

C. C. Richardson's
SERMONS

ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

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SERMON I.

THE DIVINE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

LUKE XVI. 27—31. *Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they would repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

WHAT Micah said superstitiously, when he was robbed of his idols; *ye have taken away my gods; and what have I more?* (Judg. xviii. 24,) may be truly spoken with regard to the religion of Jesus. *If that be taken from us, what have we more? If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?* Ps. xi. 3. The generality of you owe all your hopes of a glorious immortality to this heaven-born religion, and you make it the rule of your faith

and practice; confident that in so doing you please God.

But what if, after all, you should be mistaken? What if the religion of Jesus should be an imposture?—I know you are struck with horror at the thought, and perhaps alarmed at my making so shocking a supposition. But this suspicion, horrid as it is, has probably been suggested to you at times by infernal agency: this suspicion may at times have risen in your minds in their wanton and licentious excursions, or from the false alarms of a melancholy and timorous imagination: and if this suspicion has never been raised in you by the sophistical conversation of loose wits and affected rationalists, it has been owing to your happy retirement from the polite world, where infidelity makes extensive conquests, under the specious name of deism. Since therefore you are subject to an assault from such a suspicion, when you may not be armed ready to repel it, let me this day start it from its ambush, that I may try the force of a few arguments upon it, and furnish you with weapons to conquer it.

Let me also tell you, that *that* faith in the christian religion which proceeds from insufficient or bad principles, is but little better than infidelity. If you believe the christian religion to be divine, because you hardly care whether it be true or false, being utterly unconcerned about religion in any shape, and therefore never examining the matter; if you believe it true, because you have been educated in it; because your parents or ministers have told you so; or because it is the religion of your country; if these are the only grounds of your faith, it is not such a faith as constitutes you true christians; for upon the very same grounds you would have been Mahometans in Turkey, disciples of Con-

facius in China, or worshippers of the devil among the Indians, if it had been your unhappy lot to be born in those countries: for a Mahometan, or a Chinese, or an Indian, can assign these grounds for his faith. Surely, I need not tell you, that the grounds of a mistaken belief in an imposture, are not a sufficient foundation for a saving faith in a divine revelation. I am afraid there are many such implicit believers among us, who are in the right only by chance: and these lie a prey to every temptation, and may be turned out of the way of truth by every wind of doctrine. It is therefore necessary to teach them the grounds of the christian religion, both to prevent their seduction, and to give them a rational and well grounded faith, instead of that which is only blind and accidental.

Nay, such of us as have the clearest conviction of this important truth, had need to have it inculcated upon us, that we may be more and more impressed with it; for the influence of christianity upon our hearts and lives will be proportioned to the realizing, affecting persuasion of its truth and certainty in our understandings.

If I can prove that christianity answers all the ends of a religion from God; if I can prove that it is attended with sufficient attestations; if I can prove that no sufficient objections can be offered against it; and that men have no reason at all to desire another; but that if this proves ineffectual for their reformation and salvation, there is no ground to hope that any other would prove successful: I say, if I can prove these things, then the point in debate is carried, and we must all embrace the religion of Jesus as certainly true.—These things are asserted or implied in my text, with respect to the scriptures then extant, *Moses and the prophets.*

My text is a parabolical dialogue between Abraham and one of his wretched posterity, once rioting in the luxuries of high life, but now tormented in infernal flames.

We read of his brethren in his father's house. Among these probably his estate was divided upon his decease; from whence we may infer that he had no children; for had he had any, it would have been more natural to represent him as solicitous for their reformation by a messenger from the dead, than for that of his brothers. He seems, therefore, like some of our unhappy modern rakes, just to have come to his estate, and to have abandoned himself to such a course of debaucheries as soon shattered his constitution, and brought him down to the grave, and alas! to hell, in the bloom of life, when they were far from his thoughts. May this be a warning to all of his age and circumstances!

Whether, from some remaining affection to his brethren, or (which is more likely,) from a fear that they who had shared with him in sin would increase his torment, should they descend to him in the infernal prison, he is solicitous that Lazarus might be sent as an apostle from the dead to warn them. His petition is to this purpose: "Since no request in my own favour can be granted; since I cannot obtain the poor favour of a drop of water to cool my flaming tongue, let me at least make one request in behalf of those that are as yet in the land of hope, and not beyond the reach of mercy. In my father's house I have five brethren, gay, thoughtless, young creatures, who are now rioting in those riches I was forced to leave, who interred my mouldering corpse in state, little apprehensive of the doom of my immortal part; who are now treading the same enchanting paths of pleasure I walked in; and will, unless reclaimed, soon de-

scend, like me, thoughtless and unprepared, into these doleful regions: I therefore pray, that thou wouldest send Lazarus to alarm them in their wild career, with an account of my dreadful doom, and inform them of the reality and importance of everlasting happiness and misery, that they may reform, and so avoid this place of torment whence I can never escape."

Abraham's answer may be thus paraphrased: "If thy brothers perish, it will not be for want of means; they enjoy the sacred scriptures of the Old Testament, written by *Moses and the prophets*; and these are sufficient to inform them of the necessary truths to regulate their practice, and particularly to warn them of everlasting punishment! Let them therefore hear and regard, study and obey, those writings; for they need no further means for their salvation."

To this the wretched creature replies, "Nay, father Abraham, these means will not avail; I enjoyed them all; and yet here I am, a lost soul; and I am afraid they will have as little effect upon them as they had upon me. These means are common and familiar, and therefore disregarded. But if one arose from the dead, if an apostle from the invisible world was sent to them, to declare as an eye-witness the great things he has seen, surely they would repent. The novelty and terror of the apparition would alarm them. Their senses would be struck with so unusual a messenger, and they would be convinced of the reality of eternal things; therefore I must renew my request; send Lazarus to them in all the pomp of heavenly splendour; Lazarus whom they once knew in so abject a condition, and whom they will therefore the more regard, when they see him appear in all his present glory."

Thus the miserable creature pleads (and it is natural for us to wish for other means, when those we have enjoyed are ineffectual, though it should be through our own neglect!) but, alas! he pleads in vain.

Abraham continues inexorable, and gives a very good reason for his denial: “If they pay no regard to the writings of *Moses and the prophets*, the standing revelation God has left in his church, it would be to no purpose to give them another: they would not be persuaded though one arose from the dead; the same disposition that renders them deaf to such messengers as *Moses and the prophets*, would also render them impersuasive by a messenger from the dead. Such a one might strike them with a panic, but it would soon be over, and then they would return to their usual round of pleasures; they would presently think the apparition was but the creature of their own imagination, or some unaccountable illusion of their senses. If one arose from the dead, he could but declare the same things substantially with *Moses and the prophets*; and he could not speak with greater authority, or give better credentials than they; and therefore they who are not benefitted by these standing means must be given up as desperate; and God, for very good reasons, will not multiply new revelations to them.”

This answer of Abraham was exemplified when another Lazarus was raised from the dead in the very sight of the Jews, and Christ burst the bands of death, and gave them incontestible evidences of his resurrection; and yet after all they were not persuaded, but persisted in invincible infidelity.

This parable was spoken before any part of the New Testament was written, and added to the sacred canon; and if it might be then asserted, that

the standing revelation of God's will was sufficient and that it was needless to demand farther, then much more may it be asserted now, when the canon of the scriptures is completed, and we have received so much additional light from the New Testament. We have not only *Moses and the prophets*, but we have also Christ, who is a messenger from the dead, and his apostles; and therefore, surely, "if we do not hear them, neither would we be persuaded, though one arose from the dead." The gospel is the last effort of the grace of God with a guilty world; and if this has no effect upon us, our disease is incurable that refuses to be healed.

I cannot insist upon all the important truths contained in this copious text, but only design,

I. To shew the sufficiency of the standing revelation of God's will in the scriptures; to bring men to repentance; and

II. To expose the vanity and unreasonableness of the objections against this revelation, and of demanding another.

I. I am to shew the sufficiency of the standing revelation in the scriptures to bring men to repentance.

If the scriptures gives us sufficient instructions in matters of faith, and sufficient directions in matters of practice, if they are attended with sufficient evidences for our faith, and produce sufficient excitements to influence our practice, then they contain a sufficient revelation; for it is for these purposes we need a revelation, and a revelation that answers these purposes has the directest tendency to make us truly religious, and bring us to an happy immortality. But that the revelation in the scriptures, (particularly in the New Testament, which I shall more immediately consider as being

the immediate foundation of christianity.) is sufficient for all these purposes, will be evident from an induction of particulars.

1. The scriptures gives us sufficient instructions what we should believe, or are a sufficient rule of faith.

Religion cannot subsist without right notions of God and divine things; and entire ignorance or mistakes in its fundamental articles must be destructive of its nature; and therefore a divine revelation must be a collection of rays of light, a system of divine knowledge;—and such we find the christian revelation to be, as contained in the sacred writings.

In the scriptures we find the faint discoveries of natural reason illustrated, its uncertain conjectures determined, and its mistakes corrected; so that christianity includes natural religion in the greatest perfection. But it does not rest here; it brings to light things which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither the heart of man conceived*, 1 Cor. ii. 9,—things, which our feeble reason could never have discovered without the help of a supernatural revelation; and which yet are of the utmost importance for us to know.

In the scriptures we have the clearest and most majestic account of the nature and perfections of the Deity, and of his being the Creator, Ruler, and Benefactor of the universe; to whom therefore all reasonable beings are under infinite obligations.

In the scriptures we have an account of the present state of human nature, as degenerate; and a more rational and easy account of its apostacy, than could ever be given by the light of nature.

In the scriptures too (which wound but to cure,) we have the welcome account of a method of reco-

very from the ruins of our apostacy, through the mediation of the Son of God; there we have the assurance which we could find no where else, that God is reconcileable, and willing to pardon penitents upon the account of the obedience and sufferings of Christ. There all our anxious inquiries, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord; or bow myself before the most high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings? &c.* Micah vi. 6, 7, are satisfactorily answered; and there the agonizing conscience can obtain relief, which might have sought it in vain among all the other religions in the world.

In the scriptures also, eternity and the invisible worlds are laid open to our view; and “life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel;” about which the heathen sages, after all their inquiries, laboured under uneasy suspicions. There we are assured of the state . . . future rewards and punishments, according to our conduct in this state of probation; and the nature, perfection, and duration of the happiness and misery, are described with as much accuracy as are necessary to engage us to seek the one and shun the other.

I particularize these doctrines of christianity as a specimen, or as so many general heads, to which many others may be reduced; not intending a complete enumeration, which would lead me far beyond the bounds of one sermon; and for which my whole life is not sufficient. I therefore proceed to add,

2. The holy scriptures give us complete directions in matters of practice, or are a sufficient rule of life.

A divine revelation must not be calculated merely to amuse us, and gratify our curiosity with sublime and refined notions and speculations, but adapted to direct and regulate our practice, and render us better as well as wiser.

Accordingly, the sacred writings give us a complete system of practical religion and morality. There, not only all the duties of natural religion are inculcated, but several important duties, as love to our enemies, humility, &c. are clearly discovered, which the feeble light of reason in the heathen moralists did either not perceive at all, or but very faintly. In short, there we are informed of our duties towards God, towards our neighbours, and towards ourselves. The scriptures are full of particular injunctions and directions to particular duties, lest we should not be sagacious enough to infer them from general rules; and sometimes all these duties are summed up in some short maxim, or general rule; which we may easily remember, and always carry about with us. Such a noble summary is that which Christ has given us of the whole moral law; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c. and thy neighbour as thyself." Or that all-comprehending rule of our conduct towards one another, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye the same unto them."

What recommends these doctrinal instructions and practical direction is, that they are plain and obvious to common sense. It is as much the concern of the illiterate and vulgar to be religious, as of the few endowed with an exalted and philosophic genius; and consequently, whatever difficulties may be in a revelation to exercise the latter, yet all necessary matters of faith and practice must be delivered in a plain manner, level to the capacities of the former; otherwise it would be no revelation at all to them who stand in most need of it. Accordingly the religion of Jesus, though it has mysteries equally and infinitely superior to the largest capacity, yet its necessary articles are in-

telligible to all ranks who apply themselves with proper diligence to the perusal of them; and I dare affirm, that a man of common sense, with the assistance of the sacred scriptures, can form a better system of religion and morality than the wisest philosopher, with all his abilities and learning, can form without this help. This I dare affirm, because it has been put to trial, and attested by matter of fact; for whoever is acquainted with the writings of the ancient heathen philosophers, cannot but be convinced, that, amidst all their learning and study, amidst all their shining thoughts and refined speculations, they had not such just notions of God and his perfections, of the most acceptable way of worshipping him, of the duties of morality, and of a future state, as any common christian among us has learned from the scriptures, without any uncommon natural parts, without extensive learning, and without such painful study and close application as the heathen moralists were forced to use to make their less perfect discoveries. In this sense the least in the kingdom of heaven, *i. e.* any common christain, is greater than all the Socrates, the Platos, the Ciceros, and the Senecas of antiquity; as one that is of a weak sight can see more clearly by the help of day-light, than the clearest eye can without it.

And by whom was this vast treasure of knowledge laid up to enrich the world? by whom were these matchless writings composed, which furnish us with a system of religion and morality so much more plain, so much more perfect, than all the famous sages of antiquity could frame? Why, to our astonishment, they were composed by a company of fishermen, or persons not much superior; by persons generally without any liberal education; persons who had not devoted their lives to intellec-

tual improvement; persons of no extraordinary natural parts, and who had not travelled, like the ancient philosophers to gather up fragments of knowledge in different countries, but who lived in Judea, a country where learning was but little cultivated, in comparison of Greece and Rome. These were the most accomplished teachers of mankind that ever appeared in the world. And can this be accounted for, without acknowledging their inspiration from heaven? If human reason could have made such discoveries, surely it would have made them by those in whom it was improved to the greatest perfection, and not by a company of ignorant mechanics.

The persons themselves declared that they had not made these discoveries, but were taught them immediately from heaven, (which indeed we must have believed, though they had not told us so.) Now we must believe their declaration, and own them inspired, or fall into this absurdity. That a company of illiterate, wicked, and daring impostors, who were hardy enough to pretend themselves commissioned and inspired from God, have furnished us with an incomparably more excellent system of religion and virtue, than could be furnished by all the wisest and best of the sons of men beside; and he that can believe this may believe any thing; and should never more pretend that he cannot believe the christian religion upon the account of the difficulties that attend it.

I have touched but superficially upon the sufficiency of the scriptures as a rule of faith and practice; for to dwell long upon this, would be to fight without an antagonist. Our infidels reject the christian religion, because they suppose it requires them to believe and practise too much, rather than too little. Hence they are for lopping off a

great part of its doctrines and precepts, as superfluities, or incumbrances, and forming a meagre skeleton of natural religion. Their intellectual pride will not stoop to believe doctrines which they cannot comprehend; and they cannot bear such narrow bounds as the precepts of christianity fixes for them in their pursuits of pleasure, and therefore they would break these bands asunder. That which they affect most to complain of, is the want of evidence to convince them of the truth of this ungrateful religion; it will therefore be necessary to prove more largely, that,

3. The scriptures are attended with sufficient evidences of their truth and divinity.

It is certain that as God can accept no other worship than rational from reasonable creatures, he cannot require us to believe a revelation to be divine without sufficient reason; and therefore, when he gives us a revelation, he will attest it with such evidences as will be a sufficient foundation of our belief.

Accordingly the scriptures are attested with all the evidences, intrinsic, and extrinsic, which we can reasonably desire, and with all the evidences the nature of the thing will admit.

As for intrinsic evidences, many might be mentioned; but I must at present confine myself in proper limits. I shall resume the one I have already hinted at, namely, that the religion of the Bible has the directest tendency to promote true piety and solid virtue in the world; it is such a religion as becomes a God to reveal; such a religion as we might expect from him, in case he instituted any; a religion intended and adapted to regulate self love, and to diffuse the love of God and man through the world, the only generous principles and vigorous springs of a suitable conduct

towards God, towards one another, and towards ourselves; a religion productive of every humane, social, and divine virtue; and directly calculated to banish all sin out of the world; to transform impiety into devotion; injustice and oppression into equity and universal benevolence; and sensuality into sobriety: a religion infinitely preferable to any that has been contrived by the wisest and best of mortals. And whence do ye think could this god-like religion proceed? Does not its nature prove its origin divine? does it not evidently bear the lineaments of its heavenly Parent? can you once imagine that such a pure, such a holy, such a perfect system, could be the contrivance of wicked infernal spirits, of selfish, artful priests, or politicians, or of a parcel of daring impostors, or wild enthusiasts? Could these contrive a religion so contrary to their inclination, so destructive of their interest, and so directly conducing to promote the cause they abhor? If you can believe this, you may also believe that light is the product of darkness, virtue of vice, good of evil, &c. If such beings as these had contrived a religion, it would have borne the same appearance in the Bible as it does in Italy or Spain, where it is degenerated into a mere trade, for the benefit of tyrannical and voracious priests; or it would have been such a religion as that of Mahomet, allowing its subjects to propagate it with the sword, that they might enrich themselves with the plunder of conquered nations; and indulging them in the gratification of their lusts, particularly in polygamy, or the enjoyment of women. This religion I fear, would suit the taste of our licentious free-thinkers much better than the holy religion of Jesus. Or if we should suppose christianity to be the contrivance of visionary enthusiasts, then it would not be that ra-

tional system which it is, but a huddle of fanatical reveries and ridiculous whims. If, then, it could not be the contrivance of such authors as these, to whom shall we ascribe it? it must have had some author; for it could not come into being without a cause, no more than the system of the universe. Will you then ascribe it to good men? But these men were either inspired from heaven, or they were not; if they were not, then they could not be good men, but most audacious liars: for they plainly declared, they were divinely inspired, and stood in it to the last; which no good man would do, if such a declaration was false. If they were inspired from heaven, then the point is gained; then christianity is a religion from God; for to receive a religion from persons divinely inspired, and to receive it from God, is the same thing.

Another intrinsic evidence is that of prophecy.

Those future events which are contingent, or which shall be accomplished by causes that do not now exist or appear, cannot be certainly foreknown or foretold by man, as we find by our own experience. Such objects fall within the compass of Omniscience only; and therefore when short sighted mortals are enabled to predict such events many years, and even ages before they happen, it is a certain evidence that they are let into the secrets of heaven, and that God communicates to them a knowledge which cannot be acquired by the most sagacious human mind; and this is an evidence that the persons thus divinely taught are the messengers of God, to declare his will to the world.

Now there are numberless instances of such prophecies in the sacred writings. Thus a prophet foretold the destruction of Jeroboam's altar by the good Josiah, many ages before, 1 Kings xiii. 2. Cyrus was foretold by name as the restorer of the

Jews from Babylon, to rebuild their temple and city, about an hundred years before he was born, Isaiah xlv. 1, &c. Several of the prophets foretold the destruction of various kingdoms in a very punctual manner, as of Jerusalem, Babylon, Egypt, Ninevah, &c. which prediction was exactly fulfilled. But the most remarkable prophecies of the Old Testament are those relating to the Messiah; which are so numerous and full, that they might serve for materials of his history, they fix the time of his coming, viz. while the sceptre continued in Judah, Gen. xlix. 10, while the second temple was yet standing, Hag. ii. 7, Mal. iii. 2, and towards the close of Daniel's seventy weeks of years, i. e. four hundred and ninety years from the rebuilding of Jerusalem, Dan. ix. 24, &c. These prophecies also describe the lineage of the Messiah, the manner of his conception, his life and miracles, his death, and the various circumstances of it; his burial, resurrection, ascension, and advancement to universal empire, and the spread of the gospel through the world. In the New Testament also we meet with sundry remarkable prophecies. There Christ foretels his own death and the manner of it, and his triumphant resurrection; there, with surprising accuracy, he predicts the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. We find various prophecies also in the apostolic epistles, particularly that of St. Paul, Rom. xi. concerning the conversion of the Jews; which, though it be not yet accomplished, yet we see a remarkable providence making way for it, in keeping the Jews, who are scattered over all the earth, distinct from all other nations for about one thousand seven hundred years, though they are hated of all nations, and consequently under the strongest temptation to coalesce with, and lose themselves, among them; and

though all other nations have in a much shorter time mixed in such a manner, that none of them can now trace their own original; *e. g.* Who can now distinguish the posterity of the ancient Romans from the Goths and Vandals, and others that broke in upon their empire and settled among them; or of the ancient Angli from the Danes, &c. that mingled with them?

These and many other plain predictions are interspersed through the scriptures, and prove their original to be from the Father of lights, who alone knows all his works from the beginning, and who declares such distant contingent futurities from ancient times. *Isaiah xlv. 21.*

I might, as another intrinsic evidence of the truth of christianity, mention its glorious energy on the minds of men, in convincing them of sin, easing their consciences, inspiring them with unspeakable joy, subduing their lusts, and transforming them into its own likeness; which is attested by the daily experience of every true christian. Every one that believeth hath this witness in himself: and this is an evidence level to the meanest capacity, which may be soon lost in a course of sublime reasoning. But as the deists declare, alas! with too much truth, that the gospel hath no such power upon them, it is not to my purpose to insist upon it.

I therefore proceed to mention some of the extrinsic evidences of the religion of Jesus, particularly the miracles with which it was confirmed, and its early propagation through the world.

Miracles of this case are events above, or contrary to, the established laws of nature, done with a professed design to attest a revelation; and as they are obvious and striking to the senses of the most ignorant and unthinking, they are the most

popular and convictive evidences, adapted to the capacities of the generality of mankind, who are incapable of a long train of argumentation, or of perceiving the origin of a religion from its nature and tendency. •

Now the religion of Jesus is abundantly attested with this kind of evidence. The history of the life of Jesus and his apostles is one continued series of miracles. Sight was restored to the blind, the deaf were enabled to hear, the lame to walk, the maimed furnished with new-created limbs, the sick healed, the rage of winds and seas controlled, yea, the dead were raised; and all this with an air of sovereignty, such as became a God; the apostles were also endowed with miraculous powers, enabled to speak with tongues, and to communicate the Holy Spirit to others. These miracles were done not in a corner, but in the most public places, before numerous spectators, friends and foes; and the persons that wrought them appealed to them as the evidences of their divine mission; and the account of them is conveyed down to us by the best medium, written tradition, in a history that bears all the evidences of credibility, of which any compassure of that kind is capable.

Another extrinsic evidence of the truth of christianity is its extensive propagation through the world in the most unpromising circumstances.

The only religion, besides the christian, which has had any very considerable spread in the world, is that of Mahomet; but we may easily account for this, without supposing it divine, from its nature, as indulging the lusts of men; and especially from the manner of its propagation, not by the force of evidence, but by the force of arms. But the circumstances of the propagation of christianity were quite otherwise, whether we consider

its contrariety to the corruptions, prejudices, and interests of men; the easiness of detecting it, had it been false; the violent opposition it met with from all the powers of the earth; the instruments of its propagation; or the measures they took for that purpose.

Christianity was directly contrary to the corruptions, prejudices, and interests of mankind. It grants no indulgence to the corrupt propensions of a degenerate world: but requires that universal holiness of heart and life which, as we find by daily observation, is so ungrateful to them; and which is the principal reason that the religion of Jesus meets with so much contempt and opposition in every age.

When christianity was first propagated, all nations had been educated in some other religion; the Jews were attached to Moses, and the Gentiles to their various systems of heathenism; and were all of them very zealous for their own religion; but christianity proposed a new scheme, and could not take place without antiquating or exploding all other religions; and therefore it was contrary to the inveterate prejudices of all mankind; and could never have been so generally received, if it had not brought with it the most evident credentials; especially considering that some of its doctrines were such as seemed to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; particularly that one of obscure birth and low life, who was publicly executed as a slave and malefactor, should be worshipped and honoured as God, upon pain of everlasting damnation! that there should be a resurrection of the dead: the last of which was an object of ridicule to all the wits and philosophers of the heathen world. Again, as some religion or other was established in all nations, there were

many, like Demetrius and his craftsmen, whose temporal livings and interests depended upon the continuance of their religion; and if that was changed, they fell into poverty and disgrace. There was a powerful party in every nation, and they would exert themselves to prevent the spread of an innovation so dangerous to their interest, which we find by all histories of those times they actually did—And yet the despised religion of Jesus triumphed over all their opposition, and maintained its credit in spite of all their endeavours to detect it as an imposture; and this proves it was not an imposture; for,

In the next place, it was easy to have detected christianity as an imposture, nay, it was impossible it should not have been detected, if it had been such; for the great facts upon which the evidence of it rested, were said to be obvious and public, done before thousands, and in all countries; for wherever the apostles travelled, they carried their miraculous powers along with them. Thousands must know whether Christ had fed many thousands with provisions only sufficient for a few; whether Lazarus was raised from the dead before the admiring multitude; whether the apostles spoke with tongues to those various nations among whom they endeavoured to propagate their religion, (as indeed they must have done, otherwise they would not have been understood.) These things, and many others, upon which the evidence of christianity depends, were public in their own nature; and therefore, if they had not been matters of fact, the cheat must have been unavoidably detected, especially when so many were concerned to detect it.

Farther; christianity met with the most strenuous opposition from all the powers of the earth. The Jewish rulers and most of the populace were

impiacable enemies; and as they lived on the spot where its miraculous attestations were said to be given, it was in their power to crush it in its birth, and never have suffered it to spread farther, had it not been attended with invincible evidence. All the power of the Roman empire was also exerted for its extirpation; and its propagators and disciples could expect no profit or pleasure by it, but were assured from the posture of affairs, from daily experience, and from the predictions of their Master, that they should meet with shame, persecution, and death itself in its most tremendous shapes; and in the next world they could expect nothing, even according to their own doctrine, but everlasting damnation, if they were wilful impostors; and yet, in spite of all these discouragements, they courageously persisted in their testimony to the last, though they might have secured their lives, and helped their fortunes (as Judas did,) by retracting it; nay, their testimony prevailed in defiance of all opposition; multitudes in all nations then known embraced the faith; though they expected tortures and death for it; and in a few centuries, the vast and mighty Roman empire submitted to the religion of a crucified Jesus. And who were these mighty heroes that thus triumphed over the world? Why, to our surprise,

The instruments of the propagation of christianity were a company of poor mechanics, publicans, tent makers, and fishermen, from the despised nation of the Jews! And by what strange powers or arts did they make these extensive conquests?

The measures they took were a plain declaration of their religion; and they wrought miracles for its confirmation. They did not use the power of the sword, no secular terrors, or bribery; they were without learning, without the arts of reason-

ing and persuasion; and without all the usual artifice of seducers to gain credit to their imposture.

Here I cannot but take particular notice of that matchless simplicity that appears in the history of Christ and his apostles. The evangelists write in that artless, calm, and unguarded manner, which is natural to persons confident of the undeniable truth of what they assert; they do not write with that scrupulous caution which would argue any fear that they might be confuted. They simply relate the naked facts, and leave them to stand upon their own evidence. They relate the most amazing, the most moving things, with the most cool serenity, without any passionate exclamations and warm reflections. For example, they relate the most astonishing miracles, as the resurrection of Lazarus, in the most simple, and, as it were, careless manner, without breaking out and celebrating the divine power of Christ. In the same manner they relate the most tragical circumstances of his condemnation and death, calmly mentioning matter of fact, without any invectives against the Jews, without any high eulogies upon Christ's innocence, without any rapturous celebrations of his grace in suffering all these things for sinners, and without any tender lamentations over their deceased Master. It is impossible for a heart so deeply impressed with such things, as theirs undoubtedly were, to retain this dispassionate serenity, unless laid under supernatural restraints; and there appears very good reasons for this restraint upon them, viz. that the gospel history might carry intrinsic evidences of its simplicity and artless impartiality; and that it might appear adapted to convince the judgments of men, and not merely to raise their passions. In this respect, the gospel-history is distinguished from all histories in the

world: and can we think so plain, so undisguised, so artless a composure, the contrivance of designing impostors? Would not a consciousness that they might be detected keep them more upon their guard, and make them more ready to anticipate and confine objections, and take every artifice to recommend their cause, and prepossess the reader in its favour?

It only remains under this head, that I should

(4.) Shew that the religion of Jesus proposes sufficient excitements to influence our faith and practice.

To enforce a system of doctrines and precepts, two things are especially necessary, that they should be made duty by competent authority, and matters of interest by a sanction of rewards and punishments. To which I may add, that the excitements are still stronger, when we are laid under the gentle obligations of gratitude. In all these respects the christian religion has the most powerful enforcements.

The authority upon which we are required to receive the doctrines, and observe the precepts of christianity, is no less than the authority of God, the supreme Lawgiver and infallible Teacher; whose wisdom to prescribe, and right to command, are indisputable; and we may safely submit our understandings to his instructions, however mysterious, and our wills to his injunctions, however difficult they may seem to us. This gives the religion of Jesus a binding authority upon the consciences of men; which is absolutely necessary to bring piety and virtue into practice in the world; for if men are left at liberty, they will follow their own inclinations, however wicked and pernicious. And in this respect, christianity bears a glorious preference to all the systems of morality composed by

the heathen philosophers; for though there were many good things in them, yet who gave authority to Socrates, Plato, or Seneca, to assume the province of lawgivers, and dictators to mankind; and prescribe to their consciences?—All they could do was to teach, to advise, to persuade, to reason; but mankind were at liberty, after all, whether to take their advice or not. And this shews the necessity of supernatural revelation, not merely to make known things beyond human apprehension; but to enforce with proper authority such duties as might be discovered by man; since without it they would not have the binding force of a law.

As to the sanction of rewards and punishments in christianity, they are such as became a God to annex to his majestic law, such as are agreeable to creatures formed for immortality, and such as would have the most effectual tendency to encourage obedience, and prevent sin; they are no less than the most perfect happiness and misery, which human nature is capable of, and that through an endless duration. If these are not sufficient to allure rational creatures to obedience, then no considerations that can be proposed can have any effect. These tend to alarm our hopes and our fears, the most vigorous springs of human activity, and if these have no effect upon us, nothing that God can reveal, or our mind conceive, will have any effect. God, by adding the greatest sanctions possible to his law, has taken the best possible precautions to prevent disobedience; and since even these do not restrain men from it, we are sure that less would not suffice. If men will go on in sin though they believe the punishment due to it will be eternal, then much more would they persist in it, if it were not eternal; or, if they say they will indulge themselves in sin, because they believe

not eternal, then this proves from their own mouth, that it should be eternal in order to restrain them. The prevalence of sin in the world tends to render it miserable; and therefore, to prevent it, as well as to display God's eternal regard to moral goodness, it is fit that he should annex the highest degree of punishment to disobedience in every individual; for the indulgence of sin in one individual would be a temptation to the whole rational creation; and, on the other hand, the threatenings of everlasting punishment to all sinners indefinitely, is necessary to deter the whole rational world, and every particular person from disobedience. Thus in civil government, it is necessary that robbery should be threatened indefinitely with death, because, though one robber may take from a man but what he can very well spare; yet, if every man might rob and plunder his neighbour, the consequence would be universal robbery and confusion. It is therefore necessary that the greatest punishment should be threatened to disobedience, both to prevent it, and to testify the divine displeasure against it; which is the primary design of the threatening; and since the penalty was annexed with this view, it follows, that it was primarily enacted with a view to the happiness of mankind, by preventing what would naturally make them miserable, and but secondarily with a view to be executed; for it is to be executed only upon condition of disobedience; which disobedience it was intended to prevent, and consequently it was not immediately intended to be executed, or enacted for the sake of the execution, as though God took a malignant pleasure in the misery of his creatures. But when the penalty has failed of its primary end, restraining from sin, then it is fit it should answer its secondary end, and be executed upon the offender, to keep the rest of reasonable creatures in their

obedience, to illustrate the veracity and holiness of the lawgiver, and prevent his government from failing into contempt. There are the same reasons that threatenings should be executed when denounced, as for their being denounced at first; for threatenings never executed are the same with no threatenings at all.

Let me add, that the gospel lays us under the strongest obligations from gratitude. It not only clearly informs us of our obligations to God, as the author of our being, and all our temporal blessings, which natural religion more faintly discovers, but superadds those more endearing ones, derived from the scheme of man's redemption, through the death of the eternal Son of God. Though the blessings of creation and providence are great in themselves, they are swallowed up, as it were, and lost in the love of God; which is commended to us by this matchless circumstance, "that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;" and while under the constraints of this love, we cannot but devote ourselves entirely to God. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

Thus I have hinted at a few things, among the many that might be mentioned, to prove the divinity of the religion of Jesus, and its sufficiency to bring men to repentance and salvation. And if it be so, why should it be rejected, or another sought? This reminds me that I promised,

II. To expose the vanity and unreasonableness of the objection against the christian religion, or of demanding another, &c.

What can our ingenious infidels offer against what has been said? It must be something very weighty indeed to preponderate all this evidence. A laugh, or a sneer, a pert witticism, declaiming against priestcraft and the prejudices of education, artful evasions, and shallow sophisms, the usual

arguments of our pretended free-thinkers, these will not suffice to banter us out of our joyful confidence in the divinity of the religion of Jesus; and I may add, these will not suffice to indemnify them. Nothing will be sufficient for this but demonstration: it lies on them to prove the christian religion to be certainly false; otherwise, unless they are hardened to a prodigy, they must be racked with anxious fears lest they should find it true to their cost; and lest that dismal threatening should stand firm against them: "*He that believeth not, shall be damned.*" What mighty objections, then, have they to offer? Will they say that the christian religion contains mysterious doctrines, which they cannot comprehend, which seem to them unaccountable? As that of the trinity, the incarnation, and satisfaction of Christ, &c. But will they advance their understanding to be the universal standard of truth? Will they pretend to comprehend the infinite God in their finite minds? then let them go, and measure the heavens with a span, and comprehend the ocean in the hollow of their hand. Will they pretend to understand the divine nature when they cannot understand their own? when they cannot account for, or explain, the union betwixt their own souls and bodies? Will they reject mysteries in christianity when they must own them in every thing else? Let them first solve all the phenomena in nature; let them give us a rational theory of the infinite divisibility of a piece of finite matter; let them account for the seemingly magical operation of the loadstone; the circulation of the blood upwards as well as downwards, contrary to all the laws of motion; let them inform us of the causes of the cohesion of the particles of matter; let them tell us how spirits can receive ideas from material organs; how they hear and see, &c. let them give

us intelligible theories of these things, and then they may, with something of a better grace, set up for critics upon God and his ways; but, while they are mysteries to themselves, while every particle of matter baffles their understandings, it is the most inapious intellectual pride to reject christianity upon the account of its mysteries, and to set up themselves as the supreme judges of truth.

Or will they object that there are a great many difficult and strange passages in scripture, the meaning and propriety of which they do not see? And are there not many strange things in the book of nature, and the administration of Providence, the design and use of which they cannot see, many things that to them seem wrong and ill contrived? Yet they own the world was created by God, and that his providence rules it: and why will they not allow that the scriptures may be from God, notwithstanding these difficulties and seeming incongruities? When a learned man can easily raise his discourse above the capacity of common people, will they not condescend to grant that an infinite God can easily overshoot their little souls? Indeed a revelation which we could fully comprehend would not appear the production of an infinite mind; it would bear no resemblance to its heavenly Father; and therefore we should have reason to suspect it spurious. It is necessary we should meet with difficulties in the scriptures to mortify our pride. But farther, will they make no allowance for the different customs and practices of different ages? It is certain, that may be proper and graceful in one age which would be ridiculous and absurd in another: and since the scriptures were written so many years ago, we may safely make this allowance for them, which will remove many seeming absurdities. There should also allowance

be made for the scriptures being rendered literally out of dead, difficult languages; for we know that many expressions may be beautiful and significant in one language, which would be ridiculous and nonsensical if literally translated into another. Were Homer or Virgil thus translated into English, without regard to the idiom of the language, instead of admiring their beauties, we should be apt to think (as Cowley expresses it,) "that one madman had translated another madman."

Will they object the wicked lives of its professors against the holiness and good tendency of christianity itself? But is it christianity, as practised in the world, or christianity, as taught by Christ and his apostles, and contained in the bible, that I am proving to be divine? You know it is the latter, and, consequently, the poor appearance it makes in the former sense, is no argument against its purity and divinity in this. Again, are the bad lives of professors taught and enjoined by genuine christianity, and agreeable to it? No; they are quite contrary to it, and subversive of it; and it is so far from encouraging such professors, that it pronounces them miserable hypocrites; and their doom will be more severe than that of heathens. Again, are there not hypocritical professors of morality and natural religion, as well as of revealed? Are there not many who cry up morality and religion of nature, and yet boldly violate its plainest precepts? If, therefore, this be a sufficient objection against christianity, it must be so too against all religion. Further: do men grow better by renouncing the religion of Jesus? Observation assures us quite the contrary. Finally: are there not some of the professors of christianity who live habitually according to it? who give us the best patterns of piety and virtue that ever were exhibited to the world?

This is sufficient to vindicate the religion they profess, and it is highly injurious to involve such promiscuously in the odium and contempt due to barefaced hypocrites. How would this reasoning please the deists themselves in parallel cases? "Some that have no regard to christianity have been murderers, thieves, &c. therefore all that disregarded it are such." Or, "some that pretended to be honest, have been found villains; therefore all that pretend to it are such; or therefore honesty is no virtue."

Or will they change the note, and, instead of pleading that christianity leads to licentiousness, object that it bears too hard upon the pleasures of mankind, and lays them under too severe restraints? Or that its penalties are excessive and cruel? But does it rob mankind of any pleasures worthy the rational nature, worthy the pursuit of creatures formed for immortality, and consistent with the good of the whole? It restrains them indeed; but it is only as a physician restrains his patient from poison or an improper regimen; it restrains men from living like beasts; it restrains them from those pleasures which will ruin their souls and bodies in the event; it restrains them from gratifying a private passion at the expense of the public; in short, it restrains them from making themselves and others miserable. Hard restraints indeed! and the deists, to be sure, are generous patrons of human liberty, who would free us from such grievances as these! However, this objection lets us into the secret, and informs us of the reason why our pretended free-thinkers are such enemies to christianity; it is because it checks their lusts, and will not permit them to act, as well as to think freely, *i. e.* as they please. If they would content themselves with manly and rational

pleasures, they would not count the restraints of christianity intolerable; nay, they would find in it a set of peculiarly noble and refined pleasures, which they might seek in vain elsewhere; for it is so far from being an enemy to the happiness of man, that it was designed to promote it; and then we make ourselves miserable when we reject it, or it becomes our interest that it should be false. As to the penalty of everlasting punishment annexed to sin, which is but a temporal evil, I would ask them whether they are competent judges in a matter in which they are parties? Are they capable to determine what degree of punishment should be inflicted upon disobedience to the infinite majesty of heaven, when they are not only short sighted creatures, but also concerned in the affair, and their judgments may be perverted by self-interest? Whether it is most fit that the Judge of all the earth should determine this point, or a company of malefactors, as they are? Is it allowed in civil courts to determine their own doom, or pronounce their own sentence? If it were, few of them would be punished at all, and government would fall into contempt. Again, let me remind them, that the penalty was annexed to prevent disobedience, and so to render the execution needless; and consequently it was primarily intended for their good. Why then will they frustrate this design, and when they have rendered the execution necessary, complain of its severity? If they think the penalty so terrible, let them watch against sin, let them accept the salvation the gospel offers, and so avoid it instead of quarrelling with its severity, and yet rushing upon it. Or, if they say they will persist in sin because they do not believe the punishment is eternal; this gives me room to appeal to themselves whether a less penalty than everlasting misery

would be sufficient to restrain them from sin; and whether God would have taken all proper precautions to prevent sin; if he had annexed a less punishment to his law, since, by their own confession nothing less could deter them from it. I shall only add, that as the human soul must always exist, and as by indulgence in sin in the present state it contracts such habits as render it incapable of happiness in the holy enjoyment of the heavenly world, it must by a natural necessity be forever miserable, though God should not exert any positive act for its punishment. And if the devil say, that punishment for some time would reclaim offenders from sin and bring them to repentance, the difficulty is not removed, unless they can prove that misery will bring men to love that God who inflicts it, which they can never do; and it is evident, that that repentance which proceeds merely from self-love, without any regard to God at all, can never be pleasing to him, nor prepare them for happiness in the enjoyment of him. Punishment would produce a repentance like that of a sick-bed, forced, servile, and transitory.

Will they object, that miracles are not a sufficient evidence of the truth and divinity of a revelation, because infernal spirits may also work miracles, as in the case of the magicians of Egypt to confirm an imposture? But it is not known that our free-thinkers explode and laugh at the existence and power of evil spirits in other cases, and therefore must not be allowed to admit them here to serve a turn. However, we grant there are infernal spirits, and that they can perform many things above human power, which may appear to us miraculous, and yet the evidence in favour of christianity taken from miracles stands unshaken; for (1.) Can we suppose that these malignant and

wicked spirits, whose business it is to seduce men to sin and ruin, would be willing to exert their power to work miracles to confirm so holy a religion, a religion so contrary to their design, and so subversive of their kingdom and interest? This would be wretched policy indeed. Or if we should suppose them willing, yet, (2.) Can we think that God, who has them all at his controul, would suffer them to counterfeit the great seal of heaven, and annex it to an imposture, that is, to work such miracles as could not be distinguished from those wrought by him to attest an imposture? Would he permit them to impose upon mankind in a manner that could not be detected? This would be to deliver the world to their management, and suffer them to lead them blindfold to hell in unavoidable delusion: for miracles are such dazzling and pompous evidences, that the general run of mankind could not resist them, even though they were wrought to attest a religion that might be demonstrated by a long train of sublime reasoning to be false. God may indeed suffer the devil to mimic the miracles wrought by his immediate hand, as in the case of Jannes and Jambres; but, then as in that case too he will take care to excel them, and give some distinguishing marks of his almighty agency, which all mankind may easily discriminate from the utmost exertion of infernal power. But though Satan should be willing, and God should permit him to work miracles, yet, (3.) Can we suppose that all the united powers of hell are able to work such astonishing miracles as were wrought for the confirmation of the Christian religion? Can we suppose that they can controul the laws of nature at pleasure, and that with an air of sovereignty, and professing themselves the lords

believe this, then we deny them, and may as well ascribe the creation and preservation of the world to them. If they could exert a creating power to form new limbs for the maimed, or to multiply five loaves and two fishes into a sufficient quantity of food for five thousand, and leave a greater quantity of fragments when that were done than the whole provision at first, then they might create the world, and support all the creatures in it. If they could animate the dead and remand the separate soul back to its former habitation, and reunite it with the body, then I see not why they might not have given us life at first. But to suppose this, would be to dethrone the King of heaven, and renounce his providence entirely. We therefore rest assured that the miracles related in the scriptures were wrought by the finger of God.

But our free-thinkers will urge, How do we at this distance know that such miracles were actually wrought? they are only related in scripture history; but to prove the truth of scripture, from arguments that suppose the scripture true, is a ridiculous method of reasoning, and only a begging of the question. But (1.) the reality of those miracles were granted by the enemies of christianity in their writings against it; and they had no answer to make, but this sorry one, that they were wrought by the power of magic. They never durst deny that they were wrought; for they knew all the world could prove it. Indeed, an honourable testimony concerning them could not be expected from infidels; for it would be utterly inconsistent that they should own these miracles sufficient attestations of christianity, and yet continue infidels. And this may answer an unreasonable demand of the deists, that we should produce some honourable testimony concerning these attestations

from Jews and Heathens, as well as from Christians, who were parties. We should have much more reason to suspect the testimony of the former as not convictive, when it did not convince the persons themselves. But,

(2.) As these miracles were of so public a nature, and as so many were concerned to detect them, that they would unavoidably have been detected when related in words, if they had not been done; so, for the same reasons, they could not but have been detected when related in writing; and this we know they never were. If these miracles had not been matters of undoubted fact, they could not have been inserted at first in the gospel-history; for then many thousands in various countries were alive to confute them and they could not have been introduced into it afterwards, for all the world would see that it was then too late, and that if there had been such things, they should have heard of them before: for they were much more necessary for the first propagation of christianity than for its support when received.

But it may be objected, how can we at this distance know that these histories are genuine? May they not have been corrupted and many additions made to them by designing men in ages since? And why is not also asked, how do we know that there were such men as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, or king William the Third? How do we know but their histories are all romance and fable? How do we know that there were any generations of mankind before ourselves? How do we know but all the acts of parliament of former reigns are corrupted, and we are ruled by impositions? In short, how can we know any thing, but what we have seen with our eyes? We may as well make difficulties of all these things, and so destroy all human

testimony, as scruple the genuineness of the sacred writings; for never were any writings conveyed down with so good evidence of their being genuine and uncorrupted as these. Upon their first publication they were put into all hands, they were scattered into all nations, translated into various languages, and all perused them; either to be taught by them, or to cavil at them. And ever since, they have been quoted by thousands of authors, appealed to by all parties of christians, as the supreme judge of controversies; and not only the enemies of christianity have carefully watched them to detect any alterations which pious fraud might attempt to make, but one sect of christians has kept a watchful eye over the other, lest they should alter any thing in favour of their own cause. And it is matter of astonishment as well as conviction, that all the various copies and translations of the scriptures in different nations and libraries are substantially the same, and differ only in matters of small moment; so that from the worst copy of translation in the world, one might easily learn the substance of christianity.

Or will our infidels insist to be eye-witnesses of these facts? Must one arise from the dead, or new miracles be wrought to convince them by ocular demonstration? This is a most unreasonable demand, for (1.) The continuance of miracles in every age would be attended with numerous inconveniences. For example. Multitudes must be born blind, deaf, or dumb; multitudes must be afflicted with incurable diseases, and possessed by evil spirits; multitudes must be disturbed in the sleep of death; and all the laws of nature must be made precarious and fickle, in order to leave room for miraculous operations; and all this to humour a company of obstinate infidels, who would not believe upon less striking though entirely sufficient

evidence. (2.) The continuance of miracles from age to age would destroy their very nature, to which it is essential, that they be rare and extraordinary; for what is ordinary and frequent, we are apt to ascribe to the established laws of nature, however wonderful it be in itself. For example, if we saw dead bodies rise from their graves, as often as we see vegetables spring from seed rotten in the earth, we should be no more surprised at the one phenomenon than we are at the other, and our *virtuosi* would be equally busy to assign some natural cause for both.

