office of mediator or peace-maker between God and man, and in that capacity suffering the wrath of God in the room of sinners. By this he appeaseth him, rendereth him propitious or gracious to us, and purchaseth our pardon: Rom. 3:25. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood." Remember how intimately it is connected with redemption, another expression which runs through the whole of the New Testament, and is considered as equivalent to the forgiveness of sins: Eph. 1:7. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Now, redemption certainly signifies purchasing or buying with a price.

The sacrifices under the Mosaic economy did all of them imply a substitution in room of something that had been forfeited, or was due. It is observed by one eminent for his knowledge of Jewish antiquities, that besides what was done when any particular person presented a sin-offering, at the continual burnt-offering there were certain men appointed to represent the whole congregation of Israel. Their office was, to lay their hands upon the head of the lamb, and thus as it were transfer the guilt from the people to the victim. On this account they were called stationary men, because they attended continually for this end. And as the very purpose of the sacrifices under the law was, to typify the sacrifice of Christ, they are a standing evidence of the early and original reference to him, as the ground of divine mercy.

Nothing is more undeniably true, than that the offering of sacrifices was both early and universal in every nation under heaven; and it is no less certain, that those who used them did consider them as expiatory, or propitiatory, to render the offended Deity placable, and obtain his mercy. This was at once a confession of guilt, and a declaration, that they apprehended the necessity and propriety of an atonement. Neither is it possible to account for the universal prevalence of sacrifices in any tolerable manner, but by supposing,

that they were the remains of what had been taught in the ages immediately after the fall, by divine appointment.

I apprehend it is also undeniably evident, that this is the light in which the sacrifice of Christ is represented in the holy scriptures. How many passages might be adduced to this purpose? In ancient prophecy, this part of his work is set forth in the following manner, Is. 53:4, 5, 6, 7, 8. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 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 everyone 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." Daniel 9:24. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy."

In the New Testament, he tells us, he was to lay down his life for his people: John 10:11. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The same thing he plainly says in the institution of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, Matth. 26:26, 27, 28. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." That his body broken and bloodshed for his people, was to be understood of his being made a sin-offering, is plainly testified in the apostolic writings, 2 Cor. 5:21. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who

knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Gal. 3:13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Heb. 9:26, 27, 28. "But now once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." See also the assertion of the apostle Peter, 1 Peter 3:18. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, (that he might bring us to God) being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." It is evidently also on this account, that he is called the Lamb of God, and we are called to attend to him in that capacity, John 1:29. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

It is lamentable to think, that there should be any who call themselves Christians, and yet refuse to acknowledge this truth, which is woven, if I may so speak, through the whole contexture, both of the law and gospel. It brings to my mind the story of an ancient artist; who, being employed to build a magnificent and elegant temple, had the ingenuity to inscribe upon it his own name, and so to incorporate it both with the ornaments and body of the structure, that it was impossible afterwards to efface the name, without at the same time destroying the fabrick. In the same manner, Christ dying for sin is engraven in such characters through the whole revealed will of God, that it is impossible to take it away without overturning the whole system. For this end Christ came into the world; for this end he bore the name of Jesus, or the Saviour; and for this end he became the high priest of our profession, that he might, by one offering, for ever perfect them that are sanctified.

This then is the scripture-view of Christ as our propitiation, that our guilt is taken away, and we are reconciled to God through the sacrifice which he hath offered without spot or blemish. And notwithstanding all that has been thrown out against it by the pride

of self-righteousness, there is nothing that can be justly opposed to it on the part of unprejudiced reason. God is merciful, but he is also just. And as there is nothing more inseparable from the idea of sin, and an accusing conscience, than merited punishment; so there is nothing more essential to the idea of justice in God, than a disposition to inflict it. This the scripture every where declares; and the conscience of the guilty, who dreads his Maker's presence, ratifies the truth.

Now, if God shews mercy to the sinner, is it so abhorrent from reason, that this should be by a Mediator, if one can be found sit to step in between the parties, and "lay his hand upon them both?" Is not this necessary to manifest the righteousness and severity of the law, as well as the tenderness and compassion of the judge? Is not this precisely the reason assigned for it in scripture? Rom. 3:25. "To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." It is trifling to say, that there is nothing of the passion of anger in God, that should need to be appeased. Such expressions are only figurative, but they convey their meaning very clearly. It is not anger or revenge, as they appear in our disordered frame, that accepts of an atonement. These furious passions fly directly at the offending person, and reject all intercession. But justice, in calm and regular government, requires satisfaction, that the malignity and demerit of the offence may be preserved, while mercy is extended to the criminal. We ought to consider, that one great and general end of the dispensations of Providence is, to illustrate the glory of the true God in all his real perfections. This is best done by a purchased pardon, by a wise and awful mixture of impartial justice with unmerited mercy. How can you hear the word mercy so often without perceiving this? It is not mercy at all, unless it is bestowed on those who have deserved to suffer; and therefore why may not a voluntary surety be admitted to suffer in their place? The truth is, such are the impressions that are usually made on the awakened conscience, of the infinite holiness and purity, and the tremendous majesty of God, that nothing less

will satisfy it than a sufficient atonement, or a clear view how he may be "just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus."

But, my brethren, it is one thing to know, to profess, or even to support the truth; and another, but of unspeakably more moment, to feel, and to apply it. It is one thing, to have a rational conviction, from critical enquiry, that this is taught in the holy scriptures; and another, to cleave to it with esteem and affection, as the gospel of our salvation, as the great foundation of our hope and peace. Therefore in what remains of this branch of the subject, I would consider myself as speaking, not to the wrangling disputer, but to the convinced sinner; not to the self-righteous boaster, but to the broken in spirit. The chief circumstances in the propitiation which Christ hath made, to be taken notice of in this view, are these two: 1. Its absolute necessity. 2. Its perfect sufficiency.

1. Consider the absolute necessity of this atonement. There is no other way by which the sinner can be restored to the savor of God. Nothing can be clearer from the holy scriptures. It is indeed the tacit inference that may be drawn from the whole. Why is this love and mercy of God celebrated in such exalted strains by the inspired writers, and felt with so much gratitude by the redeemed, but that they were under condemnation, and must have perished, but for the help of this Saviour? Rom. 8:1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." And the same chapter, ver. 33. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." 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." As "without shedding of blood there is no remission," so we have the same infallible testimony, Heb. 10:4. that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Nay, that the thing might be put beyond all possibility of doubt, see the declaration of Peter and John, 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. And what other

sense can be put upon these words of our Saviour himself? John 14:6. "Jesus faith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." In vain then do we found our hopes upon any thing else; The holiness of the divine nature, the purity of the divine law, and the greatness of divine power, conspire in blasting every hope of the sinner but what is centred in Christ.

2. Consider the perfect sufficiency of this atonement. It is sufficient to answer all the demands of law and justice. It is sufficient to vindicate the honor of the divine government, and to illustrate the holiness and justice of God in the forgiveness of sin. It is sufficient to purchase a full and complete remission to the greatest sinner. Whoever reflects upon the infinite wisdom of God, must be sensible that it is not without reason that so much is said on this subject in scripture; that so much pains is taken to set forth the glory and greatness of the Saviour of sinners. The greatness of his person, and dignity of his character, are set before us in the most striking light. He is "the eternal and only begotten Son of God; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." And Phil. 2:6. "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Isa. 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."

It is not easy indeed to enumerate the magnificent titles with which he is adorned in scripture: The Alpha and Omega,—The first and the last,—The Prince of the kings of the earth,—The King of kings, and Lord of lords,—The King of glory,—and The King of saints. What mighty works are subscribed to him in creation and providence! We are told, "He shall reign till all enemies are brought under his feet." The propriety of his sacrifice as the Son of man, and the purity of his sacrifice as the Holy one of God, are taken notice of in scripture; Heb. 2:17. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins

of the people." Heb. 9:13, 14. "For if the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" To this you may add the continued fulness that dwells in him; John 1:16. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." Col. 1:19. "For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell." What is this, my brethren, but to encourage and embolden sinners to put their trust in him, and to carry home with power this truth, which I shall give you in the words of the Holy Ghost? 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."

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was, to consider the extent of this propitiation, founded on the last clause of the text: "And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." In general, when we remember that this epistle was written chiefly to the converts of the circumcision, it may convince us, that in all probability this expression was intended against the great and national prejudice of the Jews, of which we see very frequent notice taken in the New Testament. As they had the oracles of God committed to them, as for the wise purposes of his providence he had separated them from other nations, and the Messiah was to descend from them according to the flesh, they apprehended that all the blessings of his reign were to be confined to themselves: therefore they are often given to understand, that the purpose of mercy was far more extensive, and that Christ came with a view to fulfil that promise made to the father of the faithful, Gen. 22:18. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." The expression in the text then undoubtedly implies, that redemption through the blood of Christ was to be preached to sinners of the Gentiles; that as he had been the Saviour of all ages by the efficacy of that sacrifice which he was to offer in the fulness of

time, so that the virtue of it was not to be confined to the house of Israel, but to belong to sinners of every nation under heaven.

I am sensible, my brethren, that very great controversies have been raised in another view, as to the extent of Christ's death, and the import of this and other such general expressions in the holy scriptures. In this, as in most other debates, matters have been carried a far greater length than the interest of truth and piety requires; and, as is also usual, they have arisen from an improper and unskilful mixture of what belongs to the secret counsels of the Most High with his revealed will, which is the invariable rule of our duty. Without entering, therefore, into these debates, which are unsuitable to our present employment, or rather giving my judgment, that they are for the most part unnecessary, unprofitable, or hurtful, I shall lay down three propositions on this subject, which I think can hardly be called in question, and which are a sufficient foundation for our faith and practice.

1. The obedience and death of Christ is of value sufficient to expiate the guilt of all the sins of every individual that ever lived or ever shall live on earth. This cannot be denied, since the subjects to be redeemed are finite, the price paid for their redemption is infinite. He suffered in the human nature, but that nature intimately and personally united to the divine: so that Christ the Mediator, the gift of God for the redemption of sinners, is often called his own and his eternal Son: Rom. 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?" Such was the union of the divine and human nature in Christ, that the blood which was the purchase of our redemption is expressly called the blood of God, Acts 20:28. "To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." This is the great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, in which all our thoughts are lost and swallowed up.

2. Notwithstanding this, every individual of the human race is not in fact partaker of the blessings of his purchase; but many die in their

sins, and perish for ever. This will as little admit of any doubt. Multitudes have died, who never heard of the name of Christ, or salvation through him; many have lived and died blaspheming his person, and despising his undertaking; many have died in unbelief and impenitence, serving divers lusts and passions; and if the scripture is true, he will at last render unto them according to their works. So that if we admit, that the works of God are known to him from the beginning of the world, it can never be true, that, in his eternal counsels, Christ died to save those, who after all that he hath done, shall be miserable for ever. "He is a rock, his work is perfect." His design never could be frustrated; but, as the apostle Paul expresses it, Rom. 11:7. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." But,

3. There is in the death of Christ a sufficient foundation laid for preaching the gospel indefinitely to all without exception. It is the command of God, that this should be done: Mark 16:15. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The effect of this is, that the misery of the unbelieving and impenitent shall lie entirely at their own door: and they shall not only die in their sins, but shall suffer to eternity for this most heinous of all sins, despising the remedy, and refusing to hear the Son of God; Heb. 10:26, 27. "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." Let us neither refuse our assent to any part of the revealed will of God, nor foolishly imagine an opposition between one part of it and another. All the obscurity arises from, and may be resolved into the weakness of our understandings; but let God be true, and every man a liar. That there is a sense in which Christ died for all men, and even for those who perish, is plain from the very words of scripture; 1 Tim. 4:10. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe." 1 Cor. 8:11. "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" Thus it appears that both in a

national and personal view, Christ is "the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

III. I proceed now in the last place, to make some practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction. And,

1. From what hath been said, let us be induced to give praise to God for his mercy to lost sinners revealed in the gospel. Let us particularly give him praise for Christ Jesus, his unspeakable gift: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for us."

While we remember, with abasement of soul, the holiness and justice of God, which required satisfaction for sin, let us also remember his infinite compassion, who was pleased himself to provide "a lamb for the burnt offering." Let us at the same time give praise to the tender-hearted Saviour, who gave his life as an offering "of a sweet-smelling favor" to God. Redeeming grace shall be the theme of eternal gratitude and praise in heaven. After all our trials and dangers are over, we shall then, with unspeakable delight, ascribe the honor of our victory to him, saying, Rev. 5:12. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Why should we not also attempt to give him praise in his church on earth? for he, having finished his own work, and entered into his glory, hath give us an assured prospect, that we also shall overcome in his strength; that he will come again, and "receive us to himself; that where he is, there we may be also."

2. You may see from what hath been said, that such as are yet unrelated to this Saviour are in a state of sin, and liable to divine wrath. Hear and receive this truth, however unwelcome to the secure, however distasteful to the carnal mind. If it were not so, this propitiation which God hath set forth would have been altogether unnecessary. Let us beg of him who hath ascended up on high, to send down, according to his promise, his Spirit to convince the world

of sin. How many affecting and striking proofs have we of this, both in our character and state! and yet how difficult to make us sensible of it! What is to be seen in the world at present, or what do we read in the history of past ages, but one melancholy scene of disorder, misery, and bloodshed, succeeding another? Is not this the effect of human guilt? And do we not, by mutual injuries, at once demonstrate our own corruption, and execute the just judgment of God upon one another? May not every person discover the latent source of these flagrant crimes, in the pollution of his own heart, his aversion to what is good, and his proneness and inclination to what is evil? And yet, alas! how difficult a matter is it to make the heart humble itself, and plead guilty before God: to make us sensible, that we are transgressors from the womb, and inexcusable, in this transgression; that the threatening of the law is most just, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;" and that it is of the infinite mercy of God, that the execution is suspended, or any hope given us of being able to avert it?

Yet this, my brethren, I will repeat it, and I beseech you to attend to it, is certainly the case by nature, with every person in this assembly. Every one who now hears me is in a state of condemnation, and liable to everlasting misery, excepting that happy number who have "fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them." All insensible persons, living in a careless secure forgetfulness of God; all who indulge themselves habitually in the lusts of the flesh; drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, liars, unjust persons, lovers of the present world, are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. Oh that it were possible for me to awaken you to a sense of your danger, while there is yet a possibility escaping! Oh the importance to you of the unknown time from this day of your merciful visitation to the day of your death! What would those who are now reserved in chains to the judgment of the great day, give for the precious opportunity you are now despising! In a little time I know that you yourselves will repent; oh that it may not be when it is too late to

reform! But all words must sink under such a subject. No picture that I could draw of the despairing horror of a sinner on his death-bed, or the blaspheming rage of those who are tormented in hell-fire, could possibly give any of you a just apprehension of what it is to fall into the hands of the living God, unless it please himself to wound the conscience with the arrows of conviction, that he may afterwards pour in the healing balm of peace and consolation. And oh that it might stand with the will of God that none here present should escape!

3. Learn from what has been said, that there is no sacrifice for sin, but the one offering of our Redeemer on the cross; no hope of mercy for any child of Adam, but through his blood. The typical sacrifices under the Old Testament were but shadows, the substance is Christ. In vain will any go about to establish their own righteousness, and refuse to submit to the righteousness of God. Think not, my brethren, by attempts of reformation, by faulty defective duties, to be able to cancel any part of that guilt to which you are adding every day. How great is the folly and presumption of self-righteousness! What a profane contempt of the riches of divine grace! Hath God seen it necessary to set forth Christ as a propitiation through faith in his blood? and will you say, that it is unnecessary, and spurn the offered mercy? How much ignorance is in self-righteousness! What imperfect views must they have of the law of God, and how little knowledge of themselves, and their own hearts who admire or trust in human virtue! Above all, what is the foundation and corner-stone of self-righteousness? It is pride, that sin of all others most odious and abominable in the sight of God. Is it not a matter of daily experience, that those persons who are evidently most loose and careless in their own practice, and who, one would think, should have least of that kind to rely upon, are most prone to a self-righteous plan, and most ready to despise the doctrine of justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ. Are you sometimes surprised at this, Christians? The thing is easily explained. They know little either of the law of God or their own hearts. They seldom study the one, or reflect upon the other. If they did, they would soon

be ashamed of such a pretence. Those who apply themselves with the greatest diligence to the study of holiness in heart and life, do always most sensibly feel, and most willingly confess, that all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God.

4. In Christ Jesus, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, there is abundant provision made for the pardon of all our sins, and peace with an offended God. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Behold the Lamb which God himself hath ordained, and set apart for this important work, and which he will certainly accept! "Deliver them," saith he, "from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." Behold the immaculate and spotless victim in the purity of his human, and the glory of his divine nature! There is no sin so atrocious but his blood is sufficient to wash away the guilt. Is there any sinner in this assembly burdened with a sense of guilt, arrested by an accusing conscience, terrified by the thunders of the law, ready to cry out, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God! My flesh trembleth because of thee: I am afraid of thy judgments." Let such an one know, that help is laid on him that is "mighty to save." Let your guilt be what it will, who can so far derogate from the Redeemer's glory as to suspect that his blood cannot purge it away? Give no heed to unbelieving thoughts, or discouraging suggestions; but be "strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and attend to the Saviour's own words: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

5. In the last place, Let all the children of God, whose hope hath still been in the divine mercy through a crucified Saviour, embrace the opportunity now given them of professing, exercising, and strengthening their faith in the great atonement. Plead your relation to God through Christ, and encourage yourselves in his all-sufficiency and merit. Look upon his sufferings for humbling you under a sense of the evil of sin, which made such an expiation necessary. Nothing serves more to abase and level human pride, than to see our nature on the cross though personally united to the divine. Look upon him in his agony, for mortifying and crucifying sin in you.

There is a purifying virtue, and sanctifying efficacy, in the blood of Christ. It not only speaks peace to the wounded conscience, but purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. I am not against the introduction of every argument from scripture or reason against sin, or in support of duty; but let them never supplant the great, the leading, the constraining argument, which is drawn from the cross of Christ. Believe it, my brethren, nothing so much reconciles the heart to duty, nothing so kindles a holy indignation against sin, as a believing view of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.—This gives the Spirit of adoption, a child-like fear, and a child-like love. This fills the Christian with comfort, this inspires the Christian with zeal. To seek our comfort in a separate way, or in the first instance from our duties, is to make that comfort feeble and variable as the duties are defective; but to enliven our duties by the comforts of the gospel is to follow the order of the covenant of grace, by which we at once promote the glory of God, and most effectually secure our own comfort and peace. This is the Spirit breathed by the apostle Paul, with whose words, Gal. 2:19, 20. I shall conclude; "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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."

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN REDEMPTION

SERMON 6

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. REV. 1:5

ACTION SERMON.

THE bare repetition of these words is sufficient to convince every hearer how well they are suited to the design of our present meeting. Redeeming love is certainly the most delightful of all themes to every real Christian. It is the immediate and direct object of our contemplation in the Lord's supper. This ordinance was instituted to keep up the remembrance of the sufferings and death of Christ, which was the great and finishing proof of his love. How then can you attend on it in a more becoming and dutiful, a more pleasant and desirable, or a more happy and useful frame of spirit, than when your hearts are filled with a sense of the love of Christ, and you find yourselves disposed to join, with a mixture of joy and wonder, in the doxology of the apostle John, in the text, Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood?

The author of this book is sometimes styled the disciple whom Jesus loved. Since, therefore, it pleased his master to distinguish him by the tenderness of particular friendship, it is no wonder that we find so much of the delightful affection of love in his writings. In the beginning of this chapter, he gives an account of the general subject and design of the book of Revelation, the manner in which the discoveries contained in it were made to him, and his fidelity in testifying them to others. Then follows the apostolic salutation to the seven churches in Asia, which is a solemn benediction, in name of all the persons of the adorable Trinity: "Grace be to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come;" (that is, from God the Father, the ancient of days, immutable and eternal); "and from the seven spirits which are before his throne;" (not to detain you with a critical account of this phrase, it means the Holy Ghost, single in his person, but multiplied in his gifts; the variety, fullness, and perfection of which, are denoted by this form of expression); "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth." To him, you see, he gives three illustrious characters.

1. The faithful witness, who came from above, and revealed the whole will of God for our salvation; who being the eternal truth, might be absolutely depended on in the account he was by the apostle to communicate, of the great events of Providence towards his church and people. 2. The first begotten from the dead, declared to be the Son of God with power, by his glorious resurrection and triumph over the king of terrors. And, 3. The Prince of the kings of the earth; that is, the Lord of nature, to whom every prince and potentate must be subject, and to the ends of whose Providence, and the increase of whose kingdom, all their schemes of policy and conquest shall at last be subservient. He then, with great propriety, having mentioned the name, and given a short view of the character of his blessed Lord, lays hold of the opportunity to express his own and every other sinner's obligation to him in this sublime ascription, Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

To enter upon the consideration of the love of Christ in its full extent, in its source, its expressions, and its effects, even those that are suggested in the text, would far exceed the bounds of a single discourse. What I propose, therefore, at this time, in order to prepare your minds and my own, for the solemn action before us, is only to collect into one view some of the great and general characters of the love of Christ, which are most proper to excite our gratitude and praise; and then to make some practical improvement of it for your instruction and direction.

I. First, then, let us endeavor to point out some of the great and general characters of the love of Christ. In this I shall take care to confine myself to such views as are given of it in the holy scriptures. And every character given of it there, we are both entitled and obliged to attend to, and improve.

1. First of all, then, you may observe, that it is an everlasting love. It took its rise in the eternal counsels of Heaven. This is a character given of the love of God to his people, Jer. 31:3. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I

drawn thee." This expression is often used with a double view, to shew, on the one hand, its early, its original source, and on the other, its perpetual stability, and endless duration. Psal. 103:17. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him; and his righteousness unto children's children." Isa. 54:7, 8. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." Having cited these passages of the Old Testament, I must justify the application of them, by observing that all the covenant-mercies of God to man, in our present fallen state, are to be referred to the love of Christ, as their price, their source, and their sum. This is plain from innumerable passages of scripture: Eph. 1:4, 5. "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Eph. 3:11. "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." For this reason it is, amongst others, that Christ is called, Rev. 13:8. "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

I confess, my brethren, we are but ill able to understand, or at least to measure, the import of this truth, that the love of Christ to sinners, or of God in him, was from eternity. All our conceptions are soon lost, and swallowed up, in what is infinite and boundless. But surely it affords matter for the deepest and humblest adoration, as well as for the highest gratitude and joy. Does it not afford matter for adoring wonder, that the plan for redeeming lost sinners, and restoring them to the obedience and enjoyment of God, was the object of the divine purpose from eternity? it appears to be a very conspicuous part, or rather perhaps we are warranted to say, from the scripture revelation, that it is the chief part of our Creator's will, to which every other part of his providence is subordinate and subservient. Accordingly, in the very passage where my text lies, the Redeemer says, ver. 8. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and

the ending, faith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Does not this lead us to contemplate the glory of an infinite God, as it shines in this everlasting love? Does it not also afford matter of gratitude to the believing soul, while he considers every vessel of mercy as concerned in this eternal purpose?

I am sensible my brethren, there may be an abuse and, perversion of the doctrine of election, if we think of it as independent of its fruits, and apply it so as to produce either security or despair. But I despise the wisdom of those persons who would conceal this truth as dangerous, which it hath pleased God distinctly to reveal. It is the root which produceth the plant; but it is the plant which discovers the root. It is the fountain which produceth the streams; but the streams lead us to the fountain. Must not the sinner who by faith has laid hold on a crucified Saviour, and given credit to the word of God in a preached gospel, consider, with admiration, his name written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world? What delight will it give him! What honor does it reflect upon him, at the same time that it destroys the very foundation of arrogance and pride? This is the first, and yet it is but one of many parts of the doctrine of salvation, which at once exalts and abases us; raises our hopes, and forbids us to glory; clothes us with infinite honor, and yet discovers us to be less than nothing: so that we may say with the apostle Paul, after a view of the same subject, 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!" This leads me to observe,

2. That the love of Christ is free and unmerited love. This is a circumstance that is scarcely ever separated from the account given of the love of Christ in scripture. It may be founded even on the infinite disproportion between uncreated excellence and created weakness: Psal. 8:4. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Psal. 144:3. "Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him? or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?" Nay, as if this were a truth of the utmost

moment, we have it repeated a third time in almost the same words; Job 7:17. "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him?" But this is not all, nor indeed the main thing to be attended to; for the love of Christ hath for its object those who were in actual rebellion against God, transgressors of his holy law, and liable to the stroke of his justice. It was not only to exalt those who were low, or to supply those who were needy, that Christ came, but to deliver those who were appointed to death: John 3:16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Rom. 5:8. "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Eph. 2:4, 5. "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.)" The same thing indeed is clearly intimated in the words of our text, Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. It is on this account, in particular, that salvation, according to the gospel, is said to be free, and of grace, that is to say, an act of unmerited and voluntary kindness, which the sinner had no title to demand: Rom. 3:23, 24, 25. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory God; 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."

Believe it, Christians, this is the proper exercise of mercy; and here the divine mercy shines and reigns. Without this, it is not obscured only, but annihilated or destroyed. But, oh! what a view does this give us of the love of Christ! What an impression will his love make on all those who are truly convinced of their guilt and wretchedness! This is the very hinge upon which the whole doctrine of salvation turns. I hope you are not disposed to make any opposition to it. But alas! it is not sufficient to have learned it as a science, to have been taught it as making a part of the Christian faith; it is another matter to have a real and personal conviction of it upon the heart. Why is

the love of Christ so cold a subject to the generality of the world, but because they have no sense of their guilt and misery? I am even afraid, that many of the zealous advocates for this truth have but little experience of its power, and live but little under the influence of it in their practice. Where, indeed, is the person to be found, who does full justice to the Saviour, and considers his love as wholly unmerited and free? The most evangelical expressions do often consist with the most legal and self-righteous affections. Let me try, however, before I leave this particular, if I can make you understand it, even though you should not feel it. Suppose any of you were upon the most deliberate and composed reflection, upon the most particular and close examination, sensible that you justly deserved to be banished from the divine presence, and cast into everlasting fire; and that your blessed Saviour, when there was no other way to prevent it, did save you by the sacrifice of himself; tell me, what would you not owe to him? what words would you find to express your love to him, or your sense of his love to you? There have been some convinced sinners so rivetted, if I may speak so, to this circumstance, that they could find little other way of measuring the love of Christ, but by looking into themselves; and to whom, indeed, it has been enough to illustrate the greatness of his mercy that they were not consumed. To this add,

3. The love of Christ is unsolicited love. It took its rise, not from those who stood in need of it, but from him who bestowed it. It was not the effect of our earnest importunity, but of his own infinite mercy. This is a circumstance which we ought by no means to omit, as we find it particularly taken notice of in Scripture: 1 John 4:10. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" and in the same chapter, verse 19, "We love him because he first loved us." It is natural to expect, that those who are in misery should implore the assistance of those who are able to relieve them, or that those who have been in the offence should humble themselves before those who have it in their power to punish, or to forgive them. But it was quite otherwise here. The love of Christ discovered itself, when we were in open

rebellion against him; or in the words of the apostle Paul, Rom. 5:10. "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

This affords us at once an illustration of the love of Christ, and a moving picture of our own deplorable and guilty state. There is something infinitely more noble and generous in extending mercy to the miserable, without waiting for their request, than when it is hardly procured, or as it were extorted, by importunity and solicitation. And does it not present us with a melancholy prospect of our natural state, that we are not only unworthy to receive, but unwilling to ask for mercy? I desire, my brethren, that you may not consider this as only relating to mankind in general, and the voluntary purpose of grace and mercy from above in their favor, but as what makes a part of the experience of every particular convert. As the offer of mercy is made to him freely, so he will and must be sensible how cold and unthankful a reception he hath often given to the proposal. He will be sensible what resistance he hath often made to the design of the gospel; what exception he hath taken at the terms of it; and with how much difficulty he was at last induced to comply with it. I am persuaded there are few circumstances in the love of Christ that are more affecting to a believer, than to remember his own obstinacy, when a sinner, and his backwardness to accept of the invitations of the Saviour. After he hath rested his hope on the divine mercy, after he hath been made willing in a day of divine power, and hath obtained some comfortable evidence of the divine favor, how does he tremble at the thoughts of his former resistance! how does he wonder at the patience of God, and adore that victorious love, which stormed his heart, as well as paid the price of his redemption!

We find this particularly the case with those who having been for a season remarkably profligate, are saved as brands from the burning. They cannot help recollecting their former condition, their profane madness; and wondering, with a mixture of gratitude and fear, that they were not cut off in their wickedness, and made monuments of divine vengeance. Far from desiring a share in the love of Christ, they

were perhaps doing their utmost in contempt of his name, and in opposition to his interest. Yet, Rom. 10:20, "was he found of them that sought him not, and made manifest to them that asked not after him:" they were powerfully though sweetly constrained to return to God through him.

4. The love of Christ is a distinguishing love, which must necessarily and greatly enhance the obligation of those who are the objects of it. When one person is passed by, and another is chosen, either to be delivered from impending danger, or to be made partaker of extraordinary blessings, the loss or suffering of the one, seems to set off the superior happiness of, or the favor bestowed upon the other. To apply this to the subject we are now upon, there is a double distinction pointed out in scripture; one of our nature, in opposition to the fallen angels; and the other, of particular persons, as the vessels of mercy.

(1.) There is an evident distinction between our nature and that of the fallen angels: Heb. 2:16. "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; he took on him the seed of Abraham." 2 Pet. 2:4. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." I am sensible, that upon this subject we may be sometimes in danger of speaking with impropriety, especially if we pretend to assign the reasons of God's procedure, any further than he hath been pleased himself explicitly to reveal them. There can be no doubt that the Lord of all, God infinitely wise, had the best reasons for his conduct, the most noble and excellent purposes in view in every thing that he ordained; but they are not discovered to us, and perhaps they are above our comprehension. The single point we are called to attend to, is the distinction, infinitely gracious, which is made in our favor. A Saviour is provided for us, a mercy infinite in itself, and the more highly to be prized, that (Jude, verse 6) the angels, our fellow-creatures, "who kept not their first estate, but lest their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." If we should attempt a

comparison between ourselves and these spirits of higher order, we could find no ground of preference in our own favor; perhaps we should find many things that might seem to operate a contrary way; but it is safest, in humility and gratitude to say with the Psalmist, Psal. 115:3, "Our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he pleased."

(2.) But this is not all; there is also a distinction of particular persons as the vessels of mercy. Since I am introducing this subject, to prevent mistakes, I must observe, that every sinner of the race of Adam who shall perish eternally, shall also perish most justly; his blood shall lie at his own door, and he shall be found guilty of rejecting the counsel of God against himself. At the same time, all who are effectually brought to the saving knowledge of God through Christ, shall be obliged to confess, that they were brought in by almighty power, or, in the language of the Holy Ghost, 1 Pet. 1:2. that they are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

On this, as on the former branch of this head, it may be observed, that we must not presume to penetrate into the unsearchable depth of the divine counsels; but at the same time it must be remembered, that we are not permitted, and cannot pretend, to find the reasons of preference in ourselves; for no flesh may glory in his presence. God in many passages asserts his own sovereignty and perfect liberty in the distribution of his grace: Rom. 9:15, 16. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." And again, in the 18th verse, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Nothing can be harder, indeed, than for the proud and carnal mind to bow before the sovereignty of God; yet nothing is more evident, than that the destination of the vessels of mercy doth not proceed upon the ordinary grounds of human estimation. Nay, there seems to be an

express design to stain the pride of all human glory: 1 Cor. 1:26, 27. "For you 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." Experience daily illustrates this; for while we see some brought to an entire submission to the gospel, and an obedient conformity to the will of God, we see many of equal, or of greater rank, of equal or of greater ability and endowments of mind, and favored with equal or superior advantages and opportunities of instruction, who yet continue to bear the marks of reprobation. The same mercies dispose one to thankfulness, and inspire another with pride. The same trials will soften one heart, and harden another. All this our Redeemer makes the subject of a solemn thanksgiving to God, Luke 10:21. "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," Who that believes, in this assembly, will presume to take the least part of the honor of it to himself, or will refuse to adore the distinguishing love of God? And how often must those who bare the message of peace be obliged to seek the cause of an unsuccessful gospel in the counsels of the Most High? 2 Cor. 4:3. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

5. The love of Christ was an expensive love. So great a deliverance would have called for the most humble and thankful acknowledgment, though it had been as much without price to the Saviour as to the sinner. But oh! my brethren, how far was it otherwise! and what shall we think or say of the love of Christ, when we consider how much it cost him to procure salvation for us! when we consider the depth of his humiliation, the variety, the continuance, and the greatness of his sufferings! You cannot but be sensible how frequent mention is made of this in scripture, or rather

how seldom it is omitted when the love of Christ is introduced at all. It is the circumstance particularly pointed at in the text, Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. The same thing appears from the other doxologies, or acts of worship to the Saviour, which are contained in this book, as Rev. 5:9. "And they sang a new song, saying, 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," It appears also, from the frequent mention of the cross of Christ, on which his sufferings were completed. Nay, of so much moment was this, that it seems to have made the sum of the gospel, as preached by the apostles; 1 Cor. 2:2. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

The sufferings of Christ, then, ought to be ever present to the mind of the believer. The necessity and importance of this is plain from both the seals of the covenant of grace. The water in baptism represents the blood of Christ; and we are told, Rom. 6:3. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death." The institution of the Lord's supper also had the remembrance of Christ's sufferings, as its direct and immediate intention; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25, 26. "And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Remember, then, Christians, how he lest the throne of his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant. Remember him despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. His life, indeed, was one continued scene of sorrow, from the cradle to the grave.

I hope the particulars of his sufferings are not strangers to your meditations: may the Lord enable you to contemplate them with faith and love. Remember his agony in the garden, when he suffered from his Father's hand: For "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to

put him to grief." Think, O Christian, what it was to redeem a lost world, when you hear him saying, as in 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." Remember him seized by the treachery of one of his own disciples; accused and arraigned as a felon; dragged to the tribunal of an unrighteous judge; clothed with a purple robe, and crowned with thorns in derision of his kingly office; severely scourged; blindfolded, buffeted, and spit upon; and the whole, indeed, so conducted by the righteous permission and unseen direction of divine Providence, that hardly any expression, either of cruelty or contumely, was omitted. Cease to wonder, my dear friends, that profane wretches deride the signs of his sufferings, when you remember that the blinded rabble attending the important trial were permitted to insult him, saying, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee."

Remember him going forth without the camp, bearing his reproach. Remember that spotless victim, the Lamb of God, stretched upon a cross, and nailed to the accursed tree, while he suffered all that the extremity of bodily pain, and the most unutterable anguish of spirit, could possibly inflict upon an innocent creature. No wonder that the earth did shake, that the rocks were rent, and the natural sun refused to give his light, when the Sun of Righteousness was under so great an eclipse. Did the Saviour then willingly submit to all this pain and ignominy for our sakes? Was not this the most expensive love; and can we refuse to say with the multitude of the heavenly host, Rev. 5:12. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing?"

6. The love of Christ was the most generous and disinterested love. The supposition or suspicion of any interested views in what one person does for another, nay, even the possibility of his serving any purpose of his own at the same time, greatly abates the value of any favor, and lessens the sense of obligation. But nothing of this kind can be so much as imagined here. It was giving to those from whom

he could receive nothing, and emptying himself of that glory to which the whole creation could not make any addition. The truth is, we ought to consider in the same light every other mercy of God, as well as the love of Christ his Son, which was the source of them all; Job 22:2, 3, 4. "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? Will he reprove thee for fear of thee? will he enter with thee into judgment?" And to the same purpose, Job 35:5, 6, 7, 8. "Look unto the heavens, and see, and behold the clouds, which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." The essential glory and happiness of the Deity, and consequently of the Eternal Word, can receive no addition, nor suffer the smallest diminution, from the state of any, or of all his creatures. He was infinitely happy in himself from all eternity, before there was man or angel to serve him, and would have continued so though they had never been. How infinitely then are we indebted to this generous Saviour! with what gratitude ought we to celebrate his pure and disinterested love, who graciously interposed in our behalf, and delivered us from the wrath of God, by bearing it in our room!

7. In the last place, the love of Christ was a most fruitful, active, and beneficent love. The effects of it are unspeakably great; the blessings which we reap from it are not only infinite in number, but inestimable in value. They are indeed almost as valuable as their price was costly. It was not to be supposed that so great a person would be employed upon a trivial work, or an infinite price paid for an inconsiderable purchase. But how, my brethren, shall we form any adequate conception of the benefits that flow from our Redeemer's death? All that is necessary for us, all that is desirable to us, all that is truly precious in itself, is effectually made ours: Rom. 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?" 1 Cor. 1:30. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

(1.) We are through Christ delivered from condemnation: Rom. 8:1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Do you know any thing of a sense of guilt? Does your Creator's power and greatness ever make you afraid? Have you trembled at the approach of the king of terrors? Or of that day of righteous judgment, when God shall render to every man according to his works? Christ our Saviour hath delivered us "from the wrath to come." This is the first ground of the apostle's ascription in the text: Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. Hear also the apostle's triumphant assurance, 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.) Through Christ the believer is assured, that he shall receive every thing that is necessary for him in his passage through the world. The Spirit is purchased and bestowed to lead him into all truth, and to sanctify him wholly. Christ did not satisfy himself with cancelling our guilt, but made effectual provision for the renovation of our nature. The Spirit is also given as a spirit of consolation. He is styled the Comforter, who shall abide with us forever. Without enlarging at this time on the comforts of the gospel, they are sufficiently commended in the following words of the apostle, Phil. 4:7. "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." To these add a sanctified providence. As many as are reconciled to God through Christ, may rest satisfied that all things shall work together for their good. The most opposite events, prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, honor and reproach, nay, every thing without exception, shall be subservient to their interest: 1 Cor. 3:21, 22, 23. "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."

(3.) Through Christ the believer is entitled to everlasting glory and happiness, in the enjoyment of God to all eternity. This was among the last things he told his disciples before he left the world: John 14:2, 3. "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 if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." You are this day to commemorate your Redeemer, who died once upon a cross, but who has now been many ages upon a throne: Rev. 1:18. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for ever more, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death." He is able to make his faithful disciples more than conquerors over all their spiritual enemies; or, as it is expressed in the passage where the text lies, he will make them kings and priests to God and his Father. In the passage immediately preceding the text, he is called the first begotten from the dead; and elsewhere we are told, that the order of the resurrection is, "Christ the first fruits, and afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming." It shall both finish and illustrate his love when he shall raise them that sleep in the dust; when he "shall change their vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself." At present, how imperfect are our discoveries? how weak and feeble our conceptions? how cold and languid our affections! Now we "see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." O how joyful to every believer the deliverance from a state of suffering, temptation and sin, and the possession of perfect holiness and unchangeable happiness! And O how great the opposition of the future to the present state! No more struggling with the evils of life: No more perplexity or anxious care for food and raiment; no more distress from sickness or pain; no prisons nor oppressors there; no liars nor slanderers there; no complaints of an evil heart there, but the most perfect security of state, and most unremitted vigor of affection. How shall the

ransomed of the Lord then sing their Redeemer's praise! 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."

