

SERMONS
ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS:

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

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IN FIVE VOLUMES.

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OF

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**RELIGION THE HIGHEST WISDOM, AND SIN THE
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PSALM III. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.**

WISDOM is a character so honourable and ornamental to a reasonable being, that those who best knew the dignity of their own nature, have had no higher ambition than to be esteemed and called lovers of it. Hence the original of the name **Philosopher**, which signifies no more than a lover of wisdom. On the other hand, there is hardly any character deemed more reproachful, or that is more resented, than that of a fool. Men are often as jealous of the reputation of their understandings as of their morals, and think it as great a reproach to be without sense as without goodness.

There is a prodigious diversity in the intellectual capacities of mankind, and their souls differ as much as their bodies; but whether it be owing to

* Job xxviii. 28. Prov. i. 7. and ix. 10.

the intrinsic difference of their souls, or to the different formation of their bodies, is not my present purpose to determine. Some, that share in human nature, give very little discoveries of reason above the most sagacious sorts of brutes. The generality are endowed with common sense, which though it has nothing brilliant and pompous in it, and does not qualify them for high improvements in science, or making a figure in the learned world, yet it is sufficient for all the purposes of life, and the necessities of a human creature. There are a few also who seem raised beyond their species, and perhaps approach near to the lower ranks of angels by a superior genius. These have been the first inventors and improvers of useful arts and sciences; which others of inferior understanding, are able to put in practice for their own purposes, though they had not sagacity at first to discover them.

This little world of ours is an improved spot in the creation. How vastly different an appearance does it now make from its original state of pure nature, when it emerged out of chaos, uncultivated by art! What numerous arts and trades have been found out to furnish life with necessaries and comforts! How deeply have some penetrated into the world of knowledge! They have traced the secret workings of nature; they have even brought intelligence from the worlds above us, and discovered the courses and revolutions of the planets.

When you see these discoveries, you would conclude mankind to be a wise race of creatures; and indeed in such things as these they discover no inconsiderable abilities. Almost every man in his province can manage his affairs with some judgment. Some can manage a farm; others are dexterous in mechanics; others have a turn for mercan-

tile affairs; others can unfold the mysteries of nature, and carry their searches far into the ideal worlds; others can conduct an army, or govern a nation. In short, every man forms some scheme which he apprehends will conduce to his temporal advantage; and prosecutes it with some degree of judgment.

But is this all the wisdom that becomes a candidate for eternity? Has he a good understanding who only acts with reason in the affairs of this life; but, though he is to exist forever in another world, and to be perfectly happy or miserable there, yet takes no thought about the concerns of his immortal state? Is this wisdom? Is this consistent even with common sense? No; with sorrow and solemnity I would speak it, the most of men in this respect are fools and madmen; and it is impossible for the most frantic madmen in Bedlam to act more foolishly about the affairs of this life, than they generally do about the affairs of religion and eternity. There is such a thing as a partial madness; a person may have, as it were, one weak side to his mind, and it may be sound and rational in other respects. You may meet with some lunatics and madmen that will converse reasonably with you, and you would not suspect their heads are disordered, till you touch upon some particular point, and then you are to expect reason from them no more; they talk the wildest nonsense, and are governed entirely by their imaginations. Thus, alas! it is with the generality of mankind in the present case. They are wise for this world; they talk and act at least agreeably to common sense; but hear them talk and observe their conduct about the concerns of their souls, and you can call them reasonable creatures no longer. *They are wise to do evil; but to do good they have no knowledge: there is none that understandeth; there is none that seek-*

eth after God. To bring them to themselves by exposing to them their madness, is my present design.

The text shews us the first step to true wisdom, and the test of common sense: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.* This is so frequently repeated, that it may pass for a scripture maxim: and we may be sure it is of singular importance. Job starts the question, *Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?* He searches nature through, in quest of it, but cannot find it: he cannot purchase it with the gold of Ophir; and its price is above rubies. At length he recollects the primitive instruction of God to man, and there he finds it: *To man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* Job xxviii. 28. Solomon, the wisest of men, begins his proverbs with this maxim, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* Prov. i. 7. And he repeats it again, Prov. ix. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy,* (the knowledge of those that may be called saints with a sneer,) *is understanding.*

The fear of the Lord, in scripture, signifies not only that pious passion of filial reverence of our adorable Father who is in heaven, but it is frequently put for the whole of practical religion; hence it is explained in the last part of the verse, *by doing his commandments.* The fear of the Lord, in this latitude, implies all the graces and all the virtues of christianity; in short, all that holiness of heart and life which is necessary to the enjoyment of everlasting happiness. So that the sense of the text is this: “To practice religion and virtue, to take that way which leads to everlasting happiness, is wisdom, true wisdom, the beginning

of wisdom, the first step toward it; unless you begin here, you can never attain it; all your wisdom without this, does not deserve the name; it is madness and nonsense. To do his commandments is the best test of a good understanding; a good sound understanding have all they that do this, all of them without exception: however weak some of them may be in other things, they are wise in the most important respect; but without this, however cunning they are in other things, they have lost their understandings; they contradict common sense; they are beside themselves. In short, to pursue everlasting happiness as the end, in the way of holiness as the mean, this is wisdom, this is common sense; and there can be none without this."

Wisdom consists in two things; choosing a right end, and using right means to obtain it. Now what end so becoming a creature to live forever, as everlasting happiness? And in what way can it be obtained, but in the way of holiness? Consult the judgment of God in his word; consult your own conscience, or even common sense, and you will find that this is the case. Therefore he is a man of sense that pursues this end in this way; but he is a fool; he is brutish, that chooses an inferior end, or that pursues this in a wrong way.

My time will not allow me to do any more than to mention some instances of the folly and madness of such as do not make the fear of the Lord the beginning of their wisdom.

I. Men will not take the safest side in religion, which their reason and self-love carry them to do in other cases.

It is very possible the love of ease and pleasure, and a self-flattering disposition, may prompt your invention to form a plausible system of religion;

a religion that admits of great hopes with little evidences, and that allows you many indulgencies and lays few restraints upon you; a religion purged, as you imagine, from some of the melancholy and gloomy doctrines of christianity and that releases you from those restraints, so painful to a wicked heart, which the holy religion of Jesus lays upon you. It is very possible you may hope you shall obtain eternal happiness without much pains, and without observing the strictness of universal holiness; you may indulge hopes of heaven, though you indulge yourselves wilfully in sin; you may flatter yourselves that God is not so inexorably just as the sacred scriptures represent him; and that his threatenings are only tremendous sounds without any design to be executed in all their strictness; you may flatter yourselves, that the punishments of a future state are not intolerably dreadful, nor of everlasting duration; you may excuse and diminish your sins, and make a great many plausible apologies for them. But are you sure of these things? Have you demonstration for them, upon which you may venture your eternal all? Think the matter over seriously again; have you certainty that these things are so? and are you willing to perish forever if they should be otherwise? What if you should be mistaken? What if you should find God as strict and holy as his word represents him? What if all his dreadful threatenings should be sincere and true, and your sins have infinitely greater malignity in his eyes than in yours? What if in a little time you should find that the scriptures give a more just account of the punishments of hell than your self-flattering heart suggested to you, and that they are indeed intolerable and strictly eternal? What if you should find, when it is too late to correct the mistake, that those

neglected, ridiculous things, regeneration, conversion, holiness of heart and practice, the mortification of sin, and a laborious course of devotion—what if you should find they are absolutely necessary to everlasting happiness? What if it should appear that the wilful indulgence of the least known sin will eternally ruin you? Stand and pause, and ask yourselves, what if you should find matters thus, quite the reverse to what you flattered yourselves? What will become of you then? You are undone, irreparably undone through all eternity. Well, to speak modestly, this may be the case, for what you know; and is it not then the part of a wise man to provide against such a dreadful contingency? Will you run so terrible a risk, and yet claim a good understanding? Do you esteem a life of religion so burdensome, that you had better make such a desperate venture than choose it? Do you esteem the pleasures of sin so sweet, so solid, so lasting, that it is your interest to run the risk of intolerable, eternal misery, rather than part with them? Can you form such an estimate as this while in your senses? No, he is a madman with whom certain pleasures for a little time, the sordid pleasures of sin, outweigh an eternity of perfect happiness. He is certainly not in his right mind that would rather be tormented in hell forever, than lead an holy life, and labour to escape the wrath to come. Therefore act in this as you do in other cases of uncertainty, choose the safest side. Believe and regard what God has said; be holy in all manner of conversation; strive with all your might to enter in at the strait gate: accept of Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Do this, and you are safe, let the case be as it will; there are no bad consequences that can possibly follow from this conduct. It will, upon the whole, be the most pleasant for

you, even in this life; and your reason will tell you, this is a more certain way to escape everlasting misery, and secure eternal happiness, than the contrary. But if you are resolutely set upon running the risk, and fool-hardy enough to venture your eternal all upon such improbabilities, not to say impossibilities, you forfeit the character of a reasonable being; you are mad in this respect, however wise you may be in others.

II. Is it not the greatest folly to believe, or profess to believe, the great truths of religion, and yet act quite contrary to such a belief?

How many are there who own God to be the greatest and the best of beings, and yet neglect him, and pay a greater regard to a thousand other things! They own him lovely, and do not love him; their King, and they do not obey him; and their Benefactor, and make no returns of gratitude to him. They confess that heaven is better than earth, and yet they pursue the things of this life, to the neglect of all the happiness of heaven. They believe their souls are of more importance than their bodies; and yet they will not take half the care about them that they take about their bodies. They confess that a life of sin and impenitence is very dangerous, and that it will end in everlasting misery; yet, with this confession in their mouth, and this conviction in their consciences, they will, they obstinately will go on impenitently in sin. They own that religion and virtue are excellent things, and yet they never make it the main business of their life, but live carelessly without them. They believe they are sinners, worthy of punishment, and yet they are generally as unconcerned as if they were innocent. They believe that Christ is the only Saviour of sinners, and yet they are as little concerned to get

an interest in him as if they could be saved without him. They believe that all the pleasures of this transitory life are infinitely inferior to the pleasures of religion and the happiness of the heavenly state; they believe these pleasures will ruin them forever if they continue in them, and yet they will persist in them, though by this they throw away their everlasting happiness, and incur eternal misery! Thus they believe, or profess to believe; and our country is full of such believers; but what absurd, self-contradicting creatures are they! What madness is it to entertain a belief that answers no other end but to condemn their practice, and aggravate their sin! Do they really believe these things, or do they not? If not, what folly is it to profess to believe them? Do they think to impose by an empty profession on Him who searches the hearts and the reins? or have they no other end in their profession of religion, than just to be esteemed christians by men? Can they think that their faith will indemnify them in contradicting it? or that they may sin safely, because they sin against knowledge? Are these the conclusions of a sound mind? Must not a man be out of his senses before he can admit them? But if you suppose they believe these things, it is certain they are entirely mad in this affair. What! to neglect God, and holiness, and heaven, when they know they are of infinite importance! to choose the ways of sin, when they believe they will end in ruin! Is this the part of a wise man? Should a sick man tell you he is certain to die unless he takes such a medicine, and yet you should see that he does not take it, but continues to drink the most deadly poison, what would you think of him? Would you not conclude either that he did not believe himself, or that he was distracted? But this is the very conduct of

many professed believers, who yet think they have no small share of wisdom. I will not dispute your wisdom about your secular affairs; you may be wise to do evil; but I am sure in these instances you are quite delirious; and yourselves will be convinced of it to your cost, when God shall say unto you, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.* Luke xii. 20.

All your pleas to vindicate or excuse your conduct do but aggravate your folly. Do you say, “Your lusts are head-strong and ungovernable, and you cannot restrain them?” I doubt not but this is true; but is this a reason why you should be so easy and careless? Are your enemies so strong? And will you, on that very account, be faint and inactive in your resistance? Ought you not to rise and cry to God for his grace to change your nature, to subdue these strong sins, and make you holy, since without it you cannot be saved? Besides, consider whether your pretended excuse be not a real aggravation. “Your lusts are so strong,” you say, “that you cannot restrain them.” What is this but to say that you are so wicked, that you have no heart to break off from sin? and is the inveteracy of your wickedness an excuse for it? Does not common sense remonstrate against such an absurdity? Do you plead, that “you intend to repent of this inconsistent conduct hereafter?” But if religion is an excellent thing, as you profess to believe it, why do you not choose it now? the sooner the better. Again, is it not the greatest folly to indulge yourselves in a practice that you deliberately intend to repent of? If your present conduct be wise, why do you intend to repent of it? the very intention implies that you are even now convinced it is foolish; and what will your repentance be but a deep sense of your folly? And can there be a great-

er madness than deliberately to do any thing which at the very time you intend to repent of? Is there any thing more absurd and ridiculous? Is this your conduct in other things? Will you make a bargain, which you know you will afterwards repent of? Will you prosecute a scheme which you deliberately intend afterwards to condemn and be sorry for? Can you do such things, and yet take it ill to be called fools? Further, why do you design to repent? Is it because you hate sin? No; for if that was the reason, you would immediately forsake it. Is it because you love God and holiness? No; for then you would devote yourselves to the service of God immediately, and could not bear a delay. But you intend to force yourselves upon a little remorse of conscience, when the punishment of sin is just ready to fall upon you, with no other design but just to escape it. And can you think there is any value in such extorted sorrows, that proceed not from hatred of sin, or love to God, but merely from self-love, and a servile fear of punishment? Can any wise man look upon this as repentance to life, or hope that God will accept of it? Finally, are you sure of that uncertain hereafter, in which you purpose to repent? Is there any man in his senses that dare pretend he is certain of another day? or that he shall not die by some sudden accident, or in a delirium, in which he has no time nor composure to repent?

III. Is it not the greatest folly for men to pretend to love God, when their temper and conduct are inconsistent with it, and plainly evidential of the contrary?

If you go round the world with the question, "Do you love God? do you love him above all?" you will hardly meet with any one but what will answer, "Yes, to be sure; I have loved him all my

life." Well, but where are the evidences and effects of this love? If you pretend friendship to men, they expect the expressions of it from you on every occasion; otherwise they will see through the pretence, and pronounce it flattery. They expect you should often think of them with tender affection, perform them all the good offices in your power, study to please them, be tender of their characters, solicitous about their interest, and delight in their society. These are the inseparable effects of love; and certainly, if you love God, your love will have such effects, especially since, if you love him at all with sincerity, you love him above all other persons and things. But men will insist upon it that they love him above all, and yet very seldom or never think of him with tender affection: they love him above all, and yet indulge themselves in sin, that abominable thing, which he hates: they love him above all, and yet have little solicitude about pleasing him, and doing his will: they love him above all, and yet are unconcerned about the interests of religion in the world, which are his interests, and careless about his honour and glory: they love him above all, and yet have no pleasure in conversing with him in prayer, and the other ordinances of his grace, where he holds spiritual interviews with his people. They love him above all, and yet love and delight in a thousand other things more than him; and they would highly resent it if one should begin to question the sincerity of their love; and they hope God will accept of it; and reward it. But can men in their senses think that this will pass for true and supreme love with him, that knows all things? They cannot expect that their fellow-creatures should thus be imposed upon; and is it not the greatest madness to imagine they can thus impose upon Omniscience? Indeed it may

astonish any man that knows what love is, to find that the most of men pretend they love God, even while they are giving the most glaring evidences of disaffection to him; and after all, it is almost impossible to convince them that they do not thoroughly love him. What madness has seized the world, that they will not receive conviction in such a plain case! What mean thoughts must they have of God, when they think to put him off with such an empty compliment, and hypocritical profession!

IV. Is it not the greatest folly for men to hope for heaven, when they have no evidences at all of their title to it, or fitness for it?

Is it not the dictate of common sense, that no man can be happy in any thing but what he has a relish for, and delights in? Can an illiterate rustic find pleasure in rigid mathematical demonstrations, and learned speculations, or a man of pleasure and business in the ascetic mortified life of a hermit? Can a man, whose taste is vitiated by sickness, enjoy happiness in the entertainments of a feast? No, nothing can make a man happy, but what is suited to his relish and disposition. And yet there are thousands that have no relish for the enjoyment of God, no pleasure in thinking of him, or conversing with him, no delight in his service and acts of devotion, who yet hope to be forever completely happy in these exercises in heaven. The happiness of heaven, as I have often told you, consists in such things as these, and how can you hope to be happy there while you have no pleasure in them! There are thousands who have no delight in any thing holy or religious, but only in the gratifications of their senses and the enjoyment of earthly things, who yet hope to be happy in heaven, in the wants of all sensual and earthly enjoyments. There are thousands who now disgust the society of the reli-

gious as intolerably precise, who yet flatter themselves they shall be perfectly happy in the company of saints and angels, where the meanest is incomparably more holy than the most sanctified creature upon earth. And have they a sound understanding who can entertain such absurd hopes? Does not common sense tell us, that God, who does every thing wisely, will bring none to heaven but those whom he has made fit for it beforehand? and that as none shall be sent to hell but those that were previously wicked, so none shall be admitted into the world of glory but those who are previously made holy? None first begin to be holy in heaven or wicked in hell; both parties bring with them those dispositions which are fit for their respective places and employments. How absurd is it therefore to hope for heaven, while you have no heavenly dispositions! You may as well hope to see the sun without eyes. Further, God has assured you in his word, and you profess to believe him, that without regeneration, faith, repentance, and interest in Christ, and universal holiness, you cannot enter into his kingdom; and yet, are there not some of you who are foolish enough to hope for it, though destitute of all these? Has he not told you that drunkards, swearers, unclean, malicious, contentious persons, liars, and the like, shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven? And yet, though you know these are your characters, and the world knows it too, you will hope for admission to it, in defiance of God's most express, repeated declarations! What madness is this! and how peculiar to this affair! The debauchee will not expect happiness in mortification and devotion, nor the prodigal in hoarding up useless wealth; and yet thus absurdly will they act in their expectations of heaven!