And had we never seen the sun rise until this morning, we should justly have accounted it as great a miracle as any recorded in the scriptures; but because it is common, we neglect it as a thing of course. Indeed, it is not any thing in the event itself, or in the degree of power necessary for its accomplishment, that renders it miraculous, but its being uncommon, and out of the ordinary course of things; for example, the generation of the human body is not in itself less astonishing; nor does it require less power, than its resurrection: the revolution of the sun in its regular course is as wonderful, and as much requires a divine power, as its standing still in the days of Joshua. But we acknowledge a miracle in the one case, but not in the other, because the one is extraordinary, while the other frequently occurs. Hence it follows, that the frequent repetition of miracles, as often as men are pleased to plead the want of evidence to excuse their infidelity, would destroy their very nature: and consequently, to demand their continuance is to demand an impossibility. But (3.) Suppose that men should be indulged in this request, it would not probably bring them to believe. If they are unbelievers now, it is not for want of evidence.

but through wilful blindness and obstinacy; and as they that will shut their eyes can see no more in meridian light than in the twilight, so they that reject a sufficiency of evidence would also resist a superfluity of it. Thus the Jews, who were eye-witnesses of the miracles recorded in the scriptures, continued invincible infidels still. They had always some trifling cavil ready to object against the brightest evidence. And thus our modern infidels would no doubt evade the force of the most miraculous attestation by some wretched hypothesis or other: they would look upon miracles either as magical productions, or illusions of their senses; or rather, as natural and necessary events, which they would indeed have some reason to conclude, if they were frequently performed before their eyes. Some have pretended to doubt of the existence and perfections of God, notwithstanding the evidences thereof upon this magnificent structure of the universe; and must God be always creating new worlds before these obstinate creatures for their conviction? Such persons have as much reason to demand it in this case, as our deists have to insist for new miracles in the other. I might add, that such glaring evidence, as, like the light of the sun, would force itself irresistibly upon the minds of the most reluctant, would not leave room for us to show our regard to God in believing, for we should then believe from extrinsic necessity, and not from choice. It is therefore most correspondent to our present state of probation, that there should be something in the evidence of a divine revelation to try us; something that might fully convince the teachable and yet not remove all umbrages for cavilling from the obstinate.

Thus I have answered as many objections as the bounds of a sermon would admit; and I think they are the principal ones which lie against my subject

in the view I have considered it. And as I have not designedly selected the weakest, in order to an easy triumph, you may look upon the answers that have been given as a ground of rational presumption, that all other objections may be answered with equal ease. Indeed, if they could not, it would not invalidate the positive arguments in favour of christianity; for when we have sufficient positive evidence for a thing, we do not reject it because it is attended with some difficulties which we cannot solve.

My time will allow me to make but two or three short reflections upon the whole.

1. If the religion of Jesus be attested with such full evidence, and be sufficient to conduct men to everlasting felicity, then how helpless are they that have enjoyed it all their life without profit: who either reject it as false, or have not felt its power to ~~change~~ ~~change~~ their hearts and lives? It is the last resource provided for a guilty world; and if this fails, their disease is incurable, and they are not to expect better means.

2. If the religion of Jesus be true, then woe unto the wicked of all sorts: woe to infidels, both practical and speculative, for all the curses of it are in full force against them, and I need not tell you how dreadful they are.

3. If the religion of Jesus be true: then I congratulate such of you, whose hearts and lives are habitually conformed to it, and who have ventured your everlasting all upon it. You build upon a sure foundation, and your hope shall never make you ashamed.

Finally, Let us all strive to become rational and practical believers of this heaven-born religion. Let our understandings be more rationally and thoroughly convinced of its truth; and our hearts

and lives be more and more conformed to its purity; and ere long we shall receive those glorious rewards it ensures to all its sincere disciples; which may God grant to us all for Jesus' sake, Amen!

SERMON II.

THE METHOD OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN III. 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.*

I HAVE been solicitously thinking in what way my life, redeemed from the grave, may be of most service to my dear people. And I would collect all the feeble remains of my strength into one vigorous effort this day, to promote this benevolent end. If I knew what subject has the most direct tendency to save your souls, that is the subject to which my heart would cling with peculiar endearment, and which I would make the matter of the present discourse.

And when I consider I am speaking to an assembly of sinners, guilty, depraved, helpless creatures, and that, if ever you be saved, it will be only through Jesus Christ, in that way which the gospel reveals; when I consider that your everlasting life and happiness turn upon this hinge, namely, the reception you give to this Saviour, and this way of salvation; I say, when I consider these

things, I can think of no subject I can more properly choose than to recommend the Lord Jesus to your acceptance, and to explain and inculcate the method of salvation through his mediation; or, in other words, to preach the pure gospel to you; for the gospel, in the most proper sense, is nothing else but a revelation of a way of salvation for sinners of Adam's race.

My text furnishes me with proper materials for my purpose. Let heaven and earth hear it with wonder, joy, and raptures of praise! *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever, or that every one that believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

This is a part of the most important evening conversation that ever was held; I mean, that between Christ and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews. Our Lord first instructs him in the doctrine of regeneration, that grand constituent of a christian, and pre-requisite to our admission in the kingdom of heaven; and then he proceeds to inform him of the gospel-method of salvation, which contain these two grand articles, the death of Christ, as the great foundation of blessedness; and faith in him, as the great qualification upon the part of the sinner.—He presents this important doctrine to us in various forms, with a very significant repetition. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of Man be lifted up; that is, hung on high on a cross, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Then follows my text, which expresses the same doctrine with great force: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, gave him up to death, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.* He goes on to mention a wonder. This earth is a rebellious

province of Jehovah's dominions, and therefore if his son should ever visit it, one would think it would be as an angry judge, or as the executioner of his Father's vengeance. But, O astonishing! *God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.* Hence the terms of life and death are thus fixed, *He that believeth in him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* Sure the heavenly rivers of pleasure flow in these verses. Never, methinks, was there so much gospel expressed in so few words. Here take the gospel in miniature, and bind it to your hearts forever. These verses alone, methinks, are a sufficient remedy for a dying world.

The truths I would infer from the text for present improvement are these: that without Christ you are all in a perishing condition; that through Jesus Christ a way is opened for your salvation; that the grand pre-requisite to your being saved in this way, is faith in Jesus Christ, that every one, without exception, whatever his former character has been, that is enabled to comply with this pre-requisite, shall certainly be saved; and that the constitution of this method of salvation, or the mission of Christ into our world, as the Saviour of sinners, is a most striking and astonishing instance and display of the love of God.

1. My text implies, that without Christ you are all in a perishing condition. This holds true of you in particular, because it holds true of the world universally: for the world was undoubtedly in a perishing condition without Christ, and none but he could relieve it, otherwise God would never have given his only begotten Son to save it. God is not ostentatious or prodigal of his gifts, espe-

cially of so inestimable a gift as his Son, whom he loves infinitely more than the whole creation. So great, so dear a person would not have been sent upon a mission which could have been discharged by any other being. Thousands of rams must bleed in sacrifice, or ten thousands of rivers of oil must flow; our first born must die for our transgressions, and the fruit of our body for the sin of our souls; or Gabriel, or some of the upper ranks of angels, must leave their thrones, and hang upon a cross, if such methods of salvation had been sufficient. All this would have been nothing in comparison of the only begotten Son of God leaving his native heaven; and all its glories, assuming our degraded nature, spending thirty-three long and tedious years in poverty, disgrace, and persecution, dying as a malefactor and slave in the midst of ignominy and torture, and lying a mangled breathless corpse in the grave. We may be sure there was the highest degree of necessity for it, otherwise God would not have given up his dear Son to such an horrid scene of sufferings.

This, then, was the true state of the world, and consequently years without Christ; it was hopeless and desperate in every view. In that situation there would not have been so much goodness in the world as to try the efficacy of sacrifices, prayers, tears, reformation, and repentance, or they would have been tried in vain. It would have been inconsistent with the honour of the divine perfections and government, to admit sacrifices, prayers, tears, repentance, and reformation, as a sufficient atonement.

What a melancholy view of the world have we now before us? We know the state of mankind only under the gracious government of a Mediator; and we but seldom realize what our miserable condi-

tion would have been, had this gracious administration never been set up. But exclude a Saviour in your thoughts for a moment, and then take a view of the world—helpless! hopeless!—under the righteous displeasure of God; and despairing of relief!—the very suburbs of hell! the range of malignant devils! the region of guilt, misery, and despair!—the mouth of the infernal pit!—the gate of hell!—This would have been the condition of our world had it not been for that Jesus who redeemed it; and yet in this very world he is neglected and despised.

But, you will ask me, “How comes it that the world was in such an undone, helpless, hopeless condition without Christ; or what are the reasons of all this?”

The true account of this will appear from these two considerations, that all mankind are sinners; and that no other method but the mediation of Christ could render the salvation of sinners consistent with the honour of the divine perfections and government, with the public good, and even with the nature of things.

All mankind are sinners. This is too evident to need proof. They are sinners, rebels against the greatest and best of beings, against their Maker, their liberal Benefactor, and their rightful Sovereign, to whom they are under stronger and more endearing obligations than they can be under to any creature, or even to the entire system of creatures; sinners, rebels in every part of our guilty globe; none righteous, no, not one; all sinners, without exception: sinners from age to age for thousands of years: thousands, millions, innumerable multitudes of sinners. What an obnoxious race is this! there appears no difficulty in the way of justice to punish such creatures. But what

seeming insuperable difficulties appear in the way of their salvation! Let me mention a few of them to recommend that blessed Saviour who has removed them all.

If such sinners be saved, how shall the holiness and justice of God be displayed? How shall he give an honorable view of himself to all worlds, as a Being of perfect purity, and an enemy to all moral evil?

If such sinners be saved, how shall the honor of the divine government and law be secured? How will the dignity of the law appear, if a race of rebels may trifle with it with impunity? What a sorry law must that be that has no sanctions, or whose sanctions may be dispensed with at pleasure? What a contemptible government that may be insulted and rejected, and the offender admitted into favor without exemplary punishment! No government can subsist upon such principles of excessive indulgence.

How can such sinners be saved, and yet the good of the public secured, which is always the end of every wise and good ruler? By the public good I do not mean the happiness of mankind alone but I mean the happiness of all worlds of reasonable creatures collectively, in comparison of which the happiness of mankind alone may be only a private interest, which should always give way to the public good. Now sin has a direct tendency, not only according to law, but according to the nature of things, to scatter misery and ruin wherever its infection reaches. Therefore the public good cannot be properly consulted without giving a loud and effectual warning against all sin, and dealing with offenders in such a manner as to deter others from offending. But how can this be done! how can the sinner be saved, and yet the evil of sin be displayed, and all

other beings be deterred from it forever? How can sin be discouraged by pardoning it? its evil displayed by letting the criminal escape punishment. These are such difficulties that nothing but divine wisdom could ever surmount them.

These difficulties lie in the way of a mere pardon and exemption from punishment: but salvation includes more than this. When sinners are saved, they are not only pardoned, but received into high favor, made the children, the friends, the courtiers of the king of heaven. They are not only delivered from punishment, but also advanced to a state of perfect positive happiness, and nothing short of this can render such creatures as we happy. Now, in this view, the difficulties rise still higher, and it is the more worthy of observation, as this is not generally the case in human governments; and as men are apt to form their notions of the divine government by human, they are less sensible of these difficulties.—But this is indeed the true state of the case here; how can the sinner be not only delivered from punishment, but also advanced to a state of perfect happiness? not only escape the displeasure of his offended sovereign, but be received into full favour, and advanced to the highest honour and dignity; how can this be done without casting a cloud over the purity and justice of the Lord of all; without sinking his law and government into contempt; without diminishing the evil of sin, and emboldening others to venture upon it, and so at once injuring the character of the supreme ruler, and the public good? How can sinners, I say, be saved without the salvation being attended with these bad consequences.

And here you must remember, that these consequences must be provided against. To save men

at random, without considering the consequences, to distribute happiness to private persons with an undistinguishing hand, this would be at once inconsistent with the character of the supreme Magistrate of the universe, and with the public good. Private persons are at liberty to forgive private offences; nay, it is their duty to forgive; and they can hardly offend by way of excess in the generous virtues of mercy and compassion. But the case is otherwise with a magistrate; he is obliged to consult the dignity of his government and the interest of the public; and he may easily carry his lenity to a very dangerous extreme, and by his tenderness to criminals do an extensive injury to the state. This is particularly the case with regard to the great God, the universal supreme Magistrate of all worlds. And this ought to be seriously considered by those men of loose principles among us, who look upon God only under the fond character of a father, or a being of infinite mercy; and hence conclude, they have little to fear from him for all their audacious iniquities.—There is no absolute necessity that sinners should be saved: justice may be suffered to take place upon them.—But there is the most absolute necessity that the Ruler of the world should both be, and appear to be holy and just. There is the most absolute necessity that he should support the dignity of his government, and guard it from contempt, that he should strike all worlds with a proper horror of sin, and represent it in its genuine infernal colours, and so consult the good of the whole, rather than of a part. There is, I say, the highest and most absolute necessity for these things; and they cannot be dispensed with as matters of arbitrary pleasure. And unless these ends can be answered in the salvation of men, they cannot be saved at all. No,

they must all perish, rather than God should be out of character, as the supreme Magistrate of the universe, or bestow private favours to criminals to the detriment of the public.

And in this lay the difficulty. Call a council of all the sages and wise men of the world, and they can never get over this difficulty, without borrowing assistance from the gospel. Nay, this, no doubt, puzzled all the angelic intelligences, who pry so deep into the mysteries of heaven, before the gospel was fully revealed.—Methinks the angels, when they saw the fall of man, gave him up as desperate. “Alas! (they cried,) the poor creature is gone! he and all his numerous race are lost forever.” This, they knew, had been the doom of their fellow angels that sinned; and could they hope better for man? Then they had not seen any of the wonders of pardoning love and mercy, and could they have once thought that that glorious person who filled the middle throne, and was their Creator and Lord, would ever become a man, and die like a criminal, to redeem an inferior rank of creatures? No, this thought they would probably have shuddered at as blasphemy.

And must we then give up ourselves and all our race as lost beyond recovery? There are huge and seemingly insuperable difficulties in the way; and we have seen that neither men nor angels can prescribe any relief. But sing, *O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth, break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel, Isaiah xlv.* Which leads me to add,

II. My text implies, that through Jesus Christ a way is opened for your salvation. He, and only he, was found equal to the undertaking; and

fore him all these mountains became a plain; all these difficulties vanished; and now God can be just, can secure the dignity of his character, as the Ruler of the world, and answer all the ends of government, and yet justify and save the sinner that believeth in Jesus.

This is plainly implied in this glorious epitome of the gospel: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Without this gift all was lost: but now, whosoever believeth in him may be saved; saved in a most honourable way. This will appear more particularly, if we consider the tendency the mediation of Christ had to remove the difficulties mentioned. But I would promise two general remarks.

The first is, That God being considered in this affair in his public character, as Supreme Magistrate, or Governor of the world, all the punishment which he is concerned to see inflicted upon sin is only such as answers the ends of government. Private revenge must vent itself on the very person of the offender, or be disappointed. But to a ruler, as such, it may in some cases be indifferent, whether the punishment be sustained by the very person that offended, or by a substitute suffering in his stead. It may also be indifferent whether the very same punishment, as to kind and degree, threatened in the law, be inflicted, or a punishment equivalent to it. If the honour of the ruler and his government be maintained, if all disobedience be properly discountenanced; if, in short, all the ends of government can be answered, such things as these are indifferences. Consequently, if these ends should be answered by Christ's suffering in the stead of sinners, there would be no objection against it. This remark introduces another, namely (2.)

That Jesus Christ was such a person that his suffering as the substitute or surety of sinners, answered all the ends of government which could be answered by the execution of the punishment upon the sinners themselves. To impose suffering upon the innocent, when unwilling, is unjust: but Jesus was willing to undertake the dreadful task. And besides, he was a person (*sui juris*,) at his own disposal, his own property, and therefore he had a right to dispose of his life as he pleased; and there was a merit in his consenting to that which he was not obliged to previous to his consent. He was also a person of infinite dignity, and infinitely beloved by his Father; and these considerations rendered the merit of his sufferings for a short time, and another kind of punishment than that of hell, equal, more than equal to the everlasting sufferings of sinners themselves. Jesus Christ was also above law; that is, not obliged to be subject to that law which he had made for his creatures, and consequently his obedience to the law, not being necessary for himself, might be imputed to others: whereas creatures are incapable of works of supererogation, or of doing more than they are bound to do, being obliged to obey their divine lawgiver for themselves to the utmost extent of their abilities, and consequently their obedience, however perfect, can be sufficient only for themselves, but cannot be imputed to others. Thus it appears, in general, that the ends of government are as effectually answered by the sufferings of Christ in the room of sinners, as they could be by the everlasting punishment of the sinners themselves; nay, we shall presently find they are answered in a more striking and illustrious manner. To mention particulars:

Was it necessary that the holiness and justice of God should be displayed in the salvation of sinners? See how bright they shine in a suffering Saviour! Now it appears that such is the holiness and justice of God, that he will not let even his own Son escape unpunished, when he stands in the law-place of sinners, though guilty only by the slight stain (may I so speak,) of imputation.— Could the execution of everlasting punishment upon the hateful criminals themselves ever give so bright a display of these attributes? It were impossible. Again,

Was it a difficulty to save sinners, and yet maintain the rights of the divine government, and the honour of the law? See how this difficulty is removed by the obedience and death of Christ? Now it appears, that the rights of the divine government are so sacred and inviolable, that they must be maintained, though the darling Son of God should fall a sacrifice to justice; and that not one offence against this government can be pardoned, without his making a full atonement. Now it appears, that the Supreme Ruler is not to be trifled with, but that his injured honour must be repaired, though at the expense of his Son's blood and life. Now, the precept of the law is perfectly obeyed in every part, and a full equivalent to its penalty endured, by a person of infinite dignity; and it is only upon this footing, that is, of complete satisfaction to all the demands of the law, that any of the rebellious sons of men can be restored into favour. This is a satisfaction which Christ alone could give: to sinners it is utterly impossible, either by doing or suffering. They cannot do all the things that are written in the law; nor can they endure its penalty, without being forever miserable: and therefore the law has received a more

complete satisfaction in Christ than it would ever receive from the offenders themselves. Further,

Was it a difficulty how sinners might be saved, and yet the evil of sin be displayed in all its horrors? Go to the cross of Christ; there, ye fools, that make a mock of sin, there learn its malignity, and its hatefulness to the great God. There you may see it is so great an evil, that when it is but imputed to the man, that is God's fellow, as the surety of sinners, it cannot escape punishment. No, when that dreadful stain lay upon him, immediately the commission was given to divine justice, *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd.* Zech. xiii. 7.—When Christ stood in the room of sinners, even the Father spared not his own Son, but gave him up to death. That the criminals themselves, who are an inferior race of creatures, should not escape would not be strange: but what an enormous evil must that be, which cannot be connived at even in the favourite of Heaven, the only begotten Son of God! Surely nothing besides could give so striking a display of its malignity!

Was it a difficulty how to reconcile the salvation of sinners and the public good? that is, how to forgive sin, and yet give an effectual warning against it? How to receive the sinner into favour, and advance him to the highest honour and happiness, and in the mean time deter all other beings from offending? All this is provided for in the sufferings of Christ as a surety. Let all worlds look to his cross, and receive the warning which his wounds, and groans, and blood, and dying agonies proclaim aloud; and sure they can never dare to offend after the example of man. Now they may see that the only instance of pardon to be found in the universe

was not brought about but by such means as are not likely to be repeated; by the incarnation and death of the Lord of glory. And can they flatter themselves that he will leave his throne and hang upon a cross, as often as any of his creatures wantonly dare to offend him? No; such a miracle as this, the utmost effort of divine grace, is not often to be renewed; and therefore, if they dare to sin, it is at their peril. They have no reason to flatter themselves they shall be favoured like fallen man; but rather to expect they shall share in the doom of the fallen angels.

Or if they should think sin may escape with but a slight punishment, here they may be convinced of the contrary. If the Darling of heaven, the Lord of glory, though personally innocent, suffers so much when sin is but imputed to him, what shall the sinners themselves feel, who can claim no favour upon the footing of their own importance, or personal innocence? If these things be done “in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

Thus, my brethren, you may see how a way is opened through Jesus Christ for our salvation. All the ends of government may be answered, and yet you pardoned, and made happy. Those attributes of the divine nature, such as mercy and justice, which seemed to clash, are now reconciled; now they mingle their beams, and both shine with a brighter glory in the salvation of sinners, than either of them could apart. And must you not acknowledge this divine God-like scheme? Can you look round you over the works of the creation, and see the divine wisdom in every object, and can you not perceive the divine agency in this still more glorious work of redemption? Redemption, which gives a full view of the Deity, not as the sun in eclipse, half dark, half bright, but as

A God all over, consummate, absolute,
Full orb'd in his whole round of rays complete.

YOUNG.

And shall not men and angels join in wonder and praise, at the survey of this amazing scheme? Angels are wrapt in wonder and praise, and will be so to all eternity. See! how they pry into this mystery! hark, how they sing! "Glory to God in the highest;" and celebrate the Lamb that was slain! and shall not men, who are personally interested in the affair, join with them? O! are there none to join with them in this assembly? Surely, none can refuse!

Now, since all obstructions are removed on God's part, that lay in the way of our salvation, why should we not all be saved together? What is there to hinder our crowding into heaven promiscuously? Or what is there requisite on our part, in order to make us partakers of this salvation? Here it is proper to pass on to the next truth, inferred from the text, namely:

III. That the grand pre-requisite to your being saved in this way, is faith in Jesus Christ. Though the obstructions on God's part are removed by the death of Christ, yet there is one remaining in the sinner, which cannot be removed without his consent; and which, while it remains, renders his salvation impossible in the nature of things; that is, the depravity and corruption of his nature. Till this is cured, he cannot relish those fruitions and employments in which the happiness of heaven consists, and consequently he cannot be happy there. Therefore there is a necessity, in the very nature of things, that he should be made holy, in order to be saved; nay, his salvation itself consists in holiness. Now, faith is the root of all holiness in

a sinner. Without a firm realizing belief of the great truths of the gospel, it is impossible a sinner should be sanctified by their influence: and without a particular faith in Jesus Christ, he cannot derive from him those sanctifying influences by which alone he can be made holy, and which are conveyed through Jesus Christ, and through him alone.

Further: It would be highly incongruous, and indeed impossible, to save a sinner against his will, or in a way he dislikes. Now faith, as you shall see presently, principally consists in a hearty consent to an approbation of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, the only way in which a sinner can be saved consistently with the divine honour; so that the constitution of the gospel is not only just, but as merciful as it can be, when it ordains, that only *he that believeth shall be saved; but that he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

Again: We cannot be saved through Jesus Christ, till his righteousness be so far made ours as that it will answer the demands of the law for us, and procure the favour of God to us; but his righteousness cannot be thus imputed to us, or accounted ours in law, till we are so united to him as to be one in law, or one legal person with him. Now faith is the bond of union; faith is that which interests us in Christ; and therefore without faith we cannot receive any benefit from his righteousness.

Here then a most interesting inquiry presents itself: "What is it to believe in Jesus Christ? or what is that faith which is the grand pre-requisite to salvation?" If you are capable of attention to the most interesting affair in all the world, attend to this with the utmost seriousness and solemnity.

Faith in Christ includes something speculative in it, that is, it includes a speculative rational belief, upon the testimony of God, that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of men. But yet it is not entirely a speculation, like the faith of multitudes among us: it is a more practical experimental thing; and that you may understand its nature, you must take notice of the following particulars.

(1.) Faith pre-supposes a deep sense of our undone, helpless condition. I told you before, this is the condition of the world without Christ; and you must be sensible at heart that this is your condition in particular, before you can believe in him as your Saviour. He came to be a Saviour in a desperate case, when no relief could possibly be had from any other quarter, and you cannot receive him under that character till you feel yourselves in such a case; therefore, in order to your believing, all your pleas and excuses for your sins must be silenced, all your high conceit of your own goodness must be mortified, all your dependance upon your own righteousness, upon the merit of your prayers, your repentance, and good works, must be cast down, and you must feel that indeed you lie at mercy, that God may justly reject you forever and that all you can do can bring him under no obligation to save you. These things you must be deeply sensible of, otherwise you can never receive the Lord Jesus in that view in which he is proposed to you, namely, as a Saviour in a desperate case.

I wish and pray you may this day see yourselves in this true, though mortifying light. It is the want of this sense of things that keeps such crowds of persons unbelievers among us. It is the want of this that causes the Lord Jesus to be so little esteemed, so little sought for, so little desired

among us. In short, it is the want of this that is the great occasion of so many perishing from under the gospel, and, as it were, from between the hands of a Saviour. It is this, alas! that causes them to perish, like the impenitent thief on the cross, with a Saviour by their side. O that you once rightly knew yourselves, you would then soon know Jesus Christ, and receive salvation from his hand.

(2.) Faith implies the enlightening of the understanding to discover the suitableness of Jesus Christ as a Saviour, and the excellency of the way of salvation through him. While the sinner lies undone and helpless in himself, and looking about in vain for some relief, it pleases a gracious God to shine into his heart, and enables him to see his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Now this once neglected Saviour appears not only absolutely necessary, but also all-glorious and lovely, and the sinner's heart is wrapt away, and forever captivated with his beauty: now the neglected gospel appears in a new light, as different from all his former apprehensions as if it were quite another thing. I have not time at present to enlarge upon this discovery of Christ and the gospel, which faith includes; and indeed should I dwell upon ever so long, I could not convey just ideas of it to such of you as have never had the happy experience of it. In short, the Lord Jesus, and the way of salvation through him, appear perfectly suitable, all-sufficient, and all-glorious: and in consequence of this,

(3.) The sinner is enabled to embrace this Saviour with all his heart, and to give a voluntary, cheerful consent to this glorious scheme of salvation. Now all his former unwillingness and reluctance are subdued; and his heart no more draws

back from the terms of the gospel, but he complies with them, and that not merely out of constraint and necessity, but out of free choice, and with the greatest pleasure and delight. How does his heart now cling to the blessed Jesus with the most affectionate endearment! How is he lost in wonder, joy, and gratitude, at the survey of the divine perfections as displayed in this method of redemption? How does he rejoice in it, as not only bringing happiness to him, but glory to God; as making his salvation not only consistent with, but a bright illustration of, the divine perfections, and the dignity of his government! While he had no other but the low and selfish principles of corrupt nature, he had no concern about the honour of God; if he might be but saved, it was all he was solicitous about: but now he has a noble, generous heart; now he is concerned that God should be honoured in his salvation, and this method of salvation is recommended and endeared to him by the thought that it secures to God the supremacy, and makes his salvation subservient to the divine glory.

(4.) Faith in Jesus Christ implies a humble trust or dependence upon him alone for the pardon of sin, acceptance with God, and every blessing. As I told you before, the sinner's self confidence is mortified; he gives up all hopes of acceptance upon the footing of his own righteousness; he is filled with self-despair, and yet he does not despair absolutely; he does not give up himself as lost, but has cheerful hopes of becoming a child of God, and being forever happy, guilty and unworthy as he is; and what are these hopes founded upon? Why, upon the mere free grace and mercy of God, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. On this he ventures a guilty, unworthy, helpless soul, and finds it a firm immoveable foundation, while every other

ground of dependence proves but a quicksand. There are many that flatter themselves they put their trust in God; but their trust wants sundry qualifications essential to a true faith. It is not the trust of a humble, helpless soul, that draws all its encouragement from the mere mercy of God, and the free indefinite offer of the gospel, but it is the presumptuous trust of a proud, self-confident sinner, who draws his encouragement in part at least from his own imaginary goodness and importance. It is not a trust in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, as the only medium through which it can be honourably conveyed; but either in the absolute mercy of God, which, without a proper reference to a Mediator, or in his mercy, as in some measure deserved or moved by something in the sinner.—Examine whether your trust in God will stand this test.

I have now given you a brief answer to that grand question, What is it to believe in Jesus Christ? and I hope you understand it, though I have not enlarged so much upon it as I willingly would. I shall only add, that this faith may also be known by its inseparable effects, which are such as follow: Faith purifies the heart, and is a lively principle of inward holiness. Faith is always productive of good works, and leads us to universal obedience: faith overcomes the world and all its temptations: faith realizes eternal things, and brings them near; and hence it is defined by the apostle, *The substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* Heb. xi. 1. Here I have a very important question to propose to you: Who among you can say, “Well, notwithstanding all my imperfections, and all my doubts and fears, I cannot but humbly hope, after the best examination I can make, that such a faith has been produced in

this heart of mine?" And can you say so indeed? Then I bring you glad tidings of great joy; you shall be saved: yes, saved you shall be, in spite of earth and hell; saved, however great your past sins have been. Which thought introduces the glorious truth that comes next in order, nameiy;

IV. My text implies, that every one, without exception, whatever his former character has been, that is enabled to believe in Jesus Christ, shall certainly be saved.

The number or aggravations of sin do not alter the case; and the reason is, the sinner is not received into favour, in whole or in part, upon the account of any thing personal, but solely and entirely upon the account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Now, this righteousness is perfectly equal to all the demands of the law; and therefore, when this righteousness is made over to the sinner as his by imputation, the law has no more demands upon him for great sins than for small, for many than for few; because all demands are fully satisfied by the obedience of Jesus Christ to the law. You see that sinners of all characters who believe in him are put upon an equality in this respect; they are all admitted upon one common footing, the righteousness of Christ; and that is as sufficient for one as another.

This encouraging truth has the most abundant support from the holy scriptures. Observe the agreeable indefinite *whosoever* so often repeated. "Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Whosoever he be, however vile, however guilty, however unworthy, if he does but believe, he shall not perish, but have everlasting life. What an agreeable assurance is this from the lips of him who has the final states of men at his disposal! The same blessed

lips have also declared, *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* John vi. 37. And *Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely.* Rev. xxii. 17. He has given you more than bare words to establish you in the belief of this truth; upon this principle he has acted, choosing some of the most abandoned sinners to make them examples, not of his justice, as we might expect, but of his mercy for the encouragement of others. In the days of his flesh he was reproached by his enemies for his friendship to publicans and sinners; but sure it is, instead of reproaching, we must love him on this account. When he rose from the dead, he did not rise with angry resentment against his murderers; no, but he singles them out from a world of sinners, to make them the first offers of pardon through the blood which they had just shed. He orders *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* Luke xxiv. 47. At Jerusalem, where he had been crucified a few days before, there he orders the first publication of pardon and life to be made. You may see what monsters of sin he chose to make the monuments of his grace in Corinth. *Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* What a dismal catalogue is this! It is no wonder such a crew should not inherit the kingdom of heaven; they are fit only for the infernal prison; and yet astonishing! it follows; *such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God.* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. What sinner after this can despair of mercy upon his believing in Jesus! St.

Paul was another instance of the same kind: "This," says he, "is a faithful saying," a saying that may be depended on as true, "and worthy of all acceptation," from a guilty world, *that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief: howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me the chief, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting.* 1 Tim. i. 15. 16. A sinner of less size would not have answered this end so well; but if Saul the persecutor obtains mercy upon his believing, who can despair?

You see upon the whole, my brethren, you are not excluded from Christ and life by the greatness of your sins; but if you perish it must be from another cause; it must be on account of your wilful unbelief in not accepting of Jesus Christ as your Saviour. If you reject him, then indeed you must perish, however small your sins have been; for it is only his death that can make atonement for the slightest guilt; and if you have no interest in that, the guilt of the smallest sin will sink you into ruin.

Here is a door wide enough for you all, if you will but enter in by faith. Come, then, enter in, you that have hitherto claimed an horrid precedence in sin, that have been ringleaders in vice, come now take the lead, and shew others the way to Jesus Christ; harlots, publicans, thieves, and murderers, if such be among you, there is salvation even for you, if you will but believe. O! how astonishing is the love of God discovered in this way: a consideration which introduces the last inference from my text, namely,

V. That the constitution of this method of salvation, or the mission of a Saviour into our world, is

a most striking and astonishing display of the love of God:—*God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, &c.*

View the scheme all through, and you will discover love, infinite love, in every part of it. Consider the great God as self-happy and independent upon all his creatures, and what but love, self-moved love, could excite him to make such provision for an inferior part of them! Consider the world sunk in sin, not only without merit, but most deserving of everlasting punishment, and what but love could move him to have mercy upon such a world? Consider the Saviour provided, not an angel, not the highest creature, but his Son, his only begotten Son; and what but love could move him to appoint such a Saviour? Consider the manner in which he was sent, as a gift, a free unmerited gift; “*God gave his only begotten son:*” And what but infinite love could give such an unspeakable gift? Consider the blessings conferred through this Saviour, deliverance from perdition and the enjoyment of everlasting life, and what but the love of God could confer such blessings? Consider the condition upon which these blessings are offered, faith, that humble, self-emptied grace, so suitable to the circumstances of a poor sinner, that brings nothing, but receives all, and what but divine love could make such a gracious appointment? *It is by faith, that it may be of grace.* Rom. iv. 16. Consider the indefinite extent, or the universality of the offer, which takes in sinners of the vilest character, and excepts against none: *Whosoever believeth shall not perish, &c.* O what love is this! But I must leave it as the theme of your meditations, not only in the house of your pilgrimage, but through all eternity: eternity will be short enough to pry into this mystery, and it will employ the

understandings of men and angels through the revolutions of eternal ages.

And now, my brethren, to draw towards a conclusion, I would hold a treaty with you this day about the reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. I have this day set life and death before you: I have opened to you the method of salvation through Jesus Christ: the only method in which you can be saved; the only method that could afford a gleam of hope to such a sinner as I in my late approach to the eternal world.* And now I would bring the matter home, and propose it to you all to consent to be saved in this method, or, in other words, to believe in the only begotten Son of God; this proposal I seriously make to you, and let heaven and earth, and your own consciences, witness that it is made to you; I also insist for a determinate answer this day; the matter will not admit of a delay, and the duty is so plain, that there is no need of time to deliberate. A Roman ambassador, treating about peace with the ambassador of a neighbouring state, if I remember rightly, and finding him desirous to gain time by shuffling and tedious negotiations, drew a circle about him, and said, "I demand an answer before you go out of this circle." Such a circle let the walls of this house, or the extent of my voice, be to you: before you leave this house, or go out of hearing, I insist on a full decisive answer to this proposal, Whether you will believe in Jesus Christ this day, or not?

But before I proceed any farther, I would remove one stumbling-block out of your way. You are apt to object, "You teach us that faith is the

* This sermon was preached a little after recovery from a severe fit of sickness, and is dated Hanover, Oct. 2, 1757.

gift of God, and that we cannot believe of ourselves; why then do you exhort us to it? Or how can we be concerned to endeavour that which it is impossible for us to do?"

In answer to this, I grant the premises are true; and God forbid I should so much as intimate that faith is the spontaneous growth of corrupt nature, or that you can come to Christ without the Father's drawing you: but the conclusions you draw from these premises are very erroneous. I exhort and persuade you to believe in Jesus Christ, because it is while such means are used with sinners, and by the use of them, that it pleases God to enable them to comply, or to work faith in them. I would therefore use those means which God is pleased to bless for this end. I exhort you to believe, in order to set you upon the trial; for it is patting it to trial, and that only, which can fully convince you of your own inability to believe; and till you are convinced of this, you can never expect strength from God. I exhort you to believe, because, sinful and enfeebled as you are, you are capable of using various preparatives to faith. You may attend upon prayer, hearing, and all the outward means of grace with natural seriousness; you may endeavour to get acquainted with your own helpless condition, and, as it were, put yourselves in the way of divine mercy; and though all these means cannot of themselves produce faith in you, yet it is only in the use of these means you are to expect divine grace to work it in you: never was it yet produced in one soul, while lying supine, lazy, and inactive.

I hope you now see good reasons why I should exhort you to believe, and also perceive my design in it; I therefore renew the proposal to you, that you should this day, as guilty, unworthy, self-

despairing sinners, accept of the only begotten Son of God as your Saviour, and fall in with the gospel-method of salvation; and I once more demand your answer. I would by no means, if possible, leave the pulpit this day till I have effectually recommended the blessed Jesus, my Lord and Master, to your acceptance. I am strongly bound by the vows and resolutions of a sick bed to recommend him to you; and now I would endeavour to perform my vows. I would have us all this day, before we part, consent to God's covenant, that we may go away justified to our houses.

To this I persuade and exhort you, in the name and by the authority of the great God, by the death of Jesus Christ for sinners, by your own most urgent and absolute necessity, by the immense blessings proposed in the gospel, and by the heavy curse denounced against unbelievers.

All the blessings of the gospel, pardon of sin, sanctifying grace, eternal life, and whatever you can want, shall become yours this day, if you but believe in the Son of God; then let desolation overrun our land, let public and private calamities crowd upon you, and make you so many Jobs for poverty and affliction, still your main interest is secure; the storms and waves of trouble can only bear you to heaven, and hasten your passage to the harbour of eternal rest. Let devils accuse you before God, let conscience indict you and bring you in guilty, let the fiery law make its demands upon you, you have a righteousness in Jesus Christ that is sufficient to answer all demands, and, having received it by faith, you may plead it as your own in law. Happy souls! rejoice in hope of the glory of God, for your hope will never make you ashamed!

But I expect, as usual, some of you will refuse to comply with this proposal. This, alas! has been the usual fate of the blessed gospel in all ages and in all countries; as some have received it, so some have rejected it. That old complaint of Isaiah has been justly repeated thousands of times; *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* Isa. liii. 1. And is there no reason to pour it out from a broken heart over some of you, my dear people! Are you all this day determined to believe? If so, I pronounce you blessed in the name of the Lord; but if not, I must denounce your doom.

Be it known to you, then, from the living God, that if you thus continue in unbelief, you shut the door of mercy against yourselves, and exclude yourselves from eternal life. Whatever splendid appearances of virtue, whatever amiable qualities, whatever seeming good works you have, the express sentence of the gospel lies in full force against you, *He that believeth not shall be damned.* Mark xvi. 16. *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God.* John iii. 18. *He that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him.* John iii. 36. This is your doom repeatedly pronounced by him whom you must own to be the best friend of human nature; and if he condemn who can justify you?

Be it also known to you, that you will not only perish, but you will perish with peculiar aggravations; you will fall with no common ruin; you will envy the lot of heathens who perished without the law: for O! you incur the peculiarly enormous guilt of rejecting the gospel, and putting contempt upon the Son of God. This is an horrid exploit of wickedness, and this God resents above all the

other crimes of which human nature is capable. Hence Christ is come for judgment as well as for mercy into this world, and he is set for the fall as well as the rising again of many in Israel. You now enjoy the light of the gospel, which has conducted many through this dark world to eternal day; but remember also, *this is the condemnation;* that is, it is the occasion of the most aggravated condemnation, *that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.* On this principle Jesus pronounced the doom of Chorazin and Bethsaida more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Matt. xi. 21, 22. And would it not be hard to find a place in Virginia where the doom of unbelievers is likely to be so terrible as among us?

And now does not all this move you? Are you not alarmed at the thought of perishing; of perishing by the hand of a Saviour rejected and despised; perishing under the stain of his profaned blood; perishing not only under the curse of the law, but that of the gospel, which is vastly heavier? O! are you hardy enough to venture upon such a doom? This doom is unavoidable if you refuse to comply with the proposal now made to you.

I must now conclude the treaty; but for my own acquittance, I must take witness, that I have endeavored to discharge my commission, whatever reception you give it. I call heaven and earth, and your own consciences, to witness, that life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, have been offered to you on this day; and, if you reject it, remember it; remember it whenever you see this place; remember it whenever you see my face, or one another; remember it, that you may witness for me at the supreme tribunal, that I am clear of your blood. Alas! you will remember it among a thou-

sand painful reflections, millions of ages hence, when the remembrance of it will rend your hearts like a vulture. Many sermons, forgotten upon earth, are remembered in hell, and haunt the guilty mind forever. O that you would believe, and so prevent this dreadful effect from the present sermon.

SERMON III.

SINNERS ENTREATED TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD.

2 COR. V. 20.—*We then are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

TO preside in the solemnities of public worship, to direct your thoughts, and choose for you the subjects of your meditation on those sacred hours which you spend in the house of God, and upon the right improvement of which your everlasting happiness so much depends, this is a province of the most tremendous importance that can be devolved upon a mortal; and every man of the sacred character, who knows what he is about, must tremble at the thought, and be often anxiously perplexed what subject he shall choose, what he shall say upon it, and in what manner he shall deliver his message. His success in a great measure depends upon his choice; for, though the blessed Spirit is the proper agent, and though the best means, without his efficacious concurrence, are altogether fruitless, yet he is wont to bless those means that are best adapted to do good; and after a long course of languid and fruitless efforts, which seem to have

been unusually disowned by my divine Master, what text shall I choose out of the inexhaustible treasure of God's word? In what new method shall I speak upon it? What new untried experiments shall I make? Blessed Jesus! my heavenly Master! direct thy poor perplexed servant who is at a loss, and knows not what to do; direct him that has tried, and tried again, all the expedients he could think of, but almost in vain, and now scarcely knows what it is to hope for success! Divine direction, my brethren, has been sought; and may I hope it is that which has turned my mind to address you this day on the important subject of your reconciliation to God, and to become an humble imitator of the great St. Paul, whose affecting words I have read to you. *We then are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

The introduction to this passage you find in the foregoing verses, *God hath given to us (the apostles) the ministry of reconciliation;* the sum and substance of which is, namely, "That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." As if he had said, "The great Sovereign of the universe, though highly provoked, and justly displeased with our rebellious world, has been so gracious as to contrive a plan of reconciliation whereby they may not only escape the punishment they deserve, but also be restored to the favour of God, and all the privileges of his favourite subjects. This plan was laid in Christ; that is, it was he who was appointed, and undertook to remove all obstacles out of the way of their reconciliation, so that it might be consistent with the honour and dignity of God and his government. This he performed by a life of perfect obedience, and an atoning death, instead

of rebellious man. Though "he knew no sin" of his own; yet "he was made sin," that is, a sin-offering, or a sinner by imputation "for us," that we might "be made the righteousness of God in him. Thus all hinderances are removed on God's part. The plan of a treaty of reconciliation is formed, approved, and ratified in the court of heaven; but then it must be published, all the terms made known, and the consent of the rebels solicited and gained. It is not enough that all impediments to peace are removed on God's part; they must also be removed on the part of man; the reconciliation must be mutual; both the parties must agree. Hence arises the necessity of the ministry of reconciliation which was committed to the apostles, those prime ministers of the kingdom of Christ, and in a lower sphere to the ordinary ministers of the gospel in every age. The great business of their office is to publish the treaty of peace; that is, the articles of reconciliation, and to use every motive to gain the consent of mankind to these articles. It is this office St. Paul is discharging, when he says, *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

We are ambassadors for Christ. The proper notion of an ambassador, is that of a person sent by a king to transact affairs in his name, and according to his instructions, with foreign states, or part of his subjects, to whom he does not think proper to go himself and treat with them in his own person. Thus a peace is generally concluded between contending nations, not by their kings in person, but by their plenipotentiaries acting in their name, and by their authority; and, while they keep to their instructions, their negotiations and agreements are as valid and authentic as if they were carried

on and concluded by their masters in person. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is not personally present in our world to manage the treaty of peace himself, but he has appointed first his apostles, and then the ministers of the gospel through every age, to carry it on in his name. This is their proper character; they are ambassadors for Christ, his plenipotentiaries, furnished with a commission and instructions to make overtures of reconciliation to a rebel world, and treat with them to gain their consent.

Indeed, aspiring ecclesiastics have assumed high sounding titles merely to produce extravagant honours to themselves. They have called themselves ambassadors of Christ, messengers from God, the plenipotentiaries and viceroys of heaven, and I know not what, not with a design to do honour to their Master, but to keep the world in a superstitious awe of themselves. This priestly pride and insolence I utterly abhor; and yet I humbly adventure to assume the title of an ambassador of the great King of heaven, and require you to regard me in this high character: but then you must know, that while I am making this claim, I own myself obliged inviolably to adhere to the instructions of my divine Master contained in the Bible. I have no power over your faith; no power to dictate or prescribe; but my work is only just to publish the articles of peace as my Master has established and revealed them in his word, without the least addition, diminution, or alteration. I pretend to no higher power than this, and this power I must claim, unless I would renounce my office; for who can consistently profess himself a minister of Christ, without asserting his right and power to publish what his Lord

has taught, and communicate his royal instructions?

Therefore without usurping an equality with St. Paul or his fellow apostles, I must tell you in his language, I appear among you this day as the ambassador of the most high God; I am discharging an embassy for Christ; and I tell you this with no other design than to procure your most serious regard to what I say. If you consider it only as my declaration, whatever regard you pay to it, the end of my ministry will not be answered upon you. The end of my office is not to make myself the object of your love and veneration, but to reconcile you to God; but you cannot be reconciled to God while you consider the proposal as made to you only by your fellow mortal. You must regard it as made to you by the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Mediator between God and man. I not only allow, but even invite and charge you to inquire and judge whether what I say be agreeable to my divine instructions, which are as open to your inspection as mine, and to regard it no farther than it is so: but if I follow these instructions, and propose the treaty of peace to you just as it is concluded in heaven, then I charge you to regard it as proposed by the Lord of heaven and earth, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, though through my unworthy lips. Consider yourselves this day as the hearers not of a preacher formed out of the clay like yourselves, but of the Lord Jesus Christ. Suppose him here in person treating with you about your reconciliation to God, and what regard you would pay to a proposal made by him in person, with all his divine royalties about him, that you should now shew to the treaty I am to negotiate with you in his name and stead.

The next sentence in my text binds you still more strongly to this; *as though God did beseech you by us.* As if he said, “God the Father also concurs in this treaty of peace, as well as Christ the great Peace-maker; and as we discharge an embassy for Christ, so we do also for God; and you are to regard our beseeching and exhorting, as though the great God did in person beseech and exhort you by us.” What astonishing condescension is here intimated! not that the ministers of Christ should beseech you; this would be no mighty condescension: but that the supreme Jehovah should beseech you; that he should not only command you with a stern air of authority as your Sovereign, but as a friend, nay, as a petitioner, should affectionately beseech you, you despicable, guilty worms, obnoxious rebels! How astonishing, how God-like; how unprecedented and inimitable is this condescension! Let heaven and earth admire and adore! It is by us, indeed, by us your poor fellow mortals, that he beseeches: but O! let not this tempt to disregard him or his entreaty: though he employs such mean ambassadors, yet consider his dignity who sends us, and then you cannot disregard his message even from our mouth.

The apostle, having thus prepared the way, proceeds to the actual exercise of his office as an ambassador for Christ: *We pray you, says, he, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* As if he had said, “If Christ were now present in person among you, this is what he would propose to you, and urge upon you, that you would be reconciled to God; but him the heavens must receive till the time of the restitution of all things; but he has left us his poor servants, to officiate in his place as well as we can, and we would prosecute the same design, we would urge upon you what he would urge,

were he to speak; therefore we pray you, in his stead, be ye reconciled to God: we earnestly pray you to be reconciled: that is the utmost which such feeble worms as we can do: we can only pray and beg, but your compliance is not within the command of our power; the compliance belongs to you; and remember, if you refuse, you must take it upon yourselves, and answer the consequence."