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

1. Let me intreat every person in this house to make the following obvious reflection: If so great are the obligations of believers to the love of Christ, how dreadful must be the condition of those who die in their sins! The one of these explains and illustrates the other. The believer can owe but little, if the deliverance is not great. I have been lately speaking of the happiness of the elect of God, in being freed from the miseries of the present state; but, oh! unhappy they who shall depart from this life unreconciled to God: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."—When the heirs of glory "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father," the unbelieving and impenitent shall be cast into the lake of fire, "where the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." I desire to put you in mind of this, under the impression of this important truth, That nothing but the sovereign grace of God can make the warning effectual; and therefore beseeching him to accompany it with the powerful operation of his Holy Spirit. At the same time, I assure you, that if you reject the counsel of God against yourselves, your blood shall be upon your own heads. Do not pretend to say, "If it depends upon election, and almighty grace is necessary, all our endeavors will be vain." Secret things belong only to God. His purpose is not more unchangeable than his promise is faithful. Nay, though you may not be able to see it, nor I to explain it, they are perfectly consistent the one with the other. He will be just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth; and therefore give heed to the exhortation, not in my words, but in the words of the Holy Ghost, Phil. 2:12, 13. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Know, I beseech you, your own mercy. The necessity is urgent, and the time is uncertain. With what propriety may the words of the apostle be addressed to every person in every situation, and in every age! 2 Cor. 6:1, 2. "We then as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain: for he faith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Happy they who still hear the joyful sound! Happy the sinner who is not yet gone to his own place! Flee, flee to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.—Consider the aggravated guilt and seven-fold condemnation of the despisers of the gospel. All that you have heard of the love of Christ serves to shew the danger of his enemies. Read the words immediately following the ascription of which the text is a part, (ver. 7.) "Behold, he 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." Read also this awful description, Rev. 6:14, 15, 16, 17. "And the heavens 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 bond-man, and every free-man, hid 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?" Mark this extraordinary expression, the wrath of the Lamb, that meekest and gentlest of all creatures; teaching us, that his former meekness, and patience, and suffering, shall inflame and exasperate his future vengeance. Could I conduct you to the gates of the infernal prison, I am persuaded you would hear Judas Iscariot, and all other treacherous disciples, crying out, 'O that Christ had never come in the flesh! The thunders of Sinai would have been less terrible. The frowns of Jesus of Nazareth are insupportable. O the dreadful,

painful, and uncommon wrath of a Saviour on the judgment-seat!—The Lord speak consolation to his own people, and pierce the hearts of his enemies, that they may be brought to repentance.

2. You may learn from what has been said, that the great and leading motive to obedience under the gospel, is a deep and grateful sense of redeeming love. This runs through the whole writings of the New Testament. It binds the believer to his duty; it animates him to diligence; it fills him with comfort: 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 unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Gal. 2:19, 20. "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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." That this motive will have the most powerful influence on the believer's conduct, is evident both from reason and experience. No principle takes a faster hold of the human heart than gratitude for favors received. If the mercies be cordially accepted, and highly esteemed, which is certainly the case here, nothing can withstand its influence. It reconciles the heart to the most difficult duties; nay, it even disposes the believer to court the opportunity of making some signal sacrifice, in testimony of his attachment. Love sincere and fervent overcomes all difficulties; or rather, indeed, it changes their nature, and makes labor and suffering a source of delight and satisfaction. Let but the Saviour's interest or honor seem to be concerned, and the believer, who feels how much he is indebted to him, will cheerfully embrace the call, and set no bounds to his compliance. This shows how much beauty and force there is in our Lord's manner of recommending love and compassion to our fellow-creatures, Matthew 25:40. "And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." But to what purpose do I dwell upon this subject? for a sense of redeeming love is not only the most powerful motive to

every other duty, but is itself the possession and exercise of the first duty of the moral law, as well as the sum and substance of evangelical holiness, viz. the love of God. The first sin, by which our nature fell, was a distrust of, and departure from God; and the malignity of every sin we continue to commit, consists in giving that room in the heart to something else, which is due only to God. A sense of redeeming love, therefore, expels the enemy, and makes up the breach, as thereby the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

3. You may see, from what has been said, the necessity of a particular application of the truths of the gospel to ourselves, and the reliance of every believer upon them as the foundation of his own hope. I have sometimes had occasion to observe to you, that it is very doubtful, whether any person can so much as approve in his judgment the truths of the gospel, till he perceive his own interest in them, and their necessity to his peace. Certain it is, the world that lieth in wickedness generally despises them. However, I shall admit as a thing possible, that a bad man may, either by imitation, or the power of outward evidence, embrace the gospel as a system of truth. But surely the love of Christ can neither be a source of comfort, nor a principle of obedience, unless he consider it as terminating upon himself. Without this, the whole is general, cold, and uninteresting. But when he considers, not only the certainty of the truth, but the extent of the invitation, and can say, with Thomas, My Lord, and my God, then indeed the ties are laid upon him; then indeed he begins to feel their constraining power; then he not only contemplates the glory of God in the grace of redemption, but cheerfully and unfeignedly consecrates himself to the service of his Redeemer. This leads me, in the

Fourth and last place, to invite every sinner in this assembly to accept of Christ as his Saviour, and to rely upon him as he is offered in the gospel. To the secure and insensible, I know it is in vain to speak. But if you see your own danger, what should hinder your belief and reliance on the Saviour? If you either need or desire deliverance, what with-holds your acceptance of it, when it is not

only freely offered to you, but earnestly urged upon you? Can you doubt the testimony of the Amen, the faithful and true witness? The blessings of his purchase belong not to one people or family, but to every nation under heaven. The commission of those who bear his message is unlimited: Mark 16:15. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." They are offered, not only to the virtuous, the decent, and regular, but to the chief of sinners: 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." Whoever heareth these glad tidings, he dishonoreth God, he poureth contempt on his Saviour's love, and he wrongeth his own soul, if he does not receive consolation from them. Be not hindered by what you see in yourselves, unless you are in love with sin, and afraid of being divorced from it. The gospel is preached to sinners. It does not expect to find them, but it is intended to make them holy. A deep and inward sense of your own unworthiness, unless it is prevented by the deceiver, should only make you more highly esteem the grace of the gospel, and more willingly depend on your Redeemer's love.

I conclude with the invitation which he himself gives to the weary sinner, Matt. 11:28, 29, 30. "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

REDEMPTION THE SUBJECT OF ADMIRATION TO THE ANGELS

SERMON 7

Which things the Angels desire to look into. - 1 PETER 1:12. last clause

ACTION SERMON.

MY brethren, A serious and attentive mind, on perusing the sacred volume, can hardly help being often struck both with the sentiments and language of the inspired writers on the subject of redemption. With what a deep veneration of soul, with what warmth of affection, with what transports of adoring thankfulness, do they speak of the plan laid by divine wisdom for the salvation of lost sinners, by the cross of Christ! A person possessed only of understanding and taste, may admire these sallies of holy fervor, for the elevation of thought and boldness of expression, which a man's being in good earnest on an interesting subject doth naturally inspire. But happy, happy, and only happy, that soul who, from an inward approbation, can receive, relish, and apply those glorious things that are spoken of the name, character, and undertaking of the Saviour of sinners.

You may observe, that there are two different subjects, in general, on which the writers of the New Testament are apt to break out, and enlarge, when they are considering or commending the mystery of redemption. One is, the glory of God, as it appears in it; the lustre of divine power, wisdom, and grace, which reigns through the whole. The second is, the unspeakable interest which we have in it, from the danger escaped on the one hand, and the exalted hopes to which we are raised by it, on the other. I cannot help putting you in mind, that these two things are so inseparably joined, that none can forget or be insensible of either of them, without in reality despising both. And as a view of the divine glory seems most immediately calculated to assist and continue a proper worshipping frame, I intend, that this shall lead the way in our meditations on this occasion. The

sacrament of the Lord's supper is called the Eucharist, or sacrifice of praise; and therefore very fit for adoring contemplation.

The words which I have read are the conclusion of the apostle Peter's account of the gradual unfolding of this great design of Providence; and they contain a striking and extraordinary sentiment, That the angels themselves are filled with a holy curiosity to search into the mystery of redemption. Few commentators have failed to observe, that the word here translated to look into, properly signifies, to stoop or bend down, and examine with the strictest attention. This, my brethren, gives us a very exalted view of the scheme of redemption, as a leading design in the government of God, that these pure and exalted spirits, not only adore it as a part of their Creator's will, but that they are lost and swallowed up in the contemplation of it, and see such a series of wonders, as they are not able to comprehend. If this is so, let us no longer postpone the following reflection: How much more are we, the interested parties, called to adore and dwell on this mystery of love, on which our salvation from deserved wrath, and possession of infinite felicity to all eternity, is suspended! I cannot find a more proper subject for an introduction to the sacred and solemn service of this day; and therefore I beg your attention, while I endeavor, in dependance on divine grace, to illustrate the assertion in the text, by mentioning some particulars in the mystery of redemption, which are probably the subject of adoring inquiry, and perhaps holy astonishment, to those celestial spirits. Having done this, I will conclude with some improvement of the subject, for assisting you in your present duty.

I. First, then, we are to mention those circumstances in the mystery of redemption which are probably the subject of adoring enquiry, or perhaps holy astonishment, to the angels of God. The angels, though they are exalted creatures, are yet plainly of limited capacity. There are many things of which they are ignorant: Matth. 24:36. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." And as their employment is to be messengers and ministers of God, with some inferior agency in the conduct of his

providence; so it is not to be doubted that much of their happiness consists in the contemplation of the nature and glory of God, as discovered in his works. They are represented in the book of Job as joyful witnesses of the creation and birth of this lower world: Job 38:6, 7. "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof? when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." The state of the church is also represented as discovering to them the divine 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."

Let us, therefore, consider what circumstances in the mystery of redemption may be supposed to strike them most with astonishment and wonder. This we cannot do without finding ourselves greatly interested, and called to the deepest humility, and at the same time the highest exercise of gratitude and love. And,

1. The first thing I shall mention is the incarnation of the Son of God; the union of the divine and human nature, by the Word's being made flesh. This is indeed the first thing to be considered, both in order and in rank. O wonderful union indeed! Well might the apostle say, 1 Tim. 3:16. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." But what view must the angels have of this event? those glorious and active beings, who are thus described. Psal. 104:4. "Who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire." Their knowledge of the nature of God, as a pure and immaculate spirit, as the eternal, uncreated, self-existent Father of Spirits, and of the Son, as one with the Father, who "thought it no robbery to be equal with God," must deeply astonish them at this marvellous humiliation; that he should become one person with a creature, and that with a creature lower than themselves; for it is expressly said, that "he was made a little lower than the angels." How astonishing, that he who is the Lord of angels, and whose distance from the highest of all created

spirits is not great only, but infinite, should become a man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul!

It is more than probable from our text, especially when compared with the context, and other passages of scripture, that this discovery was made to the angels only gradually, as it was to men. They could not but have intimations of God's purpose of mercy, which was begun and carried on immediately after the fall; this, however, was done in a manner comparatively dark and obscure. There have been indeed some who seem to me to have gone a little beyond their depth; and who have supposed, that God discovered to the angels, even before the creation of man, the fall, which he foresaw, and the method by which he proposed to recover a chosen remnant, viz. the incarnation of his own Son; that the superior honor done to an inferior creature, stirred up the pride and envy of Lucifer, and his associates; and that in this consisted their guilt and apostasy, for which they were punished with an immediate banishment from the abodes of bliss, and are now reserved in chains under darkness to the day of judgment.

This at best is but mere conjecture. It seems much more probable that they learned the several parts of this great design of mercy in their gradual accomplishment. It cannot indeed be doubted, that the angels who were concerned in the ministry of providence must have known early of the intended redemption, and the Redeemer. Yet when they are said, as in the text, to look into the things preached in the gospel, it gives reason to conclude, that the incarnation and sufferings of Christ were, with regard to them, as well as to us, a mystery hid from ages and generations. Now how could those holy angels who retained their integrity, but be filled with amazement at the depth of the divine councils, when they saw themselves obliged to worship a man, to worship a feeble infant, born in a stable, and lying in a manger? when they found themselves charged with publishing the glad tidings? as in Luke 2:10, 11, 12, 13, 14. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city

of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger. 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 towards men."

There is one circumstance in the incarnation itself, which ought not to be omitted, because it is mentioned in scripture, and is certainly as astonishing as any, That he was not only made flesh, but sent in the likeness of sinful flesh. What so opposite to the nature of God as sin? And what so surprising, as that the Son of God, though without sin, yet should in all respects outwardly be like to sinners? that he should be born of a sinner, taken for a sinner, treated as a sinner, and at last crucified with the utmost ignominy, as a more than an ordinary sinner? I doubt not, but those angels who looked with wonder on him in the manger, looked with still greater wonder on him on the cross; that the whole host of them are considering this with holy wonder still; and that it shall be the theme of eternal wonder to the innumerable company about the throne. This leads me to observe,

2. That another circumstance which must afford matter for adoring enquiry to the celestial spirits, is the substitution of an innocent person in the room of the guilty, and his suffering from the hand of God. When man's apostasy was first known, I reckon we may affirm with sufficient certainty, that it could not enter into any created mind, that his recovery was possible. Many are even of opinion, that some passages of scripture carry in them an intimation, that it had been proposed, and as it were a trial made, in the councils of heaven, among assembled angels, whether any remedy could be found for the guilt and apostasy of man; and that none was found either able or willing to stand in his room; as in that of the Psalmist, cited by the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. 10:5, 6, 7. "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he faith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin, thou hast had no pleasure: Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of thy book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God." And in the

prophecies of Isaiah, chap. 59:16. "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness, it sustained him." I will not take upon me to affirm this interpretation of these passages; but the first of them, which is applied by the apostle to Christ, certainly implies, that he undertook the redemption of sinners when other sacrifices were found ineffectual.

Now, my brethren, let us prosecute the reflection pointed out by the text. The angels had always hitherto seen innocence and holiness attended with peace and felicity, and they had seen the apostate spirits laid under an irreversible sentence of condemnation. It is probable they looked upon it as manifestly founded on the nature of God, that he could not punish the innocent, and that he could not but punish the guilty. What astonishment then must it have given them, what new views of the boundless sovereignty and unsearchable wisdom of the Most High must it have opened to them, when they heard him saying, "Deliver him from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom!" How must they with wonder dwell on this part of the providence of a wise, holy, just, and gracious God, that the pure and innocent Jesus, the beloved of the Father, should make his appearance in this lower world, the abode of guilty creatures, under manifest tokens of their Creator's displeasure! that he should not only enter on the scene in the weakness of infancy, but with every circumstance of meanness and baseness! How often must they have been put to a stand, what to think of the severity and persecution, the contempt and opposition which he met with, from those very sinners whom he came to save!

But above all, how must they have been at a loss to comprehend his being exposed, not only to the contempt of man, but to the wrath of God! For "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief." What must have been the surprise of that minister of providence, who was sent "from heaven to strengthen" him, when he found him under an inexpressible agony of suffering, making supplication with strong crying and tears, saying, "Father, if it be

possible, let this cup pass from me!" And what created spirit is able to reach the unfathomable meaning of his complaint upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In the sufferings of an innocent person in the room of the guilty, in the sufferings of the well-beloved Son of God from his Father's hand, there is such an unsearchable depth, as no finite understanding is able to comprehend. At first view it seems to contradict the rectitude and holiness of the divine nature; but on a nearer inspection, there is such a striking discovery of wisdom, holiness, justice and mercy, that angels desire with a holy curiosity to contemplate and adore it.

3. As immediately founded upon the former, another circumstance in the plan of redemption through Christ, which will afford matter of wonder to the celestial spirits, is the free justification of sinners, and their acceptance with God, through the imputed righteousness of Christ. If it appears astonishing, that God, who distributes favor and punishment with the most perfect equity, should punish the innocent, it appears equally so, that he should shew favor to the guilty; that he should forgive their sins, accept their persons, and visit them with his loving-kindness, and all this for the merit and obedience of another. What! (may it be said,) is he not unchangeably holy! Is he not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Are we not assured that evil cannot dwell with him, nor sinners stand in his presence? How shall he receive into his favor these offending rebels? how shall he take into his bosom such polluted wretches? And what can be the meaning of imputation? Can personal worth be transferred? Can he commit so great an error, as to view them with complacency for the merit of another?

Must not this appear a new and extraordinary plan to the angels, who, by personal and perfect obedience, retain the favor of their Creator, and who had been hitherto strangers to the influence and intercession of a mediator? who had seen no such thing take place when their brethren had sinned? Heb. 2:16. "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." The holy angels, not inclined to say, as more

presumptuous men too often do, "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound," will rather say, "Let us step aside, and see this great sight." They will then see, that there is no way more proper for maintaining the dignity of the divine government: nay, that it is the only way by which those who have been sinners can be received into favor. They will see and confess, that there is no circumstance whatever that tends more to level the pride of the sinner's heart, and bring him to universal submission, and absolute subjection to the sovereignty of God. I am persuaded, indeed, that even angels who never sinned, have more of submission to the divine sovereignty, and dependance on the absolute grace of their Creator, than many are apt to imagine; yet surely our world is the great theatre of divine grace. The same infinite benignity which shews itself in heaven, in favor to the worthy, is displayed on earth, to the astonishment of heaven itself, in mercy to the guilty.

Suffer me, my brethren, to embrace this opportunity of observing, that nothing is more groundless than the accusation of men of corrupt minds, against the doctrine of divine grace, as encouraging to sin. It hath the very contrary effect, and that on these two accounts.

(1.) It is so mortifying to human pride, that the power of sin must be broken at least, before it can be truly and cordially received. There is not so difficult a duty in the whole compass of the moral law, as an unfeigned denial of our own righteousness and strength, and being willing to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. To receive forgiveness as mere mercy to those who had deserved to perish, without any complaint either against the strictness of the law or the severity of the sanction, is not so easy as many seem to imagine, and what no man is brought to but by the Holy Ghost.

(2.) As the sinner must be really subjected to God the Creator, before he can lay hold of his mercy through Christ the Redeemer; so it is plain, that the most effectual measures are taken to continue and

perpetuate this subjection. It is plain, that the infinite unmerited love of God to his soul, is the most powerful and operative principle of obedience that can dwell in the human heart: 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 unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Such confidence has the same apostle in the strength of this principle, that he bids defiance to all trials and opposition: Rom. 8:35. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And again, verse 38, 39. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These great principles of sanctification are new to the angels. When, therefore, they see the holiness of God shining in the free justification of sinners through Christ, it will add new force and new meaning to that song of praise which they are represented as singing, Rev. 4:8. "And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

(4.) In the last place, Another circumstance in the mystery of the gospel which will be matter of wonder to the angels, is the application of redemption, or the manner and means of translating sinners "from darkness to light," and "from the power of Satan unto God."—Before the plan of divine grace with regard to fallen man was opened to them, they had seen no examples of sinners but the fallen angels. From their irreversible sentence, and blaspheming rage in their torment, those who remained in their happy state, would be apt to conclude, that there could be no recovery for a creature who had once departed from his integrity at all. But when they learned something of the divine purpose for the salvation of fallen man, especially the amazing and unspeakable grace that appeared in the appointment of the Mediator, and the universal unlimited offer of salvation in his name, what would be the effect? I dare say they

would certainly conclude, that it would be received with the highest transports of joy, by all those unhappy criminals who were lying under the curse of a broken law. Accordingly the angel, in his message to the shepherds, calls it good tidings of great joy to all people.

What then must have been their additional surprise, when they heard the prophet saying, Isa. 53:1. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" when they saw that this gracious Saviour was "despised and rejected of men?" when they observed so many turn a deaf ear to the most importunate calls of the gospel? when they found them cavilling themselves out of eternal happiness, and advancing their own blinded and bewildered reason in contempt of the infinite wisdom of God? What must those holy angels, who are filled with gratitude for creating goodness, think of those heirs of hell, who pour contempt upon redeeming love? I cannot touch upon every thing that rises here to our view, but I am persuaded that the administration of the covenant of grace is as full of mystery to the celestial spirits, as any part of the plan. Instead of every sinner humbly imploring reconciliation with an offended God, our Redeemer, as a Sovereign Lord, as the Prince of Peace, first conquers those as enemies, whom he afterwards cherishes as friends. He is endued with all power for this great work; and the Psalmist gives a beautiful description of its influence and effect, Psal. 45:3, 4, 5. "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. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies whereby the people fall under thee." He hath sent forth his Holy Spirit as an almighty agent, to reconcile sinners unto God. Is there not also a depth of divine sovereignty to be seen in the choice of the vessels of mercy? The apostle Paul in the midst of the fury of persecuting zeal, Mary Magdalene from the midst of the flames of unclean lust, Zaccheus from the heart hardening crimes of covetousness and oppression, and many others of the chief of sinners, have been made the trophies of divine grace, and may say, in

the words of their great example 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."

It deserves also particular notice, that faith itself is said to be the operation and 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 indeed the change in general which constitutes the new nature, is considered as a birth or creation from above; 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." It appears plainly, from many express declarations of scripture, from the power necessary to overcome their obstinacy, and from the seat of the disease itself, which lies in the will, that sinners, while they continue so, instead of desiring, resist their recovery. What a subject of contemplation presents itself to the angels here! What an unknown view is given them of the infinite evil and malignity of sin! What a humbling sense of created weakness! What a lesson of caution for their after conduct! It hath been conjectured not without apparent reason and some countenance from scripture, that the great purpose which the human system is intended to serve in the universal kingdom of God, is to be an everlasting monument, that a rational creature who has once departed from its innocence and obedience to its Creator, never can again return to the same state, but by his own almighty power and sovereign grace. Upon the whole, from this faint view of the plan of redemption, as lying open to the attention of principalities and powers, we may say with the apostle Paul, 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!"

I proceed now to conclude the subject, by some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

1. What you have heard will contribute, I hope, by the divine blessing, to shew the guilt of those who despise the gospel, and serve to remove the offence of the cross. It required no small measure of

fortitude in the apostle Paul, to declare that he was not "ashamed of the cross of Christ," which at its first publication was "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The doctrine of the cross, in its simplicity and purity, has been matter of offence in every succeeding age, to men of proud and worldly minds, God knows, there are not wanting many at this time, who treat the doctrine of the cross, and salvation by grace, with as much contempt and insolence as they dare. Nor is it at all impossible, that there may be some among you who are infected with these poisonous and destructive principles. Be persuaded, O deluded soul! that "the weakness of God is stronger than man," and "that the wisdom of man is foolishness with God." This glorious and gracious plan hath the approbation and admiration of angels, though it hath the contempt of sinners. It astonished the angels, therefore no wonder though it should astonish us. You will perhaps say, It is indeed astonishing above measure; it teaches me to believe an incarnate God, a suffering Saviour, the innocent punished and the guilty forgiven. It is attended with so many surprising circumstances, that I cannot help saying, How can these things be? But as Samson said in his riddle, "Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came forth sweetness;" so out of the suggestions of your corrupt minds, I would derive some evidence of the truth. A cunningly devised fable would be dressed by the deceiver in a manner suited to the human taste; but this doctrine hath not upon it any of the marks of human wisdom. I do not think, if it had not been revealed, that it could have entered into any human mind; and therefore we may justly say, "Salvation belongeth unto God." It is because he is God, and not man, that we, the children of men, "are not consumed."

2. You may learn, from what has been said, the encouragement that is given to sinners to return to God through Christ. The very circumstances that are most astonishing and admirable in this great dispensation, are the undeserved love and unexpected condescension of God to guilty and miserable sinners. I know that the inward and effectual call can only be given by the Holy Ghost; but I know also, that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Therefore, in expectation of the blessing of him who "hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and turneth them howsoever he will," I proclaim in the hearing of every sinner within these walls, "that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." I repeat the universal call, that "him that cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out." Are there not many in this house under the power of sin, and the curse of a broken law? Nay, who is there that is not condemned by these important words, which you will find Gal. 3:10. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This sentence stands uncanceled against all who are not reconciled to God by faith in Christ Jesus. Is the application difficult? Ye slaves of sin, drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, envious and malicious slanderers, retainers of unjust gain, and all without exception who are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, ye shall be slain all of you; "as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence." Remember the misery of those who die in an unconverted state: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who can abide with devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Admire the infinite grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and admire the infinite wisdom of God that hath laid help for you upon one who is "mighty to save." May I not say, that, on this solemn occasion, your Saviour speaks to you, not only in his word, but from his cross? See the justice of God in the cross of Christ, and thence learn the evil of sin. See the power and wrath of God in the cross of Christ, and tremble at your own state. See the matchless love of God in the cross of Christ, and be persuaded to return to him with weeping, with supplication, and with mourning. Let the eye of faith be pointed at the dying Saviour, and say unto him, "O almighty sufferer, look down, look down from thy triumphant infamy, pity and pierce this hard heart with a sense of guilt and misery. Thou hast said, that when thou shouldst be lifted up from the earth, thou wouldst draw all men unto thee: let this promise be fulfilled to my experience. Draw me, we will run after thee. Lord, take away my complicated guilt; Lord, renew and pacify my unsanctified affections,

form me for thyself, that I may serve thee here, and afterwards see thee as thou art!

3. From what hath been said upon this subject, you may examine your title to partake of the holy ordinance of the Lord's supper; or, in other words, your right to the favor of God, and to eternal life. No disposition more suitable, none more necessary, at a communion-table, than a grateful and admiring sense of redeeming love. Not only the profane blasphemer, or the scornful despiser, is unfit to sit down at this feast, but the self-righteous formalist who never saw himself undone. It is true, indeed, that when angels themselves are put to a stand, all our thoughts must soon be lost and swallowed up. But, my brethren, do you desire to look into it? Do you feel a sensible pleasure and delight in this sacred employment? Do you, in some measure, see the glory of divine grace, though you are not able to measure its dimensions? There is no subject so obscure and unintelligible to those who are strangers to the power of religion, as the mystery of redeeming love; no subject so odious and distasteful to those whose minds are formed upon the maxims of the world, as the doctrine of salvation by grace. Christ upon a cross, Christ upon a throne, Christ the believer's rock and refuge, the source of his strength, and the source of his comfort, they are neither able to relish nor comprehend. All the warm expressions of gratitude and attachment, which are unspeakably sweet and ravishing to a serious soul, appear to them in the light of enthusiasm and visionary folly. But as many as it hath pleased God to bless with an inward and personal conviction of their lost state by nature, will see the greatest beauty in this plan of salvation, and will rather rejoice, than shrink, at sharing with their Redeemer himself the contempt of the world. They will say, with the apostle Paul, Gal. 6:14. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is a beautiful opposition stated by the same apostle, between a believer's understanding the love of Christ, and yet being unable to search it to the bottom, in the following passage, 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, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

4. In the last place, From what has been said, learn what is your most proper employment at the Lord's table. Adore and contemplate the riches of redeeming grace, that great theme which "the angels desire to look into." Think, with humble amazement, on the boundless mercy of God, which reached even to you, and with the highest thankfulness on the honor to which you are admitted, of receiving the sensible pledges of his love. Dwell on this impenetrable mystery of "Immanuel God with us—God manifested in the flesh." Think on this awful proof of divine justice and holiness, the wrath of God poured out upon his own Son. Think on the perfection of that atonement which is made for the sins of the world. Rejoice in the fulness of that Saviour who is now made "head over all things to the church;" and draw, by faith, from his fulness, every necessary supply to yourselves: and as you are now to commemorate his death, with a view to his second coming, think on that "day of salvation," when he shall come "to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe;" when you shall enter in triumph into the holiest of all, where no doubt the mystery of redemption shall be more fully discovered; when saints and angels shall jointly sing that new song, Rev. 5:12. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing;" when the whole plan of divine grace shall be completed and closed, and the mediatorial kingdom itself brought to a period; for "then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father;" when confirmed angels, and redeemed sinners, when the whole host of heaven shall unite in one acclamation, "Hallelujah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

GLORYING IN THE CROSS

SERMON 8

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. - GALATIANS 6:14

ACTION SERMON.

MY brethren, we are this day met to keep up the remembrance of our Redeemer's sufferings and death in our room. We are to commemorate an event the most important, the most interesting, and the most astonishing, that creation ever beheld. We are to contemplate a subject the most wonderful and mysterious that ever was offered to the mind of man. The incarnation of the Son of God, the King of kings found in the form of a servant, and the Prince of life expiring on an accursed tree. What is this but the union of things the most opposite and seemingly inconsistent that can possibly be conceived? the union of the most distant extremes of strength and weakness, glory and baseness, honor and shame?

In a sort of correspondence and analogy to this great subject itself, nothing can be more opposite than the sentiments formed by believers and unbelievers with regard to it. To the one it hath a dignity and majesty unspeakably amiable; to the other, it hath a meanness and baseness that is shameful and contemptible. The Apostle Paul often takes notice of this, that it was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" and he often discovers his own inviolable attachment to his Saviour, by an open profession of esteem for those circumstances in his character and appearance which a blinded world were most apt to treat with derision and scorn. This is particularly the case in the text, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

By the cross of Christ, in the New Testament, we are sometimes to understand the sufferings of believers for Christ's sake; but more commonly, and I think, evidently in this place, it signifies his humiliation in general, and particularly his crucifixion, to which circumstance our attention is directed, because it was the most base and ignominious of the whole. In this the apostle says he would glory: nay, he expresses his abhorrence at the thought of glorying in any thing else: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Nothing can be more suited to the employment of this day, and nothing more proper to distinguish between the friends and the enemies of Christ, than this, when carefully attended to; for the one will undoubtedly glory and the other will as certainly be ashamed of his cross.

In discoursing further on this subject, what I propose, through divine assistance, is,

I. To explain the import of the apostle's glorying only in the Saviour's cross.

II. To shew what good reason every real Christian hath to glory in it. And,

III. To make some practical application of the subject.

I. In the first place, then, let us explain the import of the apostle's glorying only in the Saviour's cross. What is this object in which the apostle says he would glory? Very wonderful indeed. It is, that Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, was subjected to a long life of sorrow, reproach, and contempt: That towards the close of it, he was arrested, accused, condemned as a malefactor; and after innumerable and unspeakable indignities, was at last nailed to a cross, an engine of torture of the most cruel and painful kind, and so shameful, that it was a manner of punishment appropriated to the most detested criminals of the basest rank. What is there here to

glory in? and what does the apostle mean by this expression? It means,

1. That he had a high esteem of it, as an event of the greatest moment, and an object worthy of the highest regard. We do not glory in common things, but in things of peculiar dignity and worth. It was not then in his view merely what it seemed. He did not consider it, surely, as the execution of a criminal; but said, with the centurion on Mount Calvary, Truly "this was a righteous man;" Truly this was "the Son of God." He considered it as the effect of the infinite love of God, who sent his only begotten Son to die for our sins. He considered it as an infinite price paid for the pardon of our offences, as the only way of deliverance from guilt, as the sure and certain pledge of peace to an awakened conscience. In this view, how does it rise in his esteem? While others are disposed to scorn, pitying their madness, he is constrained to worship and adore. Think of it, Christians, how different were the sentiments of his insulting enemies and his mourning disciples, when he hung upon the cross. The one consider him as a guilty sufferer, the other as a loving Saviour. The hearts of the one were boiling with hatred, or filled with contempt; the hearts of the other were swallowed up in admiration, or melted with love.

2. The apostle's glorying in the cross, implied his having a strong, though humble confidence of his own relation to and interest in it. I think it is impossible to separate this from our idea of the apostle's meaning. We do not glory or boast of any thing in which we have no concern. A man of great genius, or uncommon worth, I may admire and honor, merely for the eminent qualities of which he is possessed, and I may do him all justice by commendation; but I am never disposed to glory in him, nor have I any title to do it unless he is somehow related to me: but if I add, that he is my child, or he is my brother, I may be truly said to glory in him, or to boast of him, because the honor that is given to him, is, in some measure reflected upon myself. Again, I may speak of the riches and magnificence of some great city; but I am then only said to glory in it, if I add any circumstance of relation; as that it is the place of my nativity, or the

place of my residence, or the place in which I have property and interest. When therefore the apostle says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, it certainly implies a humble persuasion of his own interest in it, and his happiness to slow from it. This indeed naturally arises from a real and spiritual discovery of its proper glory. None can see the transcendent beauty of this object, till they have seen their own guilt and misery in the sight of a holy God. And no sooner do they discover the excellence of this atonement, its perfect sufficiency for all, and the unrestrained offer to all, than they fly to it as their security, and rest on it as the ground of their hope. The word here translated glorying, signifies at the same time, exulting, or rejoicing; and therefore to glory in the cross, is the same thing as to rejoice in the Saviour. The truth is, it is but seldom that this apostle mentions the death of Christ without some appropriating expression: 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;" 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."

3. To complete the idea of the apostle's glorying in the cross, it implies such a sense of its comparative worth, as prompts him to a public and open profession of esteem, with a sovereign contempt of the judgment or conduct of others, who set themselves in opposition to it. Glorying always signifies the declaration of our mind to others; and is not ill illustrated by that expression of the apostle Paul in writing to the Romans, chapter 1:16. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The opposition between the sentiments of others, and his own, he often mentions; as 1 Cor. 1:18. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness: but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God." And verse 23. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them

which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." When he glories in the cross, therefore, it implies an open and resolute adherence to this despised cause. This meaning is particularly carried in the word cross. It had been less wonder, if he had said, he gloried in his Saviour's divine power exerted before his crucifixion, or that he gloried in his triumphant resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of God after it; but, instead of this, he says he gloried in his cross, in his very abasement, in what was most vile and contemptible.

A late very eminent writer and champion for the cross, in a sermon on the same subject, makes a remark to the following purpose: "*That through the veneration of many ages, and the disuse of that punishment among us in the execution of malefactors, the word cross does not carry so base an idea to our minds; but that in the ear of a Galatian, it sounded as if the apostle had said, he gloried in a gallows, a gibbet or a halter." And in a note upon this passage of the sermon, when published, he expresses himself thus: "Some persons, I am informed, were disgusted at these words, halter, gallows, gibbet, they are so horridly contemptible: to whom I would reply, That the cross, in point of ignominy, implied all this; and in point of torture, much more. Unless the English reader forms to himself some such image as this, he will never be able to apprehend the scandalous nature and shocking circumstances of his divine master's death. The words, I must confess, were diversified, and the sentiment reiterated, on purpose to effect the mind with this astonishing truth. Neither can I prevail with myself to expunge the expressions, unless I could substitute others of a more ignominious and execrable import in their room. Only I would beg the serious reader to spend a moment in the following reflection. Is it so that a polite and delicate ear can hardly endure so much as the sound of the words? How amazing then was the condescension, how charming and adorable the goodness of God's illustrious Son, to bear all that is signified by these intolerably vile terms, bear it willingly, bear it cheerfully, for us men, and our salvation!"

Before concluding this head, it will be proper to observe, in what it was the apostle did not glory. There is plainly a tacit opposition in the form of his expression, to some things in which others were apt to glory, and he as heartily despised: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He says in general, Phil. 3:7. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." We find elsewhere, in his writings, express mention of those particulars which he renounced as any subject of boasting. 1. His learning as a scholar; 2. His privileges as a Jew; 3. Even his zeal and activity as a minister of Christ. Let us consider each of these by itself.

1. He would not glory in his learning as a scholar. The apostle Paul had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and seems to have been well accomplished in every branch of human science. Yet he speaks of it with great neglect, or rather with a noble disdain, when compared with the doctrine of the cross: 1 Cor. 1:17. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect," And again, verse 19, 20. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" It may perhaps be asked, What is the meaning of this renunciation of human learning and wisdom? Is there any real opposition between learning and the cross? Would not the legitimate use of human wisdom lead us to embrace it? To this I answer, that it seems to imply these three things.

(1) An admiration of the divine glory in that which had not on it any of the marks of human wisdom: in consequence of this, a stedfast adherence to the doctrine of the cross, though those who were wise in their own conceit might be tempted to despise it, and to despise him for its sake. This great scholar, then, was not unwilling to suffer the derision and contempt of other scholars for his glorying in the cross.

(2) It implies such a superlative admiration of this glorious and interesting object, that all the knowledge he possessed, and the honor he could otherwise acquire, seemed to him unworthy of regard: his attention was wholly fixed upon, and his affections wholly engrossed by, his Redeemer's cross.

(3) It implied, that though he certainly ought, and certainly did use the noble parts and accomplishments of which he was possessed, with zeal in his master's cause: yet he did it with that humility and self-denial, with that noble contempt of vain embellishments, which showed he was not building a monument to himself, but seeking the honor of his Saviour. The doctrine of the cross should be treated in a manner some how correspondent to it; not with a learned and ostentatious self-sufficiency, but with a meek and truly evangelical self-denial.

Mistake me not, my brethren: I am not speaking against learning in itself; it is a precious gift of God, and may be happily improved in the service of the gospel; but I will venture to say, in the spirit of the apostle Paul's writings in general, and of this passage in particular, Accursed be all that learning which sets itself in opposition to the cross of Christ! Accursed be all that learning which disguises or is ashamed of the cross of Christ! Accursed be all that learning which fills the room that is due to the cross of Christ! And once more, Accursed be all that learning which is not made subservient to the honor and glory of the cross of Christ!

Well then, the learned and eloquent apostle renounced the wisdom of words; and how do we apply this in general? By a small comparative esteem of all natural advantages; and by thinking it, in the heart, a greater honor and a higher privilege to sit down at Christ's table, and to find acceptance with him, than to possess beauty, wisdom, learning, riches, and honors in the highest possible perfection; and may God grant that every one in this assembly may be able to say, in sincerity, that, in what things he thinks he excels, these he is willing to "count loss for Christ!"

2. The apostle would not glory in his privileges as a Jew. This we find him affirming in many places of his writings: Phil. 3:4. "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man think that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Toward the latter end of the Jewish commonwealth, there was a very prevailing and gross mistake among them, to look upon their external privileges as entitling them to the favor of God, and making a difference between them and others. We have reason to be sensible, that much of the same disposition is ready to adhere to men in every age. But one great design of the gospel is, to level the pride of man, to throw down all distinction in point of merit before God, and to show, that the power of the Redeemer is equally necessary to, and equally sufficient for, all without exception: Rom. 3:22. "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." Rom. 10:12. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him." Col. 3:11. "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all."

3. The apostle did not glory in his personal character, not even in his zeal and activity as a minister of Christ. This appears through the whole of his writings, where he is at particular pains to destroy every foundation of boasting or glorying in ourselves: Rom. 3:24–28. "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; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. 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." Nay, we find that all his public services he considers as quite unfit subjects of boasting, even when he is obliged to mention them for his own vindication: 1 Cor. 15:9, 10. "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

I am persuaded that those who, from really Christian principles, serve God in their generation with the greatest zeal, will be most ready to renounce all plea of merit upon that account. I have read with pleasure the following account of the temper expressed by John Knox, that eminent instrument in the reformation, when he was drawing near to his dissolution. Some person present mentioned to him, what comfort he might now have in his extraordinary labor and great usefulness in the church: to whom he answered, "Forbear to puff up the flesh with vanity, to which it is of itself sufficiently prone. The port I would be in at, is that of the free grace of God, through the merits of my blessed Saviour." The truth is, these are but the sentiments which shall not only go with us to death, but continue with us to eternity. A deep sense of redeeming love, and grateful celebration of the Redeemer's glory, is not only the language of the church on earth, but the delightful worship of the church triumphant in heaven: Rev. 5:11, 12, 13. "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."