V. And lastly, Is it not the greatest madness to be more concerned about the affairs of time than those of eternity?

It is plain to any man in his senses, that the happiness and misery which are extreme, and which shall endure forever, are of infinitely greater importance than all the enjoyments and all the sufferings of this transitory state. And you will hardly meet with any man but will own this to be his belief. But, alas! into what consternation may it strike us, when we survey the conduct of the generality! Are they as much concerned about the eternal world to which they are hastening, as to the concerns of time? Are they as laborious and zealous to obtain everlasting happiness as to gain the riches of this world, or to gratify their sensual appetites? Are they as solicitous to avoid everlasting misery as to shun sickness, poverty, or any temporal calamity! Are they as cautious of sinning, which ruins their souls forever, as of drinking poison, which may endanger their health or temporal life! Do not many of you know it is quite the reverse with you! Are not the concerns of this life the principal objects of your thoughts, your cares, and labours! And what can be a more consummate folly! You practically prefer a trifle of an hour to a substantial good of endless duration. You are careless about everlasting torment, and yet cautiously shun the light sufferings of a few moments. It matters not what you think, or say in this matter; it is your practice that determines the affair; and does not that shew that time outweighs a vast eternity with you? And what can be more absurd! If you should throw away an estate to obtain a farthing, if you should run upon a drawn sword to escape a prickle, if you should prefer pebbles to crowns and kingdoms, darkness to light, or one luxurious meal to the support of

your whole life, it would not be so shocking a piece of madness.

I might give you many more instances of the madness of those who do not begin this wisdom with the fear of the Lord, but the inferences from the subject are so numerous and important, that I must reserve the rest of the time for them.

1. Since there is so much folly in the world in matters of religion, how astonishing is it that it is not universally contemned and ridiculed, or pitied and lamented! If men act a foolish part in other things, they soon furnish matter of laughter and contempt to the gay and witty part of mankind; and the thoughtful and benevolent view them with compassion. But let them act ever so foolishly in the concerns of eternity, there is hardly any notice taken of it; the absurdity is no way shocking; nay, the generality commend their conduct by imitating it themselves; and if any are so wise as to find fault with this madness, they are termed fools themselves, and the general laugh is turned against them. How unaccountable is this, that men who act prudently in other things, and are easily shocked with a mad and frantic behaviour, can view the folly of mankind in this respect, without horror, or perhaps with approbation! The only reason for it is, that the generality are madmen in this respect, and the folly is approved because it is common. To be singularly wise is to be foolish, in the opinion of the world; and to be fools with the multitude, is the readiest way to get the reputation of wisdom. They prove religion to be folly, by a majority of votes; and as many who are fools in this affair are wise in other respects, their judgment is implicitly submitted to. But, pray, sirs, use your own reason, and judge impartially for yourselves, and I am sure you must see the wild absurdity of their conduct. Be nobly singu-

lar in beginning wisdom with the fear of the Lord; and whatever others think of you now, God, angels, and good men will applaud your wisdom: and even those who now ridicule it, will approve of it at last.

2. With what an ill grace do the irreligious condemn and despise those that make religion their great concern, as weak, silly creatures! Sinners, let your own reason determine, can there be any thing more foolish than your own behaviour? And does it become you to brand others with the odium of folly? Alas! you have reason to turn your contempt upon yourselves, and to be struck with horror at your own wilful stupidity. Do you set yourselves up as the standards of wisdom, who want sense to keep out of everlasting ruin? Are you wise men, who throw away your eternal happiness for the trifles of time? No, they only are wise who are wise for eternity. You may excel them in a thousand things; nature may have favoured you with a better genius; you may have had a more liberal education; you may be better acquainted with men and books; you may manage your secular affairs with more discretion; in such things you may be wiser than many of them. But they are wise for eternity! they have sense to escape everlasting burnings! they have wisdom to obtain eternal happiness! and this is a more important piece of wisdom than all your acquisitions. The wisdom of Solomon, of Socrates, or Plato, is the wildest madness without this. How absurd is it therefore for you, without this, to arrogate the character of men of wisdom; or even of common sense!

3. How absurd is it for men to pretend they will not turn their thoughts to religion, lest it should make them melancholy or distracted? Alas! sin-

ners, you cannot be more so than you are already; and you will never come to yourselves till, with the prodigal, you determine to return to your father's house. And will you continue fools through the fear of becoming such? I can assure you I would rather be the wildest frantic in Bedlam, than be that wretch who ruins his soul for fear of running mad by thinking of it.

4. If the fear of the Lord, religion, is the perfection of wisdom, how unreasonably does the world charge it with making people mad? There are multitudes that lose their senses by excessive sorrows and anxieties about some temporal affair; many more than by religion; and yet they never fall out with the world on this account. But when any one, that seemed thoughtful about religion, loses his senses, then religion be sure must bear all the blame; and sinners are glad to catch at such a handle to expose it. Melancholy persons are wont to derive terrors from every thing in their reach; and, among other things, will pore upon all those doctrines of religion that can affright them. But this melancholy, as such, is a bodily disorder, and therefore has no more religion in it than a fever or a consumption. It is indeed very possible that too intense application of the mind to divine things, with a deep concern about our everlasting state, may be the occasion of melancholy; but there is nothing peculiar in this; let the mind be excessively attentive to any thing, it will have the same effect. How many disorders do men contract by their eager pursuit of the world? and yet the world is their favourite still. But if one here and there suffers by occasion of religion, O! they bless themselves from it, and think it is a terrible gloomy thing.—Those that are pious, let me tell you, are many of them much superior to

the wisest of us in all accomplishments; and they are generally as far from madness as their neighbours. Therefore drop this senseless slander, and be yourselves holy, if you would be truly wise.

5. Since men are such fools in matters of religion, since they censure it with so much severity and contempt, how astonishing is it that God should send down that divine, heaven-born thing, religion, into our world, where it is so much neglected and abused! Where the celestial guest meets with but few hearts that will entertain it; where its professors neglect it, contradict it, and by their practice call it madness; and where even its friends and subjects frequently treat it very unkindly! What astonishing condescension and grace is it, that God has not left our mad world to themselves, since they are so averse to be reclaimed! But lo! he hath sent his Son, he hath instituted the gospel, and a thousand means of grace, to bring them to themselves!

6. And lastly, Hence we may infer, that human nature is exceedingly depraved and disordered. I think this is as plain as any disorder incident to the body. Men are universally indisposed as to religion; and on this account our world is, as a great genius calls it, "the Bedlam of the universe." The same natural faculties, the same understanding, will, and affections, that render us able to act with prudence in the affairs of this life, are also sufficient for the affairs of religion; but, alas! with regard to this, they are disordered, though they exercise themselves aright about other things. They can acquire the knowledge of languages and sciences; but, alas! they have no disposition to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent.— They understand how to trade, and carry on schemes for this world; but they will not act wisely

for eternity. They have sense enough not to run into the fire, or to drink poison; but they will run on in the ways of sin to everlasting misery. They will ask the way when they have lost themselves; but how hard is it to bring them to inquire, What shall I do to be saved? They will ask help for their bodies from their fellow-creatures, but how hard is it to bring them in the posture of earnest petitioners to ask immortal blessings for their souls from God! In short, they can contrive with prudence, and act with vigour, courage, and perseverance, in the affairs of time; but in the concerns of religion and eternity they are ignorant, stupid, languid, and careless. And how can we account for this, but by supposing that they are degenerate creatures, and that their nature has suffered a dreadful shock by the first fall, which has deprived them of their senses? Alas! this is a truth too evident to be denied!

SERMON XXXIX.

REJECTION OF CHRIST A COMMON, BUT MOST UNREASONABLE INIQUITY.

MARK XII. 6.—*Having yet therefore one Son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my Son.*

THERE is no sin more common or more pernicious in the christian world, than an unsuitable reception of Jesus Christ and the gospel. It is not only the sin of professed unbelievers and profane scoffers, but it often hides itself under the cloak of religion, and a profession of faith. It is of so subtle a na-

ture, that it is often unsuspected, even by those who are destroyed by it: and it is of so deadly a nature, that nothing can save a soul under the power of it. A soul that has the offer of Christ and the gospel, and yet neglects him, is certainly in a perishing condition, whatever good works, whatever amiable qualities or appearances of virtue it may be adorned with. *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* 2 Cor. iv. 3. John iii. 18. .

This was the sin of the Jews in Christ's time, and this brought temporal and eternal ruin upon them. To represent this sin in a convictive light, is the primary design of this parable.

The blessed God had chosen the Jews, out of the world, to be his peculiar people, and distinguished them with the gracious privileges of his church.— Hence they are represented as his vineyard, enclosed from the wilderness of the world, and furnished with every thing necessary to render it fruitful. And hence God is represented as expecting fruit from them, as a man expects it from his vineyard; which intimates the reasonableness of their obedience: it is what any one would expect, who would judge by what is due and reasonable. But it does not intimate that God does properly look for or expect what will never come to pass; for the certainty and universality of his fore-knowledge excludes all possibility of a disappointment. It is speaking to us in our own language, which we are most likely to understand; but it must be explained agreeably to the perfection of the nature of God, and not according to the imperfection of ours. The scribes and pharisees, the priests and rulers of the Jews, who were entrusted with

the management of their church and state, are represented by the husbandmen, to whom this vineyard was leased or rented; and they were obliged to make annual payments of a part of the fruit.—The succession of servants sent to demand the income of fruit in its season, signifies the prophets and other messengers of God sent to the Jews to call them to bring forth the fruits of holiness.—But, instead of obeying the call, they treated them abusively, persecuted and killed them, and refused that return of duty which God demanded, and which his distinguishing mercies towards them rendered so due upon the footing of gratitude. After repeated trials, to no purpose, by these servants, the great God resolves to make one trial more, and that by his own Son, his only Son, his beloved Son. Him he will send to these rebellious husbandmen. And he presumes that, bad as they are, they would at least reverence his Son, and count themselves highly honoured in having such a messenger sent to them. He might justly have sent his army to destroy them, who had murdered his former servants; but instead of this, he sends his Son with proposals of peace once more. He presumes such clemency will melt down the rebels, and make them ashamed of their former conduct. *They will reverence my Son:* as if he should say, “Though they have wickedly abused and slain my servants, surely they will not dare to treat my Son in the same manner. Surely, the very sight of him must command awe and reverence. This will also make them ashamed of their base ingratitude and cruelty to my former messengers.”*

*The Greek word, signifies *to be flushed with shame*, as well as *to reverence*: and so it may be rendered here, “They will be struck with shame at my Son;” that is, at “the sight of him.”

When the omniscient God represents himself as presuming or expecting that they would receive his Son in a friendly manner, it does not intimate, as I just observed in a similar case, that he is defective in knowledge as to things future, or liable to disappointment; but it only expresses, in the strongest manner, the reasonableness of the thing expected. It is so reasonable, that any one who judges only according to the reasonableness of the thing, and has no view of futurity, would certainly look for it. It is so reasonable, that God himself would expect it, were he not omniscient, and incapable of being deceived by the most plausible appearances. In this view God expected, (that is, he looked upon it as infinitely reasonable,) that the Jewish rulers should reverence his Son. But, alas! when they saw him, they were raised to a still higher pitch of rebellion and cruelty. They seized the Son himself, cast him out of his own vineyard, and with wicked hands crucified and slew him. On this account the vineyard was taken from them, and let out to others, who should pay the great Proprietor his fruit in its season; that is, they were cast out of the church, and the Gentiles received in their stead, who would make a better use of their privileges.

This is the primary sense of the parable, as referring to the Jews of that age. But it will admit of a more extensive application. It reaches us in these ends of the earth, and all the nations of the world, to whom the gospel has been proposed: and in this latitude I would consider the text.

The world had gone on for four thousand years in wickedness, in spite of all the means used for its reformation by lawgivers, prophets, and philosophers, and by the providence of God. Persuasions, warnings, chastisements, mercies, and what-

ever had a tendency to bring them to repentance, had been used with them. Philosophers had often reasoned; legislators had prescribed; prophets had carefully instructed, allured with promises, and deterred with threatenings, and carried their heavenly credentials in their hands; angels had appeared and conversed with men upon extraordinary occasions; Jesus the great angel of the covenant, had given frequent preludes of his incarnation; nay, Jehovah himself had descended, and published his law with God-like pomp in the ears of his subjects on mount Sinai. But all this would not do; the world sinned on still, impenitent and incorrigible. And what shall be done in such a desperate case? What expedient remains to be tried? After so many messengers abused, persecuted, and killed, who will go upon so dangerous a message again? There is indeed the Son of God, the great co-equal of the Supreme Divinity, if he would undertake it, perhaps something might be done. But O! who can dare to hope for such condescension from one so high! Who can expect such a favour for rebels ripe for vengeance! Who can hope the Father will give him up! My text seems to hint sundry objections against it. He is his Son, his well-beloved Son, and he has but one Son; but one of his rank, though he has produced so many worlds. And will he part with his Son, his well-beloved, his only Son, and send him upon such a mission; a mission so difficult, so dangerous, in which so many of his servants have lost their lives? Who could believe that even divine love and mercy could go so far, had we not the testimony of God in the gospel for it! *Having one Son, his well-beloved, he sent him also; he sent even him, dear as he was, as well as his servants of an infe-*

rior order. So much had he at heart the salvation of his rebellious creatures!

But observe the time when he sent him: He sent him last. He did not send him till every other method was tried in vain, and the case was found to be desperate without him. He did not send him till it appeared, from many experiments, that there was absolute need of him. Lawgivers, prophets, philosophers, and other real or pretended reformers, had a clear stage, they had the world to themselves for four thousand years; but in all this time they did nothing to the purpose. Hence we are led to make this remark, which is of great importance to the right understanding of the gospel.

That the Son of God was sent into the world as a Saviour in a desperate case. It appeared, after a long course of trial, that when he undertook the case, there was no relief from any other quarter. And hence, by the way, it follows, that we can never receive him in that view in which he was sent, until we are deeply sensible that our case is desperate; that is, that we can obtain relief from no other.

But probably his being sent last has a farther meaning. It seems to intimate, that he is the last extraordinary messenger that God will ever send; that the dispensation of the gospel is the last trial that ever he will make with rebellious men, the final effort of divine grace for their salvation; and that such as are not recovered by it will be forever given up as desperate, and no farther means used with them. What an alarming thought is this to such of you, (and no doubt there are such among you,) who have enjoyed the gospel, the dispensation of the Son of God, all your days, without receiving any special benefit from it! If these means

will not do, you are not to expect better, but must perish as incurables.

If we consider the unworthiness of our guilty world, and the high character of the blessed Jesus, as his Father's only and well-beloved Son, we could have little reason to expect he would come into our world as a Saviour. But suppose he should come! suppose he should leave all the glories of his native heaven, and assume the humble nature of a man, converse with mortals, instead of the heavenly courtiers, and conflict with the calamities of life, instead of enjoying the pleasures of paradise! Suppose he should come himself, as a messenger of his Father's grace, and with his own blessed lips assure our guilty race that God is reconcilable! Suppose he should die upon a cross for us, that he might at once purchase redemption, and confirm the tidings of it! Suppose, I say, such wonders as these should happen! what then is to be expected? O! may it not reasonably be expected that this divine Messenger will be received with universal welcome? that every heart will glow with his love, and every mouth be filled with his praise? May it not be reasonably expected that his appearance among guilty men would cast them all upon the knee as humble penitents, and that now, overcome with his love, they would become his willing subjects for the future, and bitterly lament the baseness and ingratitude of their past disobedience? Is not this the most reasonable expectation that ever was formed? God speaks after the manner of men in my text: and therefore, when he says, *They will reverence my Son*, it intimates, that this would be the universal expectation of mankind, and of all reasonable creatures who consider the reasonableness of the thing. "They will reverence my Son: surely they will. Wicked and

ungrateful as they are, the very sight of him must melt them into gratitude and obedience. Though they have rejected, persecuted, and murdered prophets and lawgivers, and all my other servants, yet surely they will reverence my Son." O! is not this a most reasonable expectation? Who would apprehend the contrary in so plain a case! Who would fear that such a divine Saviour, a Saviour in so desperate a case, should be received with neglect! Who would fear that sinners, on the brink of everlasting destruction, would be careless about such a Deliverer! We cannot think they would act thus, without supposing them madmen, as well as sinners, and that they have lost their reason and self-love, as well as moral goodness.

But, alas! these are only the presumptions of reason from the reasonableness of the thing, and not matters of fact gathered from observation of the actual conduct of mankind. However likely it be from appearances that the Son of God will universally meet with an affectionate reception from creatures that stand in such absolute need of him, and however improbable it be, in an abstract view, that such creatures should neglect him, yet it is a melancholy, notorious fact, that Jesus Christ has but little of the reverence and love of mankind. The prophetic character given of him long ago by Isaiah still holds true, *He whom man despiseth; he whom the nations abhor, Isai. xlix. 7; he is despised and rejected of men.* The riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, are preferred to him. His creatures are loved more than himself. Nay, sin itself, the most hateful thing upon earth, or even in hell, is more beloved. The salvation he purchased with his blood is looked upon as hardly worth seeking. His favour is not earnestly sought, nor his displeasure carefully shunned. In short, he

has but a small place, and is but of little importance in the thoughts, the affections, and conversation of mankind. This is a most melancholy and astonishing thing; it may spread amazement and horror through the whole universe, but, alas! it is a fact; a plain fact, though but few are convinced of it, and a melancholy fact, though few lament it. My chief design at present is to fasten conviction upon the guilty; a very unacceptable design, but not therefore the less necessary or useful.

In prosecuting it, I intend,

I. To shew what kind of reception it may justly be expected we should give to the Son of God.

II. To consider the reasonableness of that expectation. And,

III. And lastly, To shew how different a reception he generally meets with from what might be reasonably expected.

Hearken, my brethren, hearken attentively, to what you are so nearly concerned in. And to engage your attention the more, let this consideration have weight with you, that your making light of this matter is a strong presumption that you make light of Christ, and do not give him that reception which he demands. Your being unconcerned in the trial of this case is sufficient to prove you guilty. I am,

I. To shew you what kind of reception we may reasonably be expected to give to the Son of God.

In general, we should give him a reception agreeable to the character which he sustains, and agreeable to the designs upon which he was sent into our world, or to those views in which he appears in it. We should treat every one according to his character: reason expects that we should do so, and God requires it. Therefore we should treat this divine Messenger according to his character.