Having thus explained the text I proceed in my poor manner to exemplify it by negotiating the treaty with you for your reconciliation to God; and you see my business lies directly with such of you as are as yet enemies to God: you are the only persons that stand in need of reconciliation. As for such of you (and I doubt not but there are such among you,) whose innate enmity has been subdued, and who are become the friends and subjects of the King of heaven after your guilty revolt, I must desire you as it were to stand by yourselves for the present hour, and help me by your prayers, while I am speaking to your poor brethren, who still continue in that state of hostility and rebellion against God, in which you once were, and the miseries of which you well know, and still lament and deplore.

But by this proposal I am afraid I have deprived myself of hearers on this subject; for have you not all already placed yourselves among the lovers of God, who consequently do not need to be reconciled to him? Is not every one of you ready to say to me, "If your business only lies with the enemies of God, you have no concern with me in this discourse; for, God forbid that I should be an enemy to him. I have indeed been guilty of a great many sins, but I had no bad design in them, and never had the least enmity against my Maker; so

far from it, that I shudder at the very thought!" This is the first obstacle that I meet with in discharging my embassy; the embassy itself is looked upon as needless by the persons concerned, like an attempt to reconcile those that are good friends already. This obstacle must be removed before we can proceed any farther.

I am far from charging any of you with so horrid a crime as enmity and rebellion against God, who can produce satisfactory evidences to your own conscience that you are his friends. I only desire that you would not flatter yourselves, nor draw a rash and groundless conclusion in an affair of such infinite moment, but that you would put the matter to a fair trial, according to evidence, and then let your conscience pass an impartial sentence as your judge, under the supreme Judge of the world.

You plead "not guilty" to the charge, and allege that you have always loved God; but if this be the case, whence is it that you have afforded him so few of your affectionate and warm thoughts? Do not your tenderest thoughts dwell upon the objects of your love? But has not your mind been shy of him who gave you your power of thinking? Have not you lived stupidly thoughtless of him for days and weeks together? Nay, have not serious thoughts of him been unwelcome, and made you uneasy? and have you not turned every way to avoid them? Have you not often prayed to him, and concurred in other acts of religious worship, and yet had but very few or no devout thoughts of him, even at the very time? And is that mind well affected towards him that is so averse to him, and turns every way to shun a glance of him? Alas! is this your friendship for the God that made you, whose you are, and whom you ought to serve!

Would you not have indulged the fool's wish,

that there were no God, had not the horror and impossibility of the thing restrained you? But, notwithstanding this restraint, has not this blasphemy shed its malignant poison at times in your hearts? If there was no God, then you would sin without controul, and without dread of punishment; and how sweet was this! Then you would have nothing to do with that melancholy thing, religion; and what an agreeable exemption would this be! But is this your love for him, to wish the Parent of all being out of being! Alas! can the rankest enmity rise higher?

Again, if you are reconciled to God, whence is it that you are secretly, or perhaps openly disaffected to his image, I mean the purity and strictness of his law, and the lineaments of holiness that appear upon the unfashionable religious few? If you loved God, you would of course love every thing that bears any resemblance to him. But are you not conscious that it is otherwise with you; that you murmur and cavil at the restraints of God's law, and would much rather abjure it, be free from it, and live as you list? Are you not conscious that nothing exposes a man more to your secret disgust and contempt, and perhaps to your public mockery and ridicule, than a strict and holy walk, and a conscientious observance of the duties of devotion? And if you catch your neighbour in any of these offences, do not your hearts rise against him? and what is this but the effect of your enmity against God? Do you thus disgust a man for wearing the genuine image and resemblance of your friend? No; the effect of love is quite the reverse.

Again, If you do but reflect upon the daily sensations of your own minds, must you not be conscious that you love other persons and things more than God? that you love pleasure, honour, riches,

your relations and friends, more than the glorious and ever-blessed God? Look into your own hearts, and you will find it so: you will find that this, and that, and a thousand things in this world, engross more of your thoughts, your cares, desires, joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears, than God, or any of his concerns.—Now it is essential to the love of God that it be supreme. You do not love him truly at all, in the least degree, if you do not love him above all; above all persons and things in the whole universe. He is a jealous God, and will not suffer a rival. A lower degree of love for supreme excellence is an affront and indignity. Is it not therefore evident, even to your own conviction, that you do not love God at all? and what is this but to be his enemy? To be indifferent towards him, as though he were an insignificant being, neither good nor evil, a mere cipher; to feel neither love nor hatred towards him, but to neglect him, as if you had no concern with him one way or other; what an horrible disposition is this towards him, who is supremely and infinitely glorious and amiable, your Creator, your Sovereign, and Benefactor; who therefore deserves and demands your highest love; or, in the words of his own law, *that you should love him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* Mark xii. 60. From what can such indifferency towards him proceed but from disaffection and enmity? It is in this way the enmity of men towards God most generally discovers itself. They feel, perhaps, no positive workings of hatred towards him, unless when their innate corruption, like an exasperated serpent, is irritated by conviction from his law; but they feel an apathy, a listlessness, an indifferency towards him; and because they feel no more, they flatter

themselves they are far from hating him; especially as they may have very honourable speculative thoughts of him floating on the surface of their minds. But alas! this very thing, this indifferency, or listless neutrality, is the very core of their enmity; and if they are thus indifferent to him now, while enjoying so many blessings from his hand, and while he delays their punishment, how will their enmity swell and rise to all the rage of a devil against him, when he puts forth his vindictive hand and touches them, and so gives occasion to it to discover its venom! My soul shudders to think what horrid insurrections and direct rebellion this temper will produce when once irritated, and all restraints are taken off; which will be the doom of sinners in the eternal world; and then they will have no more of the love of God in them than the most malignant devil in hell! If therefore you generally feel such an indifferency towards God, be assured you are not reconciled to him, but are his enemies in your hearts.

Again, All moral evil, or sin, is contrary to God; it is the only thing upon earth, or in hell, that is most opposite to his holy nature; and the object of his implacable and eternal indignation. He is of purer eyes than to behold it or endure it. It is his hatred to sin that has turned his heart against any of his creatures, and is the cause of all the vengeance that he has inflicted upon the guilty inhabitants of our world, or the spirits of hell. There is no object in the whole compass of the universe so odious to you as every sin is to a pure and all-holy God: now it is impossible you should at once love two things so opposite, so eternally irreconcilable. As much love as you have for any unlawful pleasure, just so much enmity there is in your hearts towards God. Hence, says St. Paul, *you were ene-*

emies in your minds by wicked works. Col. i. 21. Intimating, that the love and practice of our wicked works is a plain evidence of inward enmity of mind towards God. The works of the flesh are sinful: hence, says the same apostle, *the carnal mind, or the mind of the flesh, Rom. viii. 7. is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be: so then they that are in the flesh, or under the power of a carnal mind, cannot please God. Rom. viii. 8.* Because, whatever seeming acts of obedience they perform, and whatever appearances of friendship they put on, they are at heart enemies to God, and therefore cannot please him, who searches their heart, and sees the secret principle of their actions. Hence also St. James tells us, *that if any man would be a friend to the world, he is the enemy of God, because the friendship of the world is enmity against God. Jam. iv. 4.* For the world enflames the lust of men, and occasions much sin; and if we love the tempter, we love the sin to which it would allure us, and if we love the sin, we are the enemies of God; and therefore the friendship of the world is enmity against God. This then is an established maxim, without straining the matter too far, that as far as you love any sin, so far are you enemies to God. The love, as well as the service of such opposite masters, is utterly inconsistent. Now, do not your own consciences witness against you, that you have indulged, and still do habitually indulge the love of some sin or other? Whether it be covetousness or sensual pleasure, or ambition, or some angry passion, or whatever sin it be, as far as you love it, so far you are enemies to God; and if you take a view of your temper and practice, must you not unavoidably be convicted of this dreadful guilt? Horrible as the crime is, is it not an undeniable

matter of fact, that you do really love some sin, and consequently hate the infinitely amiable and ever blessed God? and therefore you are the persons I have to deal with, as needing reconciliation with God.

Farther, take a view of your general manner of serving God in the duties of religion: your manner of praying, meditation, hearing the word of God, and other acts of devotion, and then inquire, Do you perform this service as the willing servants of a master you love? Do you not enter upon such service with reluctance or listlessness, and perform it with langour and indifferency as a business to which you have no heart? But is this your manner of performing a labour of love to a friend? Will your own reason suffer you to think you would be so lake-warm and heartless in the worship of God if you sincerely loved him? No; love is an active principle, a vigorous spring of action; and if this were the principle of your religious services, you would infuse more spirit and life into them, you would exert all your powers, and be *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* Rom. xii. 11.

But when you have performed offices of devotion with some degree of earnestness, which no doubt you have sometimes done, what was the principle or spring of your exertion? Was it the love of God? or was it purely the low principle of self-love? Why did you pray with such eager importunity, and attend upon the other means of grace with so much seriousness, but because you apprehended your dear selves were in danger, and you were not willing to be miserable forever? This servile, mercenary kind of religious earnestness will not prove that you love God, but only that you love yourselves; and this you may do, and yet have no more true goodness, or genuine love to God, than an in-

fernal spirit; for there is not a spirit in hell but what loves himself. Indeed, self-love is so far from being an evidence of the love of God, that the extravagant excess of it is the source of that wickedness that abounds among men and devils. I do not mean by this utterly to exclude self-love out of genuine religion; it must have its place in the most excellent and best beings, but then it must be kept in a proper subordination, and not advance the creature above the Creator, and dethrone the supreme King of the universe.—His love must be uppermost in the heart, and when that has the highest place, the indulgence of self-love in pursuing our own happiness is lawful, and an important duty. Now, do you not find from this view of the case, that you are not reconciled to God, even in your most devout and zealous hours, much less in the languid inactive tenour of your life? If so, place yourselves among those that I have to do with to day; that is, the enemies of God.

So also, when you perform good offices to mankind; when you are harmless, obliging neighbours; when you are charitable to the poor, or strictly just in trade; is the love of God, and a regard to his authority, the reason and principle of your actions? That is, do you do these things because God commands them, and because you delight to do what he commands? or rather, do you not do them merely because it is your nature to perform humane and honourable actions in such instances; or because you may acquire honour, or some selfish advantage by them? Alas! that God should be neglected, forgotten, and left out of the question, as of no importance, even in those actions that are materially good! that even what he commands should be done, not because he commands it, but for some other sordid selfish reason! O! if you did really

love God, would you thus disregard him, and do nothing for his sake, not only when you are doing what he forbids, but even when you are performing what he has made your duty! Would he be such a cipher, a mere nothing in your practical esteem, if your hearts were reconciled to him as your God? No; such of you must look upon yourselves as the very persons whom I am to pray, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God.

I might thus, from obvious facts, lay before you many more evidences of your disaffection to the great God; but I must leave some room for the other part of my address to you, in which I am to persuade you to accept of the proposal of reconciliation; and therefore I shall add only one more test of your pretended friendship, a test which is established by the great Founder of our religion, as infallibly decisive in this case; and that is, obedience, or the keeping of the commandments of God. This, I say, is established in the strongest terms by Jesus Christ himself, as a decisive test of love, *If you love me, keep my commandments.*—John xiv. 15. *Then are ye my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* John xv. 14. *If any man love me, he will keep my words. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my saying.* John xiv. 23, 24. *This is the love of God, says St. John, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.* 1 John v. 3. That is, they are not grievous when love is the principle of obedience. The service of love is always willing and pleasing. Now, my brethren, bring your hearts and lives to this standard, and let conscience declare, Are there not some demands and restraints of the divine law so disagreeable to you, that you labour to keep yourselves ignorant of them, and turn every way to avoid the painful light of conviction? Are there

not several duties which you know in your consciences to be such, which you do not so much as honestly endeavour to perform, but knowingly and wilfully neglect? And are there not some favourite sins which your consciences tell you God has forbidden, which yet are so pleasing to you, that you knowingly and allowedly indulge and practise them? If this be your case, you need not pretend to plead any thing in your own defence, or hesitate any longer; the case is plain, you are, beyond all doubt, enemies to God; you are undeniably convicted of it this day by irresistible evidence. You perhaps glory in the profession of christians, but you are, notwithstanding, enemies to God. You attend on public worship, you pray, you read, you communicate, you are perhaps a zealous churchman or dissenter, but you are enemies of God. You have perhaps had many fits of religious affection, and serious concern about your everlasting happiness, but notwithstanding you are enemies of God.— You may have reformed in many things, but you are still enemies of God. Men may esteem you christians, but the God of heaven accounts you his enemies. In vain do you insist upon it, that you have never hated your Maker all your life, but even tremble at the thought, for undeniable facts are against you; and the reason why you have not seen your enmity was, because you were blind, and judged upon wrong principles: but if you this day feel the force of conviction from the law, and have your eyes opened, you will see and be shocked at your horrid enmity against God, before yonder sun sets.

And now, when I have singled out from the rest those I am now to beseech to reconciliation with God, have I not got the majority of you to treat with? Where are the sincere lovers of God? Alas!

how few are they! and how imperfect even in their love, so that they hardly dare call themselves lovers of God, but tremble lest they should still belong to the wretched crowd that are still unreconciled to him!

Ye rebels against the King of heaven! ye enemies against my Lord and Master Jesus Christ! (I cannot flatter you with a softer name,) hear me; attend to the proposal I make to you, not in my own name, but in the name and stead of your rightful Sovereign; and that is, that you will this day be reconciled to God. “I pray you in his stead (that is all I can do,) be ye reconciled to God.”—That you may know what I mean, I will more particularly explain this overture to you.

If you would be reconciled to God, you must be deeply sensible of the guilt, the wickedness, the baseness, the inexpressible malignity of your enmity and rebellion against him. You must return to your rightful sovereign as convicted, self-condemned, penitent, broken-hearted rebels, confounded and ashamed of your conduct, loathing yourselves because you have loathed the Supreme Excellence, mourning over your unnatural disaffection, your base ingratitude, your horrid rebellion against so good a King. And what do you say to this article of the treaty of peace? Is it an hard thing for such causeless enemies to fall upon the knee, and to mourn and weep as prostrate penitents at the feet of their injured maker? Is it an hard thing for one that has all his life been guilty of the blackest crimes upon earth, or even in hell, I mean enmity against God, to confess “I have sinned,” and to feel his own confession? to feel it, I say; for if he does not feel it, his confession is but an empty compliment, that increases his guilt.

Again, if you would be reconciled to God, you must heartily consent to be reconciled to him in Christ; that is, you must come in upon the footing of that act of grace which is published in the gospel through Christ, and expecting no favour at all upon the footing of your own goodness. The merit of what you call your good actions, of your repentance, your prayers, your acts of charity and justice, must all pass for nothing in this respect: you must depend only and entirely upon the merit of Christ's obedience and sufferings as the ground of your acceptance with God; and hope for forgiveness and favor from his mere mercy bestowed upon you, only for the sake of Christ, or on account of what he has done and suffered in the stead of sinners. The context informs you, that it is only in Christ that God is reconciling the world to himself; and consequently it is only in Christ that the world must accept of reconciliation and pardon. It does not consist with the dignity and perfections of the King of Heaven to receive rebels into favour upon any other footing. I would have you consent to every article of the overture as I go along; and therefore here again I make a pause to ask you, what do you think of this article? Are you willing to comply with it, willing to come into favour with God, as convicted, self-condemned rebels, upon an act of grace procured by the righteousness of Christ alone? Is it a mortification to creatures that never have done one action truly good in all their lives: because they have never loved God in one moment of their lives: creatures that have always, even in what they accounted their best dispositions, and best actions, been hateful to God, because even in their best dispositions and best actions they were utterly destitute of his love? Is it a mortification to such creatures to renounce all their own merit.

and consent to be saved only through grace, on account of the righteousness of another, even of Jesus Christ the great Peace-Maker? Can it be a mortification to you to renounce what you have not, and to own yourselves guilty, and utterly unworthy, when you are really such? O! may I not expect your compliance with this term of reconciliation?

Again, if you would be reconciled to God, you must engage yourselves in his service for the future, and devote yourselves to do his will. His law must be the rule of your temper and practice: whatever he commands you must honestly endeavour to perform, without exception of any one duty as disagreeable and laborious; and whatever he forbids, you must, for that reason, abstain from, however pleasing, advantageous, or fashionable. You must no longer look upon yourselves as your own, but as bought with a price, and therefore bound to glorify God with your souls and your bodies, which are his. And can you make any difficulty of complying with this term; of obeying Him, whom the happy angels in heaven obey; of observing that law which always unites your duty and your happiness, and forbids nothing but what is itself injurious to you in the nature of things; of doing the will of the wisest and best of beings rather than your own, who are ignorant and depraved creatures? O! can you make any difficulty of this? If not, you will return home this day reconciled to God; an happiness you have never yet enjoyed for one moment.

Finally, if you would be reconciled to God; you must break off all friendship with his enemies; your friendship with the world, I mean your attachment to its wicked fashions and customs, and your fondness for its rebellious inhabitants, who continue en-

emies to God; your love of guilty pleasures, and every form of sin, however pleasing or gainful you might imagine it to be; your old habits and practices, while enemies to God; all these you must break off forever; for your friendship with these is utterly inconsistent with the love of God. As long as you are resolved to love the world, to keep up your society with your old companions in sin, to retain your old pleasures and evil practices; as long, I say, as you are resolved upon this course, farewell all hope of your reconciliation to God: it is absolutely impossible. And do any of you hesitate at this article? Is sin so noble a thing in itself, and so happy in its consequences, as that you should be so loth to part with it? Is it so sweet a thing to you to sin against God, that you know not how to forbear? Alas! will you rather be an implacable enemy to the God that made you, than break your league with his enemies and your own? Do you love your sins so well, and are you so obliged to them, that you will lay down your life, your eternal life for their sakes.

I might multiply particulars, but these are the principal articles of that treaty of peace, I am negotiating with you; and a consent to these includes a compliance with all the rest. And are you determined to comply? Does the heaven-born purpose now rise in your minds, "I am determined I will be an enemy of God no longer; but this very day I will be reconciled to God upon his own terms?" Is this your fixed purpose? or is there any occasion to pray and persuade you.

I well know, and it is fit you should know, that you are not able of yourselves to consent to these terms, but that it is the work of the power of God alone to reconcile you to himself; and that all my persuasions and entreaties will never make you

either able or willing. You will then ask me, perhaps, “Why do I propose the terms to you, or use any persuasives or entreaties with you?” I answer, because you never will be sensible of your inability till you make an honest trial, and because you never will look and pray for the aid of the blessed Spirit till you are deeply sensible of your own insufficiency; and further, because, if the blessed Spirit should ever effectually work upon you, it will be by enlightening your understandings to see the reasonableness of the terms, and the force of the persuasives; and in this way, agreeably to your reasonable natures, sweetly constraining your obstinate wills to yield yourselves to God; therefore the terms must be proposed to you, and persuasives used, if I would be subservient to this divine agent, and furnish him with materials with which to work; and I have some little hope that he will, as it were, catch my feeble words from my lips before they vanish into air, and bear them home to your hearts with a power which you will not be able to resist. Finally, a conviction of the true state of your case may constrain you from self-love and the low principles of nature to use the means of reconciliation with zeal and earnestness; this you are capable of, even with the mere strength of degenerate nature; and it is only in this way of earnest endeavours that you have any encouragement to hope for divine aid; therefore, notwithstanding your utter impotence, I must pray, entreat, and persuade you to be reconciled to God.

I pray you, in the name of the great God your Heavenly Father, and of Jesus Christ your redeemer. If God should once more renew the thunder and lightning, and darkness and temper of Sinai, and speak to you as he once did to the trembling Israelites; or if he should appear to you in all

the amiable and alluring glories of a sin-pardoning reconcileable God, and pray you to be reconciled to him, would you not then regard the proposal? or if Jesus who once prayed for you from the cross, should now pray to you from his throne in heaven, and beg you with his own gracious voice to be reconciled, O! could you disregard the entreaty? Surely no. Now the overture of peace is as really made to you by the blessed God and his Son Jesus Christ as if it were expressly proposed to you by an immediate voice from Heaven. For I beseech you, *as though God did beseech you*, by me, and it is *in Christ's stead*, that I pray you be reconciled to God. Therefore, however lightly you may make of a mere proposal of mine, can you disregard an overture from the God that made you, and the Saviour that bought you with his blood? in which I am but the faint echo of their voice from heaven.

In the name of God I pray you: the name of the greatest and best of beings; that name which angels love and adore, and which strikes terror through the hardest devil in the infernal regions: the name of your Father; the immediate father of your spirits, and the Author of your mortal frames; the name of your Preserver and Benefactor, in whom you live, and move, and have your being: and who gives you life, and breath and all things; the name of your rightful Sovereign and Lawgiver, who has a right to demand your love and obedience; the name of your supreme Judge, who will ascend the tribunal, and acquit or condemn you, as he finds you friends or foes; the name of that God, rich in goodness, who has replenished heaven with an infinite plenitude of happiness in which he will allow you to share after all your hostility and rebellion, if you con-

sent to the overture of reconciliation; in the name of that God of terrible majesty and justice, who has prepared the dungeon of hell as a prison for his enemies, where he holds in chains the mighty powers of darkness, and thousands of your own race, who persisted in that enmity to him of which you are now guilty, and with whom you must have your everlasting portion, if, like them, you continue hardened and incorrigible in your rebellion; in the name of that compassionate God, who sent his dear Son (O the transporting thought!) to satisfy divine justice for you by his death, and the precepts of the law by his life, and thus to remove all obstructions out of the way of your reconciliation on the part of God; in this great, this endearing and tremendous name, I pray you be reconciled to God. I pray you for his sake: and has this name no weight with you? Will you do nothing for his sake? what, not so reasonable and advantageous a thing as dropping your unnatural rebellion, and being reconciled to him? Is your contempt of God risen to that pitch that you will not do the most reasonable and profitable thing in the world, if he entreat you to do it? Be astonished, O ye heavens! at this.

I pray you both in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, the true friend of publicans and sinners, in his name, and for his sake, who assumed your degraded nature, that he might dignify and save it; who lived a life of labour, poverty, and persecution upon earth, that you might enjoy a life of everlasting happiness and glory in heaven; who died upon a torturing cross, that you might sit upon heavenly thrones; who was imprisoned in the gloomy grave, that you might enjoy a glorious resurrection; who fell a victim to divine justice, that you might be set free from its dreadful

arrest; who felt trouble and agony of soul, that you might enjoy the smiles, the pleasures of divine love; who, in short, has discovered more ardent and extensive love for you than all the friends in the world can do; in his name, and for his sake, I pray you to be reconciled to God. And is his dear name a trifle in your esteem? Will you not do any thing so reasonable and so necessary, and conducive to your happiness for his sake; for his sake who has done and suffered so much for you? Alas! has the name of Jesus no more influence among the creatures he bought with his blood! It is hard indeed if I beg in vain, when I beg for the sake of Christ, the Friend, the Saviour of perishing souls.

But if you have no regard for him, you certainly have for yourselves; therefore, for your own sakes, for the sake of your precious immortal souls, for the sake of your own everlasting happiness, I pray you to be reconciled to God. If you refuse, you degrade the honour of your nature, and commence incarnate devils. For what is the grand constituent of a devil, but enmity against God? You become the refuse of the creation, fit for no apartment of the universe but the prison of hell. While you are unreconciled to God you can do nothing at all to please him. He that searches the heart knows that even your good actions do not proceed from love to him, and therefore he abhors them. Ten thousand prayers and acts of devotion and morality, as you have no principles of real holiness, are so many provocations to a righteous God. While you refuse to be reconciled, you are accessory to, and patronise all the rebellion of men and devils; for if you have a right to continue in your rebellion, why may not others? why may not every man upon earth? why may not every miserable ghost in the

infernal regions? And are you for raising an universal mutiny and rebellion against the throne of the Most High! O the inexpressible horror of the thought! If you refuse to be reconciled, you will soon weary out the mercy and patience of God towards you, and he will come forth against you in all the terrors of an almighty enemy. He will give death a commission to seize you and drag you to his flaming tribunal. He will break ~~off~~ the treaty, and never make you one ~~offer~~ of reconciliation more: he will strip you of all the enjoyments he was pleased to lend you, while you were under a reprieve, and ~~the~~ treaty was not come to a final issue; and will leave you nothing but bare being, and an extensive capacity of misery, which will be filled up to the uttermost from the vials of his indignation. He will treat you as his implacable enemy, and you shall be to him as Amalek, Exod. xviii. 16. with whom he will make war forever and ever. He will reprove you, and set your sins in order before you, and tear you in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver. He will meet you as a lion, "and as a bear bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of your hearts." Hos. xiii. 8. He hath for a long time held his peace, and endured your rebellion; but ere long he will go forth as a mighty man: he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war; he shall cry, yea roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. Ah! he will ease him of his adversaries, and avenge him of his enemies. He will give orders to the executioners of his justice: *These mine enemies, that would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.* Luke xix. 27. And now, if you will not submit to peace, prepare to meet your God, O sinners; gird up your loins like men; put on all the terror of your rage, and go forth to meet your al-

mighty adversary, who will soon meet you in the field, and try your strength. Call the legions of hell to your aid, and strengthen the confederacy with all your fellow-sinners upon earth; put briers and thorns around you to inclose from his reach. Prepare the dry stubble to oppose devouring flame. Associate yourselves, but ye shall be broken in pieces: gird yourselves; but alas! ye shall be broken to pieces.

But O! I must drop this ironical challenge, and seriously pray you to make peace with him whom you cannot resist: then all your past rebellion will be forgiven; you shall be the favourites of your sovereign, and happy forever; and earth and heaven will rejoice at the conclusion of this blessed peace; and my now sad heart will share in the joy. Therefore, for your own sakes, I pray you to be reconciled to God.

SERMON IV.

THE NATURE AND UNIVERSALITY OF SPIRITUAL DEATH.

EPHES. ii. 1. and 5.—*Who were dead in trespasses and sins.—Even when we were dead in sins.*

THERE is a kind of death which we all expect to feel, that carries terror in the very sound, and all its circumstances are shocking to nature. The ghastly countenance, the convulsive agonies, the expiring groan, the coffin, the grave, the devouring worm, the stupor, the insensibility, the universal inactivity, these strike a damp to the spirit, and we turn pale at the thought. With such objects

as these in view, courage fails, levity looks serious, presumption is dashed, the cheerful passions sink, and all is solemn, all is melancholy. The most stupid and hardy sinner cannot but be moved to see these things exemplified in others; and when he cannot avoid the prospect, he is shocked to think that he himself must feel them.

But there is another kind of death little regarded indeed, little feared, little lamented, which is infinitely more terrible; the death, not of the body, but of the soul: a death which does not stupify the limbs, but the faculties of the mind: a death which does not separate the soul and body, and consign the latter to the grave, but that separates the soul from God, excludes it from all the joys of his presence, and delivers it over to everlasting misery: a tremendous death indeed! "A death unto death." The expression of St. Paul is prodigiously strong and striking: Death unto death, death after death, in all dreadful succession, and the last more terrible than the first. 2 Cor. ii: 16. and this is the death meant in my text, *dead in trespasses and sins.*

To explain the context and shew you the connexion, I shall make two short remarks.

The one is, That the apostle had observed in the nineteenth and twentieth verses of the foregoing chapter, that the same almighty power of God, which raised Christ from the dead, is exerted to enable a sinner to believe. *We believe,* says he, *according to the working, or energy, of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.* The one as well as the other, is an exploit of omnipotence. The exceeding greatness of his mighty power is exerted towards us that believe as well as it was upon the dead body of Christ to restore it to life, after it had been torn and mangled upon the cross, and lain three days

and three nights in the grave. What strong language is this! what a forcible illustration! Methinks this passage alone is sufficient to confound all the vanity and self-sufficiency of mortals, and entirely to destroy the proud fiction of a self-sprung faith, produced by the efforts of degenerate nature. In my text the apostle assigns the reason of this. The same exertion of the same power is necessary in the one case and the other; because as the body of Christ was dead, and had no principle of life in it, so says he, *ye were dead in trespasses and sins*; and therefore could no more quicken yourselves than a dead body can restore itself to life. But God, verse 4th, *who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us*; that God, who raised the entombed Redeemer to life again, that same almighty God, by a like exertion of the same power, *hath quickened us*, verse 5th, *even when we were dead in sins*; dead, senseless, inactive, and incapable of animating ourselves. Let any man carefully read these verses, and consider their most natural meaning, and I cannot but think common sense will direct him thus to understand them. The scriptures were written with a design to be understood; and therefore that sense which is most natural to a plain, unprejudiced understanding is most likely to be true.

The other remark is, That the apostle having pronounced the Ephesians dead in sin, while unconverted, in the first verse, passes the same sentence upon himself and the whole body of the Jews, notwithstanding their high privileges, in the fifth verse. The sense and connection may be discovered in the following paraphrase: “You Ephesians were very lately heathens, and, while you were in that state, you were spiritually dead, and all your actions were dead works. In time past ye walked

in trespasses and sins, nor were you singular in your course: though it be infinitely pernicious, yet it is the common course of this world, and it is also agreeable to the temper and instigation of that gloomy prince, who has a peculiar power in the region of the air; that malignant spirit who works with dreadful efficacy in the numerous children of disobedience; but this was not the case of you heathens alone: we also who are Jews, notwithstanding our many religious advantages, and even I myself, notwithstanding my high privileges and unblemishable life as a pharisee, we also, I say, had our conversation in times past among the children of disobedience; we all, as well as they, walked in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires and inclinations of our sensual flesh, and of our depraved minds; for these were tainted with spiritual wickedness, independent upon our animal passions and appetites; and we were all, even by nature, children of wrath, even as others: in this respect we Jews were just like the rest of mankind, corrupt from our very birth, transgressors from the womb, and liable to the wrath of God. - Our external relation and privileges as the peculiar people of God, distinguished with a religion from heaven, makes no distinction between us and others in this matter. As we are all children of disobedience by our lives, so we are all, without exception, children of wrath by nature: but when we are all dead in sins, when Jews and Gentiles were equally dead to God, then, even then, God, who is rich in mercy, had pity upon us; *he quickened us*; “he inspired us with a new and spiritual life by his own almighty power, which raised the dead body of Christ from the grave. *He quickened us together with Christ*: “We received our life by virtue of our union with him as our vital head, who was raised

to an immortal life, that he might quicken dead souls by those influences of his Spirit, which he purchased by his death; and therefore by grace are ye saved. It is the purest, richest, freest grace, that ever such dead souls as we were made alive to God, and not suffered to remain dead forever.

This is the obvious meaning and connexion of these verses; and we now proceed to consider the text, *dead in trespasses and sins*; you dead, we dead, Jews and Gentiles all dead together *in trespasses and sins*. A dismal, mortifying character! “This one place,” says Beza, “like a thunder-bolt, dashes all mankind down to the dast, great and proud as they are; for it pronounces their nature not only hurt but dead by sin, and therefore liable to wrath.”*

Death is a state of insensibility and inactivity, and a dead man is incapable of restoring himself to life; therefore the condition of an unconverted sinner must have some resemblance to such a state, in order to support the bold metaphor here used by the apostle. To understand it aright we must take care, on the one hand, that we do not explain it away in flattery to ourselves, or in compliment to the pride of human nature; and, on the other hand, that we do not carry the similitude too far, so as to lead into absurdities, and contradict matter of fact.

The metaphor must be understood with several limitations or exceptions; for it is certain there is a wide difference between the spiritual death of the soul, and the natural death of the body, particularly in this respect, that death puts an entire end to all the powers, actions, and sensations of our

* “Hoc uno loco, quasi fulmine, totus homo, quantus quantus est prosternitur. Neque enim naturam, dicit læsam, sed mortuam, per peccatum; ideoque iræ abnoxiam.”

animal nature universally, with regard to all objects of every kind: but a soul dead in sin is only partially dead; that is, it is dead only with regard to a certain kind of sensations and exercises, but in the mean time it may be all life and activity about other things. It is alive, sensible, and vigorous about earthly objects and pursuits; these raise its passions and engage its thoughts. It has also a dreadful power and faculty of sinning, though this is not its life but its disease, its death, like the tendency of a dead body to corruption. It can likewise exercise its intellectual powers, and make considerable improvements in science. A sinner dead in trespasses and sins may be a living treasury of knowledge, an universal scholar, a profound philosopher, and even a great divine, as far as mere speculative knowledge can render him such; nay, he is capable of many sensations and impressions from religious objects, and of performing all the external duties of religion. He is able to read, to hear, to pray, to meditate upon divine things; nay, he may be an instructor of others, and preach perhaps with extensive popularity; he may have a form of godliness, and obtain a name to live among men: he is in some measure able, and it is his duty to attend upon the means God has instituted for quickening him with spiritual life, and God deals with him as with a rational creature, by laws, sanctions, promises, exhortations, and invitations: these concessions I make, not only to give you the sense of the text, but also to prevent the abuse of the doctrine, and anticipate some objections against it, as though it were an encouragement to continue idle, and use no means to obtain spiritual life: or as though it rendered all the means of grace needless and absurd, like arguments to the dead, to restore themselves to life. But, notwithstanding

all these concessions, it is a melancholy truth that an unregenerate sinner is dead. Though he can commit sin with greediness, though he is capable of animal actions and secular pursuits, nay, though he can employ his mind even about intellectual and spiritual things, and is capable of performing the external duties of religion, yet there is something in religion with regard to which he is entirely dead: there is a kind of spiritual life of which he is entirely destitute: he is habitually insensible with regard to things divine and eternal: he has no activity, no vigour in the pure, spiritual and vital exercises of religion: he has no prevailing bent of mind towards them: he has not those views and apprehensions of things which a soul spiritually alive would necessarily receive and entertain: he is destitute of those sacred affections, that joy, that love, that desire, that hope, that fear, that sorrow, which are, as it were, the innate passions of the new man. In short, he is so inactive, so listless, so insensible in these respects, that death, which puts an end to all action and sensation, is a proper emblem of his state: and this is the meaning of the apostle in my text. He is also utterly unable to quicken himself. He may indeed use means in some sort; but to implant a vital principle in his soul, but to give himself vivid sensations of divine things, and make himself alive towards God, this is entirely beyond his utmost ability; this is as peculiarly the work of almighty power as the resurrection of a dead body from the grave. As to this death it is brought upon him by and consists in *trespasses and sins*. The innate depravity and corruption of the heart, and the habits of sin contracted and confirmed by repeated indulgences of inbred corruption, these are the poisonous, deadly things that have slain the soul; these have entirely indis-

posed and disabled it for living religion. *Trespases and sins* are the grave, the corrupt effluvia, the malignant damps, the rottenness of a dead soul: it lies dead, senseless, inactive, buried in *trespases and sins*. *Trespases and sins* render it ghastly, odious, abominable, a noisome putrefaction before an holy God, like a rotten carcass, or a mere mass of corruption: the vilest lusts, like worms, riot upon and devour it, but it feels them not, nor can it lift a hand to drive the venom off. Such mortifying ideas as these may be contained in the striking metaphor, *dead in trespases and sins*; and I hope you now understand its general meaning.

If you would know what has turned my thoughts to this subject, I will candidly tell you, though with a sorrowful heart. I am sure, if any objects within the compass of human knowledge have a tendency to make the deepest impressions upon our minds, they are those things which christianity teaches us concerning God, concerning ourselves, and a future state; and if there be any exercises which should call forth all the life and powers of our souls into action, they are those of a religious nature: but alas! I often find a strange, astonishing stupor and listlessness about these things. In this I am not singular; the best among us complain of the same thing; the most lively christians feel this unaccountable langour and insensibility; and the generality are evidently destitute of all habitual concern about them; they are all alive in the pursuit of pleasure, riches, or honours; their thoughts are easily engaged, and their affections raised by such things as these: but the concerns of religion, which, above all other things are adapted to make impressions upon them, and stir up all the life within them, seem to have little

or no effect. When I have made this observation with respects to others, and felt the melancholy confirmation of it in my own breast, I have really been struck with amazement; and ready to cry out, "Lord, what is this that has befallen me, and the rest of my fellow mortals? what can be the cause of such a conduct in rational nature, to be active and eager about trifles, and stupid and careless about matters of infinite importance? O whence is this strange infatuation!" Thus I have been shocked at this astonishing fact, and I could account for it in no other way but by reflecting that we have all been *dead in trespasses and sins*. In such a solemn hour the apostle's expression does not seem at all too strong. I have no scruple at all to pronounce, not only from the authority of an apostle, but from the evidence of the thing, that I, and all around me, yea, and all the sons of men, have been dead, in the spiritual sense, utterly dead. Multitudes among us, yea, the generality are dead still; hence the stillness about religion among us; hence the stupor, the carelessness about eternal things, the thoughtless neglect of God, the insensibility under his providential dispensations, the impenitence, the presumption that so much prevail. God has indeed, out of the great love wherewith he loved us, quickened some of us, even when we were dead in sins; and we have a little life, some vital sensations and impressions at times, but Oh! how little, how superficial, how much of a deadly stupor yet remains! how little life in prayer, in hearing, or in the nearest approach to the living God! The reflection is shocking, but, alas! it is too true; consult your own hearts and you will find it even so. Animal life seems to be a gradual thing; it gradually grows in an infant, it is perfect in mature age, and in old

age it gradually decays, till all is gone; but how small is the degree of life when the foetus is just animated, or the infant born into the world! but little superior to that of a plant or an oyster. What faint sensations, what obscure and languid perceptions, what feeble motions! Such are the children of grace in the present state. Spiritual life is gradual; it is infused in regeneration; but Oh! how far from perfection while on this side heaven! Alas! the best of us are like the poor traveller that fell among thieves, and was left half dead; however, it is unspeakable mercy to have the least principle of spiritual life; and we should prize it more than crowns and empires.

If you would know my design in choosing this subject, it is partly for the conviction of sinners, that they may be alarmed with their deplorable condition, which is the first step towards their being quickened; partly to rouse the children of grace to seek more life from their vital head; and partly to display the rich grace of God in quickening such dead sinners: and bestowing upon them a spiritual and immortal life; and surely nothing can inflame our gratitude and raise our wonder more than the consideration that we were dead in trespasses and sins! If I may but answer these ends, it will be an unspeakable blessing to us all. And Oh, that divine grace may honour this humble attempt of a poor creature, at best but half alive, with success! I hope, my brethren, you will hear seriously, for it is really a most serious subject.

You have seen that the metaphorical expression in my text is intended to represent the stupidity, inactivity, and impotence of unregenerate sinners about divine things. This truth I might confirm by argument and scripture authority; but I think it may be a better method for popular conviction

to prove and illustrate it from plain instances of the temper and conduct of sinners about the concerns of religion, as this may force the conviction upon them from undoubted matters of fact and their own experience.

This, therefore, is the method I intend to pursue; and my time will allow me to particularize only the following instances.

I. Consider the excellency of the divine Being, the sum total, the great original of all perfections. How infinitely worthy is he of the adoration of all his creatures! how deserving of their most intense thoughts and most ardent affections! If majesty and glory can strike us with awe and veneration, does not Jehovah demand them, who is clothed with majesty and glory as with a garment, and before whom all the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers, as nothing, as less than nothing, and vanity? If wisdom excites our pleasing wonder, here is an unfathomable depth. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! If goodness, grace, and mercy attract our love and gratitude, here these amiable perfections shine in their most alluring glories. If justice strikes a damp to the guilty, here is justice in all its tremendous majesty. If veracity, if candour, if any, or all of the moral virtues engage our esteem, here they all centre in their highest perfection. If the presence of a king strikes a reverence; if the eye of his judge awes the criminal, and restrains him from offending, certainly we should fear before the Lord all the day, for we are surrounded with his omnipresence, and he is the inspector, and judge of all our thoughts and actions. If riches excite desire, here are unsearchable riches: if happiness has charms that draw all the world after it, here is an unbounded ocean of happiness; here is the only complete

portion for an immortal mind. Men are affected with these things in one another, though found in a very imperfect degree. Power awes and commands; virtue and goodness please; beauty charms; justice strikes with solemnity and terror; a bright genius is admired; a benevolent, merciful temper is loved: thus men are affected with created excellencies. Whence is it then they are so stupidly unaffected with the supreme original excellencies of Jehovah? Here, my brethren, turn your eyes inward upon yourselves, and inquire, are not several of you conscious that, though you have passions for such objects as these, and you are easily moved by them, yet, with regard to the perfections of the supreme and best of beings, your hearts are habitually senseless and unaffected? It is not an easy thing to make impressions upon you by them; and what increases the wonder, and aggravates your guilt, is, that you are thus senseless and unaffected, when you believe and profess that these perfections are really in God, and that in the highest degree possible. In other cases you can love what appears amiable, you revere what is great and majestic, you eagerly desire and pursue what is valuable, and tends to your happiness; and all this you do freely, spontaneously, vigorously, by the innate inclination and tendency of your nature, without reluctance, without compulsion, nay, without persuasion; but as to God and all his perfections, you are strangely insensible, backward and averse. Where is there one being that has any confessed excellency in the compass of human knowledge, that does not engage more of the thoughts and affections of mankind than the glorious and ever blessed God? The sun, moon, and stars, have had more worshippers than the uncreated fountain of light, from which they derive their lustre. Kings,

and ministers of state, have more punctual homage and frequent applications made to them than the King of kings and Lord of lords. Created enjoyments are more eagerly pursued than the supreme Good. Search all the world over, and you will find but very little motions of heart towards God; little love, little desire, little searching after him. You will often, indeed, see him honoured with the compliment of a bended knee, and a few heartless words, under the name of a prayer; but where is the heart, or where are the thoughts, where the affections? These run wild through the world, and are scattered among a thousand other objects. The heart has no prevailing tendency towards God, the thoughts are shy of him, the affections have no innate propensity to him. In short, in this respect the whole man is out of order: here he does not at all act like himself; here are no affectionate thoughts, no delightful meditation, no ardent desires, no eager pursuits and vigorous endeavours; but all is listless, stupid, indisposed, inactive, and averse; and what is the matter? "Lord! what is this that has seized the souls of thine own offspring, that they are thus utterly disordered towards thee!" The reason is, they are dead, *dead in trespasses and sins*. It is impossible a living soul should be so stupid and unaffected with such an object: it must be a dead soul that has no feeling. Yes, sinners, this is the melancholy reason why you are so thoughtless, so unconcerned, so senseless about the God that made you; you are dead. And what is the reason that you, who have been begotten again to a spiritual life, and who are united to Christ as your vital head, what is the reason that you so often feel such languishments; that the pulse of spiritual life beats so faint and irregular, and that its motions are so feeble and slow? All this

you feel and lament, but how comes it to pass? what can be the cause that you who have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, and are sensible that he is all-glorious and lovely, and your only happiness. O! what can be the cause, that you, of all men in the world, should be so little engaged to him? Alas! the cause is you have been dead, and the deadly stupor has not yet left you: you have (blessed be the quickening spirit of Christ!) you have received a little life; but, alas! it is a feeble spark; it finds the principles of death still strong in your constitution: these it must straggle with, and by them it is often borne down, suppressed, and just expiring. Walk humbly, then, and remember your shame, that you were once dead, and children of wrath, even as others. The carelessness and indisposition of the soul towards the supreme Excellence will appear yet more evident and astonishing, if we consider,

II. The august and endearing relations the great and blessed God sustains to us, and the many ways he has taken to make dutiful and grateful impressions upon our hearts. What tender endearments are there contained in the relation of a Father! This he bears to us: *he made us, and not we ourselves.* Our bodies indeed are produced in a succession from Adam by generation, but who was it that began the series? It was the Almighty, who formed the first man of the dust: it was he who first put the succession of causes in motion; and therefore he is the grand original cause, and the whole chain depends upon him. Who was it that first established the laws of generation, and still continues them in force? It is the all-creating Parent of nature; and without him men would have been no more able to produce one another than stones or clods of earth. As to our souls, the prin-

incipal part of our persons, God is their immediate author, without the least concurrence of secondary causes. Hence he is called the Father of your spirits in a peculiar sense, Heb. xii. 9. and he assumes the endearing name of "the God of the spirits of all flesh." Numb. xvi. 22. Now the name of a father is wont to carry some endearment and authority. Children, especially in their young and helpless years, are fond of their father; their little hearts beat with a thousand grateful passions towards him; they love to be dandled on his knees, and fondled in his arms; and they fly to him upon every appearance of danger, but if God be a father, where is his honour? here, alas! the filial passions are senseless and immoveable. It is but a little time since we came from his creating hand, and yet we have forgotten him. It seems unnatural for his own offspring to inquire, "where is God my Maker?" They show no fondness for him, no affectionate veneration, and no humble confidence; their hearts are dead towards him, as though there were no such being, or no such near relation subsisting between them. In childhood a rattle, or a straw, or any trifle, is more thought of than their heavenly Father: in riper years their vain pleasures and secular pursuits command more of their affections than their divine original and only happiness.

Compare your natural temper towards your heavenly Father, and towards your earthly parents, and how wide is the difference! Nature works strong in your hearts towards them, but towards him all the filial passions are dull and dead; and why? alas! the reason is, *you are dead in trespasses and sins.* But this relation of a Father is not the only relation our God sustains to you: he is your supreme King, to whom you owe allegiance; your Lawgiver, whose will is the rule of your con-

duct; and your Judge, who will call you to an account, and reward or punish you according to your works; but how unnatural is it to men to revere the most high God under these august characters! Where is there a king upon earth, however weak or tyrannical, but is more regarded by his subjects than the King of heaven by the generality of men? Were ever such excellent laws contemned and violated? Did ever criminals treat their judge with so much neglect and contempt? And are these souls alive to God who thus treat him? No. Alas! "they are dead in trespasses and sins;" however lively they are towards other things, yet in this respect they are seized with a deadly stupor. God is also our Guardian and Deliverer; and from how many dangers has he preserved us! from how many calamities has he delivered us! Dangers, distresses, and deaths crowd upon us, and surround us in every age and every place: the air, the earth, the sea, and every element are pregnant with numberless principles of pain and death ready to seize and destroy us: sickness and death swarm around us: nay, they lie in ambush in our own constitution, and are perpetually undermining our lives, and yet our divine Guardian preserves us for months and years unhurt, untouched; or, if he suffers the calamity to fall, or death to threaten, he flies to our deliverance; and how many salvations of this kind has he wrought for us; salvations from accidents, from sicknesses, from pain, from sorrows, from death; salvations for our persons and our possessions, for ourselves, and for our friends and relations; salvations from dangers seen and unseen; salvations in infancy, in youth, and in maturer years! These things we cannot deny without the most stupid ignorance, and an atheistical disbelief of divine Providence. Now, such repeat-

ed, such long continued, such unmerited favours as these would not pass for nothing between man and man. We have hearts to feel such obligations; nay, the ten thousandth, the millionth part of such gracious care and goodness would be gratefully resented, and thankfully acknowledged. Indeed it is impossible we should receive even this small, this very small proportion of favours from men in comparison of what we receive from God; and even when they are the instruments of our deliverance, he is the original Author. But after all, is there a natural aptitude in the hearts of men to think of their gracious Guardian and Saviour? Does the principle of gratitude naturally lead them to love him, and to make thankful acknowledgments to him? Alas! no. They may indeed feel some transient, superficial workings of gratitude when under the fresh sense of some remarkable deliverance; but these impressions soon wear off, and they become as thoughtless and stupid as ever. But let a man, like yourselves, save you from some great distress, you will always gratefully remember him, think of him often with pleasure, and take all opportunities of returning his kindness, especially if your deliverer was much your superior, and independent upon you; if you had forfeited his favour, provoked him, and incurred his displeasure: great favours from such an one would make impressions upon the most obdurate heart.