II. We proceed now to the second general head of discourse, viz. To consider what reason every real Christian hath to glory in the cross. This indeed opens to us a subject of the most amazing compass and extent. Though there is nothing here but what is vile and contemptible to an unbelieving worldly mind; by the eye of faith, every thing that is wonderful, amiable, and valuable, is discovered in the highest perfection. I cannot particularly enumerate every subject of glorying in the cross; and therefore shall just point out to you the three following subjects of meditation, which though they often run into one another, may be considered in distinct and separate lights.

1. The glory of divine perfection shines in it in the brightest manner.
2. The riches of divine grace are manifested in it to the most astonishing degree.
3. The sanctifying efficacy of it is so transcendently superior to that of any other mean, as shews it to have been the appointment of infinite wisdom.

1. The glory of divine perfection shines in it in the brightest manner. Would we directly contemplate the glory of the invisible God, as it shines in his works and ways? let us look upon the cross. It hath been sometimes, and very justly, said of the works of God, that they have usually in them something much more wonderful and excellent than appears at first view. It hath also been further observed, that, in this respect, there is a complete contrast and opposition between the works of the Creator and those of the creature. Every thing that flows from God, the more strictly we examine it, and the more perfectly we know it, the more we shall admire it; but every work of the creature, the more perfectly it is known, the more its inherent weakness always appears. This discovers itself, even in comparing the produce of the field with the effects of human art. Naturalists observe, that the finest and most admirable human manufactures, when seen, as by a finer sense, with the assistance of a microscope, appears quite coarse and irregular; but that if you look at a pile of grass, or any thing natural, with the same assistance, you will see still more exquisite and delicate strokes of the almighty operator.

If this is the case even in the material productions of natural power, how much more must it be so in the unsearchable mysteries of God's spiritual kingdom? In none will it hold more than in this chief of the works of God, this glorious though despised object, the cross of Christ. Here indeed the glory of God appears in all its lustre. It appears in so strong and so various lights, that the highest angels are employed, delighted, and lost in the contemplation of it: 1 Pet. 1:12. "Which things the angels desire to look into." 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." O what a display of power in the union of God and man! What an almighty arm was required to make these things meet, which were infinitely distant! The Creator of the ends of the earth born of a woman! the Self-existent become a feeble infant! the Lord of glory covered with shame! The Judge of all condemned to suffer! The Author of life giving up the ghost!

What unsearchable wisdom appears in finding a victim able to bear almighty vengeance! in finding a way by which sin might be at once punished and pardoned, justice fully satisfied, even where mercy is extended! Little wonder indeed that the angels desire to look into this mystery. They had tasted the fruits of divine benignity in the happiness of innocent creatures; they had seen the glory of divine justice in the perdition of the rebel-angels; but the cross of Christ was the first thing that discovered to them the glory of divine mercy, in pardoning the chief of sinners, without in the least obscuring the brightness either of justice or holiness, nay to the illustration of both. In the cross of Christ there is a more awful and penetrating view of the justice and holiness of God, than could have been given by the irreparable destruction of the whole race of Adam. And at the same time, his not "sparing his own Son," but "delivering him up for us all," is a more astonishing effect of love, than pardon without satisfaction could have been, had that been a thing in itself possible. There is no end or measure to our views of this subject; but I hope many of you will now say, with the apostle Paul, what I dare say he has not yet done repeating in heaven, 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. The riches of divine grace are manifested in the cross of Christ to the most astonishing degree. It is not merely a wonderful work of God, which all his intelligent creatures may behold with admiration, but it is a design in which we ourselves have an immediate and an infinite concern: For, 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 what an amazing display of unmerited love! Every divine perfection indeed appears in it very clearly, but chiefly love. The tender mercy of our God predominates, actuates, and reigns through the whole. Christ's undertaking, in general, is the fruit and evidence of the everlasting love of God: John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Salvation, in the whole of its purchase and effect, was the fruit and expression of the infinite love of Christ: 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." The believing soul is never more at a loss than when attempting to confess its obligations to redeeming love. The human mind never feels its weakness more than when it attempts to conceive, or to illustrate, this truly incomprehensible subject.

The grace of redemption may be considered and illustrated in a great variety of lights: From the greatness of the misery from which we are delivered; for "we are saved from wrath through him;" From the greatness of the happiness to which we are entitled; for we are made "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ:" From the guilt and unworthiness of the objects of this love; for it was "when we were enemies" that "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." But besides these considerations, there is more than enough of divine mercy to excite our wonder in the cross of Christ, the price paid for our redemption.

Great sufferings usually melt the heart to sympathy and tenderness, though we have no immediate concern in them at all: but how much more must every source of tenderness be opened, when we consider the sufferer as an innocent person, and as suffering in our room! Remember the person, remember the nature, remember the greatness, remember the end, of his suffering; the eternal Son of God, the great Immanuel, covered with shame, dragged to an unrighteous tribunal, not to abide the decrees of justice, but to bear the effects of blinded rage! See him, O shocking sight! blind-folded, buffeted, and spit upon, severely scourged, crowned with thorns, arrayed in purple, adored in derision! See him nailed to the cross! O shameful, O tormenting, O most accursed manner of death! Is it possible to conceive the grace of this amazing humiliation, this infinite condescension? I would even call it incredible condescension, but that happily it carries upon it this great truth, That God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. Apply it therefore, O sinner! and see how it magnifies the love of God. Was all this abasement, all this shame, all this suffering for me? and shall I not glory in the cross? Shall I even glory in any thing but the cross? As it magnifies the divine power, as it magnifies the divine mercy, so it magnifies the sinner. Is it any less to our honor than to his shame? We can never appear so valuable as when our salvation is purchased by our Saviour's dying groans.

3. In the last place, The real Christian has reason to glory in the cross, for its efficacy as a principle of sanctification. This is plainly implied in the clause immediately following the text: for "by it the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The apostle certainly has this also in view, when he celebrates the doctrine of the cross as the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation. And indeed to every believer the cross, considered only as the truth, and as operating by faith on the understanding and heart, is such an argument to duty, as there is not another in the whole compass of human knowledge that may once be compared to it. Does any thing set in so strong a light the obligation of God's most holy law? Does any thing set in so strong a light the infinite evil of sin? the infinite

holiness of God? the infinite danger of sin? Must not the reflection of every believer be, "Who can stand before this Holy Lord God? If such things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

But what is the great source, evidence, sum, and perfection of sanctification? Is it not the love of God? And how shall this be produced? how shall it be preserved and improved, in so effectual a manner, as by believing views of the cross of Christ, the most tender and costly expression of his love to us? 1 John 4:19. "We love him; because he first loved us." How does this fill the Christian with indignation against sin, which he must consider as "crucifying him to himself afresh!" &c. How does it endear to him his Saviour's commands! how does it inspire him with zeal in doing his will, and fortitude in suffering for his cause! Will any thing so effectually determine us to love our fellow-creatures, as his command and example? Will any thing so effectually persuade us to discharge the most important duties to others, I mean, seeking their eternal welfare, as the value of a precious soul estimated by the cross? Will any thing so effectually dispose us to the most difficult duties to others, I mean meekness, patience and forgiveness, as the great debt cancelled to us by his sufferings on the cross? Is it possible that his own words, in that awful season, can ever be forgotten, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do?" I cannot at present enlarge further on these views; but well might the apostle, and well may every Christian, glory in his Master's cross, for the unspeakable benefit he receives from it: For, 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 proceed now to make some practical application of what hath been said. And,

1. From what hath been said, you may learn what is the great and leading doctrine of the gospel, the sum and substance of the truth as it is in Jesus, viz. the doctrine of the cross, or Christ suffering the wrath of God, to redeem us from hell. This was the great design

formed in the councils of peace, early intimated in the first promise, gradually unfolded in after ages, and completely manifested in the fulness of time. The Saviour was the subject of the ancient promises, the hope of the ancient patriarchs, the substance of the New-Testament dispensation, and the burden of the everlasting gospel. He faith of himself, Rev. 1:8, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, faith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." On his glorious character, and precious blood, the inspired apostles delighted to dwell. Did they then mistake their message? did they mislead their hearers? No; it was, and it shall ever remain an unchangeable truth, what the apostle declares, 1 Cor. 3:2. "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

On this foundation, every thing that is agreeable to the will of God, in doctrine or practice, must be built. Every other part of the word of God derives light and beauty from the cross; every other part of the word of God derives force and meaning from the cross; every other part of the word of God derives life and efficacy from the cross. Let us therefore remember its influence and value, and never lose view of it. Let us despise the ignorant reproaches of those who slander it as unfavorable to moral virtue. I dare not say indeed, that it is very favorable to an ostentatious parade of human merit; but I am sure it is the only way of producing self-denied obedience to the will of God.

2. From what hath been said, you may see the guilt and danger of the enemies of the cross, and at the same time may learn who they are who deserve this character. They may be divided into two distinct classes: 1. Those who are enemies in principle to the cross, who have no sense of their own unworthiness, of the evil of sin, or the necessity of an atonement. Such may sometimes retain the name of Christians, and contend that they ought to retain it, while they oppose, with the utmost virulence and malice, its most important and fundamental truth. I cannot think, without horror, on the guilt and ingratitude of all such persons, and the fearful punishment which they shall meet with at last, when this despised Saviour "shall come in the clouds,

and every eye shall see him." 2. They are also enemies to this truth who are governed in temper and practice by a spirit directly opposite to that of the cross. The shame and reproach which the cross implied are not sufficiently attended to, nor the humility and self-denial necessary to all those who would be the followers of a crucified master. Are there not many who will have no religion but what will be pliable, and accommodate itself to the maxims of the world? Loaded with prudence, they are unwilling to break measures, either with the good or the bad. Dazzled with human pomp, they despise every thing in religion, but what, either in substance or circumstances, is grateful to human pride. Fashionable practices, however dangerous or vicious, they have not courage to oppose. It were well, if they would consider the ancient form of confession at baptism. Do you renounce the devil, and all his works? I do. Do you renounce the world, its pomps, its pleasures, and its vanities? I do. And this was not merely Heathenish idolatry, and ceremonies of false worship, but that indulgence of vanity, and that gratification of appetite, in which worldly men, in every age, place their supreme delight.

3. What hath been said may serve for the support and consolation of real believers, under the trials to which they are exposed in the present state. It is melancholy to think, how frequently, and how easily, we are unhinged by distress what discontent and impatience we are apt to discover under suffering. Alas! my brethren, are you not ashamed of impatience, when you consider the unparalleled sufferings of your Redeemer in your room? A believing view of the Saviour's cross, one would think, might stop every mouth, and compose every murmuring thought. Has he suffered so much for us? and shall we refuse to suffer from him, and for him? His sufferings should make us patient, as they shew us the evil of sin, and what we have deserved. Did we really deserve avenging wrath? and shall we dare to complain of fatherly correction? Did he suffer with patience who did no sin? and shall we complain who are punished less than our iniquities deserve? His sufferings should teach us patience, because they take away the bitterness and malignity of our

sufferings, and turn them from a poison to a medicine: he hath exhausted, if I may speak so, the whole wrath of God, and lest nothing for us but what is highly salutary. And as he hath changed the nature of all the sufferings of life, he hath taken away the sting of death, which is the end of all our suffering. That blood which speaks peace to the wounded spirit, should be a healing balm to the wounded body.

But of all the different kinds of suffering, if we pretend to glory in the cross, we ought to be least afraid of the reproach thrown upon us for adherence to our duty. To glory in the cross, is indeed to glory in shame. The form of expression used with regard to Peter and John, Acts 5:41, is very remarkable. They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. It would greatly tend to fortify us against this trial, if we would lay up in our hearts what hath been said on the doctrine of the cross. If it is impossible to avoid it, we must needs sit down composedly under it. And if our attachment to our great master is what it ought to be, we will cheerfully follow him even without the camp, bearing his reproach.

4. In the last place, By what hath been said, you may try your title to sit down at the Lord's table, and learn your employment there. This ordinance is a sensible memorial of our Redeemer's cross and passion. It was on the cross that his body was broken, and his bloodshed, for you. Are you then to commemorate it? You cannot do so, either in an acceptable or profitable manner, unless you can join the apostle in glorying in it. Have you seen any thing of the excellence and amiableness of this despised object? Nothing so tasteless and insipid to the proud and self-righteous; nothing so delightful and refreshing to the broken in heart. Have you seen any thing of the glory of the true God, in the sufferings of Christ? and can you say with the apostle Paul, Heb. 2:10. "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." Do you see the glory of infinite mercy in the cross? and

are your hearts drawn with the cords of love to him who "loved you, and gave himself for you?" Have you experienced the sanctifying influence of the cross? are your corruptions weakened and mortified by looking upon it? Is it your unfeigned desire, that they may be finally destroyed by it?

To draw to a conclusion of the subject: I cannot point out your duty to you in a manner more suited to this day's employment, or more proper for your after security and comfort, than to turn the three reasons for glorying in the cross into the form of exhortations. — I beseech you, my beloved hearers, contemplate the glory of God in the cross of Christ. See him, infinite in power, infinite in wisdom, infinite in holiness. You may see a faint emblem of his glory in the book of nature; but you can only see his transcendent majesty in the book of God. And may "he who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ!"—Adore and apply the riches of divine grace. Let the convinced, fearful, trembling sinner, fly to this atoning blood, rest his hope upon it, and be secure.—And neglect not to use the cross of Christ for mortifying your corruptions. Let your views of it now be lively and strong, and carry the same impression away, to be your great preservative from daily temptation. Make no image of the cross in your houses; but let the remembrance of it be ever on your hearts. One lively view of this great object will cool the flames of unclean lust: one lively view of this great object will make the unjust man quit his hold: one lively view of this tremendous object will make the angry man drop his weapon: nay, one look of mercy from a dying Saviour will make even the covetous man open his heart. In one word, believing views of the cross of Christ will unite the Christian more and more to a reconciled God, will make his presence comfortable, his worship delightful, and excite a humble longing for that time when we shall see him no more through the help of these elements, but as he is in himself, exalted on his throne, where his worship and service are everlasting.

THE WORLD CRUCIFIED BY THE CROSS OF CHRIST

SERMON 9

— By whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.
- GALATIANS 6:14. last clause

THE character of a servant of God is sometimes described in scripture by particular dispositions or instances of obedience, and sometimes by a general view of the spirit that runs through the whole of his temper and carriage. Each of these ways has its own advantage and use. Each of them is to be found in its proper order in the holy scriptures, and stands there as a proof of their fulness and perfection. The whole of this passage, but particularly the last clause, upon which I am now to insist, is of the general kind, and, in the apostle's own example, gives us a very comprehensive view of what ought to be the temper and disposition of every real Christian; "By whom," that is, by Christ crucified, or, "by which," that is to say, by the cross of Christ, "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

This description will serve, if carefully attended to, as a trial and touchstone of sincerity: and, in particular, will serve to distinguish real religion from some of its most deceitful and plausible counterfeits. At the same time, it will furnish the sincere Christian with very important directions for his preservation and improvement, by pointing out the most fatal and dangerous rocks of temptation, which it is his interest to avoid. Having explained the words in my discourse upon the former part of the verse, I now only

observe, that the proposition contained in them is "That the world is crucified to the believer, and he to the world, by the cross of Christ." This naturally resolves itself into two parts, which I propose to consider distinctly, viz.

I. What is the import of a believer's being crucified to the world, and the world to him.

II. What influence the cross of Christ hath in producing this effect. Having done this, I will,

III. Make a practical improvement of the subject.

I. FIRST, then, we are to consider the import of a believer's being crucified to the world, and the world to him. This seems to deserve the greater attention, that through the whole New Testament, there is a direct opposition stated between the world and the disciples of Christ; an opposition of character, an opposition of interest, and a continual conflict in consequence of both; John 15:18, 19. "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." In this passage the world seems to be taken chiefly for the men of the world, or its inhabitants. It is, however, taken in a more extensive sense in the two following: 1 John 2:15. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 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." Here, no doubt, it signifies not only men, and our hopes or fears from them, but every thing in the present life that may be the object of carnal affection, of sinful or undutiful attachment.

The expression in the text, "The world is crucified to me" is figurative; but abundantly plain, and exceedingly strong. It might be considered very extensively, and several things upon it may probably

afterwards occur. Let it suffice at present to make two observations.

1. This intimates the sincerity and heartiness of the believer's opposition to the world. It must be remembered, that crucifixion was a death the most painful and disgraceful that could possibly be inflicted. When this image therefore, is borrowed, and applied to the believer's separation from the world, it implies not only an indifference to it, but the most sovereign contempt of it, from the deepest and strongest conviction of its absolute vanity. Nay, as no persons were crucified, but who were hated as well as despised by their judges, to be crucified to the world, implies an unfeigned abhorrence of its pollution, and a dread of being enslaved by it.

2. The same thing intimates the perpetuity and fixedness of the Christian's opposition to the world. Those who were crucified were devoted to destruction, when they were nailed to the tree; they were not only tormented for a season, but fixed there till death concluded the scene: so I apprehend the apostle intended to signify, by this expression, his final separation from the world, without the least hope or desire of ever returning to it.

After taking this short and general view of the import of the expression, it will be necessary more distinctly and fully to consider what is implied in being crucified to the world. This ought to be done with the greater care, that it is at once an important and difficult duty. To be truly crucified to the world, I am afraid is exceeding rare; and even those who are so in sincerity, upon the whole, are far from being so in the degree that they ought to be. The punishment of crucifixion is a strong image, in one particular, of the believer's character. Though it was certain death, it was slow and lingering; so worldliness, in many persons, continues long vigorous, and dies very slowly.

There is another reason for treating this subject with care, that men are very apt to consider such expressions as extravagant, and carrying matters an unreasonable length. Mistaking the nature of the duty, they are neither concerned themselves to practise it, nor will

they allow that any body else does so in reality. I will therefore endeavor to shew you, 1. What is not implied in crucifying the world; 2. Wherein it immediately and properly consists.

On the first of these, I beg your attention to the following particulars.

1. The world's being crucified to us, does not imply that there is any evil in the natural world, considered in itself, and as the work of God. The whole frame of nature, as it was produced and is preserved by God, and the whole course of Providence, as conducted by him, are perfectly faultless. We may even say more, the creation carries on it such an image of its Maker, as the materials are able to bear. In this view, it is our duty to look upon the world with reverence, and adore the glory of God in all its parts, from the highest to the lowest. The evil arises wholly from ourselves, and our disposition to sin. When we say a corrupt enticing deceitful world, it is but another way of speaking for the corruption of the human heart.

2. It does not imply that we should undervalue or be insensible of present mercies. Every gift of God is good, if it be received with thankfulness, and used with sobriety. The more the world is crucified as it ought to be, the more we will discern the goodness of God, even in common mercies. It is matter of daily experience, and well worthy of observation, that those who idolize the world most, as an object of sinful desire, do usually despise the world most, as the subject or ground of thankfulness to God. A voluptuous, ambitious, or envious person, who pursues the world with eagerness, and never thinks he has enough, is commonly discontented and unthankful. His eyes are so wistfully fixed on what he wants, that he neither remembers nor values what he already has. On the contrary, the self-denied and mortified Christian, though despising the world as an object of pursuit, is yet deeply sensible of the kindness of Providence, in his daily preservation, or liberal provision. A mind formed upon the principles of the gospel, may look down with contempt upon the lustre of a throne, and yet know the value, and feel a sense of gratitude in the possession of a crumb.

3. It doth not imply that the world is useless to a believer, even with regard to his spiritual benefit. It is not only certain that he may have, but that he will have, the sanctified improvement of every state: 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." The same mercies which make a wicked man insolent, make a good man thankful. They also extend his power of doing good to others. You may see, by our Saviour's advice, how the world may be profitably employed: Luke 16:9. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." See also the account of his procedure at the great day, Matth. 25:34.–36. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

4. It does not imply that we ought to retire from the employment or business of the world altogether. Though there is a manifest danger in being too much involved in business, as well as too much devoted to pleasure; it is an error, on the other hand, to place religion in voluntary poverty, in monkish austerity, or uncommanded maceration of the body. This is not doing, but deserting our duty: it is not crucifying the world, but going out of it; it is not overcoming the world, but flying from it.

But let us now consider, directly and positively, what is implied in the world's being crucified to us, and we to the world. And that the after illustrations may be at once more intelligible and more convincing, it will not be improper to begin by saying, in general, that we must be crucified to the world in those respects in which man, at his first apostasy, fell away to the world from God. While man continued in innocence, the world, which in itself is without stain, was never put to any but a sacred use. It was then a theatre of

divine glory, as indeed it is still; but not a scene of human guilt, as it is now. It was intended for a place of trial, however, in which man was left to the freedom of his own will; and therefore it was capable of being abused. Thence came that sacrilegious attachment to the world, from which it is so much our interest to be effectually delivered. But to explain this matter a little more at large, the world must be crucified to the believer in the following respects; which, though I confess they all come at last to the same thing, yet I think it is proper and necessary to mention distinctly.

1. As it is the subject and occasion of, or a temptation to sin. It is very plain, that however faultless and excellent the whole works of nature and providence are in themselves, from the corruption of our nature they become the food of carnal affection, the fuel of concupiscence. The very liberality of Providence, and rich provision made for the supply of our wants and the gratification of our appetites, becomes a temptation to gross sensuality, and criminal indulgence. This is well described by the apostle John, 1 Ep. 2:16, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." In this view, we ought to hold it in the utmost abhorrence. But how is this to be done? By seriously considering the unhappy and powerful influence it hath in soliciting us to evil. Instead of being taken with its charms, we ought to dread their force, we ought to be sensible how unequal we are to the conflict, and how unable, without superior strength, to keep ourselves from its pollution.

When we see persons in honor and power, and are tempted to envy their distinguished rank in life, we ought to consider how naturally exaltation tends to intoxicate the mind, how few are able to bear honor or reputation with humility, and how little reason we have to confide in our own steadiness and resolution. When we see the splendor of a rich and affluent state, we ought to consider the strong temptation which commonly arises from riches, to contempt of God, oppression of others, sensuality of temper and forgetfulness of eternity. Suffer me, on this subject, to make every man his own

reprover. How few are there in a rich and affluent state, whose conduct in the application of riches you can wholly approve! Are you not constantly blaming them for covetousness and oppression on the one hand, or prodigality on the other? How is it, then, that you entertain no suspicion that you yourselves would be led astray by the same means? Is not this a strange infatuation, and blindness to divine truth, even where every word of the Spirit of God is ratified by daily experience?

When we see and are tempted to envy the votaries of pleasure, those who live delicately and fare sumptuously every day, we ought to consider what a dangerous ensnaring thing appetite is, how it steals upon men insensibly, and at last enslaves them absolutely; how hard it is for the most cautious to set proper bounds to it, as well as how dreadful and fatal the excessive indulgence of it. To crucify the world then, as a temptation to sin, is not to consider its charms by themselves, but always in connexion with their probable effects. This seems to have suggested the wise and well-conceived prayer of the prophet Agur, Prov. 30:7, 8, 9. "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." On the same thing is founded the advice of Solomon, with regard to the sin of sensuality: Prov. 23:31. "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright."

2. The world must be crucified to the believer, as it would be his supreme felicity and chief good. This is no otherwise to be distinguished from the former consideration, than as the general course and stream of our affections differs from particular acts of transgression. It is very necessary, however, to attend to it; for there are many under the habitual government of a worldly mind, who do not think themselves, and who perhaps are not justly chargeable with gross acts of irregularity and excess. I bleed inwardly to think, how

many of the ordinary professors of religion are here included. How many are there, who, if conscience would be faithful, must confess, that the favor of God, his worship, his sabbaths, his people, are not their supreme delight! Yet that this is essential to real religion, or rather is the substance of all true religion, I think we have repeated assurances in the holy scriptures. It is plain from the language of the Psalmist, Psal. 73:25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." It is plain from the sum of the moral law, Luke 10:27. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself;" as also from that trying passage, Matth. 10:37. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."

Take heed then, my brethren, to this important truth. If the world would keep its distance, so to speak, it might be esteemed, and used, in its proper place, and to its proper end; but if it will needs pretend to be what it is not, and to promise what it cannot give, we must take it for a deceiver, and hold it in detestation. Your Maker formed you for his own glory: He must be the rest and consolation of your souls, or they never shall have rest; he must be their happiness, or they shall be miserable for ever. But if the world would seem to be your home, if it promiseth you content and satisfaction, if the possession of it is the ultimate end at which you aspire, so that you do not heartily, and with affection, look any further, it is usurping its Creator's throne; and therefore down with the idol, and tread it in the dust.

Is not this the great question with regard to us all, Whether the objects of faith, or of sense, things present or things to come, God or the world, has the possession of our hearts? A believer who will thankfully receive and use the blessings of a present world for their proper end, will notwithstanding hold it, and all its possessions, in the highest degree of contempt, when compared with the one thing needful. He will say, from the bottom of his heart, in the presence of

an all-seeing God, "Lord, let me never have my portion in this world only. The glory of a throne, the most inexhaustible mines of gold and silver, without thy favor, I would not only despise, but abhor."

Whence arises this disposition in the believer? From a conviction of the unsatisfying nature of all earthly enjoyments; from an inward persuasion of this truth, That "the world, in its best state, is altogether vanity;" from a sense of the infinite disproportion between the possession of the creature, and the favor of the Creator; but, above all, from a deep and abiding conviction of the precariousness and uncertainty of all earthly things. However undeniable it is, that the fashion of this world passeth away, few there are who live under the strong and lively practical impression of it. The deceived hearts of sinners believe the contrary. How well are they described by the Psalmist, Psal. 49:11, 12, 13. "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honor, abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve of their sayings!" One would think, nothing more should be necessary to crucify the world, than to reflect upon the many descriptions given us in the word of God of its uncertain duration; Psal. 37:35, 36. "I have seen the wicked in great power; and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Isa. 40:6. "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." I shall only add our Lord's description of the sudden call of a worldly man to death and judgment; Luke 12:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits, and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy

soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

3. The world must be crucified, as it pretends to be necessary to our felicity. This is chiefly directed against those who love the world to excess, though at the same time they at least pretend to love God more. They seem to have chosen God as their supreme; but it does not appear, that they have chosen him as their sufficient portion. The world still bulks so much in their eye, that they know no happiness or comfort of which it makes not a part. They see, or think they see, the insufficiency of the world, without the favor of God, as a refuge when the world fails; but they can no more rest satisfied in God without the world, than in the world without God. I have no doubt you will be sensible there are many amongst us in this condition: nay, I am afraid there will be not a few within themselves secretly justifying this character and conduct. They will say, 'Is it possible to deny that the world is necessary to us while we continue here? is it not so to you as well as to us? and therefore why should it not be regarded in this light?'

To all such I answer, The world, in a certain proportion, is indeed necessary to us; but this proportion is not to be ascertained by us. It must be left to the disposal of infinite wisdom, without any conditions. When there is a divorce or separation between the believer and the world, it is entire and complete, without reserve or limitation. He gives up all as the object of carnal affection, that he may receive again, for a nobler purpose, that measure which seems necessary to the sanctified will of God. He is just in the situation of a man who, having contracted obligations which he is unable to discharge, has surrendered his all into the hands of another; and has no further use of what was formerly his own, than as much, or as long as the new proprietor shall think fit. I know no image that more properly represents the condition of the believer: with this difference, that in human affairs the change is usually for the worse;

but in spiritual things, the renunciation is an infinite advantage, and the seeming loss an unspeakable gain.

Think not, my brethren, that this is carrying matters to excess. It is what our Saviour expressly requires of all that would embrace his doctrine: Luke 9:23. "And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." It is indeed one of the hard sayings of the gospel. You have heard it sometimes said, that every Christian must be a martyr in resolution; and doubtless the world is not thoroughly crucified, unless our attachment to every worldly enjoyment, without exception, be so broken, that we are ready to resign it whenever God, in his Providence, shall see fit to demand it. We have an excellent lesson to this purpose, in the trial to which our Saviour put the young man in the gospel, with a decent and regular profession: Matth. 19:21, 22. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." To crucify the world, then, is to count no worldly enjoyment whatever necessary, either to our present comfort, or everlasting happiness, but to put an absolute and unshaken confidence in the wisdom and goodness of a reconciled God. This is excellently expressed by the prophet Habakkuk, chap. 3:17, 18. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olives 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."

4. In the last place, The world must be crucified, as it is a separate and independent good, without its due relation to God. God himself alone is independent. All other things stand in an inseparable relation to him, and should be used in subserviency to his honor: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." Every rational creature, who continues in, or return to his duty, discerns this relation, and maintains this subserviency. It was the first

idolatry and sacrilege, to break the ties that join the Maker to his works, and love the creatures for its own sake. But he that is crucified to the world, will consider every earthly enjoyment as the gift of God: he will confess the goodness of God in bestowing it, and will obey the command of God in the use and application of it. That this is the duty of a Christian, is plain from the general strain of the holy Scriptures; and particularly from this express and positive declaration, 1 Cor. 10:31. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The world, then, as a separate independent good, or as a mere gratification of carnal desire, is to be crucified. It was not given us for so low a purpose as the indulgence of appetite, but for nobler ends. But perhaps it will be necessary to observe, that some of the mystic writers have raised a variety of improper questions on this subject. Some have affirmed the unlawfulness of tasting any of the sweetness of created enjoyments more than was barely necessary for subsistence. It is easy to see, that it must be very hard, in many such cases, to fix the bounds between necessity and convenience, use and pleasure: hence the conscience is involved in unspeakable and endless perplexity. Upon this I would observe, that the general reference of all things, even common actions, to the glory of God, is sufficiently and clearly established upon the passage of scripture above mentioned. But in order to do this in the most profitable manner, some subordinate ends also must be considered: and therefore, not only what is necessary to health and comfort must be used with this view, but the enjoyment of many of the creatures may be allowed as the fruits of divine bounty, and tending to inspire an habitual cheerfulness and gratitude to God.

I shall conclude with giving you these two general rules to be observed in the enjoyment of outward mercies.

1. That we have greater reason to guard against sins of excess and intemperance than of abstinence. The first are unspeakably more common and prevalent than the other: they always have been so, and

are always likely to be so. If some few have gone into superstition, by extraordinary mortification, thousands have been betrayed into sin, and at last brought to perdition, by the charms of a sensual life.

2. If any are in danger of erring on the opposite side, the way to discover when we are going wrong, is to consider, whether the mortification renders us more spiritual, and more active, or, by excess of scrupulosity, we are consuming our time, and neglecting our duty. The deceits of Satan are very subtle: he fills some persons with so many doubts upon every particular, that they are like one who makes little progress in his journey, from continual uncertainty, and frequent stopping to enquire the way. It is certainly far better to carry on the general ends of God's glory, and point to this as our ultimate purpose, than every now and then to entangle and embarrass ourselves with questions of little moment.

Before proceeding to the second general head, I shall finish this discourse by a few observations for the improvement of what hath been already said. And,

1. From what hath been said upon this subject, you may learn the great importance of the duty; that it is the distinguishing character of a real Christian, to be crucified to the world, and the world to him. Alas! how many deceive themselves in this particular! How many satisfy themselves with a name to live, when they are dead; with a form of godliness, while they deny the power thereof! How many, with a decent and regular outward profession, are yet wholly devoted to the world! Their meditation dwells upon it; their affections centre in it; their care is bestowed upon it; and their delights entirely flow from it. Let it be considered, that there is nothing more contrary to true religion. The world, or created good, is the great competitor with God for the heart. All the honor and esteem that is given to it is taken from God. All the service and obedience that is bestowed upon it is refused to God. Call to mind some of the passages of scripture referred to in the preceding discourse; particularly the following: 1 John 2:15. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the

world, if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

My dear brethren, there are many who would look with contempt or indignation on those who are guilty of particular scandalous and disgraceful sins, for example, on a profane swearer, drunkard, or unclean person, while yet they themselves are as much wedded to the world, and have as great an inward aversion at the practice of piety, and the power of the spiritual life, as any of them all. Other sins are but the body or the members: worldliness is the soul and spirit of irreligion. Other sins are but the acts or expressions, worldliness the inward principle that gives them life.

How important a part this is of the Christian character, will plainly appear from these two considerations: 1. Worldliness may be itself the principle which restrains men from many other sins. A desire of reputation, a delight in the esteem of others, is often the cause of outward decency; nay, it is not seldom the cause of apparent zeal and eminent hypocrisy. 2. There may be as great a degree of worldliness with, as without a profession of piety. Men may retain a form of godliness chiefly to set themselves free from the reproofs of conscience, that their present enjoyments may have the higher relish. Nay, I cannot help observing, that though covetousness is one of the gross sins mentioned in scripture, as entirely subversive of religion, there is scarcely any sin that can be carried to such a degree, without casting off the profession of it.—Hence it plainly appears how important a part of the character of a real Christian it is to be crucified to the world. Without this the soundest principles, and the strictest profession, will avail nothing; for they that are "Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts."

2. From what hath been said you may see, not only the importance, but the great extent of the duty. The world itself, and all that is therein, in the sense formerly explained, must be crucified. That you may, in some measure, conceive the extent of this, consider the common division of worldly enjoyments, viz. riches, honors and

pleasures. All these, without exception, and all these equally, must be denied by the Christian. You shall often see, that the covetous man will despise and hate the prodigal, and even express the greatest zeal against riot and extravagance of every kind. The sensualist, on the other hand, despises the miser, as glued to the world, and a slave to the most sordid of all human passions. And the ambitious man, eager in the pursuit of honor and dignity, vainly conceives himself superior to both. But they are all equally opposite to, and inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. If your supreme delight, if your portion and happiness is here, it is of little consequence whether your hearts are set upon "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life." It is with the soul as with the body: there are many different diseases taking place in different parts, and shewing themselves by different symptoms, but which will equally end in death as their effect.

3. You may hence learn the difficulty of the duty; to be crucified to the world, and yet to live in the world; to be crucified to the world, and yet to possess the world; to be crucified to the world, and yet to have a great part of our thoughts and love necessarily employed about the world. The temptation is ever present, and, through the corruption and treachery of our own hearts, fatally strong. Ought we not hence to infer the absolute necessity of continual vigilance, and continual prayer? continual vigilance in our duty, and jealous of every temptation that may be in danger of diverting us from it? continual prayer to the Father of lights, in the name of Christ, for supernatural strength? Every exercised Christian knows from experience the danger of the world as an enemy, and how hard it is to keep such clear views of the things of eternity, as to be preserved from an undue and sinful attachment to the things of time. The world is dangerous even to those who maintain an habitual jealousy of it, and hold it as an enemy: how much more must it be ruinous and fatal to those who love and prosecute it as the object of their chief desire.

4. I shall now conclude, by improving this subject for the purpose of self-examination. And surely no serious hearer will be backward to

bring himself to the trial. My beloved hearers I speak to all of every rank, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, who profess to bear the name of Christians: Are you, or are you not, crucified to the world, and the world to you? All real believers are so. If you are not, your riches or your poverty, your honor or your shame, your regular behavior, or even your zeal for public duties, will avail you nothing in the day of Christ's appearance. I am sensible, that the decision of the question, Whether you are, or are not, crucified to the world? may often be attended with no little difficulty. I will therefore, as far as I am able, endeavor to assist you in the trial. For which purpose, I beg your attention to the following observations:

1. You are crucified to the world, if you do not habitually allow your thoughts to dwell upon it, and your desires to run out after it. The cross was an abhorred object, which no body could look upon with delight.—Worldliness is often as much discovered by our desires after what we have not, as by the use or employment of what we have. There are many whose great delight seems to arise from the fond expectations they entertain of worldly happiness to come: nay, there are many who are so slothful as not to pursue the world, and yet feed themselves with the very imagination of it. Their thoughts, and even their language, constantly runs upon idle fancies, and romantic suppositions of the happiness they should enjoy, were they in such or such a state. Now, my brethren, he that is crucified to the world will make conscience of restraining these irregular desires; and, from a deep conviction of the vanity of the world, will find little pleasure in the contemplation of it.

2. Your being crucified to the world will appear in the moderation of your delight and complacency in what you possess of it. You will not, if I may speak so, give yourselves up to it, but will always qualify the enjoyment of it by a reflection upon its vanity in itself, and its short duration as to any connexion we shall have with it. We are ready to pity the weakness of children, when we see them apply themselves with so much eagerness to trifles, and so greatly delighted with their

amusements and enjoyments. A parent, looking on them when hotly engaged at play, will be at once pleased to see them happy, and at the same time filled with a tender commiseration of their want of reflection. Something of the same view one crucified to the world has of all earthly enjoyments. Many a grown person will smile at the play of children, while he himself is perhaps as eagerly engaged in the schemes of ambition, in political struggles, and contests for power; which are often as great trifles as the play-things of children, only that they are the play-things of men.

3. You are crucified to the world if you have low hopes and expectations from it. It is hope that stirs us up chiefly to action in all our pursuits. And so long as we entertain high thoughts of what the world will afford us in some after-season, we are not crucified to it. There is a common proverbial saying, "If it were not for hope, the heart would break:" just so, when our hopes from the world are destroyed, the heart of the old man is broken. We are exceeding ready to think, that were such or such a difficulty or uneasiness removed, could we obtain such or such an advantage in view, we would be happy. But there is always a deception at bottom. We vainly think, that happiness arises from the creature; but he that is crucified to the world judges, by past experience, that it hath little comfort to give; and therefore he will place but little dependance upon it.

4. He is crucified to the world who hath truly subdued all invidious dispositions towards the possession of it. There are many who seem to have little comfort from their own enjoyments; but there is reason to fear, that it arises not so much from self-denial, as from discontent. The world may be said to be crucified to them, but they are not crucified to the world. It is by this that worldliness expresses itself chiefly in the lower rank of life. Those who are obliged to live moderately and hardly, from mere penury, often shew, by their carriage and language, that they have as much sensuality in their hearts, as those who indulge their irregular desires to the greatest excess. But he that is crucified to the world, not only sees all its pomp and splendor in others without repining, but will often bestow a

thought of compassion upon the great, for the ensnaring circumstances in which they are placed with regard to their souls. And surely they are of all others most to be pitied. May the Lord, in mercy, convince them of their danger; and, in the mean time, preserve his own people from being led astray by their influence and example.

THE WORLD CRUCIFIED BY THE CROSS OF CHRIST

SERMON 10

— By whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.
- GALATIANS 6:14. last clause

I NOW proceed to the second thing proposed, which was, To show the influence of the cross of Christ in crucifying the world. This, my brethren, deserves your most serious attention, as pointing you to the great and vital principle of the Christian's sanctification, the true and only source of spiritual comfort and peace. The cross of Christ is always considered in the apostolic writings as an object of the highest dignity and merit; and the believer is there taught to speak of it in expressions of the warmest attachment and regard. Witness the words of the text itself, in the preceding clause: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." We may perhaps be easily induced, in a time of external quietness and peace to adopt this sentiment as an opinion, or to use it as a form; but happy, and only happy, those in whom it dwells as an ever present truth, and operates as a daily governing principle!