More particularly, does Jesus Christ appear in our world under the character of a Saviour in a desperate case, a relief for the remediless, a helper for the helpless? Then it may reasonably be expected that his appearing in our world under this character would immediately flash universal conviction upon mankind, that they are altogether undone and helpless in themselves, and can obtain relief from no other quarter. It may reasonably be expected that they should give up all their proud self-righteous conceit of themselves, and abandon all trust in their own righteousness and good works; for till they do this, they can never receive him in the character; that is, as a Saviour in a desperate case. It may reasonably be expected, they should welcome Christ as the great, the only Deliverer, and give up themselves entirely to him, to be saved by him, who alone is mighty to save. And it may reasonably be expected, that every heart should be transported with admiration, joy, and gratitude at his appearance: and a contrary temper towards him can proceed from nothing but stupid ignorance of our sin and danger, and an ungrateful, base disaffection to him.

Does Jesus appear among men as a great High-Priest, making atonement for sin? Then it may justly be expected that we should place all our trust upon the virtue of his atonement, and that all hands should be eagerly stretched out to receive those pardons which he offers, in consequence of his propitiatory sacrifice. Does he appear to destroy the works of the devil, and to save men from sin by making them holy, and are the influences of the holy spirit intrusted to his disposal to renew their nature and implant every grace and virtue in their hearts? Then, who would not expect that we would all fall in with his design, all

form a noble conspiracy against sin, seek for the sanctification of our hearts, and earnestly apply to him for the influences of divine grace to make us holy! Again, does Christ appear in the character of a mediatorial King, invested with all power in heaven and earth, and demanding universal homage? Then it may reasonably be expected that we should all bow the knee in humble submission, all make his will the rule of our conduct, and labour after universal obedience. Further, does he appear both as the publisher and the brightest demonstration of the Father's love? and has he discovered his own love by the many labours of his life, and by the agonies and tortures of his cross? O! may it not be expected we should return him love for love! the love of worms for the love of a God! an obediential love for his bleeding, dying love! May it not be expected that the sight of a crucified Saviour, dying in agonies of love and pain, should melt every heart, and draw the whole world to his arms! He himself had this reasonable expectation: *I, says he, if I be lifted from the earth, (that is, suspended on the cross,) will draw all men unto me.* If such love will not draw, what can do it? May it not be expected that this strong assurance that their offended Sovereign is reconcileable, and so much in earnest to pardon obnoxious rebels, would at length make them sensible of their base ingratitude, would melt them down into ingenuous generous sorrows for their unnatural rebellion against so good a God, and determine them to cheerful obedience in future? Again, does Christ exhibit himself as able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him, and as willing as able, as gracious as powerful? Then may it not reasonably be expected that all the unbelieving fears and tremblings of desponding penitents should

vanish forever, that they should all fly to his arms with cheerful hope and humble confidence, and do him the honour, and themselves the kindness to believe themselves safe, upon their compliance with his invitation? Further, does Christ appear in the character of a great Prophet sent to publish his Father's will, to reveal the deep things of God, and to shew the way in which guilty sinners may be reconciled to God? a way which all the philosophers and sages of antiquity, after all their perplexing searches, could never discover! May it not then be reasonably expected that we should be all attention to his instructions, that we should resign our understandings to him as our Teacher, and readily believe what he has revealed, and particularly that we should cheerfully comply with the only method of salvation contained in the gospel? Once more, Does Christ assume the august character of supreme Judge of the quick and the dead, and must we all appear before the judgment seat of Christ? Then it may be expected we should all humbly revere and adore him, fear to offend him and make him our enemy, and prepare for our appearance before him. In short, considering him as the supreme Excellency, it is infinitely reasonable we should love and esteem him as the Physician of sick souls; that we should put ourselves under his all-healing hands, and submit to his prescriptions; as our Advocate, that we should present all our petitions in his name, and depend upon his intercession for acceptance. And as he is all in all in the mediatorial dispensation of religion under which we live, the only religion for sinners, that he should be all in all to us.

This is a brief view of the reception which we ought to give to the Son of God, upon his appearance in our world. Unless we receive him thus,

we can receive no benefit from him; but must incur the aggravated guilt of rejecting him. *But to as many as thus receive him, to them he gives power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe in his name.* John i. 12.

Do not imagine that none are concerned to give him a proper reception but those with whom he conversed in the days of his flesh. We at the distance of seventeen hundred years, and six or seven thousand miles from the time and place of his appearance in human form, are as much concerned with him as they. He is an ever-present Saviour, and he left his gospel on earth in his stead, when he went to heaven. It is with the motion of the mind, and not of the body, that sinners must come to him; and in this sense we may come to him, as properly as those that conversed with him. He demands the reverence, love, and trust of mankind now, as well as seventeen hundred years ago; and we need his righteousness, his influence, and his salvation, as well as the sinners of Judea, among whom he appeared in person. Nay, as his glory has now pierced through the cloud that obscured it in the days of his flesh, and as he is exalted to the height of honour and dignity, it may be expected with still more reason that we should reverence him, and submit to him in his high character. He is not now the object of our bodily senses, we cannot see and handle him; but he is now an object for the acts of the mind with peculiar advantage. That must be a mere lump of flesh, or a beast, and not a man, that can love nothing but what he can see and feel. Spiritual and intellectual things are the most proper objects for all reasonable creatures. Therefore, though Jesus be not now within reach of our senses, yet reason and faith may reach him, and perceive his glories: and it is reasonably ex-

pected we should admire, love, trust, and serve him. This, I say, is reasonably expected of us.— I now proceed,

II. To shew the reasonableness of the expectation, that we should give the Son of God a welcome reception.

Here full evidence must strike every mind at first sight. Is there not infinite reason that infinite beauty and excellence should be esteemed and loved? that supreme authority should be obeyed, and the highest character revered? Is it not reasonable that the most amazing display of love and mercy should meet with the most affectionate returns of gratitude from the party obliged? shall the Creator die for his creatures, the Sovereign for his rebellious subjects, the great lawgiver transfer the penalty of his own law upon himself, in order to remove it from obnoxious criminals? shall he die in extremities of torture, and write his love in characters of blood? O shall he do this, and is it not infinitely reasonable that his creatures, that his rebellious subjects, that obnoxious criminals should be transported with wonder, joy, and gratitude; and that such miracles of love should engross their thoughts, their affections, and conversation? If we form our expectations from what we find in fact among mankind in other cases, sure we may expect the Son of God would meet with such a reception in our world; the thousandth part of this kindness would excite gratitude between man and man, and he would be counted a monster that would not be moved with it. And shall kindness from worm to worm, from sinner to sinner, excite love and gratitude? and shall not the infinite mercy of God towards rebellious creatures inflame their love and gratitude? Is this the only species of kindness that must pass unnoticed? Is

Jesus the only Benefactor that must be forgotten? Is it not reasonable, and would not any one expect, that the perishing would willingly accept of a Saviour? that the guilty would stretch out an eager hand to receive a pardon? that the diseased would apply to the physician? that inexcusable offenders should repent of their causeless offences against the best of beings? and that needy dependant creatures should embrace the offer of happiness? Can any thing be more reasonably expected than this? Is it not as reasonable as to expect that creatures that love themselves, will seek their own happiness, or that the miserable will accept of deliverance? In short, no man can deny the reasonableness of this expectation without denying himself to be a creature: no man can deny its reasonableness, without asserting that the highest excellency should be despised, the highest authority rejected, the richest goodness contemned, that rebellion and ingratitude is a virtue, and self-destruction a duty; that is, no man can deny this, without commencing a monster, abjuring his reason, and embracing the most extravagant and impious absurdities in its stead. I am afraid I shall not be able to gain the temper and practice of all of you to my side in this affair, but I am sure if you are men, and believe the gospel, I have already brought over your judgment and conscience. Your judgment and conscience declare, that if it be reasonable for a child to reverence a tender affectionate parent, if it be reasonable you should love your life, or your own happiness, that then certainly it is infinitely reasonable you should give such a reception as has been mentioned to the blessed Jesus. Happy for us, happy for the world, if we could as easily prove that the expectation is as much founded upon actual facts as upon reason. But, alas! here the evi-

dence turns against us. In such a wicked disordered world as this, it would be a very deceitful method of reasoning, to infer that things are, because they should be. This introduces what comes next under consideration, namely,

III. And lastly, To shew how different a reception the Son of God generally meets with in our world, from what might reasonably be expected.

Here a most melancholy scene opens. And O! that it may please the blessed Spirit to affect our hearts deeply with the survey of it! Forgive me if I make my address as pungent and particular as I can, and speak directly to the conscience of each of you. The case really requires plain dealing, because without it you are not likely to be convinced, and, without conviction, you can never return, nor be reformed.

Let me put you all upon a serious search, what kind of reception you have given to Jesus Christ. You have lived all your days under his gospel; you profess his religion; you own him as the Author of your hopes: and what kind of treatment have you given him in these circumstances? It is high time for you to inquire into your behaviour.

Are not some of you sensible that you have never received him as a Saviour in a desperate case! No, you have never seen your case to be indeed desperate. Your proud hearts have not been brought so low. You have not had such an affecting view of your guilt and depravity, and the imperfections of your best works, and of the holiness and justice of God and his law, as to make you sensible you were undone and helpless in yourselves, that your own righteousness could by no mean recommend you to God, and that you must perish forever, unless Jesus Christ, out of mere mercy, would undertake to save you: unless you have had an affecting

sense of your undone condition, you have certainly never received him as a Saviour.

Again, Is it not evident that Jesus Christ has had but little share in your thoughts and affections? Do not the things of this perishing world gain the pre-eminence? Have you not a thousand thoughts of a thousand trifles, for one affectionate thought of Jesus, the darling of his Father? Have you not been generally thoughtless of him all your lives? Take the time that is nearest to you as a specimen, which surely you have not yet forgot. Recollect now how many affectionate thoughts you have had of him the week past, or even upon this sacred morning, when you had this solemn worship immediately in view. May not even this short review convince you that you are guilty of the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the world; a thing which appears so improbable in an abstract view, that one would hardly believe you would venture upon it; I mean neglecting the Son of God, who has visited our world upon such designs of love?

Again, Is Jesus Christ the favourite subject of your conversation? Is his dear name the sweetest sound your lips can pronounce? And do you love to sit with his few friends in our guilty world, and talk over the wonder of his love, till your hearts burn within you, like the disciples in conference on the way to Emmaus? *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*; and were he uppermost in your hearts, he would have a proper share in your conversation. Or if you should mingle in a company (and such company is every where to be found,) where prudence would not suffer you to dwell upon this darling subject, would the restraint be painful to you, and would his love, like a smothered fire in your hearts, struggle to break out, and vent itself—vent itself at least in some retired

corner in his presence, if you could not enjoy the pleasure of letting it flame out in the society of his creatures? But, alas! is not this the reverse of your true character? Are you not disgusted, or struck silent as soon as the conversation takes this turn? With horror I think of it—to converse concerning Jesus Christ is generally deemed needless, impertinent, or ostentatious, by creatures that profess themselves his disciples, redeemed by his blood! And does not this horrid guilt fasten upon some of you?

Farther, are not your hearts destitute of his love? If you deny the charge, and profess that you love him, where are the inseparable fruits and effects of his love? Where are your eager desires and pantings after him? Where is your delight to converse with him in his ordinances? Where your anxiety, your zeal, your earnest endeavours to secure his favour? Where is your conscientious observance of his commandments? For he himself has made this the test of your love to him; *then, says he, are ye my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*—John xv. 14. And again, *If any man love me, he will keep my words.* John xiv. 28. Does not the evidence, from this inquiry, turn against you? Are you not convicted in your consciences, that if these are the inseparable fruits of love, you are entirely destitute of it? Is it not evident to yourselves, that your own pleasure, your own worldly interest, your honour or ease, is the general rule of your conduct, without any regard to his will?

Inquire farther, Have you learned to intrust your souls in his hands, to be saved by him entirely in his own way! Or do you not depend, in part at least, upon your own imaginary goodness? Do you not wonder and start at the doctrine of grace, and secretly disgust it! Does it not appear strange to

you, to be told, that after all your good works, God will deal with you entirely as guilty sinners, void of all goodness, and have no regard at all to your supposed merit in the distribution of his mercy, but entirely to the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Are you not utter strangers to that exploit of faith which cast a poor guilty depraved soul, void of all goodness, upon the mere mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, who justifies the ungodly? For this purpose the Son of God came into the world; and you do not give him a proper reception, but wickedly reject him as well as the Jews, unless you thus intrust yourselves to him.

The evidence grows upon me as I proceed; and I cannot but wonder you do not perceive it yourselves. Can any thing be more plain than that you make light of Christ! that you choose to have as little to do with him as possible! that you have no delight in his service! Does not your own consciences now tell you, there are this and that, and a thousand things, that you have more pleasure in! Do not your hearts fly off from him, whenever they are urged to approach him! When you are a little awakened with a sense of your guilt and danger, and ready with eager eyes to look about for a Saviour, alas! how naturally do you relapse into carelessness and security! How soon do you drop your purpose of seeking after him with unwearied endeavours, till you find him! how ready are you to take up with any thing in his stead! A little repentance and reformation are substituted in his place. You would rather get ease to your consciences from any quarter than from him. Like Judas, you sell him for a few pieces of silver; that is, you would rather part with him than give up your over-eager pursuit of earthly things.

A thousand such facts might be easily produced, which sadly prove that the blessed Jesus does not meet with that reception from multitudes among us which his character demands. — Indeed their not being easily convicted of sin is an evidence they are guilty; for if they had a real regard for him, they would be concerned to inquire how the case stands, or how their hearts are disposed towards him. And a little honest inquiry would soon lead them into the truth.

And now I have a few questions to propose to such of you as are guilty of neglecting the Son of God, or have never given him that reception that might justly be expected of you; questions of the utmost importance, which I beg you would put home to your own hearts.

The first is, do you not think that by thus neglecting the Lord Jesus, you contract the most aggravated guilt? It is the Son of God, his only Son, his well-beloved Son, that you neglect. — And must not the Father resent it? Do you not touch his honour in a very tender point? and will he not muster up all the forces of omnipotence to avenge the affront! Since you neglect him, whom the Father loves; him, whom all the heavenly armies adore; him, whom all good men upon earth treat with the highest honour; since you neglect a person of infinite glory and dignity, your rightful Sovereign and only Saviour, how deep is your guilt! what a horrid exploit of wickedness this! neither heathens nor devils can sin up to such a pitch: devils cannot, because no Saviour was ever provided for them, or offered to them; and heathens cannot, because a Saviour was never revealed to them. You stand without a rival by your horrid pre-eminence in guilt. To you may be applied the words of Jesus, as well as to the unbe-

believing Jews: *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they would not have had sin; that is, they would not have had sin of so aggravated a nature; but now they have no cloak for their sin, John xv. 22, they are utterly inexcusable; for they have both seen and hated me and my Father. John xv. 24.*

The next question I would ask you is, must not your punishment be peculiarly aggravated, since it will be proportioned to your guilt? To be punished not only for sins against the law of nature, but against revelation, against the gospel of grace, against the love of a crucified Saviour—how dreadful must this be! *He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy, says St. Paul: of how much sorer punishment, (sorer than dying without mercy! O terrible!) suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God. Heb. x. 29.* You may make light of this now, but O! it will not prove light in the issue. Here let me mention a most alarming consideration: The love that God bears to his Son is the great source of all our hopes: it is because he loves him, that he accepts of his atonement for our sins; it is because he loves him, that he forgives and loves believing sinners for his sake; it is because he loves the head, that he shews such favour to the members; but as to such as neglect his Son, even the love which the Father has for him, becomes a source of peculiar terror, and prompts him to signal vengeance. “If he infinitely loves his Son, he must infinitely resent it to see him neglected and slighted by others. If he loves him he will avenge the affront offered him; and the more he loves him, the more severely he must resent and avenge it.” How wretched then is their condition, upon whom even the love of God for his Son calls aloud for vengeance! and how signal

will the punishment be, that the Father's love for his Son will inflict upon the despisers of him!

The third question I would propose to you is, **How do you expect to escape this signal vengeance, if you still continue to neglect the Lord Jesus? Answer the apostle's question if you can: *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* Heb. ii. 3.** You cannot expect Jesus will be a Saviour while you treat him thus: and if he refuse, to whom will you turn?—What angel or saint can save whom he is determined to destroy? If he be against you, who can be for you? Remember the text—the Father sent his Son last into the world. He comes last, and therefore if you reject him, you need not look for another Saviour. You must take him or none: take him or perish forever.

I would further ask you, If your guilt and danger be so great, and if in your present condition you are ready every moment to be engulfed in everlasting destruction, does it become you to be so easy and careless, so gay and merry! If your bodies were sick, you would be pensive and sad, and use means for their recovery: if your estates were in danger, you would be anxious till they were secured: if you were condemned to die for a crime against civil government, you would be sollicitous for a pardon. In short, it is natural for man to be pensive, anxious, and sad, in circumstances of danger; and it is shocking to the common sense of mankind, to see one thoughtless and gay in such circumstances. Can you be easy under such a load of guilt? careless under a sentence of condemnation? and negligent, when the possibility of deliverance is set before you? I would not willingly see you sorrowful and dejected: but when your case calls for it, when your temporal sorrow may be medicinal, and save you from everlasting pain,

when it is as necessary in your circumstances as a sickness at the stomach in the operation of physic, then I cannot form a kinder wish for you, than that your hearts may be pierced and broken with penitential sorrows. You have, in your manner, commemorated the birth of a Saviour this Christmas;* that is, you have danced and caroused, and sinned to his honour. But now I come after, and demand in his name another kind of reception for him: I call you to the sorrowful work of repentance, for your ill treatment of him. Instead of such mirth and extravagance, would it not have been more proper for you to have listened to St. James's advice, *Be afflicted, and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God;* that mighty hand which can crush ten thousand worlds, and which is lifted up against you to revenge the quarrel of his beloved Son. Can you return home this evening as thoughtless and merry as usual? Well, your career will soon be at an end: your vanity and trifling will soon be over. Perhaps, as Jeremiah denounced to the false prophet, *this year thou shalt die,* Jeremiah xxviii. 16; and O! that will engulf you in everlasting sorrows.