But though God be infinitely superior to us, and it is nothing to him what becomes of us, though we have rebelled against him, and deserve his vengeance, yet ten thousand deliverances from his hands have little or no effect upon the hearts of men: all these cannot bring them to think of him, or love him as much as they do a friend, or a common benefactor of their own species: and does such

stupid ingratitude discover any spiritual life in them? No: they are dead in this respect, though they are all alive to those passions that terminate upon created objects. Farther, God is the Benefactor of mankind; not only in delivering them from dangers and calamities, but in bestowing unnumbered positive blessings upon them. Here I cannot pretend to be particular, for the list of blessings is endless; and it will be the happy employment of an eternity to recollect and enumerate them. What an extensive and well furnished world has our God formed for our accommodation! For us he has enriched the sun with light and heat, and the earth with fruitfulness. The numerous inhabitants of every element, the plants, minerals, and beasts of the earth, the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the air, are all rendering their service to man: some afford him food, and others work for him: the winds and seas, fire and water, stones and trees, all conspire to be useful to him. Our divine Benefactor crowns us with the blessings of liberty, of society, of friendship, and the most endearing relations: he preserves our health, gives us "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness." In short, he gives us life, and breath, and all things; every day, every hour, every moment has arrived to us richly freighted with blessings; blessings have resided with us at home, and attended us abroad; blessings presented themselves ready for our enjoyment as soon as we entered into the world; then God provided hands to receive us, knees to support us, breasts to suckle us, and parents to guard and cherish us; blessings have grown up with us, and given such constant attendance, that they are become familiar to us, and are the inseparable companions of our lives. It is no new or useful thing to us to see an

illustrious sun rising to give us the day, to enjoy repose in the night, to rise refreshed and vigorous in the morning, to see our tables spread with plenty, the trees covered with fruit, the fields with grain, and various forms of animals growing up for our support or service. These are such familiar blessings to us, that they too often seem things of course, or necessary appendages of our being. What a crowd of blessings have crowned the present morning! You and yours are alive and well, you have not come hither ghastly and pining with hunger, or agonizing with pain. How many refreshing draughts of air have you drawn this morning! how many sprightly and regular pulses have beat through your frame! how many easy motions have you performed with hands, feet, eyes, tongue, and other members of your body! and are not all these favours from God? Yes, undoubtedly; and thus has he gone on blessing you all your days, without any interruption at all in many of these particulars of kindness, and with but very little in the rest. Sinful and miserable as this world is, it is a treasury rich in blessings, a store-house full of provisions, a dwelling well furnished for the accommodation of mortals, and all by the care, and at the expense of that gracious God who first made and stills preserves it what it is. "Lord, whence is it then that the inhabitants forget and neglect thee, as though they were not at all obliged to thee? O! whence is it that they love thy gifts, and yet disregard the Giver? that they think less of thee than an earthly father or friend, or an human benefactor; that there should be so little gratitude towards thee, that of all benefactors thou shouldst be the least acknowledged; that the benefactors of nations, and even of private persons, in instances unworthy to be mentioned with those of thy good-

ness, should be celebrated, and even adored, while thou art neglected, thine agency overlooked, and thy goodness forgotten? O! whence is this strange phenomenon, this unaccountable, unprecedented stupidity and ingratitude in reasonable creatures? Surely, if they had any life, any sensation in this respect, they would not be capable of such a conduct; but they are dead, dead to all the generous sensations of gratitude to God: and as a dead corpse feels no gratitude to those that perform the last friendly office, and cover it with earth, so a dead soul stands unmoved under all the profusion of blessings which Heaven pours upon it.

The blessings I have mentioned, which are confined to the present state, are great, and deserve our wonder and thanksgiving. Especially considering that they are bestowed upon a race of rebellious, ungrateful creatures, who deserve the severest vengeance; but there is a set of blessings yet unmentioned, of infinitely greater importance, in which all others are swallowed up, by the glory of which they are obscured, like the stars of night by the rising sun. To some of our race God has given crowns and kingdoms. For Israel Jehovah wrought the most astonishing miracles; seas and rivers opened to make way for them; rocks burst into springs of water to quench their thirst; the clouds poured down manna, and fed them with bread from heaven; their God delivered Daniel from the jaws of hungry lions, and his three companions from the burning fiery furnace. He has restored health to the sick, sight to the blind, and life to the dead. These blessings and deliverances have something majestic and striking in them; and had we been the subjects of them, we could not but have regarded them as great and singular; but what are these in comparison of God's gift of his

Son, and the blessings he has purchased! his Son, who is of greater value, and dearer to him than ten thousand worlds; his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased; him has he given for us, given up for us, given up to three and thirty years of the most mortifying abasement, and an incessant conflict with the severest trials; given up to death, and all the ignominy and agonies of crucifixion. Thus has God loved our world! and never was there such a display of love in heaven or on earth. You can no more find love equal to this among creatures, than you can find among them the infinite power that formed the universe out of nothing. This will stand upon record to all eternity, as the unprecedented, unparalleled, inimitable love of God. And it appears the more illustrious when we consider that this unspeakable gift was given to sinners, to rebels, to enemies, that were so far from deserving it, that, on the other hand, it is a miracle of mercy that they are not all groaning forever under the tremendous weight of justice. O! that I could say something becoming this love; something that might do honour to it! but, alas! the language of mortals was formed for lower subjects. This love passes all description and all knowledge. Consider also what rich blessings Christ has purchased for us; purchased not with such corruptible things as silver and gold, but with his own precious blood: the price recommends and endears the blessings, though they are so great in themselves as to need no such recommendation. What can be greater or more suitable blessings to persons in our circumstances, than pardon for the guilty, redemption for slaves, righteousness and justification for the condemned, sanctification for the unholy, rest for the weary, comfort for mourners, the favour of God for rebels and exiles, strength for the impo-

tent, protection for the helpless, everlasting happiness for the heirs of hell, and, to sum up all, grace and glory, and every good thing, and all the unsearchable riches of Christ for the wretched and miserable, the poor, the blind, and naked! These are blessings indeed, and, in comparison of them, all the riches of the world are impoverished, and vanish to nothing; and all these blessings are published, offered freely, indefinitely offered to you, to me, to the greatest sinner on earth, in the gospel; and we are allowed,—allowed did I say? we are invited with the utmost importunity, entreated with the most compassionate tenderness and condescension, and commanded by the highest authority, upon pain of eternal damnation, to accept the blessings presented to us! And what reception does all this love meet with in our world! I tremble to think of it. It is plain, these things are proposed to a world dead in sin; for they are all still, all unmoved, all senseless under such a revelation of infinite grace; mankind know not what it is to be moved, melted, transported with the love of a crucified Saviour, till divine grace visits their hearts, and forms them into new creatures; they feel no eager solicitude, nay, not so much as a willingness to receive these blessings, till they become willing by almighty power: and judge ye, my brethren, whether they are not dead souls that are proof even against the love of God in Christ, that are not moved and melted by the agonies of his cross, that are careless about such inestimable blessings as these? Has that soul any spiritual life in it, that can sit senseless under the cross of Jesus, that can forget him, neglect him, dishonour him, after all his love and all his suffering: that feels a prevailing indifferency and languor towards him; that loves him less than an earthly friend, and

seeks him with less eagerness than gold and silver? Is not every generous passion, every principle of gratitude quite extinct in such a spirit? It may be alive to other objects, but towards this it is dead, and alas! is not this the common case? O look round the world, and what do you see but a general neglect of the blessed Jesus, and all the blessings of his gospel? How cold, how untoward, how reluctant, how averse are the hearts of men towards him? how hard to persuade them to think of him and love him? Try to persuade men to give over their sins which grieve him, dishonour him, and were the cause of his death; try to engage them to devote themselves entirely to him, and live to his glory, alas! you try in vain; their hearts still continue cold and hard as a stone; try to persuade them to murder or robbery, and you are more likely to prevail. Suffer me, in my astonishment, to repeat this most melancholy truth again; the generality of mankind are habitually careless about the blessed Jesus; they will not seek him, nor give their hearts and affections, though they must perish forever by their neglect of him! Astonishing, and most lamentable, that ever such perverseness and stupidity should seize the soul of man! Methinks I could here take up a lamentation over human nature, and fall on my knees with this prayer for my fellow men, "Father of spirits, and Lord of life, quicken, O quicken these dead souls!" O, sirs, while we see death all around us, and feel it benumbing our own souls, who can help the most bitter wailing and lamentation! who can restrain himself from crying to the great Author of life for a happy resurrection! While the valley of dry bones lies before me, while the carnage, the charnel-house of immortal souls strikes my sight all around me far and wide, how can I forbear crying, *Come from the four winds, O breath,*

breathe upon these slain, that they may live. But to turn from this digression, into which I was unavoidably hurried by the horror of the subject, I would observe farther, that kind usage and pleasing treatment may not be always best for such creatures as we are: fatherly severities and chastisements, though not agreeable to us, yet may be necessary and conducive to our greatest good. Accordingly, God has tried the force of chastisements to make impressions on our hearts: these indeed have been but few in comparison of his more agreeable dispensations; yet recollect whether you have not frequently felt his rod. Have you not languished under sickness and pain, and been brought within a near view of the king of terrors? Have you not suffered the bereavement of friends and relations, and met with losses, adversity, and disappointments? Others have felt still greater calamities in a closer succession, and with fewer mercies intermixed. These things, one would think, would immediately bring men to regard the hand that smites them, and make them sensible of their undutiful conduct, which has procured the correction; these are like the application of fire to one in a lethargy, to awaken him to life; but alas! under all these afflictions, the stupor and insensibility still remain. Sinners groan by reason of oppression, but it is not natural for them to inquire, *Where is God my Maker, that giveth songs in the night?* It is not natural for them to repent of their undutiful conduct and amend; or if they are awaked to some little sense, while the painful rod of the Almighty is yet upon them, as soon as it is removed they become as hardened and senseless as ever. And is not a state of death a very proper representation of such sullen, incorrigible stupidity? Living souls have very tender sensations; one touch of their

heavenly Father's hand makes deep impressions upon them; they tremble at his frown, they fall and weep at his feet, they confess their offences, and mourn over them; they fly to the arms of mercy to escape the impending blow; and thus would all do were they not quite destitute of spiritual life.

I have materials sufficient for a discourse of some hours; but at present I must abruptly drop the subject: however, I cannot dismiss you without making a few reflections. And,

1. What a strange, affecting view does this subject give us of this assembly! I doubt not but I may accommodate the text to some of you with this agreeable addition, "You hath he quickened, though you were once dead in trespasses and sins." Though the vital pulse beats faint and irregular, and your spiritual life is but very low, yet, blessed be God, you are not entirely dead: you have some living sensations, some lively and vigorous exercises in religion. On the other hand, I doubt not but some of you not only were, but still are *dead in trespasses and sins*. It is not to be expected in our world, at least not before the millennium, that we shall see such a mixed company together, and all living souls. Here then is the difference between you; some of you are spiritually alive, and some of you are spiritually dead: here the living and the dead are blended together in the same assembly, on the same seat, and united in the nearest relations: here sits a dead soul, there another, and there another, and a few living souls are scattered here and there among them: here is a dead parent and a living child; or a dead child and a living parent: here life and death (O shocking!) are united in the bonds of conjugal love, and dwell under the same roof: here is a dead servant and a living master: and there a dead master (O terrible!) commands a living ser-

vant. Should I trace the distinction beyond this assembly into the world, we shall find a family here and there that have a little life; perhaps one, perhaps two, discover some vital symptoms; but O what crowds of dead families! all dead together, and no endeavours used to bring one another to life; a death-like silence about eternal things; a deadly stupor and insensibility reign among them; they breathe out no desires and prayers after God, nor does the vital pulse of love beat in their heart towards him; but, on the contrary, their souls are putrifying in sin, which is very emphatically called *corruption* by the sacred writers; they are overrun and devoured by their lusts, as worms insult and destroy the dead body. Call to them, they will not awake; thunder the terrors of the Lord in their ears, they will not hear; offer them all the blessings of the gospel, they will not stretch out the hand of faith to receive them: lay the word of God, the bread of life, before them, they have no appetite for it. In short, the plain symptoms of death are upon them: the animal is alive, but alas! the spirit is dead towards God. And what an affecting, melancholy view does this give of this assembly, and of the world in general! *O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!* Weep not for the afflicted, weep not over ghastly corpses dissolving into their original dust, but O! weep for dead souls. Should God now strike all those persons dead in this assembly, whose souls are *dead in trespasses and sins*, should he lay them all in pale corpses before us, like Ananias and Sapphira at the apostles' feet, what numbers of you would never return from this house more, and what lamentations would there be among the surviving few! One would

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lose a husband or a wife, another a son or a daughter, another a father or a mother; alas! would not some whole families be swept off together, all blended in one promiscuous death! Such a sight as this would strike terror into the hardest heart among you. But what is this to a company of rational spirits slain and dead in trespasses and sins? How deplorable and inexpressibly melancholy a sight this! Therefore,

2. *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, that Christ may give thee light.* This call is directed to you, dead sinners; which is a sufficient warrant for me to exhort and persuade you. The principle of reason is still alive in you; you are also sensible of your own interest, and feel the workings of self-love. It is God alone that can quicken you, but he effects this by a power that does not exclude, but attends rational instructions and persuasions to your understanding. Therefore, though I am sure you will continue dead still if left to yourselves, yet with some trembling hopes that his power may accompany my feeble words, and impregnate them with life, I call upon, I entreat, I charge you sinners to rouse yourselves out of your dead sleep, and seek to obtain spiritual life. Now, while my voice sounds in your ears, now, this moment, waft up this prayer, "Lord, pity a dead soul, a soul that has been dead for ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, or more and lain corrupting in sin, and say unto me, "Live: from this moment let me live unto thee." Let this prayer be still upon your hearts; keep your souls always in a supplicating posture, and who knows but that he, who raised Lazarus from the grave, may give you a spiritual resurrection to a more important life? But if you wilfully continue your security, expect in a little time to suffer the second death; the mor-

tification will become incurable; and then, though you will be still dead to God, yet you will be “tremblingly alive all over” to the sensations of pain and torture. O that I could but gain this one request of you, which your own interest so strongly enforces! but alas! it has been so often refused, that to expect to prevail is to hope against hope.

Let the children of God be sensible of their great happiness in being made spiritually alive. Life is a principle, a capacity necessary for enjoyments of any kind. Without animal life you would be as incapable of animal pleasures as a stone or a clod; and without spiritual life you can no more enjoy the happiness of heaven than a beast or a devil. This therefore is a preparative a previous qualification, and a sure pledge and earnest of everlasting life. How highly then are you distinguished, and what cause have you for gratitude and praise!

4. Let us all be sensible of this important truth, that it is entirely by grace we are saved. This is the inference the apostle expressly makes from this doctrine: and he is so full of it, that he throws it into a parenthesis, (verse the 5th,) though it breaks the connexion of his discourse; and as soon as he has room he resumes it again (verse 8th,) and repeats it over and over, in various forms, in the compass of a few verses. *By grace ye are saved.—By grace are you saved through faith.—It is the gift of God;—not of yourselves,—not of works.* (verse 9th.) This, you see, is an inference that seemed of great importance to the apostle; and what can more naturally follow from the premises? If we were once dead in sin, certainly it is owing to the freest grace that we have been quickened; therefore, when we survey the change, let us cry, “Grace, grace unto it.”

SERMON V.**THE NATURE AND PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE.**

EPHES. II. 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.*

IT is not my usual method to weary your attention by a long confinement to one subject; and our religion furnishes us with such a boundless variety of important topics, that a minister who makes them his study will find no temptation to cloy you with repetitions, but rather finds it difficult to speak so concisely on one subject, as to leave room for others of equal importance; however the subject of my last discourse was so copious and interesting, that I cannot dismiss it without a supplement. I there showed you some of the symptoms of spiritual death; but I would not leave you dead as I found you; and therefore I intend now to consider the counterpart of that subject, and shew you the nature and symptoms of spiritual life.

I doubt not but a number of you have been made alive to God by his quickening spirit; but many, I fear, still continue *dead in trespasses and sins*; and, while such are around me, I cannot help imagining my situation something like that of the prophet Ezekiel (chap. xxxvii.) in the midst of the valley full of dry bones, spread far and wide around him: and should I be asked, *Can these dry bones, can these dead souls live?* I must answer with him,—*O Lord God, thou knowest.* “Lord, I see no symptoms of life in them, no tendency towards it. I know nothing is impossible to thee; I firmly be-

lieve thou canst inspire them with life, dry and dead as they are; and what thy designs are towards them, whether thou intendest to exert thy all-quickenings power upon them, thou only knowest, and I would not presume to determine; but this I know, that, if they are left to themselves, **they will continue dead to all eternity; for, O Lord, the experiment has been repeatedly tried; thy servant has over and over made those quickening applications to them, which thy word, that sacred dispensary, prescribes; but all in vain: they still continue dead towards thee, and lie putrifying more and more in trespasses and sins: however, at thy command, I would attempt the most unpromising undertaking; I would proclaim even unto dry bones and dead souls, *O ye dry bones, O ye dead souls, hear the word of the Lord. Ezek. xxxvii. 4. I would also cry aloud for the animating breath of the Holy Spirit, Come from the four winds and breathe; breathe upon these slain, that they may live. v. 9.***

Ye dead sinners, I would make one attempt more in the name of the Lord to bring you to life; and if I have the least hope of success, it is entirely owing to the encouraging peradventure that the quickening spirit of Christ may work upon your hearts while I am addressing myself to your ears. And, O sirs, let us all keep our souls in a praying posture, throughout this discourse. If one of you should fall into a swoon or an apoplexy, how would all about you bestir themselves to bring you to life again! And alas! shall dead souls lie so thick among us, in every assembly, in every family; and shall no means be used for their recovery? Did Martha and Mary apply to Jesus with all the arts of importunity in behalf of their sick and deceased brother, and are there not some of you that have

dead relations, dead friends and neighbours, I mean dead in the worst sense, "dead in trespasses and sins!" and will you not apply to Jesus, the Lord of life, and follow him with your importunate cries, till he come and call them to life? Now let parents turn intercessors for their children, children for their parents, friend for friend, neighbour for neighbour, yea enemy for enemy. O! should we all take this method, we might soon expect to see the valley of dry bones full of living souls, an *exceeding great army*. Ezek. xxxvii. 10.

In praying for this great and glorious event, you do not pray for an impossibility. Thousands, as dead as they, have obtained a joyful resurrection by the power of God. Here in my text you have an instance of a promiscuous crowd of Jews and Gentiles that had lain dead in sin together, and even St. Paul among them, who were recovered to life, and are now enjoying an immortal life in the heavenly regions; and, blessed be God, this spiritual life is not entirely extinct among us. Among the multitudes of dead souls that we every where meet with, we find here and there a soul that has very different symptoms: once indeed it was like the rest; but now, while they are quite senseless of divine things, and have no vital aspirations after God, this soul cannot be content with the richest affluence of created enjoyments; it pants and breathes after God; it feeds upon his word, it feels an almighty energy in eternal things, and receives vital sensations from them. It discovers life and vigour in devotion, and serves the living God with pleasure, though it is also subject to fits of languishment, and at times seems just expiring, and to lose all sensation. And whence is this vast difference? Why is this soul so different from what it once was, and what thousands around still are?

Why can it not, like them, and like itself formerly, lie dead and senseless in sin, without any vital impressions or experiences from God or divine things? The reason is, the happy reason, my brethren, is, this is a living soul: "God, out of the great love wherewith he loved it, hath quickened it together with Christ," and hence it is alive to him.

My present design is to explain the nature and properties of this divine life, and to shew you the manner in which it is usually begun in the soul: I shall open with the consideration of the last particular.

Here you must observe, that, though spiritual life is instantaneously infused, yet God prepares the soul for its reception by a course of previous operations. He spent six days in the creation of the world, though he might have spoken it into being in an instant.—Thus he usually creates the soul anew after a gradual process of preparatory actions. In forming the first man, he first created chaos out of nothing, then he digested it into earth; on the sixth day he formed and organized the earth into a body, with all its endless variety of members, juices, muscles, fibres, veins, and arteries; and then, after this process, he inspired it with a living soul; and what was but a lump of clay, sprung up a perfect man. Thus also the foetus in the womb is for some months in formation before the soul or the principle of life is infused. In like manner the Almighty proceeds in quickening us with spiritual life; we all pass through a course of preparation, though some through a longer, and some shorter. And as one reason why the great creator took up so much time in the creation of the world, probably was, that he might allow the angels time for leisurely surveys of the astonishing process, so he may advance thus gradually

in the new creation, that we may observe the various steps of the operation, and make proper reflections upon it in future life. My present design is to trace these steps to their grand result, that you may know whether ever divine grace has carried you through this gracious process.

And that you may not fall into needless perplexities, it may be necessary for me to premise farther, that there is a great variety in these preparatory operations, and in the degrees of spiritual life. Indeed the difference is only circumstantial, for the work is substantially the same, and spiritual life is substantially the same in all; but then, in such circumstances as the length of time, the particular external means, the degree of previous terror, and of subsequent joy and vitality, &c. God exercises a sovereign freedom, and shews that he has a variety of ways by which to accomplish his end; and it is no matter how we obtain it, if we have but spiritual life. I shall therefore endeavour to confine myself to the substance of this work, without its peculiarities in different subjects; and when I cannot avoid descending to particulars, I shall endeavour so to diversify them, as that they may be easily adapted to the various cases of different christians. To draw their common lineaments, whereby they may be distinguished from all others, is sufficient to my present purpose; whereas, to draw the particular lineaments, or peculiar features, whereby they may be distinguished from one another, is a very difficult task, and cannot be of any great service to what I have now in design.

I have only one thing more to premise, and that is, that the way by which divine grace prepares a sinner for spiritual life, is by working upon all the principles of the rational life, and exciting him to

exert them to the utmost to obtain it. Here it is proper for you to recollect what I observed in my last discourse, that even a sinner dead in trespasses and sins is alive, and capable of action in other respects: he can not only perform the actions, and feel the sensations of animal life, but he can also exercise his intellectual powers about intellectual objects, and even about divine things: he is capable of thinking of these, and of receiving some impressions from them: he is also capable of attending upon the ordinances of the gospel, and performing the external duties of religion. These things a sinner may do, and yet be dead in sin. Indeed he will not exercise his natural powers about these things while left to himself: he has the power, but then he has no disposition to employ it: he is indeed capable of meditating upon spiritual things, but what does this avail when he will not turn his mind to such objects? or if he does, he considers them as mere speculations, and not as the most interesting and important realities. How few, or how superficial and unaffecting are a sinner's thoughts of them! Heaven and hell are objects that may strike the passions, and raise the joys and fears of a natural man, but in general he is little or nothing impressed with them. He is capable of prayer, hearing, and using the means of grace: but I believe, if you make observations upon the conduct of mankind, that you will find they are but seldom employed in these duties, or that they perform them in such a careless manner, that they have no tendency to answer the end of their institution: In short, the more I know of mankind, I have the lower opinion of what they will do in religion when left to themselves. They have a natural power, and we have seen all possible means used with them to excite them to put it forth; but

alas! all is in vain, and nothing will be done to the purpose till God stir them up to exert their natural abilities; and this he performs as a preparative for spiritual life. He brings the sinner to exert all his active powers in seeking this divine principle: nature does her utmost, and all outward means are tried before a supernatural principle is implanted.

The evangelist John has given us the history of the resurrection of the dead body of Lazarus after it had been four days in the grave; and I would now give you the history of a more glorious resurrection, the resurrection of a soul that had lain dead for months and years, and yet is at last quickened by the same almighty power with a divine and immortal life.

Should I exemplify it by a particular instance, I might fix upon this or that person in this assembly, and remind you, and inform others, of the process of this work in your souls. And Oh! how happy are such of you, that you may be produced as instances in this case!

You lay for ten, twenty, thirty years, or more, dead in trespasses and sins; you did not breathe and pant like a living soul after God and holiness; you had little more sense of the burden of sin than a corpse of the pressure of a mountain; you had no appetite for the living bread that came down from heaven; the vital pulse of sacred passions did not beat in your hearts towards God and divine things, but you lay putrifying in sin; filthy lusts preyed upon you like worms on the bodies of the dead; you spread the contagion of sin around you by your conversation and example, like the stench and corrupt effluvia of a rotten carcass; you were odious and abominable to God, fit to be shut up in the infernal pit out of his sight; and you were ob-

jects of horror and lamentation to all that knew and daily considered your case, your deplorable case. During this time many quickening applications were made to you; you had friends that used all means to bring you to life again; but alas! all in vain; conscience proved your friend, and pierced and chafed you, to bring you to some feeling, but you remained still senseless, or the symptoms of life soon vanished.—God did not cast you away as irrecoverably dead, but stirred and agitated you within, and struggled long with the principles of death to subdue them: and if it was your happy lot to live under a faithful ministry, the living oracles that contain the seeds of the divine life were applied to you with care and solicitude. The terrors of the Lord were thundered in your ears to awaken you. The experiment of a Saviour's dying love, and the rich grace of the gospel, were repeatedly tried upon you: now you were carried within hearing of the heavenly music, and within sight of the glories of Paradise, to try if these would charm you; now you were, as it were, held over the flames of hell, that they might by their pungent pains scorch and startle you into life. Providence also concurred with these applications, and tried to recover you by mercies and judgments, sickness and health, losses and possessions, disappointments and successes, threatenings and deliverances. If it was your unhappy lot to lie among dead souls like yourself, you had indeed but little pity from them, nay, they and Satan were plying you with their opiates and poison to confirm the deadly sleep. And O! how astonishing is it that you should be quickened in a charnel-house, in the mansions of the dead, with dead souls lying all around you! But if it was your happiness to be in the society of the living, they pitied

you, they stirred and agitated you with their warnings and persuasions, they, like Martha and Mary in behalf of their deceased brother, went to Jesus with their cries and importunities, "Lord, my child, my parent, my servant, my neighbour is dead, O come and restore him to life! Lord, if thou hadst been here, he would not have died; but even now I know it is not too late for thee to raise him." Thus, when one is dead in our heavenly Father's family, the whole house should be alarmed, and all the domestics be busy in trying to bring him to life again. But, O! reflect with shame and sorrow how long all these quickening applications were in vain; you still lay in a dead sleep, or, if at times you seemed to move, and gave us hopes you were coming to life again, you soon relapsed, and grew as senseless as ever. And alas! are there not some of you in this condition to this very moment? O deplorable sight! May the hour come, and O that this may be the hour, in which such dead souls *shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live.* John v. 25.

But as to such of you in whom I would exemplify this history of a spiritual resurrection when your case was thus deplorable, and seemingly helpless, the happy hour, the time of love came, when you must live. When all these applications had been unsuccessful, the all-quickening spirit of God determined to exert more of his energy, and work more effectually upon you. Perhaps a verse in your Bible, a sentence in a sermon, an alarming Providence, the conversation of a pious friend, or something that unexpectedly occurred to your own thoughts, first struck your minds with unusual force; you found you could not harden yourselves against it as you were wont to do; it was attended with a power you never before had felt,

and which you could not resist: this made you thoughtful and pensive, and turned your minds to objects that you were wont to neglect; this made you stand and pause, and think of the state of your neglected souls; you began to fear matters were wrong with you; “What will become of me when I leave this world? Where shall I reside forever? Am I prepared for the eternal world? How have I spent my life?” These, and the like inquiries put you to a stand, and you could not pass over them so superficially as you were wont to do; your sins now appeared to you in a new light; you were shocked and surprised at their malignant nature, their number, their aggravations, and their dreadful consequences. The great God, whom you were wont to neglect, appeared to you as a Being that demanded your regard; you saw he was indeed a venerable, awful, majestic Being, with whom you had the most important concern: in short, you saw that such a life as you had led would never bring you to heaven: you saw you must make religion more your business than you had ever done, and hereupon you altered your former course: you broke off from several of your vices, you deserted your extravagant company, and you began to frequent the throne of grace, to study religion, and to attend upon its institutions; and this you did with some degree of earnestness and solicitude.

When you were thus reformed, you began to flatter yourselves that you had escaped out of your dangerous condition, and secured the divine favour: now you began to view yourselves with secret self-applause as true christians; but all this time the reformation was only outward, and there was no new principle of a divine supernatural life implanted in your hearts: you had not the generous passions and sensations of living souls towards God,

but acted entirely from natural, selfish principles: you had no clear heart-affecting views of the intrinsic evil, and odious nature of sin, considered in itself, nor of the entire universal corruption of your nature, and the necessity not only of adorning your outer man by an external reformation, but of an inward change of heart by the almighty power of God: you were not deeply sensible of the extent and spirituality of the divine law, nor of the infinite purity and inexorable justice of the Deity: you had no love for religion and virtue for their own sakes, but only on account of their happy consequences. Indeed your love of novelty and a regard to your own happiness might so work upon you, for a time, that you might have very raised and delightful passions in religious duties; but all your religion at that time was a mere system of selfishness, and you had no generous disinterested delight in holiness for its own excellency, nor did you heartily relish the strictness of pure, living religion: you were also under the government of a self-righteous spirit: your own good works were the ground of your hopes, and you had no relish for the mortifying doctrine of salvation through the mere mercy of God and the righteousness of Jesus Christ: though your education taught you to acknowledge Christ as the only Saviour, and ascribe all your hopes to his death, yet in reality he was of very little importance in your religion; he had but little place in your heart and affections, even when you urged his name as your only plea at the throne of grace: in short, you had not the spirit of the gospel, nor any spiritual life within you. And this is all the religion with which multitudes are contented: with this they obtain a name that they live; but in the sight of God, and in reality, they are dead; and had you been suffered

to rest here, according to your own desire, you would have been dead still.

But God, who is rich (O how inconceivably rich!) in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved you, resolved to carry on his work in you; and therefore, while you were flattering yourselves, and elated with a proud conceit of a happy change in your condition, he surprised you with a very different view of your case; he opened your eyes farther, and then you saw, you felt those things of which till then you had but little sense or apprehension; such as the corruption of your hearts, the awful strictness of the divine law, your utter inability to yield perfect obedience, and the necessity of an inward change of the inclinations and relishes of your soul. These, and a great many other things of a like nature, broke in upon your minds with striking evidence and a kind of almighty energy; and now you saw you were still "dead in sin," weak, indisposed, averse towards spiritual things, and "dead in law," condemned to everlasting death and misery by its righteous sentence: now you set about the duties of religion with more earnestness than ever; now you prayed, you heard, and used the other means of grace as for your life, for you saw that your eternal life was indeed at stake; and now, when you put the matter to a thorough trial, you were more sensible than ever of your own weakness, and the difficulties in your way. "O! who would have thought my heart had been so depraved that it should thus fly off from God, and struggle and reluctate against returning to him?" such was then your language. Alas! you found yourselves quite helpless, and all your efforts feeble and ineffectual; then you perceived yourselves really dead in sin, and that you must continue so to all eternity, unless quickened by a

power infinitely superior to your own; not that you lay slothful and inactive at this time; no, never did you exert yourselves so vigorously in all your life, never did you besiege the throne of grace with such earnest importunity, never did you hear and read with such eager attention, or make such a vigorous resistance against sin and temptation: all your natural powers were exerted to the highest pitch, for now you saw your case required it: but you found all your most vigorous endeavours insufficient, and you were sensible that, without the assistance of a superior power, the work of religion could never be effected.

Now you were reduced very low indeed. While you imagined you could render yourselves safe by a reformation in your own power, you were not much alarmed at your condition, though you saw it bad. But O! to feel yourselves dead in sin, and that you cannot help yourselves; to see yourselves in a state of condemnation, liable to execution every moment, and yet to find all your own endeavors utterly insufficient to relieve you; to be obliged, after all you had done, to lie at mercy, and confess that you were as deserving of everlasting punishment as ever the most notorious criminal was of the stroke of public justice; this was a state of extreme dejection, terror, and anxiety indeed. The proud, self-confident creature was never thoroughly mortified and humbled till now, when he is slain by the law, and entirely cut off from all hopes from himself.

And now, finding you could not save yourselves, you began to cast about you, and look out for another to save you; now you were more sensible than ever of the absolute need of Jesus; and you cried and reached after him, and stirred up yourselves to take hold of him. The gospel brought

the free offer of him to your ears, and you would fain have accepted of him: but here new difficulties arose. Alas! you did not think yourselves good enough to accept of him, and hence you took a great deal of fruitless pains to make yourselves better: you also found your hearts strangely averse to the gospel-method of salvation, and, though a sense of your necessity made you try to work up yourselves to an approbation of it, yet you could not affectionately acquiesce in it, and cordially relish it.

And now, how melancholy was your situation! you were "shut up to the faith," Gal. iii. 23. there was no other possible way of escape, and yet, alas! you could not take this way: now you were ready to cry, "I am cut off: my strength and my hope are perished from the Lord;" but, blessed be God, he did not leave you in this condition. Man's extremity of distress is God's opportunity for relief and salvation; and so you found it.

Now the process of preparatory operations is just come to a result. Now it is time for God to work, for nature has done her utmost, and has been found utterly insufficient; now it is proper a divine supernatural principle should be infused; for all the principles of nature have failed, and the proud sinner is obliged to own it, and stand still, and see the salvation of God. In this situation you wanted nothing but such a divine principle to make you living christians indeed. These preparatives were like the taking away the stone from the sepulchre of Lazarus, which was a prelude of that almighty voice which called him from the dead. Now you appear to me like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, in one stage of the operation. After there had been a noise, and a shaking among them, and the bones had come together, bone to his bone;

I beheld, says he, and lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them; Ezek. xxxvii. 8. this was all that was wanting to make them living men. In like manner you at this time had the external appearance of christians, but you had no divine supernatural life in you; you were but the fair carcasses of christians; your religion had a body completely formed, but it had no soul in it; and, had the holy Spirit now given over his work, you would have continued dead still.

But now the important crisis is come, when he who stood over the grave of Lazarus, and pronounced the life-restoring mandate, *Lazarus come forth*; when he who breathed into Adam the breath of life, and made him a living soul; I say, now the crisis is come, when he will implant the principles of life in your souls; suddenly you feel the amazing change, and find you are acting from principles entirely new to you: for now your hearts that were wont to reluctate, and start back from God, rise to him with the strongest aspirations: now the way of salvation through Christ, which you could never relish before, appears all amiable and glorious, and captivates your whole souls. Holiness has lovely and powerful charms, which captivate you to the most willing obedience, notwithstanding your former disgust to it; and, though once you were enamoured with sin, or disliked it only because you could not indulge it with impunity, it now appears to you a mere mass of corruption and deformity, an abominable thing, which you hate above all other things on earth or in hell. At this juncture you were animated with a new life in every faculty of your souls, and hereupon you felt the instincts, the appetites, the sympathies and antipathies of a new life, a divine life, justly styled

by the apostle *the life of God*; the life of God in the soul of man. The pulse of sacred passions began to beat towards spiritual objects; the vital warmth of love spread itself through your whole frame; you breathed out your desires and prayers before God; like a new-born infant you began to cry after him, and at times you have learned to lisp his name with filial endearment, and cry *Abba, Father*; you hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and as every kind of life must have its proper nourishment, so your spiritual life fed upon Christ the living bread, and the sincere milk of his word. You also felt a new set of sensations; divine things now made deep and tender impressions upon you; the great realities of religion and eternity now affected you in a manner unknown before; you likewise found your souls actuated with life and vigour in the service of God, and in the duties you owed to mankind. This strange alteration, no doubt, filled you with surprise and amazement, something like that of Adam when he found himself start into life out of his eternal non-existence. With these new sensations every thing appeared to you in a quite different light, and you could not but wonder that you had never perceived them in that manner before.

Thus, my dear brethren, when you were even dead in sin, God quickened you together with Christ. It is true, the principle of life might be very weak at first, like the life of a new-born infant, or a foetus just animated in the womb; nay, it may be but very weak still, and at times may languish, and seem just expiring in the agonies of death; but, blessed be the quickening spirit of Christ, since the happy hour of your resurrection you have never been, and you never will be to all eternity, what you once were, "dead in trespasses"

and sins." Should I give you your own history since that time, it would be to this purpose, and you will discern many symptoms of life in it. You have often known what sickness of soul is, as well as of body; and sometimes it has risen to such a height as to endanger your spiritual life. The seeds of sin, that still lurk in your constitution, like the principles of death, or a deadly poison circulating through your veins, have often struggled for the mastery, and cast you into languishing or violent disorders; then was the divine life oppressed, and you could not freely draw the breath of prayer and pious desires; you lost the appetite for the word of God, and what you received did not digest well and turn to kindly nourishment; the pulse of sacred passions beat faint and irregular, the vital heat decayed, and you felt a death-like cold creeping upon you and benumbing you. Sometimes you have been afflicted, perhaps, with convulsions of violent and outrageous passions, with the dropsy of insatiable desires after things below, with the lethargy of carnal security, or the fever of lust; at other times you have felt an universal disorder through your whole frame, and you hardly knew what ailed you, only you were sure your souls were not well; but perhaps your most common disorder that seizes you is a kind of consumption, a lowness of spirits, a langour and weakness, the want of appetite for your spiritual food, or perhaps a nausea and disgust towards it; you also live in a country very unwholesome to living souls; you dwell among the dead, and catch contagion from the conversation of those around you, and this heightens the disorder: and further, that old serpent the devil labours to infect you with this deadly poison, and increase the peccant humours by his temptations: at such times you can hardly

feel any workings of spiritual life in you, and you fear you are entirely dead; but examine strictly, and you will discover some vital symptoms even in this bad habit of soul; for does not your new nature exert itself to work off the disorder? Are not your spirits in a ferment, and do you not feel yourselves in exquisite pain, or at least greatly uneasy? Give all the world to a sick man, and he despises it all: "O give me my health," says he, "or you give me nothing." So it is with you; nothing can content you while your souls are thus out of order. Do you not long for their recovery, that you may go about your business again; I mean that you may engage in the service of God with all the vigour of health? and do you not apply to Christ as your only physician in this condition? And O! what an healing balm is his blood! what a reviving cordial in his love! and how kindly does his spirit purge off the corrupt humours, and subdue the principles of sin and death! Has not experience taught you the meaning of the apostle, when he says, *Christ is our life: and I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*, Gal ii. 20. Do you not perceive that Christ is your vital head, and that you revive or languish just as he communicates or withholds his influence? And have you not been taught in the same way what is the meaning of that expression so often repeated, *The just shall live by faith?* Heb. ii. 4. Do you not find that faith is, as it were, the grand artery by which you derive life from Christ, and by which it is circulated through your whole frame; and that when faith languishes, then you weaken, pine away, and perhaps fall into a swoon, as though you were quite dead? Are you not careful of the health of your souls? You endeavour to keep them warm with the love of God; you shun those sickly regions as far as you can, where the

example and conversation of the wicked spread their deadly infection, and you love to dwell among living souls, and breathe in their wholesome air. Upon the whole, it is evident, notwithstanding your frequent indispositions, you have some life within you: life takes occasion to shew itself even from your disorders. It is a plain symptom of it, that you have something within you that makes such a vigorous resistance against the principles of sin and death, and throws your whole frame into a ferment, till it has wrought off the distemper. In short, you have the sensations, the sympathies and antipathies, the pleasures and pains of living souls.

And is it so indeed? Then from this moment begin to rejoice and bless the Lord, who raised you to spiritual life. O let the hearts he has quickened beat with his love; let the lips he has opened, when quivering in death, speak his praise, and devote that life to him which he has given you, and which he still supports!

Consider what a divine and noble kind of life he has given you. It is a capacity and aptitude for the most exalted and divine services and enjoyments. Now you have a relish for the Supreme Good as your happiness, the only proper food for your immortal souls, and he will not suffer you to hunger and thirst in vain, but will satisfy the appetites he has implanted in your nature. You have some spirit and life in his service, and are not like the dead souls around you, that are all alive towards other objects, but absolutely dead towards him: you have also noble and exalted sensations; you are capable of a set of pleasures of a more refined and sublime nature than what are relished by groveling sinners. From your inmost souls you detest and nauseate whatever is mean, base, and abominable,

and you can feast on what is pure, amiable, excellent, and worthy of your love. Your vitiated taste for trash and poison is cured, and you feed upon heavenly bread, upon food agreeable to the constitution of your spiritual nature; and hence you may infer your meetness for the heavenly world, that region of perfect vitality. You have a disposition for its enjoyments and services, and this is the grand preparative. God will not encumber the heaven of his glory with dead souls, nor infect the pure salubrious air of paradise with the poison of their corruption; but the everlasting doors are always open for living souls, and not one of them shall ever be excluded; nay, the life of heaven is already within you; the life that reigns with immortal health and vigour above, is the very same with that which works in your breasts; only there it is arrived to maturity and perfection, and here it is in its rudiments and weakness. Your animal life, which was hardly perceivable in the womb, was the very same with that which now possesses you, only now it is come to perfection. Thus you are now angels in embryo, the fœtus (might I be allowed the expression,) of glorified immortals; and when you are born out of the womb of time into the eternal world, this feeble spark of spiritual life will kindle and blaze, and render you as active and vigorous as “the rapt seraph that adores and burns.” Then you will fear no more weakness, no more languors, no more qualms of indisposition; the poison of temptation, and the contagion of bad example cannot reach you there; and the inward seeds of sickness and death will be purged entirely out of your souls: you will be got quite out of the sickly country, and breathe a pure reviving air, the natural element of your souls. There you will find the fountain, yea, whole rivers

of the waters of life, of which you will drink in large draughts forever and ever, and which will inspire you with immortal life and vigour. O how happy are you in this single gift of spiritual life! this is a life that cannot perish, even in the ruins of the world. What though you must ere long yield your mortal bodies and animal life to death and rottenness? your most important life is immortal, and subject to no such dissolution; and therefore be courageous in the name of the Lord, and bid defiance to all the calamities of life, and all the terrors of death; for *your life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory.* Col. iii. 3, 4.

I would willingly go on in this strain, and leave the pulpit with a relish of these delightful truths upon my spirit; but, alas! I must turn my address to another set of persons in this assembly; but "where is the Lord God of Elijah," who restored the Shunamite's son to life by means of that prophet? I am going to call to the dead, and I know they will not hear, unless he attend my feeble voice with his almighty power. I would pray over you like Elijah over the dead child, *O Lord God, let this sinner's life come into him again.* 1 Kings xvii. 21. Are not the living and the dead promiscuously blended in this assembly? Here is a dead soul, there another, and there another all over the house; and here and there a few living souls thinly scattered among them. Have you ever been carried through such a preparatory process as I have described? or if you are uncertain about this, as some may be who are animated with spiritual life, inquire, have you the feelings, the appetites and aversions, the pleasing and the painful sensations of living souls? Methinks conscience breaks its silence

in some of you, whether you will or not, and cries, "O no; there is not a spark of life in this breast."

Well, my poor deceased friends (for so I may call you,) I hope you will seriously attend to what I am going seriously to say to you. I have no bad design upon you, but only to restore you to life. And though your case is really discouraging, yet I hope it is not quite desperate. The principles of nature, reason, self-love, joy, and fear are still alive in you, and you are capable of some application to divine things. And, as I told you, it is upon the principles of nature that God is wont to work; to prepare the soul for the infusion of a supernatural life. And these I would now work upon, in hopes you are not proof against considerations of the greatest weight and energy, I earnestly beg you would lay to heart such things as these.

Can you content yourselves with an animal life, the life of beasts, with that superfluity, reason, just to render you a more ingenious and self-tormenting kind of brutes; more artful in gratifying your sordid appetites, and yet still uneasy for want of an unknown something; a care that the brutal world, being destitute of reason, are unmeddled with? O! have you no ambition to be animated with a divine immortal life, the life of God?

Can you be contented with a mere temporal life, when your souls must exist forever? That infinite world beyond the grave is replenished with nothing but the terrors of death to you, if you are destitute of spiritual life. And O can you bear the thought of residing among its grim and ghastly terrors forever?

Are you contented to be cut off from God, as a mortified member from the body, and to be banished forever from all the joys of his presence? You cannot be admitted to heaven without spiritual

life. Hell is the sepulchre for dead souls, and thither you must be sent, if you still continue dead. And does not this thought affect you?

Consider also, now is the only time in which you can be restored to life. And O! will you let it pass by without improvement?

Shall all the means that have been used for your revival be in vain? Or the strivings of the Spirit, the alarms of your own consciences, the blessings and chastisements of Providence, the persuasions, tears, and lamentations of your living friends, O! shall all these be in vain? Can you bear the thought? Surely, no. Therefore, O heave and struggle to burst the chains of death. Cry mightily to God to quicken you. Use all the means of vivification, and avoid every deadly and contagious thing.

I know not, my brethren; how this thought will affect us at parting to day, that we have left behind us many a dead soul. But suppose we should leave as many bodies here behind us as there are of dead souls among us; suppose every sinner destitute of spiritual life should now be struck dead before us, O how would this floor be overlaid with dead corpses! How few of us would escape! What bitter lamentations and tears would be among us! One would lose a husband or a wife, another a child or a parent, another a friend or a neighbour. And have we hearts to mourn, and tears to shed over such an event as this, and have we no compassion for dead souls? Is there none to mourn over them? Sinners, if you will still continue dead, there are some here to day who part with you with this wish, *O that mine head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.* And O that our mournings may reach the ears of the Lord of life, and that you might be quickened from your death in trespasses and sins! Amen and Amen.

SERMON VI.

POOR AND CONTRITE SPIRITS THE OBJECTS OF THE DIVINE FAVOUR.