Taking the subject in great latitude, I might observe, that the cross of Christ being the price paid for the blessings of salvation in general, every illuminating discovery in the mind, and every gracious affection in the heart, which are the work of the divine Spirit, may be justly ascribed to it. But I propose, at this time, to consider it singly as an object of faith, and to shew how the firm persuasion and frequent recollection of this great truth tends to crucify the world to us, and us to the world; the rather, that we find elsewhere our victory over the world ascribed to faith, and this faith particularly terminating on the Son of God: 1 John 5:4, 5. "For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" For the further illustration of this subject, then, let us observe,

1. That the cross of Christ crucifies the world, as it gives us an immediate and striking view of the mortality of our nature, as well as the original and general cause of this mortality. The vanity of created things is in nothing more manifest, than in their precarious nature, particularly our own tendency to the dust, by which all earthly relations shall be speedily and entirely dissolved. In this view, indeed, you may say, that the death of any other person, sickness, and all its attending symptoms, or a funeral, with its mournful solemnities, tends to crucify the world: and most certainly they do. But there is something still more in the cross of Christ. There we see, not only the death of our nature but the death of the Son of God in our room. There we are carried back to a view of the great cause of the universal reign of the king of terrors, sin. Sin first brought death into the world; and this made it necessary that Christ "should taste of death for every man," that we might be restored to spiritual life. Mortality, therefore, is written in the most legible characters on the cross of Christ. Nay, the curse of creation itself is written upon the cross of Christ. We cannot look upon it, therefore, in a serious manner, without being deeply affected with the doom which we ourselves have still to undergo: "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." It is impossible to avoid knowing that we must die; but those

only discover the moment of this truth, who see its procuring cause. Those only have just and abiding impressions of the speedy approach of natural death, who are filled with concern for their own deliverance from the power of the second death.

2. The cross of Christ crucifies the world to a believer, as it shews him how little he deserves at the hand of God. Believers on the cross of Christ see him standing in their room, and bearing the wrath of an offended God, which was their due. When this is not only professed with the mouth, but received into the heart, it gives a deep conviction of the evil of sin, and lays the sinner prostrate in humility and self-abasement. Must not this greatly weaken and mortify all worldly affection, which takes its rise from pride and self-sufficiency? It is, if I may speak so, a sort of claim and demand upon Providence, as if something were due to us. Worldly persons, in prosperity, not only cleave to the world as their portion, but may be said to assert their title to it as their property. The same inward disposition may be discovered by their carriage in the opposite state. When their schemes are broken, and their hopes blasted, by repeated disappointments, or when their possessions are taken from them by unexpected strokes, they resist and rebel with impatience and indignation, as if some person had done them wrong.

But when men are sensible that they deserve nothing at the hand of God, this mortifies their earthly desires, and puts their complaints to silence. See how Job expresses himself after all his calamities, as sensible that he had lost nothing of his own, chapter 1:21. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Let me speak of this, my brethren, as a gracious disposition, which, alas! is too often but weak, yet surely hath place in the heart of every child of God. Let me suppose him convinced, that he is unworthy of the least of all God's mercies; will he not keep his possessions the more loosely, and will he not quit his hold the more easily? But where shall we learn real self-abasement so well as from the cross? where shall we learn how little we deserve that is

good, so well as in that place which shews we have indeed deserved every thing that is evil? where shall we learn to make moderate demands of created mercies, but where we see, that not only the creature, but life itself, was forfeited by our guilt? Let me suppose a condemned criminal carried, with many others, to a scaffold, there receiving a pardon, and witnessing, in the execution of others, what was the sentence of the law upon himself; will he, at this instant, think you, be impatient or thankful? Will he be jealous of the honor or respect paid to him? will he quarrel about the dignity or convenience of the place assigned to him? No surely. Lost in the consideration of the fate he has escaped, and the favor he has received, he will pay little regard to matters of small comparative importance. Just so the Christian, placed by faith at the foot of the cross, deeply moved by a discovery of the wrath of God, which he had deserved to suffer to eternity, and taking an immediate view of what his Redeemer suffered to deliver him from it, will be little thoughtful of the world, or any of its enjoyments.

3. The cross of Christ crucifies the world, by reversing all worldly maxims, and shewing of how light estimation worldly greatness is in the sight of God. So long as worldly maxims prevail, and worldly greatness is in high esteem, the cross of Christ is a despised object. But so soon as this object acquires bulk and value in the believer's eye, by being taken for what it really is, the world is disgraced in its turn. It pleased God, in his infinite wisdom, for the salvation of sinners, to send his own Son into the world, in the human nature: and as it was in itself a deep step of humiliation, for the Son of God to be found in fashion as a man; so, even in this assumed nature, he was attended with every circumstance of meanness and baseness. No retinue of illustrious ministers to serve him; no splendid or elegant apartment to receive him; but born of a mean woman, brought forth in a stable, and laid in a manger. Memorable and instructive history indeed! which shall never be forgotten where the gospel is preached, to the end of time.

Remember, my beloved hearers, though divine sweetness and benignity adorned his carriage, though divine power and energy attended his ministrations; yet poverty, slander, and contempt were his continual portion; so that he could say, in the language of the prophet, "Reproach hath broken my heart:" and again, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Some of the ancients have represented the Saviour as of extraordinary beauty of countenance and comeliness of form, founded perhaps on a literal interpretation of that expression in the Psalmist, Psalm 45:2. "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever." Without being positive, I shall only say, that this does not correspond much with the other circumstances of his incarnation, And indeed some have supposed directly the contrary, founding their opinion upon the language of the prophet Isaiah, chap. 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);" as also, chap. 53:2. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness: and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." Whatever be in this, it is beyond all question, that the whole course of his life, and particularly the remarkable conclusion of it, was one continued tract of suffering and mortification.

Does not this, Christians, bring a reproach upon worldly greatness, and stain the pride of all human glory? Does it not show how little it is esteemed of God, and how little it is an evidence of his acceptance or approbation? What an influence must this have upon the believer to crucify the world? How must it endear to him a mean and despised, and reconcile him to a suffering state? With what propriety does the Christian, when he is baptized in the name of Christ, renounce the world, its pomps, and its pleasures? Does not a single reflection on the despised state of our Redeemer, in the days of his flesh, make you patient under contempt, and extinguish the desire of applause? Have you any remaining uneasiness at seeing others

getting before you in the career of ambition, over-topping you with titles, eclipsing you with splendor? Do you not now see the propriety of the account given of the carriage of the apostles, when the world and they were at variance, Acts 5:41. "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Whether do you now envy the conqueror or the sufferer, the prince or the martyr? Where ever there is a real Christian raised to opulence by the will of God, or surrounded with ensigns of dignity and honor, will not this consideration fill him with deep humility and self-denial, and a holy jealousy, lest he should abuse his influence, or misapply his talents? The highest honor of real ability is usefulness, the brightest ornament of worldly greatness is self-abasement. All this shews, in the clearest manner, how the cross of Christ crucifies the world, by reversing every worldly maxim, and giving a new turn to the principles of honor and of shame. This leads me to observe,

4. In the last place, That the cross of Christ crucifies the world, by putting a quite different object of desire and affection in its room. Our limited powers can attend but to few things at once; and therefore, when any one acquires an interest in our affections, it must comparatively weaken or destroy the interest of others, especially those of an opposite or independent kind. Make a new bed to a river, and turn its stream in that direction, and it will immediately dry up its former channel. Now, the cross of Christ presents to us an object of infinite importance, peace and reconciliation with God here, and everlasting happiness in his presence hereafter. Can any worldly object be laid in the balance with these? What esteem or attention can it merit in comparison with these?

Whether we consider the end or the means of salvation, the cross of Christ tends to supplant the world, by improving our views of and increasing our affection to both. It shews the infinite importance of eternity and its consequences: and what more proper to deliver us from an undue attachment to the things of time? Eternity, by its

greatness, makes time itself to shrink into a point, and annihilates all those little temporary distinctions on which worldly affection entirely depends. What doth it signify to him that views eternity aright, whether he be for a few years in health or sickness, riches or poverty, on a throne or in a cottage? How immense, according to human measure, appears the difference between the possessions of some persons in the world and others! But of all the generations before us, who have now fallen asleep, how equal is the condition in this respect! The monarch and the slave, when laid in the dust, fill nearly the same space.

If we consider the means of religion, the cross of Christ applied by a convinced sinner, opens to him such a prospect of the infinite unmerited love of God, and of this astonishing expression of it, the death of his Son, as at once captivates the heart, and, if I may speak so, occupies so much room there, as leaves but little for any other object. How soon did it open the heart of the publican Zaccheus, and expel the spirit of covetousness and extortion! Luke 19:8. "And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." In how strong a manner does the apostle Paul express his comparative esteem of the cross of Christ! Phil. 3:7, 8. "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." This is the very same disposition with that which he expresses in the text; and it differs no otherwise from that of every Christian, than that it is probable he had a particular view to his calling as a minister and an apostle. Captivated with a sense of his Redeemer's love, filled with a view of the glory of his cross, and devoted to his service in the ministry of the gospel, he renounces all worldly prospects, and sets at defiance every thing that might distract his attention, or divide his care: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world."

III. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And as, upon this interesting subject, it is necessary that I should speak with all seriousness and fidelity, as well as at some length, so I most earnestly beseech you, as you regard your present peace, your comfort in the hour of death, and the everlasting happiness of your souls, to hear it with attention and application.

1. I must take the opportunity to reprove the sin, and shew the danger of those who are wedded to the world. I would willingly interrupt that comfort, and break that peace, which will end in perdition. For this purpose, and in order to make the reproof more distinct and effectual, I shall direct it separately to the three following characters.

(1) To those whose love of the world is so great, that they scruple not to use, occasionally at least, if not habitually, sinful means of getting or keeping possession of it. This indeed opens to us a very extensive field: it leads us to consider all the particular sins which an inordinate love of the world may produce, or increase. It is melancholy, my brethren, to think what contention and variance, nay what hatred and violence, even amongst the nearest relations, the division of worldly property occasions. What envy and grudging, what slander and evil-speaking, between person and person, between family and family! And even in the ordinary way of traffick, what art and dissimulation, what falsehood and equivocation, are to be found between man and man! But what I have chiefly in view is, to speak a few words to those who, in order to promote their worldly ends, have been guilty of direct dishonesty, and known injustice. How many are there whose consciences, if they would be faithful, must tell them, that they are now in possession of the fruits of unlawful gain! Oh! the blindness of those deluded unhappy souls! if an inordinate love of the world, however honestly acquired, is not only sinful, but destructive of your eternal interest; what shall become of those who have trodden under foot the laws both of God and man, in order to obtain it? If an excessive love of the most lawful, enjoyments, father

and mother, wife and children, is inconsistent with salvation; what must become of those who have loved and followed the gain of unrighteousness? what must become of those who, to clothe their backs or seed their bellies, or gratify their pride, have not scrupled to be guilty of breach of trust, or breach of promise, of open oppression, or secret fraud? If every poor worldling must stand trembling upon the brink of eternity, when he sees all his painted shadows ready to sink into everlasting darkness; what horror must seize upon the dying sinner, who is just about to surrender all his dear possessions to another, while his conscience is loaded with the guilt of fraud or perjury? and this he cannot leave behind him. Oh! my dear brethren, tremble at the thoughts or dishonest gain; loathe it; return it; shake your hands clear of it. It will imbitter your enjoyments: it will be a moth in your substance, a fire in your consciences on earth, and a hell to your souls after the earth itself, and all that is therein, is burnt up.

(2) I would address this reproof to those who are apparently more decent and regular; whom a sense of honor, or a desire of approbation of their fellow-creatures, preserves from grosser crimes, or whom perhaps natural conscience persuades to take up the outward and ordinary part of religion as a form. Many such persons are wedded to the world. Their thoughts are there, their delights are there, their hopes and expectations are only there. Bear with me, my brethren, in pressing this a little; and do not turn away, and refuse the charge. Worldliness is the reigning sin, and will be the eternal ruin of many persons of better rank, to whose conversation, a more liberal way of thinking, and a sense of decency, may give even an amiable appearance. I would beseech the attention of such persons to what shall now be said; not from any disrespect to their state and situation in civil life, God knoweth! but from fidelity to their souls. Consider, I pray you, the extreme danger of worldliness of mind. It is itself a great and aggravated sin, and is the parent of many others. It is a sin, where it hath dominion, inconsistent with salvation. Here the words of the Lord Jesus: "He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me." There are some forts

of sinners on whom you would look with contempt or abhorrence; but you may possibly deceive yourselves. The strict and regular, but covetous Pharisees, little thought that the publicans and sinners were nearer the kingdom of heaven than themselves. I do not say this to extenuate sin of any kind, but to guard you against the power of delusion and self-deceit. I know that none but the Searcher of hearts can make a certain judgment of the degree of depravity in different characters; and therefore I do not so much urge the comparison for your condemnation, as caution you against relying upon it for your justification. The unalterable rule, taken both from the law and the gospel, is this: Which of the two has the supreme commanding interest in your affections, God or the world? As an eminent author expresses it, 'He is the most wicked man that hath in his heart the strongest interest that is opposite to God; and all that is not subordinate to him is opposite to him: I say again, the greater creature-interest, the more sinful the state. Though you be neither thieves, nor extortioners, nor adulterers, your sin may be as deep rooted, and the interest of the world as predominant, or more so, in you, than in some of them. Alas! Sirs, the abstaining from some of these sins, and living like civil and orderly persons, though it is so far commendable, is not enough. If the world be not crucified to you, and you to it, such abstinence will but hide your sin and misery, and hinder your shame and repentance, but not prevent your eternal damnation. Your lands and your houses, and hopeful posterity, and other provision you have made for the flesh, may have more of your hearts, than the world hath of the heart of a poor wretch who never had so much to idolize.' Upon the whole, my brethren, let me only put you in mind, this exhortation is not less necessary to you than the like cautions were to the hearers of Christ in the days of his flesh, whom he warns against the dangers of an affluent state: Luke 8:14. "And that which fell among thorns, are they, which when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." Matt. 19:23, 24. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for

a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." It ought to give you great consolation, that he adds, verse 26, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

(3) I would address this exhortation to the children of God, in whom I know the world is crucified upon the whole; yet, alas! it still retains such a degree of interest as is provoking to God, offensive to others, and hurtful to their own peace. In what glass can you see more clearly the weakness of faith, and every other gracious disposition, than in their little influence in restraining the motions of carnal affection? Had the great objects of faith and hope that place in our hearts, and that entire dominion in our affections, which they ought to have; would there be so much conformity to worldly maxims and practices, as is daily to be seen? would there be so much emulation in all the outward expressions of pride and gaiety, in dress, furniture, and equipage? would there be so much desire of the increase of wealth and greatness? would there be so much envy of those who are successful, and go beyond us? Shall I tell you how a Christian should look upon those who prosper remarkably in their worldly affairs? If they are truly pious, he should rejoice with them; for here is so much wealth and influence put into such hands as will employ them in doing good. On the other hand, if they are wicked, he should sincerely pity them, as immersed in the most dangerous temptations. If we were thoroughly dead to the world, and the world to us, would the loss of wealth or reputation wound us so deeply as they generally do? would the malice or slanders of others make so sensible an impression? It should be pitied, as it is their sin; but it may easily be despised, as it is our danger. Try this by the condition and conduct of the opposite character. A wicked man is dead to God and spiritual things. What then, does he value the loss of any thing of that nature? Tell him, that he hath lost such or such an opportunity of communion with God, in his worship in public, or in family; that he hath lost an opportunity of excellent instruction, in a sermon or discourse; with what manifest contempt will he receive the information, and smile at your weakness and credulity in shewing any attachment to such things! Were we crucified to the world as we

ought, would there be so much impatience under the hand of God in poverty, sickness, the loss of relations, or calamities of any kind? The lopping off a limb or member that is dead, gives little or no uneasiness: it is the life that remains which occasions the pain of separation. If the world fall loose upon us, its removal would scarcely be felt; but we must needs suffer at the very heart when any thing is withdrawn that hath its hold there. Let me therefore beseech you, in this, to confess your sin, to be humbled for it, and to pray, that you may be daily more and more delivered from it.

2. I shall improve this subject for pointing out the use of affliction, and the ground of your consolation under it. This world at best is but a scene of sorrow; and we then reap most comfort from it when we are sensible that it is so. The very purpose of affliction is, to shew us the vanity and uncertainty of all created comforts, and deliver us from an excessive attachment to them. It is much more difficult to crucify a smiling than a frowning world. It is not easy to hate it in its loveliest form, or, if I may use such an expression, to speak harshly to it when it is speaking kindly to us? But in the time of affliction, when we are obliged to confess its vanity, is it not reasonable to expect, that our affection for it will be abated? I have said, that this seems the natural effect of suffering; because it is the lesson evidently carried in it. And accordingly the prophet Isaiah says, chap. 26:9. "For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." I am sensible, however, that the reception which affliction meets with, and the effects which it produces, are very different in different persons. It makes the worldly man curse his idol in the rage of despair; and it makes the child of God abhor the idolatry, and dwell with complacency on his unchangeable portion.

Consider this, I beseech you, my brethren; for you are all liable to the stroke of affliction, young and old, rich and poor, holy and unholy. It is indeed lamentable to see the fretful impatience of those to whom the world is blasted from without, but the love of the world, in all its strength, still subsisting within. They have no source of consolation

in themselves; and nothing comfortable can be spoken to them by others in a manner consistent with truth and duty. To deal faithfully with them, we must do our utmost to add the bitterness of repentance to their other sufferings; and this the cruel kindness of surrounding relations will seldom permit to be done. In the case of dying persons, in particular, with what concern have I heard friends and physicians telling the grossest falsehoods, in order to keep off, for a few moments, the apprehension of what they knew must immediately and certainly take place, and be the more terrible for the surprise!

On the other hand, it is comfortable to reflect, that the sanctifying influence of afflictions is no less the language of experience than of scripture. Many have borne their testimony, and set their seal to it. Some have been so effectually mortified to pride and vanity, by the injuries or the slanders of others, that they have even felt consolation in the reproach itself. But in a particular manner, I have been often pleased with young persons to whom the world, and all their expectations from it, have been crucified by early affliction, expressing themselves, not merely with submission, but with serenity and thankfulness. Bear with me in mentioning a real instance, known to myself, of a young man, who had been long confined with a diseased member, and had a near and certain prospect of his dissolution. When, at the desire of some person present, his loathsome fore was uncovered, he expressed himself, to the best of my remembrance, in these very words; 'There it is; and a precious treasure it has been to me! It saved me from the folly and vanity of youth: it made me cleave to God as my only portion, and eternal glory, as my only hope; and I think it has now brought me very near to my Father's house.' Now, what a spring of consolation is here! Our duty, our business our interest is, to crucify the world, and to be crucified to it. May we not, then, with the utmost gratitude, as well as patience, receive the appointments of that God who has promised, not only to deliver us from all our sufferings in due time, not only to make up and recompense our losses with something better, of a different kind, but has assured us, that these very

sufferings and losses, as their immediate effect, shall crucify sin, and further our meetness for his own presence?

3. Let me improve this subject by earnestly exhorting you to endeavor to acquire more and more of the temper and state of mind expressed by the holy apostle, in the text, "By whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." Be persuaded, my beloved hearers, to look upon all created things with the eye of faith. Remember their relation to God. He is their Maker and yours; and they must not be loved or served but in subordination to his glory. Do not place your chief happiness in them; do not esteem them too highly; do not love them immoderately; do not prosecute them too violently. Place your chief happiness in the favor of God, in communion with him on earth, and the well-grounded hope of the perpetual enjoyment of him in heaven; and let your regard to earthly things be no other, nor greater, than is suited to this end. That I may press this resolution upon you, allow me to propose the three following considerations.

(1) Consider the unsatisfying nature of all earthly enjoyments. They do not at all carry in them that sweetness and excellence which worldly men suppose. Sin has drawn a mist of delusion over the minds of men. The inflamed and disordered appetites of our corrupted nature always promise themselves, in worldly possessions, a satisfaction infinitely greater than they are able to afford. We have this from the confession of many who have made the experiment with every possible advantage. The book of Ecclesiastes is an admirable and animated description of the vanity of human enjoyments. Solomon seems to have been raised up in Providence, for this among other ends, that he might leave behind him an account of the vanity of earthly greatness. And this is the title that he hath left written upon all that the world can give: Eccles. 1:2. "Vanity of vanities, faith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Power and wealth, dignity and same, variety of pleasures, nay knowledge itself, as a source of present comfort, he affirms the vanity of them all: Eccles. 2:11. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had

wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." And towards the close of the same book, ch. 12:12. he says, "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Have there not been innumerable examples of the same testimony in every age and country? And what says your own experience? or your observation of others? Do men indeed rise in comfort and satisfaction, in proportion as they rise in station or opulence? On the contrary, do they not rather commonly increase in anxiety and discontent? Do you indeed think, that those who appear in gilded equipages have always on that account the most joyful hearts? Alas! there cannot be a greater mistake. Could you see what passes within, there would appear ungoverned passions, ungratified desires, and disappointed hopes; and could you enter their houses, you would find weariness and impatience, family-distress, family-disorders, and family-quarrels. It has been an old, and it is a most just observation, particularly upon avarice, That the desire still grows with the possession. It is the same with every other sinful passion. Indulgence does not gratify so much as it inflames them. Let a man climb ever so high on the ladder of ambition, he sees still others before him; and emulation and envy are as strong, or stronger, between those who stand on the adjoining steps at the top as at the bottom. There is one particular remark, that serves at once to show the vanity of the world, and the sinfulness of human nature: The greater variety of the worldly comforts any person possesses, he is not the more, but the less content, under the want of any one. The more and the longer any person hath been accustomed to obsequiousness or flattery, he is the more impatient of the least contradiction. The more abundant and universal respect that has been paid to any person, he is the more deeply wounded by neglect or contempt; as Haman, notwithstanding all his greatness, was quite unsatisfied while there remained one poor man in the king's gate who would not do him reverence. Take but one example more. If a man hath great and extensive possessions, and is without children, he is but the more distressed to

think, that so noble an estate and family should be without an heir, and will often envy the families of the poor, as if it were hard measure, that he who had so many temporal mercies should not have all. Upon the whole, you may see, that there is a double vanity in the present state. Created comforts are unsatisfying on the one hand, and human desires are insatiable on the other.

(2) Consider the uncertainty of all earthly enjoyments. No circumstance whatever should more abate our attachment to the world than its instability. What happiness can we receive from, or what value should we put upon those possessions, which may be taken from us the next moment? The speedy, unexpected, and melancholy change, which often takes place from health to sickness, from wealth to poverty, from honor to contempt, I leave every hearer to meditate upon, from his own knowledge and observation of human life; only I cannot help mentioning to you the strong language of the holy scriptures, Prov. 23:5. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." But the circumstance upon this subject to which I would particularly and chiefly point your attention, is, that our possessions and enjoyments of every kind are under the immediate and constant direction of Divine Providence. Believe it, Christians, and remember it, the providence of God reaches to every event that befalls you, however inconsiderable it may seem. It is God that "giveth you power to get wealth."—It is he by whom you are "diminished and brought low."—It is he that "raiseth up one, and putteth down another."—It is he that makes the "voice of joy and health" to be heard in your dwellings, or that chastises you with pain, and the multitude "of your bones with strong pain." If this is the case, what reason have you to be afraid of giving that love and service to any worldly enjoyment that is due to God? Will you "provoke him to jealousy? Are you stronger than he?" If you set your affections immoderately on any temporal possession, he can immediately remove it, or turn it into gall and wormwood.

Instead of enumerating the several kinds of present enjoyments, I shall only mention one, the desire of which is commonly very strong, viz. children or posterity. Now, how easily can a holy and righteous God take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke? Nay, in how many instances is the life of children a heavier trial than their death itself? For I must say upon this subject, as I have said often in your hearing, that to one that truly fears God, I do not know any temporal calamity equal to that of having profane or profligate children.

But perhaps some attentive hearer will hesitate a little, and say, 'I have not observed this to hold true in experience. Even pious persons seem generally to bear the irregularities of their children, though some of them very scandalous, much better than their deaths. Neither is it unfrequent to see them excusing or palliating the worst practices, from the partiality of natural affection.' Perhaps then I must retract, or alter the assertion, and say, it is either the heaviest trial, or the most dangerous temptation. But, after all, who can tell what floods of tears are shed in secret on this subject? Parents may be often obliged to conceal their sorrow from the world, because they know it would be treated with derision. I the rather incline to this supposition in many cases; for where indifference or partiality to the sins of children is so plain that it cannot be denied, I should greatly suspect the piety of such persons, let the appearance or profession be as flaming as it will.

All your mercies, then are in the hand of God, who can give or withhold, continue or withdraw them at his pleasure. But there is something more still: your life itself is in his hand. Though outward things were ever so stable in themselves, they are altogether precarious as to us. We know not what a day or a night may bring forth, or at what time our souls shall be required at our hands. This surely ought, and if it be seriously attended to, certainly will weaken our attachment to the things of a present world; according to the inference drawn from it by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 7:29, 30, 31. "But this, I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as

though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

(3) Consider that there is really much more real satisfaction to be found in a crucified than in an idolized world. This to many will appear a contradiction; but it is a great and certain truth. It is impossible for any person to pass ever so little the limits of duty in the use of the creatures, but it is to his own prejudice. This I do not mean only of its after consequences, but even in point of present comfort. There is a more genuine sweetness in those things that are used with moderation and self-denial, as the gospel requires, than in any sinful gratification. But if this holds even with regard to the simple enjoyment, it holds much more strongly when we consider the benefit of a sanctified world. He that, from a humble sense of the divine mercies, can rise to a grateful acknowledgment of the Giver of all good; he who is thereby inspired with a holy zeal to serve him in his generation, and values no temporal blessing, but so far as it may be useful in promoting the glory of God, and the good of others, has a delight from them, infinitely superior to what arises from the licence of criminal indulgence. He enjoys his mercies without sting, he possesses them without the fear of losing them; nay, he can even rejoice in the surrender itself, as a part of the will of God. Is this fabulous, my brethren, or extravagant? I hope not. I believe and trust it is matter of real experience to the children of God. Did the Psalmist David say, it was good for him that he was afflicted? did the apostles of Christ take joyfully the spoiling of their goods? did they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name? I hope that many others will rejoice, that they have been enabled to use their substance in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and other useful purposes. I am persuaded, that a pious and liberal mind tastes a more exquisite delight in relieving a poor family, than in the most costly and sumptuous entertainment; and that he who values his reputation only for his usefulness, will give thanks to God for the esteem in which he may be held; and when reproached for doing his

duty, will have a pleasure in submitting to it without complaint, greater than the proud and selfish can possibly receive from the daily incense of flattery and praise.

4. In the last place, As this subject has the most intimate connexion with the power of religion, I shall conclude with offering to serious persons a few particular directions for their daily practice.

(1) Remember that your great care ought to be the one thing needful. Salvation is your great work, heaven is your home, the world is but your passage to it. If you can keep this constantly upon your minds, you will immediately perceive the danger of the world, as a temptation to sin. You will not be able to forget, because you will daily feel, what influence it hath in helping or hindering you in your journey heavenward. A traveller who hath his thoughts still fixed on the place of his destination, and is anxious to get forward, will sensibly feel every incumbrance from the weather, or the way, by which his progress is retarded. It is by misrepresentation that the world leads us astray; true and just apprehensions of our own state, would keep our affections in their just measure with regard to it.

(2) Be particularly upon your guard against the unsanctified use of lawful comforts. A person who hath any principle of conscience, would be filled with horror, at the thoughts of gross sin, such as uncleanness, injustice, or sensuality; yet such may be in great danger of placing their affections upon the world, and resting on it as their portion. Their houses and lands, their children, their name and reputation, may inroach upon them, and usurp dominion in their hearts. Be careful, therefore, habitually to improve these to the glory of God; learn to give him thanks for them, as the blessings of his providence, and to serve him by them, as they are talents or opportunities of usefulness, for which you must render an account in the day of judgment.

(3) Be attentive to the course of Providence, and improve the characters and conduct of others, to your own profit. If you see one

man grow proud and self-sufficient as he grows rich, if you see him forgetful of God while he continues in prosperity, tyrannical to others because they are in his power, then fear lest you also be tempted. If you see wealth suddenly poured in upon any persons make them anxious, quarrelsome, and impatient, then moderate your desires of prosperity, and "be content with such things as you have." It is very common to enumerate and censure the faults of others, that we may nourish our own pride by the comparison; but it is infinitely more beneficial, to improve the weakness of others for our own humiliation. What is the ordinary style in conversation? Were I such a person, had I his estate and possessions, I should not grudge to be more liberal to the poor; I would do something for the public; I would do every thing for my friends. Truly you do not know what you would do. Were you raised to the same situation, perhaps you would be ten times more proud and covetous than the man you blame. And as you would observe the sins of others, so observe the ways of God towards them. If an oppressor is at last overtaken in his wickedness, if he is held as a wild bull in a net, and, instead of humility, it produceth nothing but the rage of impatience and despair; adore the righteous judgment of God, and be sensible that neither mercies nor trials will change the heart, unless they are accompanied with the power of divine grace. If it pleaseth God to bring down any from riches to poverty, or from honor to disgrace, remember that he visits his people in mercy for their correction, and his enemies in vengeance for their punishment; so that, whether you are the one or the other, you have no charter of security from the same calamities.

(4) Think much of mortality, and the innumerable sufferings which are every where to be seen among our fellow creatures. The wise man tells us, Eccles. 7:2, 3. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." There are some who, from mere tenderness of heart, and a strong attachment to sensual delight, are not able to look upon scenes of misery and distress. They fly from them, therefore, and deceive themselves into a

dream of security by intoxicating pleasures. But, my brethren, it is infinitely better to fortify yourselves against the fear of death, by faith in him who is the resurrection and the life; and then the frequent observation of others in affliction, will have the noblest and most salutary influence in mortifying worldly affections. You may also sometimes see the triumph of faith in the joyful departure of believers, which is one of the most edifying and comfortable sights that any Christian can behold.

(5.) In the last place, I would recall to your minds, and earnestly recommend to your meditation, what made a principal branch of the doctrinal part of this subject, "the cross of Christ." By this the believer will indeed crucify the world. Reason and experience may wound the world, so to speak; but the cross of Christ pierces it to the heart. Shall we murmur at the cross, when our Redeemer bore it? Are not the thoughts of what he suffered, and what we deserved, sufficient to eradicate from our minds every the least inclination to what is provoking to him? Are not the thoughts of what he purchased, sufficient to destroy in our hearts the least disposition to place our happiness here? The thoughts of the cross of Christ are strengthening as well as instructive. We are drawn as it were by the power of sympathy, emboldened by his example, and animated by his conquest. Is not the Christian, when he is in full contemplation of this great object, saying, 'O most merciful Saviour, shall I any more idolize that world which crucified thee? shall I be afraid of their scorn who insulted thee? shall I refuse any part of his will, who, by the cross, has glorified thee?'

Let us conclude by attempting to say, in faith, what God grant every one of us may be able to say in the awful hour of the last conflict: "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

FERVENCY AND IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER

SERMON 11

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. -
GENESIS 32:26

MY brethren, real communion with God is a blessing of such inestimable value, that it cannot be sought with too great earnestness, or maintained with too much care. If it is no fable, that God vouchsafes to his people, on some occasions, a sense of his gracious presence, and, as it were, visits them in love; with what fervor should they desire, with what diligence should they improve, so great a mercy! In a particular manner, when a good man hath in view, either an important and difficult duty, or a dangerous trial, it is his interest to implore, with the greatest importunity, the presence and countenance of God, which only can effectually direct him in the one, and support him in the other. This, my brethren, ought to be our concern at present, as we have in view a very solemn approach to God, viz. laying hold of one of the seals of his covenant: what trials may be before us, or near us, it is impossible to know.

The words I have read relate to a remarkable passage of the patriarch Jacob's life. He was now returning from Padan-aram with a numerous family, and great substance, and had received information that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. We are told, v. 7. of the chapter, that he was "greatly afraid and distressed," being, in all probability, quite uncertain whether his brother was coming with a friendly or a hostile intention; or rather,

having great reason to suspect the latter to be the case. He rose up, we are told, long before day, and sent his wives, his children, and cattle, over the brook Jabbok: and as it follows, in the 24th verse, "Jacob was left alone: and there wrestled a man with him, until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Some of the fathers, and also some of the Jewish writers, suppose, that all this was done in prophetic vision, to represent to him the difficulties that were yet before him, which, by faith and patience he was to overcome. But it is more reasonable to think, that this was in truth the appearance of an angel to him; and indeed most probably of the angel of the covenant; because, from the passage itself, it appears that he had "prevailed with God." The same thing we are assured of by the prophet Hosea, chap. 12:3, 4. "He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us." From this passage also we learn, that it was the same who met with him at Beth-el. Some think, with a good deal of probability, that this attack was made upon him by way of punishment for the weakness of his faith; that though he had received the promise, he should yet be under so great a terror at the approach of his brother. In this indeed he was an example of what happens to believers in every age. Past mercies are forgotten at the approach of future trials; therefore the same God who visited at Beth-el, and promised to be with him, now meets him in displeasure, and threatens to destroy him; but by "weeping and supplication" he not only obtained his preservation, but a further blessing. It is also the opinion of many, that the wrestling or conflict was literal and real for some time, and that Jacob perhaps took it to be one of Esau's attendants who had come to surprise him in the night; but that at last he perceived his mistake, when the angel, by a flight touch of his thigh, shewed him,

that, if he had pleased, he might easily have destroyed him. Then, as he had contended with his supposed adversary, he now continues the struggle, by insisting upon a blessing; which he obtains, in such terms as carry in them a commendation both of his constancy and importunity: v. 28. "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed." The last part of this verse is supposed indeed to be wrong translated; and that it should be, "as a prince thou hast had power with God, and therefore much more shalt thou prevail over men:" which was a promise not only of present security, but of future prosperity and conquest.

But though this remarkable event had a particular and immediate relation to Jacob, there is no doubt, that the Spirit of God, in putting it on record, had a purpose of further and more extensive usefulness. It is plainly an example of importunity, and, as it were, holy violence in prayer. So uniform and general has this sense of the passage been, that fervency and importunity in prayer has been generally called wrestling with God. This is a subject which well deserves our most serious attention; the rather that I am sorry to say, the practice has fallen into much disrepute; and I am afraid the expression itself is in some danger of being treated with derision. In discoursing further on this subject, I shall,

I. Explain and illustrate a little the nature and subject of this holy wrestling and importunity in prayer.

II. The duty and reasonableness of it.

III. The great benefit arising from it. And,

IV. In the last place, I shall make some improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

I. FIRST, then, I am to explain and illustrate a little the nature and subject of this holy wrestling and importunity in prayer. Wrestling necessarily supposes some resistance or opposition to be overcome.

Prayer indeed, of itself, and in the simplest cases, may be said to carry this idea in it; because he that prays stands in need of something which he can only obtain by prevailing with, or bending the will of another to bestow: Matth. 7:7. "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." But as there are many gracious assurances of God's readiness to hear our prayers, the subject we are now upon leads us particularly to the consideration of the obstructions or difficulties that lie in the way, either of our praying as we ought, or praying with success. These two things must be joined together, because they are in their nature inseparably connected: James 4:3. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James 1:5, 6, 7. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him, ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Now, for the illustration of this duty and practice, in a way suited to the condition and daily experience of the children of God, I shall mention some of the chief obstructions or difficulties we have to wrestle with in our access to God, and which must be overcome by the importunity and holy violence of prayer.

1. The first of these I shall mention is a sense of guilt overwhelming the soul. This, which is the strongest of all arguments for the necessity of prayer, is often found in experience to hinder the performance. When any person is arrested of conscience, when his multiplied transgressions appear before him in all their variety, and in all their aggravations, it is apt to fill him with a jealousy of God, a dread of entering into his presence, and in some sort a despair of obtaining his mercy. This hath been often seen in great profligates, overtaken by a visitation of Providence, and stung by the reproaches of conscience. When they have been urged to apply for divine mercy, they have answered, 'I cannot pray:' or, 'How can I pray, who 'have been so monstrous a sinner?' Nay, it may be frequently observed, that men who live in security, without any just conviction of their

sinful state, will maintain some sort of form of religion, will even go through their form with some pleasure, and place some dependance upon it. But when conscience begins to rise a little upon them, and they see the enormities they are guilty of, though it cannot make them forsake their sins, it makes them speedily forsake all their religion. It is taken notice of by Dr. Doddridge, in his life of Col. Gardiner, that when he was indulging himself in all manner of wickedness, he began, from a natural sense of duty, to pay some acknowledgments to God; but as he was not resolved to forsake his sins, the daring profanity of it struck him with horror. He therefore determined, says the author, 'to make no more attempts of this sort; and was perhaps one of the first that deliberately laid aside prayer from some sense of God's omniscience, and some natural principle of honor and conscience.' In this last reflection, the worthy author is undoubtedly mistaken; for he was not the first, nor will he be the last, who has been driven from prayer by a sense of sin, and a horror of his Maker's presence.

I have described this difficulty in its most hideous form, if I may speak so, as it stands in the way of wicked men. But there is often too much of it to be found even in good men themselves. A deep sense of sin often fills them with a slavish fear, mars their confidence before God, and tempts them to keep at a distance from him. Psal. 40:12. "For innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me." He that wrestles in prayer, refuses to yield to this discouragement. He still ventures, though at a distance, to look to his offended God. Though he is filled with tribulation and fear, he will not give up his plea. He says with the Psalmist, Ps. 77:7, 8, 9. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah." He endeavors to take such views of the glory and extent of divine mercy as will give him some ground of hope. He maketh supplication with strong crying and tears. Against hope he believeth in hope; or

resolves, that if he perish, he shall perish at the footstool of mercy. And nothing is so proper to bring him to this resolution, nay, nothing is sufficient for that purpose, but the freeness of salvation, as it is offered in the gospel of Christ, where all confidence is derived, not from the goodness of the sinner, but from the power and grace of the Saviour.

2. Another difficulty to be overcome in prayer is, a frowning Providence discouraging the mind. When this is added to the former, as they commonly go together, it augments the difficulty, and adds to the distress. When great calamities are brought upon the believer, when one stroke follows upon the back of another, when sin challenges and Providence punishes him, he is then in danger of giving up his condition as desperate, and without remedy. See the reflections of Job in this strain, notwithstanding he is commended to us as a pattern of patience, Job 19:8, 9, 10. "He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. He hath stript me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and my hope hath he removed like a tree."

When the rod of correction falls heavy, the Christian finds it very difficult to believe that it comes from the love of a father, and is rather apt to tremble under it as the severity of a judge. So did Jacob himself, after all his experience, in the close of life, Gen. 42:36. "And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." Sometimes the course of Providence in general has the same effect. The prosperity and insolence of sinners, the oppressed state of the children of God, the disappointed endeavors of his servants, make them often call in question his presence, his faithfulness, or his power. This is the subject of the whole 73d Psalm, and summed up in the 10th and 11th verses: "Therefore his people return hither; and waters, of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?"