Therefore what would you now think of making one honest trial, before it be too late, to obtain an interest in that Saviour whom you have hitherto neglected? O! will you not make trial, whether the disaffection of your hearts towards him, inveterate as it is, may yet be subdued by divine grace? whether he, who prayed with his dying breath, even for his murderers, will not have mercy upon you? whether the virtue of his blood is not still sufficient to cleanse you from all sin? O will you

* This Sermon is dated Jan. 16, 1758.

give up the matter as desperate, before you make a thorough trial?

Your case is indeed very discouraging, but it is not yet hopeless; if I thought it was, I would not say one word to you about it, to torment you before the time. But I can assure you upon the best authority, of Jesus Christ himself, that if you now give him that reception which his character requires, he will receive you into favour as though you had never offended him, and make you forever happy. Therefore, come ye poor, guilty, perishing sinners, fly to the arms of his mercy, which are opened wide to embrace you. Cry for the attractive influences of his grace, which alone can enable you to come to him, and let there be joy in heaven this day over repenting sinners upon earth!

SERMON XL.

THE DOOM OF THE INCORRIGIBLE SINNER.

PROVERBS XXIX. 1. *He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

A PROVERB is a system of wisdom in miniature: it is a pertinent, striking observation, expressed in a few words, that it may be the more easily remembered; and often in metaphorical language, that it may be the more entertaining. A collection of proverbs has no connexion, but consists of short, independent sentences, each of which makes full sense in itself; and therefore, in explaining them, there is no need of explaining the

context; but we may select any particular sentence, and consider it separately by itself.

Such a collection of wise sayings is that book of the sacred scriptures, which we call the Proverbs of Solomon. Wise men in all ages, and in all languages, have often cast their observations into the concise significant forms of proverbs; but the sages of antiquity, especially, were fond of this method of instruction, and left legacies of wisdom to posterity, wrapt up in a proverbial dress; many of which, particularly of the Greek philosophers, are extant to this day. Solomon chose this method of recording and communicating his wise observations as most agreeable to the taste of the age in which he lived. The sacred memoirs of his life inform us, that *he spake three thousand proverbs.* 1 Kings iv. 32. Of these the most important and useful were selected probably by himself, and afterwards by the men of Hezekiah; that is, by persons appointed by Hezekiah to copy them off; and they are conveyed down to all ages in this cabinet of precious jewels, the Book of Proverbs.

Among the many significant and weighty sayings of this wisest of men, the solemn monitory proverb in my text deserves peculiar regard: *He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.**

The request of a friend, and my fears that this proverb may have a dreadful accomplishment upon

**He that being often reprov'd*—This in the original, is *a man of reproofs*; and it may either signify as our translators understand it, “a man often reprov'd;” or it may mean, “a man often reprov’g;” that is, a man that often reproves others, if he harden his own neck, while he pretends a great zeal to reduce others under the yoke of obedience, he shall suddenly be destroyed, &c. But the first sense appears more pertinent and natural, and therefore in that view I only consider it.

some of my hearers, have induced me to make it the subject of your meditations for the present hour. And O! that the event may shew I was divinely directed in the choice!

This proverb may be accommodated to all the affairs of life. In whatever course a man blunders on, headstrong, and regardless of advice and admonition, whether in domestic affairs, in trade, in politics, in war, or whatever it be he pursues by wrong measures with incorrigible obstinacy, it will ruin him at last, as far as the matter is capable of working his ruin. To follow the conduct of our own folly, and refuse the advantage we might receive from the wisdom of others, discovers an uncreaturely pride and self-sufficiency; and the career of such a pursuit, whatever be the object, will always end in disappointment and confusion. In this extent perhaps, this adage was intended by Solomon, who was a good economist and politician, and well skilled in the affairs of common life, as well as those of religion.

But he undoubtedly intended it should be principally referred to matters of religion. It is especially in these matters it holds true in the highest sense; *that he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth himself, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

He that being often reprov'd—This is undoubtedly our character. We in this congregation have been often reprov'd, and that in various forms, and by various monitors. We have been reprov'd from heaven and earth, by God, men, and our own consciences; and, I might add, by the irrational creation, and even by infernal spirits.

Men of various classes have reprov'd us. It is the happiness of several of us to live in families where we are often reprov'd and admonish'd with

the tender, affecting address of a father and a master, who are deeply concerned that their children and domestics should be their companions in the heavenly road, and be effectually warned from the alluring paths of sin and ruin. And have not our affectionate mothers often become our monitors, and gently, yet powerfully reprov'd us, with that forcible eloquence which could only proceed from the heart of a woman and a mother;—or if our parents have been cruelly deficient in this noblest office of love, has not God raised up unexpected reprovers for us, in a brother, a sister, or perhaps a poor despised slave? And who can resist the force of an admonition from such an unexpected quarter?—And have not some of us found an affectionate, faithful monitor in the conjugal state; a husband or a wife, that has reprov'd the vices or the negligence and carelessness of the other party; and, by striking example at the least, if not in more explicit language, given the alarm to greater diligence and concern in the affairs of religion and eternity? Such are powerful, though modest and private assistants to the ministers of the gospel, and O! that they had but more assistance from this quarter! To encourage the few among you that improve the intimacy of this near relation for so important and benevolent a purpose, let me remind you of St. Paul's tender excitement to this duty, given one thousand seven hundred years ago:—*What knowest thou, O wife! Whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O husband! Whether thou shalt save thy wife?* 1 Cor. vii. 16. The tender names of husband and wife have so much force in them, as may irresistibly constrain us to perform all the kindest offices in our power to those who bear them. But O! to save a husband! to save a wife! to save those dear creatures from everlast-

ing misery! how great, how important the kindness! and by so much the more pleasing, by how much the dearer the persons are to whom it is shewn! But to return—If we are not so happy as to be agreeably surrounded with such honest reprovers in our own houses; yet, blessed be God, we live in a neighbourhood where we may meet with one of them here and there. Has not a pious friend or a neighbour dropt a word now and then in conversation which might have served, and perhaps was intended, as a serious admonition to you? Alas! have you never had a friend in the world, who has sometimes taken occasion to talk solemnly and pungently with you about the neglected concerns of your souls? or at least, has not his example been a striking lesson to you? Alas! is it possible one should live in this congregation, without enjoying the benefit of a reprovor? Sure there are still some among us to bear their testimony against sin, and espouse the deserted cause of religion. But if the friends of religion have been silent, (and indeed they are generally too modest in this respect,) yet have you not sometimes received an accidental, undesigned reproof even from the wicked? just as Caiaphas once prophecied of the death of Christ, and its blessed consequences. Not to observe, that their eagerness and indefatigable industry in pursuing their pleasures, whether they place them in honour, riches, or sensuality, and in serving their guilty lusts, in spite of all restraints, may serve as a pungent reproof of your lukewarmness and carelessness in the pursuit of the pleasures of religion and immortality, so much more noble and interesting. But I say, to take no notice of this, have they not at times rebuked you in more direct terms? Have they not twitted and reproached you to this purpose: “I thought you, that pre-

tend to so much sanctity, would not dare to venture upon such a thing." Or, "see the saint, the communicant, the presbyterian drunk—see his fraud and villany—see him as vain and frolicsome as his neighbours; sure, we that make no such profession, may take such liberties, since such saints do so."—Such reflections as these, my brethren, however sarcastical and malignant, blind and bitter, have all the keenness of the sharpest reproof. And O! that none of us may ever give any occasion for them! but if offences should come to occasion them, may our hearts always feel their force!—Thus may we derive good out of evil; be warned from sin by sinners; and restrained in our career to ruin by those who are themselves rushing into it!—But though all around you, both saints and sinners, should refuse to be your monitors, how many solemn warnings and reproofs have you had from the pulpit! You have heard many ministers of Christ, who have been your solemn admonishers in the dread name of their Master. And it is now eleven or twelve years since I have began to discharge the painful and unacceptable office of a reprover of sin and sinners among you.—And what kind and liberal assistance have I received in my office, from the other side of the vast ocean, in the many excellent books which British piety and charity have furnished us with! Our friends, whose voice cannot reach you, have sent over reprovers into your houses; reprovers that speak particularly to the poor, especially to the neglected slaves. In short, I knew no spot of America so happy in this important respect as Hanover.

Thus have you been reprov'd by men from all quarters. And certainly so loud, so general, so repeated an admonition, even from men, must have great weight. But who can resist an admonition

from heaven! Surely, if Jehovah, the great Sovereign of the universe, condescends to be your reprover, you must immediately take the reproof, and set about a reformation. Well, this office he has condescended to sustain. He has himself become your monitor: and that in various ways, both mediately and immediately: mediately by his word and providence; and immediately, by his blessed Spirit, whose office it is to *reprove the world of sin.* John xvi. 9.

The word of God has reprov'd you; has honestly laid before you the destructive consequences of sin, and denounced the divine displeasure against you on its account. All its commands, prohibitions, and dissuasives of various forms, are so many friendly warnings and admonitions to you. He conveys his reproofs through your eyes and ears, when you read and hear his word; and sometimes I doubt not, he has made the hardest heart among you feel his rebukes, and tremble under them. In short, you must own yourselves, that if any of you go on obstinately in sin, and perish, it will not be because the word of God did not act a faithful part towards you, but because you presumptuously disregard its most solemn and affectionate warnings.

Again: God has often reprov'd you by his providence. His providence has kindly chastised you with personal and relative afflictions; with sickness and pains, bereavements, losses, and disappointments. Providence has admonished you with the striking voice of sick beds, dying groans, ghastly corpses, and gaping graves in your families or neighbourhoods, or perhaps in both. How many among us, in a few years have been brought down to the gates of the grave, that they might enter into a serious conference with death and eternity, which they were so averse to in the giddy, unthinking

hours of health and hurry of business! And what narrow escapes, what signal, unexpected deliverances has Providence wrought for you in those seasons of danger and distress, that you might enjoy a longer space of repentance! How many of our friends and neighbours have sickened and died for the admonition of survivors! Providence has pitched upon one here and there, that was wont to sit among us in our religious assemblies, and made him an example and a warning to the rest. They are gone before, to shew us the way; and put us in mind that our turn also will soon come.* *Sickness and death, expiring agonies, pale corpses,*

The knell, the shroud, the mattock, and the grave,
The deep damp vault, the darkness, and the worm—

*Our dying friends come o'er us like a cloud,
To damp our brainless ardours, and abate
That glare of life which often blinds the wise.
Our dying friends are pioneers, to smooth
Our rugged pass to death; to break those bars
Of terror and abhorrence nature throws
Cross our obstructed way; and thus to make
Welcome as safe, our port from every storm.
Each friend by fate snatch'd from us, is a plume
Pluck'd from the wing of human vanity,
Which makes us stoop from our ærial heights,
And, damp't with omen of our decease,
On drooping pinions of ambition lower'd,
Just skim earth's surface, ere we break it up,
O'er putrid pride to scratch a little dust,
And save the world a nuisance. Smitten friends
Are angels sent on errands full of love;
For us they languish, and for us they die:
And shall they languish, shall they die in vain?—
Shall we disdain their silent, soft address;
Their posthumous advice, and pious prayer?
Senseless as herds that graze their hallow'd graves,
Tread under foot their agonies and groans;
Frustrate their anguish, and destroy their deaths?

These are very solemn monitors; and that heart is hard indeed, that does not feel their reproof.

The providence of God has also reprov'd us, in common with our countrymen, by the public calamities that have hovered over or fallen upon our land and nation; and particularly by the ravages and desolations of war. Providence has commissioned Indian savages and French papists to be our reprovers, and loudly admonished us with the horrid roar of cannons, the clangour of martial trumpets, and all the dread artillery of ruin and death.—What ear among us has not heard, what heart has not trembled, at this terrible warning!

Thus, and in a thousand other ways, has Providence incurred with the word, and feelingly reprov'd us with his fatherly rod. And we should always remember, that the hand of Providence is the hand of God, whatever instruments he is pleas'd to use.

But has he not often laid aside all instruments, and reprov'd you more immediately by his Spirit? Has not his Spirit been long and frequently striving with you; reprov'ing you of sin; alarming you with apprehensions of your danger: exciting in you good resolutions, and serious thoughts of reformation? Has not the blessed Spirit at times borne home the word upon your hearts with unusual power, and roused your conscience to fall upon you with terrible, though friendly violence? Which leads me to add,

You have been your own monitors; I mean your consciences have often admonished and warn'd you; have whispered in your breasts, that “this course of vice and irreligion will not do: this carelessness and indifferency in the concerns of your souls, this stupid neglect of God and eternal things, will not end well.” Conscience has often honestly

pronounced your doom: "Thou art a guilty, wicked creature, under the displeasure of God. Thou art destitute of true vital religion, and hast no title to the divine favour. If thou die in this condition, thou wilt be undone forever." Thus has conscience warned you; and you have, no doubt, sometimes sweated and agonized under its chastisements. Though you have preposterously laboured to bribe it, or suppress it by violence; yet it has still borne at least a faint testimony for its Master, and against you. Thus you always carry a reprovèr in your own bosoms wherever you go; and though every mouth around you should be silent, this will speak, if you do but attend, and give it fair play.

I may add, that even the irrational creation is your monitor; and in silent, but forcible language, remonstrates against your conduct. Can you hear the musicians of the air in every bush warbling out grateful anthems to their Maker, without being convicted of your guilty silence in his praise? Can you see the sun invariably rolling in the path first marked out for him by his Maker and Lord, without feeling yourselves reprovèd for your numberless deviations from the path of duty? Do not the regulated, stated revolutions of the seasons, and of night and day, sensibly reprove your neglect of the returns of your hours of devotion? In short, does not all nature cry out against you? Is not every thing you see obedient to its Maker's laws, but man? Man, who should claim the precedence in obedience, as he is appointed lord of the lower creation.*

*How natural are these reflections of that great and good man, Doctor Watts!

With steady course thy shining sun
Keeps his appointed way;
And all the hours obedient run
The circle of the day.

Nay, even infernal spirits, those everlasting enemies of man and goodness, may serve as your reprovers. Can you think of their unwearied roaming over the earth, in quest of souls as their prey, and their industry and toil to do mischief, without blaming your own negligence to save your souls, and do good? And could you but hear the lost ghosts of your own race, who are now shut up in the infernal prison, bursting out into despairing cries, and bitterly accusing themselves for their presumption and security, their lazy delays, misimprovement of time, and neglect of the means of grace, while upon earth; how loud and striking a warning would this be to you, who are now walking in their steps!

Thus, my brethren, I have given you a brief list of your many monitors. And who can stand the united reproofs of such a multitude? Who dare set himself against the admonition of earth, heaven, and hell; of God and all his creatures? Must you not all yield to the warning?

Solomon supposes, in my text, that a man may be often reprov'd, and yet *harden his neck*; that is, obstinately refuse submission and reformation. A stiff neck is a metaphor often used in scripture, to signify an unyielding incorrigible spirit, resolute

But, ah! how wide my spirit flies,
And wanders from her God!
My soul forgets the heavenly prize,
And treads the downward road!

The raging fire and stormy sea
Perform thine awful will;
And every beast and every tree,
Thy great designs fulfil:

While my wild passions rage within,
Nor thy commands obey;
And flesh and sense, enslav'd to sin,

Draw my best thoughts away.....Lyric Poems

to disobedience, in spite of all restraints; in spite of advice, dissuasives and reproofs. And to harden the neck, is to confirm one's self in disobedience, in opposition to admonition; or to refuse to reform, and strengthen one's self in the refusal, in spite of all the means of reformation. It is to cherish obstinacy, to despise reproof, and resolve to follow a headstrong impetuous self-will at all adventures.* The metaphor is taken from an unmanageable, sullen ox, that will not bend his neck to the yoke, nor kindly draw under it; but stiffens his neck, that it may not bear it; and hardens it, that it may not feel it; and the lash and the goad do not break his obstinate spirit, nor reduce him to willing subjection. Thus, nothing but a sullen and senseless beast can represent the stupid, unreasonable conduct of that man who hardens himself in sin, against the strongest dissuasives and reproofs from God and his creatures.

And is not this the character of some of you? I am very unwilling to presume such bad things of any of you; but I must at least put it to your consciences to determine, whether it be so or not? This you may know by this single inquiry, whether you have reformed of those things for which you have been reprov'd? or whether you still obstinately persist in them, in opposition to the most striking admonitions? The profane and prodigate among you have often been reprov'd for your vices; your drunkenness, swearing, lying, contempt of sacred things, and other immoralities: but do you not still

* That this is the meaning of the metaphor, will appear from a particular survey of those passages of scripture, where it is used either in the original, or in our translation. Exod. xxxii. 9, 9, and xxxiii. 3. Deut. ix. 6, 13, and x. 16, and xxviii. 48. 2 Chron. xxx. 8, and xxxvi. 13. 2 Kings xvii. 14. Neh. ix. 16, 17, 29. Psalm lxxv. 5. Isa. xlviii. 4. Jer. vii. 26, and xvii. 23, and xix. 15. Acts vii. 54.

obstinately persist in the practice of them? You have often been reproved for the neglect of the worship of God in your families, and the souls of your domestics; what warm remonstrances have you heard upon this head! And yet, have you not prayerless families, prayerless mornings and evenings still? Have you not been solemnly warned of the danger of neglecting, or carelessly attending upon the means of grace? And yet you are negligent and careless still! Have you not been earnestly admonished for your presumption and security, your entertaining high hopes of future happiness, and that you are genuine christians, at random, without honest trial and repeated self-examination? And yet do not some of you still persist in this stupid, pernicious conduct? Alas! how ignorant of your own true character! How unwillingly are you dragged to the bar of conscience, there to be tried, and hear your sentence! How ready are you to flatter yourselves with pleasing expectations, though in reality contrary to the declarations of eternal truth! And how secure and thoughtless are you about the great concerns of religion and eternity! how lukewarm and inactive in the duties you owe to God and man, and in your endeavours to work out your salvation! But have you not been solemnly warned of the pernicious consequences of this cause? How often have you been honestly told, that this is not the narrow and rugged road of virtue and religion that leads to heaven! How often have you been warned of the danger of mistaking external formalities for vital religion, and a mere profession of christianity for the heart-experience and constant practice of it! And yet do not some of you indulge this destructive mistake still? Have you not been often reproved for contenting yourselves with a dead, fruitless faith, an empty

speculation, or historical belief; with transient unwilling fits of servile repentance, that produce no reformation; and the counterfeit appearances of other graces and virtues? I say, have you not often been reprov'd for contenting yourselves with these, instead of that lively, operative, heart-affecting faith, that kindly, ingenuous, voluntary repentance, and thorough reformation, and those other active, practical graces and virtues, which are required in the gospel, as essential constituents of a true christian, and absolutely necessary pre-requisites to everlasting life? And yet you wilfully indulge the delusion still, and are unwilling to admit conviction, and discover the truth! How often and how solemnly have you been reprov'd for your excessive eagerness and avarice in the pursuit of this vain world, and your stupid neglect to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, and to be rich towards God! And yet, is not this enchanting world your favourite, and the idol of your hearts still? And are you not still careless what will become of you through an everlasting duration, in an infinitely more important world? That one expostulation from Christ himself might have been an irresistible rebuke to you, *What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* But, alas! have you not stood out against this, and a thousand other pungent admonitions? Have you not often had the dreadful guilt and danger of making light of Christ and his precious gospel, of delaying your conversion to some uncertain hereafter, and of presuming upon the mercy and patience of God, exposed to your view in a striking light? And yet you have still persisted in the practice, in spite of reproof and conviction. I might easily multiply instances on this head; but these

must serve as specimens at present; and I shall only add this general rule for your farther conviction, that whatever sin you indulge yourselves in, whatever duty you omit, whatever grace or virtue you live destitute of, in opposition to the conviction of your own minds within, and of the reproofs and admonitions of God and man from without, you are then guilty of hardening your neck.