ISAIAH LXVI. 2.—*To this man will I look; even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

AS we consist of animal bodies as well as immortal souls, and are endowed with corporeal senses as well as rational powers, God, who has wisely adapted our religion to our make, requires bodily as well as spiritual worship; and commands us not only to exercise the inward powers of our minds in proper acts of devotion, but also to express our inward devotion in suitable external actions, and to attend upon him in the sensible outward ordinances which he has appointed. Thus it is under the gospel; but it was more remarkably so under the law, which, compared with the pure and spiritual worship of the gospel, was a system of carnal ordinances, and required a great deal of external pomp and grandeur, and bodily services. Thus a costly and magnificent structure was erected, by divine direction, in the wilderness, called the tabernacle, because built in the form of a tent, and moveable from place to place; and afterwards a most stately temple was built by Solomon with immense cost, where the divine worship should be stately celebrated, and where all the males of Israel should solemnly meet for that purpose three times in the year.

These externals were not intended to exclude the internal worship of the spirit, but to express and assist it. And these ceremonials were not to

be put into the place of morals, but observed as helps to the practice of them, and to prefigure the great Messiah. Even under the Mosaic dispensation, God had the greatest regard to holiness of heart and a good life; and the strictest observer of ceremonies could not be accepted without them.

But it is natural to degenerate mankind, to invert the order of things, to place apart the easiest and meanest part of religion, for the whole of it, to rest in the externals of religion as sufficient, without regarding the heart, and to depend upon a pharisaical strictness in ceremonial observances, as an excuse or atonement for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith.

This was the unhappy error of the Jews in Isaiah's time; and this the Lord would correct in the first verses of this chapter.

The Jews gloried in their having the house of God among them, and were ever trusting in vain words, saying, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.* Jer. vii. 4. They filled his alters with costly sacrifices; and in these they trusted to make atonement for sin, and secure the divine favour.

As to their sacrifices God lets them know, that while they had no regard to their morals, but chose their own ways, and their souls delighted in their abominations, while they presented them in a formal manner, without the fire of divine love, their sacrifices were so far from procuring his acceptance, that they were odious to him. He abhors their most expensive offerings as abominable and profane. *He that killeth an ox for sacrifice is as far from being accepted, as if he unjustly slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck, &c.* Isaiah lxvi. 3.

To remove this superstitious confidence in the temple, the Lord informs them that he had no need

of it; that, large and magnificent as it was, it was not fit to contain him; and that, in consecrating it to him, they should not proudly think that they had given him any thing to which he had no prior right. “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, where I reign conspicuous in the visible majesty and grandeur of a God; and though the earth is not adorned with such illustrious displays of my immediate presence, though it does not shine in all the glory of my royal palace on high, yet it is a little province in my immense empire, and subject to my authority; it is my footstool. If, then, heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool; if the whole creation is my kingdom, where is the house that ye build unto me? where is your temple which appears so stately in your eyes? it is vanished, it is sunk into nothing. Is it able to contain that infinite Being to whom the whole earth is but an humble footstool, and the vast heaven but a throne? Can you vainly imagine that my presence can be confined to you in the narrow bounds of a temple, when the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain me? Where is the place of my rest? can you provide a place for my repose, as though I were weary? or can my presence be restrained to one place, incapable of acting beyond the prescribed limits? No; infinite space only can equal my being and perfections; infinite space only is a sufficient sphere for my operations.

“Can you imagine you can bribe my favour, and give me something I had no right to before, by all the stately buildings you can rear to my name? Is not universal nature mine? For all these things hath mine hand made out of nothing, and all these things have been, or still subsist by the support of my all-preserving hand, and what right can be more valid and inalienable than that founded upon creation?

Your silver and gold are mine, and mine the cattle upon a thousand hills; and therefore of mine own do you give me, saith the Lord.”

These are such majestic strains of language as are worthy a God. Thus it becomes him to advance himself above the whole creation, and to assert his absolute property in, and independency upon the universe.

Had he only turned to us the bright side of his throne, that dazzles us with insufferable splendour; had he only displayed his Majesty unallayed with grace and condescension in such language as this, it would have overwhelmed us, and cast us into the most abject despondency, as the outcasts of his providence beneath his notice. We might fear he would overlook us with majestic disdain, or careless neglect, like the little things that are called great by mortals, or as the busy emmets of our species are apt to do. In the hurry of business they are liable to neglect, and in the power of pride and grandeur to overlook or disdain their dependents. We should be ready in hopeless anxiety to say, “Is all this earth which to us appears so vast, and which is parcelled into a thousand mighty kingdoms, as we call them, is it all but the humble footstool of God? hardly worthy to bear his feet? What then am I? an atom of an atom-world, a trifling individual of a trifling race. Can I expect he will take any notice of such an insignificant thing as I? The vast affairs of heaven and earth lie upon his hand, and he is employed in the concerns of the wide universe, and can he find leisure to concern himself with me, and my little interests? Will a king deliberating upon the concerns of nations, interest himself in favour of the worm that crawls at his footstool? If the magnificent temple of Solomon was unworthy of the divine inhabitant, will he ad-

mit me into his presence, and give me audience? how can I expect it? It seems daring and presumptuous to hope for such condescension. And shall I then despair of the gracious regard of my Maker?"

No, desponding creature! mean and unworthy as thou art, hear the voice of divine condescension, as well as of Majesty: *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.* Though God dwelleth not in temples made with hands, though he pours contempt upon princes, and scorns them in all their haughty glory and affected majesty, yet there are persons whom his gracious eye will regard. The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, and dwelleth in the high and holy place, he will look down through all the shining ranks of angels upon—whom? Not on the proud, the haughty and presumptuous, but upon him *that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at his word.* To this man will he look from the throne of his majesty, however low, however mean he may be. This man is an object that can, as it were, attract his eyes from all the glories of the heavenly world, so as to regard a humble self-abasing worm. This man can never be lost or overlooked among the multitude of creatures, but the eyes of the Lord will discover him in the greatest crowd, his eyes will graciously fix upon this man, this particular man, though there were but one such in the compass of the creation, or though he were banished into the remotest corner of the universe, like a diamond in a heap of rubbish, or at the bottom of the ocean.

Do you hear this, you that are poor and contrite in spirit, and that tremble at his word? ye that, above all others, are most apt to fear you shall be disregarded by him, because you, of all others, are most deeply sensible how unworthy you are of his

gracious notice: God, the great, the glorious, the terrible God, looks down upon you with eyes of love, and by so much the more affectionately, by how much the lower you are in your own esteem. Does not your heart spring within you at the sound? Are you not lost in pleasing wonder and gratitude, and crying out, "Can it be? can it be? is it indeed possible? is it true?" Yes, you have his own word for it, and do not think it too good news to be true, but believe, and rejoice, and give glory to his name; and fear not what men or devils can do unto you.

This, my brethren, is a matter of universal concern. It is the interest of each of us to know whether we are thus graciously regarded by that God on whom our very being and all our happiness entirely depend. And how shall we know this? In no other way than by discovering whether we have the characters of that happy man to whom he condescends to look. These are not pompous and high characters, they are not formed by earthly riches, learning, glory, and power: *But to this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.* Let us inquire into the import of each of the characters.

I. It is the poor man to whom the Majesty of heaven condescends to look.

This does not principally refer to those that are poor in this world; for, though it be very common that "the poor of this world are chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," James ii. 5. yet this is not an universal rule; for many, alas! that are poor in this world are not rich towards God, nor rich in good works, and therefore shall famish through eternity in remediless want and wretchedness. But the poor here signifies such as

Christ characterises more fully by the *poor in spirit*. Matt. v. 3. And this character implies the following ingredients:

(1.) The poor man to whom Jehovah looks, is deeply sensible of his own insufficiency, and that nothing but the enjoyment of God can make him happy.

The poor man feels that he is not formed self-sufficient, but a dependent upon God. He is sensible of the weakness and poverty of his nature, and that he was not endowed with a sufficient stock of riches in his creation to support him through the endless duration for which he was formed, or even for a single day. The feeble vine does not more closely adhere to the elm than he does to his God. He is not more sensible of the insufficiency of his body to subsist without air, or the productions of the earth, than of that of his soul without his God, and the enjoyment of his love. In short, he is reduced into his proper place in the system of the universe, low and mean in comparison with superior beings of the angelic order, and especially in comparison with the great Parent and support of nature. He feels himself to be, what he really is, a poor, impotent, dependent creature, that can neither live, nor move, nor exist without God. He is sensible that his *sufficiency is of God*, 2 Cor. iii. 5. "and that all the springs of his happiness are in him."

This sense of his dependence upon God is attended with a sense of the inability of all earthly enjoyments to make him happy, and fill the vast capacities of his soul, which were formed for the enjoyment of an infinite good. He has a relish for the blessings of this life, but it is attended with a sense of their insufficiency, and does not exclude a stronger relish for the superior pleasures of reli-

gion. He is not a precise hermit, or a sour ascetic, on the one hand; and, on the other, he is not a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.

If he enjoys no great share of the comforts of this life, he does not labour, nor so much as wish for them as his supreme happiness: he is well assured they can never answer this end in their greatest affluence. It is for God, it is for the living God, that his soul most eagerly thirsts. In the greatest extremity he is sensible that the enjoyment of his love is more necessary to his felicity than the possession of earthly blessings; nay, he is sensible, that if he is miserable in the absence of these, the principal cause is the absence of his God. Oh! if he were blest with the perfect enjoyment of God, he could say with Habakkuk, *Though the fig-tree should not blossom, and there should be no fruit in the vine; though the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall; though universal famine should strip me of all my earthly blessings, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, as my complete happiness; I will joy in the God of my salvation.* Hab. iii. 17, 18.

If he enjoys an affluence of earthly blessings, he still retains a sense of his need of the enjoyment of God. To be discontent and dissatisfied is the common fate of the rich as well as the poor; they are still craving, craving an unknown something to complete their bliss. The soul, being formed for the fruition of the Supreme Good, secretly languishes and pines away in the midst of other enjoyments, without knowing its cure. It is the enjoyment of God only that can satisfy its unbounded desires; but, alas! it has no relish for him, no thirst after him; it is still crying, "More, more of the delights of the world;" like a man in a burning

fever, that calls for cold water, that will but inflame his disease, and occasion a more painful return of thirst. But the poor in spirit know where their cure lies. They do not ask with uncertainty, *who will shew us any sort of good?* but their petitions centre in this, as the grand constituent of their happiness, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;* and this puts more gladness into their hearts *than the abundance of corn and wine.* Psalm iv. 6, 7. This was the language of the Psalmist, *There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.* Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26. And as this disposition extends to all earthly things, so it does to all created enjoyments whatsoever, even to those of the heavenly world; the poor man is sensible that he could not be happy even there without the enjoyment of God. His language is, *whom have I in heaven but thee?* It is *beholding thy face in righteousness, and awaking in thy likeness, that alone can satisfy me.* Psalm xvii. 15.

(2.) This spiritual poverty implies deep humility and self-abasement.

The poor man on whom the God of heaven condescends to look is mean in his own apprehensions; he accounts himself not a being of mighty importance. He has no high esteem of his own good qualities, but is little in his own eyes. He is not apt to give himself the preference to others, but is ready to give way to them as his superiors. He has a generous sagacity to behold their good qualities, and a commendable blindness towards their imperfections: but he is not quick to discern his own excellencies, nor sparing to his own frailties.

Instead of being dazzled with the splendor of his own endowments or acquisitions, he is apt to

overlook them with a noble neglect, and is sensible of the weakness and defects of his nature.

And as to his gracious qualities, they appear small, exceeding small to him: when he considers how much they fall short of what they should be, they as it were vanish and shrink into nothing. How cold does his love appear to him in its greatest fervour? How feeble his faith in its greatest confidence! How superficial his repentance in its greatest depth! How proud his lowest humility! And as for the good actions he has performed, alas! how few, how poorly done, how short of his duty do they appear! After he has done all, he counts himself an unprofitable servant. After he has done all, he is more apt to adopt the language of the publican than the pharisee, *God, be merciful to me a sinner.* In his highest attainments he is not apt to admire himself; so far is he from it, that it is much more natural to him to fall into the opposite extreme, and to account himself the least, yea, less than the least of all other saints upon the face of the earth: and if he contends for any preference, it is for the lowest place in the list of christians. This disposition was remarkably exemplified in St. Paul, who probably had made greater advancement in holiness than any saint that was ever received to heaven from this guilty world.

He that is poor in spirit has also a humbling sense of his own sinfulness. His memory is quick to recollect his past sins, and he is very sharp sighted to discover the remaining corruptions of his heart, and the imperfections of his best duties. He is not ingenious to excuse them, but views them impartially in all their deformity and aggravations. He sincerely doubts whether there be a saint upon earth so exceeding corrupt; and, though he may be convinced that the Lord has begun a work of grace

in him, and consequently, that he is in a better state than such as are under the prevailing dominion of sin, yet he really questions whether there be such a depraved creature in the world as he sees he has been. He is apt to count himself the chief of sinners and more indebted to free grace than any of the sons of men. He is intimately acquainted with himself; but he sees only the outside of others, and hence he concludes himself so much worse than others; hence he loaths himself in his own sight for all his abominations. Ezek. xxxvi. 31. Self abasement is pleasing to him; his humility is not forced; he does not think it a great thing for him to sink thus low. He plainly sees himself to be a mean, sinful, exceeding sinful creature, and therefore is sure that it is no condescension, but the most reasonable thing in the world for him to think meanly of himself, and to humble and abase himself. It is unnatural for one that esteems himself a being of great importance to stoop; but it is easy, and appears no self denial for a poor mean creature to do so, who looks upon himself, and feels himself, to be such.

Finally, the poor man is deeply sensible of his own unworthiness. He sees that in himself he deserves no favour from God for all the good he has ever done, but that he may after all justly reject him. He makes no proud boasts of his good heart, or good life, but falls in the dust before God, and casts all his dependence upon his free grace:—which leads me to observe,

(3.) That he who is poor in spirit is sensible of his need of the influences of divine grace to sanctify him, and enrich him with the graces of the Spirit.

He is sensible of the want of holiness; this necessarily flows from his sense of his corruption,

and the imperfection of all his graces. Holiness is the one thing needful with him, which he desires and longs for above all others; and he is deeply sensible that he cannot work it in his own heart by his own strength; he feels that without Christ he can do nothing, and that it is God who must work in him both to will and to do. Hence, like a poor man that cannot subsist upon his stock, he depends entirely upon the grace of God to work all his works in him, and to enable him to work out his salvation with fear and trembling.

(4.) He is deeply sensible of the absolute necessity of the righteousness of Christ for his justification.

He does not think himself rich in good works to bribe his judge, and procure acquittance, but, like a poor criminal that, having nothing to purchase a pardon, nothing to plead in his own defence, casts himself upon the mercy of the court, he places his whole dependence upon the free grace of God through Jesus Christ. He pleads his righteousness only, and trusts in it alone. The rich scorn to be obliged; but the poor, that cannot subsist of themselves, will cheerfully receive. So the self-righteous will not submit to the righteousness of God, but the poor in spirit will cheerfully receive it.

(5.) And lastly, the man that is poor in spirit is an importunate beggar at the throne of grace.

He lives upon charity; he lives upon the bounties of Heaven; and, as these are not to be obtained without begging, he is frequently lifting up his cries to the Father of all his mercies for them.—He attends upon the ordinances of God, as Bartimeus by the way side, to ask the charity of passengers. Prayer is the natural language of spiritual poverty: *The poor, saith Solomon, useth entreaties; Prov. xviii. 23.* whereas they that are rich in

their own conceit can live without prayer, or content themselves with the careless formal performance of it.

This is the habitual character of that poor man to whom the Majesty of heaven vouchsafes the looks of his love. At times indeed he has but little sense of these things; but then he is uneasy, and he labours to re-obtain it, and sometimes is actually blessed with it.

And is there no such poor man or woman in this assembly? I hope there is. Where are ye poor creatures? stand forth, and receive the blessings of your Redeemer, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, &c.* He who has his throne in the height of heaven, and to whom this vast earth is but a footstool, looks upon you with eyes of love. This spiritual poverty is greater riches than the treasures of the universe. Be not ashamed therefore to own yourselves poor men, if such you are. May God thus impoverish us all; may he strip us of all our imaginary grandeur and riches, and reduce us to poor beggars at his door!

But it is time to consider the other character of the happy man upon whom the Lord of heaven will graciously look: and that is,

II. Contrition of spirit. *To this man will I look, that is of a contrite spirit.*

The word *contrite* signifies one that is beaten or bruised with hard blows or an heavy burden. And it belongs to the mourning penitent whose heart is broken and wounded for sin. Sin is an intolerable burden that crushes and bruises him, and he feels himself pained and sore under it. His stony heart, which could not be impressed, but rather repelled the blow, is taken away; and now he has an heart of flesh, easily bruised and wounded. His heart is not always hard and senseless, light and trifling;

but it has tender sensations; he is easily susceptible of sorrow for sin, is humbled under a sense of his imperfections, and is really pained and distressed because he can serve his God no better, but daily sins against him. This character may also agree to the poor anxious soul that is broken with cruel fears of its state. The stout-hearted can venture their eternal all upon uncertainty; and indulge pleasing hopes without anxiously examining their foundation; but he that is of a contrite spirit is tenderly sensible of the importance of the matter, and cannot be easy without some good evidence of safety. Such shocking suppositions as these frequently startle him, and pierce his very heart; "What if I should be deceived at last? What if after all I should be banished from that God in whom lies all my happiness?" &c. These are suppositions full of insupportable terror, when they appear but barely possible; and much more when there seems to be reason for them. Such an habitual pious jealousy as this, is a good symptom; and to your pleasing surprise, ye doubtful christians, I may tell you that *that* Majesty, who you are afraid disregards you, looks down upon you with pity. Therefore lift up your eyes to him in wonder and joyful confidence. You are not such neglected things as you think. The Majesty of heaven thinks it not beneath him to look down through all the glorious orders of angels, and through interposing worlds, down, down even upon you in the depth of your self-abhorrence. Let us,

III. Consider the remaining character of the happy man to whom the Lord will look: *Him that trembleth at my word.*

This character implies a tender sense of the great things of the word, and an heart easily impressed with them as the most important realities. This

was remarkably exemplified in tender-hearted Josph. 2 Chron. xxiv. 19, 20, 27. To one that trembles at the divine word, the threatenings of it do not appear vain terrors, nor great swelling words of vanity, but the most tremendous realities. Such an one cannot bear up under them, but would tremble, and fall, and die away, if not relieved by some happy promise of deliverance. He that trembles at the word of God is not a stupid hearer or reader of it. It reaches and pierces his heart as a sharp two-edged sword; it carries power along with it, and he feels that it is the word of God, and not of men, even when it is spoken by feeble mortals. Thus he not only trembles at the terror, but at the authority of the word;—which leads me to observe farther, that he trembles with filial veneration of the majesty of God speaking in his word. He considers it as his voice who spake all things into being, and whose glory is such, that a deep solemnity must seize those that are admitted to hear him speak.

How opposite is this to the temper of multitudes who regard the word of God no more than (with horror I express it,) the word of a child or a fool. They will have their own way, let him say what he will. They persist in sin, in defiance of his threatenings. They sit as careless and stupid under his word, as though it were some old, dull, trifling story. It seldom makes any impressions upon their stony hearts. These are the brave, undaunted men of the world, who harden themselves against the fear of futurity. But, unhappy creatures! the God of heaven disdains to give them a gracious look, while he fixes his eyes upon the man that “is contrite, and that trembles at his word.”

And where is that happy man? Where in this assembly, where is the contrite spirit? Where the man that trembleth at the word? You are all ready to catch at the character, but be not presumptuous on the one hand, nor excessively timorous on the other. Inquire whether this be your prevailing character. If so, then claim it, and rejoice in it, though you have it not in perfection. But if you have it not prevailingly, do not seize it as your own. Though you have been at times distressed with a sense of sin and danger, and the word strikes a terror to your hearts, yet, unless you are habitually of a tender and a contrite spirit, you are not to claim the character.

But let such of you as are poor and contrite in spirit, and that tremble at the word of the Lord, enter deeply into the meaning of this expression, that the Lord looks to you. He does not look on you as a careless spectator, not concerning himself with you, or caring what will become of you, but he looks upon you as a father, a friend, a benefactor: his looks are efficacious for your good.

He looks upon you with acceptance. He is pleased with the sight. He loves to see you labouring towards him. He looks upon you as the objects of his everlasting love, and purchased by the blood of his Son, and he is well pleased with you for his righteousness' sake. Hence his looking upon him that is poor, &c. is opposed to his hating the wicked and their sacrifices, ver. 3. And is he whom you have so grievously offended, he whose wrath you fear above all other things, is he indeed reconciled to you, and does he delight in you? what cause of joy, and praise, and wonder is here?

Again, he looks to you so as to take particular notice of you. He sees all the workings of your hearts towards him. He sees and pities you in your honest, though feeble conflicts with in-dwelling sin. He observes all your faithful though weak endeavours to serve him. His eyes pierce your very hearts, and the least motion there cannot escape his notice. This indeed might make you tremble, if he looked upon you with the eyes of a judge, for O how many abominations must he see in you! But be of good cheer, he looks upon you with the eyes of a friend, and with that love which covers a multitude of sins. He looks upon you with the eyes of compassion in all your calamities. He looks upon you to see that you be not overborne and crushed. David, who passed through as many hardships and afflictions as any of you, could say from happy experience, *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.* Psal. xxxiv. 15.

Finally, he looks to you so as to look after you, as we do after the sick and weak. He looks to you so as to provide for you: and he will give you grace and glory, and *no good thing will be held from you.* Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

And are you not safe and happy under the inspection of a father and a friend? Let a little humble courage then animate you amid your many dejections, and confide in that care of which you feel yourself to be so unworthy.

Here it may not be amiss to observe, what must give you no small pleasure, that those very persons who according to the estimate of men are the most likely to be overlooked, are those whom God graciously regards. The persons themselves are apt to cry, "Happy I, could I believe that the God of heaven thus graciously regards me; but alas! I feel

myself a poor unworthy creature; I am a trembling broken hearted thing, beneath the notice of so great a majesty." And art thou so indeed? then I may convert thy objection into an encouragement. Thou art the very person upon whom God looks. His eyes are running to and fro through the earth in quest of such as thou art; and he will find thee out among the innumerable multitudes of mankind. Wert thou surrounded with crowds of kings and nobles, his eyes would pass by them all to fix upon thee. What a glorious artifice, if I may so speak, is this, to catch at and convert the person's discouragement as a ground of courage! to make that the character of the favourites of Heaven, which they themselves look upon as marks of his neglect of them! "Alas," says the poor man, "if I was the object of divine notice, he would not suffer me to continue thus poor and broken-hearted." But you may reason directly the reverse, he makes you thus poor in spirit, sensible of your sinfulness and imperfections, because that he graciously regards you. He will not suffer you to be puffed up with your imaginary goodness, like the rest of the world, because he loves you more than he loves them.

However unaccountable this procedure seems, there is very good reason for it. The poor are the only persons that would relish the enjoyment of God, and prize his love; they alone are capable of the happiness of heaven, which consists in the perfection of holiness.

To conclude, let us view the perfection and condescension of God as illustrated by this subject. Consider, ye poor in spirit, who he is that stoops to look upon such little things as you. It is he whose throne is in the highest heaven, surrounded with myriads of angels and archangels; it is he

whose footstool is the earth, who supports every creature upon it; it is he who is exalted above the blessing and praise of all the celestial armies, and who cannot without condescension behold the things that are done in heaven; it is he that looks down upon such poor worms as you. And what a stoop is this?

It is he that looks upon you in particular, who looks after all the worlds he has made. He manages all the affairs of the universe; he takes care of every individual in his vast family; he provides for all his creatures, and yet he is at leisure to regard you. He takes as particular notice of you as if you were his only creatures. What perfection is this! what an infinite grasp of thought! what unbounded power! and what condescension too!—Do but consider what a small figure you make in the universe of beings. You are not so much in comparison with the infinite multitude of creatures in the compass of nature, as a grain of sand to all the sands upon the sea shore, or as a mote to the vast globe of earth. And yet he, that has the care of the whole universe, takes particular notice of you—you who are but trifles, compared with your fellow creatures; and who, if you were annihilated, would hardly leave a blank in the creation. Consider this, and wonder at the condescension of God; consider this, and acknowledge your own meanness; you are but nothing, not only compared with God, but you are as nothing in the system of creation.

I shall add but this one natural reflection: If it be so great a happiness to have the great God for our patron, then what is it to be out of his favour? to be disregarded by him? methinks an universal tremour may seize this assembly at the very supposition. And is there a creature in the universe

in this wretched condition? methinks all the creation besides must pity him. Where is the wretched being to be found? must we descend to hell to find him? No, alas! there are many such on this earth! nay, I must come nearer you still, there are many such probably in this assembly: all among you are such who are not poor and contrite in spirit, and do not tremble at the word of the Lord. And art thou not one of the miserable number, O man? What! disregarded by the God that made thee! not favoured with one look of love by the Author of all happiness! He looks on thee indeed, but it is with eyes of indignation, marking thee out for vengeance; and canst thou be easy in such a case? wilt thou not labour to impoverish thyself, and have thy heart broken, that thou mayest become the object of his gracious regard?

SERMON VII.

THE NATURE AND DANGER OF MAKING LIGHT OF
CHRIST AND SALVATION.

MATT. XXII. 5.—*But they made light of it.*

THERE is not one of us in this assembly that has heard any thing, but what has heard of Christ and salvation: there is not one of us but has had the rich blessings of the gospel freely and repeatedly offered to us: there is not one of us but stands in the most absolute need of these blessings, and must perish forever without them; I wish I could add, there is not one of us but has cheerfully accepted them according to the offer of the gospel. But, alas! such an assembly is not to be expected on

earth! Multitudes will make light of Christ and the invitations of the gospel, as the Jews did.

This parable represents the great God under the majestic idea of a king.

He is represented as making a marriage feast for his Son; that is, God in the gospel offers his Son Jesus Christ as a Saviour to the guilty sons of men, and, upon their acceptance of him, the most intimate endearing union, and the tenderest mutual affection takes place between Christ and them; which may very properly be represented by the marriage relation. And God has provided for them a rich variety of blessings, pardon, holiness, and everlasting felicity, which may be signified by a royal nuptial feast, *verse 2.*

These blessings were first offered to the Jews, who were bidden to the wedding by Moses and the prophets, whose great business it was to prepare them to receive the Messiah, *verse 3.*

The servants that were sent to call them, that were thus bidden, were the apostles and seventy disciples, whom Christ sent out to preach that the gospel kingdom was just at hand, *verse 3.*

When the Jews rejected this call, he sent forth other servants, namely, the apostles, after his ascension, who were to be more urgent in their invitations, and to tell them that, in consequence of Christ's death, all things were now ready, *verse 4.*

It is seldom that invitations to a royal feast are rejected; but alas! the Jews rejected the invitation of the gospel, and would not accept of its important blessings. They made light of Christ and his blessings; they were careless to them, and turned their attention to other things.

These things were not peculiar to the Jews, but belong to us sinners of the Gentiles in these ends

of the earth. Christ is still proposed to us; to the same blessings we are invited; and I have the honour, my dear brethren, of appearing among you as a servant of the heavenly King, sent out to urge you to embrace the offer.

I doubt not but sundry of you have complied; and you are enriched and made forever.

But alas! must I not entertain a godly jealousy over some of you? have you not made light of Christ and salvation, to which you have been invited for so many years successively?

Your case is really lamentable, as I hope you will see before I have done; and I most sincerely compassionate you from my heart. I now rise up in this solemn place with the design to address you with the most awful seriousness, and the most compassionate concern; and did you know how much your happiness may depend upon it, and how anxious I am lest I should fail in the attempt, I am sure you could not but pray for me, and pity me. If ever you regarded a man in the most serious temper and address, I beg you would now regard what I am going to say to you.

You cannot receive any benefit from this, or indeed any other subject, till you apply it to yourselves. And therefore, in order to reform you of the sin of making light of Christ and the gospel, I must first inquire who are guilty of it. For this purpose let us consider,

What it is to make light of Christ and the invitations of the gospel.

I can think of no plainer way to discover this, than to inquire how we treat those things that we highly esteem; and also by way of contrast, how we treat those things which we make light of; and hence we may discover whether Christ and the gospel may be ranked among the things we esteem, or those we disregard.

I. Men are apt to remember and affectionately think of the things that they highly esteem; but as for those which they disregard, they can easily forget them, and live from day to day without a single thought about them.

Now do you often affectionately remember the Lord Jesus, and do your thoughts affectionately go after him? do they pay him early visits in the morning? do they make frequent excursions to him through the day? and do you lie down with him in your hearts at night? Is not the contrary evident as to many of you? Can you not live from day to day thoughtless of Jesus, and your everlasting salvation? Recollect now, how many affectionate thoughts have you had of these things through the week past, or in this sacred morning. And can you indeed highly esteem those things which you hardly ever think of? Follow your own hearts, Sirs, observe which way they most naturally and freely run, and then judge whether you make light of the gospel or not. Alas! we cannot persuade men to one hour's serious consideration what they should do for an interest in Christ; we cannot persuade them so much as to afford him only their thoughts, which are such cheap things; and yet they will not be convinced that they make light of Christ. And here lies the infatuation of sin, it blinds and befools men, so that they do not know what they think of, what they love, or what they intend, much less do they know the habitual bent of their souls. They often imagine themselves free from those sins to which they are most enslaved, and particularly they think themselves innocent of the crime of making light of the gospel, when this is the very crime that is likely to destroy them forever.

II. The things that men value, if of such a nature as to admit of publication, will be the frequent subjects of their discourse: the thoughts will command the tongue, and furnish materials for conversation. But those things that they forget and disregard they will not talk of.

Do not they therefore make light of Christ and salvation, who have no delight in conversing about them, and hardly ever mention the name of Christ but in a trifling or profane manner? They do not like the company where divine things are discoursed of, but think it precise and troublesome. They had much rather be entertained with humorous tales and idle stories, or talk about the affairs of the world. *They are of the world, says St. John, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them, 1 John iv. 5.* They are in their element in such conversation. Or others may talk about religion; but it is only about the circumstances of it, as, "How such a man preached; it was a very good or a bad sermon," &c. but they care not to enter into the spirit and substance of divine things; and if they speak of Christ and experimental religion, it is in an heartless and insipid manner. And do not such make light of the gospel? and is not this the character of many of you?

III. Men make light of those things, if they are of a practical nature which they only talk about, but do not reduce into practice.

Christianity was intended not to furnish matter for empty talkers, but to govern the heart and practice. But are there not some that only employ their tongues about it, especially when their spirits are raised with liquor, and then a torrent of noisy religion breaks from them. Watch their lives, and you will see little appearance of christianity there. And do not these evidently make light of

Christ, who make him the theme of their drunken conversation, or who seem to think that God sent his Son from heaven just to set the world a talking about him? There is nothing in nature that seems to me more abominable than this.

IV. We take the utmost pains and labour to secure the things we value, and cannot be easy while our property in them is uncertain; but those things that we think lightly of we care but little whether they be ours or not.

Therefore, have not such of you made light of Christ and salvation, who have lived twenty or thirty years uncertain whether you have interest in him, and yet have been easy and contented, and take no method to be resolved? Are all that hear me this day determined in this important question, "What shall become of me when I die?" Are you all certain upon good grounds, and after a thorough trial, that you shall be saved! Oh that you were! but, alas! you are not. And do you think you would bear this uncertainty about it, if you did not make light of salvation? No; you would carefully examine yourselves; you would diligently peruse the scriptures to find out the marks of those that shall be saved; you would anxiously consult those that could direct you, and particularly pious ministers, who would think it the greatest favor you could do them to devolve such an office upon them. But now ministers may sit in their studies for a whole year, and not ten persons perhaps, in five hundred, agreeably intrude upon them on this important business.

Oh, Sirs, if the Gospel should pierce your hearts indeed, you could but cry out with the convinced Jews, *Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?* Acts ii. 37. ~ Paul, when awakened, cries out, in a trembling consternation, *Lord! what wilt*

thou, have me to do? But when shall we hear such questions now-adays?

V. The things that men highly esteem, deeply and tenderly affect them, and excite some motions in their hearts: but what they make light of, makes no impressions upon them.

And if you did not make light of the gospel, what workings would there be in your hearts about it? what solemn, tender, and vigorous passions would it raise in you to hear such things about the world to come! what sorrows would burst from your hearts at the discovery of your sins! what fear and astonishment would seize you at the consideration of your misery: what transports of joy and gratitude would you feel at the glad tidings of salvation by the blood of Christ! what strong efficacious purposes would be raised in you at the discovery of your duty! O what hearers should we have, were it not for this one sin, the making light of the gospel! whereas now we are in danger of wearying them, or preaching them asleep with our most solemn discourses about this momentous affair? We talk to them of Christ and salvation till they grow quite tired of this dull old tale, and this foolishness of preaching. Alas! little would one think, from the air of carelessness, levity, and inattention that appears among them, that they were hearing such weighty truths, or have any concern in them.

VI. Our estimate of things may be discovered by the diligence and earnestness of our endeavours about them. Those things which we highly value, we think no pains too great to obtain; but what we think lightly of we use no endeavours about, or we use them in a languid careless manner.

And do not they make light of Christ and salvation, who do not exert themselves in earnest to ob-

tain them, and think a great deal of every little thing they do in religion? they are still ready to cry out, "What need of so much pains? we hope to be saved without so much trouble." And, though these may not be so honest as to speak it out, it is plain from their temper and practice, they grudge all the service they do for Christ as done to a master they do not love. They love and esteem the world, and therefore for the world they will labour and toil all day, and seem never to think they can do too much; but for the God that made them, for the Lord that bought them, and for their everlasting salvation, they seem afraid of taking too much pains. Let us preach to them as long as we will, we cannot bring them in earnest to desire and pursue after holiness. Follow them to their houses, and you will hardly ever find them reading a chapter in their Bibles, or calling upon God with their families, so much as once a day. Follow them into their retirements, and you will hear no penitent confessions of sin, no earnest cries for mercy. They will not allow to God that one day in seven which he has appropriated to his own immediate service, but they will steal and prostitute some even of those sacred hours for idleness, or worldly conversation, or business. And many of them are so malignant in wickedness, that they will reproach and ridicule others that are not so made as themselves in these respects. And is not Christ worth seeking? Is not eternal salvation worth so much trouble? does not that man make light of these things that thinks his ease or carnal pleasure of greater importance? Let common sense judge.

VII. That which we highly value we think we cannot buy too dear; and we are ready to part with every thing that comes in competition with it. The

merchant that found one pearl of great price, sold all that he had to purchase it, Matt. xiii. 46. but those things that we make light of, we will not part with things of value for them.

Now, when Christ and the blessings of the gospel come in competition with the world and sinful pleasures, you may know which you most highly esteem, by considering which you are most ready to part with. You are called to part with every thing that is inconsistent with an interest in Christ, and yet many of you will not do it. You are called but to give God his own, to resign all to his will, to let go all these profits and pleasures which you must either part with, or part with Christ, and yet your hearts cling to these things, you grasp them eagerly, and nothing can tear them from you. You must have your pleasures, you must keep your credit in the world, you must look to your estates, whatever becomes of Christ and salvation; as if you could live and die better without Christ than without these things; or as if Christ could not make you happy without them. And does not this bring the matter to an issue, and plainly shew that you make light of Christ in comparison with these things? Christ himself has assured you, over and over, that unless you are willing to part with all for his sake, you cannot be his disciples; and yet, while you have this quite contrary disposition, you will pretend to be his disciples; as if you knew better what it is that constituted his disciples than he.

VIII. Those things which we highly value, we shall be for helping our friends to obtain.

Do not those, then, make light of Christ who do not take half so much pains to help their children to an interest in him, as to set them up in credit in the world, and leave them large fortunes? They

supply the outward wants of their families, but they take little or no care about their everlasting salvation. Alas! Sirs, the neglected, ignorant, and vicious children and servants of s_____ of you can witness against you, that you make very light of Christ and salvation, and their immortal souls.

IX. That which men highly esteem they will so diligently pursue, that you may see their regard for it in their endeavors after it, if it be a matter within their reach.

You may therefore see that many make light of the gospel by the little knowledge they have of it, after all the means of instruction with which they have been favoured. Alas! where is their improvement in holiness! how little do they know of their own hearts, of God and Christ, and the world to come, and what they must do to be saved! Ask them about these things, and you will find them stupidly ignorant; and yet they have so much conceited knowledge that they will not acknowledge it; or if they do, they have no better excuse than to say they are no scholars, or they have a poor memory; as if it required extensive learning, or a great genius to know the things that are necessary to salvation. O! if they had not made light of these things; if they had bestowed but half the pains upon them which they have taken to understand matters of trade and worldly business, they would not be so grossly ignorant as they are! When men that can learn the hardest trade in a few years, when men of bright parts, and perhaps considerable learning, after living so many years, are still mere novices in matters of religion, and do not so much as know the terms of life according to the gospel, is it not plain that they care but little about these things, and that they make light

of the Son of God, and all his inestimable immortal blessings.

Thus I have offered you sufficient matter of conviction in this affair. And what is the result? does not conscience smite some of you by this time, and say, "I am the man that have made light of Christ and his gospel!" If not, upon what evidence are you acquitted! Some of you, I doubt not, can say, in the integrity of your hearts, "Alas! I am too careless about this important affair, but God knows I am often deeply concerned about it; God knows that if ever I was in earnest about any thing in all my life, it has been about my everlasting state; and there is nothing in all the world that habitually lies so near my heart. But are there not some of you whom conscience does not accuse of this crime of too much carelessness about the gospel, not because you are innocent, but because you make so very light of it, that you will make no thorough search into it? and does not this alone prove you guilty? I beseech such to consider the folly of your conduct. Do you then think to excuse your crime, by being careless whether you are guilty of it or not? Can you avoid the precipice by shutting your eyes? If you discover your sin now, it may be of unspeakable service, but if you now shut your eyes you must see it hereafter, when it will be too late; when your conviction will be your punishment. I beseech you also to consider the dreadful evil of your conduct in making light of a Saviour. And here I shall offer such arguments to expose its aggravations as I am sure cannot fail to convince and astonish you, if you act like men of reason and understanding.

I. Consider you make light of him who did not make light of you, when you deserved his final re-

glect of you: You were worthy of nothing but contempt and abhorrence from him. As a man you are but a worm to God, and as a sinner you are viler than a toad or a serpent. Yet Christ was so far from making light of you, that he left his native heaven, became a man of sorrows, and died in the most exquisite agonies, that a way might be opened for the salvation of your miserable soul: and can you make light of him after all his regard to you? What miracles of love and mercy has he shewn towards you! and can you neglect him after all? Angels, who are less concerned in these things than we, cannot but pry into them with delightful wonder, 1 Peter, i. 12. and shall sinners, who have the most intimate personal concern in them, make light of them? This is a crime more than devilish; for the devils never had a Saviour offered to them, and consequently never could despise him. And can you live in a carelessness of Christ all your days, and yet feel no remorse?

II. Consider you make light of matters of the greatest excellency and importance in all the world. Oh, sirs, you know not what it is that you slight; had you known these things you would not have ventured to make light of them for ten thousand worlds. As Christ said to the woman of Samaria, *If thou hadst known the gift of God, and who it is that speaketh to thee, thou wouldest have asked of him living water.* John iv. 13. *Had the Jews known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.* 1 Cor. ii. 8. So had you known what Jesus is, you would not have made light of him; he would have been to you the most important being in the universe. Oh! had you been but one day in heaven, and seen and felt the happiness there! or had you been one hour under the agonies of hell, you could never more have trifled with salvation.

Here I find my thoughts run so naturally into the same channel with those of the excellent Mr. Baxter, about an hundred years ago, that you will allow me to give a long quotation from him, that you may see in what light this great and good man viewed the neglected things which the gospel brings to your ears. His words are these; and I am sure to me they have been very weighty:—"Oh, Sirs, they are no trifles or jesting matters that the gospel speaks of. I must needs profess to you that when I have the most serious thoughts of these things, I am ready to wonder that such amazing matters do not overwhelm the souls of men: that the greatness of the subject doth not so overmatch our understandings and affections, as even to drive men beside themselves, but that God hath always somewhat allayed it by distance; much more do I wonder that men should be so blockish as to make light of such things. Oh Lord, that men did but know what everlasting glory and everlasting torments are! would they then hear us as they do? would they read and think of these things as they do? I profess I have been ready to wonder when I have heard such weighty things delivered, how people can forbear crying out in the congregation, and much more do I wonder how they can rest, till they have gone to their ministers and learned what they shall do to be saved, that this great business should be put out of doubt. Oh that heaven and hell should work no more upon men! Oh that eternity should work no more! Oh how can you forbear when you are alone to think with yourselves what it is to be everlastingly in joy or torment! I wonder that such thoughts do not break your sleep, and that they do not crowd into your minds when you are about your labour! I wonder how you can almost do any thing else! How can you have any

quietness in your minds? how can you eat or drink, or rest, till you have got some ground of everlasting consolations? Is that a man or a corpse that is not affected with matters of this moment? that can be readier to sleep than to tremble, when he hears how he must stand at the bar of God? is that a man or a cled of clay that can rise up and lie down without being deeply affected with his everlasting state? that can follow his wordly business, and make nothing of the great business of salvation or damnation, and that when he knows it is so hard at hand? Truly, Sirs, when I think of the weight of the matter, I wonder at the best saints upon earth, that they are no better, and do no more in so weighty a case. I wonder at those whom the world accounts more holy than needs, and scorns for making too much ado, that they can put off Christ and their souls with so little; that they do not pour out their souls in every prayer; that they are not more taken up with God; that their thoughts are not more serious in preparation for their last account. I wonder that they are not a thousand times more strict in their lives, and more laborious and unwearied for the crown than they are. And for myself (says that zealous, flaming, and indefatigable preacher) as I am ashamed of my dull and careless heart, and of my slow and unprofitable course of life, so the Lord knows I am ashamed of every sermon that I preach: when I think what I am, and who sent me, and how much the salvation and damnation of men is concerned in it, I am ready to tremble, lest God should judge me as a slighter of his truth and the souls of men, and lest in my best sermon I should be guilty of their blood. Methinks we should not speak a word to men in matters of such consequence without tears, or the greatest earnestness that possibly we can. Were we not too

much guilty of the sin which we reprove, it would be so. Whether we are alone or in company, methinks our end, and such an end, should still be in our mind, and as before our eyes; and we should sooner forget any thing, or set light by any thing, or by all things, than by this."

And now, my brethren, if such a man as this viewed these things in this light, Oh what shall we, we languishing careless creatures, what shall we think of ourselves? Into what a dead sleep are we fallen! Oh let the most active and zealous among us awake, and be a thousand times more earnest: and ye frozen-hearted, careless sinners, for God's sake awake, and exert yourselves to good purpose in the pursuit of salvation, or you are lost to all eternity.

III. Consider whose salvation it is you make light of. It is your own. And do you not care what becomes of your own selves? Is it nothing to you whether you be saved or damned forever? Is the natural principle of self-love extinct in you? Have you no concern for your own preservation? Are you commenced your own enemies? If you slight Christ and love sin, you virtually love death, Prov. viii. 36. You may as well say, "I will live, and yet neither eat nor drink," as say, "I will go to heaven, and yet make light of Christ." And you may as well say this in words as by your practice.

IV. Consider your sin is aggravated by professing to believe that gospel which you make light of. For a professed infidel that does not believe the scripture-revelation concerning Christ and a future state of rewards and punishments, for such a one to be careless about these things would not be so strange; but for you that make these things your creed, and a part of your religion, for you that

call yourselves christians, and have been baptized into this faith; for you, I say, to make light of them, how astonishing! how utterly inexcusable! What! believe that you shall live forever in the most perfect happiness or exquisite misery, and yet take no more pains to obtain the one, and escape the other? What! believe that the great and dreadful God will shortly be your judge, and yet make no more preparation for it? Either say plainly "I am no christian, I do not believe these things;" or else let your hearts be affected with your belief, and let it influence and govern your lives.

V. Consider what those things are which engross your affections, and which tempt you to neglect Christ and your salvation. Have you found out a better friend, or a more substantial and lasting happiness than his salvation? O! what trifles and vanities, what dreams and shadows are men pursuing, while they neglect the important realities of the eternal world! If crowns and kingdoms, if all the riches, glories, and pleasures of the world were insured to you as a reward for making light of Christ, you would even then make the most foolish bargain possible; for what are these in the scale to eternal joy or eternal tempest? and *what shall it profit a man if he gain even the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Matt. xvi. 26. But you cannot hope for the ten thousandth part: and will you cast away your souls for this? You that think it such a great thing to live in riches, pleasures and honours, consider, is it such a mighty happiness to die rich? to die after a life of pleasure and honour? Will it be such a great happiness to give an account for the life of a rich sensualist, rather than of a poor mortified creature? Will Dives then be so much happier than Lazarus? Alas! what does the richest, the highest, the most voluptuous sin-

ner, what does he do, but lay up treasures of wrath against the day of wrath? O how will the unhappy creatures torture themselves forever with the most cutting reflections for selling their Saviour and their souls for such trifles! Let your sins and earthly enjoyments save you then, if they can; let them then do that for you which Christ would have done for you if you had chosen him. Then go and cry to the gods you have chosen; let them deliver you in the day of your tribulation.

VI. Your making light of Christ and salvation is a certain evidence that you have no interest in them.—Christ will not throw himself and his blessings away upon those that do not value them. “Those that honour him he will honour; but they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed,” 1 Sam. ii. 30. There is a day coming, when you will feel you cannot do without him; when you will feel yourselves perishing for want of a Saviour; and then you may go and look for a Saviour where you will; then you may shift for yourselves as you can; he will have nothing to do with you; the Saviour of sinners will cast you off forever. I tell you, Sirs, whatever estimate you form of all these things, God thinks very highly of the blood of his Son, and the blessings of his purchase; and if ever you obtain them, he will have you think highly of them too. If you continue to make light of them, all the world cannot save you. And can you find fault with God for denying you that which was so little in your account?

VII. And lastly, the time is hastening when you will not think so slightly of Christ and salvation. O, sirs, when God shall commission death to tear your guilty souls out of your bodies, when devils shall drag you away to the place of torment; when you find yourselves condemned to everlasting fire

by that Saviour whom you now neglect, what would you then give for a Saviour? When divine justice brings in its heavy charges against you, and you have nothing to answer, how will you then cry, "O if I had chosen Jesus for my Saviour, he would have answered all!" When you see that the world has deserted you, that your companions in sin have deceived themselves and you, and all your merry days are over forever, would you not then give ten thousand worlds for Christ? and will you not now think him worthy of your esteem and earnest pursuit? Why will ye judge of things now quite the reverse of what you will do then, when you will be more capable of judging rightly!

And now, dear immortal souls! I have discovered the nature and danger of this common but unsuspected and unlamented sin, Making light of Christ. I have delivered my message, and now I must leave it with you, imploring the blessing of God upon it. I cannot follow you home to your houses to see what effect it has upon you, or to make application of it to each of you in particular; but, O may your consciences undertake this office! Whenever you spend another prayerless, thoughtless day, whenever you give yourselves up to sinful pleasures, or an over-eager pursuit of the world, may your conscience become your preacher, and sting you with this expostulation: "Alas! is this the effect of all I have heard? Do I still make light of Christ and the concerns of religion? Oh what will be the end of such a conduct!"