He that wrestles in prayer, therefore, considers the depth of Divine Providence with reverence. He dwells upon the wisdom and power of God, who alone can bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. He taketh hold of his covenant, and the sure and everlasting mercy that is contained in it, and humbly and earnestly prays for universal and absolute resignation to the divine will. This, my brethren, is one of the greatest and most important objects of prayer, and what believers should wrestle for with the greatest fervor and importunity. They should cry mightily to God, and expostulate earnestly with their own hearts, as the Psalmist, Ps. 42:9, 10, 11. "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me: while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." I am not here to go through all the grounds of encouragement on which the suffering and pleading believer may place his dependance, drawn from the perfections of an unchangeable God, from the power of a Saviour upon a throne, from the precise and express promises in scripture of support or deliverance, and the daily experience of the faithful. It is sufficient that I have pointed out to you the state and practice of a distressed and afflicted Christian wrestling with God.

3. Another difficulty often arises from unbelieving thoughts, and inward temptations distressing the spirit. Prayer takes its rise from and is carried on by faith. Prayer indeed is little else than the immediate and lively exercise of faith: Heb. 11:6. "For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." On this account, dutiful and acceptable prayer is called the prayer of faith. Who would apply, or who can apply, to God, for any mercy, but from a persuasion that he is present to hear, and that he is able and willing to bestow? Now, when this faith begins to fail, either from its natural weakness, from our sinful negligence, from the subtle insinuations, or the more violent assaults

of the adversary of our salvation, it must be a great hindrance to the exercise of prayer.

Many are the difficulties of this kind which the Christian, from time to time, hath to struggle with. Sometimes he is made to doubt of the certainty, and sometimes of the meaning of the promises. We see some distressed persons so embarrassed with scruples, or so misted by controversy, as to lose the relish and spiritual comfort of the word of God, while they are contending about it. Sometimes they are made to doubt their own title to apply the promises which appear like a rich and sumptuous table, encompassed with a flaming sword, forbidding their approach. Thus they are led away from the consolation of Israel, and made to seek in vain for a foundation of comfort in themselves. How often do we see, that the very sense of sin, and fear of danger, the very misery and necessity which particularly discover the fitness and excellence of the truths of the everlasting gospel, are made use of to discourage us from embracing them!

Sometimes the truths themselves are perverted, or set in opposition one to another, and mutually destroy each other's influence. Thus, while the constant and overruling providence of God should be the great foundation both of our faith and prayer, it is sometimes set in opposition to both. The false reasoner will say to himself, Why should I pray for deliverance from this distress? why should I pray or hope for the possession of such a mercy? The whole order and course of events is fixed and unalterable. If it is appointed to happen, it shall happen, whether I speak or be silent; if it is otherwise determined, the prayers of the whole creation will not be able to obtain it. How unhappily do men thus reason themselves out of their own peace! not considering the unspeakable absurdity of making our weak and imperfect conceptions of the nature and government of God to stand in opposition to his own express command. The influence of second causes, moral as well as natural, is a matter of undeniable experience. If you acknowledge it in the one, should you deny it in the other? Is not intemperance the cause of disease? is not

slothfulness the way to poverty? is not neglected tillage the cause of a barren field? and is not restraining prayer also the way to barrenness of spirit? Believe it, my brethren, fervent prayer is as sure and effectual a mean of obtaining those mercies which may be lawfully prayed for, as plowing and sowing is of obtaining the fruits of the ground.

Again, sometimes by the cunning of Satan, the believer is driven to the brink of the precipice, and made to doubt of the very being of God, and the reality of all religion. It is easy to see, that this must wholly take away the necessity and use of prayer. But even when it is not so powerful as to prevent the practice, yet doth it in a great measure, cool the fervor and destroy the comfort of prayer. He that wrestles with God has often these difficulties, in a greater or lesser degree, to struggle with. Some of them it is his duty to oppose by reason, and some of them directly and immediately to resist and banish as temptations; and I think an exercised Christian will usually make the matter of his complaint the subject of his prayer. This is indeed defeating the tempter with his own weapons: it is bringing sweetness out of the strong, and meat out of the eater, when the difficulties thrown in the way of our prayers serve to excite us to greater ardor, importunity, and frequency in that necessary and profitable exercise.

4. Another difficulty with which the believer hath to struggle, is the coldness and slothfulness of his own heart. This is as great a hindrance of prayer as any that hath been named; and I believe it is of all others the most common and prevalent. At the same time it affords a very mortifying view of our own character and state. Strange indeed! that when we consider the great and eternal God with whom we have to do, we should find so much difficulty in maintaining a serious and attentive frame of spirit! that when we lie under so great and unspeakable obligations to his mercy, our sense of gratitude should be so weak and languid! that when we have blessings to ask of so inestimable value, we should notwithstanding do it with so much indifference! And what is stranger still, are there

not many who have tasted, in some degree, the sweetness and consolation of communion with God, and yet are ready to return to a state of coldness and negligence!

I am persuaded I need not tell any serious person in this assembly the danger or frequency of the Christian's being seized with a slothfulness, coldness, or security of spirit. It is probable many are at this moment inwardly ashamed on being thus barely put in mind of it. How often is it the reproach and stain of all our worship in public, in family, and in secret! how easily do we degenerate into a form! how hardly is the spirit and affection kept alive! How many are there over whom conscience has so much power, that they neither dare absent themselves from public ordinances, nor discontinue the form of secret duty: and yet they may continue long in a heartless, lifeless, and unprofitable attendance upon both! Times of deep conviction, of heavy affliction, or harrassing temptation, are more distressing; but they are not so insnaring, as this leprosy that creeps upon us in a season of quiet and serenity. The other difficulties, if I may speak so, force us to wrestle with them, because they leave us no peace; but this tempts us to sit still under it, because it gives us no disturbance.

He that wrestles with God in prayer, then, must maintain a conflict with the slothfulness of his own spirit, and endeavor to preserve that vigor and fervency of affection so necessary to the right performance of the duty. You will say, perhaps, With what propriety is this called wrestling with God? it is rather wrestling with himself. But when we consider, that every gracious disposition must come down from above, from the Father of lights, and author of every good and perfect gift: and, in particular, that the spirit of prayer is one of his most precious and excellent gifts; the justness and propriety of this language will manifestly appear. The coldness of our hearts, and deadness of our affections in worship, ought, on the one hand, to be imputed to ourselves as the immediate and sinful cause, and, on the other, may be considered as a part of God's most holy providence, who withdraws his Spirit in righteous judgment. Thus the Psalmist very beautifully says, Psal. 65:4, "Blessed is the man whom thou

chusest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." And thus the spirit of supplication is a remarkable gospel-promise: Zech. 12:10. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born."

My brethren, there is the greatest reason for every Christian, not only to wrestle against a slothful disposition as a sin, but to fear its influence as a judgment; for if among spiritual judgments it holds a chief place, when God giveth "the spirit of slumber; eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;" it ought to be treated in the same manner with all other obstructions, that is to say, encountered by vigorous resistance. Like all other enemies, it acquires courage by success; like all other sins, it is strengthened by indulgence. And yet, alas! how often is this very circumstance made use of as an excuse for the omission of prayer? When the Christian finds himself lifeless and indisposed to prayer, it makes him either neglect it altogether, or slur over the performance in a careless and trifling manner, saying to himself, "I am not now in a fit temper for it." Nay, sometimes he reasons himself even religiously out of his duty, saying, "I shall but dishonor God by such a heartless sacrifice; and therefore I had better delay it till I be in a frame that is fitter for it." But if the time and other circumstances call for the duty, our own indisposition of heart is, of all others, the most foolish and criminal excuse. How much better would it be to wrestle as Jacob in the text, and insist upon the blessing; which cannot be more sensibly illustrated with respect to this particular branch, than by mentioning to you a resolution which an eminent Christian entered into for his own practice: That he would not be baffled by a treacherous spirit; for he would never give over the work of praise, till his affections were stirred, and he was brought to a sense of gratitude for divine goodness; and that he would never give over enumerating and

confessing his sins, till his heart was melted in contrition and penitential sorrow!

5. I may mention one other difficulty with which we have to struggle in prayer, viz. when it pleases God to postpone, for a season, his compliance with our requests. Though his ears are always open to the cry of his people, he sometimes carries in such a manner, as if they were fall closed against them. Though their petitions be offered up in faith, and on a subject agreeable to the will of God, they may not always be granted in the manner, in the measure, or in the season that they themselves desire, or even in their imperfect judgment may think most proper. Many examples might be given of this. A minister praying for the success of his labors, may be heard in mercy, though it do not happen so soon, and though he cannot see it so clearly, as it is natural for him to desire. He may have many seals of his ministry, although he meet with disappointment in some of those on whom he looked with the most favorable eye. A parent may pray for the salvation of his children, and his desires may have gone up with acceptance before the throne, although the accomplishment be yet far distant, and they seem, for the time, to increase unto more ungodliness. An afflicted person may have actually obtained the sanctified improvement of his affliction, although he cannot yet perceive the ends of Divine Providence in it, the comfortable discovery of which may be a feast reserved for him at some future season; or, in general, a mercy may be granted with advantage and increase, though it be suspended for a time.

In this interval, however, the Christian's eyes may be ready to fail with looking long; he may be in danger of ceasing his application, or abating his fervor, through despair of success. Therefore we have many exhortations in scripture to perseverance and importunity in prayer. We are exhorted to pray without ceasing, and to continue instant in prayer. Our Saviour, Luke 18:1, spoke a parable on purpose to teach men, that they ought always to pray, and not to faint: Heb. 10:36, 37. "For ye have need of patience; that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and

he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." Habakkuk 2:3. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry." To which passage I shall only add Lamentations, chap. 3:25, 26. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

I shall conclude this head by observing, that all these obstructions are at the direction and disposal of Providence, for the trial of the faith and patience of believers; and therefore their perseverance under, and constancy in opposition to them, is, with great propriety, considered as an imitation of the patriarch Jacob in his wrestling with God.

Before proceeding to the remaining part of this subject, suffer me to make a practical improvement of what hath been already said. And,

1. Let us hence learn the infinite grace and condescension of God, who not only admits his people to communion with him, but invites and encourages them to the most pressing importunity, and even, to speak so, to offer a holy violence to him. The reasons of this will be more fully opened in the next discourse. In the mean time, let us make it the subject of wonder and praise. Well may we say with Job, chap. 7:17, 18, "What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" This is the dignity of human nature indeed, not from what he is in himself, but what he may be by union with God through Christ; for through him we have all access by one Spirit unto the Father. And if nearness to God is so great a privilege, who would not covet it? who would not cultivate it; Surely all but those who, to their final condemnation, disbelieve and despise it.

2. Let us learn from what hath been said, to defend the exercises of piety, and particularly this honorable privilege of the saints, from the

scorn and reproach of the enemies of vital religion. I am abundantly sensible, that there are some, and some amongst ourselves, who treat this subject with contempt and disdain, and look upon a believer's wrestling with God in prayer, his being sometimes in, and sometimes not in a frame for his service, as the raving and incoherent effusions of weakness and enthusiasm. This is not only an evidence of their being themselves strangers to true religion, but is indeed directly contrary to found judgment and reason. I have laid down to you the meaning and subject of this wrestling and importunity in prayer; and is there any thing more clearly founded upon truth, nature, and experience? Hear, ye unbelievers; might I not transfer every particular, and illustrate it in the intercourse of man with man? If you had a favor to ask of another, and were sensible that you had done him a great, recent, and unprovoked injury, would not this fill you with jealousy? would it not keep you at a distance? would it not make you, as the common saying is, afraid to look him in the face? If he had carried himself as your enemy, and seemed in many instances, to set himself in opposition to you; would not this give you even more than suspicion and uncertainty as to the issue of your application? If by the suggestion of his enemies, you were made to believe him resentful and implacable; would not this extinguish your hope, and break up all correspondence? If your own heart were naturally too proud to intreat, or too careless to give attendance, would not the suit be neglected? Or if you had presented your petition, and for a long tract of time no answer was returned; would you not give up all hopes of it as forgotten or rejected? Is not this an image of the state of the Christian in many instances? And therefore, if prayer is a part of natural religion, if it is a matter of duty or necessity at all, it must often have the above difficulties to overcome, and, on that account, be justly considered as a species of wrestling with God. And why should the Christian's being in or out of frame for his duty to God, be made the subject of derision? Is there not something similar to it as to every object of study or application? Are there not some seasons when you say, your mind lies to your book, your work, or even your play, and then it goes on sweetly and pleasantly? Are there not others, when it is against the grain, and

then every trifle is a difficulty, and even the air is a burden. If you consider these things, you must be sensible, that all to whom eternity is the highest concern, and therefore religion their chief care, must be attentive to the state of their hearts towards God. And if this is the case, every thing, whether inward or outward, that promotes or hinders their acquaintance with him, will appear to them of the utmost moment. The truth is, whoever takes the liberty to despise and ridicule the concern of serious persons about communion with God, must excuse me for saying, because it is my deliberate judgment, either that they are enemies to religion in their hearts, or that they are wholly ignorant of the important subject.

3. As we would defend the duty above explained from the scoffs of infidels, let us also guard it from abuse, and distinguish it from any corruption that may pretend, or may be thought to resemble it. Particularly, let us beware of allowing in ourselves, or approving in others, any gross indecent familiarity, either of speech or carriage. You see, my brethren, that wrestling with God arises from a deep impression of the infinite and unspeakable importance of the blessings in prospect, and their absolute necessity to the petitioner. This will make him still insist, and urge his request, and, as it were, refuse to let go his hold. But it is also constantly attended with a sense of the holiness of God's nature, and the greatness of his power; which, when set home upon the wounded conscience, is often the principal cause of the distress. Is there not then the justest reason for earnestness and concern? But is it not also plain, that this must preserve the believer from impropriety; and that it cannot lead to any foolish or indecent familiarity, which is often mistaken for it, and often reproached in its room?

What hath been said upon the subject, I hope, will point out to you the just middle between every vicious extreme. Such real concern, such fervor of spirit, will not indeed lead any to study in their prayers a nice, vain, or ornamented style. This is the language of a mind at ease. It is but of little value at any rate: but O how misplaced! O how unsuitable in prayer to God! This is best carried on by plain and

ardent expressions of the very temper of the soul, when the fulness of the heart gives a ready utterance to the tongue. But neither will the views which the wrestling believer hath of the glory and majesty of God, of the strictness of his law, and the terror of his wrath, suffer him to give way to any trifling, slovenly, or ridiculous manner of addressing himself to the throne of grace. It must be observed indeed, that there will be a difference, according to the different circumstances, station, and capacity of the persons concerned. There may be many a serious Christian, who knows what it is to pour out his heart before God, and spread his sins and sorrows at his feet, who would not be fit for leading the devotion of a public or promiscuous assembly; yet he may be the person who, as a prince, hath power with God, and prevails. The prayers of such a wrestler, with all the blemishes that attend them, are probably far more effectual, than those of such over-nice persons, as despise the weakness of his understanding, or make themselves merry with the homeliness of his style: nay, I must say further, that we sometimes meet with persons whose language in prayer is so unspeakably superior to their abilities or performances of other kinds, as to show that they have an unction from the Holy One; and that they are examples of the accomplishment of that promise, Psal. 25:14. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: and he will shew them his covenant."

4. I must conclude the subject at this time with earnestly exhorting you all to the diligent exercise of this duty. And that it may be the more distinct and effectual, I shall briefly point out to you the following objects of prayer.

1. Be fervent in prayer for the improvement of the spiritual life in your own souls. Prayer is at once the security and the comfort of a Christian. Hate, fear, prevent as much as in you lieth every thing that may obstruct your regularity and earnestness in this duty.

2. Be earnest in your supplication, and importunate in your pleading for the church of Christ, and the glory of his kingdom, especially in your native country. The character of real Christians, in this respect,

is well described by the prophet: Is. 62:6, 7. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." The languishing state of religion in this nation, and the threatening aspect of Providence, should press us to this duty: and surely, in proportion as our belief of the truths of the gospel is real and prevalent, we must behold transgressions with grief, and be ready to intercede for a "time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

3. Be earnest for a season for the power of God at this approaching communion. We serve an all-sufficient and unchangeable God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, who is able to pour down his Spirit in a large and plentiful measure, and make it a happy time for the espousal of many sinners to Christ, and for edifying his saints, that they may go on their way rejoicing, and eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart. Let us plead his own promise, Is. 44:3, 4. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

4. Pray for the ministers of the gospel. The apostles often ask this assistance of the faithful: Col. 4:3. "Withal, praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds." If you believe the efficacy of prayer, you must be sensible that your diligence in this respect will prepare ministers for you, and you for them. This is to point the eye of faith beyond the servants to the master of the feast; and you will probably both look for and receive your answer from himself.

5. In the last place, I would earnestly recommend to you the exercise of joint and social conference and prayer. There is great danger of extinguishing the heavenly flame, if while you are necessarily surrounded with a flood of ungodly men, you do not often associate

with the excellent ones of the earth, and place your delight there: Malachi, 3:16. "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." There is a great advantage in society for every purpose. If we know the benefit of united bodies for business and trade, if we find the pleasure of joining together for mutual entertainment and social converse, must not as great a benefit result from a more sacred union? Serious persons, by associating together, direct each other by their counsels, embolden each other by their examples, and assist each other by their prayers. There is also a particular promise of efficacy to social prayer: Matth. 18:19, 20. "I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Now, may the Lord himself visit you with his gracious presence, and make you to say with Jacob at Bethel, Gen. 28:16, 17, "And he said, 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."

FERVENCY AND IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER

SERMON 12

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. -
GENESIS 32:26

Second sermon on the text.

II. WE proceed now to the second thing proposed in the distribution of the subject; which was, To show you the duty and reasonableness of wrestling and importunity in prayer. Here I am sensible, that a corrupt and impatient mind may be able to muster up objections against it. There is something wonderful and unsearchable in all the works of God, and in none more, as it is reasonable to suppose, than in the methods of his grace. In particular, it may appear surprising that he should exercise his people with such conflicts and trials, that it should be necessary to overcome him, as it were, by importunity, before we can obtain those blessings which himself hath commanded us to ask, and which he hath promised to bestow. Why, will it be said, does a God of mercy, and of infinite fullness, to whom all our wants and weaknesses are perfectly known, wait for our prayers, before he will part with what is so much needed by us? Why doth he, who knoweth our frame, and remembers that we are dust, unnecessarily throw obstructions in our way, and wrap himself up in darkness, to discourage our approach?

But how does this surprise increase, when we consider how unequal we are for the conflict, if no strength but our own is opposed to the Almighty! nay, that our strength for resistance must come only from himself: so that he wounds, and he heals; he oppresses, and he sustains; he discourages, and he invites. It is by prayer that we must obtain every blessing from the Father of lights; and one of the greatest and most necessary of these blessings is the spirit of prayer itself. My brethren, when either unbelief or profanity moves any such difficulties as these, I think it my duty to call upon you, in the first

place, to bow yourselves before the sovereignty of God. There is an unsearchable impenetrable depth in the divine wisdom, whether we look upon the works of nature, or of grace. As Creator of the world, he could, no doubt, in a moment, with one word of his power, have raised the whole fabric in perfection; yet it pleased him, in a gradual manner, to finish every part by the addition of another, for the space of six days. When he gave the first promise to Adam, or when he renewed it to the father of the faithful, he could, no doubt, have sent the Saviour into the world, to finish transgression, and make an end of sin; yet he saw it proper to give only distant intimations of this blessed period, and to defer the long-expected appearance till the fulness of time, while the nations were suffered to sit for many ages in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death. In the same manner he often takes a great variety of steps with his people before they are made partakers of his promises.

But notwithstanding that something must still remain mysterious, and beyond the comprehension of a finite creature, in the management of God, who "giveth not account of any of his matters," we may see much propriety and beauty in this part of his procedure. And is it not our duty to attend to it? We may see the reasonableness, nay we may perceive the wisdom, of his requiring a holy fervency, wrestling, and importunity in prayer; for it serves to engrave upon our hearts, and even to work into, our affections, some of the most important truths of religion, and such as will have the most powerful and extensive influence upon our temper and practice. This will plainly appear from the three following considerations.

1. Fervency of spirit, and importunity in prayer, is suitable and necessary, because of the greatness and glory of that God with whom we hold communion, as well as because it serves to strengthen and improve the sense of this upon our minds. The infinite majesty of God, and the unmeasurable distance at which he is removed from all created weakness, is often spoken of in scripture with admiration of his condescension: Psal. 8:3, 4. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast

ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Under a deep impression of the same great truth, Solomon says, 2 Chron. 6:18, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built?" Is not, then, some fervor of affection due to the greatness and glory of that God whom we worship? Our affections should always, in their strength and exertion, be in proportion to their object, its dignity and worth. Indifference and carelessness, in an inferior towards a superior, is always counted a mark of disdain. We naturally suppose, that those in great and high stations ought to be approached with reverence, and solicited in the humblest manner, by their inferiors, who hope to share in their bounty; and the more exalted the person, the more submissive the posture, and the more earnest the supplication. Much more ought this to take place between God and us. On this account it is, probably at least on this amongst others, that indifference and coldness in religion is represented as peculiarly the object of divine detestation: Rev. 3:15, 16. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

2. Our own great unworthiness, who are the objects of divine love, and admitted to this sacred intercourse, should powerfully excite us to fervency in pleading. This is precisely a counterpart to the former consideration, and greatly strengthens the conclusion. Even the highest of the spirits above, most eminent in knowledge and sanctity, who stand nearest to the throne of God, we are told, cover their faces with their wings, as lost in respect and wonder, when they look to him who dwells in inaccessible light. How much more "man, who is a worm, and the son of man, who is a worm, whose foundation is in the dust, who dwells in houses of clay, and is crushed before the moth!" Accordingly, in some of the examples we have of the most importunate pleading and wrestling in prayer, this is the very difficulty which seems to stand in the way, and requires the greatest efforts of holy boldness to overcome; as in the account we have of

Abraham's intercession for devoted Sodom, Gen. 18:27. "And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." And again, in the 32d verse, "And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

But, my brethren, I beseech you remember, it is not our frail nature, and limited powers only, that point out our unworthiness; but our guilt and impurity, so opposite and so odious to the divine nature. This, I have shown you in the preceding discourse, is one of the greatest hinderances of our access to God in prayer. And may we not say, How suitable, how necessary is it, that, in order to keep us still deeply humble, God should sometimes cover himself with a cloud, and exercise the sinner with strong crying and tears, before he will vouchsafe the intimations of his love? This reason will be felt, and that the most sensibly by the best and most dutiful of his children, as their sanctification continues imperfect so long as they are here below. How should a sense of guilt and misery at once increase our self-abasement, and add to the earnestness of our desires! There cannot be a juster description, both of our state and duty, where misery and weakness conspire in showing the necessity and difficulty of wrestling with God, than the apostle hath given us, Rom. 8:26. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

3. The duty and reasonableness of wrestling and importunity in prayer, appears from the inestimable value of the mercies to be obtained. Should there not be a proportionable strength of desire to the worth of the blessings in prospect? Now, who can compute the value of the divine favor, and all its happy effects? and therefore who can compute the guilt of indifference, and the necessity of fervor in asking it? The blessings of salvation in general are in their nature and source unspeakable, and in their duration without end.—On the one hand, deliverance from everlasting misery, from the wrath of an

almighty and incensed God. True it is, that those who are but yet in the way must be very unable to form just conceptions of this. But we may in general conclude, from the glory of creating power, which is in so many instances displayed before our eyes, how fearful a thing it must be to be the monuments of the vengeance of such a God. He who is mighty to make and save, is also mighty to destroy. This is particularly felt by the sinner, when humbled by conviction; and in every inward conflict there is a repetition of the same distress, as it arises from the same cause.

On the other hand, what must be the value of everlasting happiness in the presence and the enjoyment of God! How blessed, beyond expression, must the believer be when the fulness of the divine benignity, of which we have now access to taste only some smaller and more distant streams, shall be the portion of the soul! What supplications should we not make, when we are assured, that importunity may obtain so rich a treasure! And let me add, how valuable present fellowship and communion with God, which is the earnest and foretaste of complete deliverance from the one, and the eternal unchangeable possession of the other! Say now, my brethren, is it not just and reasonable, that these blessings should be desired with ardor, and sought with importunity? What fervent language have we from the scripture-saints upon this subject! Psal. 42:1, 2. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Psal. 63:1, 2. "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." Is it any wonder that there should be often trials and conflicts in the way to so honorable a relation, and so happy a state? What is cheaply obtained, is commonly esteemed of little worth. Is it to be expected, then, that God should prostitute the blessings of his love to cold and disdainful petitions, to lukewarm and indifferent petitioners? And are there not alas! too many who "ask and have not, because they ask

amiss," who, by their feeble and heartless demands, do justify, and, if I may use such an expression, even solicit a refusal?

III. We proceed to the third thing proposed in the method; which was, To point out the great advantages which flow from wrestling with God. These in consequence of what hath been already said, may be considered as all centring in one point, viz. its power and efficacy in procuring the blessings. Nothing can be said stronger on the benefit of wrestling with God, than that we shall assuredly prevail. The success of Jacob's wrestling is recorded in the passage immediately following the text, verses 27, 28, 29. "And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? and he blessed him there." But that I may illustrate this a little in a practical manner, observe, that the efficacy of wrestling with God in prayer, appears from the three following considerations.

1. It prepares and disposes the people of God for receiving his mercies, and in some cases is itself the actual possession of them. Every part of the divine conduct towards his saints is full of wisdom, and full of grace. One reason why he who knows our wants, requires us to pray, is, that we may be prepared for a profitable supply. We may also rest assured, that he will not delay his interposition one moment beyond the fittest season. Now, that ardent prayer, wrestling, and importunity with God, is the best preparation for receiving his mercies, is plain, both in respect of worth and capacity. It may seem, indeed, improper to speak of any fitness as to worth for receiving the divine mercies, which are all free and unmerited on our part, however dearly purchased on the part of our surety. But, my brethren, with due caution, we may also take in this consideration, the rather that it is in the exercise of prayer that this fitness is obtained: which plainly shews, that it cometh from God, that it is his own gift, and his own work. Is not that person the fitter

for deliverance from distress of any kind, and for the communications of divine favor, who is wholly emptied of himself, truly and deeply humbled, brought prostrate before the Divine Majesty, convinced and satisfied of the vanity of all created enjoyments, and breathing after God, as his sole refuge and consolation, which he will not, and cannot forego?

May we not also say, that he is much more fit, than one, on the other hand, who flies from God with impatient complaints, or sullen disdain; or who, without asking help from above, when one earthly comfort fails him, cleaves the closer to another? The great, if not the only end of divine correction, is, to weaken the power of sin, to make us feel the vanity of the creature, and to break every attachment to the world that is inordinate and excessive. When this end is obtained, therefore, must not the rod be withdrawn? and will not this promise be certainly accomplished? that the Lord will "appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified;" Is. 61:3. If we look into the scripture qualifications for receiving the communications of divine love, we shall find the chief of them to be, the earnestness of our own desires: Is. 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."

Further, wrestling and importunity in prayer gives a capacity of relishing the mercies of God. They are then, and not till then in the same degree, truly mercies, earnestly desired, infinitely prized. It is a common and beaten remark, That the worth of any mercy is never known till we are deprived of it. There is great access to observe this in the Christian life, not only in its beginning, but in every step of its progress. O how refreshing is the intimation of pardon to a convinced sinner, who hath long trembled through fear of wrath, or to the believer, who hath long groaned under a spirit of bondage! O how ravishing is a sense of divine love to that child of God who hath

long complained of the hiding of his Father's face! When, after he hath been lost on a sea of temptations, one wave or billow following close upon the back of another, he is at last received into a peaceful haven! the everlasting arms are stretched round about him, the faithfulness of God is his shield and buckler, and the strength of the Almighty his impregnable security? There is no such stayedness or composure of mind as after a variety of trials. The exercised Christian has tried and thrown away every broken reed, one after another; he hath found the vanity of every refuge of lies; and hath settled his hope on the immoveable foundation of the Rock of ages, which shall never fail.

I added, in entering on this particular, that wrestling and importunity in prayer is in many cases itself the possession of the very mercies we desire. It is the exercise of almost every gracious disposition. To increase in sanctification, to have his graces strengthened, and his corruptions subdued, is the habitual and prevailing desire of every real believer. But how can this be more effectually obtained than by fervent prayer? How, and where, can any gracious disposition be either more improved and strengthened, or more clearly discerned, than when it is in exercise. Faith, love, penitential sorrow, trust, and resignation, are the very dispositions essential to a wrestling believer. Perhaps some will say, True indeed; but they are only attempting to shew themselves, often discovering their weakness, sometimes yielding to their opposites. Alas! says the Christian, my faith is often over-matched with unbelief, and my love contradicted by impatient complaints: what is my penitential sorrow but weeping over a hard heart? my trust and resignation is but a short-lived promise: in a little time my courage fails, and I am ready to tremble at the falling of a leaf. But my dear brethren, is not the importunate wrestler maintaining the conflict, instead of yielding to the stream? and how infinitely preferable are his hours of deepest anguish to that slothful and unequal conduct to be observed in many secure and formal Christians! It is also certain, that many times deliverance comes unlooked for. As the Psalmist says, that whilst he was musing the fire burned; so it frequently happens, that a gracious

God, visits distressed souls, even when they least expect it, with the joy of his salvation, and causeth the bones which he hath broken to rejoice.

2. The efficacy of importunate prayer appears from the promises of success which are annexed to it in scripture. I must here begin by observing, that there are many commands in the word of God to pray, to pray without ceasing, to continue instant in prayer. Now, every command to pray, contains in it a promise of a gracious answer from the hearer of prayer. It necessarily implies it. The truth of God is a pledge and security for it. He would not deceive us with vain hopes, or put us upon a fruitless attempt: for he is not a man, that he should lie. But besides this general consideration, there are many express promises particularly to the earnestness and importunity of the desire: Prov. 2:3, 4, 5. "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her, as for hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." See also the parable of the importunate widow, and the unjust judge, Luke 18:1, which concludes thus, ver. 7. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"

Let me beg your attention to another passage recorded in the 17th chapter of Matthew, where there was brought to our Saviour a possessed person, whom his disciples could not cure: ver. 19, 20, 21. "Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit, this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting." This passage is somewhat remarkable, and entirely to our present purpose. It shews, that in the œconomy of divine grace, there are some mercies that may be obtained by less, and some that require more earnest and fervent prayer. This species of devils, it seems, would not yield to the

same influence that others did. See only further James 5:16. "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."

3. In the last place, The same thing appears from the daily experience of the people of God, and many memorable examples of the efficacy of prayer. I might cite a great number of these to you from the holy scriptures, which are not only a sacred repository of divine truth, but a history of divine Providence. You may take the few following instances. Abraham's intercessory prayer for Sodom, in which that ancient patriarch, honored with the glorious title of the friend of God, was allowed to plead with him, to repeat and urge his request, as well as to strengthen it with arguments. It is true, it saved not the whole city from destruction; yet was it heard in every part of it, according to its tenor. Nay, even though the ten righteous, which was his lowest supposition, were not found in it; yet the few righteous that were there, were not involved in the general calamity, but suffered to escape. Take also the example of Elias, as cited by the apostle James, chap. 5:17, 18. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." See the case of Daniel, recorded in the 2d chapter of that book, particularly the 17th, 18th and 19th verses of that chapter, where you will learn, that, by the united prayer of Daniel and his companions, the secret of the king's dream was communicated to them in a revelation from heaven. I only add the instance recorded Matth. 15:21, and downwards, where the woman of Canaan so importunately presses her request, and at last receives this answer: ver. 28. "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

I might easily mention many more recent examples of the efficacy of prayer; but those which have been already produced are abundantly

sufficient. The truth is, I am persuaded that every serious Christian is able to recollect examples of it from his own experience; and surely they are of all others most inexcusable, who restrain prayer before God, after-they have known the unspeakable benefit which flows from it.

IV. LET us now make some practical improvement of what hath been said on this subject. And,

1. Suffer me to improve what hath been said, for the conviction and reproof of those who are habitually unmindful of this important duty. Alas! my brethren, what reason have we to complain of the neglect of wrestling, and want of importunity in prayer! Is not the language itself become unfashionable, and liable to scorn? As a person as eminent in station as in piety once said, "Men have now devised a smooth and easy way to heaven, quite consistent with the spirit of the world, in which temptations and spiritual conflicts, and inward trials, are unknown." But be assured, however changeable we are in our fancy and inclination, the word of God abideth for ever. There is very great reason to fear, nay there is good ground to affirm, that those who are strangers to wrestling with God in prayer, are sleeping in security, and under the dominion of sin. You will say perhaps, you live at ease and undisturbed. It may be so, and it is so much the worse; for the prince of this world, will always consult the peace and quietness of his own subjects.

I would earnestly intreat every hearer of the gospel to suffer this reproof to enter into his mind, as it is what can be certainly known only to God and your own souls. Though there is sufficient outward evidence of the general neglect of this duty, how far any person is particularly guilty, must be left to the determination of his own conscience, and the judgment of him who seeth and searcheth the heart. If there is any among you who habitually despiseth prayer, who makes every little business, every little indisposition or laziness of mind, an excuse for neglecting or postponing it: if there are any who satisfy themselves with a dead cursory formality in duty; who

call in question the reality of communion with God in others, because they are strangers to it themselves; without all doubt they have great cause to fear, that they are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Tell me, what is the reason of your backwardness to drawing near to God? Is it not, that you are afraid of coming into his presence? Is it not, that you cannot bear the opening of your hearts? Is it not from some dark jealousy and suspicion, that all is not right with you, though you had rather cover than confess it? My earnest prayer to God is, that though you keep at a distance from him, he may not keep at a distance from you; that he may, by his Spirit, convince you of your danger, and, in great mercy, deliver you from this miserable state.

2. You may learn, from what has been said, one great cause of the low state of religion, and the barrenness of ordinances among us at present. It is the neglect of prayer, and that many, though they may condescend to ask, yet do not think it worth their while to wrestle for the blessing. The profane are not the only persons justly chargeable with a failure in this part of their duty. Many real Christians are apt to slacken their diligence in this important exercise, and many often read their sin in their punishment. But is it not very wonderful, my brethren, that those who have once tasted that the Lord is gracious, who have known the sweetness of communion with God, should ever lose it by their own indifference and backwardness to maintain it? Yet here we must, of necessity, lay the blame. We must still say, in justification of his procedure, Is. 59:1, 2. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." It seems to appear from the experience of Christians, that God is jealous of their treatment of his love, and deeply resents the alienation of their affections; and therefore, to have sensible joy in him, and to walk in the comfort of the holy Ghost, which is so great a privilege, cannot be preserved without the greatest watchfulness on their part, and the greatest constancy in prayer.

3. Suffer me now, in a few words, to exhort every person in this assembly, and in particular those who have so lately renewed their engagement to God, over the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, to give themselves unto prayer. Of what use is your being admitted to this sacred table, if it do not incline you to live nearer to God in the habitual tenor of your life? This is the very privilege which we obtain by the blood of Christ, that we have access with boldness and confidence through the faith of him. This is the very advantage that we obtain by his continual intercession before the throne, Heb. 4:14, 16. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Again, have you not devoted your lives to the service of God? have you not promised to keep his commandments? How do you expect to fulfil your promise? Are you not ready to say, 'Not unless he be pleased himself to preserve and keep me; not unless he put his Spirit within me, and write his laws in my heart?' And do you not know, that he hath said, "Yet for all these things will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them?" I will ask you one question more. Do you not know that you are yet in an evil world? Do you not know what variety of temptations and sufferings you may yet be exposed to? How shall you bear up under trials; how shall you "glorify God in the day of visitation," if you live habitually at a distance from him? Christians, it is to him you must look when trouble cometh upon you. All other refuge will soon fail: and vanity, vanity, be seen written upon the creature. But with what confusion must you then lift up your eyes to him, if you forget him in prosperity! Therefore let me beseech you, in the most earnest manner, to renew your diligence in the exercise of prayer. In a particular manner, I must recommend this exercise to young persons. You, my dear brethren, are exposed to many dangers, your strength small, your experience little, your knowledge imperfect. Live a life of prayer, and dependance upon God. Daniel and his companions were young persons, yet mighty in prayer: therefore learn it early, practise it diligently, and wait upon it habitually and

constantly. Hear what the prophet says in commendation of it, Isa. 40:29, 30, 31. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. 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, and they shall walk and not faint."

4. I shall conclude the subject, by giving you two or three directions for the preservation and improvement of the spiritual life; and particularly for enabling you to persevere with uniformity and comfort in the exercise of prayer.

1. Be watchful and circumspect in the whole of your conversation. Let it be your great aim, to keep consciences void of offence towards God and towards man. Prayer and watchfulness have a reciprocal influence upon one another. Neglect of prayer will make you yield to temptation, and the indulgence of sin will make you afraid to pray. But habitual watchfulness will carry you with comfort to God, at the hour of prayer, both in thankfulness for past mercies, and reliance on him for future strength.

2. Observe with attention the course of his providence towards you. Enumerate his mercies to you in prosperity, adore his righteous will in adversity. Let this be the work, not only of particular seasons, but of every day. This will at once shew you the necessity, and abundantly supply the matter of prayer. If you do otherwise, you will go to prayer without any clear and determinate views of what you are to pray for, and then it is no wonder that it degenerate into a lifeless form. Once more,

3. Be much employed in intercession for others. This noble testimony of Christian love, has the most powerful influence in warming the heart, and enlivening the affections in prayer. It happens frequently, that those who have hardly a word to say for themselves, and whose desires are quite heavy and languid as to what regards their own

interest, no sooner come to supplicate for others, than they are enabled to pour out their whole souls before God with the greatest fulness of expression, and enlargement of affection; as if it were the purpose of God, to invite us to this exercise, by honoring it with a particular mark of his acceptance and approbation. Oh that it would please God to revive among professing Christians a spirit of prayer, that when they cannot unite in sentiment, they may unite in prayer; that when impiety and immorality are bold and insolent, they may oppose them by prayer; and that when they are slandered, insulted, or abused by their enemies, they may find unspeakable comfort in imitating their dying Saviour, loving them that hate them, blessing them that curse them, and praying for them who despitefully use them and persecute them. I conclude with the words of the apostle Jude. ver. 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."

OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE COMPARED

SERMON 13

Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams. - 1 SAMUEL, 15:22

THAT obedience is due to God from all his intelligent creatures, I suppose none here present will deny. It is the original unchangeable law of creation, which every after discovery served not to undetermine, but to support and confirm. It was the religion of man in his primitive state of innocence; and it shall be the religion of heaven, when we shall see our Maker as he is. The very excellence of truth itself lies in its influence on holiness, and the very purpose of every sacred institution is to form our minds to a habit of obedience and subjection to the will of God.