And if this be the case, how many of you are involved in this guilt? Lay your hand now upon your heart, and say, does not conscience whisper, or perhaps clamour, "Guilty! guilty!" It is strange, it is unaccountable, it is horrible, that there should be such a monster upon earth, on whom the repeated reproofs and warnings of God and his fellow creatures have been thrown away; and who dares singly to stand it out against the whole universe! But, alas! are there not many such monsters among us? To reprove them again, is a very unpromising and almost desperate attempt; for they have been so inured to it, that they are hardened against it, and set it at defiance. Yet duty and compassion constrain us to make the attempt once more: for O! we cannot yet give them up as altogether desperate, nor resign them with willing hands as a tame prey to ruin. I know no other way to bring them out of danger but to make them sensible of it. And this I shall attempt, in illustrating the remaining part of the text, which informs you of the plain truth, that *he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, or broken, and that without remedy; or, "and there is no cure."*

The stiff neck that will not bend to the yoke of obedience, must be broken; and its own stiffness renders it the more easily broken: for it is not easy to break what is yielding and pliable; but even the

resistance of the stiff neck occasions its own ruin. It may harden itself into insensibility under reproof: but O! it cannot harden itself into insensibility under divine judgments. It may refuse the easy and gentle yoke of the divine law; but divine justice will forcibly impose its iron yoke upon it, and constrain it to bow till it be broken. This is the doom of the obstinate incorrigible sinner: thus shall he be destroyed and broken to pieces.

But this is not all: he shall suddenly be destroyed, suddenly broken. Sudden ruin is aggravated, because it strikes a man into a consternation, overtakes him unawares, surprises him at a disadvantage, when unprovided with any methods to escape; and also tears all his pleasing hopes from him: and by how much the higher the hopes from whence he falls, by so much the deeper he is engulfed in misery.

Sudden ruin is the certain and natural consequence of a man's incorrigible obstinacy, in spite of admonition. He must be ruined because he will not be warned, nor forsake the path that leads to destruction. He will even take his own way at all adventures, and no man can help it: and, therefore, he must be destroyed. He must also be suddenly destroyed, because he would hope for safety in spite of warning; suddenly broken because he would not foresee the blow. Till he feels the stroke, he would not believe it was coming; and, therefore, his destruction is sudden, surprising, and confounding. This is the natural end of foolishness and obstinacy, in spite of all restraints and admonitions: and there is no help for it: such obstinacy and presumption is an incurable disease, that excludes all remedy. This is implied in the last part of the text:

He shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy; or, as it might be more literally rendered, "and there is no cure, or medicine, or healing." There can be no preventive medicine to such a self-willed, head-strong creature; because he will not apply it; and pushes off every friendly hand that would apply it. And there can be no healing or restorative medicine applied; for the breach, when made, is desperate, and admits no cure. The stiff neck is broken in pieces, so that it never can be healed. Then the patient, so obstinate before, would most willingly apply a remedy: but O! it is too late.

Reproofs and admonitions from God and men, and our own consciences, are the great means to recover sinners: and while these are ineffectual, no other can possibly have any effect. How can he be reclaimed from sin, who will sin in opposition to all restraints! In opposition to the checks of conscience, and the strivings of the holy Spirit within, and the united dissuasives and rebukes of Providence, of the word of God, and of all his friends from without! Neither God nor all his creatures can reform and save such a wretch, while he continues proof against all the means of reformation and salvation. It is unavoidable, that he should suddenly be destroyed; and there is no help for it; he must be given up as an incurable. The whole universe may look on, and pity him; but, alas! they cannot help him; he has the instrument of self-murder in his own hand; and he will not part with it, but uses it against his own life, without control; and none can take it out of his hand; that is, none can give his free will a new turn, but that God whom he is daily offending, and who is therefore not obliged to obtrude such a favour upon him.

This is the unavoidable doom of the man that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck. And since this is the character of some of you, have you not reason to fear and forebode this tremendous doom? Let me reason a little with you for your farther conviction.

Your danger will appear from these two considerations, that if you always continue in your present condition, proof against all admonition, you must be destroyed without remedy; and that there is dreadful reason to fear, you always will continue in your present condition.

That if you live and die in your present condition, you must be destroyed without remedy, is lamentably evident from what has been said—It is the declaration of the wisest of men, inspired from heaven; *he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be broken, and there is no remedy.* It is one of the proverbs of this wisest of men. Now a proverb is a wise remark, made after long observation, and frequently exemplified in the world. Therefore when we consider Solomon here not only as speaking an inspired truth, but pronouncing a proverb, it is as if he had said, “This I have collected from long experience, and careful observation of mankind, and the course of Providence; this is daily exemplified in the world without exception; this all ages may regard as a sure and important truth, and I record it among my immortal proverbs for their warning, that *he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and there is no remedy.*” A proverb being a familiar observation upon the common occurrences of the world, it follows farther, that the accomplishment of it is a common thing, that falls under every man’s notice, to his full conviction; and therefore Solomon, by insert-

ing this remark among his Proverbs, intimates, that the sudden and remediless destruction of an incorrigible sinner, is a familiar event that falls under every man's notice, and which no man can dispute, without disputing the common sense and experience of mankind. Thus certain, irreprovable sinners! thus common is your doom, if you continue in your present condition: it is common, even to a proverb. And if you still go on in your present course, you will at last become a hissing, a by-word, and a proverb to all the world.—Your destruction, as I observed, is unavoidable and remediless, according to the nature of things: it is the natural, spontaneous, and inseparable result and effect of incorrigible obstinacy. You resolutely set your free wills, which are not under the control of any creature but yourselves, upon your own ruin: and what then remains but that you must be ruined! To ruin you must go, though attended with the prayers and tears of the saints, and checked by their friendly admonitions, enforced with those of God himself. They cannot help you against your wills. What can keep you from engulfing yourselves in destruction, when you break through all restraints from God and the whole creation? You reject the only means of cure: and must you not die as incurables! If the Spirit of God strives with you in vain; if conscience check and admonish you in vain; if Providence uses its chastising rod in vain; if sickness, and death, and graves preach in vain; if Bibles and good books are put into your hands in vain; if ministers, and friends, and neighbours, and the dearest relatives, advise, and persuade, and warn, and reprove in vain; if heaven, and earth, and hell, if God and all his creatures admonish in vain; what hopes can yourselves entertain of your salvation! what better

means can you desire! what other means can you expect! can you hope to be reformed and prepared for heaven, when these means, the best, the only means that ever were used with sinful creatures, and which have proved effectual in the most discouraging cases, have no effect upon you! Judge yourselves, whether your destruction is not unavoidable in your present condition.

And that you will always continue in your present condition, is, alas! but too probable. You have continued in it all your life past: and is not this a dreadful presumption that you will continue in it all your life to come! Can you expect better means than you have had? Or are your hearts become more soft and pliable now, when hardened by an obstinate course of incorrigible impenitence, that you should hope the same means will have greater efficacy upon them in time to come than formerly? Are you as sure of twenty or thirty years before you, as that you have enjoyed twenty or thirty years in time past! Is God the less provoked, by how much the longer you have offended him, so that you have more encouragement to expect the assistance of his grace hereafter than formerly? Are you now any more out of danger of being judicially hardened and given up of God, than ten years ago? And are you the more sure of his favour, by how much the more you deserve his wrath? Are the habits of sin grown weaker through inveteracy and long indulgence? Does the work of your salvation grow easier by delays, and by your having fewer days for work! Does conscience gain strength upon you, by your repeated violences; or the spirit of God work the more powerfully, the more you resist and grieve him! Does your being inured to the gospel, give it greater force upon you! If the happy change of your present condi-

tion be probable, the probability must depend, in human view, upon such absurdities as these. But can these be the foundation of probability? No; but of the greatest improbability. The truth of the case is, your condition is growing more and more discouraging every day; and you are approaching fast towards a fixed, unchangeable state of incorrigible obstinacy in wickedness. Ten years ago, it was much more likely, in human view, that you would have been converted ere now, than it now is, that you will be converted in ten years to come. In short, the only ground of hope concerning you, is not at all from the appearance of things in human view, but merely from the free and sovereign grace of God. I may say of your salvation, what Christ said of the salvation of the rich, *with men that is impossible*: that is, according to the ordinary way of judging among men, who can judge only by appearances, and who count those things likely or unlikely, possible or impossible, which seem to be so in their own nature: according to this rule of judging, there is no reason at all to hope for it: it is quite desperate. *But with God all things are possible*: he can and sometimes does act contrary to appearances and the natural tendency of things; and astonishes his creatures with unexpected and surprising wonders. Thus, veteran, obstinate sinners! he may yet deal with some of you. Omnipotence may yet take you in hand, disarm all your resistance, and cause you to feel those admonitions you have made light of. This, perhaps, God may do. But O! it is an anxious, dreadful peradventure; for you must know, though he sometimes singles out an hardened sinner of your class here and there, to make him the illustrious trophy of the power of his grace, yet this is not his usual way: he does not commonly work upon such rough,

unsuitable materials. He generally pitches upon the young and pliable, upon those that have not been long inured to the gospel, nor hardened in sin. Therefore, even this, which is your only ground of hope, can afford you but a trembling, anxious hope. Notwithstanding this, you have reason to fear that you will die as you have hitherto lived, hardy, resolute, incorrigible sinners. And if so, you know your dreadful end; you shall suddenly be destroyed; your stiff neck shall be unexpectedly broken; and there will be no help, no remedy.

And if you are indeed in so much danger, will you not now lay it to heart, and endeavour to escape while you may? Alas! shall this admonition also, this admonition for your disregarding all past admonitions, be lost upon you like the rest? O! will you not at length take warning, before it is too late! Perhaps the voice that now warns you, may not long sound in your ears. But O! let me find this day, that those whom I have reprov'd in vain for so many years, regard me at last, and submit and yield. Then, and not till then, you will be safe from the vengeance denounced in this alarming proverb, *He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

SERMON XLI.**THE NATURE OF LOOKING TO CHRIST OPENED AND EXPLAINED.**

ISAIAH XLV. 22.—*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.*

IT is the peculiar sin and unhappiness of the christianized world, that, while they profess and speculatively believe Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, the Saviour of sinners; and while they harbour some kind of high esteem for him as a Benefactor that appeared upon earth about seventeen hundred years ago, who should be still remembered with gratitude, yet that they are not deeply sensible of that intimate, personal concern which degenerate sinners have with him in every age.—They do not make that eager, importunate, affectionate application to him, which his character requires as the Saviour of guilty men. Divine justice indeed was satisfied, the demands of the law were answered by the obedience and sufferings of our divine Redeemer long before we came into existence, and God became reconcileable to a guilty world. But all this alone does not insure our salvation. Redemption must not only be purchased, but applied; and though it was purchased without our concurrence, yet all mankind, in all ages, are concerned in the application of it. There was no need of the gospel and its ordinances to procure it; but all these are necessary, and therefore appointed for our obtaining an actual interest in it. Hence Christ, as an almighty Saviour, is exhibited, and the blessings of his purchase are offered in

the gospel; and all that hear the gracious proposal are invited to entertain this Saviour with suitable dispositions, and to consent to the terms on which these blessings are offered, upon the penalty of everlasting damnation. Our personal consent is required as much in this age as when the gospel was first published to the world; and it is this which is solicited by all the means of grace; it is to gain your consent to this gracious proposal, that the gospel is still continued among you. It is for this we preach; for this you should hear, and perform every other duty; for this the Lord's supper in particular was instituted, and has been to-day administered among you. It is to melt your hearts, and engage your affections to a dying Saviour, that he is represented both in words and in speaking actions, in all the agonies of Gethsemane, and in all the tortures of Calvary.

But though these affecting means have been used from age to age, yet, alas! they have not had the intended effect upon multitudes. They act like a sick person infatuated with the imagination that the mere grateful remembrance of Galen or Hippocrates, or some other eminent physician of past ages, will be sufficient for his recovery, without following their prescriptions, or making a speedy application to a living physician now; whereas there is as much reason why we in this age should be pricked to the heart and cry out, *What shall we do to be saved?* as there was for St. Peter's hearers. Acts ii. 37, 38. There is as much reason to exhort unregenerate sinners now to repent and be converted, as there was to exhort the impenitent Jews to it. There is as much cause to direct and persuade men now to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the heathen jailer, who had been an infidel. Acts xvi. 31. It is true indeed, when we

now exhort men to believe in Christ, we cannot include all the ideas in it which were included in this exhortation when addressed to infidel Jews and heathens in the apostolic age; for then it included, that they should renounce their former religion, and assent to this important truth, that Jesus is the Messiah, and take upon them the profession of christianity; and this is rendered in general, I hope, needless in our land, as we have been initiated into this persuasion by our education and other means. But, my brethren, all this is far short of that consent which we must yield to the gospel, if we expect to be saved by it. This faith is not that living faith which we are called to act upon the Redeemer; and we must give him another kind of reception than multitudes do, who thus believe his divine mission, and profess his religion. We must have those affectionate dispositions and vigorous exercises of heart towards him, which become guilty, perishing sinners towards an almighty and gracious Saviour, who deserves and therefore demands our supreme affection, our humble dependence on his merits alone, and our hearty consent to be his servants forever. We must be brought to believe in him with such a faith as will regulate our practices, and render the whole of our life a series of grateful obedience to him, who is an atoning Priest upon a throne of royal authority, enacting laws and demanding the dutiful submission of his subjects. And therefore, though it is needless to call upon you to believe in the same sense in which this exhortation was addressed to infidels by the apostles; yet there is still room enough to urge you to this duty, only leaving out one ingredient then included, viz. a speculative belief and external profession of the christian religion, and that Christ is the Messiah. There is

still reason to persuade sinners to consent to the terms of life established in the gospel, to renounce all dependance on their own righteousness, and to place their humble confidence in his alone, to acquiesce with the warmest complacence in the method of salvation through grace, and in the meantime to surrender themselves to his government, to obey his will, with the most cheerful willingness, the most ardent devotion, and the humblest adoration: in short, to entertain the great Redeemer with those affections and dispositions which the nature and design of his mediatorial office demand, and which become our condition as guilty, miserable, helpless creatures; all which are included in that faith in Jesus which the gospel enjoins as the grand condition of salvation.

This faith is one of the principal subjects of sacred scripture, and is expressed in various forms: sometimes in plain terms, but more frequently in metaphors borrowed from earthly things, and particularly from the actions of the body. This method of expressing spiritual objects and intellectual ideas, in terms that originally and properly are applied to the body, is not only common in scripture, but intermingled in conversation, and authorised by the best authors in all ages and languages. We speak of the eye of the understanding as well as of our bodily eye: and to see an argument, or a meaning, is almost as common a phrase as to see a man or any other material object. The evidence by which the soul forms its determinations is called light, as well as the medium of proper vision. And as the metaphor is here borrowed from the eye, so it is frequently borrowed from the other organs of the body and their actions. This is owing to the penury of the language of mortals, who, as they are most conversant with material objects, and have the

earliest and most frequent occasions of receiving or conveying their ideas of them in sound, are habituated to a dialect proper to these things; and, when they would express their ideas of immaterial things, they are obliged to transfer these terms, originally applied to material objects, to express those immaterial things; and there is not only necessity but reason for this, as there is a resemblance between those actions of the body from which these metaphors are borrowed, and those actions of the mind to which they are transferred; yea, it is not only a reasonable, but a beautiful and moving method of representing divine things: in this principally consists the beauty of poetry, that it clothes intellectual ideas in lively material images, which make deep impressions on our imaginations.