I cannot but fear after all, that some of you, as usual, will continue careless and impenitent. Well, when you are suffering the punishment of this sin in hell, remember that you were warned, and acquit me from being accessory to your ruin. And when we all appear before the supreme Judge, and I am

called to give an account of my ministry: when I am asked, “Did you warn these creatures of their danger? Did you lay before them their guilt in making light of these things;” you will allow me to answer, “Yes Lord, I warned them in the best manner I could, but they would not believe me; they would not regard what I said, though enforced by the authority of thy awful name, and confirmed by thine own word.” O sirs, must I give in this accusation against any of you? No, rather have mercy upon yourselves; and have mercy upon me, that I may give an account of you with joy, and not with grief.

SERMON VIII.

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST TO WEAK BELIEVERS.

MATT. XII. 20. *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.*

THE Lord Jesus possesses all those virtues in the highest perfection, which render him infinitely amiable, and qualify him for the administration of a just and gracious government over the world. The virtues of mortals, when carried to a high degree, very often run into those vices which have a kind of affinity to them. “Right, too rigid, hardens into wrong.” Strict justice steels itself into excessive severity; and the man is lost in the judge. Goodness and mercy sometimes degenerate into softness and an irrational compassion inconsistent with government. But in Jesus Christ these seemingly opposite virtues centre and harmonise in the high-

est perfection, without running into extremes. Hence he is at once characterised as a Lamb, and as the Lion of the tribe of Judah: a lamb for gentleness towards humble penitents; and a lion to tear his enemies in pieces. Christ is said to *judge and make war*, Rev. xix. 11. and yet he is called *the Prince of peace*. Isa. ix. 6. He will at length shew himself terrible to the workers of iniquity; and the terrors of the Lord are a very proper topic whence to persuade men; but now he is patient towards all men, and he is all love and tenderness towards the meanest penitent. The meekness and gentleness of Christ is to be the pleasing entertainment of this day; and I enter upon it with a particular view to those mourning, desponding souls among us, whose weakness renders them in great need of strong consolation. To such in particular, I address the words of my text: *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.*

This is a part of the Redeemer's character, as delineated near three thousand years ago by the evangelical prophet Isaiah, Isa. xlii. 1—4. and it is expressly applied to him by St. Matthew: *Behold, says the Father, my Servant whom I have chosen for the important undertaking of saving the guilty sons of men; "my Beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased;" my very soul is well pleased with his faithful discharge of the important office he has undertaken. I will put my spirit upon him; that is, I will completely furnish him by the gifts of my spirit for his high character; and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles: to the poor benighted Gentiles he shall shew the light of salvation, by revealing the gospel to them; which, in the style of the Old Testament, may be called his judgments. Or he will shew and execute the judgment of this world by casting out its infernal prince,*

who had so long exercised an extensive cruel tyranny over it. *He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets;* that is, though he enters the world as a mighty prince and conquerer to establish a kingdom of righteousness, and overthrow the kingdom of darkness, yet he will not introduce it with the noisy terrors and thunders of war, but shall shew himself mild and gentle as the prince of peace. Or the connexion may lead us to understand these words in a different sense, namely: He shall do nothing with clamorous ostentation, nor proclaim his wonderful works, when it shall answer no valuable end. Accordingly the verse of our text stands thus connected: *Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, and charged them that they should not make him known. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying—He shall not cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets;* that is, he shall not publish his miracles with noisy triumph in the streets and other public places. And when it is said, *He shall not strive,* it may refer to his inoffensive, passive behaviour towards his enemies that were plotting his death. For thus we may connect this quotation from Isaiah with the preceding history in the chapter of our text: *Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, instead of praying to his Father for a guard of angels, or employing his own miraculous power to destroy them, he withdrew himself from thence;—that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, saying—He shall not strive.*

The general meaning of my text seems to be contained in this observation: “That the Lord Jesus has the tenderest and most compassionate re-

gard to the feeblest penitent, however oppressed and desponding; and that he will approve and cherish the least spark of true love towards himself.

The bruised reed seems naturally to represent a soul at once feeble in itself, and crushed with a burden; a soul both weak and oppressed. The reed is a slender, frail vegetable in itself, and therefore a very proper image to represent a soul that is feeble and weak. A bruised reed is still more frail, hangs its head, and is unable to stand without some prop. And what can be a more lively emblem of a poor soul, not only weak in itself, but bowed down and broken under a load of sin and sorrow, that droops and sinks, and is unable to stand without divine support? Strength may bear up under a burden, or struggle with it, till it has thrown it off; but oppressed weakness, frailty under a burden, what can be more pitiable? and yet this is the case of many a poor penitent. He is weak in himself, and in the mean time crushed under an heavy weight of guilt and distress.

And what would become of such a frail, oppressed creature, if, instead of raising him up and supporting him, Jesus should tread and crush him under the foot of his indignation? But though a reed, especially a bruised reed, is an insignificant thing, of little or no use, yet, "a bruised reed he will not break," but he raises it up with a gentle hand, and enables it to stand, though weak in itself, and easily-crushed in ruin.

Perhaps the imagery, when drawn at length, may be this: "The Lord Jesus is an almighty Conqueror, marches in state through our world; and here and there a bruised reed lies in his way. But instead of disregarding it, or trampling it under foot, he takes care not to break it: he raises up the drooping straw, trifling as it is, and supports it

with his gentle hand." Thus, poor broken-hearted penitents, thus he takes care of you, and supports you, worthless and trifling as you are.— Though you seem to lie in the way of his justice, and it might tread you with its heavy foot, yet he not only does not crush you, but takes you up, and inspires you with strength to bear your burden, and flourish again.

Or perhaps the imagery may be derived from the practice of the ancient shepherds, who were wont to amuse themselves with the music of a pipe of reed or straw; and when it was bruised they broke it, or threw it away as useless. But the bruised reed shall not be broken by this divine Shepherd of souls. The music of broken sighs and groans is indeed all that the broken reed can afford him: the notes are but low, melancholy, and jarring: and yet he will not break the instrument, but he will repair and tune it, till it is fit to join in the concert of angels on high; and even now its humble strains are pleasing to his ears. Surely every broken heart among us must revive, while contemplating this tender and moving imagery!

The other emblem is equally significant and affecting. *The smoking flax shall he not quench.* It seems to be an illusion to the wick of a candle or lamp, the flame of which is put out, but it still smokes, and retains a little fire, which may again be blown into a flame, or rekindled by the application of more fire. Many such dying snuffs or smoking wicks are to be found in the candlesticks of the churches, and in the lamps of the sanctuary. The flame of divine love is just expiring, it is sunk into the socket of a corrupt heart, and produces no clear steady blaze, but only a smoke that is disagreeable, although it shews that a spark of the sacred fire still remains; or it produces a faint quiv-

ering flame that dies away, then catches and revives, and seems unwilling to be quenched entirely. The devil and the world raise many storms of temptation to blow it out; and a corrupt heart, like a fountain, pours out water to quench it. But even this smoking flax, this dying snuff, Jesus will not quench, but he blows it up into a flame, and pours in the oil of his grace to recruit and nourish it.— He walks among the golden candlesticks, and trims the lamps of his sanctuary. Where he finds empty vessels without oil or a spark of heavenly fire, like those of the foolish virgins, he breaks the vessels, or throws them out of his house. But where he finds the least spark of true grace, where he discovers but the glimpse of sincere love to him, where he sees the principle of true piety, which, though just expiring, yet renders the heart susceptible of divine love, as a candle just put out is easily rekindled, there he will strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die: he will blow up the dying snuff to a lively flame, and cause it to shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day. Where there is the least principle of true holiness he will cherish it. He will furnish the expiring lamp with fresh supplies of the oil of grace, and of heavenly fire; and all the storms that beat upon it shall not be able to put it out, because sheltered by his hand.

I hope, my dear brethren, some of you begin already to feel the pleasing energy of this text.— Are you not ready to say, “Blessed Jesus! is this thy true character? Then thou art just such a Saviour as I want, and I most willingly give up myself to thee.” You are sensible you are at best but a bruised reed, a feeble, shattered, useless thing: an untuneable, broken pipe of straw, that can make no proper music for the entertainment of

your divine Shepherd. Your heart is at best but smoking flax, where the love of God often appears like a dying snuff; or an expiring flame that quivers and catches, and hovers over the lamp, just ready to go out. Such some of you probably feel yourselves to be. Well, and what think ye of Christ? "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;" and therefore, may not even your guilty eyes look to this gentle Saviour with encouraging hope? May you not say to him, with the sweet singer of Israel, in his last moments, *He is all my salvation, and all my desire.* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

In prosecuting this subject I intend to illustrate the character of a weak believer, as represented in my text, and then to illustrate the care and compassion of Jesus Christ even for such a poor weakling.

I. I am to illustrate the character of a weak believer as represented in my text, by "a bruised reed, and smoking flax."

The metaphor of a bruised reed, as I observed, seems most naturally to convey the idea of a state of weakness and oppression. And therefore in illustrating it I am naturally led to describe the various weakness which a believer sometimes painfully feels, and to point out the heavy burdens which he sometimes groans under; I say, sometimes, for at other times even the weak believer finds himself strong, *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man.* The joy of the Lord is his strength; and he "can do all things through Christ strengthening him." Even the oppressed believer at times feels himself delivered from his burden, and he can lift up his drooping head, and walk upright. But, alas! the burden returns, and crushes him

again. And under some burden or other many honest-hearted believers groan out the most part of their lives.

Let us now see what are those weaknesses which a believer feels and laments. He finds himself weak in knowledge; a simple child in the knowledge of God and divine things. He is weak in love; the sacred flame does not rise with a perpetual fervour, and diffuse itself through all his devotions, but at times it languishes and dies away into a smoking snuff. He is weak in faith; he cannot keep a strong hold of the Almighty, cannot suspend his all upon his promises with cheerful confidence, nor build a firm immoveable fabric of hope upon the rock Jesus Christ. He is weak in hope; his hope is dashed with rising billows of fears and jealousies, and sometimes just overset. He is weak in joy; he cannot extract the sweets of christianity, nor taste the comforts of his religion. He is weak in zeal for God and the interests of his kingdom; he would wish himself always a flaming seraph, always glowing with zeal, always unwearied in serving his God, and promoting the designs of redeeming love in the world; but, alas! at times his zeal with his love, languishes and dies away into a smoking snuff. He is weak in repentance; troubled with that plague of plagues, an hard heart. He is weak in the conflict with indwelling sin, that is perpetually making insurrections within him.— He is weak in resisting temptations; which crowd upon him from without, and are often likely to overwhelm him. He is weak in courage to encounter the king of terrors, and venture through the valley of the shadow of death. He is weak in prayer, in importunity, in filial boldness, in approaching the mercy-seat. He is weak in abilities to endeavour the conversion of sinners, and save

souls from death. In short, he is weak in every thing in which he should be strong. He has indeed, like the church of Philadelphia, a little strength; Rev. iii. 8. and at times he feels it; but Oh! it seems to him much too little for the work he has to do. These weaknesses or defects the believer feels, painfully and tenderly feels, and bitterly laments. A sense of them keeps him upon his guard against temptations: he is not venturesome in rushing into the combat. He would not parley with temptation, but would keep out of its way; nor would he run the risk of a defeat by an ostentatious experiment of his strength. This sense of weakness also keeps him dependent upon divine strength. He clings to that support given to St. Paul in an hour of hard conflict, *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*; and when a sense of his weakness has this happy effect upon him, then with St. Paul he has reason to say, *When I am weak, then I am strong.* 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

I say the believer feels and laments these weaknesses; and this is the grand distinction in this case between him and the rest of the world. They are weak too; much weaker than he, nay, they have, properly, no spiritual strength at all; but, alas! they do not feel their weakness, but the poor vain creatures boast of their strength, and think they can do great things when they are disposed for them. Or if their repeated falls and defeats by temptation extort them to a confession of their weakness, they plead it rather as an excuse, than lament it as at once a crime and a calamity. But the poor believer tries no such artifice to extenuate his guilt. He is sensible that even his weakness itself has guilt in it, and therefore he laments it with ingenuous sorrow among his other sins.

Now, have I not delineated the very character of some of you; such weaklings, such frail reeds you feel yourselves to be? Well, hear this kind assurance, "Jesus will not break such a feeble reed, but he will support and strengthen it."

But you perhaps not only feel you are weak, but you are oppressed with some heavy burden or other. You are not only a reed for weakness, but you are a bruised reed, trodden under foot, crushed under a load. Even this is no unusual or discouraging case; for,

The weak believer often feels himself crushed under some heavy burden. The frail reed is often bruised; bruised under a due sense of guilt. Guilt lies heavy at times upon his conscience, and he cannot throw it off. Bruised with a sense of remaining sin, which he finds still strong within him, and which at times prevails, and treads him under foot. Bruised under a burden of wants, the want of tenderness of heart, of ardent love to God and mankind, the want of heavenly-mindedness and victory over the world; the want of conduct and resolution to direct his behaviour in a passage so intricate and difficult, and the want of nearer intercourse with the Father and his spirit; in short, a thousand pressing wants crush and bruise him. He also feels his share of the calamities of life in common with other men. But these burdens I shall take no farther notice of, because they are not peculiar to him as a believer, nor do they lie heaviest upon his heart. He could easily bear up under the calamities of life if his spiritual wants were supplied, and the burden of guilt and sin were removed. Under these last he groans and sinks. Indeed these burdens lie with all their full weight upon the world around him; but they are dead in trespasses and sins, and feel them not: they do

not groan under them, nor labour for deliverance from them. They lie contented under them, with more stupidity than beasts of burden, till they sink under the intolerable load into the depth of misery; But the poor believer is not so stupid, and his tender heart feels the burden and groans under it. *We that are in this tabernacle*, says St. Paul, *do groan, being burdened.* 2 Cor. v. 4. The believer understands feelingly that pathetic exclamation, *O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Rom. vii. 24. He cannot be easy till his conscience is appeased by a well-attested pardon through the blood of Christ; and the sins he feels working within him are a real burden and uneasiness to him, though they should never break out into action, and publicly dishonour his holy profession.

And is not this the very character of some poor oppressed creatures among you? I hope it is. You may look upon your case to be very discouraging, but Jesus looks upon it in a more favourable light; he looks upon you as proper objects of his compassionate care. Bruised as you are, he will bind you up, and support you.

II. *But* I proceed to take a view of the character of a weak christian, as represented in the other metaphor in my text, namely, *smoking flax*. The idea most naturally conveyed by this metaphor is, that of grace true and sincere, but languishing and just expiring like a candle just blown out, which still smokes and retains a feeble spark of fire. It signifies a susceptibility of a farther grace, or a readiness to catch that sacred fire, as a candle just put out is easily re-kindled. This metaphor therefore leads me to describe the reality of religion in a low degree, or to delineate the true christian in his most languishing hours. And in so doing I

shall mention those dispositions and exercises which the weakest christian feels, even in these melancholy seasons; for even in these he widely differs still from the most polished hypocrite in his highest improvements. On this subject let me solicit your most serious attention; for, if you have the least spark of real religion within you, you are now likely to discover it, as I am not going to rise to the high attainments of christians of the first rank, but to stoop to the character of the meanest. Now the peculiar dispositions and exercises of heart which such in some measure feel, you may discover from the following short history of their case.

The weak christian in such languishing hours does indeed sometimes fall into such a state of carelessness and insensibility, that he has very few and but superficial exercises of mind about divine things. But generally he feels an uneasiness, an emptiness, an anxiety within, under which he droops and pines away, and all the world cannot heal the disease. He has chosen the blessed God as his supreme happiness; and, when he cannot derive happiness from that source, all the sweets of created enjoyments become insipid to him, and cannot fill up the prodigious void which the absence of the Supreme Good leaves in his craving soul. Sometimes his anxiety is indistinct and confused, and he hardly knows what ails him; but at other times he feels it is for God, the living God, that his soul pants. The evaporations of this smoking flax naturally ascend towards heaven. He knows that he never can be happy till he can enjoy the communications of divine love. Let him turn which way he will, he can find no solid ease, no rest, till he comes to this centre again.

Even at such times he cannot be thoroughly reconciled to his sins. He may be parleying with some of them in an unguarded hour, and seem to be negotiating a peace; but the truce is soon ended, and they are at variance again. The enmity of a renewed heart soon rises against this old enemy. And there is this circumstance remarkable in the believer's hatred and opposition to sin, that they do not proceed principally, much less entirely, from a fear of punishment, but from a generous sense of its intrinsic baseness and ingratitude, and its contrariety to the holy nature of God. This is the ground of his hatred to sin, and sorrow for it; and this shews that there is at least a spark of true grace in his heart, and that he does not act altogether from the low, interested, and mercenary principles of nature.

At such times he is very jealous of the sincerity of his religion, afraid that all his past experiences were delusive, and afraid that, if he should die in his present state, he would be forever miserable. A very anxious state is this! The stupid world can lie secure while this grand concern lies in the most dreadful suspense. But the tender-hearted believer is not capable of such fool-hardiness: he shudders at the thought of everlasting separation from that God and Saviour whom he loves. He loves him, and therefore the fear of separation from him, fills him with all the anxiety of bereaved love. This to him is the most painful ingredient of the punishment of hell. Hell would be a sevenfold hell to a lover of God, because it is a state of banishment from him whom he loves. He could forever languish and pine away under the consuming distresses of widowed love, which those that love him not cannot feel. And has God kindled the sacred flame in his heart in order to render him capable of the

more exquisite pain? Will he exclude from his presence the poor creature that clings to him, and languishes for him? No, the flax that does but smoke with his love was never intended to be fuel for hell; but he will blow it up into a flame, and nourish it till it mingles with the seraphic ardours in the region of perfect love.

The weak believer seems sometimes driven by the tempests of lust and temptation from off the rock of Jesus Christ. But he makes towards it on the stormy billows, and labours to lay hold upon it, and recover his station there; for he is sensible there is no other foundation of safety; but that without Christ he must perish forever. It is the habitual disposition of the believer's soul to depend upon Jesus Christ alone. He retains a kind of direction or tendency towards him, like the needle touched with the load-stone towards the pole: and, if his heart is turned from its course, it trembles and quivers till it gains its favourite point again, and fixes there. Sometimes indeed a consciousness of guilt renders him shy of his God and Saviour; and after such base ingratitude he is ashamed to go to him: but at length necessity as well as inclination constrains him, and he is obliged to cry out, *Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life, John vi. 68.* "In thee alone I find rest to my soul; and therefore to thee I must fly, though I am ashamed and confounded to appear in thy presence."

In short, the weakest christian upon earth sensibly feels that his comfort rises and falls, as he lives nearer to or farther from his God. The love of God has such an habitual predominancy even in his heart, that nothing in the world, nor even all the world together, can fill up his place. No, when he is gone, heaven and earth cannot replenish the

mighty void. Even the weakest christian upon earth longs to be delivered from sin, from all sin, without exception; and a body of death hanging about him is the burden of his life. Even the poor jealous languishing christian has his hope, all the little hope that he has, built upon Jesus Christ.— Even this smoking flax sends up some exhalations of love towards heaven. Even the poor creature that often fears he is altogether a slave to sin, honestly, though feebly, labours to be holy, to be holy as an angel, yea, to be holy as God is holy. He has an heart that feels the attractive charms of holiness, and he is so captivated by it, that sin can never recover its former place in his heart: no, the tyrant is forever dethroned, and the believer would rather die than yield himself a tame slave to the usurped tyranny again.

Thus I have delineated to you, in the plainest manner I could, the character of a weak christian. Some of you I am afraid cannot lay claim even to this low character. If so, you may be sure you are not true christians, even of the lowest rank. You may be sure you have not the least spark of true religion in your hearts, but are utterly destitute of it.

But some of you, I hope, can say, “Well, after all my doubts and fears, if this be the character of a true, though weak christian, then I may humbly hope that I am one. I am indeed confirmed in it, that I am less than the least of all other saints upon the face of the earth, but yet I see that I am a saint; for thus has my heart been exercised, even in my dark and languishing hours. This secret uneasiness and pining anxiety, this thirst for God, for the living God, this tendency of soul towards Jesus Christ, this implacable enmity to sin, this panting and struggling after holiness: these things

have I often felt." And have you indeed? then away with your doubts and jealousies; away with your fears and despondencies! There is at least an immortal spark kindled in your hearts, which the united power of men and devils, of sin and temptation, shall never be able to quench. No, it shall yet rise into a flame, and burn with seraphic ardours forever.

For your farther encouragement, I proceed,

II. To illustrate the care and compassion of Jesus Christ for such poor weaklings as you.

This may appear a needless task to some: for who is there that does not believe it? But to such would I say, it is no easy thing to establish a trembling soul in the full belief of his truth. It is easy for one that does not see his danger, and does not feel his extreme need of salvation, and the difficulty of the work, to believe that Christ is willing and able to save him. But O! to a poor soul, deeply sensible of its condition, this is no easy matter. Besides, the heart may need to be more deeply affected with this truth, though the understanding should need no farther arguments of the speculative kind for its conviction; and to impress this truth is my present design.

For this purpose I need but read and paraphrase to you a few of the many kind declarations and assurances which Jesus has given us in his word, and relate the happy experiences of some of his saints there recorded, who found him true and faithful to his word.

The Lord Jesus seems to have a peculiar tenderness for the poor, the mourners, the brokenhearted; and these are peculiarly the objects of his mediatorial office. *The Lord hath anointed me, says he, to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me all the way from my native heaven down to earth,*

upon this compassionate errand, *to bind up the broken-hearted, 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.* Isa. lxi. 1, 3. Thus saith the Lord, in strains of majesty that become him, *the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath my hand made, saith the Lord.* Had he spoken uniformly in this majestic language to us guilty worms, the declaration might have overwhelmed us with awe, but could not have inspired us with hope.—But he advances himself thus high, on purpose to let us see how low he can stoop. Hear the encouraging sequel of this his majestic speech: *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* Let heaven and earth wonder that he will look down through all the shining ranks of angels, and look by princes and nobles, to fix his eye upon this man, this poor man, this contrite, broken-hearted, trembling creature. Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. He loves to dwell upon this subject, and therefore you hear it again in the same prophecy: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy,”—what does he say? *I dwell in the high and holy place.* Isa. lvii. 15. This is said in character. This is a dwelling in some measure worthy the inhabitant. But O! will he stoop to dwell in a lower mansion, or pitch his tent among mortals? yes, he dwells not only in his *high and holy place*, but also *with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* He charges Peter to feed his lambs as well as his sheep; that is, to take the tenderest care even of the weak-

est in his flock. John xxi. 15. And he severely rebukes the shepherds of Israel, *Because, says he, ye have not strengthened the diseased, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken.* Ezek. xxxiv. 4. But what an amiable reverse is the character of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls! *Behold, says Isaiah, the Lord will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold his reward is with him, and his work before him.* How justly may we tremble at this proclamation of the approaching God! for who can stand when he appeareth? But how agreeably are our fears disappointed in what follows! If he comes to take vengeance on his enemies, he also comes to shew mercy to the meanest of his people. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young,* Isa. xl. 10, 11. that is, he shall exercise the tenderest and most compassionate care towards the meanest and weakest of his flock. *He looked down, says the Psalmist, from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; not to view the grandeur and pride of courts and kings, nor the heroic exploits of conquerors, but to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to die. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come.* Psalm cii. 17—20. It was written for your encouragement, my brethren. Above three thousand years ago this encouraging passage was entered into the sacred records for the support of poor, desponding souls in Virginia, in the ends of the earth. O what an early provident care does God shew for his people! There are none of the seven churches of Asia so highly commended by

Christ as that of Philadelphia; and yet in commending her, all he can say is, "Thou hast a little strength." *I know thy works; behold I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength.* Rev. iii. 8. O how acceptable is a little strength to Jesus Christ, and how ready is he to improve it! *He giveth power to the faint, says Isaiah, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.* Isa. xl. 29. Hear farther what words of grace and truth flowed from the lips of Jesus. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: for I am meek and lowly in heart.* Matt. xi. 28, 29. *Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.* John vi. 57. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.* John vii. 37. *Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.* Rev. xxii. 17. O what strong consolation is here! what exceeding great and precious promises are these! I might easily add to the catalogue, but these may suffice.

Let us now see how his people in every age have ever found these promises made good. Here David may be consulted, *instar omnium*, and he will tell you, pointing to himself, *this poor man cried, and the Lord heard and delivered him out of all his troubles.* Psalm xxxiv. 6. St. Paul, in the midst of affliction, calls God *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation.* 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. *God, says he, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforteth us.* 2 Cor. vii. 6. What a sweetly emphatical declaration is this! "God the comforter of the humble comforted us." He is not only the Lord of Hosts, the King of Kings, the creator of the world, but among his more august characters he assumes this title, the Comforter of "the humble." Such St. Paul found him in an

hour of temptation, when he had this supporting answer to his repeated prayer for deliverance: *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* 2 Cor. xii. 9. Since this was the case; since his weakness was more than supplied by the strength of Christ, and was a foil to set it off, St. Paul seems quite regardless what infirmities he laboured under. Nay, most gladly, says he, *will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities—for when I am weak, then am I strong.* He could take no pleasure in feeling himself weak; but the mortification was made up by the pleasure he found in leaning upon this almighty support. His wounds were painful to him; but, Oh! the pleasure he found in feeling this divine physician dressing his wounds, in some measure swallowed up the pain. It was probably experience, as well as inspiration, that dictated to the apostle that amiable character of Christ, that he is a merciful and faithful high priest, who being himself tempted, knows how to succour them that are tempted. Heb. ii. 17, 18. And we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Heb. iv. 15.

But why need I multiply arguments? Go to his cross, and there learn his love and compassion, from his groans and wounds, and blood, and death. Would he hang there in such agony for sinners if he were not willing to save them, and cherish every good principle in them? There you may have much the same evidence of his compassion as Thomas had of his resurrection; you may look into his hands, and see the print of the nails; and into his side, and see the scar of the spear; which loudly proclaim his readiness to pity and help you.

And now, poor, trembling, doubting souls, what hinders but you should rise up your drooping head, and take courage? May you not venture your souls into such compassionate and faithful hands! Why should the bruised reed shrink from him, when he comes not to tread it down, but raise it up?

As I am really solicitous that impenitent hearts among us should be pierced with the medicinal anguish and sorrow of conviction and repentance, and the most friendly heart cannot form a kinder wish for them, so I am truly solicitous that every honest soul, in which there is the least spark of true piety, should enjoy the pleasure of it. It is indeed to be lamented that they who have a title to so much happiness should enjoy so little of it; it is very incongruous that they should go bowing the head in their way towards heaven, as if they were hastening to the place of execution, and that they should serve so good a master with such heavy hearts. O lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees! *Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Trust in your all-sufficient Redeemer, trust in him though he should slay you.*

And do not indulge causeless doubts and fears concerning your sincerity. When they arise in your minds examine them, and search whether there be any sufficient reason for them; and if you discover there is not, then reject them and set them at defiance, and entertain your hopes in spite of them, and say with the Psalmist, *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, the health of my countenance, and my God. Psl. xliii. 11.*

SERMON IX.

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN PRESENT HOLINESS AND FUTURE FELICITY.

HEB. XII. 14.—*Follow holiness; without which no man shall see the Lord.*

AS the human soul was originally designed for the enjoyment of no less a portion than the ever-blessed God, it was formed with a strong innate tendency towards happiness. It has not only an eager fondness for existence, but for some good to render its existence happy. And the privation of being itself is not more terrible than the privation of all its blessings. It is true, in the present degeneracy of human nature, this vehement desire is miserably perverted and misplaced: man seeks his supreme happiness in sinful, or at best in created enjoyments, forgetful of the uncreated fountain of bliss; but yet still he seeks happiness; still this innate *impetus* is predominant, and though he mistakes the means, yet he still retains a general aim at the end. Hence he ransacks this lower world in quest of felicity; climbs in search of it the slippery ascent of honour; hunts for it in the treasures of gold and silver; or plunges for it in the foul streams of sensual pleasures. But since all the sordid satisfaction resulting from these things are not adequate to the unbounded cravings of the mind, and since the satisfaction is transitory and perishing, or we may be wrenched from it by the inexorable hand of death, the mind breaks through the limits of the present enjoyments, and even of the lower creation, and ranges through the unknown scenes of futurity in quest of some untried



The Connexion between

good. Hope makes excursions into the dark duration between the present *now* and the grave, and forms to itself pleasing images of approaching blessings, which often vanish in the embrace, like delusive phantoms. Nay, it launches into the vast unknown world that lies beyond the grave, and roves through the regions of immensity after some complete felicity to supply the defects of sublunary enjoyments. Hence, though men, till their spirits are refined by regenerating grace, have no relish for celestial joys, but pant for the poor pleasures of time and sense, yet as they cannot avoid the unwelcome consciousness that death will ere long rend them from these sordid and momentary enjoyments, are constrained to indulge the hope of bliss in a future state: and they promise themselves happiness in another world when they can no longer enjoy any in this. And as reason and revelation unitedly assure them that this felicity cannot then consist in sensual indulgencies, they generally expect it will be of a more refined and spiritual nature, and flow more immediately from the great Father of spirits.

He must indeed be miserable that abandons all hope of this blessedness. The christian religion affords him no other prospect but that of eternal, intolerable misery in the regions of darkness and despair; and if he flies to infidelity as a refuge, it can afford him no comfort but the shocking prospect of annihilation.

Now, if men were pressed into heaven by an unavoidable fatality, if happiness was promiscuously promised to them all without distinction of characters, then they might indulge a blind unexamined hope, and never perplex themselves with anxious inquiries about it. And he might justly be deemed a malignant disturber of the repose of

mankind that would attempt to shock their hope, and frighten them with causeless scruples.

But if the light of nature intimates, and the voice of scripture proclaims aloud, that this eternal felicity is reserved only for persons of particular characters, and that multitudes, multitudes who entertained pleasing hopes of it, are confounded with an eternal disappointment, and shall suffer an endless duration in the most terrible miseries, we ought each of us to take the alarm, and examine the grounds of our hope, that, if they appear sufficient, we may allow ourselves a rational satisfaction in them; and, if they are found delusive, we may abandon them and seek for a hope which will bear the test now while it may be obtained. And however disagreeable the task be to give our fellow creatures even profitable uneasiness, yet he must appear to the impartial a friend to the best interests of mankind, who points out the evidences and foundation of a rational and scriptural hope, and exposes the various mistakes to which we are subject in so important a case.

And if, when we look around us, we find persons full of the hopes of heaven, who can give no scriptural evidences of them to themselves or others; if we find many indulging this pleasing delusion, whose practices are mentioned by God himself as the certain marks of perishing sinners; and if persons are so tenacious of these hopes, that they will retain them to their everlasting ruin, unless the most convictive methods are taken to undeceive them; then it is high time for those to whom the care of souls (a weightier charge than that of kingdoms,) is entrusted, to use the greatest plainness for this purpose.

This is my chief design at present, and to this

my text naturally leads me. It contains these doctrines:

First, That without holiness here, it is impossible for us to enjoy heavenly happiness in the future world. To see the Lord, is here put for enjoying him; see Rom. viii. 24. And the metaphor signifies the happiness of the future state in general; and more particularly intimates that the knowledge of God will be a special ingredient therein. See a parallel expression in Matt. v. 8.

Secondly, that this consideration should induce us to use the most earnest endeavours to obtain the heavenly happiness. Pursue holiness, because *without it no man can see the Lord.*

Hence I am naturally led,

I. To explain the nature of that *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*

II. To shew what endeavours should be used to obtain it. And,

III. To urge you to use them by the consideration of the absolute necessity of holiness.

I. I am to explain the nature of holiness. And I shall give you a brief definition of it, and then mention some of those dispositions and practices which naturally flow from it.

The most intelligible description of holiness as it is inherent in us, may be this; "It is a conformity in heart and practice to the revealed will of God." As the Supreme Being is the standard of all perfection, his holiness in particular is the standard of ours. Then we are holy when his image is stamped upon our hearts and reflected in our lives; so the apostle defines it, *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* Eph. iv. 24. *Whom he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.* Rom. viii. 29. Hence holiness may be

defined, "A conformity to God in his moral perfections." But as we cannot have a distinct knowledge of these perfections but as they are manifested by the revealed will of God, I choose to define holiness, as above, "A conformity to his revealed will." Now his revealed will comprises both the law and the gospel; the law informs us of the duty which we as creatures owe to God as a being of supreme excellency, as our Creator and Benefactor, and to men as our fellow creatures; and the gospel informs us of the duty, which as sinners, we owe to God as reconcileable through a Mediator. Our obedience to the former implies the whole of morality, and to the latter the whole of evangelical graces, as faith in a Mediator, repentance, &c.

From this definition of holiness it appears, on the one hand, that it is absolutely necessary to see the Lord; for unless our dispositions are conformed to him, we cannot be happy in the enjoyment of him: and on the other hand, that they who are made thus holy, are prepared for the vision and fruition of his face, as they can relish the divinest pleasure.

But as a concise definition of holiness may give an auditory but very imperfect ideas of it, I shall expatiate upon the dispositions and practices in which it consists, or which naturally result from it; and they are such as follow:

1. A delight in God for his holiness. Self-love may prompt us to love him for his goodness to us; and so, many unregenerate men may have a selfish love to God on this account. But to love God because he is infinitely holy, because he bears an infinite detestation to all sin, and will not indulge his creatures in the neglect of the least instance of holiness, but commands them to be holy as he is holy, this is a disposition connatural to a renewed

soul only, and argues a conformity to his image. Every nature is most agreeable to itself, and a holy nature is most agreeable to an holy nature.

Here I would make a remark, which may God deeply impress on your hearts, and which for that purpose I shall subjoin to each particular, that holiness in fallen man is supernatural; I mean, we are not born with it, we give no discoveries of it, till we have experienced a great change. Thus we find it in the present case: we have no natural love to God because of his infinite purity and hatred to all sin; nay, we would love him more did he give us greater indulgencies; and I am afraid the love of some persons is founded upon a mistake; they love him because they imagine he does not hate sin, nor them for it, so much as he really does; because they think he will bring them to heaven at last, let them live as they list; and because they do not expect he is so inexorably just in his dealings with the sinner. It is no wonder they love such a soft, easy, passive being as this imaginary deity; but did they see the lustre of that holiness of God which dazzles the celestial armies; did they but know the terrors of his justice, and his implacable indignation against sin, their innate enmity would shew its poison, and their hearts would rise against God in all those horrible blasphemies with which awakened sinners are so frequently shocked. Such love as this is so far from being acceptable, that it is the greatest affront to the Supreme Being, as, if a profligate loved you on the mistaken supposition that you were such a libertine as himself, it would rather inflame your indignation than procure your respect.

But to a regenerate mind how strong, how transporting are the charms of holiness! Such a mind joins the anthem of seraphs with the divinest com-

placency, Rev. iv. 8. and anticipates the song of glorified saints, *Who would not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy?* Rev. xv. 4. The perfections of God lose their lustre, or sink into objects of terror or contempt, if this glorious attribute be abstracted. Without holiness power becomes tyranny, omniscience craft, justice revenge and cruelty, and even the amiable attribute of goodness loses its charms and degenerates into a blind promiscuous prodigality, or foolish undiscerning fondness: but when these perfections are clothed in the beauties of holiness, how godlike, how majestic, how lovely and attractive do they appear! and with what complacence does a mind fashioned after the divine image, acquiesce in them! It may appear amiable even to an unholy sinner that the exertions of almighty power should be regulated by the most consummate wisdom; that justice should not without distinction punish the guilty and the innocent; but an holy soul only can rejoice that divine goodness will not communicate happiness to the disgrace of holiness; and that, rather than it should overflow in a blind promiscuous manner, the whole human race should be miserable. A selfish sinner has nothing in view but his own happiness; and if this be obtained, he has no anxiety about the illustration of the divine purity; but it recommends happiness itself to a sanctified soul, that it cannot be communicated in a way inconsistent with the beauty of holiness.

2. Holiness consists in an hearty complacence in the law of God, because of its purity. The law is the transcript of the moral perfections of God; and if we love the original we shall love the copy. Accordingly it is natural to a renewed mind to love the divine law, because it is perfectly holy; because it makes no allowance for the least sin,

and requires every duty that it becomes us to perform towards God. Psalm cxix. 140. and xix. 7, 10. Romans vii. 12, compared with 22.

But is this our natural disposition? Is this the disposition of the generality? Do they not, on the contrary, secretly find fault with the law, because it is so strict? And their common objection against that holiness of life which it enjoins is, that they cannot bear to be so precise. Hence they are always for abating the rigour of the law, for bringing it down to some imaginary standard of their own, to their present ability, to sins of practice without regard to the sinful dispositions of the heart; or to the prevailing dispositions of the heart without regard to the first workings of concupiscence, those embryos of iniquity; and if they love the law at all, as they profess to do, it is upon supposition that it is not so strict as it really is, but grants them greater indulgences. Rom. vii. 7.

Hence it appears that, if we are made holy at all, it must be by a supernatural change; and when that is effected, what a strange and happy alteration does the sinner perceive? with what pleasure does he resign himself a willing subject to that law to which he was once so averse? And when he fails, (as, alas! he does in many things,) how is he humbled! he does not lay the fault upon the law as requiring impossibilities, but lays the whole fault upon himself as a corrupt sinner.

3. Holiness consists in an hearty complacence in the gospel method of salvation, because it tends to illustrate the moral perfections of the Deity, and to discover the beauties of holiness.

The gospel informs us of two grand pre-requisites to the salvation of the fallen sons of men, namely, the satisfaction of divine justice by the obedience and passion of Christ, that God might

be reconciled to them consistently with his perfections; and the sanctification of sinners by the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, that they might be capable of enjoying God, and that he might maintain intimate communion with them without any stain to his holiness. These two grand articles contain the substance of the gospel; and our acquiescence in them is the substance of that evangelical obedience which it requires of us, and which is essential to holiness in a fallen creature.

Now, it is evident, that without either of these, the moral perfections of the Deity, particularly his holiness, could not be illustrated, or even secured in the salvation of a sinner. Had he received an apostate race into favour, who had conspired in the most unnatural rebellion against him, without any satisfaction, his holiness would have been eclipsed; it would not have appeared that he had so invincible an abhorrence of sin, so zealous a regard for the vindication of his own holy law; or to his veracity, which had threatened condign punishment to offenders. But by the satisfaction of Christ, his holiness is illustrated in the most conspicuous manner; now it appears, that God would upon no terms save a sinner but that of adequate satisfaction, and that no other was sufficient but the suffering of his co-equal Son, otherwise he would not have appointed him to sustain the character of Mediator; and now it appears that his hatred of sin is such that he would not let it pass unpunished even in his own Son, when only imputed to him. In like manner, if sinners, while unholy, were admitted into communion with God in heaven, it would obscure the glory of his holiness, and it would not then appear that such was the purity of his nature that he could have no fellowship with sin. But now it is evident, that even the

blood of Immanuel cannot purchase heaven to be enjoyed by a sinner while unholy, but that every one that arrives at heaven must first be sanctified. An unholy sinner can be no more saved, while such, by the gospel than by the law; but here lies the difference, that the gospel makes provision for his sanctification, which is gradually carried on here, and perfected at death, before his admission into the heavenly glory.

Now it is the genius of true holiness to acquiesce in both these articles. A sanctified soul places all its dependence on the righteousness of Christ for acceptance. It would be disagreeable to it to have the least concurrence in its own justification. It is not only willing, but delights to renounce all its own righteousness, and to glory in Christ alone. Phil. iii. 3. Free grace to such souls is a charming theme, and salvation is more acceptable, because conveyed in this way. It would render heaven itself disagreeable, and wither all its joys, were they brought thither in a way that degrades or does not illustrate the glory of God's holiness; but O how agreeable the thought, that he that glorieth must glory in the Lord, and that the pride of all flesh shall be abased!

So an holy person rejoices that the way of holiness is the appointed way to heaven. He is not forced to be holy merely by the servile consideration that he must be so or perish, and so unwillingly submits to the necessity which he cannot avoid, when in the mean time, were it put to his choice, he would choose to reserve some sins, and neglect some painful duties. So far from this, that he delights in the gospel-constitution, because it requires universal holiness, and heaven would be less agreeable, were he to carry even the least sin there. He thinks it no hardship that he must deny himself in

his sinful pleasures, and habituate himself to so much strictness in religion; no, but he blesses the Lord for obliging him to it, and where he fails he charges himself with it, and is self-abased upon the account.

This is solid, rational religion, fit to be depended upon, in opposition to the antinomian licentiousness, the freaks of enthusiasm, and the irrational flights of passion and imagination on the one hand, and in opposition to formality, mere morality, and the self-sprung religion of nature on the other. And is it not evident we are destitute of this by nature? Men naturally are averse to this gospel method of salvation; they will not submit to the righteousness of God, but fix their dependence, in part at least, upon their own merit. Their proud hearts cannot bear the thought that all their performances must go for just nothing in their justification. They are also averse to the way of holiness; hence they will either abandon the expectation of heaven, and since they cannot obtain it in their sinful ways, desperately conclude to go on in sin, come what will; or, with all the little sophistry they are capable of, they will endeavour to widen the way to heaven, and persuade themselves they shall attain it, notwithstanding their continuance in some known iniquity, and though their hearts have never been thoroughly sanctified. Alas! how evident is this all around us! How many either give up their hopes of heaven rather than part with sin, or vainly hold them, while their dispositions and practices prove them groundless? And must not such degenerate creatures be renewed ere they can be holy, or see the Lord?

4. Holiness consists in an habitual delight in all the duties of holiness towards God and man, and an earnest desire for communion with God in them.

This is the natural result of all the foregoing particulars. If we love God for his holiness, we shall delight in that service in which our conformity to him consists; if we love his law, we shall delight in that obedience which it enjoins; and if we take complacence in the evangelical method of salvation, we shall take delight in that holiness, without which we cannot enjoy it. The service of God is the element, the pleasure of an holy soul; while others delight in the riches, the honours, or the pleasures of this world, the holy soul desires one thing of the Lord, that it may behold his beauty while inquiring in his temple. Psalm xxvii. 4.—Such a person delights in retired converse with heaven, in meditation and prayer. Ps. cxxxix. 17. and lxiii. 5, 6, and lxxiii. 28. He also takes pleasure in justice, benevolence, and charity towards men. Ps. cxii. 5, 9, and in the strictest temperance and sobriety. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

Moreover, the mere formality of performing religious duties does not satisfy the true saint, unless he enjoys a divine freedom therein, receives communications of grace from heaven, and finds his graces quickened. Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

This consideration also shews us that holiness in us must be supernatural; for do we naturally thus delight in the service of God? or do you all now thus delight in it? is it not rather a weariness to you, and do you not find more pleasures in other things? Surely you must be changed, or you can have no relish for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

5. To constitute us saints indeed, there must be universal holiness in practice. This naturally follows from the last, for as the body obeys the stronger volitions of the will, so when the heart is prevailingly disposed to the service of God, the man

will habitually practise it. 'This is generally mentioned in scripture as the grand characteristic of real religion, without which all our pretensions are vain. 1 John iii. 3, 10, and v. 3. John xv. 14. True christians are far from being perfect in practice, yet they are prevailing holy in all manner of conversation; they do not live habitually in any one known sin, or wilfully neglect any one known duty. Psalm cxix. 6.

Without this practical holiness no man shall see the Lord; and if so, how great a change must be wrought or most before they can see him, for how few are thus adorned with a life of universal holiness? Many profess the name of Christ, but how few of them depart from iniquity? But to what purpose do they call him Master and Lord, while they do not the things which he commands them?

Thus I have, as plainly as I could, described the nature and properties of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and they who are possessed of it may lift up their heads with joy, assured that God has begun a good work in them, and that he will carry it on; and on the other hand, they that are destitute of it may be assured, that, unless they are made new creatures, they cannot see the Lord. I come,

II. To shew you the endeavours we should use to obtain this holiness. And they are such as these:

1. Endeavour to know whether you are holy or not by close examination. It is hard indeed for some to know positively that they are holy, as they are perplexed with the appearances of realities, and the fears of counterfeits; but it is then easy for many to conclude negatively that they are not holy, as they have not the likeness of it. To determine this point is of great use to our successful

seeking after holiness. That an unregenerate sinner should attend on the means of grace with other aims than one that has reason to believe himself sanctified is evident. The anxieties, sorrows, desires, and endeavours of the one should run in a very different channel from those of the other. The one should look upon himself as a guilty and condemned sinner; the other should allow himself the pleasure of a justified state: the one should pursue after the implantation, the other after the increase, of holiness: the one should indulge a seasonable concern about his lost condition; the other repose an humble confidence in God as reconciled to him: the one should look upon the threatenings of God as his doom; the other embrace the promises as his portion. Hence it follows that, while we are mistaken about our state, we cannot use endeavours after holiness in a proper manner. We act like a physician that applies medicines at random, without knowing the disease. It is a certain conclusion that the most generous charity, under scriptural limitations, cannot avoid, that multitudes are destitute of holiness, and ought not we to inquire with proper anxiety whether we belong to that number? Let us be impartial, and proceed according to evidence. If we find those marks of holiness in heart and life which have been mentioned, let not an excessive scrupulosity frighten us from drawing the happy conclusion: and, if we find them not, let us exercise so much wholesome severity against ourselves, as honestly to conclude we are unholy sinners, and must be renewed before we can see the Lord. The conclusion no doubt will give you painful anxiety, but if you was my dearest friend, I could not form a kinder wish for you than that you might be incessantly distressed with it till you are born again. This conclusion will not be

always avoidable; the light of eternity will force you upon it; and whether is it better to give way to it now, when it may be to your advantage, or be forced to admit it then, when it will be only a torment?

2. Awake, arise, and betake yourself in earnest to all the means of grace. Your life, your eternal life is concerned, and therefore it calls for all the ardour and earnestness you are capable of exerting. Accustom yourself to meditation, converse with yourselves in retirement, and live no longer strangers at home. Read the word of God and other good books, with diligence, attention, and self-application. Attend on the public ministrations of the gospel not as a trifler, but as one that sees his eternal all concerned. Shun the tents of sin, the rendezvous of sinners, and associate with those that have experienced the change you want, and can give you proper directions. Prostrate yourself before the God of heaven, confess your sin, implore his mercy, cry to him night and day, and give him no rest, till the importunity prevail, and you take the kingdom of heaven by violence.