In the mean time it is of the utmost moment, that we have clear and just conceptions of the nature and principles of obedience, and that we guard against the errors that are often committed on this subject. Some, from a partial or excessive attachment to one branch of duty, are apt to disparage another; and some are apt to make a merit of their zeal and diligence in one duty, as if it would procure indulgence for them in the wilful neglect of another. From the language in the remarkable passage of scripture which I have chosen for my text, it is plain, that sacrifices, or the outward worship of God, are sometimes made a cover for the neglect of obedience. Nor are there wanting other passages where complaints are brought against the same mistake. On the other hand, this passage where the text lies, and another expression a-kin to it in the gospel, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," have been grossly misapplied, to bring contempt upon every positive institution, and even upon the whole exercises of piety; and that by such persons as do very little honor either to themselves or their opinions, by the perfection of their obedience. I have chosen these words, with a view to the information and conviction of both these sorts of persons, and for the instruction and edification of those who desire to walk in the straight path of duty, without turning to the right hand or to the left. In discoursing further upon them, I propose,

I. To open a little, and make a few remarks on the history which gave occasion to the words of the prophet.

II. To shew in what respect it is, that obedience is opposed and preferred to sacrifice, or justly called better, as in the words of the text.

III. In the last place, To make some application of the subject.

I. FIRST, then, I am to open a little, and make a few remarks upon the history which gave occasion to the words of the prophet. This will be the more proper, that the setting this part of the sacred story in a clear light, will both afford us some excellent instructions, and also obviate the cavils of unreasonable men. The people called Amalekites were derived, and had their name, from one Amalek, the son of Esau's eldest son Eliphaz, by a concubine. (Gen. 36:12.) The first mention we have made of them as a people, was their being engaged in a very unjust war with the children of Israel. (Ex. 17:8.) This provoked God to determine, or at least upon this occasion he was pleased to intimate, their being devoted to utter destruction; as Exod. 17:14, 15, 16. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah nissi. For he said, Because the Lord hath sworn, that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

The injustice and impiety of this action of the Amalekites, which provoked God, not only to threaten, but to swear their destruction, may be learned from the account of this matter given us in Deut. 25:17, 18, 19. "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt: how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it." From this it appears, that the Amalekites attacked the

Israelites unprovoked, and without any cause; for the Israelites neither intended to possess themselves of their country, nor were they so much as passing by their borders, which might have given them some cause of suspicion. Without any thing of this sort, they came out of their own country to attack the Israelites in the wilderness, either in consequence of the old grudge between Esau and Jacob, or from a principle of covetousness, to seize upon the riches which they heard the children of Israel had brought out of Egypt.

It is further observed, that they cut off those that were faint and weary, when the distressed condition of that people seemed rather to call for compassion and help. This was unjust and cruel; and discovers them to have been a savage and profligate people; especially if one circumstance more be taken notice of, that they did all this in open defiance and contempt of God. They had no doubt heard, that he interested himself in a particular manner in the preservation of the Israelites, and was, in a literal sense, their king and governor; and therefore it is said particularly, ver. 18, of the last cited passage, that the Amalekites "feared not God." Is there any thing absurd or unsuitable to the majesty of the King of kings, in his declaring he would have war with such a people from generation to generation, and at last destroy them, as he certainly foreknew that they would not grow better, but worse and worse?

Let us not omit to observe the long-suffering and patience of God. It was not till some hundreds of years afterwards, that orders were issued out to put the sentence in execution against that people, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and were ripe for judgment. This appears evidently from the hints of their character given in the chapter where the text lies. They are called, verse 18, "the sinners the Amalekites," by way of emphasis, to shew, that they were eminently wicked above all other people. It is no less evident, that their king that ruled over them was a bloody cruel man, from the words of Samuel to him, verse 33, "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." These

circumstances make it highly probable, that this prince and his people were commonly employed in the trade of war, in plundering and murdering such of their neighbors as they were able to subdue. Now, how groundless are all the tragical outcries of unbelievers against this part of the history of the Bible! Is not God the supreme disposer of every event? Is not the fate of nations decided by his righteous will? Is he not known by the exercise of this his holy prerogative, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay?" It is incontestable, from "many undoubted facts in the history of Providence, that verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." Oh! that this were considered in time by many who are bold enough to impeach the conduct of their Maker, to whom one part of the character of the Amalekites seems very applicable, "They fear not God."

It will perhaps be expected, that I should take particular notice of that part of the command given to Saul to destroy the "infants and sucklings," together with those who were come to age. On this you may observe, that it was no more than the exercise of that absolute right which God hath to the lives of all his creatures. He gave them at his pleasure, and he may recall them whenever he will. Those who offer this objection against the scripture history, do not seem to consider, that it militates equally against the daily and visible course of Providence. How many infants do we see daily carried off by the diseases incident to that state? Do not the half of mankind die before they grow up to the years of reason? Does this happen without the fore-knowledge and Providence of God? or dare any charge him with being unjust in this part of his will? If we dare not presume to go so far, then, the commanding the children to be cut off by the hand of man, is a mere circumstance, that cannot alter the nature of the decree. The sovereignty of God appears in the clearest manner from the whole of his written word, and from what happens every day before our eyes. Instead, therefore, of raising presumptuous objections against such instances as this referred to in the text, it would be far more just, as well as dutiful, to infer from them, that we are "conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity;" that we lie under an universal forfeiture of life, and therefore a righteous God

may execute it upon us at whatever time, and in whatever manner, it seems good unto himself.

I might also observe, that if we consider the circumstances in which these Amalekite children were, from the character of their parents, we shall see, in the conduct of God towards them, a mixture of mercy with judgment. I have already observed, from the sacred history, what wicked persons the Amalekites were. Now, supposing their children lest to be trained up by their parents, the presumption is, that they would have been formed by their pernicious example, to murder and rapine, and all sorts of wickedness; and, in particular, to a hatred of the people and God of Israel. This would have rendered their condition infinitely more miserable than we can possibly suppose it by their being cut off in infancy, before the commission of actual guilt. Have we not every day before our eyes examples of persons living and dying in sin, to whom it would have been a great mercy if their eyes, as soon as ever they saw the light, had been closed up in everlasting darkness? Upon the whole, we have reason to be fully satisfied on every such question as this, by resolving it into the sovereignty of God; but I have shortly mentioned this particular to show how incapable we are of forming a proper judgment of the procedure of Divine Providence; and that the order to destroy "both man and woman, infant and suckling," when given by the Lord of nature, hath nothing in it either unjust or unmerciful.

This awful command was given to Saul, the king of Israel; which he, being fully satisfied of its coming from God, prepared himself to execute. But he and the people, from a principle of covetousness, reserved what was most valuable of the effects of the Amalekites for their own use, in direct contradiction to the command of God, who had ordered the cattle and substance of that people also to be destroyed. This was probably done to show, that their punishment was an act of pure justice, without any intention to enrich his inheritance by it. When the prophet Samuel challenged Saul for his disobedience, he endeavors to cover his conduct by a pretext of religion, verse 15. "And Saul said, — The people spared the best of

the sheep, and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." To this my text is the answer, made by Samuel, in the name of the Lord: "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

Before I proceed to the second general head, I will make a few observations on this piece of history, for your instruction.

1. How easily are people misled into disobedience by their present interest, or carnal inclinations! how ready are these to mix themselves in all our actions, and to turn what was intended as an instance of obedience, into an act of impiety and transgression! The children of Israel would not destroy the goodly substance of the Amalekites, according to the express command of God, that they might have it to themselves; though it is remarkable, that they do not appear from the history to have made any difficulty in executing what was by far the hardest part of the command, viz. the slaying of man and woman, infant and suckling, that fell into their hands. Agag, indeed, and him only, they excepted, perhaps to grace their triumph, or from some other selfish motive. Interest seems to have prevailed here; but there are other passions also which too often mix themselves with our religion. Malice and anger, for example, and a desire of revenge, are often seen to intermingle themselves with our zeal for the glory of God, and convert one of the most amiable virtues into a detestable crime.

2. You may observe how natural it is for people, when challenged for any fault, to lay the blame of it upon others, even when there is little prospect of hiding their own guilt, "But the people," says Saul, ver. 21, "took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed." Whereas, though no doubt they were also in the fault, he was much more guilty than they. He had received the particular command from God: he was king and leader of the people, and ought to have restrained them from acting

contrary to the divine purpose. This, however, he was so far from so much as attempting, that he is spoken of as consenting to, and a chief actor in the offence, ver. 9. "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen." This disposition seems to be as old as sin itself; for we see it in the case of Adam, after eating the forbidden fruit: Gen. 3:11, 12. "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst 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." We ought to be humbled for it, as a part of the corruption of our nature, which is not only prone to the commission of sin, but backward to repentance or confession.

3. We may see it is no unusual thing for men to imagine they have been obedient to God even in that very action by which they have in a remarkable manner shown their disobedience. This was plainly the case with Saul, whom we find maintaining and insisting upon his innocence, ver. 20. "And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites." Where ever any duty, in its substance, in its circumstances, or even in its principle, varies from the rules laid down for it in the word of God, it is essentially defective; and where the fault is capital it becometh a sin. This, I believe, will be always found to be the case where merit is pleaded from human performances. True obedience is always humble, and sensible of the imperfections attending it. Ostentatious obedience, if it were for no other reason, is an abomination in the sight of God.

4. How often does it happen, that the excuses for sin are the aggravations of it! It seemed to Saul, that he had fully justified his conduct by saying, that he spared of the best of the spoil, to sacrifice unto the Lord. If there was no such thing in his or the people's mind, when they departed from their commission, then it was a fearful aggravation of his sin, to add to it the guilt of falsehood and hypocrisy; nor did it seem to want impiety, to pretend to offer sacrifices from the accursed substance of that devoted race. If, on the

other hand, they really from the beginning intended to present a part of the spoil as a sacrifice to God, it shows the great deceitfulness of sin, which suggested this unholy composition, and made them think, that their disobedience might be atoned for by a gift at the altar. Many like instances might be given in which the excuses for sin are an addition to the guilt. There are not wanting some who, either in a doubtful or explicit manner, would lay the blame of their sins upon their Maker, and impute to the influence of his providence what belongs to the freedom of their own wills. At the same time, it is very remarkable, though melancholy to reflect upon, that those excuses for sin which carry in them the most daring profanity, are commonly most stupifying to the conscience. Such is the state of all those who fortify themselves in an evil practice, by embracing loose principles, who, having first given way to unbridled inclination in the breach of God's laws, steel themselves against conviction and repentance, by a denial of his truth.

5. How great is the folly of men who hope to atone for their disobedience by any compensation, but particularly by religious rites! Saul and his people, whatever were their views at first, seem to have hoped that they might escape the punishment of disobedience by offering sacrifices. There seems to have been a tendency to this among the Jews, in general, in after times; and it is the mistaken hope of hypocrites in every age. But how manifest is the error! how gross is the delusion! Sacrifices, and all acts of worship, derive their very beauty and excellence from the disposition of the worshipper. Solomon tells us, Prov. 15:8, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight." How absurd and contradictory, how dishonorable to God, is it, for the same person to be a zealous worshipper and a wicked liver, a man fervent in prayer and deceitful in dealing, heavenly in his language and sensual in his heart! One would think the dreadful inconsistency of such a conduct would alarm the most drowsy conscience; but God, in righteous judgment, gives up to a spirit of slumber, that they may be the standard of punishment for the greatest sinners, who shall be appointed their portion "with

hypocrites and unbelievers, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone for evermore."

II. I PROCEED to the second thing proposed; which was, To show in what respects it is that obedience is opposed and preferred to sacrifice, or justly called better, as in the words of the text. It is not uncommon to hear this passage produced in order to prove the value of moral above positive precepts. Moral precepts, I suppose you know, are precepts of perpetual and unchangeable obligation; and positive, such as either have not, or do not seem to have, any intrinsic excellence in themselves, but depend upon the immediate and express institution of God. Now though, no doubt, if it is done with proper care, and upon legitimate principles, a distinction may be stated between these different kinds of duties: yet it is plain that this cannot be the spirit of the passage before us. There needs no more to satisfy us of this, than to reflect upon the history illustrated above, which gave occasion to the words of the prophet. That command of God, for disobedience to which Saul was so severely reproved, and afterwards so signally punished, was so far from being in itself a moral duty antecedent to the command, that it was not merely a positive, but an occasional and temporary duty; nay, without the express appointment and authority of God, it would have been an atrocious crime, viz. "Utterly destroying the Amalekites, man and woman, infant and suckling." We have not therefore the least encouragement from this example to make light of any command that is supported by the institution and authority of God. Well then, may it be said, were not sacrifices instituted by him? and how does the prophet affirm in this passage, that "obedience is better than sacrifice?" For illustrating this, and at the same time guarding it against perversion and abuse, I intreat your attention to the following observations.

1. Obedience is preferred to sacrifices, as they were uncommanded, free, and voluntary. If we attend to the sacrifices under the law, we shall find them of different kinds; particularly, we shall find them distinguished in this respect, that some of them were expressly and

positively ordained, and others were left to the good-will or spontaneous inclination of the offerer. The first were binding upon the whole of that people in the strongest manner, and could not be dispensed with; the others were left to themselves, as the occasion should point out the propriety, and the piety or gratitude of their hearts should dispose to the performance. It would be a great mistake to suppose, that the appointed service of the sanctuary might be omitted or altered by any human prudence, or dispensed with, even under pretence of obedience to the moral law. The observation of the sabbath, of circumcision, of the passover, the daily burnt-offering, the annual sacrifice on the great day of expiation, the trespass-offering, and many others, were so indispensably necessary, that no opposition was to be presumed or imagined between them and the moral law. Nay, the whole circumstances of these rites were precisely specified, and those who varied any thing in the manner of their observation were to be cut off from their people. For this see Exodus 12:19.: 31:14, and many other passages. I must further observe, that even with respect to voluntary or free-will offerings, though they were left at liberty whether they would offer such at all or not; yet if they did offer, the manner in which it behoved to be conducted, was appointed precisely, and they were forbidden to depart from it, under the same awful sanction. You may see the rules laid down for peace-offerings in the 2d and 3d chapters of Leviticus; and for the danger of any error in attending on them, see Lev. 7:20, 21.; Lev. 17:8, 9. Now, nothing can be more plain, than that the sacrifices which Saul and his people had in view to offer, or at least pretended to have had in view, were voluntary or free-will offerings: they were no part of the regular, stated, unalterable service of the sanctuary; but might be offered or not, as they themselves thought proper. When you remember this, my brethren, you will see with how great justice and force the prophet opposes sacrifices of this kind, to obeying the voice of the Lord: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" As if he had said, Can you imagine that God will be as well pleased with gifts of your own devising, as with a strict and punctual execution of the orders which himself had given; especially when the very

sacrifices you would offer to him, are purchased by the breach of his own express command?

The words of the text having been spoken by the Old-Testament prophet, and in language directly suited to the circumstances of that dispensation, I have kept the laws of the Mosaic œconomy closely in view. The spirit however of the whole, and the truth resulting from it, belongs as clearly and sensibly to us as to the fathers. We are not to presume to make light of any institution of God, though, either in whole or in part, of a positive nature. But considering sacrifices as including all acts of worship, nay all acts of religion or service to God, of whatever kind, so far as they are voluntary in their circumstances, let us not think to put them in the room of obedience to his law. If any man, from this passage of scripture, shall take liberty to despise the sabbath, to forbear prayer in secret and in family, to neglect the sacraments or instituted worship of God, he perverteth and wresteth the scriptures, to his own destruction. On the other hand, if any person, under pretence of extraordinary prayer, shall neglect his calling, if he shall put voluntary fasts and bodily mortification in the room of repentance, if he shall make donations to the poor, or to sacred uses, instead of paying his just debts, to the prejudice of others, it may, with great propriety, be said to him in the words of Samuel, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

2. Obedience is opposed to sacrifices as they are false and hypocritical. Even in those sacrifices that were most expressly appointed, and of the most indispensable obligation, there might be an essential defect, from the inward disposition not corresponding to the outward action. Reason, as well as scripture, teacheth us, that in all acts of worship, the sincerity of the heart makes the chief ingredient. It is the prerogative, and the glory of God, that he searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Therefore, in every part of his service, he requires integrity and uprightness of heart: "He desireth truth in the inward parts." That I

may treat this part of the subject with the greater distinctness, you may observe, that our sacrifices or worship may be polluted by a two-fold hypocrisy. These may be called, hypocrisy towards God, and hypocrisy towards man; or, in other words, inconsistency or unsoundness in the character, and disguise or insincerity in the act of worship.

(1) Our sacrifices may be polluted by inconsistency or unsoundness in the character. This is the case where men are careful in attending upon the institutions of religion, but do not make conscience of keeping the commandments of God in their ordinary-conversation; when they are punctual in the outward performance of the duties of the first table of the law, but are under no restraint as to sins against the second; but, in a particular manner, when they are under the unhappy delusion of imagining, that the one will make atonement for the other. I believe it will be found, that this is the meaning of many passages of scripture, where sacrifices are spoken of with disregard. The word of God could never be so inconsistent with itself, as to condemn them simply, while the law concerning them stood in force; but when they were offered by wicked men, when they were rested on as the whole of religion, or made to compensate for the neglect of moral duties, then they are spoken of with abhorrence: Hosea 6:6. "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God, more than burnt-offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me." Is. 1:10. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of your God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts? 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. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Psal. 1:6. "Unto the wicked God faith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?" Amos verse 21–24, I hate, I despise your feast-days, "and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Indeed, my brethren, what can be more abominable, than the worship of such persons as live in the habitual indulgence of sin? what more provoking to God? what more presumptuous in the sinner? And who can sufficiently wonder at the blindness of all of this character? That their very access to God, which should increase their abhorrence of sin, should, notwithstanding, set them at ease in the commission of it? Will he bear more in you, think you, than in others? He will bear less. He will visit you sooner in his providence, and he will punish you heavier to all eternity. Things are quite opposite to what you suppose. Instead of your duties rendering your sins pardonable, your sins render your duties insupportable.

(2) The other kind of hypocrisy is, when men put on religion as a cloak and covering on their wickedness, and, without any inward regard or sense of duty to God, aim only at the praise of men. This is, if possible, more daring and presumptuous than the other, or rather is a more advanced stage of the same character. It was for this that our Saviour so severely reprehended the Pharisees: Matth. 6:1, 2. "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou dost thine alms, do not found a trumpet before

thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." And verse 5, "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." But truly this is not all. Some are not satisfied with doing things in themselves praise-worthy from ostentation, or the hope of applause from men, but they endeavor, by their shining and burning zeal in such things, to blind the eyes of others, and hinder them from discovering and punishing their secret wickedness: Matth. 23:14. "Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye devour widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." Whenever this is the case, it is no wonder that obedience should be preferred before sacrifice, and indeed set in opposition to it. You see, however, that this is no more than what our Saviour says of almsgiving, which is so eminent a moral duty, but which can never find acceptance with God, when done merely from a principle of ostentation. It is impossible, upon the whole, to set this matter in a juster light than our Saviour has done, in speaking of the same Pharisees, Matth. 23:23. "Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint and annise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

3. Obedience is opposed to sacrifices, as they are dead and formal. I am not at this time to mention all the ends which an infinitely wise God intended to serve by the appointment of sacrifices: but every one must be sensible, that they could be of no avail without taking in the principle from which they were brought, and the temper and disposition of the offerer. There was no doubt very much of outward form in the Mosaic œconomy; and the ritual practices bore so great a bulk in it, that, by way of comparison with the spirituality of the gospel, it is called the law of a carnal commandment. But it would be mistaking it very much to suppose that God was fully satisfied with,

or desired that his people should rest in the outward form. This is plain from many passages of scripture. What an example of fervor and elevation of spirit have we in the exercise and language of the Psalmist David, through the whole of his writings! You may see, Ps. 5:7. "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." Ps. 26:6. "I will wash my hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord." To this you may add what he says, Psal. 51:16, 17. "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

In opposition to this, however clear a dictate, both of reason and scripture, it seems to have been the disease of ancient times, to imagine, that the sacrifices were some how necessary or useful to their Maker in themselves; and that he was pleased with the possession of the gift, independent of the disposition of the giver. This led both Jews and Gentiles to suppose, that the more numerous and costly the victims, the greater would be their influence: Micah 6:6. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old! Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" To such an excessive height did this error proceed, that on extraordinary occasions the Heathens of many different nations offered human sacrifices, and endeavored, by their number, their youth, or the high rank of their parents, to increase their value in the sight of God. In opposition to this gross delusion, God often asserts his all sufficiency as well as sovereignty; as particularly in that admirable passage, Ps. 50:7.-14. "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild

beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High." And even with regard to their ordinary attendance on instruction, he says, Ezekiel 33:31. "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness."

This conduct, so dishonorable to God, and so inconsistent with the holiness and purity of his nature, had no sufficient excuse either among Jews or Heathens. But surely it is still more criminal among Christians. The gospel, as a dispensation of clearer light, and greater purity, is called the ministration of the Spirit. And in opposition to all ceremonial and local worship, our Saviour says, John 4:23, 24, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." But are there not some amongst us who may be justly charged with guilt in this respect? or rather, who is there amongst us that does not in some degree fall under the reproof? Are there not some who rest in the form of worship, and are strangers to the spirit of it? Are there not some who value and trust in their forms while they are regardless of the spirit? Nay, are there not some who not only submit to, but are pleased with the form, and yet have no relish for that nearness to God, and sense of his presence, which constitutes the spirit of worship? How many sinful motives may bring us to the house of God! If you come to avoid the reproach of men, is that a real sacrifice to God? If you come from ostentation, to be seen of men, is that an offering acceptable to God? If you come to gratify your fancy, by hearing the performance of man, you are offering the incense to the creature that is due only to God. Consider further, how often we may be sinfully employed in the house of God. Are careless inattentive persons offering acceptable sacrifices to God? And those who indulge vain, proud, sensual,

covetous thoughts in worship, offering sacrifice to God? Are those who come to censure or admire the speaker, offering sacrifice to God? In all such cases, without any disparagement to the holiest institutions of God, or rather from a just concern to defend them from profanation, we may say, in the words of the text, "Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

4. In the last place, obedience is opposed to sacrifices, as they are misplaced and unseasonable. In the ancient dispensation, time and place were as much ascertained as any circumstance that belonged to the temple-service; and nothing could be more contrary to the spirit of that œconomy, than taking any liberty with the order which God himself had established. There are several instances of heavy judgments denounced against princes, whose chief fault seems to have been, offering the appointed sacrifices in forbidden places, or at improper seasons. If, therefore, he would not suffer any variation in circumstances which he had prescribed, how could Saul suppose, that he would accept of a sacrifice in the place of a duty which he had commanded? It is also to be observed, that the duties of the moral law are perpetually binding; and therefore, when in Providence any example of them occurs, strengthened with the urgent call of necessity and mercy, they become exceptions to an ordinance of a positive nature. Thus our Saviour does not contradict the law of Moses in what he teaches concerning the Sabbath; but shows in what manner that command was, or ought always to have been understood by the Jews themselves. See an instance of this, Luke 13:14, 15, 16. "And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath-day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come, and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox, or his ass, from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?" See also two other examples of the same thing, in the 12th chapter of the gospel

according to Matthew; in support of which our Lord cites a passage from the Old Testament, ver. 7. "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."

The same general rule is to be observed at all times. We must attend to the intimations of Providence, and as far as they can be clearly discerned, discharge those duties to which we are immediately called. Every thing is beautiful in its place and season, and is then not only most acceptable to God, but most useful to men. It is so far from being any disparagement of sacrifices, that it is their very excellence, to be confined to their time and place. And the maxim in the text will apply with equal propriety to every duty of the moral law. The most excellent of them may be misapplied. True religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is, to visit the fatherless and the widow; and yet, if the time of divine worship be unnecessarily chosen for that purpose, or if too much time be consumed in it by those whose presence cannot be useful, it is a rejected sacrifice. Feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, is the character that shall meet with the approbation of our final judge; and yet, if any shall, out of ostentation, feed the poor abroad, and starve their families at home, or perform this duty at the expence of any other more immediately binding, he falls under the condemnation of the prophet in the text: "Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams." To conclude this head, we shall greatly misinterpret this passage of scripture, if we pretend to honor one part of religion to the prejudice of another. The sacrifices condemned by the prophet are not to be understood of positive duties, as opposed to moral, nor of acts of worship, as opposed to the duties of the second table; but of every act of religion, however excellent in itself, or necessary in its place, if it is done from an ill principle, with a sinful purpose, in a sinful manner, or substituted in the room of that which God in his Providence doth immediately require.

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

1. From what hath been said, you may learn what are the great characters of acceptable obedience; and, I think, they may be reduced to the three following. 1. It must be implicit obedience. It must be founded immediately and directly on the authority of God. We must not take upon us to judge of the moment and importance of any part of his will, further than he hath made it known himself. It is a very dangerous thing for us to make comparisons between one duty and another, especially with a view of dispensing with any of them, or altering their order, and substituting one in another's place. 2. A second character of true obedience is, that it be self-denied and impartial, that it be not directed or qualified by our present interest. It was the best of the spoil that Saul and the people saved; that which was vile and refuse, they utterly destroyed. It is too common, that our own interest both points out the object, and assigns the measure of our obedience; and in that case, it does not deserve the name of obedience to God at all. But when the Christian is devoted to God, ready at his call, and equally disposed to any employment assigned him in Providence, he then may be said indeed to do his will. 3. A third character of obedience is, that it be universal, without any exception. Saul, and the children of Israel, had complied so far with the order given them, that the greatest part both of the people and substance of Amalek was destroyed; but he stopped short, and knowingly lest unfinished what had been enjoined him by the same authority.

2. From what hath been said on this subject, you may see, that the true notion of obedience is inconsistent with the notion of merit, as if we could lay our Maker under some sort of obligation. This is as fatal and dangerous an error as any whatever, to think we may merit at the hand of God, and yet it is very common. Nay, it seems to be natural to us all, with great difficulty restrained, and never in this life wholly overcome. You see how Saul justified himself, and said, "Yea, but I have obeyed the voice of the Lord." But, in the judgment of

God, there was no consideration had of what he had done, but a severe sentence of condemnation upon him for what he had neglected. True obedience is always considered in this light, as a debt due to God, for the performance of which nothing can be claimed, but for the neglect of which a penalty is incurred. I wish this were properly attended to. The guilt of transgression is plainly inconsistent with the merit of obedience. If we are liable to punishment for not obeying, the right of our Maker to our service must be complete, there is no room to plead any merit in compliance, and the reward must be of grace, and not of debt. Thus, I think, it is always felt by good men; and the more that they are devoted to God, they are the less disposed to avail themselves of any thing they have done, and the more inclined to ask forgiveness for what hath been either omitted, or ill done.

3. From what hath been said, you may learn the great defects of our obedience in general. If we consider the characters of true obedience, implicit, impartial, and universal, we must be sensible what great blemishes attend every act of duty to God which we perform. We shall always find something amiss, either in its extent, its principle, or its end. What reason this for humiliation? what a powerful argument to every Christian to live a life of continual dependance on divine strength to enable him to obey, and on divine mercy to accept of his imperfect obedience? Nothing but great ignorance of themselves, or great inattention to what passes in their own hearts, can embolden men to put confidence in themselves. And indeed their doing so is commonly attended with very mortifying effects. When God leaves them, in fatherly displeasure, to prove and try them, or when he leaves sinners to themselves, to fill up the measure of their iniquities, it soon affords a satisfying proof, that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing. To will may be present with us, but to do that which is good, we find not.

4. In the last place, Suffer me earnestly to exhort you to make it your daily study, not only to keep the commandments of God, but to take particular notice from what principle your obedience flows. See how

much there is in it of self-denial, of devotedness to God, of subjection to his providence. One act of silent submission, or a quiet application to those duties that are immediately necessary, though neither easy nor honorable, is of much more value, than a long tract of activity and zeal in a public and visible sphere of action, sweetened by reputation and applause. As the submissive Christian lives upon the Creator alone, independent of the creature, so the obedient Christian serves his God and Redeemer alone, without paying any regard to the esteem or approbation of his fellow-sinners. In this way only is your obedience given to God, and in this way only will you find it pleasant or profitable to yourselves. If you keep clearly and closely to the command of God, and have not so much as any other desire or inclination, than to know what it is, you will hardly ever be mistaken. But if you allow other motives to have place, if you take upon you to judge of what is most proper or expedient, or even practicable, you will pollute every part of your duty, and find yourselves often involved in impenetrable darkness. If what is duty be the inquiry, and interest set aside, if duty be the object of your attention, and events left to God, you will find unspeakable consolation from it in the mean time, as well as the success more effectually secured, than it could possibly have been by any anxiety or foresight of your own. Let God then have the unadulterated obedience of all his creatures; and let us ask of him, according to his promise, "to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure."

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD

SERMON 14

The NAME of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. - PROV. 18:10

THIS book of Proverbs consists almost entirely of observations upon human life. The characters and pursuits of men are described in it with a strength and propriety, which was never exceeded by those who devoted their whole attention to the study of what is called the knowledge of the world and of mankind. But in one particular it differs from, and excels all human learning, that it never separates the knowledge of the world from the knowledge of him who made and who governs it. There we are taught to improve the lessons we receive in the course of providence, for leading us to obedience and submission to him, "who doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou? There, while a view is given us of the innumerable paths which men have struck out for themselves in travelling through life, our eyes are continually directed to the paths of righteousness, the sure and only way to rest and peace.

Experience alone, and unassisted, will make us wiser in one sense, will show us many of the unavoidable calamities of life; but the greatest exertion of human reason could never yet lead to an effectual cure. I believe it will be found, that persons of the greatest vigor and resolution of mind, when they trusted to their own internal strength, and sought a resource in themselves for the evils with which they were assaulted, have often run headlong into the most furious and desperate courses, as some of the strongest animals, when taken in a snare, do, by their violent struggles, entangle themselves the more, drawing the cords which bind them still more strait, and increase their confinement by their endeavors to escape.

The wise man, in our text, points out what is the refuge and security of every child of God. The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. And he certainly intends to set this in opposition to every thing else on which worldly men might

place their dependance; for he adds, as an example, in the verse following the text, "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit." The truth conveyed to us in this passage has an intimate connexion with practical and experimental religion; and on a firm belief and habitual application of it, in a great measure, depends the comfort and peace of the servants of God. In discoursing on it, I shall endeavor, in divine strength,

I. To explain what is to be understood by the NAME of the LORD.

II. What is implied in the righteous running into it as a strong tower.

III. Point out the security they attain by doing so.

And, in the last place, I shall make some application of the subject.

I. Then, I am to explain what is to be understood by the NAME of the LORD. And here, I hope, I need scarce observe, that it was by no means the intention of the Spirit of God, by this expression, to teach us to conceive any particular virtue or charm in the name literally so called; that is, the sound or pronunciation of the word. To imagine any thing of this kind, would be to go into the foolery and idle dreams of superstition, to which there is not the least countenance given in the holy Scriptures. Human nature seems, however, to have been very prone to this in every age. The use of amulets and charms seems to have prevailed in the greatest part of the heathen nations; as also magical incantations, though it did not exert itself precisely in the same way, the principle seems to have been the same, which led the Jews from a pretended veneration for the name Jehovah, never to pronounce it at all; a custom which they retain to this day, alledging, either that they cannot pronounce it, or that it is unlawful to utter it. We may also observe, that, in our neighbor church, they seem to have fallen into the same error in the custom of bowing at the name of Jesus, while they do not bow to the names of Christ, Lord, or God.

Having mentioned these things for the illustration of the subject before us, I cannot help observing, that if a superstitious veneration for the letters or the sound of a name, is blame-worthy, a rash profanation of the name of God is unspeakably more criminal. My heart bleeds to think of the commonness of this sin, among all ranks and all ages. What have those parents to answer for, who have taught, or who have not restrained their children from taking the name of God in vain? This is a sin little thought of among men, but highly criminal in the sight of God, and he hath taken to himself the work of avenging it: "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain."

By the NAME of the LORD, in our text, we are to understand the Lord God himself; his nature as it is discovered to us in all his glorious perfections, particularly his power and goodness, to save and deliver them that put their trust in him. In this sense the name of God, or the name of the Lord, is used in many passages of Scripture, as Psal. 20:1, 5, 7, verses, "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend thee. We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners. —Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." As also in all those places where mention is made of calling on the name of the Lord, or praising the name of the Lord. Agreeably to this, we find, in our Saviour's directory for prayer, the following petition, Hallowed be thy name; that is, let God himself, and his glorious perfections be acknowledged, and a suitable regard paid to them, by all without exception. The same way of speaking is observed with respect to Christ, Acts 4:12. "For there is none other name, under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." That is to say, there is no other Saviour, besides Christ, to whom we can flee for deliverance from guilt and misery. At the same time, it is easy to see the propriety of this expression, the name of the Lord; it is used for God himself, because, amongst mankind, we are distinguished from one another by our names, so God is known or distinguished by the

discoveries he hath made of himself, and the daily exercise of his perfections, in behalf of his people.

There are three principal ways by which God hath discovered himself to mankind; namely, the visible creation, his written word, and the daily administration of his providence. Let us consider them shortly, as they may be justly said to be his name; for they serve to explain his nature.

1. Let us consider the visible creation as the name of God. He hath engraven his name on all the works of his hands; he hath engraven it in an universal language, in which every intelligent creature may read it, and the most weak and ignorant may easily comprehend it. Psal. 19:1. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy works." Rom. 1:20. "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."

Are men ignorant of God? It is because they do not like to retain him in their knowledge; for the whole creation is full of him, 'He is not far from every one of us.' We can no where turn our eyes, to the heavens above, or to the earth below, but we may see the most manifest proofs of his almighty power, his unsearchable wisdom, his unbounded goodness, and his universal presence. How feeling a sense of this does the Psalmist-express, Psal. 139:1-7. "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it all together. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" It will fall more properly under the following head to shew, how the righteous run into the name of God as a strong tower. We now consider only his works as

shewing forth his glory. See, to this purpose, the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, from the 12th verse and onward. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord; or being his counsellor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed him the way of understanding?"

2. God hath revealed himself in his written word; there he hath clearly and explicitly written his name, and revealed his nature; there all his various perfections, excellent in themselves and suitable to us, are enumerated and explained: in these lively oracles, there is a remedy not for the uncertainty of nature's light, but for the darkness of our bewildered understandings. Here we must not forget that he hath in his word clearly revealed himself, as infinitely gracious to sinners through Jesus Christ. This may well be called his name, because it is the only way by which we are brought to an interest in his favor. John 14:6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." This unlocks the gates of the strong tower, and opens a sanctuary to the sinner, who is fleeing from the sword of avenging wrath. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." His name and memorial to all generations, is said to "be gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." And it is in Christ Jesus, and his cross, that his mercy is displayed; it is for Christ's sake that his mercy is bestowed; it is by Christ Jesus that every mercy is dispensed: therefore we may apply to this subject, the prophecy of Christ in Psal. 22:22. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."

3. In the last place, God reveals his name in the daily administration of his providence. In this, I include not only what regards the support and preservation of natural life, but all the methods of his grace. The

one and the other of these give us a continual and sensible display of the nature and glory of God, What the works of nature teach us to infer by reason, what the holy scriptures teach us by information concerning God, the administration of providence, gives us an opportunity of seeing and feeling in our own experience. The appearances of God in providence, and his gracious interposition in behalf of his own people, are expressed by his name's being near, or his name's being made great, Psal. 75:1. "Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks; unto thee do we give thanks; for that thy name is near, thy wondrous works declare." Psal. 76:1. "In Judah is God known, his name is great in Israel."

An experimental knowledge of the power and mercy of God, is, of all others, the most complete and effectual. To this we may well apply the words of 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." It is also probable, that the Psalmist David often affixes this particular meaning to the knowledge of God's name, as in Ps. 9:10. "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." For the same reason he recommends a careful observation of Providence, as an excellent mean of being partakers of divine mercy. Psal. 107:42, 43. "The righteous shall see it and rejoice, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

I shall conclude this head, by an earnest exhortation to every one in this assembly, to endeavor to understand more and more of the name of God, as it appears in his works, in his word, and in his providence. Has he written it in so great a variety of characters, and will you not take the pains to observe it? O the sottish folly of worldly men? their curiosity is insatiable to hear things of no moment, while they cannot be persuaded to hear what regards their own eternal state. They will run in crowds to see every idle or pernicious sight, if it be called rare, while they will not open their eyes on the magnificence and glory of their Creator's works.

But let me in a particular manner, beg of you, the careful observation of Divine Providence, towards yourselves in particular. You will find the unspeakable advantage of it. It will make God more present with you than ever. It will set home the obligation of every duty, and the enormity of every sin upon the conscience, in a manner far more forcible than ever. It will also give every mercy a richness and value, which it could not derive from any other source; just as the man who has been fed at a distance, by the streams of a prince's bounty, would feel his heart drawn with far stronger bonds of love and gratitude, were he to be brought into his presence, and receive his favors immediately from his own hand.

I am aware of an objection against this. Perhaps some persons will say, how can I make a particular application of Providence? how can I certainly know the voice or meaning of every event that besals myself or my family? is there not a great danger of running into visionary folly and enthusiasm? In the remaining part of this subject, I shall have occasion to say more as to the meaning of Providence. In the mean time, let me only desire you to begin by a personal application of the unquestionable truths concerning Providence, and this will lead you farther than you apprehend, without the least danger of mistake. Is it not certain, that "a sparrow falleth not to the ground without your heavenly Father, and that the very hairs of your head are all numbered by him." Is it not of the Lord's mercy then, that you awakened this morning, and did not sleep the sleep of death? If you had done so, were you ready for it? Do you know how, when, or how soon it may be so? Were you engaged in any scene of intemperance, lewdness, debauchery? and would that have been a proper scene for death? Have you been preserved from any imminent danger, recovered from any threatening disorder? Is not that a mercy? Has the desire of your eyes been taken away by a stroke? Have you heard the reproach of many on every side? Is not this the will of God? Whether does it call for patience or pride? Have you suffered in your substance? Whether does this teach you to love the world or to despise it?—Is there any uncertainty here? Believe it, Christians, a personal application of the truths relating to Divine

Providence, would reveal as it were a new world to you, and would make the paths of God towards you every day more intelligible, every day more profitable, and shall I not add, every day more comfortable.

II. We proceed now to the second thing proposed, viz. what is implied in the righteous running into the name of the Lord as a strong tower. The word tower, especially when joined with the epithet strong, immediately conveys to the mind the idea of protection and defence. It evidently alludes to the state of many ancient nations and tribes, who were continually exposed to hostile inroads and invasions, and were obliged to have castles and towers as places of refuge and security; and this is far from being an improper image of the state of a child of God in this present world, whether we consider the common calamities to which he is liable as a man, or the peculiar trials with which he may be afflicted as a good man. To have a clear view of the import of the metaphor, we need only consider some parallel places, where we find the same expression, and others of the same meaning, Psal. 18:2, 3. "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. 27:1, 2. "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 the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me, to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." Psal. 61:2, 3, 4. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever; I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah." When we hear a good man using such expressions as these, we may gather, with the greatest certainty and clearness, what is the general import of God's being a strong tower, namely, that he is a most powerful protector; that his almighty Providence is the surest and strongest defence against all enemies of whatever kind, let their art, their activity, their malignity, be what they will.