In such metaphorical terms, as I observed, faith is often represented in sacred scripture. Sometimes the metaphor is borrowed from the feet; and then to believe is to come to Christ; to come to him as one oppressed with a heavy burden to a person that can relieve, Matt. xi. 28; to come to him as one perishing with thirst to a fountain of living water, Isaiah lv. 1, Rev. xxii. 17; or as the manslayer, closely pursued by the avenger of blood, to the city of refuge: hence it is expressed by the most emphatical phrase of *fleeing for refuge*. Heb. vi. 18. Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the conduct of a dutiful and loyal people towards their rightful Sovereign upon his entering among them in his own territories. John i. 11, 12. Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the ears; and faith is expressed by hearing his voice, as an impoverished, dying wretch would hear the offer of plenty and life. Isaiah lv. 3. John v. 25. And sometimes, as in the text, the metaphor is taken from the eye;

and faith is represented as looking to Christ. My present design is,

I. To explain the duty here expressed by the metaphor of looking.

II. To urge it upon you by sundry important considerations.

I. To explain the duty expressed by the metaphor of looking, we are to observe in general, that a man's looks often discover his condition and the frame of his mind. By virtue of the strange union between the soul and the body, the dispositions of the one are often indicated by the emotions and appearances of the other. The eye, in particular, is a mirror in which we may see the various passions of the mind; and it has a kind of silent, and yet significant language, which conveys to others those inward exercises which the tongue does not, and perhaps cannot express. Hence we can understand a look of surprise and consternation, a look of sorrow and compassion, a look of joy, the look of a perishing supplicant, or of a needy, expecting dependant. If an agonizing patient casts an eager look upon his physician, we understand it to be a silent petition for relief. When a dying husband fixes a wishful, tender look upon his surviving half, or those little other selves his children, they know the melting language, and feel its resistless energy. And when we see a drowning man casting a wild and eager look towards a boat coming to his relief, we understand it to be the language of earnest importunity for speedy help. Hence it follows, that "looking to Christ, implies those suitable dispositions and exercises of heart towards him, which are expressed by the earnest and significant looks of persons in a distressed condition towards their deliverer." And in such a case it is natural to conceive a person as expressing by

his looks a particular notice and distinct knowledge of his deliverer, an importunate cry for his assistance—a wishful expectation of it—a dependance upon him for it—an universal submission to him—an hearty love and approbation of him—and joy and gratitude for his deliverance. And these dispositions and exercises of mind towards Christ are intended in the text by looking to him.

1. Looking to Christ, implies a particular notice and distinct knowledge of him. When we fix an earnest look upon an object, we take particular notice and a distinct survey of it, and so obtain a clear knowledge of it. Thus we are called to fix our intellectual eyes upon Christ, to make him the object of our contemplation, and by these means to obtain the knowledge of him. Mankind are too commonly regardless and ignorant of him.—And are not many of you chargeable with this criminal neglect? The blessed Jesus has exhibited himself to your observation in the gospel, but your attention is so engaged by other objects, that you will not allow him an earnest look. He has been set forth evidently crucified before your eyes, but you have, as it were, passed and repassed careless and unconcerned by his cross. You have had a variety of opportunities and means to be instructed in the glorious mysteries of the gospel; to know the person of the Redeemer as Immanuel, God and man; to know the absolute necessity, the gracious design, and the high degree of his sufferings; to know his sufficiency and willingness to pardon and save believing penitents; and, in a word, to obtain a competent acquaintance with the method of salvation. But you have taken but little or no notice of these things; and consequently remained contentedly ignorant of them. It is equally lamentable and astonishing, that in a land like this, abound-

ing in Bibles and other means of instruction, christianity should be so little known even by those that profess it. How ridiculous a figure would an artist make that knew nothing of his trade! a schoolmaster that could not spell! Or a doctor that knew nothing of physic! And yet men have the impious impudence to call themselves christians, and resent it when their profession is pronounced an hypocritical pretence, though they are ignorant of the rudiments of christianity. You are therefore called in the text to pursue the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, John xvii. 3, to make this the object of your study; for without it you cannot be saved. It is by the knowledge of him you are justified, Isa. liii. 11; and if you are *a people of no understanding, he that formed you will not have mercy on you*, Isa. xxvii. 11, but you shall be destroyed through lack of knowledge. Hosea iv. 6. Not that a mere speculative knowledge of Christ will suffice; no, it must not be a look of curiosity and speculation, but you must be affected with the object; your eye must affect your heart; and by beholding the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel, you must be changed into the same image, or conformed to him in holiness. 2 Cor. iii. 18. A perishing man is not a mere curious spectator of his deliverer; but he views him with the tenderest passions. So you must look upon Christ. Thus the knowledge of him was attended with supreme affection to him in St Paul. Phil. iii. 7, 8. But this will be farther illustrated under the following particulars.

2. Looking to Christ, implies an importunate eagerness for relief from him. See Psalm xxv. 15. If your child were fallen into the hand of a murderer just ready to dispatch him, and should cast a wishful look upon you, while you was running

to his deliverance, you would understand it as a silent cry for help. So we are enjoined to look to Christ with the most eager importunity for deliverance from him as our Saviour. And this supposes a deep sense of our need of him. When a guilty creature, that had been involved in the general presumptuous security, is effectually alarmed with just apprehensions of his danger; when he sees his numberless transgressions in all their horrid aggravations, and the dreadful threatenings of the law in full force, and ready to be executed against him: in short, when he sees himself ripe for ruin, and ready every moment to sink into it, with what importunate cries will he betake himself to him for relief! Behold, he prayeth! now he is often on his knees before God in secret, as well as in social prayer; and in the intervals between his prayers, he is often looking to the hills from whence cometh his aid, Psa. cxxi. 1, and wafting up many an importunate cry to heaven. Sometimes he sinks into an abyss of sorrow, and is overwhelmed with boisterous waves of fears, so that, with Jonah, he is ready to cry out, *I am cast out of thy sight, O Lord*; yet, with him he says, *I will look again towards thy holy temple.* Jonah ii. 4. Happy the souls that are thus looking to Jesus, who is lifted up for the recovery of a dying world, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness! John iii. 14. And happy we, should this spirit of pious importunity prevail among us, and banish that spirit of deep sleep which seems poured out upon us! Then would prayer be our employ, not only when we observed the returns of stated prayer in secret, in our families, and in our public assemblies, but our souls would be always in a supplicating posture; every wish, every groan would be a cry for mercy: and then might we expect to obtain the

blessings we need; and the aspect of our religious affairs would be happily altered among us. To this duty the text invites us; and O that we may consult our own interest, as well as regard the authority of God, so far as to *seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near!* Isa. lv. 6.

3. Looking to Christ implies a wishful expectation of deliverance from him. See Psalm lxxix. 3. It may be illustrated by the history of the lame beggar, in Acts iii. 4, 5. He begged an alms of the apostles Peter and John: they do not immediately relieve him, but give him some ground of encouraging expectation by taking particular notice of him, and telling him to fix his eyes upon them. Thereupon the anxious cripple gives heed to them, and wishfully looks upon them, expecting to receive something of them. So a poor sinner, amidst all his anxious fears and despondencies, approaches the throne of grace, and begs for mercy. The Lord Jesus, though his bowels are yearning over him, does not give him immediate relief; he puts him off for a while, as he did the Syrophœnician, that he may give occasion for him to plead with the more importunity, and more suitably prize the blessing when obtained. Yet, in this melancholy interval, he does not leave him quite hopeless. The invitations of the gospel cry, "Look on me;" and the poor sinner lifts up the eyes of wishful expectation to receive something. "Who knows, but that sovereign and unbounded grace, which has relieved thousands, may also listen to my cries? Blessed Jesus! may I not indulge some trembling hope that thou wilt at length grant me deliverance? Thy free, thine indefinite invitations and absolute promises give me some ground of pleasing expectation; and O! shall it be frustrated? No, let me

trust in thee for the gracious accomplishment.”— Such are the soliloquies of such an anxious soul. And though we might be all left in remediless despair, yet, blessed be God, we have encouragement to look to Jesus with humble joyful hope; and it is to this the text exhorts us.

4. Looking to Jesus, implies an humble dependence upon him for salvation. This supposes that we are deeply sensible of our own utter inability to relieve ourselves; and when we are convinced of this, we shall immediately look to another: when we see no ground at all for self-confidence, we shall place our trust in Jesus alone. It was such a look as this that good Jehoshaphat raised to heaven: *We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee.* 2 Chron. xx. 12. So Micah, finding no room for human confidence, resolves, *Therefore I will look unto the Lord.* Micah vii. 7. Thus an humble sinner, sensible of his utter inability, resolves to venture upon Christ, *to trust in him, though he should slay him.* Job xiii. 15. And in those happy moments when the sinner has some glimmering hopes of acceptance, with what pleasure and satisfaction does he rest upon this eternal rock! and how happy we, should we be engaged this day to place our humble dependence there! It is to this the text calls us.

5. Looking to Christ, means an universal, cheerful submission to his authority. We must consent to be his servants forever, and wait all the intimations of his will to obey them. We must look and observe the motion of his hand pointing out to us the way of duty. We must look as a servant upon his master, eager to receive his orders. So the phrase seems used in Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2. *Unto thee I lift up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens*

Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look unto the Lord. Thus, whoever trusts in Jesus with a saving faith, surrenders himself to an unlimited obedience to all his commandments; and to this the text invites us.

6. Looking to Christ, implies a hearty approbation of him as a Saviour, and supreme affection to him. Love is often expressed by looks; and when we look affectionately upon an object, it evidences that we are pleased with the survey. So a perishing world is commanded to acquiesce in the method of salvation through Christ, to love him above all, and to take the fullest and noblest complacence in him: and upon their so doing, they are assured of salvation. We have indeed been influenced by education and the like means to entertain a general good esteem of Christ; but, alas! this is very far short of that endearing affection and hearty complacence which he claims and deserves.—Our hearts must be engaged to him; he must be the chief among ten thousand in our eyes. Our thoughts and passions must often ascend to him, and we must rest in him with complacence, as containing all our salvation and all our desire. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

7. And lastly, Looking to Christ, implies joy and gratitude for his delivering goodness. The passions of joy and gratitude are easily discovered by the looks; and, therefore, are intended by this phrase, *look unto me.* And this is not only the duty, but the delightful inclination of one that has been relieved by him from the horrors of a guilty conscience, and the dreadful displeasure of God. Joy is in itself a pleasing passion, and we delight to indulge it: and to a heart that has just felt the

mercy of deliverance from everlasting destruction, thanksgiving is a most grateful and pleasing employ; and, in this, much of the happiness of heaven consists.

From this view of the duty intended by looking to Jesus, take occasion, my brethren, to examine, whether ever you have complied with it; for it is a matter of infinite importance, as your eternal state depends upon it. *He that hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.* 1 John v. 12.

SERMON XLII.

ARGUMENTS TO ENFORCE OUR LOOKING TO CHRIST.

ISAIAH XLV. 22.—*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.*

THE duty of looking to Christ, being explained, I shall,

II. Urge you to look to him by several weighty considerations.

This is the great duty of saints and sinners, and consequently of every one in all ages and places, even to *the ends of the earth*.—It is the duty of sinners to turn away their eyes from beholding vanity and fix them upon this attractive, but, alas! neglected Saviour; to turn their attention from the trifles of time to the great Antitype of the brazen serpent, who is lifted up that a dying world may open their eyes just closing in death, and look and live. And saints, whose eyes have been turned to

this glorious object, ought to fix them more intensely upon him, to take larger surveys of his glory, and to renew their affectionate trust in him.

I would premise, that when I exhort sinners to look to Jesus, I would not intimate, that they are able to do this of themselves. No; I am very sensible, that all the exhortations, persuasions, invitations, and expostulations that a feeble mortal, or even the most powerful angel in heaven can use with them will have no effect, but vanish into air, without the efficacious operation of almighty grace. And yet such exhortations are neither useless, improper, or unscriptural: they tend to convince sinners of their inability to believe, which is necessary to their believing aright; and it is while such arguments are addressed to their understanding, that the holy Spirit is wont to work upon their hearts. Hence they are so often commanded in scripture *to repent, to believe in Christ, to look to him to make them a new heart, &c.* I would add, that when I express the duty enjoined under the metaphor of looking, I hope it will not lead any of you into gross corporeal ideas, since the import of it has been so fully shewn.

The arguments to enforce this important evangelical duty can never be exhausted; and therefore I must confine myself to those which this copious text furnishes us with, which, when resolved into particulars, will stand thus:

It is salvation we are called upon to pursue—It may be obtained upon the easiest terms, without any personal merit, viz: by a look—It is Immanuel, the incarnate God, that commands and invites us to look—and he is the glorious and affecting object to which we are to look—and our looking shall not be in vain, for he is God, who engages to save those that look to him;—and it is in vain to look

elsewhere for salvation, and needless to fear his grace should be controlled by another; for as he is God, so there is none else—and we in particular are invited, being especially meant by *the ends of the earth*.

1. It is salvation that is here offered. Look, and be saved. Salvation! O most propitious, transporting sound? Amazing! that ever it should be heard by our guilty ears! Sin, my brethren, has exposed us to the curse of the divine law, to the loss of heaven, and all its joys, yea, and of earth too, and all its entertainments; for death, the consequence of sin, will rend us from them. We have no title to any good to satisfy our eager pantings; and must languish and pine through an endless duration without a drop of bliss, if punished according to our demerit. We are also subject to the torturing agonies of a remorseful conscience, to be cut off from the earth by the sword of justice, and swept away by the besom of destruction into the regions of horror and despair, there to consume away a long, long eternity in inextinguishable flames, in remediless, intolerable torments, in the horrid society of devils and damned ghosts, who shall mutually promote and join in the general roar of torture and desperation. This, sirs, is our just, our unavoidable doom, unless we obtain an interest in the salvation of the Lord. But salvation brings us a complete remedy, equal to our misery. It contains a title to the divine favour, and consequently to all the joys of heaven; it contains a perfect deliverance from all the torments of hell: and shall we not then regard and obey the voice that cries, *Look unto me, and be ye saved!* Is it not fit those should perish without remedy who hear the offer of such a salvation with indifference? *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salva-*

tion? Were we now under a sentence of condemnation to death by an earthly court, and were going out one after another to the place of execution, and should some welcome messenger with a general pardon in his hand come with joyful speed into this assembly, and proclaim, salvation! salvation! to all that would accept it, on the easiest terms, what a shout of general joy would burst from this assembly! What changed faces, what tears of general joy, would appear among us! In this agreeable character, my brethren, I have the honour and the happiness of appearing among you this day. I proclaim salvation from the Lord to dying men; salvation to all that will look to him for it. And I would not make the offer to the air, or to the walls of this house, but to rational creatures, capable of consenting and refusing. I therefore request you to look upon it as a proposal made to you; to you men, to you women, to you youth and children, to you negroes, demanding a speedy answer. Will you look to Jesus? or will you hide your faces from him? Will you not think him and his salvation worth a look? Which leads me to observe,

2. This salvation may be obtained upon low terms. It may be obtained by a look. Look and be saved: and this metaphor implies that no merit is required in us to procure this salvation. It is as cheap a cure as that which the Israelites obtained by looking to the brazen serpent. The salvation is wrought already; Christ would not separate his soul and body, and put an end to his pains, till he could say, *it is finished*, and all required of us is a cheerful acceptance: and what terms can be easier? It is true we are required to abstain from sin, and be holy, in order to enjoy this salvation; but can this be looked upon as a hard term? It is impossible in the nature of things you should be saved in

a course of sin; for one great part of the salvation consists in deliverance from sin. This is the deadly disease which must be healed, in order to your happiness. And how then can you expect to be saved while you indulge it? Would you not think your physician made easy prescriptions to you, if he assured you of recovery, when you were sick, upon condition that you would abstain from poison, and confine yourselves to a wholesome diet? Holiness is as necessary to happiness as temperance to health; and though sinners, like drunkards, think this a hard imposition, yet it cannot be altered, without a change in the immutable Deity. Therefore submit to the terms of salvation; they are as low, as easy as the nature of things will permit. They are not the rigid arbitrary impositions of an austere being, but the mild, unavoidable requisitions of an indulgent and wise God, acting according to the reason of things. If salvation was offered to you, upon condition of your making an infinite satisfaction for sin, you might start off from the proposal; for even almighty grace could not enable you to do this: for this you could not do without being advanced above the rank of creatures, and endowed with infinity, which you are physically incapable of. But grace can dispose you to consent to the terms of the gospel, grace can turn your eyes to look to Jesus, for you are only morally incapable of this; that is, you are unwilling, you are sinfully averse to it. Come then, look and live. The lowness of the terms aggravates the guilt of a non-compliance with them. What do those deserve who do not think of a salvation purchased with the blood of God worth a look? What drudgery do you endure, what hardships do you voluntarily undergo, to procure some of the specious toys of this world? What a difficult

regimen will you submit to, what nauseous potions will you take, for the recovery of the health of your mortal bodies? And will you not take the trouble of a look for the salvation of your immortal souls? How eagerly will you accept the offer of any temporal advantage! and will you neglect this invitation to look and live? Especially, when,

3. It is Immanuel, our incarnate God, that invites and commands you to look to him, and be saved. You may trifle with the commands of an usurper, and reject the treacherous invitations of an enemy; but dare you trifle with the injunctions, dare you refuse the gracious invitations of our supreme King and heavenly Friend?—That it is Christ who here calls us to look to him, is evident from the application of this context to Christ by the apostle: *To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living. For it is written, as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. Rom. xiv. 9—11.*—Which words, according to the Hebrew, you find in the verse following my text. See also Phil. ii. 9—11. Moreover the characters here predicated concerning the Lord Jehovah, most properly belong to Christ, according to the dialect of the New Testament; *Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.* Now we know that Christ is every where represented as our righteousness and strength, *In the Lord shall the seed of Israel be justified,* verse 24, 25, which is spoken most properly of Christ, through whom alone we can be justified. It is therefore the voice of our Immanuel that sounds so delightfully in our text. It is his voice which spoke this goodly universe into being out of its original nothing; which said, *Let there be light; and there was light; and dare we*

disobey his voice by whom all things were created? Col. i. 16. He spoke us into being, and we obeyed; and shall we, when blest with existence, resist his almighty call? It is his voice whom angels obey; Gabriel, and all his flaming ministers, fly at the first hint of his sovereign pleasure. Nay, universal nature hears his awful mandate, and all her laws are observed, or cancelled according to his pleasure. Events natural and supernatural are equally easy to him. And is this the majestic voice which sinners hear sounding in the gospel, and yet disregard? Is this he whom they make so light of, as not to vouchsafe him a look? Amazing presumption! And further, It is his voice which shall pronounce the final sentence upon the assembled universe. He now sits exalted upon a throne of grace, scattering blessings among his subjects, and inviting a dying world to look to him and live; but ere long he will put on majesty and terror, and ascend the throne of judgment. From thence he will speak, and omnipotence will attend his word to execute it. From thence he will pronounce, *come, ye blessed*, on all that hear his call now; and neither earth nor hell can repeal the joyful sentence. And on those that will not now look to him, he will pronounce, *depart from me*; “away, away ~~from~~ my blissful presence, ye cursed creatures, never, never to see me more.” And though they can now resist the voice of mercy, yet then they must obey the dreadful orders of justice, and shrink confounded from his face, and sink to hell. We, my brethren, must mingle in that vast assembly, and hear our doom from his lips; and can we, in the serious expectation of that day, refuse his call to look to him now? Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him; and how shall we stand the terror of his face, if we now treat him

so contemptuously?—These considerations shew, that the call in my text is the command of authority, and therefore that our neglect of it is disloyalty and rebellion.—But O! there is a more melting, a more endearing consideration still. It is the voice of our Beloved, it is the gracious invitation of love: it is his voice who heard the cry of our helpless misery; who, though equal with God, and possessed of infinite, independent happiness, emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant. He often looked up to heaven with strong cryings and tears in the days of his flesh for us. For us he spoke many a gracious word, still upon record; for us he wrought many a miracle; for us he travelled many a fatiguing journey and endured hunger and thirst, and all the calamities of poverty. For us he was reproached, belied, persecuted; and O! for us he sweat and groaned in Gethsemane; for us his back was furrowed with scourging, his face defiled with spitting, his head bruised with buffetings, and pierced with thorns. For us he was nailed to the cross; for us he hung in ignominy and torture; for us he shed his blood, he breathed out his life; for us his side was pierced; and for us the Lord of life lay in the dust of death. And O! blessed Jesus! after all this love, after all these sufferings, will not the sons of men afford thee one affectionate, believing look, when thou exhibitest thyself in the gospel, crying with a loud and loving voice, “Behold me, behold me; look unto me, and be ye saved?” O, sirs, can you reject the invitation of such a Saviour? are you capable of such horrid ingratitude? He bespeaks your attention with dying groans; his wounds preach from the cross and cry, *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.* There he was lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness;

that whosoever believeth in him, though in the agonies of death, should not perish, but have everlasting life; and can we neglect the invitation of such a Saviour in such circumstances? Shall a guilty world always find something else to look upon, so that they cannot spare a glance to the blessed Jesus? With what pious horror must angels behold such a sight! And may not the earth shudder to support such impious ingratitude!