But after all, acknowledge that it is God that must work in you both to will and to do, and that when you have done all these things you are but unprofitable servants. I do not prescribe these directions as though these means could effect holiness in you; no, they can no more do it than a pen can write without a hand. It is the holy Spirit's province alone to sanctify a degenerate sinner, but he is wont to do it while we are waiting upon him in the use of these means, though our best endeavours give us no title to his grace; but he may justly leave us after all in that state of condemnation and corruption into which we have voluntarily brought ourselves. I go on,

III. And lastly, to urge you to the use of these means from the consideration mentioned in the text, the absolute necessity of holiness to the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

Here I would shew that holiness is absolutely necessary, and that the consideration of its necessity may strongly enforce the pursuit of it.

The necessity of holiness appears from the unchangeable appointment of heaven, and the nature of things.

1. The unchangeable appointment of God excludes all the unholy from the kingdom of heaven; see 1 Cor. ix. 6. Rev. xxi. 27. Psalm v. 4, 5. 2 Cor. v. 17. Gal. vi. 15. It is most astonishing that many who profess to believe the divine authority of the scriptures, will yet indulge vain hopes of heaven in opposition to the plainest declarations of eternal truth. But though there were no positive constitution excluding the unholy from heaven, yet,

2. The very nature of things excludes sinners from heaven; that is, it is impossible, in the nature of things, that while they are unholy, they could receive happiness from the employments and entertainments of the heavenly world. If these consisted in the affluence of those things which sinners delight in here; if its enjoyments were earthly riches, pleasures and honours; if its employments were the amusements of the present life, then they might be happy there, as far as their sordid natures are capable of happiness. But these trifles have no place in heaven. The felicity of that state consists in the contemplation of the divine perfections, and their displays in the works of creation, providence, and redemption; hence it is described by seeing the Lord. Matt. v. 8. and as a state of knowledge. 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12. In the satisfaction resulting

thence, Ps. xvii. 15. and a complacency in God as a portion, Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26. and in perpetual serving and praising the Lord; and hence adoration is generally mentioned as the employ of all the hosts of heaven. These are the entertainments of heaven, and they that cannot find supreme happiness in these, cannot find it in heaven. But it is evident these things could afford no satisfaction to an unholy person. He would pine away at the heavenly feast, for want of appetite for the entertainment; an holy God would be an object of horror rather than delight to him, and his service would be a weariness, as it is now. Hence it appears, that if we do not place our supreme delight in these things here, we cannot be happy hereafter; for there will be no change of dispositions in a future state, but only the perfection of those predominant in us here, whether good or evil. Either heaven must be changed, or the sinner, before he can be happy there. Hence also it appears, that God's excluding such from heaven is no more an act of cruelty than our not admitting a sick man to a feast, who has no relish for the entertainments; or not bringing a blind man into the light of the sun, or to view a beautiful prospect.

We see then that holiness is absolutely necessary; and what a great inducement should this consideration be to pursue it; if we do not see the Lord, we shall never see good. We are cut off at death from all earthly enjoyments, and can no longer make experiments to satisfy our unbounded desires with them; and we have no God to supply their room. We are banished from all the joys of heaven, and how vast, how inconceivably vast is the loss! We are doomed to the regions of darkness forever, to bear the vengeance of eternal fire, to feel the lashes of a guilty conscience, and to spend an eternity in an horrid intimacy with infernal

ghosts; and will we not then rather follow holiness, than incur so dreadful a doom? By the terrors of the Lord, then be persuaded to break off your sins by righteousness, and follow holiness; *without which no man shall see the Lord.*

SERMON X.

THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM AND GLOBES OF JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN XVIII. 37.—*Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.*

KINGS and kingdoms are the most majestic sounds in the language of mortals, and have filled the world with noise, confusions, and blood, since mankind first left the state of nature, and formed themselves into societies. The disputes of kingdoms for superiority have set the world in arms from age to age, and destroyed or enslaved a considerable part of the human race; and the contest is not yet decided. Our country has been a region of peace and tranquillity for a long time, but it has not been because the lust of power and riches is extinct in the world, but because we had no near neighbours, whose interest might clash with ours, or who were able to disturb us. The absence of an enemy was our sole defence. But now, when the colonies of the sundry European nations on this continent begin to enlarge, and approach towards each other, the scene is changed; now, en-

incroachments, depredations, barbarities, and all the terrors of war begin to surround and alarm us. Now our country is invaded and ravaged, and bleeds in a thousand veins. We have already,* so early in the year, received alarm upon alarm: and we may expect the alarms to grow louder and louder as the season advances.

These commotions and perturbations have had one good effect upon me, and that is, they have carried away my thoughts of late into a serene and peaceful region, a region beyond the reach of confusion and violence; I mean the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. And thither, my brethren, I would also transport your minds this day, as the best refuge from this boisterous world, and the most agreeable mansion for the lovers of peace and tranquillity. I find it advantageous both to you and myself, to entertain you with those subjects that have made the deepest impression upon my own mind: and this is the reason why I choose the present subject. In my text you hear one entering a claim to a kingdom, whom you would conclude, if you regarded only his outward appearance, to be the meanest and vilest of mankind. To hear a powerful prince, at the head of a victorious army, attended with all the royalties of his character, to hear such an one claim the kingdom he had acquired by force of arms, would not be strange. But here the despised Nazarene, rejected by his nation, forsaken by his followers, accused as the worst of criminals, standing defenceless at Pilate's bar, just about to be condemned and hung on a cross, like a malefactor and a slave, here he speaks in a royal style, even to his judge, *I am a king; for this purpose was I born; and for this cause came I into the*

*This sermon was preached in Hanover, Virginia, May, 9, 1756.

world. Strange language indeed to proceed from his lips in these circumstances! But the truth is, a great, a divine personage is concealed under this disguise; and his kingdom is of such a nature, that his abasement and crucifixion were so far from being a hinderance to it, that they were the only way to acquire it. These sufferings were meritorious; and by these he purchased his subjects, and a right to rule them.

The occasion of these words was this: the unbelieving Jews were determined to put Jesus to death as an impostor. The true reason of their opposition to him was, that he had severely exposed their hypocrisy, claimed the character of the Messiah, without answering their expectations as a temporal prince and a mighty conqueror; and introduced a new religion, which superseded the law of Moses, in which they had been educated. But this reason they knew would have but little weight with Pilate the Roman governor, who was an heathen, and had no regard to their religion. They therefore bring a charge of another kind, which they knew would touch the governor very sensibly, and that was that Christ had set himself up as the King of the Jews; which was treason against Cæsar the Roman emperor, under whose yoke they then were. This was all pretence and artifice. They would now seem to be very loyal to the emperor, and unable to bear with any claims inconsistent with his authority; whereas, in truth, they were impatient of a foreign government, and were watching for an opportunity to shake it off. And had Christ been really guilty of the charge they alleged against him, he would have been the more acceptable to them. Had he set himself up as a King of the Jews, in opposition to Cæsar, and employed his miraculous powers to make good his claim, the

whole nation would have welcomed him as their deliverer, and flocked round his standard. But Jesus came not to work a deliverance of this kind, nor to erect such a kingdom as they desired, and therefore they rejected him as an impostor. This charge, however, they bring against him, in order to carry their point with the heathen governor. They knew he was zealous for the honour and interest of Cæsar his master; and Tiberius, the then Roman emperor, was so jealous a prince, and kept so many spies over his governors in all the provinces, that they were obliged to be very circumspect, and shew the strictest regard for his rights, in order to escape degradation, or a severer punishment. It was this that determined Pilate, in the struggle with his conscience, to condemn the innocent Jesus. He was afraid the Jews would inform against him, as dismissing one that set up as the rival of Cæsar; and the consequence of this he well knew. The Jews were sensible of this, and therefore they insist upon this charge, and at length plainly tell him, *If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.* Pilate therefore, who cared but little what innovations Christ should introduce into the Jewish religion, thought proper to inquire into this matter, and asks him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" dost thou indeed claim such a character, which may interfere with Cæsar's government? Jesus replies, *My kingdom is not of this world;* as much as to say, "I do not deny that I claim a kingdom, but it is of such a nature, that it need give no alarm to the kings of the earth. Their kingdoms are of this world, but mine is spiritual and divine,* and therefore cannot interfere with

*Domitian, the Roman emperor, being apprehensive that Christ's earthly relations might claim a kingdom in his right, inquired of them concerning the nature of his king-

theirs. If my kingdom were of this world, like theirs, I would take the same methods with them to obtain and secure it; my servants would fight for me, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now, you see, I use no such means for my defence, or to raise me to my kingdom: and therefore you may be assured, my kingdom is not from hence, and can give the Roman emperor no umbrage for suspicion or uneasiness." Pilate answers to this purpose: *Thou dost, however, speak of a kingdom; and art thou a king then? dost thou in any sense claim that character?* The poor prisoner boldly replies, *Thou sayest that I am a king; that is, "Thou hast struck upon the truth: I am indeed a king in a certain sense, and nothing shall constrain me to renounce the title."* *To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth; particularly to this truth, which now looks so unlikely, namely, that I am really a king. I was born to a kingdom and a crown, and came into the world to take possession of my right. This is that good confession which St. Paul tells us, 1 Tim. vi. 13. our Lord witnessed before Pontius Pilate. Neither the hopes of deliverance, nor the terrors of death, could cause him to retract it, or renounce his claim.*

In prosecuting this subject I intend only to inquire into the nature and properties of the kingdom of Christ. And in order to render my discourse the more familiar, and to adapt it to the present state of our country, I shall consider this kingdom in contrast with the kingdoms of the earth, with which we are better acquainted.

The scriptures represent the Lord Jesus under a

dom, and when and where it should be set up. They replied, "It was not earthly, but heavenly and angelical, and to be set up at the end of the world."

great variety of characters, which, though insufficient fully to represent him, yet in conjunction assist us to form such exalted ideas of this great personage, as mortals can reach. He is a Surety, that undertook and paid the dreadful debt of obedience and suffering, which sinners owed to the divine justice and law: He is a Priest, a great High Priest, that once offered himself as a sacrifice for sin; and now dwells in his native heaven, at his Father's right hand, as the advocate and intercessor of his people: He is a Prophet, who teaches his church in all ages by his word and spirit: He is the supreme and universal Judge, to whom men and angels are accountable; and his name is Jesus, a Saviour, because he saves his people from their sins. Under these august and endearing characters he is often represented. But there is one character under which he is uniformly represented, both in the Old and New Testament, and that is, that of a King, a great king, invested with universal authority. And upon his appearance in the flesh, all nature, and especially the gospel-church, is represented as placed under him, as his kingdom. Under this idea the Jews were taught by their prophets to look for him; and it was their understanding these predictions of some illustrious king that should rise from the house of David, in a literal and carnal sense, that occasioned their unhappy prejudices concerning the Messiah as a secular prince and conqueror. Under this idea the Lord Jesus represented himself while upon earth, and under this idea he was published to the world by his apostles. The greatest kings of the Jewish nation, particularly David and Solomon, were types of him; and many things are primarily applied to them, which have their complete and final accomplishment in him alone. It is to him ulti-

mately we are to apply the second psalm: *I have set my king, says Jehovah, upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.* Psalm ii. 6, 8. If we read the seventy second Psalm we shall easily perceive that one greater than Solomon is there. *In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him. His name shall continue forever; his name shall endure as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; and all nations shall call him blessed.* Psalm lxxii. 7, 11, 17. The hundred and tenth Psalm is throughout a celebration of the kingly and priestly office of Christ united. *The Lord, says David, said unto my Lord, unto that divine person who is my Lord, and will also be my son, sit thou at my right hand, in the highest honour and authority, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, and submit to thee in crowds as numerous as the drops of morning dew.* Ps. cx. 1, 3. The evangelical prophet Isaiah is often transported with the foresight of this illustrious king, and the glorious kingdom of his grace:—*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and he shall be called—the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever.* Isa. ix. 6, 7. This is he who is described as another David in Ezekiel's prophecy, *Thus saith the Lord, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen. And I will make them one nation—and one king shall be king to them all, even David my ser-*

vant shall be king over them. Ezek. xxxvii. 21, 22, 24. This is the kingdom represented to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, as a stone cut out without hands, which became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. And Daniel in expounding the dream, having described the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and Roman empires, subjoins, *In the days of these kings, that is, of the Roman emperors, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not, like the former, be left to other people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.* Dan. ii. 34, 35, 44.—There is no character which our Lord so often assumed in the days of his flesh as that of the Son of Man; and he no doubt alludes to a majestic vision in Daniel, the only place where this character is given him in the Old Testament: *I saw in the night visions, says Daniel, and behold, one like the Son of Man came to the Ancient of days, and there was given to him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed,* Dan. vii. 13, 14, like the tottering kingdoms of the earth, which are perpetually rising and falling. This is the king that Zechariah refers to when, in prospect of his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, he calls the inhabitants to give a proper reception to so great a Prince. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee, &c.* Zech. ix. 9. Thus the prophets conspire to ascribe royal titles and a glorious kingdom to the Messiah. And these early and plain notices of him raised a general expectation of him under this royal character. It was

from these prophecies concerning him as a king, that the Jews took occasion, as I observed, to look for the Messiah as a temporal prince; and it was a long time before the apostles themselves were delivered from these carnal prejudices. They were solicitous about posts of honour in that temporal kingdom which they expected he would set up: and even after his resurrection, they cannot forbear asking him, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* Acts i. 6, that is, “Wilt thou now restore the Jews to their former liberty and independency, and deliver them from their present subjection to the Romans?” It was under this view that Herod was alarmed at his birth, and shed the blood of so many innocents, that he might not escape.—He was afraid of him as the heir of David’s family and crown, who might dispossess him of the government; nay, he was expected by other nations under the character of a mighty king; and they no doubt learned this notion of him from the Jewish prophecies, as well as their conversation with that people. Hence the Magi, or eastern wise men, when they came to pay homage to him upon his birth, inquired after him in this language,—“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” Matt. ii. 2. And what is still more remarkable, we are told by two heathen historians, that about the time of his appearance a general expectation of him under this character prevailed through the world. “Many,” says Tacitus, “had a persuasion that it was contained in the ancient writings of the priests, that at that very time the east should prevail, and that some descendant from Judah should obtain the universal government.”* Suetonius

*Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valescerat oriens, projectique Judea rerum potirentur. Tacit. Hist. i. 5. p. 621.

speaks to the same purpose: "An old and constant opinion," says he, "commonly prevailed through all the east, that it was in the fates, that some should rise out of Judea who should obtain the government of the world."* This royal character Christ himself assumed, even when he conversed among mortals in the humble form of a servant. *The Father, says he, has given me power over all flesh.* John xvii. 2. *Yea, all power in heaven and earth is given to me.* Matt. xviii. 13. The gospel church which he erected is most commonly called the kingdom of heaven or of God, in the evangelists: and when he was about to introduce it, this was his proclamation: *The kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Under this character also his servants and disciples celebrated and preached him. Gabriel led the song in foretelling his birth to his mother. *He shall be great, and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end.* Luke i. 32, 33. St. Peter boldly tells the murderers of Christ, *God hath made that same Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.* Acts ii. 36. and exalted him, with his own right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour. Acts v. 31. And St. Paul repeatedly represents him as advanced far above principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and that God hath put all things under his

*Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus & constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judea profecti rerum potirentur.—Suet. in Vesp. c. 4.

The sameness of the expectation is remarkably evident, from the sameness of the words in which these two historians express it. *Judea profecti rerum potirentur.* It was not only a common expectation, but it was commonly expressed in the same language.

feet, and given him to be the head over all things to his church. Eph. i. 21, 22. Phil. ii. 9—11. Yea, to him all the hosts of heaven, and even the whole creation in concert, ascribe *power and strength, and honour and glory.* Rev. v. 12. Pilate the heathen was over-ruled to give a kind of accidental testimony to this truth, and to publish it to different nations, by the inscription upon the cross in the three languages then most in use, the Latin, Greek and Hebrew: *This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews;* and all the remonstrances of the Jews could not prevail upon him to alter it. Finally, it is he that wears upon his *vesture, and upon his thigh, this name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.* Rev. xix. 16. and as his name is, so is he.

Thus you see, my brethren, by these instances, selected out of many, that the kingly character and dominion of our Lord Jesus runs through the whole Bible. That of a king is his favourite character in which he glories, and which is the most expressive of his office. And this consideration alone may convince you that this character is of the greatest importance, and worthy of your most attentive regard.

It is the mediatorial kingdom of Christ that is here intended, not that which as God he exercises over all the works of his hand: it is that kingdom which is an empire of grace, an administration of mercy over our guilty world. It is the dispensation intended for the salvation of fallen sinners of our race by the gospel; and on this account the gospel is often called the kingdom of heaven; because its happy consequences are not confined to this earth, but appear in heaven in the highest perfection, and last through all eternity. Hence, not only the church of Christ on earth, and the

dispensation of the gospel, but all the saints in heaven, and that more finished economy under which they are placed, are all included in the kingdom of Christ. Here his kingdom is in its infancy, but in heaven is arrived to perfection; but it is substantially the same. Though the immediate design of this kingdom is the salvation of believers of the guilty race of man, and such are its subjects in a peculiar sense; yet it extends to all worlds, to heaven, and earth, and hell. The whole universe is put under a mediatorial head: but then, as the apostle observes, *he is made head over all things to his church*, Eph. i. 22. that is, for the benefit and salvation of his church. As Mediator he is carrying on a glorious scheme for the recovery of man, and all parts of the universe are interested or concern themselves in this grand event; and therefore they are all subjected to him, that he may so manage them as to promote this end, and baffle and overwhelm all opposition. The elect angels rejoice in so benevolent a design for peopling their mansions, left vacant by the fall of so many of their fellow angels with colonies transplanted from our world, from a race of creatures that they had given up for lost. And therefore Christ as a Mediator, is made the head of all the heavenly armies, and he employs them as *his ministering spirits, to minister to them that are heirs of salvation*. Heb. i. 14. These glorious creatures are always on the wing ready to discharge his orders in any part of his vast empire, and delight to be employed in the services of his mediatorial kingdom. This is also an event in which the fallen angels deeply interest themselves; they have united all their force and art for near six thousand years to disturb and subvert his kingdom, and blast the designs of redeeming love; they therefore are all

subjected to the control of Christ, and he shortens and lengthens their chains as he pleases, and they cannot go an hair's breadth beyond his permission. The scriptures represent our world in its state of guilt and misery as the kingdom of Satan; sinners, while slaves to sin, are his subjects; and every act of disobedience against God is an act of homage to this infernal prince. Hence Satan is called *the God of this world*, 2 Cor. iv. 4, *the prince of this world*, John xii. 31, *the power of darkness*, Luke xxii. 53, *the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*. Eph. ii. 5. And sinners are said to be *taken captive by him at his will*. 2 Tim. ii. 26. Hence also the ministers of Christ, who are employed to recover sinners to a state of holiness and happiness, are represented as soldiers armed for war; not indeed with carnal weapons, but with those which are spiritual, plain truth arguments, and miracles; and *these are made mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. 2 Cor. x. 3, 4, 5. And christians in general are represented as *wrestling, not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*. Eph. vi. 12. Hence also in particular it is that the death of Christ is represented not as a defeat, but as an illustrious conquest gained over the powers of hell; because, by this means a way was opened for the deliverance of sinners from under their power, and restoring them into liberty and the favour of God. By that strange contemptible weapon, the cross, and by the glorious resurrection of Jesus,

he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them. Col. ii. 15. *Through death,* says the apostle, *he destroyed him that had the power of death; that is, the devil.* Heb. ii. 14. Had not Christ by his death offered a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of men, they would have continued forever under the tyranny of Satan; but he has purchased liberty, life, and salvation for them; and thus he hath destroyed the kingdom of darkness, and translated multitudes from it into his own gracious and glorious kingdom.

Hence, upon the right of redemption, his mediatorial authority extends to the infernal regions, and he controls and restrains those malignant, mighty, and turbulent potentates, according to his pleasure. Farther, the inanimate world is connected with our Lord's design to save sinners, and therefore is subjected to him as Mediator. He causes the sun to rise, the rain to fall, and the earth to yield her increase, to furnish provision for the subjects of his grace, and to raise, support and accommodate heirs for his heavenly kingdom. As for the sons of men, who are more immediately concerned in this kingdom, and for whose sake it was erected, they are all its subjects; but then they are of different sorts, according to their characters. Multitudes are rebels against his government; that is, they do not voluntarily submit to his authority, nor choose they to do his service: they will not obey his laws. But they are his subjects notwithstanding; that is, he rules and manages them as he pleases, whether they will or not. This power is necessary to carry on successfully his gracious design towards his people; for unless he had the management of his enemies, they might baffle his undertaking, and successfully counteract the pur-

poses of his love. The kings of the earth, as well as vulgar rebels of a private character, have often set themselves against his kingdom, and sometimes they have flattered themselves they had entirely demolished it.* But Jesus reigns absolute and supreme over the kings of the earth, and overrules and controls them as he thinks proper; and he disposes all the revolutions, the rises and falls of kingdoms and empires, so as to be subservient to the great designs of his mediation; and their united policies and powers cannot frustrate the work which he has undertaken. But besides these rebellious involuntary subjects, he has (blessed be his name!) gained the consent of thousands, and they have become his willing subjects by their own choice. They regard his authority, they love his government, they make it their study to please him, and to do his will. Over these he exercises a government of special grace here, and he will make them the happy subjects of the kingdom of his glory hereafter. And it is his government over these that I intend more particularly to consider. Once more, the kingdom of Jesus is not confined to this world, but all the millions of mankind in the invisible world are under his dominion, and will continue so to everlasting ages. *He is the Lord of the dead and the living*, Rom. xiv. 9. and has the keys of Hades, the vast invisible world, (including heaven as well as hell) and of death. Rev. i. 18. It is he that turns the key, and opens the door of death for mortals to pass from world to world: it is he that opens the gates of heaven, and welcomes and admits the nations that keep the commandments of God: and it is he that opens the prison of

*In the 10th and last Roman persecution, *Dioclesian* had a medal struck with this inscription, "The christian name demolished, and the worship of the gods restored."

hell, and locks it fast upon the prisoners of divine justice. He will forever exercise authority over the vast regions of the unseen world, and the unnumbered multitudes of spirits with which they are peopled. You hence see, my brethren, the universal extent of the Redeemer's kingdom; and in this respect how much does it differ from all the kingdoms of the earth? The kingdoms of Great-Britain, France, China, Persia, are but little spots of the globe. Our world has indeed been oppressed in former times with what mortals call universal monarchies; such were the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and especially the Roman. But in truth, these were so far from being strictly universal, that a considerable part of the habitable earth was not so much as known to them. But this is an empire strictly universal. It extends over land and sea: it reaches beyond the planetary worlds, and all the luminaries of heaven; nay, beyond the throne of the most exalted archangels, and downward to the lowest abyss in hell. An universal empire in the hands of a mortal is an huge, unwieldy thing; an heap of confusion; a burthen to mankind; and it has always rushed headlong from its glory, and fallen to pieces by its own weight. But Jesus is equal to the immense province of an empire strictly universal: his hand is able to hold the reins; and it is the blessing of our world to be under his administration. He will turn what appears to us scenes of confusion into perfect order, and convince all worlds that he has not taken one wrong step in the whole plan of his infinite government.

The kingdoms of the world have their laws and ordinances, and so has the kingdom of Christ. Look into your Bibles, and there you will find the laws of this kingdom, from its first foundation im-

mediately upon the fall of man. The laws of human governments are often defective or unrighteous; but these are perfect, holy, just, and good. Human laws are enforced with sanctions: but the rewards and punishments can only affect our mortal bodies, and cannot reach beyond the present life: but the sanctions of these divine laws are eternal, and there never shall be an end to their execution. Everlasting happiness and everlasting misery, of the most exquisite kind and the highest degree, are the rewards and punishments which the immortal King distributes among his immortal subjects; and they become his character, and are adapted to their nature.

Human laws extend only to outward actions, but these laws reach the heart, and the principle of action within. Not a secret thought, not a motion of the soul, is exempted from them. If the subjects of earthly kings observe a decorum in their outward conduct, and give no visible evidence of disloyalty, they are treated as good subjects, though they should be enemies in their hearts. "But Jesus is the Lord of souls;" he makes his subjects bow their hearts as well as the knee to him. He sweetly commands their thoughts and affections as well as their external practice, and makes himself inwardly beloved as well as outwardly obeyed. His subjects are such on whom he may depend: they are all ready to lay down their lives for him. Love, cordial, unfeigned, ardent love, is the principle of all their obedience; and hence it is that his commandments are not grievous, but delightful to them.

Other kings have their ministers and officers of state. In like manner Jesus employs the armies of heaven as ministering spirits in his mediatorial kingdom: besides these he has ministers, of an

humbler form, who negotiate more immediately in his name with mankind. These are intrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, to beseech men, in his stead, to be reconciled to God. These are appointed to preach his word, to administer his ordinances, and to manage the affairs of his kingdom. This view gives a peculiar dignity and importance to this office. These should be adorned, not like the ministers of earthly courts, with the trappings of gold and silver, but with the beauties of holiness, the ornament of a meek and quiet, zealous and faithful spirit, and a life becoming the gospel of Christ.

Other kings have their soldiers: so all the legions of the elect angels, the armies of heaven, are the soldiers of Jesus Christ, and under his command. This he asserted when he was in such defenceless circumstances, that he seemed to be abandoned by heaven and earth. "I could pray to my Father, (says he,) and he would send *me more than twelve legions of angels.*" Matt. xxvi. 53. I cannot forbear reading to you one of the most majestic descriptions of this all-conquering hero and his army, which the language of mortality is capable of. Rev. xix. 11, 16. *I saw heaven open, says St. John, and behold a white horse, an emblem of victory and triumph, and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True.* How different a character from that of mortal conquerors! "And in righteousness he doth judge and make war." War is generally a scene of injustice and lawless violence; and those plagues of mankind, we call heroes and warriors, use their arms to gratify their own avarice or ambition, and make encroachments upon others. Jesus, the Prince of peace, makes war too, but it is in righteousness; it is in the cause of righteousness he takes up arms. The divine description proceeds:

His eyes were as a flame of fire; and on his head were many crowns, emblems of his manifold authority over the various kingdoms of the world, and the various regions of the universe. And he was clothed with a vesture dipt in blood, in the blood of his enemies; and his name was called, The Word of God: and the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean: the whitest innocence and purity, and the beauties of holiness are, as it were, the uniform, the regimentals of these celestial armies. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God: and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords. In what manner the war is carried on between the armies of heaven and the powers of hell, we know not: but that there is really something of this kind we may infer from Rev. xii. 7, 9. There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil and Satan.

Thus you see all the hosts of heaven are volunteers under the Captain of our salvation. Nay, he marshals the stars, and calls them by their names. *The stars in their courses*, says the sublime Deborah, *fought against Sisera*, the enemy of God's people. Judges v. 20. Every part of the creation serves under him, and he can commission a gnat, or a fly, or the meanest insect, to be the executioner of his enemies. Fire and water, hurricanes and earthquakes; earthquakes, which have so lately shattered so great a part of our globe, now totter-

ing with age, and ready to fall to pieces, and bury the guilty inhabitants in its ruins, all these fight under him, and conspire to avenge his quarrel with the guilty sons of men. The subjects of his grace in particular are all so many soldiers; their life is a constant warfare; and they are incessantly engaged in hard conflict with temptations from without, and the insurrections of sin from within. Sometimes, alas! they fall; but their General lifts them up again, and inspires them with strength to renew the fight. They fight most successfully upon their knees. This is the most advantageous posture for the soldiers of Jesus Christ; for prayer brings down recruits from heaven in the hour of difficulty. They are indeed but poor weaklings and invalids; and yet they overcome, through the blood of the Lamb; and he makes them conquerors, yea, more than conquerors. It is the military character of christians that gives the apostle occasion to address them in the military style, like a general at the head of his army. Eph. vi. 10—18. *Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication.* The ministers of the gospel in particular, and especially the apostles, are soldiers, or officers, in this spiritual army. Hence St. Paul speaks of his office, in the military style; *I have, says he, fought the good fight.* 2 Tim. iv. 7. *We war, says he,*

though it be not after the flesh. The humble doctrines of the cross are our weapons, and these are mighty through God, to demolish the strong holds of the prince of darkness, and to bring every thought into a joyful captivity to the obedience of faith, 2 Cor. x. 3—5. *Fight the good fight,* says he to Timothy. 1 Tim. vi. 12. And again, *thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.* 2 Tim. ii. 3. The great design of the gospel-ministry is to rescue enslaved souls from the tyranny of sin and Satan, and to recover them into a state of liberty and loyalty to Jesus Christ; or, in the words of the apostle, *to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God.* Acts xxvi. 18. Mortals indeed are very unequal for the conflict; but their success more conspicuously shews that the excellency of the power is of God: and many have they subdued, through his strength, to the obedience of faith, and made the willing captives of the cross of our divine Immanuel. Other kingdoms are often founded in blood, and many lives are lost on both sides in acquiring them. The kingdom of Christ, too, was founded in blood; but it was the blood of his own heart; life was lost in the conflict; but it was his own; his own life lost, to purchase life for his people. Others have waded to empire through the blood of mankind, and even of their own subjects, but Christ shed only his own blood to spare that of his soldiers. The general devotes his life as a sacrifice to save his army. The Fabii and Decii of Rome, who devoted themselves for their country, were but faint shadows of this divine bravery. O! the generous patriotism, the ardent love of the Captain of our salvation! How amiable does his character appear, in contrast with that of the kings of the earth! They often sacrifice the lives of their subjects, while they keep themselves out


of danger, or perhaps are rioting at ease in the pleasures and luxuries of a court; but Jesus engaged in the conflict with death and hell alone. He stood a single champion in a field of blood. He conquered for his people by falling himself: he subdued his and their enemies by resigning himself to their power. Worthy is such a general to be Commander in Chief of the hosts of God and to lead the armies of heaven and earth! Indeed much blood has been shed in carrying on this kingdom. The earth has been soaked with the blood of the saints; and millions have resisted even unto blood, striving against sin, and nobly laid down their lives for the sake of Christ and a good conscience. Rome has been remarkably the seat of persecution; both formerly under the Heathen Emperors, and in latter times, under a succession of Popes, still more bloody and tyrannical. There were no less than ten general persecutions under the Heathen Emperors, through the vast Roman empire, in a little more than two hundred years, which followed one another in a close succession; in which innumerable multitudes of christians lost their lives by an endless variety of tortures. And since the church of Rome has usurped her authority, the blood of the saints has hardly ever ceased running in some country or other; though, blessed be God, many kingdoms shook off the yoke at the ever-memorable period of the Reformation, above two hundred years ago: which has greatly weakened that persecuting power. This is that mystical Babylon which was represented to St. John as *drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.* Rev. xvii. 6. In her was found the blood of the prophets, and of the saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth. Chap. xviii. 24. And these scenes of blood are

still perpetrated in France, that plague of Europe, that has of late stretched her murderous arm across the wide ocean to disturb us in these regions of peace. There the Protestants are still plundered, chained to the gallies, broken alive upon the torturing wheel, denied the poor favour of abandoning their country and their all, and flying naked to beg their bread in other nations. Thus the harmless subjects of the Prince of Peace have ever been slaughtered from age to age, and yet they are represented as triumphant conquerors. Hear a poor persecuted Paul on this head: *In tribulation, in distress, in persecution, in nakedness, in peril and sword, we are conquerors, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* Rom. viii. 36, 37. *Thanks be to God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ.* 2 Cor. ii. 14. *Whatsoever is born of God, says the evangelist, overcometh the world.* 1 John v. 4. Whence came that glorious army which we so often see in the Revelation? We are told *they came out of great tribulation.* Chap. vii. 14. *And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.* Chap. xii. 11. They that suffered tortures and death under the beast, are said *to have gotten the victory over him.* Chap. xv. 2. Victory and triumph sound strange when thus ascribed;—but the gospel helps us to understand this mystery. By these sufferings they obtained the illustrious crown of martyrdom and peculiar degrees of glory and happiness through an endless duration. Their death was but a short transition from the lowest and more remote regions of their Redeemer's kingdom into his immediate presence and glorious court in heaven. A temporal death is rewarded with an immortal life: and *their light afflictions, which were*

but for a moment, wrought out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17. Even in the agonies of torture, their souls were often filled with such delightful sensations of the love of God, as swallowed up the sensations of bodily pain; and a bed of flames was sweeter to them than a bed of roses. Their souls were beyond the reach of all the instruments of torment; and as to their bodies they shall yet have a glorious resurrection to a blessed immortality. And now I leave you to judge, whether they or their enemies got the victory in this conflict; and which had most cause to triumph. Like their Master, they rose by falling; they triumphed over their enemies by submitting, like lambs, to their power. If the soldiers of other generals die in the field, it is not in the power of their commanders to reward them. But the soldiers of Jesus Christ, by dying, are, as it were, carried in triumph from the field of blood into the presence of their Master, to receive his approbation, and a glorious crown. Death puts them into a capacity of receiving and enjoying greater rewards than they are capable of in the present state. And thus it appears, that his soldiers always win the day; or, as the apostle expresses it, he causes *them always to triumph*; and not one of them has ever been or ever shall be defeated, however weak and helpless in himself, and however terrible the power of his enemies.—And O! when all these warriors meet at length from every corner of the earth, and, as it were, pass in review before their General in the fields of heaven, with their robes washed in his blood, with palms of victory in their hands, and crowns of glory on their heads, all dressed in uniform with garments of salvation, what a glorious army will they make! and how

will they cause heaven to ring with shouts of joy and triumph!

The founders of earthly kingdoms are famous for their heroic actions. They have braved the dangers of sea and land, routed powerful armies, and subjected nations to their will. They have shed rivers of blood, laid cities in ruins, and countries in desolation. These are the exploits which have rendered the Alexanders, the Cæsars, and other conquerors of this world, famous through all nations and ages. Jesus had his exploits too; but they were all of the gracious and beneficent kind. His conquests were so many deliverances, and his victories salvations. He subdued, in order to set free; and made captives to deliver them from slavery. He conquered the legions of hell, that seemed let loose at that time, that he might have opportunity of displaying his power over them, and that mankind might be sensible how much they needed a deliverer from their tyranny.—He triumphed over the temptations of Satan in the wilderness, by a quotation from his own word. He rescued wretched creatures from his power by an almighty command. He conquered the most inveterate and stubborn diseases, and restored health and vigour with a word of his mouth. He vanquished stubborn souls with the power of his love, and made them his willing people. He triumphed over death, the king of terrors, and delivered Lazarus from the prison of the grave, as an earnest and first-fruits of a general resurrection. Nay, by his own inherent powers, he broke the bonds of death, and forced his way to his native heaven. He destroyed him that had the power of death, *i. e.* the devil, by his own death, and laid the foundation in his own blood for destroying his usurped



kingdom, and forming a glorious kingdom of willing subjects redeemed from his tyranny.

The death of some great conquerors, particularly of Julius Cæsar, is said to be prognosticated or attended with prodigies: but none equal to those which solemnized the death of Jesus. The earth trembled, the rocks were burst to pieces, the veil of the temple was rent, the heavens were clothed in mourning, and the dead started into life: And no wonder, when the Lord of nature was expiring upon a cross. He subdued and calmed the stormy wind, and the boisterous waves of the sea. In short, he shewed an absolute sovereignty over universal nature, and managed the most unruly elements with a single word. Other conquerors have gone from country to country, carrying desolation along with them; Jesus went about doing good. His miraculous powers were but powers of miraculous mercy and beneficence. He could easily have advanced himself to a temporal kingdom, and routed all the forces of the earth; but he had no ambition of this kind. He that raised Lazarus from the grave could easily restore his soldiers to vigour and life, after they had been wounded or killed. He that fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, could have supported his army with plenty of provisions in the greatest scarcity. He that walked upon the boisterous ocean, and enabled Peter to do the same, could easily have transported his forces from country to country, without the conveyance of ships. Nay, he was capable, by his own single power, to have gained universal conquest. What could all the armies of the earth have done against him, who strack an armed company down to the earth with only a word of his mouth? But these were not the victories he effected: Victories of grace, deliver-

ances for the oppressed, salvation for the lost; these were his heroic actions. He glories in his being mighty to save. Isa. lxiii. 1. When his warm disciples made a motion that he should employ his miraculous powers to punish the Samaritans who ungratefully refused him entertainment, he rebuked them, and answered like the Prince of Peace, *The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save.* Luke ix. 56. *He came to seek and to save that which was lost.* Luke xix. 10. O how amiable a character this! How much more lovely the Saviour of sinners, the Deliverer of souls, than the enslavers and destroyers of mankind; which is the general character of the renowned heroes of our world. Who has ever performed such truly heroic and brave actions as this almighty Conqueror! He has pardoned the most aggravated crimes, in a consistency with the honours of the divine government: he has delivered an innumerable multitude of immortal souls from the tyranny of sin and the powers of hell, set the prisoners free, and brought them into the liberty of the Son of God; he has peopled heaven with redeemed slaves, and advanced them to royal dignity. *All his subjects are kings.* Rev. i. 6. *To him that overcometh, says he, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.* Rev. iii. 21. They shall all be adorned with royal robes and crowns of unfading glory. They are advanced to empire over their lusts and passions, and all their enemies. Who ever gave such encouragement to his soldiers as this, *If we suffer with him, we know that we shall also reign with him?* 2 Tim. ii. 12. What mortal general could bestow immortality and perfect happiness upon his favourites? But these boundless blessings Jesus has to bestow. In human

governments merit is often neglected, and those who serve their country best, are often rewarded with degradation. But none have ever served the King of kings in vain. The least good action, even the giving a cup of water to one of his necessitous saints, shall not pass unrewarded in his government.

Other kings have their arms, their swords, their cannon, and other instruments of destruction; and with these they acquire and defend their dominions. Jesus, our king, has his arms too; but O! of how different a kind! The force of evidence and conviction in his doctrine, attested with miracles, the energy of his dying love, the gentle, and yet efficacious influence of his holy Spirit; these are the weapons with which he conquered the world. His gospel is the great magazine from whence his apostles, the first founders of his kingdom, drew their arms; and with these they subdued the nations to the obedience of faith. *The gospel, says St. Paul, is the power of God unto salvation. Rom. i. 16.* The humble doctrines of the cross became almighty, and bore down all before them, and after a time subdued the vast Roman empire which had subdued the world. The holy Spirit gave edge and force to these weapons; and, blessed be God, though they are quite impotent without his assistance, yet when he concurs, they are still successful. Many stubborn sinners have been unable to resist the preaching of Christ crucified: they have found him indeed the power of God. And is it not astonishing that any one should be able to stand it out against his dying love, and continue the enemy of his cross? *I, says he, If I be lifted up from the earth, i. e. if I be suspended on the cross, will draw all men unto me. John xii. 32.* You see he expected his cross would be an irresistible

weapon. And O! blessed Jesus, who can see thee expiring there in agonies of torture and love; who can see thy blood gushing in streams from every vein; who can hear thee there, and not melt into submission at thy feet! Is there one heart in this assembly proof against the energy of this bleeding, agonizing, dying love? Methinks such a sight must kindle a correspondent affection in your hearts towards him; and it is an exploit of wickedness, it is the last desperate effort of an impenetrable heart, to be able to resist.

Other conquerors march at the head of their troops, with all the ensigns of power and grandeur, and their forces numerous, inured to war, and well armed; and from such appearances and preparations, who is there but what expects victory? But see the despised Nazarene, without riches, without arms, without forces, conflicting with the united powers of earth and hell; or see a company of poor fishermen and a tent-maker, with no other powers but those of doing good, with no other arms but those of reason, and the strange unpopular doctrines of a crucified Christ! see the professed followers of a Master that was hung like a malefactor and a slave, see these men marching out to encounter the powers of darkness, the whole strength of the Roman empire, the lusts, prejudices, and interests of all nations, and travelling from country to country, without guards, without friends, exposed to insult and contempt, to the rage of persecution, to all manner of torture and tormented deaths which earth or hell could invent: see this little army marching into the wide world, in these circumstances, and can you expect they will have any success? Does this appear a promising expedition? No; human reason would forebode they will soon be cut in pieces, and the

christian cause buried with them. But these unpromising champions, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, conquered the world, and spread the religion of the crucified Jesus among all nations. It is true they lost their lives in the cause, like brave soldiers; but the cause did not die with them. Their blood proved the seed of the church. Their cause is immortal and invincible. Let devils in hell, let Heathens, Jews, and Mahometans, let Atheists, Freethinkers, Papists, and persecutors of every character, do their worst; still this cause will live in spite of them.— All the enemies of Christ will be obliged to confess at last, with Julian the apostate Roman emperor, who exerted all his art to abolish christianity; but, when mortally wounded in battle, outrageously sprinkled his blood towards heaven, and cried out, *Vicisti, O Galilæe!* “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!” Yes, my brethren, Jesus, the Prophet of Galilee, will push his conquest, from country to country, until all nations submit to him. And, blessed be his name, his victorious arm has reached to us in these ends of the earth: here he has subdued some obstinate rebels, and made their reluctant souls willingly bow in affectionate homage to him. And may I not produce some of you as the trophies of his victory? Has he not rooted out the enmity of your carnal minds, and sweetly constrained you to the most affectionate obedience? Thus, blessed Jesus! thus go on conquering, and to conquer. *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty!* and in thy glory and majesty ride prosperously through our land, and make this country a dutiful province of the dominion of thy grace. My brethren, should we all become his willing subjects, he would no longer suffer the perfidious slaves of France, and their savage allies, to chastise and punish us for our rebellion against him; but *peace*

should again run down like a river, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

The kingdoms of the world have their rise, their progress, perfection, declension, and ruin. And in these things, the kingdom of Christ bears some resemblance to them, excepting that it shall never have an end.

Its rise was small at first, and it has passed through many revolutions in various ages. It was first founded in the family of Adam, but in about 1600 years, the space between the creation and the flood, it was almost demolished by the wickedness of the world; and at length confined to the little family of Noah. After the flood, the world soon fell into idolatry, but, that this kingdom of Christ might not be destroyed quite, it was erected in the family of Abraham; and among the Jews it continued until the coming of Christ in the flesh.— This was indeed but the infancy of his kingdom, and indeed is seldom called by that name. It is the gospel constitution that is represented as the kingdom of Christ, in a special sense. This was but very small and unpromising at first. When its founder was dying upon Calvary, and all his followers had forsaken him and fled, who would have thought it would ever have come to any thing, ever have recovered? But it revived with him; and, when he furnished his apostles with gifts and graces for their mission, and sent them forth to increase his kingdom, it made its progress through the world with amazing rapidity, notwithstanding it met with very early and powerful opposition. The Jews set themselves against it, and raised persecutions against its ministers, wherever they went. And presently the tyrant Nero employed all the power of the Roman empire to crush them. Peter, Paul, and thousands of the christians fell a prey

to his rage, like sheep for the slaughter. This persecution was continued under his successors, with but little interruption, for about two hundred years.

But, under all these pressures, the church bore up her head; yea, the more she was trodden, the more she spread and flourished; and at length she was delivered from oppression by Constantine the Great, about the year 320. But now she had a more dangerous enemy to encounter, I mean prosperity: and this did her much more injury than all the persecutions of her enemies. Now the kingdom of Christ began to be corrupted with heresies: the ministry of the gospel, formerly the most dangerous posts in the world, now became a place of honour and profit, and men began to thrust themselves into it from principles of avarice and ambition; superstition and corruption of morals increased; and at length the Bishop of Rome set up for universal head of the church in the year 606, and gradually the whole monstrous system of popery was formed and established, and continued in force for near a thousand years. The kingdom of Christ was now at a low ebb; and tyranny and superstition reigned under that name over the greatest part of the christian world. Nevertheless, our Lord still had his witnesses. The Waldenses and Albigenses, John Hus, and Jerome of Prague, and Wickliffe in England, opposed the torrent of corruption; until at length, Luther, Calvin, Zuinglius, and several others, were made the honoured instruments of introducing the Reformation from popery; when undry whole kingdoms, which had given their power to the beast, and particularly our mother-country, shook off the papal authority, and admitted the pure light of the gospel. Since that time the kingdom of Christ has struggled hard,

and it has lost ground in several countries; particularly in France, Poland, Bohemia, &c. where there once were many Protestant churches; but they are now in ruins. And alas! those countries that still retain the reformed religion, have too generally reduced it into a mere formality; and it has but little influence upon the hearts and lives even of its professors. Thus we find the case remarkable among us. This gracious kingdom makes but little way in Virginia. The calamities of war and famine cannot, alas! draw subjects to it; but we seem generally determined to perish in our rebellion rather than submit. Thus it has been in this country from its first settlement; and how long it will continue in this situation is unknown to mortals: however, this we may know, it will not be so always. We have the strongest assurances that Jesus will yet take to him his great power, and reign in a more extensive and illustrious manner than he has ever yet done; and that the kingdoms of the earth shall yet become *the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*. There are various parts of the heathen world where the gospel has never yet been; and the Jews have never yet been converted as a nation; but both the calling of the Jews and the fulness of the Gentiles, you will find plainly foretold in the 11th chapter of the Romans; and it is, no doubt, to render the accomplishment of this event the more conspicuous, that the Jews, who are dispersed all over the world, have, by a strange, unprecedented, and singular providence, been kept a distinct people to this day, for 1700 years; though all other nations have been so mixt and blended together, who were not half so much dispersed into different countries, that their distinct original cannot be traced. Posterity shall see this glorious event in some happy future period.

How far it is from us, I will not determine: though, upon some grounds, I apprehend it is not very remote. I shall live and die in the unshaken belief that our guilty world shall yet see glorious days. Yes, my brethren, this despised gospel, that has so little effect in our age and country, shall yet shine like lightning, or like the sun, through all the dark regions of the earth. It shall triumph over Heathenism, Mahometism, Judaism, Popery, and all those dangerous errors that have infected the christian church. This gospel, poor negroes, shall yet reach your countrymen, whom you left behind you in Africa, in darkness and the shadow of death, and bless your eyes with the light of salvation: and the Indian savages, that are now ravaging our country, shall yet be transformed into lambs and doves by the gospel of peace. The scheme of Providence is not yet completed, and much remains to be accomplished of what God has spoken by his prophets, to ripen the world for the universal judgment; but when all these things are finished, then proclamation shall be made through all nature, "That time shall be no more;" then the Supreme Judge, the same Jesus that ascended the cross, will ascend the throne, and review the affairs of time: then will he put an end to the present course of nature, and the present form of administration. Then shall heaven and hell be filled with their respective inhabitants: then will time close, and eternity run on in one uniform tenor, without end. But the kingdom of Christ, though altered in its situation and form of government, will not then come to a conclusion. His kingdom is strictly the kingdom of heaven; and at the end of this world, his subjects will only be removed from these lower regions into a more glorious country, where they and their King shall live together

forever in the most endearing intimacy; where the noise and commotions of this restless world, the revolutions and perturbations of kingdoms, the terrors of war and persecution, shall no more reach them; but all will be perfect peace, love, and happiness, through immeasurable duration. This is the last and most illustrious state of the kingdom of Christ, now so small and weak in appearance: this is the final grand result of his administration: and it will appear to admiring worlds wisely planned, gloriously executed, and perfectly finished.