Though this may not seem to need any further explication; yet, for the assistance and direction of serious persons, let us consider a little what is implied in the righteous running into this tower for their protection. This is the rather necessary, that though it is the privilege, the duty, and the practice of the servants of God, to make Him their defence and stay, yet they may be faulty and defective in this part of their duty, and suffer a proportional loss in point of comfort.

1. Then, running to the name of God as their strong tower, implies the lively exercise of faith both in the power and willingness of God to protect them. It is only by faith that we can go to an invisible God. As faith must be the principle of all acceptable service to God, so faith is evidently the immediate mean of all trust in or enjoyment of God. Therefore it is said, with the greatest propriety, "the just shall live by faith."

You may observe, I have said the lively exercise of faith; for, besides the habitual persuasion of the great truths of religion, as the foundation of our adherence to God as our portion, there must be an actual contemplation of them as the mean of our support in trial or deliverance from danger. Whatever be the nature or source of temptation, we must meet it, as it were, and resist it, by taking suitable views of the fulness and all-sufficiency of God. Does the believer stand in need of any thing spiritual or temporal? is he distressed with the want of it? does he see no human or probable way of his being supplied with it? He runs to the name of God as his strong tower, by considering, that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:" that his wisdom is infinite; and that, if it is really necessary, he can easily find a way of bestowing it. Ps. 34:9, 10. "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." He dwells upon the universal presence and the special providence of God, and endeavors to reason down his anxiety and fear. Perhaps he may do it in the words of our blessed Saviour, Matth. 6:25, to the 33d verse, "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 seedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet, I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Is the believer distressed with enemies, malicious, powerful, implacable? does he suffer, or is he afraid of suffering from them, in his name, in his person, in his life itself? he considers the power of God to shield him from their attacks, or more than compensate all the injuries which he may receive from them, and strengthen and animate him to a vigorous discharge of his duty in opposition them. Psal. 3:5, 6, 7, 8. "I laid me down and slept, I awaked; for the Lord sustained me: I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O Lord; save me O my God; for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon a the cheek-bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; thy blessing is upon thy people, Selah." He endeavors to deliver himself from the distressing fear of man, by the reasonable and dutiful fear of offending God, Luke, 12:4, 6. "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." Dan. 3:16, 17, 18. "Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, answered, and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar! we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If

it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King! But, if not, be it known unto thee, O King! that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Is the believer afraid of the ordinary evils of life? is he of a timorous nature, trembling at the thoughts of the accidents that may befall him? he runs to the name of God as the supreme disposer of every event, and thinks of the invisible power that governs and directs all visible things, and that the very ministers of Providence have received a charge concerning his people: Psal. 91:1–12. "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 snare 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. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee: only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked, because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation. There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling: for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee, in all thy ways."

To the power I joined the willingness of God to preserve and protect his people, on their sincere and humble application to him for it. This is absolutely necessary as a part of the object of faith. It would be in vain to run to any strong place, with a view of being preserved from our enemies, unless we have some ground to hope we shall be received into; and it would be madness to flee to a fortress kept by an enemy; but God is every righteous man's friend: all the divine perfections are engaged for his welfare: and therefore he may

confidently run to God from every danger, and be assured both of a kind welcome, and of all that safety which is necessary for him.

Faith, in this respect, has an immediate relation to the promises of God. It is his name, as I observed on a former head, to which we are to flee, as revealed in his written word; and much of the life of practical religion consists in attending to the tenor, and in a daily application of the promises. God himself requires us to call upon him in a time of trouble, Psal. 50:15. "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me." Nay, he is graciously pleased to reckon our calling upon him an essential character of his own people, Zech. 13:9. "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, the Lord is my God." He is pleased to esteem this, as giving him the glory of his truth and faithfulness, wisdom, power, and goodness, which we find represented in scripture as so many chambers of protection into which the righteous are called to enter for safety and preservation, Isa. 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 over-past."

I shall only further observe, that faith in both these respects, as applying the power and promise of God, receives very much strength from the examples of his mercy, either towards ourselves or others. His name is recorded in every page of the history of providence. And his people cannot in a more proper or effectual manner, run into it as a strong tower, than by considering and weighing the examples of divine interposition, in behalf of his faithful servants. For this reason, is so great a part of the holy Scriptures historical; because they serve, in a more effectual manner, to engrave the truths of religion both on the memory and heart. Many can remember what befel Abraham, David, Samuel, Daniel, and others, who would forget the precepts delivered them in a more abstract manner. And every one must be sensible, that the instructions which arise clearly and

obviously from historical facts, come home upon the conscience with a degree of evidence, superior to any thing that flows merely from the deductions of reason. May not the Christian, with great advantage, say, "Do I not serve an everlasting and unchangeable God? Is he not the same yesterday, to-day, and forever? Is his hand at all shortened, that it cannot save; or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Is not he who saved David the stripling, from the strength of Goliah; who saved Daniel from the power of the lions; and in many other instances, assisted and delivered his own people, when employed in his service, able to save me from the power of the enemy, and to carry me through all the trials of this earthly state, whether they arise from temptation or suffering?" I hope I need not tell you to apply, in the same manner, all that you have learned of the wisdom or goodness of Providence, from reading or conversation. For this reason, the Psalmist declares his resolution of communicating the mercy of God to his soul, Psal. 66:16. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

Suffer me here to say, that I cannot see a shadow of reason why Christians should not imitate the Psalmist's example, in imparting their experience of divine grace, for their mutual instruction and consolation. If the student will communicate his intellectual discoveries; if the naturalist will communicate his facts and observations; if the tradesman will communicate his attainments in his profession; if no man scruples to communicate what he hath known to be useful, for the health of the body; tell me, ye scorers, what should hinder the Christian to communicate to his fellow-servants, what may serve for their spiritual consolation and peace?

But if our mutual experience may be serviceable to each other, how much more must the past goodness of God towards themselves, encourage his children to put their trust in him? How just and beautiful the Psalmist's reflection, Psal. 63:7. "Because thou hast been my help; therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." In the same manner he recovers from his doubts and fears, Psal. 77:5–

12. "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times; 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 for ever? 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. 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."

Thus, my brethren, the believer runs, by faith, into the name of God as his strong tower; and as he who once gets into what he thinks an impregnable fortress, will speak to his enemies in the language of disdain and defiance; so he who hath reposed his confidence in an almighty Protector, may tread upon the necks of his enemies; may be confident, that through God he shall do valiantly. Neither is it any fable, but matter of certain experience, that many, "through faith have subdued kingdoms; wrought righteousness; obtained promises; stopped the mouths of lions; quenched the violence of fire; escaped the edge of the sword; out of weakness were made strong; waxed valiant in fight; turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Heb. 11:33, 34.

2. The righteous runneth into the name of God as a strong tower by the exercise of fervent prayer. Prayer is the immediate and direct means of imploring the divine assistance and protection. Faith is the habitual principle, and prayer is the actual application of it. Many are the precepts in Scripture enjoining the diligent exercise of this duty. Col. 4:2. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." 1 Thess. 5:17. "Pray without ceasing." Many are the promises of a gracious answer to our prayers. Matth. 7:7. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."—21:22. "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." John 14:13. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son." There are also exhortations to importunity in prayer.

Luke 18:1. "And he spake a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Many assurances of the success of prayer. Psal. 34:6, 17. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." Many examples of the power and efficacy of prayer, as in Jacob, David, Daniel.—It seems plainly an essential character of true piety, to be given to prayer. Psal. 109:4. "For my love they are my adversaries, but I gave myself unto prayer." I forbear enlarging on these particularly, and shall only say, that it is quite necessary, in order to our running into the name of God as a strong tower. Though he knoweth all our wants perfectly, he requires that we implore his assistance by prayer. Phil. 4:6. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

The truth is, prayer is the natural remedy to which all are ready to fly in extremity. Even bad men are disposed to cry unto God in great distress, but his own children are more habitually exercised to the duty, and as they only do it on proper principles, and with proper dispositions, so they only have the promise of acceptance, and success. Jam. 5:16. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

3. In the last place, The righteous runneth into the name of God as a strong tower, by diligence in his duty. This also is necessary and inseparable from a child of God; and in order to take a distinct view of the Christian's diligence, in this particular light, as the foundation of trust, you may observe, that it implies these following things. (1.) Diligence in all duties in general; in order to ascertain his character, and to be assured of the divine favor and protection, the promises of deliverance, of strength and preservation, are all made to those who serve God in sincerity. There is no such thing as a promise in any part of scripture to a bad man, as such. There are also the most positive and gracious assurances of powerful support in suffering, and all necessary help to those who truly fear God, Isa. 43:1, 2. "But

now, thus faith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob! and he that formed thee, O Israel! Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. 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." Nay, the most express declarations, that all things shall issue to their advantage, however discouraging an aspect they may wear for a season. 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." From this it plainly follows, that the very way to run into the name of God, is, by habitual diligence in doing his will. The more we can, by walking in his fear, keep clear our title to his special favor, the more unshaken trust and confidence we may place in his power and mercy, in every trial; for he hath not forsaken them that love him. So certain is this, that I believe every experienced Christian will bear testimony, that when he is unhinged by distress, when he is filled with anxiety and fear of any kind, it arises as much, or more, from suspicion of himself, and doubt of his relation to God, as from any disbelief of the general truth, that God will support and strengthen his own people. Therefore the righteous may be said to run into the name of God, when they exercise themselves in keeping consciences void of offence, and walk so as they may humbly hope for his acceptance and approbation.

(2.) As a good man runs into his strong tower, by diligence in every part of his duty in general; so particularly by a watchful attention to his conduct, in every time of trial or danger. He will be on his guard, lest by any part of his behaviour he provoke God to depart from him. He will then, in a peculiar manner, set the Lord before him, that he may, with the greater confidence, commit his cause and his interest to his care. The suffering disciples of Christ are often warned of the necessity of this. 1 Pet. 4:19. "Therefore, 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." Whether therefore the danger arises from bodily distress, from worldly losses, from slander

and reproach, or from whatever other quarter, the first and great care of the Christian should be, to keep his conscience undefiled; and the necessity of this is the greater, that suffering times are always times of trial. It is no easy matter to resist the temptations which arise from a suffering state, ordained expressly for the trial of our faith, which we are told, is "more precious than that of gold which perisheth." We may be tempted to impatience under calamity, to resentment of injuries, to taking wrong and sinful methods of redress. In opposition to all these, the servant of God will be particularly careful to avoid those sins which his situation invites him to, and to discharge those duties which the aspect of Providence seems to ask of him; he will consider this as the great and only object of his attention, and freely commit the conduct of events, and the issue of things, to an all-gracious, and Almighty God. Psal. 37:5, 6. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day.

(3.) A good man will diligently use every lawful mean for his protection and deliverance. This may be considered as included under the former particular, being a part of his duty. Trust in God, is by no means a presumptuous and slothful security, but a patient dependance on the blessing of Providence in an application to our duty. To do otherwise, is just what is called in scripture, tempting God. For the wisest purposes, God hath fixed and settled the relation between the means and the end; and we are not to expect, either in natural or spiritual things, to obtain the end, while we despise the means. Gal. 6:7. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But,

(4.) In the last place, The good man will renounce all dependance on created help, as such, and place his ultimate hope only on the power and sovereignty of Divine Providence. He will not neglect the use of outward means, in obedience to the command of God, but will look for the expected benefit from them, only by the blessing of God. The running into a strong tower, implies a renunciation of our

dependance on any thing else, we give up all other methods of defence, and trust in it alone for security. So it is here. There may be not only a dependance on means unlawful in themselves, but a sinful, because an excessive dependance upon such as are most lawful. We see this remark made on Asa. 2 Chron. 16:12. "And Asa, in the thirty and ninth year of his reign, was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: Yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Many are the evidences we have from daily experience, of the weakness and uncertainty of all outward means, that we may not be tempted to idolize them, or to trust in them; and we find, in many passages of scripture, an express opposition stated between trust in God, and trust in human or created help. Psal. 118:8, 9. "It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." Psalm 146:3. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help."

III. We proceed now to the third thing proposed: which was, to consider the perfect security of the righteous, who runneth into the name of the Lord as a strong tower—the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. And here my brethren, I cannot help observing, that though this is a truth of the most manifest importance, and, at the same time, the most undoubted certainty, it is what but few attain to the unshaken persuasion and daily application of, in their passage through this valley of tears. In order to illustrate it, I shall shortly consider, 1st, Wherein this safety of the righteous consists. 2dly, The absolute certainty of their being thus perserved safe.

We are told, the righteous runneth into this tower, and is safe. In a perfect consistence with the use of the metaphor, the word might perhaps be better translated, is exalted, or placed on high. Now, their safety, I think, consists in the following particulars. 1. God, many times, by the course of his providence, preserves them from dangers which they could not otherwise escape. Every good man, who has attended, if I may so speak, to his own history, must have observed, that he hath been delivered from danger by such means as were no

way the effect of his own prudence or foresight, nor indeed could be, and which therefore he is constrained to ascribe to the goodness, and wisdom of Providence. Nay, sometimes things fall out so contrary to human expectation, and the ordinary course of things, that he is constrained, with wonder, to confess the very finger of God. He sometimes blasts the counsel of the wicked, and makes their devices of none effect. The Egyptians thought the Israelites were so inclosed in the Wilderness, with the Red Sea before them, and their army at their back, that it was impossible for them to escape: but God, by a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm, opened a way for them through the midst of the waters, and their enemies were drowned in the depths of the sea. Haman, no doubt, thought his vengeance sure against all the Jews; but, when it was just ready to burst, God turned his devices against himself, and caused him to perish by the very means which he had contrived for the destruction of the innocent.

I need not attempt, because indeed it is impossible, to enumerate the various ways by which the great Disposer of all things works deliverance in danger. He sometimes changes the hearts of enemies, as he did of Esau towards Jacob—and of the Apostle Paul, when breathing out threatening against the church—He sometimes carves out other work for persecutors, as Saul was once and again called off from the pursuit of David by the Philistines; and sometimes he makes the intended evil prove a real blessing; as in the case of Joseph, in whose history we have one of the most beautiful draughts of Providence that is any where to be seen, and done with that union of majesty and simplicity, which so remarkably distinguishes the sacred writings. The whole hundred and twenty-fourth Psalm is a celebration of divine power, and a hymn of praise for divine protection. "If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of

the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

I shall only add, on this head, that a serious person, when thinking or speaking of deliverance from danger, will always consider sin as the greatest danger: he will reflect, with the highest pleasure, on the instances in which God has enabled him to discharge his duty with constancy. Let me beg of you to remember, with what courage and resolution the young persons, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego spoke to King Nebuchadnezzar, and resisted the threatenings of that powerful prince. It is worth while to observe, that they and Daniel seem, in that perilous time, to have given themselves much to the exercise of prayer. Thus, running into the name of God as a strong tower, they obtained security, while other very eminent persons, by trusting in themselves, or boasting of their own strength, fell before temptations of a very trifling kind, as Abraham and Isaac in denying their wives, and the Apostle Peter in denying his Master.

2. The security of the righteous consists in the promise of strength and support in the time of trial. Although God preserves his people from many dangers, yet he has nowhere promised them deliverance from all. On the contrary, we are told, "that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution; and that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God." Yet even in these circumstances, they are safe, because God is with them in their afflictions; his rod and his staff powerfully support them. Need I tell you, that here, in a particular manner, the text is exemplified: The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. Under a smarting rod, what can a child of God do, but enter into his secret chambers, and supplicate the assistance and presence of his reconciled Father? and has he not promised to grant it? Isa. 43:1. "But now, thus saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob! and he that formed thee, O Israel! fear not; for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." And has he not many times, in fact, granted it? The three children walking at liberty in the midst of the fire with the Son of God, as their companion, was but

one instance of what has many times happened in every age. Who would not rather be in the place of Paul and Silas, singing praises to God in their chains, than be the master of the world, with all the danger and anxieties of a throne? Let me here make an observation, which I think is warranted both by scripture and experience, that just as in point of duty, so also in point of suffering, the security and comfort of the people of God depends upon their running into, and, if I may so express it, keeping within the bounds of their strong tower. If they keep close to God, no suffering will disconcert them; no enemy will terrify them; but, if they neglect this, they may be unhinged by a very flight trial. I hinted before, self-dependance will make men fall before a very trifling temptation: but dependance on divine strength will make them superior to the greatest. In the very same manner, it hath been often seen, that persons, who have lost their temper, or lost their courage, in sufferings of no extraordinary kind, when more severely tried have behaved infinitely better, and being constrained to flee to God for protection, have found such benefit from it, that they have slept in peace and comfort in a loathsome prison, have gone with an undaunted step to an ignominious scaffold, nay, and embraced, with joy and transport a halter or a stake.

3. In the last place, The righteous is safe under the divine protection, as they are sure of deliverance in the end, and complete victory over all sufferings of every kind. Thus it is said, Psal. 34:17, to the end, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones, not one of them is broken. Evil shall stay the wicked, and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." There is a great beauty in this last passage, which is lost or concealed in our translation; it lies in the opposition between the 19th and 21st verses. The 19th verse runs thus, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord

delivereth him out of them all." In opposition to this, it is said, in the 21st verse, as it should be translated, "One evil shall slay the wicked; and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate." This probably points at the great distinguishing security of good men, that their salvation is safe in the keeping of God, and quite beyond the reach of their most implacable enemies. Whatever straitening circumstances they may be reduced to, they have treasures in heaven, "which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thief break through and steal." They may be driven from their habitations, or banished from their country; they may resemble those of whom we read, Heb. 11:36, 37, 38. "And others had trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings; yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, (of whom the world was not worthy;) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and caves of the earth;" but they cannot be banished from the kingdom of heaven. No tyrant can shut the gates of Paradise against them; for they have been opened by him, "who openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." I have often read with admiration, both in the inspired writings and ecclesiastical history, the patience and constancy of the martyrs. How edifying is it to observe, that by witnessing a good confession, together with the gracious influence of the spirit of God, they have become superior to the fear of death, and have been enabled to despise or pity the weakness of persecuting rage? Sometimes we may clearly see, the unrighteous judges torn in pieces, with the fury of infernal passions, vainly endeavoring to wreak their malice, by newly invented tortures, and the happy prisoners, as it were, already beyond their reach, while by faith and hope they are firmly assured of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven above."

Having thus considered the nature of the good man's security, I am now to consider the absolute certainty of it. On this I shall be very short, it rests upon the divine perfection, the divine promise, and the experience of the saints. 1. The divine perfection. Is there any thing

too hard for the Almighty? Is he not the Lord of nature? And are not all things obedient to his will? The great enemy of souls, and all his instruments and agents, are under the government of God. He sets bounds to their rage, and will not suffer them to go so much as one hair's breadth beyond the limits he hath appointed for them. How great then must be the security of those who put their trust in him? Again,

2. Consider his faithful promise; he hath said it, he hath repeated it, he hath sworn it, that his covenant shall stand fast for ever. Every page of the sacred oracles is full of the most gracious assurances; and these expressed in the most condescending terms. Psa. 91:1–4. "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 snare 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." Zech. 2:8. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye." Nay, the very ministers of his Providence are your attendants." Psal. 91:11. "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

3. Consider the experience of the saints; they all, with one voice, bear their testimony to the divine faithfulness and mercy. It is with this particular view that the Psalmist says, in that forecited text, Psal. 9:10. "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, a Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." And indeed in every age, Christians of standing and experience are ready to give their sanction to the certainty of God's promises, and will often confess the greatness of his past mercy, even while they are chiding their own impatience and distrust, that it can scarcely suffice to embolden them for future duty, and prepare them for future trials.

IV. I come now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And, first, From what hath been said, you may see the sinfulness of distrust. Has God laid so

noble a foundation for our dependance upon him; and are we still so backward to the duty? Is not distrust in some measure a denial of God himself? A denial of his presence, a denial of his perfections, and disbelief of his promises? Let us all be covered with shame, when we consider how much we have already dishonored him, in this respect. And let us pray, that he may enable us henceforward not only to send up our cries to heaven, for relief in distress, but to cast our cares and burdens upon the Lord, in the faith "that he will sustain us, that he will never suffer the righteous to be moved."

2. You may see the remedy of distrust, which is, to be more and more acquainted with the name of God. Contemplate his glory in the visible creation: he may be seen not only in his spreading out the Heavens like a curtain, but in the formation of the meanest creature; in a pile of grass, or in a grain of sand. While you are daily tasting his gifts, forget not to acknowledge his bounty, in the rising sun, the growing corn, and the falling rain. Think of his faithful word, read his promises, lay them up in your memories, write them in your hearts; and especially, the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting gospel, which may be yours, which you are intreated to accept as yours, and if they be not yours, you shall render an account to himself at the last day, for receiving them in vain. — Think also of his Providence, all you have seen, and all you have felt, of preserving goodness, and of redeeming grace; and continue to cleave to him as your portion, in the Psalmist's words, Psalm 48:14. "This God is our God, for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death."

3. In the last place, learn from hence, what is the surest and shortest, and indeed, the only safe way of deliverance from suffering. Flee to God as your strong tower, by prayer and supplication: but with this, endeavor by the renewed exercise of faith in your Redeemer's blood, to ascertain your title to the favor of God; endeavor by a stedfast adherence to your duty, to commit your ways to God; and so soon, and so far, as you have good ground to know that you are his children, you ought to resist and banish every doubt of your security,

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." Verse 32, of the same chapter, "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 NATURE AND EXTENT OF VISIBLE RELIGION

SERMON 15

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. - MATTHEW 5:16

THERE are two different divisions frequently made of practical religion. One, into our duty to God, and our duty to man. Not as though every part of our duty were not to be ultimately referred to God, and to be done from a regard to his authority enjoining it; but because there are some duties, of the performance of which the Lord our maker, and some of which our neighbor is the immediate object. Another common division is into the hidden and the apparent part; the inward frame and temper of the mind, and the outward life and conversation. These two divisions, though they are near a-kin to one another, and often by indistinct speakers in a great measure confounded, yet are by no means one and the same; and when the difference is not sufficiently attended to, it is followed by many bad consequences. It is undeniable that God is chiefly delighted with truth in the inward parts; yet there are many of the duties we owe to God, which ought to have an outward expression, which without it

will not be acceptable to him, but which are greatly neglected by those who imagine that a good life and conversation implies no more than the performance of a few of the most obvious and necessary social virtues. The truth is, there are few things that seem to be less understood than the nature, extent, and obligation of visible religion. Some lean to one extreme, and some to another. Reproaches are mutually thrown upon one another. Some are blamed for too much profession; and they are ready to retort the charge, and blame their accusers with at least equal justice, for too little, or none at all. In the mean time there are too few of any sort who have such a conduct and character as really adorns the doctrine of their Saviour, and serves for the instruction of sinners, or the edification and comfort of those who fear God. For this reason I have chosen to insist a little upon these words of our Saviour to his disciples, in his excellent sermon on the mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I am sensible that some, and particularly one commentator of great eminence, understand these words as addressed only, or chiefly, to the twelve apostles; and that by light is to be understood their doctrine, which they were to let, or to suffer to shine; freely to communicate, as they had freely received it. This they presume to have been intended, in opposition to the Heathen philosophers and the Jewish teachers, who confined their instructions to their schools, and imparted what they esteemed their most valuable discoveries only to a few select disciples. To support this interpretation, it is alledged, that the metaphor of light is constantly used in Scripture to signify knowledge; and that of darkness, ignorance. But though this be the primary intention of the metaphor, it is surely sometimes carried on to express the effects of knowledge; and not only walking in the light (as 1 John 1:7,) but shining as lights in the world, (as in Phil. 2:15,) an expression almost the same with that in our text, is used to signify holiness of life. Besides, I do not think the above interpretation can be made, without some constraint, to agree with the expression in the last part of the verse, "that they may see your good works." I understand the words, therefore, as originally

addressed to all who then heard our Lord's discourse, and now to all professing Christians; and by the expression, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works;" that the holiness and purity of their conversation should be visible and eminent; that men, by observing it, might be constrained to acknowledge the truth and power of the principles which produced it, and persuaded to yield themselves also to their government.

In discoursing upon this subject, what I propose, through divine assistance, is,

I. To illustrate the meaning and extent of the exhortation, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works:

II. To illustrate the motives with which it is enforced, as they are contained in the text, the glory of God, and the good of others: And, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I. In the first place, then, let us consider the extent and meaning of the exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." This, in general, includes the whole of visible religion; every part of the duty of a Christian, to which his neighbors are or may be witnesses. And here it is of importance to observe, that though the inward temper of the mind is not in itself and immediately the object of human observation; and though there may be, and there is, much hypocrisy in the world; yet every disposition of the heart hath a natural and genuine expression, and may be more clearly or more obscurely discerned by some outward symptoms. There are therefore few grosser mistakes than to suppose, either that no conclusions will, or that none ought, to be drawn by the world about us, concerning our inward dispositions, from our outward carriage. So established is the connexion between them, that hypocrites are usually much more successful in deceiving themselves than the world. On the other hand, those who, from a real or pretended fear of the imputation of hypocrisy, put off all outward

appearances of devotion, and abstain from all expressions of the inward exercise of their souls, will hardly persuade any impartial person, that the hidden source is strong and plentiful, when the streams which should issue from it are so easily concealed. Other natural affections of the mind, as sorrow, anger, and joy, do immediately discover themselves in the countenance and carriage; and though they may be restrained and moderated, can scarcely be wholly or long concealed: Why then should it be otherwise with religious affections, which are at least as just in their nature, and much more noble in their object? I am afraid we may say, with too much truth, that there is but little real religion in the world at present; and yet even that little is often, in a most shameful and cowardly manner, dissembled or denied.

But because the impression of general truths is but seldom strong or lasting, I shall add a few particular observations, for opening the meaning and extent of this exhortation, Let your light shine before men. — And, in the first place, If you would make your light to shine before the world, you must be careful of the practice of such duties as are most rare and uncommon; and that whether their being so arises from the difficulty of the duties themselves, or from the peculiar degeneracy and contrary practice of any particular age or place. The metaphor itself will teach you this. Nothing can be said to shine, but that which throws out a distinguished lustre, in comparison of other objects. Those who are but as other men, and do no way excel the world about them, cannot possibly bring any honor to their profession, or be properly said to make their light to shine. Thus our Saviour argues, in recommending a very rare and eminent virtue;* "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.—For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?"

I observed, in entering upon this particular, that the practice of some duties may be uncommon, either from the difficulty of the duties

themselves, or the peculiar degeneracy of any particular age or place. The first of these happens in all those cases in which the law of God, from its purity and spirituality, is most immediately contrary to the bent of carnal affection. For though it be true in general, as the apostle Paul tells us,* that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be;" yet this enmity is much stronger in some cases than in others. Some of those gracious dispositions which shone in the man Christ Jesus when he dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and which he so ardently recommends, such as, contempt of the world, and heavenliness of mind, meekness, humility, the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies, are much more opposite to the tendency of corrupt nature, than some other parts of the moral law. Or, to speak more properly, it is only by an obedience to the will of God, carried to this degree, and manifestly flowing from such principles, and such an inward temper, that we can make our light to shine in the view of an observing world.

I took notice also, that whether any duty be difficult or easy in itself, if it is neglected, or brought into contempt, by the peculiar degeneracy of any age or place, he who would make his light to shine before men, must, with boldness and resolution, with stedfastness and constancy, adhere to the practice of it. If in any place, or in any age, the very outward attendance upon the ordinances of Christ's institution is made light of, or despised, by many of every rank; if the name of God is profaned and abused by unholy conversation; it is then the duty of every real servant of God, publicly to manifest his esteem and love for divine ordinances, and to maintain the highest reverence for the holy name of God in his discourse and language. And, if I am not mistaken, the very meaning of making our light to shine before men, is, to be doubly watchful in all such cases, not only on our own account, but upon account of others; or, as our Saviour expressed it, that they may see our good works: For instance, not only to esteem the institutions of Christ in the gospel, for their tendency to promote our sanctification and comfort, but even when these purposes might be at least as well obtained in another way, at

particular times; yet to attend carefully upon public ordinances, that we may contribute our part to preserve the respect that is due to them: or, in the other case supposed, when profane swearing is common and prevalent, to discover the deeper reverence for the holy name of God, and use the utmost caution in the whole of our conversation, to avoid every doubtful expression, or any thing that may have a tendency to insnare the unwary, or confirm the wicked in an evil course. You will probably conclude, that my mentioning these two instances arises from a persuasion that these sins prevail remarkably among us in the present age, and your conclusion is just. I shall add one more to them, viz. voluptuousness; either excessive sensuality and intemperance, or at least a pleasing of the flesh, with a total neglect of mortification and self-denial. And be assured, my brethren, you are particularly called upon, by the exhortation in the text, in these and every other instance of the like kind, not to lose your horror of sin by the frequency of it, but, according to the exhortation of the apostle Paul,* to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

In the second place, In order to make your light shine before men, you must act an unexceptionable part in all such cases as your conduct falls most immediately, and most fully, under the observation of others. I have said above, that the exhortation in its full extent, includes the whole of visible religion. But there are some cases in which our conduct is comparatively more visible than in others, and more immediately subjected to the examination of the world. As there are some places more conspicuous and exposed to public view than others, so are there also some persons in the whole of their deportment, and some actions of the same persons. It is the last of these that chiefly relates to my present subject. Are you not sensible then, that in those actions which fall most immediately under the observation of others, the greatest caution and circumspection is necessary? It is from these that the judgment of men is chiefly formed of professing Christians, and the character fixed which they must bear in the world. With respect to other

actions, men proceed more upon conjecture, and therefore will not, even themselves, lay so much stress upon their observations; but in such as are wholly subjected to their view, their conclusions are peremptory. If you ask, what are those actions that fall most immediately under the observation of others? I answer, they are many. Most of those of which our neighbor is the object; particularly all relative duties, and also the government of the tongue. Although those who are conversant with you, may make shrewd guesses, by what they see in your outward deportment, whether you are constant in secret devotion, or serious and fervent in public, they must still labor under much uncertainty. But a neighbor will quickly and certainly know whether you are friendly or selfish, froward or peaceable; a wife must know, whether she hath an affectionate husband, and a husband whether he hath a dutiful wife; a servant must know, whether he is under a reasonable and gentle, or a capricious and cruel master; and a master, whether he hath a submissive and diligent, or an idle and slothful servant. The same thing holds with respect to every other relation. And as to the government of the tongue, the world must know whether your conversation is pure and inoffensive at all times, and profitable, as opportunities present themselves; or if it is frothy, unprofitable and vain, rash, peevish, passionate, unchaste, or censorious. As therefore, in the language of our Saviour, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid; so a Christian, in these cases, cannot be concealed. And I hope I may be allowed to say, without being thought to put the shadow of religion for the substance, or preferring the form to the spirit, that he ought, in all such cases, to be particularly watchful that nothing may escape him, which may, in its consequences, tend to the dishonor of God, or the ruin of the souls of men.

In the third place, In order to make your light to shine before men, you must be careful in the discharge of such duties as are most acceptable to others. It is self-evident, that if there are some of the duties which we owe to our neighbors more acceptable to them than others, nothing will more recommend religion to their esteem, which is the design of a shining conversation, than the faithful discharge of

such duties. Now, that there are some duties more acceptable to mankind than others, is very evident; and none will call it in question, who reflect upon the different reception given to those duties which promote men's temporal interest, and those which restrain or punish their crimes. The one class of these procures the love and esteem of all without exception, whether good or bad; the other often provokes the resentment and inflames the passions of the vicious, who make so great a part of the world. Reflect also what a different reception is usually given to a covetous hard-hearted oppressor, or to a fraudulent unjust man, on the one hand; and to a profane swearer, a drunkard, or despiser of religion, on the other. The first is hated and fled from by all; the last is freely caressed by many, and indeed often by those from whose profession a more equal and impartial detestation of vice and wickedness might have been expected. This is easily to be accounted for, if we consider that worldly interest is the idol of by far the greatest part of men, and that there is too strong a bias to it in the very best.

From this it is plain, that he who would make his light to shine before others, must be extremely careful of such duties as are most acceptable to them, particularly justice and integrity in all his dealings; and such justice as, if possible, may be beyond dispute, and to the conviction of all. There was a very great beauty and dignity in the language of Samuel to the children of Israel, when he was able to appeal to themselves, as to the unblameableness of his conduct among them in a public station: "* Behold, hear I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind my eyes therewith? and I will restore it unto you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand." Mercy and charity also to those in distress is universally acceptable: this is still more acceptable to mankind in general than justice alone. The reason is, they think they have a claim to justice, and, in many cases, can obtain it by compulsion, when it is not willingly given them. Besides, that worldly wisdom may easily be

conceived the principle of just dealings, through fear of a discovery, and its consequences: but charity and compassion to the necessities of others, is looked upon as the free unconstrained exertion of good dispositions. The apostle Paul supposes a difference in the estimation of the world, between a merely righteous or just man, and a good or merciful man, when he says,* "for scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die."

The same selfish bias in men to their worldly interest will indeed sometimes carry them so far, as to make them excessive and unreasonable in their expectations. The world seems not only to expect, that those who profess to fear God should be just and upright in their dealings, merciful and charitable to proper objects; but that they should be at all times ready to yield up their own rights to the extravagant demands of worldly men, and give such evidences of self-denial, as are neither consistent with wisdom nor with piety. These excessive expectations of the world, which it is found by experience impossible to gratify, are too apt to make some, in peevishness and displeasure, throw up all hopes of, or endeavors after, avoiding its reproaches. This is to disobey God, because it is impossible perfectly to please men. The more ready they are to take offence without reason, the more watchful ought the conscientious Christian to be, that he may give no just ground for it. And undoubtedly the private example, or the public endeavors of any person for reformation, bid much fairer for success, when his conduct is such in the particulars above-mentioned, as the world in general must confess to be amiable and excellent.

I shall only add one consideration more, to shew the necessity or propriety of shining in such duties as are most acceptable to others. It is, that usually the loose or profane part of the world, in order to prevent or wipe off in some measure, the reproach which their conduct, in other instances, brings upon them, pretend to glory in the justness of their dealings, their generosity and charity; and this often not without insinuations, that those who appear to be religious,

are not so strict in point of moral honesty. It is therefore incumbent on every servant of God to make his practice a continual and visible refutation of this calumny; and to shew, that none can, to such perfection, discharge any moral duty whatever, as those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, and having the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, must of consequence love their brethren also.

In the fourth and last place, If you would make your light shine before men, you must be diligent in the practice of such duties as are most profitable to others. It will not be difficult to determine, what are the duties most profitable to others, if we only consider what has the most immediate tendency to promote their spiritual and eternal interest. Of this kind, there are many incumbent on persons of every station, and in every situation of life? though the obligation of them is little thought of, for the most part, and the practice generally neglected: such as, private and personal instruction, tender and affectionate counsel, faithful admonition and reproof. Every one of us knows the persons to whom his influence extends, when any scheme for his worldly interest and advancement, or that of his friends, or the power and credit of his party, is at stake; but few think of using the same interest for the glory of God, and the salvation of deluded sinners.

Of this kind are all the duties of superiors to their inferiors; as parents and heads of families, teachers of youth, ministers of the gospel, magistrates and rulers. These every one, in their several capacities, are obliged, either more directly, or by consequence, to promote the everlasting interest of those who are under them; and nothing will make their light more to shine, nothing will contribute more to adorn and illustrate their Christian character, than a faithful, zealous, and diligent discharge of the duties of these stations.

Perhaps it may be thought, that the reasoning on the former particular is contrary to this; and that if these duties, which are acceptable to others, make a Christian's conversation to shine, the practice of such as men are averse from submitting to, must have an

opposite effect. But this is far from being the case: for though some sins are contrary to other sins, religion is consistent throughout; and every part of it, instead of obscuring, throws a lustre upon another. This will easily appear, if you consider, that however unwilling men are to be instructed in their duty, or restrained and limited from their irregular indulgence; so soon as the endeavors used for that purpose are successful, they will, with the highest thankfulness, acknowledge the care bestowed upon them. Though a child may, at first, and for some time, be impatient of the father's authority; if it is attended with success, he will ever afterwards reckon it one of the greatest blessings of his life; and the memory of such a parent will be infinitely more dear, than of one who has shown the most partial and indulgent fondness.

Further, such duties, though they may be harsh and unpleasant to those who are the immediate objects of them; yet as they are unquestionably good and useful in themselves, they must command the esteem and approbation of every impartial observer. It is indeed by this means alone, or chiefly, that the public honor and credit of religion is preserved, amongst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. What they would hate and resist, or perhaps revile, in their own case; when others are concerned, conscience constrains them to bear a clear and strong testimony in its favor. Nay, not only so, but the most wicked and profligate, though they hate religion and righteousness in itself; yet are they sufficiently sensible of the connection between a religious profession and its proper fruits, and sufficiently apt to reproach those in whom they observe the deficiency; and that in such cases as the performance would be painful, and not acceptable to themselves. Thus a child of a slothful parent, a subject of an unfaithful magistrate, if their profession is such as to make the neglect scandalous, shall despise them in their hearts, and sometimes go so far as to reproach them by their words, even where their own ease and security is wholly owing to that very criminal indulgence. From all which it evidently appears, that a conscientious discharge of such duties as are most useful and

profitable to others, is highly proper to make our light to shine before men.

I am sensible, my brethren, that these classes into which I have divided our public and visible duties, viz. such as are most rare and uncommon, such as are most subject to the observation of others, such as are most acceptable, and such as are most profitable to them, are not so entirely distinct one from another, but that there are many parts of the duty of a Christian, which fall under more than one of these divisions, and some that may perhaps fall under them all; yet I have mentioned them separately, because each of them hath some duties which do peculiarly, or at least eminently belong to itself: and as every one of them contributes to shew us the extent of our duty upon the whole, so they, at the same time, serve to set the obligations to it in a striking light.

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was, briefly to illustrate the two motives added in the text to enforce the exhortation; and these are, the glory of God, and the good of others.

1. The glory of God. The glory of God is the supreme and highest aim of every real Christian, to which every other design is subordinate and subservient. I am not ignorant, that profane and worldly men are apt to deride this language, of the glory of God being the highest aim of a Christian. It is not however less agreeable to truth, that it is contrary to the spirit of the world: "*For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It might be sufficient to support this manner of speaking, to say, it is agreeable to the word of God, which is a much surer test of truth, than any maxims established by human wisdom. But for silencing gainsayers in some measure, though their conviction (without a change of heart) cannot be hoped for, I would observe, that it is the character of a Christian to love God above all: and is it not a natural consequence of supreme love, to be jealous of the honor and zealous in the interest and cause of the object of our esteem? Real love

cannot, even in imagination, be separated from this its natural effect and expression.

Now, if this is once admitted, there is no way in which we can so well, or rather there is no way in which we can at all promote the glory of God, but by a holy and unblameable conversation. As the works of creation are said to shew forth his glory, because they point out his natural perfections exerted in their formation; so his reasonable creatures glorify him, when his image, or some resemblance of his moral excellence, and this as his own workmanship, is discerned upon their hearts.