4. It is Immanuel we are to look to. *Look unto me.* He that issues the command is the glorious and attractive object we are called to behold. The adorable glories of a God, and the milder beauties of a perfect man, meet in his person. His glories attract the admiring gaze of angels, and charm the attention of the happy immortals above. The survey of his perfections is the source of all their bliss, and will furnish all their powers with extatic employ, through the revolutions of eternal ages. And will not worms look up from the dust to him? Shall every sordid trifle engage their intense contemplation, while they hide their faces from this glorious Immanuel, as though he had no form or comeliness? There is an infinite variety of objects within the compass of the creation which attract our attention. Our eyes are charmed with the splendour of the day, the midnight glories of the starry arch, the verdure of the spring, the majesty of mountains, the beauties of human faces; nay, there is not a trifling curiosity in nature but engages our observation. But all the glories of the universe are but the faint reflections of his; they are but obscure copies of his underived excellencies. And shall we be charmed with the transcript, and take no notice of the original? Does the contemplation of the works of nature afford such exquisite entertainment to philosophic minds, and

shall not every mind be transported in the survey of Immanuel's uncreated glories?—But if all these considerations fail, sure the love of Christ must constrain you. He has exhibited himself to your view this day in a vesture dipt in blood. He has emblematically passed before you crowned with thorns, and covered with blood; and as Pilate said to the Jews, to melt them in compassion, so say we to you, *Behold the man!* And will you turn away from him regardless, or view him with as much indifference as though he were a malefactor? What is this but to join the Jewish rabble, *away with him! away with him! crucify him! crucify him!* He has virtually said to you as to Thomas, *Look into my hands, and behold the print of the nails; and look into my side, and behold the stab of the spear, which opened a fountain of life for you.* And can you deny an affectionate look to such an object? He hangs conspicuous on the cross, his nerves racked, his bones disjoined, his heart melting like wax in the midst of his bowels, while streams of blood run down his sacred body; and it is in this posture we are to look upon him. In this posture, as it were, he issues forth his gracious invitation, *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.* And is there a mortal so hardy, so ungrateful, as to refuse an affectionate look to him in such circumstances? Shall he complain, with David, his type, *I looked for some to pity: but there was none.* Psalm lxi. 20. *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: no man cared for my soul.* Psalm cxliii. 4. Blessed Jesus! shalt thou take up this complaint over creatures for whom thou didst bleed and die! over creatures who owe all their hopes to thee! may not the whole creation be struck with consternation at the complaint! why are not the miraculous solem-

ainties that attend thy death renewed? why do not the earth tremble, the rocks rend, the sun put on the livery of a mourner, to see a dying God and a careless world! the Creator, the Saviour of men, in agony, in blood; and his creatures, his ransomed, asleep, and not affording him so much as a look of love and compassion! Were ever such horrid incongruities pronounced at a breath, or united in one sentence!—But the cross is not the only place where we should look upon him. Lift up your eyes to seats above, there you may behold him who tasted of death, crowned with glory and honour. His head, that was once crowned with thorns, is now adorned with a crown of glory: his face that was once bruised with blows, and disgraced with spitting, shines brighter than the sun in his meridian glory: His hands, that were once nailed to the cross, now sway the sceptre of the universe: and his feet, that were cruelly pierced, now walk the crystal pavement of heaven. He that was insulted by Jews and Gentiles, he at whom they wagged their heads, is now adored by all the heavenly hosts, who congratulate his exaltation, and cry with united voice, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Rev. v. 11, 12. This is the voice of ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands in that world where Jesus is best known. And shall we break the harmony of the universal choir? Shall we not echo back their song, and reply, *To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, (which is more than he did for angels,) to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen.* Rev. i. 5, 6. Shall we not look to him whose glory attracts the eyes of all the celestial armies, and congratulate his exaltation? We have

cause indeed to rejoice in it; for O! he is exalted, that he may have mercy upon us, Isa. xxx. 18; he has ascended the throne, that he may thence scatter blessings on a guilty world beneath him. He retains his usual love, and the tenderest bowels of compassion towards the meanest of his people. He is now pleading their cause in the court of heaven, and preparing a place for them. From thence he exhibits himself to our intellectual view, and invites us to look to him. And can we slight such glory and love united? Are our natures capable of such infernal ingratitude? O let us look to him, especially since it shall not be in vain:

For, 5. He is able to save us upon our looking to him. *Look unto me, and be ye saved, for I am God.* This is annexed as the reason of the duty enjoined; and what can give us greater security of salvation upon our compliance? *If God be for us, who shall be against us? If God justify, who is he that condemneth?* It is his right to constitute the terms of salvation, and he has almighty power to save all that comply with them. It is that God, who threatens to punish sinners, that here promises to save them upon their looking to him. And what glorious encouragement, what strong consolation does this afford us! Is there a creature here so full of unbelieving despondency, as seriously to think that even Jehovah cannot save him? Surely no; therefore look and be saved, for it is God that undertakes to save you. And he can do exceeding abundantly more for you than you can ask or think. Your sins may be mighty, but not almighty: your guilt may be great, but the blood of God can expiate it: the obstructions in your way may be numerous and insuperable to you, but he can reduce a mountain into a plain before you. You are feeble, helpless things, *but have you not heard, have*

you not known, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint. Isa. xl. 28—31.

6. Look to him; for as he is God, so there is none else. This implies that there is no other Saviour, and that this sole Saviour is uncontrollable, and therefore able to save.

It is only a God that is able to work our salvation. Men, angels, all creatures are unequal to the task. They cannot satisfy divine justice for our sin; they cannot subdue our corruptions, and sanctify our hearts; nor conduct us safe through all the dangers and temptations that surround us. We, in particular, are utterly incapable of these things. It is not in the power of our hand to relieve ourselves.* And if you will not look to Christ, to whom will you look? *Call now, if there be any that will answer thee; and to which of the saints, to which of the angels, wilt thou turn!* You are shut up to the faith, my brethren; you have no alternative but to look to Christ, or sink to hell. There is no salvation in any other. And will you rather be without a Saviour than look to him as such? Why, what evil hath he done? Why such strange aversion to your best Friend, who is able to save to the utmost? And as none else can save, so

* To attempt to save ourselves is to affect to be Gods, and to claim the peculiar work of omnipotence.

He is able to save, because beyond control. There is no God besides, to reverse his will; but whom he blesses, is blessed indeed. *He is head over all things to his church.* He limits the power, controls the rage, and baffles all the politic schemes of the powers of hell; and the hearts of men, of kings, are in his hand; and he turns them whithersoever he pleases. None therefore shall pluck his sheep out of his hand; but he will give unto them eternal life. Look then to him, poor trembling weaklings, that are daily putting your life in his hand, and often dismally forebode your own destruction, and the victory of your enemies. *Trust in the Lord, Jehovah; for in his arm is everlasting strength.*

7. And lastly, look to him, for you are particularly invited, being especially meant by those in the ends of the earth. A promiscuous call may not be regarded so much as a particular invitation directed to us, as it were, by name. We dwell in a continent that may be called the ends of the earth with peculiar propriety; and though America was unknown in Isaiah's time, and probably not in his thoughts when he uttered these words, yet no doubt that omniscient Spirit, who inspired his lips, had a reference to it. It is true the words may be taken figuratively, as referring to the Gentiles in general, who might be said to be in the ends of the earth with respect to the favourite land of Judea, which was situated near the middle of the then known world, on the borders of Asia, near where it joins with Europe and Africa. Those in the ends of the earth seem also to suggest to us the ideas of poor outcasts in a helpless condition, as the Gentiles then were, without the knowledge of God and the means of grace. And if we take the text in this sense, it still refers to us who are the posterity of heathens. But methinks there is a particular beau-

ty and propriety in it taken literally; “Look unto me, and be ye saved, ye that dwell in the remotest ends of the inhabited earth; look unto me, ye Americans, ye Virginians.” O what a joyful sound! Not many years ago, we, or our near ancestors came from the old continent of Europe or its adjacent islands; and the Lord hath driven out the heathen from before us, and planted us in their stead. We left his church and the favourite lands where his gospel had shined for ages, and came among savages that never heard of the name of Jesus, but dwelt in darkness and the shadow of death. But lo! he sends his gracious invitation after us to the ends of the earth, *Look unto me, and be ye saved,* In the days of Isaiah God was mindful of America, he was mindful of Virginia, and treasured up a rich invitation, till it should be inhabited, and in need of it. And shall we not regard it? Shall we not regard his voice crying in this wilderness? Indeed if any other blessings were worthy to be compared with those of the gospel, I might observe that he has not been kind to us in this respect only. He has turned this wilderness into a fruitful field: the residence of savages and wild beasts into a mart of nations. *He hath blessed us also, so that we are multiplied greatly; and he suffereth not our cattle to decrease.* See Psalm cvii. 36—38. We may borrow the words of Moses, in Deut. xxxii. 10—14. But, alas! we have waxed fat, and kicked against God, like well-fed horses against their proprietor. We have turned his blessings into occasions of sinning. We have improved in guilt and impiety in proportion to our improvement in riches and the arts of life. And it is an instance of divine patience that may astonish even heaven itself, that so ungrateful a land has not been visited with some signal judgment. But our iniquities are not yet

full, and we hope there are more than ten righteous persons among us, whose prayers stand in the gap, and prevent the irruption of vengeance. But perhaps our day is at hand, and then, though Noah, Daniel, and Job should stand before God, yet his heart will not be turned towards us. *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise! is not he thy Father, that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee and established thee? Deut. xxxii. 6.* But to abuse the gospel is the greatest of all crimes. It is this that ripens a people for ruin, and fills up the measure of their iniquity: God will easier bear with the abuse of any mercy than with the contempt of his Son. *Therefore look unto him, and be ye saved. O ye ends of the earth.*

SERMON XLIII.

THE VESSELS OF MERCY AND THE VESSELS OF WRATH DELINEATED.

ROM. IX. 22, 23.—*The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and the vessels of mercy which He had afore prepared unto glory.*

THE true notion of the present world is, that it is a state of preparation for another; and, therefore, such as we habitually are here, such shall we be forever. Mankind are now forming, like clay in the potter's hands, some for honour and some for dishonour; some for wrath and some for glory. And as the potter does not put his vessels to their respective uses until they are finished and prepared for them, so neither are men removed from the present state, and fixed in their respective resi-

dences in the eternal world, until they are prepared, finished, and completely fitted for them. The vessels of mercy are prepared before hand for that glory with which they shall be filled. And, on the other hand, the vessels of wrath are fitted to destruction, and fit for nothing else, before they are dashed to pieces by the iron rod of divine justice.

It is a criticism worthy to be mentioned, even in this solemn place, where I never choose to make a parade of useless learning, that the apostle uses a different form of expression, when speaking of these different sorts of persons. The preparation of the vessels of mercy for glory, he ascribes to God, as his work. Hence he uses an active verb, *πρόσῆμιασεν*, referring expressly to God as the agent—the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory. But the fitting or preparing the vessels of wrath for destruction, he does not ascribe to God, but intimates, that it is their own work. Hence he uses a passive particle—*κατασκευάσμενα*, the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction—fitted by their own wilful sin and impenitence, during the long-suffering of God towards them, which had a tendency to lead them to repentance.

Vessels of wrath—How terribly emphatical is this phrase! Vessels dreadfully capacious of divine wrath! to be filled to the brim with that burning liquid! But how beautifully significant is the metaphor—*vessels of mercy!* vessels formed, prepared, finished, adorned by the gentle and skilful hand of divine mercy! vessels capacious of mercy, and to be filled, to overflow, with glory!

The gracious and sovereign God, who might justly have dashed these vessels of wrath to pieces as soon as ever they became marred clay in his plastic hands, endures or bears with them with

much long-suffering, as well as with the vessels of mercy: Bears with them, as he has with you, for days, for months, and years, notwithstanding their daring provocations, and ungrateful abuse of his patience; which nothing but divine patience could bear with so long. But all this time, they contracted more and more filth and pollution; they became every day less fit for their master's use, and rendered themselves more and more fit for destruction, and fit for nothing else.

And shall these vessels of wrath answer no valuable use in the great house of the universe? Will they serve to furnish out no apartment of this vast building? Will they be of no use in this numerous family of reasonable creatures? Yes, they will furnish out the regions of hell, a place as necessary and useful in the universe, as it is now constituted, as prisons and bedlams upon the earth. They will serve as public and terribly illustrious monuments of the divine power and justice, and the righteous resentments of Heaven against sin. They will serve as loud warnings to all worlds, to deter them from that destructive evil. And thus they will answer a valuable, and even a benevolent end in the creation, and contribute to the public good; as the execution of criminals tends to guard the laws from violation, and so promote the good of society. They will serve, as my text informs you, "to shew the wrath and make known the power" of God: Their destruction will illustriously display the glory of these perfections. The flames of hell will burn dreadfully bright, to reflect a terrible and yet amiable splendour upon them: And it is for this terrible but righteous end, among others, that God now endures them with so much long-suffering: that his perfections and the honour of his government may be the more illustriously displayed

in the execution of deserved punishment upon them.

But the vessels of mercy are intended and prepared for nobler uses. On them God intends to display the glory, the riches of the glory of his more gentle attributes, his love and grace. With them he intends to furnish out the many mansions of his heavenly house. By them he intends to let all worlds see what glorious vessels he can form, not only of the dust, but of the shattered and polluted fragments of human nature, broken and polluted by the fall of Adam, and by their own.

The view in which I now consider my text leads me to confine myself to this practical inquiry:—

Wherein does preparation for glory, and wherein does fitness for destruction, consist?

Some of you, perhaps, when you heard the text, were struck with horror, and ready to bless yourselves at the sound: For “now,” you thought within yourselves, “we shall have a sermon upon the horrible doctrine of predestination.” But you see I propose to consider the text entirely in a practical view; and, therefore, your fears are imaginary. Nor do I choose to consider it in this view, to let you see with what dexterity I can evade the genuine sense of it, and make a mental reservation of a doctrine so unpopular; but because whatever else the text in its connexion may mean, it does naturally lead me to this grand inquiry; and because my present design is to speak to your hearts, about an affair which you are all concerned and capable to know, and not to perplex your minds with a controversy, of which not many of you are competent judges. I must own, indeed, I am not altogether a sceptic in that doctrine. It is not an entire blank in my creed; nor am I at all ashamed to declare my sentiments in a proper time and

place. At present I shall only tell you, that I cannot be persuaded God has made such a world as this, without first drawing the plan of it in his own omniscient mind. I cannot think he would produce such a numerous race of reasonable and immortal creatures, without first determining what to do with them. I cannot think the events of time, or the judicial process of the last day, will furnish him with any new intelligence to enable him to determine the final states of men more justly than he could from eternity.—But away with all controversial thoughts at present; and let an object of more importance engross all your attention; For you will find, I am not now going to plunge and drown you in this unfathomable depth. This you may be sure of, that, if you have not made yourselves fit for destruction, and fit for nothing else, by your own wilful sin, you shall never be doomed to it by virtue of any decree of God. And, on the other hand, you may be equally sure, that he never decreed to admit you into heaven, unless you are prepared for it; nor to exclude you if you are so. I now proceed to the grand inquiry,

Wherein does preparation for glory, and wherein does fitness for destruction consist? This will naturally lead me to inquire into your habitual dispositions and behaviour: for it is by comparing these to the nature and quality of the regions of heaven and hell, that you can discover which you are fit for. If your temper and dispositions be heavenly and divine, you may be sure that you shall be admitted into those blessed mansions. But if, on the other hand, your temper and dispositions be infernal and diabolical; if they be such as are prevalent and universal in hell, you may be equally sure, that unless they are changed, you will be doomed forever to that dismal region.—

This must, methinks, appear quite evident to common sense. The righteous Judge of all the earth will always invariably do that which is fit. If you are fit for the enjoyments and services of heaven, you need not fear but he will admit you; never yet has such a soul been excluded. And what can you reasonably desire more? Would you have heaven encumbered with such as could not be happy, even in the very regions of happiness, for want of a proper relish for the enjoyments there? But, if you are fit only for the infernal prison, is there not a propriety, as well as justice, in your being confined there? The same propriety, as that madmen should be shut up in bedlam, or notorious criminals in a dungeon. Therefore,

1. Are you fit for heaven? do you love and delight in God—in a God of infinite purity? If not, the enjoyment of his presence, and the beatific vision of his face, which is the principal ingredient of heavenly happiness, could afford no happiness to you. Do you delight in the service of God, in contemplating his glories, in celebrating his praises, and in the humble forms of worship in his church on earth? Do these afford you the most exalted pleasure? If not, heaven is no place for you; for these are the eternal exercises there: And to such of you as have no pleasure in them, the heavenly state would be an eternal drudgery. Do you delight in holiness? If not, what would you do in the region of holiness? Alas! to you it would be an unnatural element. Are the saints, those whom the world perhaps calls so with a sneer, because they make it their great business to be holy in all manner of conversation, are these your favourite companions? Is their society peculiarly delightful to you? And are they the more agreeable to you, by how much the more holy they are? If not, what

would you do among the holy inhabitants of heaven? With what pleasure could you mingle in society with them, while your temper and theirs are so directly contrary? Are your hearts full of ardent love and benevolence to mankind? If not, how would you breathe in the pure element of perfect love?—Without such dispositions as these, you are no more fit for heaven than a sick man for a feast, a swine for a palace, or a blind man to view the splendours of the sun, and, therefore, you may be certain, that God, who will never do any thing that is unfit, will not admit you there, while you continue such as you now are.