What conqueror ever erected such a kingdom! What subjects so completely, so lastingly happy, as those of the blessed Jesus!

SERMON XI.

THINGS UNSEEN TO BE PREFERRED TO THINGS SEEN.

2 COR. IV. 18.—*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

AMONG all the causes of the stupid unconcernedness of sinners about religion, and the feeble endeavours of saints to improve in it; there is none more common or more effectual, than their not forming a due estimate of the things of time, in comparison of those of eternity. Our present affairs engross all our thoughts, and exhaust all our activity, though they are but transitory trifles; while the awful realities of the future world are hid from our eyes by the veil of flesh and the clouds of ignorance.

Did these break in upon our minds in all their almighty evidence and tremendous importance, they would annihilate the most majestic vanities of the present state, obscure the glare of earthly glory, render all its pleasures insipid, and give us a noble insensibility under all its sorrows. A realizing view of these would shock the libertine in his thoughtless career, tear off the hypocrite's mask, and inflame the devotion of languishing saints. The concern of mankind would then be how they might make a safe exit out of this world, and not how they may live happy in it. Present pleasure and pain would be swallowed up in the prospect of everlasting happiness or misery hereafter. Eternity, awful eternity, would then be our serious contemplation. The pleasures of sin would strike us with horror, if they issue in eternal pain, and our present afflictions, however tedious and severe, would appear but light and momentary, if they work out for us *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

These were the views the apostle had of things, and these their effects upon him. He informs us in this chapter of his unwearied zeal to propagate the gospel amidst all the hardships and dangers that attended the painful discharge of his ministry. Though he bore about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, though he was always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, yet he fainted not; and this was the prospect that animated him, that his *light affliction, which was but for a moment, would work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* When we view his sufferings absolutely, without any reference to eternity, they were very heavy and of many years continuance; and when he represents them in this view, how moving is the relation! see 2 Cor. xi. 23—29. But when he views

them in the light of eternity, and compared with their glorious issues, they sink into nothing; then scourging, stoning, imprisonment, and all the various deaths to which he was daily exposed, are but light, trifling afflictions, hardly worth naming; then a series of uninterrupted sufferings for many years are but afflictions that endure for a moment. And when he views a glorious futurity, human language cannot express the ideas he has of the happiness reserved for him; it is *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*; a noble sentiment! and exprest in the sublimest manner the language of mortals can admit of.

It is glory, in opposition to affliction; a weight of glory, in opposition to light affliction; a massy oppressive blessedness, which it requires all the powers in the soul, in their full exertion, to support: and in opposition to affliction for a moment, it is eternal glory: to finish all, it is *a far more exceeding glory*. What greater idea can be grasped by the human mind, or expressed in the feeble language of mortality! Nothing but feeling that weight of glory could enlarge his conception; and nothing but the dialect of heaven could better express it. No wonder that, with this view of things, *he should reckon that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.* Rom. viii. 18.

The apostle observes, that he formed this estimate of things, while he looked not at the "things which are seen, but at those which are not seen." By the things that are seen, are meant the present life, and all the things of time; all the pleasures and pains, all the labours, pursuits, and amusements of the present state. By the things that are not seen, are intended all the invisible realities of the eternal world; all the beings, the enjoyments

and sufferings that lie beyond the reach of human sight; as the great Father of spirits, the joys of paradise, and the punishments of hell. We look on these invisible things, and not on those that are seen. This seems like a contradiction; but it is easily solved by understanding this act, described by looking, to be the act not of the bodily eye, but of faith and enlightened reason. Faith is defined by this apostle to be *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* Heb. xi. 1. And it is the apostle's chief design in that chapter, to give instances of the surprising efficacy of such a realizing belief of eternal invisible things; see particularly ver. 10, 13, 14, 16, 25, 26, 27. Hence to look not at visible, but at invisible things, signifies that the apostle made the latter the chief objects of his contemplations, that he was governed in the whole of his conduct by the impression of eternal things, and not by the present; that he formed his maxims and schemes from a comprehensive survey of futurities, and not from a partial view of things present; and, in short, that he acted as an expectant of eternity, and not as an everlasting inhabitant of this wretched world. This he elsewhere expresses in equivalent terms, *We walk by faith and not by sight.* 2 Cor. v. 7.

Further, he assigns a reason why he had a greater regard to invisible things than visible in the regulating of his conduct; *for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen, says he, are eternal.* An important reason indeed! Eternity annexed to a trifle would advance it into infinite importance, but when it is the attribute of the most perfect happiness, or of the most exquisite misery, then it transcends all comparison: then all temporal happiness and misery, however great and long continued, shrink into nothing, is drown-

ed and lost, like the small drop of a bucket in the boundless ocean.

My present design, and the contents of the text, prescribe to me the following method:

I. I shall give you a comparative view of visible and invisible things, that you may see the trifling nature of the one, and the importance of the other. This I choose to do under one head, because by placing these two classes of things in an immediate opposition, we may the more easily compare them, and see their infinite disparity. And,

II. I shall shew you the great and happy influence a suitable impression of the superior importance of invisible to visible things would have upon us.

I. I shall give you a comparative view of visible and invisible things; and we may compare visible and invisible things, as to their intrinsic value, and as to their duration.

1. As to their intrinsic value; and in this respect the disparity is inconceivable.

This I shall illustrate in the two comprehensive instances of pleasure and pain. To shun the one, and obtain the other, is the natural effort of the human kind: This is its aim in all its endeavours and pursuits: The innate desire of happiness and aversion to misery are the two great springs of all human activity: and, were these springs relaxed or broken, all business would cease, all activity would stagnate, and universal torpor would seize the world. And these principles are co-existent with the soul itself, and will continue in full vigour in a future state. Nay, as the soul will then be matured, and all its powers arrived to their complete perfection, this eagerness after happiness, and aversion to misery, will be also more quick and vigorous. The soul in its present state

of infancy, like a young child, or a man enfeebled and stupified by sickness, is incapable of very deep sensations of pleasure and pain; and hence an excess of joy, as well as sorrow, has sometimes dissolved its feeble union with the body. On this account we are incapable of such degrees of happiness or misery from the things of this world as beings of more lively sensations might receive from them: and much more are we incapable of the happiness or misery of the future world, until we have put on immortality. We cannot see God and live. Should the glory of heaven blaze upon us in all its insuperable splendour, it would overwhelm our feeble nature; we could not support such a weight of glory. And one twinge of the agonies of hell would dislodge the soul from its earthly mansion: one pang would convulse and stupify it, were not its powers strengthened by the separation from the body. But in the future world all the powers of the soul will be mature and strong, and the body will be clothed with immortality; the union between them after the resurrection will be inseparable, and able to support the most oppressive weight of glory, or the most intolerable load of torment. Hence it follows that pleasure and pain include all that we can desire or fear in the present or future world; and therefore a comparative view of present and future pleasure and pain, is sufficient to enable us to form a due estimate of visible and invisible things. By present pleasure, I mean all the happiness we can receive from present things, as from riches, honours, sensual gratifications, learning, and intellectual improvements, and all the amusements and exercises of this life. And by future pleasure, or the pleasure which results from invisible things, I mean all the fruitions and enjoyments in which

heavenly happiness consists. By present pain, I intend all the uneasiness which we can receive from the things of the present life; as poverty, losses, disappointments, bereavements, sickness, and bodily pains. And by future pain, I mean all the punishments of hell; as banishment from God, and a privation of all created blessings, the agonizing reflections of a guilty conscience, the horrid company and exprobatations of infernal ghosts, and the torture of infernal flames.

Now let us put these in the balance, and the one will sink into nothing, and the other rise into infinite importance.

Temporal things are of a contracted nature, and not adequate to the capacities of the human soul; but eternal things are great, and capable of communicating all the happiness and misery which it can receive. The soul, in its present state, is not capable of such degrees of happiness and misery as it will be in the future, when it dwells among invisible realities. All that pleasure and pain which we receive from things that are seen, are intermingled with some ingredients of a contrary nature; but those proceeding from things that are not seen, are pure and unmingled.

1. Visible things are not equal to the capacities of the human soul. This little spark of being, the soul, which lies obscure in this prison of flesh, gives frequent discoveries of surprising powers: its desires in particular have a kind of infinity.—But all temporary objects are mean and contracted; they cannot afford it a happiness equal to its capacity, nor render it as miserable as its capacity of suffering will bear. Hence, in the greatest affluence of temporal enjoyments, in the midst of honours, pleasures, riches, friends, &c. it still feels a painful void within, and finds an unknown

something wanting to complete its happiness.—Kings have been unhappy upon their thrones, and all their grandeur have been but majestic misery. So Solomon found it, who had an opportunity and curiosity to make the experiment; and this is his verdict upon all earthly enjoyments, after the most impartial trial, “Vanity of vanities,” saith the preacher, “vanity of vanities; all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” On the other hand, the soul may possess some degree of happiness, under all the miseries it is capable of suffering from external and temporal things. Guilt indeed denies it this support; but if there be no intestine broils, no anguish resulting from its own reflections, not all the visible things can render it perfectly miserable; its capacity of suffering is not put to its utmost stretch. This has been attested by the experience of multitudes who have suffered for righteousness’ sake. But, O, when we take a survey of invisible things, we find them all great and majestic, not only equal but infinitely superior to the most enlarged powers of the human and even of the angelic nature. In the eternal world the great Invisible dwells, and there he acts with his own immediate hand. It is he that immediately communicates happiness through the heavenly regions; and it is his immediate breath that, like a stream of brimstone, kindles the flames of hell: whereas in the present world he rarely communicates happiness, and inflicts punishment, but by the instrumentality of creatures; and it is impossible the extremes of either should be communicated through this channel. This the infinite God alone can do, and though in the future world he will use his creatures to heighten the happiness or misery of each other, yet he will have a more immediate agency in them himself. He will commu-

nicate happiness immediately from himself, the infinite fountain of it, into the vessels of mercy; and he will immediately show his wrath, and make his power known upon the vessels of wrath. I may add, that those creatures, angels and devils, which will be the instruments of happiness or misery to the human soul in the invisible world, are incomparably more powerful than any in this; and consequently capable of contributing more to our pleasure or pain. And let me also observe, that all the objects about which our faculties will be employed then, will be great and majestic; whereas, at present, we grovel among little sordid things. The objects of our contemplation will then be either the unveiled glories of the divine nature, and the naked wonders of creation, providence, and redemption; or the terrors of divine justice, the dreadful nature and aggravations of our sin, the horrors of everlasting punishment, &c. And since this is the case, how little should we regard the things that are seen, in comparison of them that are not seen? But though visible things were adequate to our present capacities, yet they are not to be compared with the things that are not seen, because,

2. The soul is at present in a state of infancy, and incapable of such degrees of pleasure or pain as it can bear in the future world. The enjoyments of this life are like the playthings of children; and none but childish souls would trifle with them, or fret and vex themselves or one another about them; but the invisible realities before us are manly and great, and such as an adult soul ought to concern itself with. The soul in another world can no more be happy or miserable from such toys, than men can be happy or wretched in the possession or loss of the baubles of children; it will then

demand great things to give it pleasure or pain.—The apostle illustrates this matter in this manner. 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 11. How foolish is it then to be chiefly governed by these puerilities, while we neglect the manly concern of eternity, that can make our souls perfectly happy or miserable, when their powers are come to perfection!

3. And lastly, all the happiness and misery of the present state, resulting from things that are seen, are intermingled with contrary ingredients. We are never so happy in this world, as to have no uneasiness; in the greatest affluence we languish for want of some absent good, or grieve under some incumbent evil. On the other hand, we are never so miserable as to have no ingredient of happiness. When we labour under a thousand calamities, we may still see ourselves surrounded with, perhaps, an equal number of blessings. And where is there a wretch so miserable as to endure simple unmingled misery without one comfortable ingredient? But in the invisible world there is an eternal separation made between good and evil, pleasure and pain: and they shall never mingle more. In heaven, the rivers of pleasures flow untroubled with a drop of sorrow; in hell, there is not a drop of water to mitigate the fury of the flame. And who then would not prefer the things that are not seen to those that are seen! especially if we consider.

4. The infinite disparity between them as to duration. This is the difference particularly intended in the text; *the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal.*

The transitoriness of visible things, implies, both that the things themselves are perishable, and they may soon leave us; and that our residence among them is temporary, and we must soon leave them.

And the eternity of invisible things implies the quite contrary, that the things themselves are of endless duration; and that we shall always exist to receive happiness or misery from them.

Before we illustrate these instances of disparity, let us take a view of time and eternity in themselves, and as compared to one another.

Time is the duration of creatures in the present state. It commenced at the creation, and near 6000 years of it are since elapsed; and how much of it yet remains we know not. But this we know, that the duration of the world itself is as nothing in comparison of eternity. But what is our duration compared with the duration even of this world? It is but a span, a hair's breadth; sixty, seventy, or eighty years, is generally the highest standard of human life, and it is by far the smallest number of mankind that arrives to these periods. The most of them die like a flower blasted in the morning, or at noon; and we have more reason to expect it will be our fate than to hope the contrary. Now the span of time we enjoy in life is all our time; we have no more property in the rest of it than in the years before the flood. All beside is eternity. "Eternity!" We are alarmed at the sound! Lost in the prospect! Eternity with respect to God, is a duration without beginning as well as without end! Eternity, as it is the attribute of human nature, is a duration that had a beginning but shall never have an end. This is inalienably entailed upon us poor dying worms: and let us survey our inheritance. Eternity! it is a duration that excludes all number and computation; days, and months, and years, yea, and ages are lost in it, like drops in the ocean. Millions of millions of years, as many years as there are sands on the sea shore, or particles of dust in the globe

of the earth, and these multiplied to the highest reach of number, all these are nothing to eternity. They do not bear the least imaginable proportion to it; for these will come to an end, as certain as day; but eternity will never, never come to an end. It is a line without end; it is an ocean without a shore. Alas! what shall I say of it! It is an infinite unknown something, that neither human thought can grasp, nor human language describe.

Now place time in comparison with eternity, and what is it? It shrinks into nothing, and less than nothing. What then is that little span of time in which we have any property? Alas! it is too diminutive a point to be conceived. Indeed, properly speaking, we can call no part of time our own but the present moment, this fleeting *now*: future time is uncertain, and we may never enjoy it; the breath we now respire may be our last; and as to our past time, it is gone, and will never be ours again. Our past days are dead and buried, (though perhaps guilt, their ghost, may haunt us still. And what is a moment to eternity? The disparity is too great to admit of comparison.

Let me now resume the former particulars, implied in the transitoriness of visible and eternity of invisible things.

Visible things are perishable and may soon leave us. When we think they are ours, they often fly from our embrace. Riches may vanish into smoke and ashes by an accidental fire. We may be thrown down from the pinnacle of honour, and sink the lower into disgrace. Sensual pleasures often end in satiety and disgust, or in sickness and death. Our friends are torn from our bleeding hearts by the inexorable hand of death. Our liberty and property may be wrested from us by the hand of tyranny, oppression, or fraud. In a word, what

do we enjoy but we may lose? On the other hand, our miseries here are temporary; the heart receives many a wound, but it heals again. Poverty may end in riches; a clouded character may clear up, and from disgrace we may rise to honour; we may recover from sickness; and if we lose one comfort, we may obtain another. But in eternity every thing is everlasting and unchangeable. Happiness and misery are both of them without end; and the subjects of both well know that this is the case. It is this perpetuity that finishes that happiness of the inhabitants of heaven; the least suspicion of an end would intermingle itself with all their enjoyments, and embitter them; and the greater the happiness, the greater the anxiety at the expectation of losing it. But O how transporting for the saints on high to look forward through the succession of eternal ages, with an assurance that they shall be happy through them all, and that they shall feel no change but from glory to glory! On the other hand, this is the bitterest ingredient in the cup of divine displeasure in the future state, that the misery is eternal. O with what horror does that despairing cry, Forever, forever, forever! echo through the vaults of hell? Eternity is such an important attribute, that it gives infinite weight to things that would be insignificant, were they temporary. A small degree of happiness, if it be eternal, exceeds the greatest degree that is transitory; and a small degree of misery that is everlasting, of greater importance than the greatest degree that soon comes to an end. Would you rather endure the most painful tortures that nature can bear for a moment, than an eternal tooth-ach or head-ach? Again, should we consider all the ingredients and causes of future happiness and misery, we should find them all everlasting. The blessed God

is an inexhaustible perennial fountain of bliss; his image can never be erased from the hearts of glorified spirits; the great contemplation will always lie obvious to them; and they will always exist as the partakers and promoters of mutual bliss. On the other hand, in hell the worm of conscience dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; divine justice is immortal; malignant spirits will always exist as mutual tormentors, and their wicked habits will never be extirpated.

And now, need I offer any thing farther to convince you of the superior importance of invisible and eternal to visible and temporary things? Can a rational creature be at a loss to choose in so plain a case? Can you need any arguments to convince you that an eternity of the most perfect happiness is rather to be chosen than a few years of sordid unsatisfying delight? Or that the former should not be forfeited for the sake of the latter? Have you any remaining scruples whether the little anxieties and mortifications of a pious life are more intolerable than everlasting punishment? O! it is a plain case: what then mean an infatuated world, who lay out all their concern on temporal things, and neglect the important affairs of eternity? Let us illustrate this matter by supposition. Suppose a bird were to pick up and carry away a grain of sand or dust from the globe of this earth once in a thousand years, till it should be at length wholly carried away; the duration which this would take up appears a kind of eternity to us. Now suppose it were put to our choice, either to be happy during this time, and miserable ever after, or to be miserable during this time and happy ever after, which would you choose? Why, though this duration seems endless, yet he would be a fool that would not make the latter choice; for, O! behind this vast

duration, there lies an eternity, which exceeds it infinitely more than this duration exceeds a moment. But we have no such seemingly puzzling choice as this; the matter with us stands thus— Will you choose the little sordid pleasures of sin that may perhaps not last an hour, at most, not many years, rather than everlasting pleasure of the sublimest kind? Will you rather endure intolerable torment forever, than painfully endeavour to be holy? What does your conduct, my brethren, answer to these questions? If your tongues reply, they will perhaps for your credit give a right answer; but what say your prevailing disposition and common practice? Are you not more thoughtful for time than eternity? more concerned about visible vanities than invisible realities? If so, you make a fool's choice indeed.

But let it be further considered, that the transitoriness of invisible things may imply that we must ere long be removed from them. Though they were immortal it would be nothing to us, since we are not so in our present state. Within a few years, at most, we shall be beyond the reach of all happiness and misery from temporal things.

But when we pass out of this transitory state, we enter upon an everlasting state. Our souls will always exist; exist in a state of unchangeable, boundless happiness or misery. It is but a little while since we came into being out of a state of eternal non-existence; but we shall never relapse into that state again. These little sparks of being shall never be extinguished! they will survive the ruins of the world, and kindle into immortality. When millions of millions of ages are past, we shall still be in existence: and O! in what unknown region! In that of endless bliss, or of interminable misery! Be this the most anxious inquiry of our lives!

Seeing then we must soon leave this world, and all its joys and sorrows, and seeing we must enter on an unchangeable everlasting state of happiness or misery, be it our chief concern to end our present pilgrimage well. It matters but little whether we lie easy or not during this night of existence, if so be we awake in eternal day. It is but a trifle, hardly worth a thought, whether we be happy or miserable here, if we be happy forever hereafter. What then mean the bustle and noise of mankind about the things of time? O, Sirs! eternity, awful, all-important eternity, is the only thing that deserves a thought. I come,

I. To shew the great and happy influence a suitable impression of the superior importance of invisible to visible things would have upon us. This I might exemplify in a variety of instances with respect to saints and sinners.

When we are tempted to any unlawful pleasures, how would we shrink away with horror from the pursuit, had we a due sense of the misery incurred, and the happiness forfeited by it!

When we find our hearts excessively eager after things below, had we a suitable view of eternal things, all these things would sink into trifles hardly worth a thought, much less our principal concern.

When the sinner, for the sake of a little present ease, and to avoid a little present uneasiness, stifles his conscience, refuses to examine his condition, casts the thoughts of eternity out of his mind, and thinks it too hard to attend painfully on all the means of grace, has he then a due estimate of eternal things? Alas! no; he only looks at the things that are seen. Were the mouth of hell open before him, that he might behold its torments, and had he a sight of the joys of paradise, they would

harden him into a generous insensibility of all the sorrows and anxieties of this life, and his inquiry would not be, whether these things required of him are easy; but, whether they are necessary to obtain eternal happiness, and avoid everlasting misery.

When we suffer any reproach or contempt on a religious account, how would a due estimate of eternal things fortify us with undaunted courage, and make us willing to climb to heaven through disgrace, rather than sink to hell with general applause!

How would a realizing view of eternal things animate us in our devotions? Were this thought impressed on our hearts when in the secret or social duties of religion, "I am now acting for eternity," do you think we should pray, read, or hear with so much indifferency and languour? O no; it would rouse us out of our dead frames, and call forth all the vigour of our souls. With what unwearied importunity should we cry to God! with what eagerness hear the word of salvation?

How powerful an influence would a view of futurity have to alarm the secure sinner that has thought little of eternity all his life, though it be the only thing worth thinking of!

How would it hasten the determination of the lingering, wavering sinner, and shock him at the thought of living one day unprepared on the very brink of eternity!

In a word, a suitable impression of this would quite alter the aspect of things in the world, and would turn the concern and activity of the world into another channel. Eternity then would be the principal concern. Our inquiries would not be, Who will shew us any temporal good? What shall we eat, or what shall we drink? But What shall we do to be saved? How shall we escape the wrath

to come? Let us then endeavour to impress our hearts with invisible things, and for that purpose consider, that

We shall, ere long, be engulfed in this awful eternity, whether we think of it or not. A few days or years will launch us there; and O! the surprising scenes that will then open to us!

Without deep impressions of eternity on our hearts, and frequent thoughtfulness about it, we cannot be prepared for it.

And if we are not prepared for it, O, how inconceivably miserable our case! But if prepared, how inconceivably happy!

Look not then at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal.

SERMON XII.

THE SACRED IMPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN NAME.

ACTS XI. 26. *The Disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

MERE names are empty sounds, and but of little consequence: and yet it must be owned there are names of honour and significancy; and, when they are attended with the things signified by them, they are of great and sacred importance.

Such is the Christian name; a name about seventeen hundred years old. And now, when the name is almost lost in party-distinctions, and the thing is almost lost in ignorance, error, vice, hypocrisy, and formality, it may be worth our while to con-

sider the original import of that sacred name, as a proper expedient to recover both name and thing.

The name of Christian was not the first by which the followers of Christ were distinguished. Their enemies called them Galileans, Nazarenes, and other names of contempt: and amongst themselves they were called Saints, from their holiness; Disciples, from their learning their religion from Christ as their teacher; Believers, from their believing in him as the Messiah; and Brethren, from their mutual love and their relation to God and each other. But after some time they were distinguished by the name of Christians. This they first received in Antioch, an heathen city, a city infamous for all manner of vice and debauchery: a city that had its name from Antiochus Epiphanes, the bitterest enemy the church of the Jews ever had. A city very rich and powerful, from whence the christian name would have an extensive circulation; but it is long since laid in ruins, unprotected by that sacred name: in such a city was Christ pleased to confer his name upon his followers: and you cannot but see that the very choice of the place discovers his wisdom, grace, and justice.

The original word, which is here rendered *called*, seems to intimate, that they were called christians by divine appointment, for it generally signifies an oracular nomination, or a declaration from God; and to this purpose it is generally translated. Hence it follows that the very name christian, as well as the thing, was of a divine original; assumed not by a private agreement of the disciples among themselves, but by the appointment of God. And in this view it is a remarkable accomplishment of an old prophecy of Isaiah, chap. lxii. 2. *The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy*

glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. So Isaiah lxx. 15. The Lord shall call his servants by another name.

This name was at first confined to few; but it soon had a surprising extensive propagation through the world. In many countries, indeed it was lost and miserably exchanged for that of Heathen, Mahometan, or Musselman. Yet the European nations still retain the honour of wearing it. A few scattered christians are also to be found here and there in Asia and Africa, though crushed under the oppressions of Mahometans and Pagans. This name has likewise crossed the wide ocean to the wilderness of America, and is worn by the sundry European colonies on this continent. We, in particular, call ourselves christians, and should take it ill to be denied the honour of that distinction. But do we not know the meaning and sacred import of that name? Do we not know what it is to be christians indeed? That is, to be in reality what we are in name: certainly it is time for us to consider the matter; and it is my present design that we should do so.

Now we may consider this name in various views; particularly as a name of distinction from the rest of the world, who know not the Lord Jesus, or reject him as an impostor;—as a patronymic name, pointing out the Father and Founder of our holy religion and the christian church;—as a badge of our relation to Christ as his servants, his children, his bride;—as intimating our unction by the holy Spirit, or our being the subject of his influences; as Christ was anointed by the holy Spirit, or replenished with his gifts above measure (for you are to observe that anointed is the English of the Greek name Christ, and of the Hebrew, Messiah*) and as

*Psalm cv. 15. Touch not my Christs; that is, my anointed people. So the seventy.

a name of appropriation, signifying that we are the property of Christ, and his peculiar people. Each of these particulars might be profitably illustrated.*

But my present design confines me to consider the christian name only in two views; namely, as a catholic name, intended to bury all party denominations; and as a name of obligation upon all that wear it to be christians indeed, or to form their temper and practice upon the sacred model of christianity.

I. Let us consider the christian name as a catholic name, intended to bury all party denominations.

The name Gentile was odious to the Jews, and the name Jew was odious to the Gentiles. The name christian swallows up both in one common and agreeable appellation. He that hath taken down the partition-wall, has taken away partition names, and united all his followers in his own name, as a common denomination. For now, says Paul, *there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all.* Col. iii. 11. *And ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* Gal. iii. 28. According to a prophecy of Zechariah, *The Lord shall be king over all the earth; and in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one.* Zech. xiv. 9.

It is but a due honour to Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, that all who profess his religion should wear his name; and they pay an extravagant and even idolatrous compliment to his subordinate officers and ministers, when they take their denomination from them. Had this humour prevailed in the primitive church, instead of the common name christians, there would have been as

*See a fine illustration of them in Dr. Grosvenor's excellent essay on the christian name; from whom I am not ashamed to borrow several amiable sentiments.

many party-names as there were apostles or eminent ministers. There would have been Paulites from Paul; Peterites from Peter; Johnites from John; Barnabites from Barnabas, &c. Paul took pains to crush the first risings of this party spirit in those churches which he planted; particularly in Corinth, where it most prevailed. While they were saying, *I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ*, he puts this pungent question to them: “Is Christ divided? Are his servants the ringleaders of so many parties? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in or into the name of Paul, that you should be so fond to take your name from him?” He counted it a happiness that providence had directed him to such a conduct as gave no umbrage of encouragement to such a humour. *I thank God*, says he, *that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius: lest any should take occasion to say, I baptized into my own name, and was gathering a party for myself.* 1 Cor. i. 12—15.

But alas! how little has this convictive reasoning of the apostle been regarded in the future ages of the church? What an endless variety of denominations taken from some men of character, or from some little peculiarities, has prevailed in the christian world, and crumbled it to pieces, while the christian name is hardly regarded? Not to take notice of Jesuits, Jansenits, Dominicans, Franciscans, and other denominations and orders in the popish church, where, having corrupted the thing, they act very consistently to lay aside the name, what party names have been adopted by the protestant churches, whose religion is substantially the same common christianity, and who agree in much more important articles than in those they differ; and who therefore might peaceably unite under the

common name of Christians! We have Lutherans, Calvinists, Arminians, Zuinglians, Churchmen, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and a long list of names which I cannot now enumerate. To be a christian is not enough now-a-days, but a man must also be something more and better; that is, he must be a strenuous bigot to this or that particular church. But where is the reason or propriety of this? I may indeed believe the same things which Luther or Calvin believed: but I do not believe them on the authority of Luther or Calvin, but upon the sole authority of Jesus Christ, and therefore I should not call myself by their name, as one of their disciples, but by the name of Christ, whom alone I acknowledge as the Author of my religion, and my only master and Lord. If I learn my religion from one of these great men, it is indeed proper I should assume their name. If I learn it from a parliament or convocation, and make their acts and canons the rule and ground of my faith, then it is enough for me to be of the established religion, be that what it will: I may with propriety be called a mere conformist; that is my highest character: but I cannot be properly called a christian: for a christian learns his religion, not from acts of parliament or from the determinations of councils, but from Jesus Christ and his gospel.

To guard against mistakes on this head, I would observe that every man has a natural and legal right to judge and choose for himself in matters of religion; and that is a mean supple soul indeed, and utterly careless about all religion, that makes a compliment of this right to any man, or body of men upon earth, whether pope, king, parliament, convocation, or synod. In the exercise of this right, and searching for himself, he will find that he agrees more fully in lesser as well as more im-

portant articles with some particular church than others; and thereupon it is his duty to join in stated communion with that church; and he may, if he pleases, assume the name which that church wears, by way of distinction from others; this is not what I condemn. But for me to glory in the denomination of any particular church as my highest character; to lay more stress upon the name of a presbyterian or a churchman, than on the sacred name of christian; to make a punctilious agreement with my sentiments in the little peculiarities of a party the test of all religion; to make it the object of my zeal to gain proselytes to some other than the christian name; to connive at the faults of these of my own party, and to be blind to the good qualities of others, or invidiously to misrepresent or diminish them; these are the things which deserve universal condemnation from God and man; these proceed from a spirit of bigotry and faction, directly opposite to the generous catholic spirit of christianity, and subversive of it. And yet how common is this spirit among all denominations! And what mischief has it done in the world! Hence proceed contentions and animosities, uncharitable suspicions and censures, slander and detraction, partiality and unreasonable prejudices, and a hideous group of evils, which I cannot now describe. This spirit also hinders the progress of serious practical religion, by turning the attention of men from the great concerns of eternity, and the essentials of christianity, to vain jangling and contest about circumstances and trifles. Thus the christian is swallowed up in the partisan, and fundamentals lost in extra-essentials.

My brethren, I would now warn you against this wretched mischievous spirit of party. I would not have you entirely sceptical and undetermined

even about the smaller points of religion, the modes and forms, which are the matters of contention between different churches; nor would I have you quite indifferent what particular church to join with in stated communion. Endeavour to find out the truth, even in these circumstantial, at least so far as is necessary for the direction of your own conduct. But do not make these the whole or the principal part of your religion; do not be excessively zealous about them, nor break the peace of the church by magisterially imposing them upon others. "Hast thou faith in these little disputables?" it is well; "but have it to thyself before God," and do not disturb others with it. You may, if you please, call yourselves presbyterians and dissenters, and you shall bear without shame or resentment all the names of reproach and contempt which the world may brand you with. But as you should not be mortified on the one side, so neither should you glory on the other. A christian! a christian! let that be your highest distinction; let that be the name which you labour to deserve. God forbid that my ministry should be the occasion of diverting your attention to any thing else. But I am so happy that I can appeal to yourselves, whether I have during several years of my ministry among you, laboured to instil into you the principles of bigotry, and make you warm proselytes to a party: or whether it has not been the great object of my zeal to inculcate upon you the grand essentials of our holy religion, and make you sincere practical christians. Alas! my dear people, unless I succeed in this, I labour to very little purpose, though I should presbyterianize the whole colony.

Calumny and slander it is hoped, have by this time talked themselves out of breath; and the lying spirit may be at a loss for materials to form a po-

pular plausible falsehood, which is likely to be credited where the dissenters are known. But you have heard formerly, and some of you may still hear strange and uncommon surmises, wild conjectures, and most dismal insinuations. But if you would know the truth at once, if you would be fully informed by one that best knows what religion I am of, I will tell you (with Mr. Baxter,) "I am a christian, a mere christian; of no other religion: my church is the christian church." The Bible! the Bible! is my religion; and if I am a dissenter, I dissent only from modes and forms of religion which I cannot find in my Bible; and which therefore I conclude have nothing to do with religion, much less should they be made terms of christian communion, since Christ, the only lawgiver of his church, has not made them such. Let this congregation be that of a christian society, and I little care what other name it wears. Let it be a little Antioch, where the followers of Christ shall be distinguished by their old catholic name, Christians. To bear and deserve this character, let this be our ambition, this our labour. Let popes pronounce, and councils decree what they please; let statesmen and ecclesiastics prescribe what to believe: as for us, let us study our Bibles: let us learn of Christ; and if we are not dignified with the smiles or enriched with the emoluments of an establishment, we shall have his approbation, who is the only Lord and Sovereign of the realm of conscience, and by whose judgment we must stand or fall forever.

But it is time for me to proceed to consider the other view of the christian name, on which I intend principally to insist; and that is,

II. As a name of obligation upon all that wear it to be christians indeed, or to form their temper

and practice upon the sacred model of christianity. The prosecution of this subject will lead me to answer this important inquiry, what is it to be a christian?

To be a christian, in the popular and fashionable sense, is no difficult or excellent thing. It is to be baptised, to profess the christian religion, to believe, like our neighbours, that Christ is the Messiah, and to attend upon public worship once a week, in some church or other that bears only the christian name. In this sense a man may be a christian, and yet be habitually careless about eternal things; a christian, and yet fall short of the morality of many of the heathens; a christian, and yet a drunkard, a swearer, or a slave to some vice or other; a christian, and yet a wilful impenitent offender against God and man. To be a christian in this sense is no high character; and, if this be the whole of christianity, it is very little matter whether the world be christianized or not. But is this to be a christian in the original and proper sense of the word? No; that is something of a very different and superior kind. To be a christian indeed, is the highest character and dignity of which the human nature is capable: it is the most excellent thing that ever adorned our world: it is a thing that Heaven itself beholds with approbation and delight.

To be a christian is to be like to Christ, from whom the name is taken: it is to be a follower and imitator of him; to be possessed of his spirit and temper; and to live as he lived in the world: it is to have those just, exalted, and divine notions of God, and divine things, and that just and full view of our duty to God and man, which Christ taught: in short, it is to have our sentiments, our temper, and practice formed upon the sacred model of the

gospel. Let me expatiate a little upon this amiable character.

1. To be a christian, is to depart from iniquity. To this the name obliges us; and without this, we have no title to the name. *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.* 2 Tim. ii. 19; that is, let him depart from iniquity, or not dare to touch that sacred name. Christ was perfectly free from sin: he was *holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.* His followers also shall be perfectly free from sin in a little time; ere long they will enter into the pure regions of perfect holiness, and will drop all their sins, with their mortal bodies, into the grave. But this, alas! is not their character in the present state, but the remains of sin still cleave to them. Yet, even in the present state, they are labouring after perfection in holiness. Nothing can satisfy them until they are conformed to the image of God's dear Son. They are hourly conflicting with every temptation, and vigorously resisting every iniquity in its most alluring forms. And, though sin is perpetually struggling for the mastery, and sometimes in an inadvertent hour, gets an advantage over them, yet, as they are not under the law, but under grace, they are assisted with recruits of grace, so that no sin has any habitual dominion over them. Rom. vi. 14. Hence they are free from the gross vices of the age, and are men of good morals. This is their habitual universal character; and to pretend to be christians without this requisite, is the greatest absurdity.

What then shall we think of the drunken, swearing, debauched, defrauding, rakish, profligate, profane christians, that have overrun the christian world? can there be a greater contradiction? A loyal subject in arms against his sovereign, an ig-

norant scholar, a sober drunkard, a charitable miser, an honest thief, is not a greater absurdity, or a more direct contradiction. To depart from iniquity is essential to christianity, and without it there can be no such thing. There was nothing that Christ was so remote from as sin; and therefore for those that indulge themselves in it to wear his name, is just as absurd and ridiculous as for a coward to denominate himself from Alexander the great, or an illiterate dunce to call himself a Newtonian philosopher. Therefore, if you will not renounce iniquity, renounce the christian name; for you cannot consistently retain both. Alexander had a fellow in his army that was of his own name, but a mere coward. "Either be like me," says Alexander, "or lay aside my name." Ye servants of sin, it is in vain for you to wear the name of Christ, it renders you the more ridiculous, and aggravates your guilt: you may with as much propriety call yourselves lords, or dukes, or kings, as christians, while you are so unlike to Christ. His name is a sarcasm, a reproach to you, and you are a scandal to his name. His name is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.

2. To be a christian is to deny yourselves and take up the cross and follow Christ. These are the terms of discipleship fixt by Christ himself. *He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* Luke ix. 23. To deny ourselves is to abstain from the pleasures of sin, to moderate our sensual appetites, to deny our own interest for the sake of Christ, and in short to sacrifice every thing inconsistent with our duty to him, when these come in competition. To take up our cross, is to bear sufferings, to encounter difficulties, and break through them all in imitation of Jesus Christ, and

for his sake. To follow him, is to trace his steps, and imitate his example, whatever it cost us. But this observation will coincide with the next head, and therefore I now dismiss it. These, Sirs, and these only are the terms, if you would be christians, or the disciples of Christ. These he honestly warned mankind of when he first called them to be his disciples. He did not take an advantage of them, but let them know beforehand upon what terms they were admitted. He makes this declaration in the midst of a great crowd, in Luke xiv. 25, &c. *There went a great multitude with him, fond of becoming his followers: but he turned, and said unto them, if any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* By hating, is here meant a smaller degree of love, or a comparative hatred; that is, if we would be Christ's disciples, we must be willing to part with our dearest relations, and even our lives, when we cannot retain them consistently with our duty to him. He goes on: *Whosoever does not bear his cross, and encounter the greatest sufferings after my example, cannot be my disciple.* The love of Christ is the ruling passion of every true christian, and for his sake he is ready to give up all, and to suffer all that earth or hell can inflict. He must run all risks, and cleave to his cause at all adventures. This is the essential character of every true christian.

What then shall we think of those crowds among us who retain the christian name, and yet will not deny themselves of their sensual pleasures, nor part with their temporal interest for the sake of Christ? Who are so far from being willing to lay down their lives that they cannot stand the force of a laugh or a sneer in the cause of religion, but

immediately stumble and fall away? or, are they christians whom the commands of Christ cannot restrain from what their depraved hearts desire? No, a christian, without self denial, mortification, and a supreme love to Jesus Christ, is as great a contradiction as fire without heat, or a sun without light, an hero without courage, or a friend without love. And does not this strip some of you of the christian name, and prove that you have no title at all to it?

3. I have repeatedly observed, that a true christian must be a follower or imitator of Christ. *Be ye followers of me, says St. Paul, as I also am of Christ.* 1 Cor. xi. 1. Christ is the model after whom every christian is formed; for, says St. Peter, *he left us an example, that we should follow his steps.* 1 Pet. ii. 21. St. Paul tells us, that *we must be conformed to the image of God's dear Son.* Rom. viii. 29. and that *the same mind must be in us which was also in Christ Jesus.* Phil. ii. 5; unless we partake of his spirit, and resemble him in practice; unless we be as he was in the world, we have no right to partake of his name.

Here I would observe, that what was miraculous in our Lord's conduct, and peculiar to him as the Son of God and Mediator, is not a pattern for our imitation, but only what was done in obedience to that law of God which was common to him and us. His heart glowed with love to his Father, he delighted in universal obedience to him; it was his meat and his drink to do his will, even in the most painful and self-denying instances; he abounded in devotion, in prayer, meditation, fasting, and every religious duty. He was also full of every grace and virtue towards mankind: meek and lowly, kind and benevolent, just and charitable, merciful and compassionate; a dutiful son, a loyal subject, &

faithful friend, a good master, and an active, useful, public-spirited member of society. He was patient and resigned, and yet undaunted and brave under sufferings: he had all his appetites and passions under proper government, he was heavenly-minded, above this world in heart while he dwelt in it. Beneficence to the souls and bodies of men was the business of his life; for *he went about doing good.* Acts x. 38. This is an imperfect sketch of his amiable character; and in these things every one that deserves to be called after his name, does in some measure resemble and imitate him. This is not only his earnest endeavour, but what he actually attains, though in a much inferior degree; and his imperfections are the grief of his heart. This resemblance and imitation of Christ is essential to the very being of a christian, and without it, it is a vain pretence. And does your christianity, my brethren, stand this test? may one know that you belong to Christ by your living like him, and discovering the same temper and spirit? Do the manners of the divine Master spread through all his family; and do you shew that you belong to it by your temper and conduct? Alas! if you must be denominated from hence, would not some of you with more propriety be called Epicureans from Epicurus, the sensual atheistic philosopher, or Mammonites from Mammon, the imaginary god of riches, or Bacchanals from Bacchus, the god of wine, than Christians from Christ, the most perfect pattern of living holiness and virtue that ever was exhibited to the world?

If you claim the name of Christians, where is that ardent devotion, that affectionate love to God, that zeal for his glory, that alacrity in his service, that resignation to his will, that generous benevolence to mankind, that zeal to promote their best

interests, that meekness and forbearance under ill usage, that unwearied activity in doing good to all, that self-denial and heavenly mindedness which shone so conspicuous in Christ, whose holy name you bear? Alas! while you are destitute of those graces, and yet wear his name, you burlesque it, and turn it into a reproach both to him and yourselves.

I might add, that the christian name is not hereditary to you by your natural birth, but you must be born anew of the Spirit to entitle you to this new name; that a christian is a believer, believing in Him after whom he is called as his only Saviour and Lord, and that he is a true penitent. Repentance was incompatible with Christ's character, who was perfectly righteous, and had no sin of which to repent; but it is a proper virtue in a sinner, without which he cannot be a christian. On these and several other particulars I might enlarge, but my time will not allow; I shall therefore conclude with a few reflections.

First. You may hence see that the christian character is the highest, the most excellent and sublime in all the world; it includes every thing truly great and amiable. The christian has exalted sentiments of the Supreme Being, just notions of duty, and a proper temper and conduct towards God and man. A christian is a devout worshipper of the God of heaven, a cheerful observer of his whole law, and a broken hearted penitent for his imperfections. A christian is a complication of all the amiable and useful graces and virtues; temperate and sober, just, liberal, compassionate and benevolent, humble, meek, gentle, peaceable, and in all things conscientious. A christian is a good parent, a good child, a good master, a good servant, a good husband, a good

wife, a faithful friend, an obliging neighbour, a dutiful subject, a good ruler, a zealous patriot, and an honest statesman; and as far as he is such, so far, and no farther, he is a christian. And can there be a more amiable and excellent character exhibited to your view? It is an angelic, a divine character. Let it be your glory and your ambition to wear it with a good grace, to wear it so as to adorn it.

To acquire the title of kings and lords is not in your power; to spread your fame as scholars, philosophers, or heroes, may be beyond your reach; but here is a character more excellent, more amiable, more honourable than all these, which it is your business to deserve and maintain. And blessed be God, this is a dignity which the meanest among you, which beggars and slaves may attain. Let this therefore be an object of universal ambition and pursuit, and let every other name and title be despised in comparison of it. This is the way to rise to true honour in the estimate of God, angels, and good men. What though the anti-christian christians of our age and country ridicule you? let them consider their own absurd conduct and be ashamed. They think it an honour to wear the christian name, and yet persist in unchristian practices; and who but a fool, with such palpable contradiction, would think so? A beggar that fancies himself a king, and trails his rags with the gait of majesty, as though they were royal robes, is not so ridiculous as one that will usurp the christian name without a christian practice; and yet such christians are the favourites of the world. To renounce the profession of christianity is barbarous and profane; to live according to that profession, and practise christianity, is preciseness and fanaticism. Can any thing be more preposterous? This

is as if one should ridicule learning, and yet glory in the character of a scholar; or laugh at bravery, and yet celebrate the praises of heroes. And are they fit to judge of wisdom and propriety, or their censures to be regarded, who fall into such an absurdity themselves?

Secondly, Hence you may see that, if all the professors of christianity should behave in character, the religion of Christ would soon appear divine to all mankind, and spread through all nations of the earth. Were christianity exhibited to the life in all its native and inherent glories, it would be as needless to offer arguments to prove it divine, as to prove that the sun is full of light: the conviction would flash upon all mankind by its own intrinsic evidence. Did christians exemplify the religion they profess, all the world would immediately see that *that* religion which rendered them so different a people from all the rest of mankind, is indeed divine, and every way worthy of universal acceptance. Then we should have no such monsters as Atheists, Deists, and Infidels in christian countries. Then would Heathenism, Mahometism, and all the false religions in the world, fall before the heaven-born religion of Jesus Christ. Then it would be sufficient to convince an infidel just to bring him into a christian country, and let him observe the different face of things there from all the world beside. But alas!

Thirdly, How different is the christian world from the christian religion? Who would imagine that they who take their name from Christ have any relation to him, if we observe their spirit and practice? Should a stranger learn christianity from what he sees in popish countries, he would conclude it principally consisted in bodily austerities, in worshipping saints, images, relics, and a thousand trifles,

in theatrical fopperies and insignificant ceremonies, in believing implicitly all the determinations of a fallible man as infallibly true, and in persecuting all that differ from them, and shewing their love to their souls by burning their bodies. In protestant countries, alas! the face of things is but little better as to good morals and practical religion. Let us take our own country for a sample. Suppose a Heathen or Mahometan should take a tour through Virginia to learn the religion of the inhabitants from their general conduct, what would he conclude? would he not conclude that all the religion of the generality consisted in a few Sunday formalities, and that the rest of the week they had nothing to do with God, or any religion, but were at liberty to live as they please? And where he told these were the followers of one Christ, and were of his religion, would he not conclude that he was certainly an imposter, and the minister of sin? But when he came to find that, notwithstanding all this licentiousness, they professed the pure and holy religion of the Bible, how would he be astonished, and pronounce them the most inconsistent, barefaced hypocrites! My brethren, great and heavy is the guilt that lies upon our country upon this account. It is a scandal to the christian name; it is guilty of confirming the neighbouring heathen in their prejudices, and hinders the propagation of christianity through the world. O let not us be accessory to this dreadful guilt, but do all we can to recommend our religion to universal acceptance!—I add,

Fourthly, and lastly, Let us examine whether we have any just title to the christian name; that is, whether we are christians indeed; for if we have not the thing, to retain the name is the most inconsistent folly and hypocrisy, and will answer no end but to aggravate our condemnation. A lost chris-

tiā is the most shocking character in hell; and, unless you be such christians as I have described, it will ere long be your character. Therefore, be followers of Christ, imbibe his spirit, practise his precepts, and depart from iniquity, otherwise he will sentence you from him at last as workers of iniquity. *And then will I profess unto them (they are Christ's own words,) I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matt. vii. 23.*

END OF VOL. I.