It is no doubt, in one view, difficult for us to conceive how the glory of God, who is perfect and unchangeable, should at all depend upon our conduct: yet as this is the light in which he hath represented it to us himself, so it is necessarily felt in this manner by every one of his servants. Indeed we see, that the unholiness or the unguarded conduct of those who profess to serve God, and stand in an apparent relation to him, has the greatest tendency to dishonor him, as far as that expression hath any meaning or propriety in it. The state of the world may easily convince us of this; for as no argument has been oftener used against the gospel, so none ever gave it a deeper wound, than the wicked lives of its professors. As many, therefore, as have any regard to the glory of God, or the honor of the Redeemer's name, must carefully endeavor to make their light shine before men, "that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven."

2. The other obligation contained in the text, to an useful or shining conversation, is the good of others. As some degree of love to mankind is naturally implanted in every heart, and as love to others is the second commandment of the law, and a necessary effect of the love of God; so it is impossible but this love, if it be real, must, in every believer, evidence itself in a deep concern for and conscientious endeavor after, the salvation of others. Whomsoever we love, we naturally express this love, by endeavoring to avert from

them those ills which we most fear, and to procure for them those advantages which to ourselves appear most valuable: and therefore, the looking upon sinners with indifference, and not using the means in our power for their recovery and salvation, is the most unquestionable evidence, either of our not believing the important truths of religion, or being altogether void of good-will to our fellow-creatures, or rather of both; because they are essential branches of the same character. A parent who should profess, from his own experience, to have the greatest apprehensions of the danger of a certain practice, and yet should freely suffer or encourage his children in the same practice, would give good ground to judge, either that his fears were wholly affected, or that he was altogether destitute of love to his children, or concern for their welfare.

Now, how can any man more effectually promote the real, that is, the everlasting interest of others about him, than by a shining example of piety and usefulness of conversation? A blameless life, such as becometh the gospel, is a more effectual reprimand to vice, and a more inviting argument to the practice of religion, than the best of reasoning. Reason and argument, for pattern and example, is but as an uninformed picture to a living man. The most part of mankind are best instructed by their senses, and are both unwilling to attend to, and incapable of perceiving the force of speculative reasoning; but a good life, answering to what their own consciences declare to be right, is a sensible representation, that never fails to make an impression, both on the memory and heart. As the impression on the wax is more discernible than the engraving on the seal, though this last be just and perfect, whereas many accidents may render the impressed image faulty and defective; so though a just and complete view of the doctrine of Christ is only to be had from the scriptures of truth, yet the general integrity and uprightness of a good man is more legible to the bulk of mankind; and being the character of a man originally of like passions with themselves, engages them to imitate it. From all this I conclude, that the love of God, and the love of our neighbor, jointly concur in laying the strongest obligation upon every Christian to make his light shine before men.

III. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

First, From what has been said, you may see in what respect alone it is our duty to aim at the approbation of others, and from what principle it ought to flow. We are bound so to order our outward conversation, as that it may on the one hand, contribute nothing to the corruption of others, but rather that they may be invited to the practice, and persuaded of the excellence and amiableness of true religion. There is no character against which our Saviour pronounces a severer doom, than that of being religious that we may be seen of men; that is to say, when the view is only to procure their applause to our own character as a gratification of vanity. Such persons have their reward. But when the design is, to watch that the name of God be not blasphemed on our account, to bear much fruit that God may be glorified, there are few things more useful and important. For this reason the friends of religion owe no thanks to those who glory in a contempt of what others think or say of them, who are at no pains to avoid the appearance of evil, but freely indulge themselves in whatever they can, with any plausibility, alledge to be lawful in itself. They may cry out, as much as they will, against the uncharitableness and censoriousness of the world; but they themselves are acting in downright contradiction to the exhortation in our text, and neither show regard to the will of God, nor compassion to the souls of men. In opposition to this, the Christian who would make his light to shine, in obedience to his master's command, must use the utmost tenderness; and circumspection, not lest his own reputation should be wounded, but lest religion should suffer through his unguarded conduct. Such an one hath this advantage, that though perfectly to please a capricious world is impossible, he may yet obtain mercy of God to be faithful; and though there is a wo to the world because of offences, he may escape the wo of that man by whom the offence cometh.

In the second place, What hath been said upon this subject serves to reprove the sin, and shew the danger, of all those who are

notoriously deficient in the practice of the duty recommended in the text. Indeed you may see from the extent of it, that it affords ground of humiliation for all without exception; and, like every other precept of the pure and holy law of God, shews plainly, that a perfect righteousness is not to be found in ourselves; and that, for our final acceptance, we must be indebted to the free grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. But, in a particular manner, this reproof is directed to two sorts of persons.

First, Those who are wholly unprofitable to others, and altogether insensible of their obligation to profit them. There are not a few in the world who openly justify themselves, and extenuate their sins by this pretence, that they do no harm to others; that, if they do evil, none suffer but themselves. This is the usual pretence of dissolute livers, who are plunged in sensuality. Let such consider their entire neglect of the command of our Saviour in the text; let them consider their obligations to serve God, and the account they must render to him. Let me suppose any of you had a servant who should altogether neglect your business, and, upon your reproving him, should make this excuse, I have done no harm, I have put nothing out of order, I have not hindered the other servants in their work; how would you be satisfied? or rather with what indignation would you receive the shameless pretence? Let this then convince you of the justice of the sentence that shall at last be pronounced by our Supreme Master upon all such:* "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness, where there shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." But the worst of it is, this excuse, weak as it is, is not true; for all those who are not profitable, must be hurtful to others. Drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, and the whole tribe of those who pretend to do harm to none but themselves, pollute and corrupt, by their example and influence, all that come within their reach: so that, for the hazard of infection, thieves and robbers are less dangerous companions.

But, secondly, This reproof ought to be directed to such as are further chargeable with the actual guilt of seducing others. How

many are there who, by the contrary methods of flattering insinuations, or derision and insult, as they expect from the dispositions of the persons the one or the other will be most successful, endeavor to banish a sense of religion from the minds of others, and gradually to involve them in sin and guilt? This is the immediate tendency of all that conversation, which, with a malicious pleasure, enlarges upon the real or supposed miscarriages of the people of God, and charges every profession of religion with hypocrisy. How aggravated is the guilt of all such, and how dreadful will be the punishment! They are eminent and faithful agents for the devil. The works of their father they do, and his reward they shall share. As the union and mutual love of the saints in heaven will increase the happiness of every particular member of that blessed society; so we must suppose, that the mutual reproaches of the damned and miserable spirits in hell, accusing each other as the authors of their destruction, will greatly sharpen their anguish. The fear of this seems to have alarmed the rich man, even in torments, lest his brethren should come to the same place. What must a child, for example, ruined by the neglect of restraint, or pernicious example of a parent, think of or say to the author of his misery? Oh! unmerciful monster, and not a parent, who, instead of correcting, sported with or encouraged the first instances of impiety: who taught me, by example, to profane my Creator's name, and to neglect his service; and who, though ambitious of making me rich and great for a few days in a transitory world, hast contributed to bring me to, and fix me forever in this place of torment! Take warning then, I beseech you, all of every rank, and increase not your own condemnation by the guilt of seducing others.

In the third place, what hath been said upon this subject will enable you to try the purity and sincerity of your outward conversation. An inquiry here is of the more consequence, that we are in great danger of deceiving ourselves, because both a truly serious and a worldly motive may lead to many of the same outward actions. For this purpose let me ask you, whether it is the glory of God, and the good of others, that makes you watchful of your conduct; or a tenderness

of your own reputation? This may be, in a good measure, discerned by the faithful search and trial of your own hearts; and particularly by observing, whether the injuries and reproaches of wicked men excite in you a greater resentment of the offence, or compassion for their folly. Again, I would ask you, whether you are equally conscientious in such duties as may be painful and troublesome, and may expose you to the reproaches and insults of the ungodly, as in those that immediately tend to your outward honor and credit? I have shown above, that it is necessary to make your light to shine, by the first as well as the last. Is then your concern equal and impartial to fulfil the duties of your station, whatever they are, whether agreeable or mortifying to the flesh? or are you most careful when you will reap the greatest present reward? By examining into these particulars, you may be enabled to judge of the purity of your intentions.

In the last place, suffer me to improve this subject, by an earnest exhortation to all who now hear me, to the practice of the duty recommended in the text, to "make your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." That this may be the more distinct and effectual, I shall address it to three different classes.

First, To those who are the professed advocates of good works. Every one who hath any experience of, or commerce with the world, must know, that there is a set of men who profess to love and esteem those discourses only that teach and recommend good works; and that in order to state a distinction where there ought to be none, between the truths of the glorious gospel, and the doctrines of morality. I intreat all of you to consider what hath been said of the great extent of visible religion, and it will have a greater tendency to humble you, and excite you to seek the sanctifying grace of God as the source of true holiness, than to glory in the excellence or perfection of your moral character. Take heed also, that you fall not into the shameful inconsistency too common in the world, of being the strongest pleaders for moral preaching, and the least tender of moral practice.

What a shame and scandal is it, and how pitiful in the eyes of those who understand what true and undefiled religion is, to hear one who is unwilling, unable or ashamed to worship God in his own family, who is but rarely to be seen in the public assemblies of God's people, who hardly ever gave child or servant a serious advice, but whom they have often seen guilty of drunkenness and excess; to hear, I say, such an one rise up as an advocate for morality; to hear him crying out, morality is the whole of religion; and therefore that he cannot endure such stuff as conviction and humiliation, conversion or regeneration, flying to, embracing, or relying upon a Saviour; phrases which, among too many, are now going into desuetude; whether they retain their important meaning, I shall leave to the judgment of another day. Nay, I am afraid we might produce more instances than one, capable of saying, upon hearing a discourse of the love of God, "Such things are not to be understood; 'twere pity but ministers would satisfy themselves with preaching plain morality;" as if the love of God, which is the sum and substance of the moral law, were no part of it at all. To such may it not justly be said, "*Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?" Let all such of you, therefore, be exhorted to act up to their character, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." But be sure you understand what these commandments are: and then, if you can maintain before God, who is greater than your hearts, that you have kept these perfectly in thought, word and deed, you may rest your salvation upon it; for it not only was, but continues to be a certain truth, that "the man who doth them shall live in them." But it is greatly to be feared, that this is a source of life, by far too deep for any of the children of Adam to draw it out.

In the second place, I would address this exhortation to all who have, or profess to have a high esteem of the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Extremes commonly beget one another; and so the ill-founded zeal which despisers of the gospel sometimes pretend for good works, makes others state themselves in opposition to them, and makes the word itself to have an unacceptable found. But, my

brethren, beware of being thus overcome of evil. Remember the words of our Saviour, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." Hear also the apostle Paul, "† 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." You cannot more effectually bring a reproach on that holy name by which you are called, and in which you glory, than by being enemies in word or indeed to holiness and purity of conversation, or by not being even apparently and visibly holy. For though you must lay your account with the reproach of men, and hatred of the world in many cases, who is pronounced against you, if you do not "love them that hate you, and bless them that persecute you." Let therefore your conversation be without offence. Neglect not any part of your duty in the sight of the world, and be the more watchful, that, on account of your profession, they will be the more diligent in observing, and the more severe in censuring your conduct. Whilst therefore you remember that faith in Christ is the only source of new obedience, remember also, that faith without works is dead, being alone.

In the last place, I would address this exhortation to all such in this audience as, by their office or station, or wealth or character, are raised above others. You will surely be sensible of the propriety of this exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." You are placed in a conspicuous situation, exposed to public view, and your influence will be great, whether it be profitable or hurtful. You ought not to count your higher station in life a favor blindly bestowed on you for your pleasure only, but a trust committed to you for which you must render an impartial account. How should this repress and restrain all vain-glorious ostentation of the temporary differences between man and man, and excite to a diligent improvement of your talents against the coming of your Lord, when the highest shall be upon a level with the lowest. I hope it will contribute to enforce the exhortation, that, in this age, the declining state of religion loudly calls for the assistance of all to its revival, but particularly for eminent and shining examples. How

hard is it, that when vice and infidelity have so many advocates in writing and conversation, there should be so few exerting themselves in their station for the promoting of truth and righteousness! And let none excuse themselves for their own neglect of duty, by throwing the blame upon others, and holding up to light the sloth or wickedness of those who are most eminently guilty. Let none say, "Alas, my sphere of usefulness is very narrow, my influence is very small; but if those who are in more eminent stations, and whose stations, give them greater weight, would but exert themselves, the effect would be sensible." Remember your stations are just what God hath assigned you, and for these, and these alone, you are to be called to an account. The less important they are, the duties are the more easily fulfilled, and the neglect, in one respect at least, (though I cannot say in all,) more criminal and inexcusable. To conclude, Let the wise and powerful magistrates, ministers, parents, and heads of families, be diligent in discharging the duties incumbent upon them, and join earnest prayer to God, that he would arise and effectually plead his own cause. Amen.

THE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN

SERMON 16

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. —REV. 7:15

MY brethren, however great a degree of corruption prevails at present in the visible church, the very profession of every Christian,

implies a renunciation of the world, and a fixed hope of a better state. His attendance upon the ordinances of God on earth, is in order to secure the possession, and prepare himself for the enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance. He confesseth that he is a stranger and pilgrim on the earth; that he lives by faith, and not by sight. And, therefore, nothing can be more suitable to his character; nothing more conducive to his comfort, than frequent views of the employment and happiness of the spirits of just men made perfect.

And, surely, this is a subject highly proper for our meditation on the evening of a communion Sabbath. In this ordinance, you have had the price paid for this glorious inheritance set before you by symbolical representation, that your faith in, and hope of the possession of it, might be the more confirmed. In the institution itself, as recorded by the apostle Paul, you find he connects the commemoration of the sufferings and death of Christ, with his second appearance in glory, 1 Cor. 11:26. "For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Nay, our Lord himself seems to have had his heart and his thoughts in heaven, when he left this memorial of his presence on earth, as appears from Matth. 26:29. "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And, indeed, we have his own example in this first communion, wherein he himself was the administrator, for following or concluding it with a meditation on the heavenly happiness; for before he rose from it, he begins his excellent consolatory discourse in this manner, John 14:1, 2. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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."

It is true, indeed, my brethren, our knowledge of the future glory of the saints, is at present, extremely imperfect, and must be so, for wise reasons, while we continue in the body. There are, however, several different views of it given in the word of God, highly worthy of our attention. Amongst others, this in our text, that they are before

the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. That these words are to be understood of the saints in heaven, and not of any glorious period of the church on earth, or, if of this last, manifestly in allusion to the former, I think is plain, both from what goes before, and what follows them; which I shall read in connexion, as all the explication of the text that is necessary, from verse 13. "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, what are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? and I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall seed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

What I propose from this passage, at present, is, through divine assistance, to illustrate a little to you, the happiness of the saints in perpetual communion with God in his temple above; and then to make some improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction while you continue here below.

I. In the first place, then, I am to illustrate a little to you the happiness of the saints in perpetual communion with God in his temple above. And, here, observe, that though I have said perpetual communion with God, and did mean it of his immediate worship and service, I did not intend to assert, that they are at no time employed in a different manner, or in work which may be called by a different name. What variety of exercises may be provided for their noble and vigorous faculties, in the nature or works of God, we cannot pretend to know. As the angels are called "ministring spirits, sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation;" so we know not how far he may bless and dignify his saints, by employing them in the administration of some part of his extensive dominion. But it is

surely just to call their communion with God in his worship perpetual, both because of their frequent actual application to it, and because of that constant adoration of soul which we must suppose will accompany either an investigation of the nature and works, or an execution of the will of God. It is also well warranted by the expression in the text, and serve him day and night in his temple. Now, in order to illustrate the worship of the saints in heaven, we may consider it in two different lights: First, As it is internal and spiritual.—Secondly, As it is external and sensible.

First, Let us consider the happiness of the saints, in that part of their celestial worship, which is internal and spiritual; and, in general, we must frequently recal to our minds the imperfection of our present discoveries, and remember, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what the Lord hath laid up for them that love him." There may, for any thing we know, be discoveries, and by consequence, acts of worship, and dispositions of mind corresponding to them, totally different in kind from any thing we are now capable of, as well as higher in degree. Of these we must be absolutely silent: therefore, all that shall follow upon this subject, is founded upon the following remark, that whatever acts of worship we have now any experience of, and by which we are initiated, so to speak, into, and trained up for the employment of heaven, shall then be performed to far greater perfection, and with infinitely greater joy.

In order to the more distinct consideration of this subject, you may observe, that all the acts of worship, of which we are now capable, may be reduced to the four following kinds: First, Acts of adoration. Secondly, Of gratitude. Thirdly, Of desire. And, Fourthly, Of trust and subjection.

In the first place, Acts of adoration. By these, as distinguished from the others mentioned, I understand the immediate contemplation of the glorious excellence of the divine nature, and the exercise of those affections of soul which correspond to it. The nature of God is

discovered, and his glory exhibited to view, in all his works, and in all his ways. And he is the proper object of the highest esteem, the deepest admiration, and most ardent love of every reasonable creature, for what he is in himself, independent of any interest they may have, or hope to have in his favor. Therefore it is the first duty and chief end of man to give unto the Lord the glory that is due unto his name. I know this is what worldly men, who live in sin, cannot understand, and therefore are apt to deride; which is indeed the case with respect to all the truths of God, considered in their full extent, and as resting upon their proper foundation; the natural man cannot receive them. But as it is the first commandment of the law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;" so it is the leading and the capital truth taught and repeated in the sacred oracles, that all things were made for, that all things shall finally tend to; and therefore all intelligent creatures ought, supremely, to aim at the glory of God.

This may be easily supported by unprejudiced reason; for what can be more just than to have the highest esteem of the highest excellence, the deepest admiration of boundless and spotless perfection, and a supreme love for what is infinitely amiable. It is wholly owing to the corruption of our nature, that we are so little sensible of the sin of neglecting this. And, indeed, a short and just description of our corruption may be given thus; it consists in dethroning God, and setting up self to be honored, loved, and served in his room.

But, my brethren, every real Christian has been recovered to a view of this his first obligation as a creature; knows, experimentally, what it is, supremely, to honor the living and true God, and hath a peculiar pleasure in the survey and celebration of all his perfections. All such rejoice in his dominion, and feel a satisfaction in it, as infinitely right and fit, that the will of the Lord should be done. They join, in their manner, on earth, with the heavenly hosts, as thus represented, Rev. 11:16, 17. "And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, we give

thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned." Rev. 19:6. "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." But how incomparably more perfect, and more joyful, their adoration of God, when they are come into his presence! then the veil shall be drawn aside: they shall "see him face to face;" they shall "know, even as they are known." Instead of these comparatively obscure hints and intimations, which they now have of his glory, then, the whole extensive plan of providence, of which they now see only a small detached part, shall be opened to their view: then shall they see the overthrow and subjection of the pride and arrogance, and boasted wisdom of man, "which is foolishness with God;" and the blessed, happy issue, of those various trials of the people of God, which formerly gave them so many anxious and distrustful thoughts. But why do I mention particulars, when all the effects of creating skill, all the fruits of supporting and preserving goodness, shall be laid before them?

And is there not some lover of Christ, saying here within himself, why do you not mention the mystery of redemption, "God manifested in the flesh:" in this the glory of God eminently shines, his unequalled, his unrivalled glory. That this, as the work of God, (though we can hardly keep our own concerns out of view) shall be the particular theme of celestial praise, is not to be doubted, and is evident from hence, that Christ, as the object of worship, is represented, as appearing there like a Lamb that had been slain.

Once more, as the church of God, at present, is the mean of illustrating his wisdom to principalities and powers, or to the angelic hosts, which we learn from 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;" so the order and government of these superior intelligences shall be opened to the view of the saints in glory. In the prospect of all this, they shall say,

Rev. 15:3. "—Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." With what exultation of soul, then, with what fervor of adoring wonder, and admiring love, shall they celebrate the divine glory! As they shall be wholly freed from every degree of sinful and selfish bias, they shall feel the clearest conviction of the obligation of their duty, and discharge it by a free unconstrained impulse of soul: for the same reason, the pleasure arising from it will be so much the more pure and unmixed, that it is not aimed at on its own account, nor purchased by any compliance that might but seem to have a mercenary view.

In the second place, Let us consider the celestial worship, as consisting in acts of gratitude and praise. And, here observe, that though I have considered the disinterested love of God, and the humble adoration of his own matchless inherent excellence, as first both in order and dignity, which it ought to be, this does not take away, or supercede acts of thanksgiving, but rather lays the justest and noblest foundation for their exercise; because it subjects the creature to the Creator; keeps its dependance and obedience continually in view, and greatly enhances the favors bestowed by such a hand, and upon such objects. Gratitude for the goodness of God, is what, surely, we may have some conception of, even in this state, in which he loads us with his benefits, and in which every moment of our continuance is a proof and evidence of his patience and forbearance. The saints especially, who have learned not only to discern and confess the hand that sustains them, but to acknowledge God, as the God of their salvation, must understand what it is to praise him for his mercies.

But how much louder must the voice of praise be in heaven than in earth? The mercies for which they give praise are incomparably greater; so is also the uniformity and security of their possession. What is the richest and most gorgeous attire, the most sumptuous and delicate fare, which this world can afford, compared with those rivers of pleasures which are at God's right hand? How imperfect are

all the enjoyments of this state, by reason of the sufferings and sorrows that are mingled with them? We are apt to envy one another through ignorance; but the man liveth not on earth, who hath not some sorrows to allay his prosperity, except, perhaps, for a few moments, when the mind is ingrossed, and, as it were, intoxicated with some late acquisition. Our present character is such as doth not admit of perfect happiness. Here must be the fire of affliction to purge away the dross of sin. But, in the world to come, the happiness of the saints is perfect and unmixed, for the people shall be all righteous. So it is said, in the words immediately following the text; "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. And, Rev. 21:3, 4. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." The precariousness of our present enjoyments greatly diminishes their value; they are very uncertain in their own nature, and our continuance with them is equally so. But, in heaven, there shall be no more death, the inhabitants shall go no more out: and their enjoyments shall be such as can neither waste nor change. How animated, then, must be the praises of the higher house, especially when the reflection upon the wretchedness and precariousness of their past state must so greatly improve their sense of the riches and security of the present? Let me suppose a case, which, indeed, happens every day, though the effect of it is not fully discernable by us; suppose a poor Christian, perhaps, poor in this world, but certainly poor in spirit, who hath long struggled with the evils of life, who hath patiently endured the insulting language and disdainful eye of the proud and prosperous, nay, which is far worse, hath been distressed with many anxious fears concerning his own future state; such an one, taken from the world, how amazing, how blessed the change! from an earthly cottage, to a throne of glory; from a despising world, to an approving God; from a frail, diseased, dying body, to everlasting strength, and

undecaying beauty! how must his mouth be filled with praises, when the days of his mourning are for ever ended?

But that which especially serves to enliven the praises of the saints in heaven is, their sense of their own unworthiness as sinners: this it is which makes all the gifts of God of seven-fold value, they are all of free unmerited grace and mercy. Redemption! Redemption is the theme of the praises of heaven, Rev. 1:5. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. Rev. 5:9. And they sang a new song, saying 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." Redemption is, at present, carelessly sought after and coldly acknowledged; but then shall they know the guilt they have contracted, the hell they have escaped, the glory which they possess, and the price at which it was bought. Oh, my brethren! how light a sense of the evil of sin has the most humbled penitent now, compared to what he shall have in heaven! how light a sense of the misery of the impenitent, compared to what he shall have after he has heard their sentence pronounced by the judge, and seen them go away into everlasting punishment! how small a value does he put upon the gift of God, eternal life, till he taste of it! and how weak is his love to God in Christ, whilst it is only kindled by faith, compared to what it shall be, when he sees the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world!

In the third place, Let us consider the celestial worship, as consisting in acts of desire. There is much of this in the disposition of the people of God on earth, they say with the prophet Isaiah, ch. 26:8. "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." And as every agreeable object is the more desired, the more it is known; so the clear discovery that is made in heaven, of the glory and excellence of God, and the delightful communications of his love, must still increase our desire of further and further degrees of it; and there is a fulness, both in the divine nature and benignity, that can never be exhausted: Earthly things, indeed, to which we often,

through ignorance, affix an erroneous and excessive value, the more they are known, are often the less esteemed; but this can never take place where the object cannot be esteemed in proportion to its worth, because its worth can never be completely discovered. Perhaps it may be thought improper to include desire among the acts of celestial worship, as there the happy souls shall be so fully gratified, in every holy inclination, as to leave no room for any further demand. But we must consider that there shall be room for an everlasting progressive improvement to every finite creature; and the gradual enlargement of their capacity shall make way for these further communications of divine love.

There shall, indeed, be no such desire, as implies any anxious or impatient craving. This is, ordinarily, produced by doubt, or difficulty of supply, which can have no place here; but there may, nevertheless, be such desire as leads to, and prepares for, the continuance or increase of enjoyment. It is natural, indeed, for us, from our present experience, to conceive that desire must weaken or lessen with possession, as it is chiefly kept up by variety and novelty, a love of which seems to be so essential to, and powerful in the human nature. To remove this apprehension, I observe these two things, First, That in the infinity of the divine perfections and works, there is sufficient diversity to employ and gratify a finite creature, through all eternity; so that if it please God to continue, after the resurrection, a love of novelty, or any disposition similar to it, he is well able to provide it with proper exercise.

But, secondly, It appears highly probable, that the love of change, so observable in human nature, is more owing to the vanity of created enjoyments, than any thing essential to us, as rational spirits; and, therefore, when we enjoy the substance instead of the shadow, the Creator instead of the creature, the cause being gone, the effect will cease of course. And, to confirm this, we may observe, that novelty is not an essential qualification of what pleases us; for habit often creates as strong or stronger attachment to what we have long known, than the charms of novelty to what is untried: enjoyment

therefore may, in some cases, excite desire. And if this is the case, sometimes, on earth, there is all reason to think it will be always so in heaven. May I not just add, that we find, from our present imperfect experience, that a life of hope and activity, when there is suitable encouragement and success, from time to time, is the most agreeable of any that can be conceived. How delightful then must be both the habitual and actual desires of the saints in glory, pointed at the worthiest objects, and not only assured of, but constantly rewarded with, complete satisfaction!

In the fourth and last place, Let us consider the celestial worship, as consisting in acts of trust and subjection. I join them together, because they are very much involved in, and founded upon one another. And I have mentioned them last, because the issue of every serious exercise of a believer's soul, of every act of communion with God, is ordinarily his being brought to a composed trust, complacency, and acquiescence in God, as his satisfying portion; and a consecration of himself and his all to God in obedience and submission. And how infinitely more complete, as well as joyful, must the trust and submission of the saints be in heaven than on earth! If even here they say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" how much more reason have they to put an unshaken trust in God, when they have tasted the fruits of his love, and received the proof of his faithfulness, in the actual possession of his promises? as the Psalmist says, Psal. 9:10. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee."

Thus clear discoveries of God's nature, and extensive views of his works and ways, must establish them in a cheerful dependance on his unchangeable truth. And, O, with what a readiness, or rather with what pleasure and alacrity, will they resign themselves to his will, and consecrate themselves to his service! There will then be no remains of the carnal mind to refuse obedience, or of an impatient murmuring spirit, to complain under the yoke; but they will be as the angels, his ministers to do his pleasure, ready at his call, and

earnestly coveting employment. Obedience will be their prevailing inclination, and the formal expression, and tender of it, to their God and Redeemer, will be a part of their actual service.

And, now, to conclude this head, you may observe, that I could not avoid, in illustrating the worship of the saints in heaven, frequently to bring in view their habitual frame and constant employment; but I hope this is not altogether improper; for there is not, by far, so great a difference between their acts of worship, and their ordinary work, as between ours on earth. They run into one another and are very much of a similar nature; they are shadowed forth, but very saintly, in the state of that man on earth, who walks with God all the day long. As his life is a constant course, either of vocal or mental worship, so, in a higher degree, they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.

Let us, now, in the second place, consider the worship of the saints in heaven, as it is external and sensible. That there is something even external and sensible in it, necessarily follows from the resurrection of the body, which is so important a part of the Christian doctrine: for though the bodies with which the saints shall be clothed at the resurrection, shall exceedingly differ from their gross bodies, in splendor and beauty, and, particularly, shall so far excel them in purity, as to be termed by the apostle Paul 1 Cor. 15:44, "Spiritual bodies;" yet, if they be body or matter at all, they must be limited to some place, and have an external and sensible form. The same thing appears from that beautiful passage in the book of Job, ch. 19:25. "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

Further, though we are, no doubt, taught, in scripture, to consider heaven more as a nature than a place, yet there is evident foundation, from several expressions, to suppose that there is some portion of the works of God set apart for that purpose, and adorned with such a visible glory, as is proper to affect the imaginations of created beings. Thus there is mention made of the third heaven, the

highest heaven, the heaven of heavens. See also Rev. 21:1, 2. "And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea; and I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." And from the 19th verse of that chapter to the end, it is described in such terms, as naturally suggest to us the greatest glory and magnificence.

This is the temple of God in which his servants shall serve him, in which we may suppose the general assembly of the church of the first born meet together, for the joint celebration of their Creator and Redeemer's praise. But as to a more particular account, either of the place or manner of the worship there performed, it were more easy to form amusing and curious speculations, than to fix upon any thing solid and certain. In this, as indeed in every other part of the heavenly state and employment, comparative reflections are most to be depended on. And surely, if in this lower world, and that part of the creation which is at present subjected to our view, there is so much order and beauty, so much splendor and magnificence, though it be the abode of guilty creatures, under manifest tokens of divine displeasure, what must be the unclouded lustre and perfect beauty, of that place where the glory of almighty God is peculiarly displayed, and which was prepared for the reception of the objects of his special love, before the foundation of the world? If the several senses, with which we are now endued, are capable of affording us so exquisite a pleasure in their present gratification, notwithstanding their apparent disorder, how high and ravishing a delight may they communicate when they are refined and purified, furnished with their proper objects, and freed from that insatiableness, and tendency to excess, which is the fruit of sin, the evidence of a corrupted frame, and which as a mixture of gall, poisons every worldly joy? It is worth observation, upon this subject, that the happiness of the saints is many times described in scripture, by their external circumstances and position, so to speak, and by sensible gratifications; as by sitting upon thrones, at the right hand of God; by a city highly adorned; by a river of water of life; a tree of life, bearing

twelve manner of fruits. And his service is described by the melody of songs of praise, and even by instrumental music, Rev. 15:2. where mention is made of the harps of God. Now, though God forbid that we should understand these expressions in such a manner, as to suppose that the enjoyments of the saints above have any thing in them resembling the grossness of present sensual indulgence, yet we may, with safety, conclude, that as the body shall then join in the service of God, it shall be instrumental in perceiving the pleasure of it; and that a sense and perception of the beauty and grandeur of that temple of the living God, in which they offer up their celestial sacrifices, shall increase and enliven their gratitude to, and adoration of him, who, raised the glorious fabric.

But the external circumstance, which, in my apprehension, will contribute most to the delight and happiness of the saints, in their heavenly worship, will be their union and society in it. Man is evidently framed for deriving his chief happiness in this state from society. It never was, and never will be good for man to live alone. Social worship is peculiarly acceptable to God, as might be shewn from many passages of scripture, Math. 18:19, 20. "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Psal. 87:2. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob." And doth not the experience of every one of those who love the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honor dwelleth, testify what an elevation of soul, and enlargement of heart, they obtain by mingling their voices in his praise? As united fires brighten each others blaze, as many concordant sounds make the finer harmony, so the union of many hearts in divine worship, makes the higher spiritual melody, not only more grateful to God, but more delightful to themselves. The pleasure of this is, indeed, greatly allayed on earth, by a mixture of discordant notes (to continue the former allusion) of enemies with friends. But allow me to make a supposition, that all within these walls, this evening, were perfectly upright with God, and that our

mutual sincerity were perfectly known to each other, what inexpressible fervency and rapture of spirit, would it give to every one, in singing the praises of God and of the Lamb, to consider himself as joined with such a number of pure, holy, blessed, redeemed souls? But how much beyond conception will this be increased, when we meet with the innumerable company of the redeemed above, and all our pious fathers, who, many ages before this, served our common Master; many, we hope, who kept holy days, in this very place, and whose bodies now sleep in the dust under our feet, and around us; nay, when all, from the east and from the west, shall be completely gathered in, when every heart shall agree with every tongue, and salvation to the Lamb shall be the universal, delightful, repeated, acclamation? There are two passages of scripture which speak of the multitude, and employment of this glorious company, which ought never to be read without a holy and delightful reverence. Rev. 5:9, 15. "And they sang a new song, saying, 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; and the four beasts said Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down, and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever." Rev. 7:9, 12. "After this, I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; saying, Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God, forever and ever. Amen."

I proceed, now, to conclude the subject, by some practical improvement of what has been said. And can we refuse to begin, by praising God for his unspeakable love, and matchless condescension? The whole work of our redemption is wonderful; but, in a particular manner, the conclusion of it: that we should not only have our clothes washed in the blood of the Lamb, but should be before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. At the dedication of the temple of Solomon, that wise and pious

prince breaks out into an expression of holy admiration and astonishment, and says, 2 Chron. 6:18. "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built?" How much greater reason have we to say, when recollecting our guilt and unworthiness, "and shall men in very deed dwell with God in heaven?" How amazing the distance! how glorious the dwelling and employment! and how mean the invited guests! Let us take confusion of face to ourselves, and acknowledge, that this cannot be accounted for, but by the propitiation and purchase of the eternal Son of God, as the only foundation of our hope. Let us, in the view of every privilege, renew the exercise of faith in him, as giving us a title to it; and, on this occasion, particularly, beg of him to lead us, by his Spirit, through all the necessary steps of previous preparation, and at last receive us into his glory.

In the second place, from what has been said, you may see the importance and benefit of the worship and service of God on earth. If this state is a state of trial and preparation for that which is to follow it, and the worship of God is so great a part of the employment, and so great a source of the happiness of the saints above, it is plain that his worship on earth must be of the highest usefulness. It is not only an unquestionable duty, but it is manifestly necessary to fit us for, and habituate us to the heavenly exercise. It is plain from the whole analogy of providence, that a preparation of nature is necessary for the possession and enjoyment of any state. We see, even in natural things, that sowing, and a long time of gradual nourishment, is necessary to the strength and consistency of any plant or tree; and that, according to the seed, so is the production. This the apostle very strongly applies, Gal. 6:7. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—Those that expect to serve God in his temple above, must be habituated to serve him in his church on earth. This is the seed time; then is the harvest. The house of God is the place both of the birth and nourishment of his people, Psal. 87:5. "And of Zion it shall be said, this and that man was born in her; and the Highest himself shall establish her."

Therefore suffer me, my brethren, to reprove the sin, and show the danger of those, who altogether neglect and despise the worship of God. If chance, imitation, curiosity, or a worse motive, has brought to this audience, any who are habitual despisers of the worship of God, I hereby assure them, in his name, that, unless they change their heart and practice, in heaven they shall never dwell, because its employment they do not love. It is both the evidence and cause of the degeneracy of many in this age, that they have fallen into a neglect and contempt of the public worship of God; that, in their notions of religion, when they form any at all, they, in a great measure, leave out their duty to their Maker, and confine it only to a few of the ordinary offices due from one man to another. Experience, indeed, plainly shows the weakness and feebleness of these virtues that are not enlivened and animated by piety towards God; and that it is as possible to uphold the superstructure, by taking away the foundation, to preserve the vigor and verdure of the branches of a tree, by separating them from the root, as to preserve and secure any regularity of conduct, without a principle of divine life, of vital, spiritual union with God through Christ. But what, in a particular manner, shows the folly of all such, is their relation to eternity. Supposing their practice were every way sit and proper for this world, how does it agree with the employment of heaven? Doth not conscience tell you, that you have neither right nor relish, nor even capacity for it, and, by necessary consequence, are under a sentence of condemnation, "children of wrath, and heirs of hell?" for there is no middle state. I beseech you therefore, nay, obtest you, in the most solemn manner, that you henceforth honor God in his house and ordinances, if you expect that ever he should honor you: and, remember, that this warning, which you have received by the wise disposal of his providence, will be an aggravation of your guilt, if you neglect and despise it.

I cannot help, also, upon this occasion, putting you in mind of the neglected duty of worshipping God in your families. These smaller societies, in which the members are connected by the strongest ties, and stand in the nearest and most endearing relations to one

another, how proper are they for the joint worship of God? and how great is the sin of neglecting it? How can you expect any thing else, but either an angry Providence, or hardening and stupifying prosperity, which is infinitely worse, unless you call on the name of God? whereas, by mingling your voices in his praises on earth, you prepare yourselves for his service in heaven. I cannot go through all the excuses offered for this neglect; but wo shall be to that man, who is too busy, too proud, or too modest, to worship, in his family, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who made him by his power, and upholds him by his providence.

In the third place, Let me improve this subject for the trial of those whose state is more doubtful. However many open enemies there are to religion in these days, it is to be lamented, that there are many also, who continue their attendance upon the ordinances of God, but in a cold and formal manner, and resting upon the form, without the power, lay themselves asleep in security. Bring yourselves to the test, then, and suffer conscience to discover the truth, however painful and mortifying. Is there any of you, who has heard of the employment of the saints above, as consisting in the service of God, who are not able to conceive the happiness or delight of such work? Is there any among you, who weary of the service of God, not from weakness of body, but from aversion of mind, who, immediately after, return to the world, and its enjoyments, with eagerness, and lightness of mind, like a bullock, when he is loosed from the yoke? Such have good reason to suspect their condition, and to fear, that they are unrenewed in heart. But, I hope, there are not a few, who, from their heart, call the Sabbath, "a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; who esteem a day in God's courts better than a thousand;" whose highest joy it is, to have their hearts captivated with his love, and their affections enlarged in his praise; and whose indisposition often to this work, by sloth or worldliness of mind, is their greatest grief. Such, my brethren, have good reason to look forward to that happy time, when they shall serve him with unwearied vigor and alacrity; and shall behold the smile of his countenance without one mortifying frown.

In the fourth place, I would improve this subject for the consolation of the afflicted. The hope of glory is the true and proper source of consolation; whether your sorrow arises from suffering, or from sin; for both these shall be perfect strangers to the happy abode of the saints above. If you are under the anxiety of worldly care, the oppression and reproach of the ungodly, the attacks of sickness, the gradual loosening of the pins of this feeble tottering frame; if these weaken the strength and mar the melody of your present songs, and compel you to mix your praises with groans, remember, that in a short time, these complaints will be at an end, the harps of God will be given you, and skill to handle them. If a sense of inherent corruption, if grief for an absent or an angry God, make your hands to hang down, exert the hope of being made not only perfectly happy, but perfectly holy, and of serving him day and night in his temple.

This leads me, in the last place, To direct you, to improve this subject for animating your present devotion. Nothing is more proper for this purpose, than the lively hope, or rather anticipation of the heavenly employment. Let us overcome our present sloth, by entering, in faith and hope, within the vail, and considering how we shall then praise him: then there shall be no wandering thought, no cold heart, no faltering tongue, no flagging spirits. And, as without all question, some are here present, not a few, I would charitably hope, who shall enter into that temple of the living God; so we know not how soon any of us may be sent for, to leave this worldly sanctuary, to be above the use of present ordinances, and to join the innumerable company about the throne. In the prospect of this, Psal. 149:1, 2. "—Let us sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Amen.

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