You must also consider, that if you are fit for those pure and blessed regions, it is God that has made you so, by his own almighty power; *He that hath wrought you for this self-same thing is God,* 2 Cor. v. 5, and you have been deeply sensible that the work was indeed his, was divine and godlike, and beyond the utmost efforts of your degenerate nature. You are able indeed to fit yourselves for destruction; that you can easily do; and that, I am afraid, some of you have effectually done already. But it is God alone that can make you fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. And have you ever been the subjects of this divine operation? Have you ever felt the power of almighty grace opening your blinded minds—breaking your stony hearts, and melting them into floods of ingenuous sorrow, under the warm beams of a Saviour's love, like snow before the sun? Have you ever felt it subduing your favourite sins, and making them more bitter to you than death, and implanting and cherishing every grace and virtue in your souls? Has the Holy Spirit turned the prevailing bent of your souls towards holiness, so that you esteem it the principal ornament of your nature, and make

it the object of your eager desires, and most vigorous pursuit? Does holiness appear to you amiable in itself, and not only pre-requisite to your happiness, but the principal ingredient of it? And is heaven its self more endeared to you by this consideration, that it is the region of pure, unmingled holiness, that no unclean thing can enter there, and that even the way that leads to it is holy? If these things are not matters of experience to you, you may be sure you are not *afore prepared for glory.*

Let us now take a view of the opposite dispositions, and we shall make the same discovery:— Suppose your hearts are set upon the enjoyments of this life, as your principal happiness; suppose you are chiefly solicitous and laborious to heap up riches, or to indulge your sensual lusts and appetites; supposing this to be the ruling passion of your souls, are you fit for heaven? In heaven there are none of these low and sordid enjoyments: And what pleasure would you have there, who have a taste only for these things? You are indeed fit to dig in the earth, like moles, and steal the serpent's food: You are fit to scrape up riches; fit to wallow in the mire of guilty and debauched pleasures; fit to live in this world, could you always make your residence in it: This gross, impure, earthly element, suits your depraved constitutions. But can you once imagine you are fit for heaven; fit to breathe in that pure salubrious air; fit to share in those refined and spiritual enjoyments; fit to join in the exalted employments of seraphs, while this is your prevailing temper? Surely, no. And what then will become of you? The impure and gross region of this world, so agreeable to you, will not always last, and you will not probably live in it as long as it does last; but death, ere long, will tear

you away from all that is dear to you under the sun. And, alas! whither then shall you go? where then shall you take up your eternal residence?—I leave you to pause and think upon it.

Suppose the service of God be a weariness to you, and the thoughts of Him unwelcome to your minds: suppose your hearts are full of angry, malignant passions: in short, suppose you love sin more than holiness, can you flatter yourselves you are fit for heaven? Alas! it would be as unnatural an element to you as for a fish to live out of water, or you to live in it.—But the farther illustration of this will fall under the next head; therefore,

2. Inquire, Whether your temper and disposition be not infernal and diabolical, and such as render you fit for destruction, and for nothing else? Are your hearts destitute of the love of God?—“No,” you answer; “we thank God we have never been so bad as that comes to.” But if you love God, whence is it that you have so few affectionate thoughts of him? that you do not study to please him in all things, and delight in his service? If you love God, how comes it that you do not keep his commandments, which is the grand, decisive test of love? Alas! instead of loving him, are not your hearts disaffected to him? As evidences of this, may I not produce your dislike to serious thoughts of him, your aversion to his service, your disregard to his will as the rule of your conduct, and your headlong propensity to follow your own pleasure? Do not the murmurings and insurrections of your hearts against him and his dispensations, your uneasy, rebellious spirit under his providences, your aversion to his service, do not these shew that you are really disaffected to him? Now this is the very temper of hell; this is the constituent of a devil; the very worst ingredient

in that infernal composition; and, therefore, unless this temper be changed, you must dwell with devils forever: It is fit all the enemies of God should be shut up together in one vast prison. It is unfit that rebels and traitors should always run at large, or mingle with loyal subjects. Alas! sirs, a soul without the love of God is devilized already, ripe for destruction, and fit for nothing else.

Again, Are there not some of you who have no pleasure in devotion, no delight in conversing with God in his ordinances? The posture of humble worshippers at the throne of grace is not easy and agreeable to you; and hence that you have prayerless families and prayerless closets; and if you join in public worship once a week, it is a mere customary formality. You cannot bear to wean your thoughts and tongues from temporal affairs in the few hours devoted to the service of God, though they make up but one day in seven; you do not delight in religious conversation, but it strikes you dumb, like the man without the wedding garment. Well, in the infernal regions you will have as little of this exercise as you could wish. The patient will then be hopeless and incurable, and therefore no farther means will be used with him. Then you will no more be troubled with prayers, bibles, sermons, religious conversation, or the tedious hours of the Lord's day. And, since you have no taste for such exercises, is it not fit you should be sent into those ungodly regions, where you shall never be employed in them?

Again, Are not the minds of some of you defiled with all manner of sin and moral pollutions? And do not these render you fit only for that region of corruption and impurity? Do you not indulge an angry, contentious, unforgiving, malicious temper? Well, that is the temper of hell, and renders you

fit for it. Nay, these outrageous passions, when broke loose from restraint, will create a hell in your own breasts, and not only expose you to punishment, according to justice, but become the ingredients of your punishment, according to the course of nature. Do not some of you indulge yourselves in backbiting, and all the base, malignant arts of defamation, and perhaps are firebrands in the neighbourhood where you live? Well, in hell you shall have enough of this work; and, while you indulge this spirit, you are preparing yourselves for that land of universal hostility and revenge. Is not cursing and swearing the familiar language of some of you? Well, this is the language of hell; and you are now practising the infernal dialect, and preparing to converse with the ghosts below in their own style, in the region of imprecation and blasphemy. Do not some of you live in the practice of the works of the devil; that is, of those works to which he tempts you, and in which he has persisted, who was a sinner from the beginning? Are you not then fit for that everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels? Even the gentle lips of Jesus himself, would tell you, as he did the Jews, that *you are of your father the devil*, John viii. 44, since you habitually do his works. And is it not fit you should be doomed to the society of your infernal father?

Do you not find your hearts are habitually hard and insensible? Or if you have some kind of repentance, it is only a servile horror, extorted remorse, and involuntary pangs of desperate agony. This is the very kind of repentance in hell, where they still love sin, and cannot but upbraid and torment themselves because they have ruined themselves by indulging it. Conscience tortures them with the keenest reflections; but they feel no kindly ingenuous relentings; no generous sor-

rows, proceeding from a sense of the intrinsic vileness and baseness of sin, and from a sincere, disinterested love to God and holiness. Hence their repentance is only a punishment, but has no tendency to their reformation. And is not this the very nature of your repentance at present?

But I need not dwell long upon this inquiry. It is enough to tell you, in short, that if you are still in your natural state; if you still retain that temper which is natural to you as the degenerate sons of Adam, without any supernatural change; that estrangement from God; that disaffection to him; that carnality and earthly-mindedness; that blindness and insensibility about divine things; that presumption, security, and love of lawless pleasure: I say, if this be still your prevailing temper, you are not meet for the heavenly inheritance; for in order to be heirs of that, you must be born again of God. But you are fitted for destruction; for *by nature you are the children of wrath*, Eph. ii. 3, and while you continue such, you must be *vessels of wrath*. Therefore bring the matter to a short issue, by this decisive inquiry: "Have I ever been born again? Have I ever experienced such a mighty change in the temper of my mind, as may, with propriety, be called a *new birth*, or a *new creation*? For if any man be in Christ he is a *new creature*; old things are passed away, and all things are become new. 2 Cor. v. 17. Have I thus been renewed in the spirit of my mind? or am I still the same *old man*, with my old affections and lusts?" This my brethren is the grand decisive inquiry; for if you have been begotten again, St. Peter tells you, it is to an *inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away; reserved in the heavens for you*. 1 Pet. i. 4. But Jesus, the friend of sinners; Jesus, who never pronounced a harsh sentence, and

who never will exclude from heaven one soul that is fit for it, nor doom to destruction one soul that is fit for any thing else: even Jesus himself has strongly assured you with his own gracious lips, that *except you be born again, born of the spirit, as well as of water, you cannot see the kingdom of heaven; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh,* John iii. 3, 5, 6, carnal, corrupt, unholy, and utterly unfit for that spiritual, pure, and holy kingdom.

Here I would enlarge a little upon an observation, which I just hinted at before, namely, That these corrupt dispositions are not only criminal, and therefore will bring upon you the penalty of the divine law, according to justice, but that they are, in their own nature, destructive, and therefore, according to the course of nature, will be your ruin. Suppose God had made no positive constitution to exclude you from heaven; yet while you have no relish for the employments and enjoyments of that state, it is impossible, in the nature of things, you should be happy there. As you must have animal senses, to render you capable of animal pleasures, so you must have spiritual senses to render you capable of the pure spiritual pleasures of paradise; and without these you can no more be happy there than a stone can enjoy the pleasures of an animal, or a beast those of reason: you would be miserable wretches in paradise itself. Do but consider in what things the bliss of heaven consists, and methinks you will rather fear, than hope and desire admission there. Is religion so pleasing a thing to you, that you might expect you should be completely happy if it were but perfected in you? Alas! are there not a thousand things more agreeable to some of you? But in heaven there are none of these things, and how do you

expect to be happy there? There must be another heaven created for you, a Mahometan paradise of sensual pleasures, or else your temper must be changed. The paradise of saints and angels does not suit your vitiated taste.

Farther, Suppose God should not inflict any positive punishment upon you with his own immediate hand, but only suffer the course of nature to run on, and let your corrupt dispositions have full scope and range without restraint, would not these dispositions alone create a hell within you? Anger, malice, envy, and every wicked and turbulent passion against God and his creatures, will break out into outrageous hurricanes, when the kind restraints under which they now lie are taken off, and they will agitate and distract your souls forever, and render you incapable of all peace, serenity and joy. Then also, all temporal enjoyments, the objects of your love and desire, and the only things you have now to allay your raging thirst for happiness, will be forever torn from you, and leave you to famish in a dismal void; and then you will pine away with eager, impatient, insatiable desires, which will gnaw your hearts, and prey upon your spirits like hungry vultures. Suppose you were now stript naked of every enjoyment, and nothing left you but bare being, with your usual capacity of enjoyment; suppose you were deprived of the light of the sun, the products of the earth, the comforts of society, and every imaginable blessing, and doomed to wander, forlorn and hungry, in some dismal desert, how consummately miserable would this privation alone render you! But this will be the doom of the ungodly, as soon as death breaks their connexions with this world. They must leave all their enjoyments behind them, and yet carry their eager desires, their insatiable avarice of hap-

piness, along with them; and these will make them capacious vessels of pain; for a capacity of enjoyment, not satisfied, is a dreadful capacity of positive misery. Thus, you see your destruction comes upon you according to the course of nature; and you will die eternally, though the hand of the executioner should never touch you, as the unavoidable result of your present temper, the deadly disease under which you labour.

And hence you may see, by the way, that it is no act of cruelty or injustice in the Supreme Judge, to shut you up in the prison of hell; for what else should he do with you, when you are fit for no other place? Is it cruel to exclude the sick from entertainments, or persons infected with the plague from the society of the sound and healthy? Is it cruel to confine madmen in bedlam, or criminals in prison? Certainly no. Therefore God and his throne will be guiltless forever.

And now, my dear brethren, have any of you been convinced that this is really your case? That your temper and conduct is such as at once renders and proves you utterly unfit for heaven, and as it were, naturalizes and seasons you for the infernal regions. Alas! this is a shocking and alarming discovery indeed: but, blessed be God, you have made it in time, you have made it while in the land of hope, and in a state of trial; and therefore, there is reason to hope, that, if you now take the alarm, and earnestly use the means of grace, your condition, bad as it is, may be happily altered; and you, who are now fit for nothing but destruction, may yet be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. It is because there is some reason for this hope, that I have honestly exposed these alarming and unpopular things to your view. You must know them

sooner or later: and if you should not know them until you fall into destruction, alas! it will then be too late. Believe me, my brethren, these things do not proceed from a morose malevolent heart, nor are they intended to drive you into despair. I speak to you with melting pity and affectionate benevolence; and instead of driving you into despair, my design is to save you from it forever, and bring you to have a good hope through grace. And as the evidence of what I have offered is so plain to common sense, do not pretend you cannot understand me, and do not know what I would aim at. I am only inculcating upon you this self-evident truth, that unless you are prepared for heaven, you shall not be admitted; and that, if you are fit for nothing but destruction, you must be destroyed. Can any mathematical demonstration be more plain than this? And are any of you so void of sense, reason and faith, as not to understand and believe it?

I now presume, that such of you as have made this discovery with regard to yourselves, are also convinced, that you cannot possibly escape destruction, unless your present temper be changed, and quite a new frame of spirit given you.

And who do you think, can work this happy change in your hearts! If you are so vain and ignorant, as to flatter yourselves that you can effect it in your own strength, make the trial, and you will soon be undeceived. It is God alone that can work in you both to will and to do. My text tells you, it is He that prepares the vessels of mercy for glory: it is his Holy Spirit alone that is equal to the arduous work.

But in what way is this influence to be expected? Is it in a course of impenitent sinning? of presumption and security? of sloth and negligence? No; to

expect it in that way, is to tempt the Lord your God. But such of you as would escape the damnation of hell; such of you as have any desire to be forever happy, hear me, seriously hear me, and I will tell you in a few plain words what you must do, if you would expect the aids of divine grace to prepare you for glory.

You must immediately think seriously of your condition: you must labour impartially to know the truth of your case: pry into the dreadful secrets of wickedness in your hearts: review your sinful lives: reflect upon the purity and justice of God and his law, and what you have deserved for a whole life of unnatural rebellion against him: read and hear the word of life with solemnity and attention, and use all proper means to furnish your minds with religious knowledge. It may pain you at first to confine your minds to such objects; but it must be done;—and there is no disputing against necessity: besides, the pain is medicinal; it will contribute to the recovery of your dying souls.

Again, You must accustom yourselves to frequent importunate prayer. If ever you be saved, or prepared for salvation, it will be in answer to prayer: therefore engage in it, persevere in it, and never give over until you obtain your request.

Further, You must guard against every thing that tends to divert your minds from this grand concern; as excessive hurries and cares about earthly things, vain and vicious company, and every avoidable temptation.

Finally, You must persevere in this course, if you hope to succeed; and never rest until you feel the dispositions of heaven wrought in your souls. A pang of remorse, a serious fit, a transient prayer, will not suffice, but you must hold on your way to the last. You may expect difficulties in this

new course, and you will probably meet with more than you can now foresee or expect. But you must break through all; for your immortal interest, your all is at stake.

This is the course I would advise you to, if ever you hope to be prepared for glory. I cannot give you any the least encouragement in any other way. If any other can shew you a more easy, and yet safe course, and produce sufficient authority for it, you may take it: but, for my part, if I teach you what I learn in my bible, I can give you no other directions; nor do I expect to be saved in any easier way myself. And, therefore, if you will choose another, you must be answerable for it. Remember I warn you against it, and would not be necessary to it for ten thousand worlds.

Now, if this course must be taken, I ask when, do you think, must it be begun? Will you appoint to-morrow, or next year, or old age, or a sick bed, for that purpose? Alas! you may never live to see that time. Before then you may drop into destruction, as rotten fruit fall to the ground by their own weight. Therefore now, this present fleeting now, is the only time you are sure of, and consequently, this is the only proper time to begin this course. Now then, now, while my voice is sounding in your ears, form the resolution, and carry it into immediate execution. Bear it home upon your hearts to your houses, and there let it dwell until the great work is done. O! that you did but know its importance and necessity! then you could not delay it one moment longer.

And now, if you have any regard for the God that made you, for the Lord that bought you, or for your own everlasting happiness, take this course immediately. If you have any need of excitements, take the following.

1. Consider your present dangerous situation. You hang over the pit of destruction by the slender thread of life, held up only by the hand of an angry God, as we hold a spider, or some poisonous insect, over a fire, ready to throw it in. You are ripe for destruction, and therefore in danger every day, every hour, every moment, of falling into it. You are as fit for destruction as a murderer for the gallows, or a mortified limb to be cut off. Such polluted vessels of wrath must be thrown out of the way into some dark corner in hell, that they may no more encumber or disgrace the more honourable apartments of the universe. And is this a situation in which it becomes you to be merry, and gay, and thoughtless, and eager after the trifles of time? O! does it not become you rather to be on your knees at the throne of grace, and vigorously pressing into the kingdom of God?

2. Reflect with how much long suffering God has endured you, notwithstanding all your audacious and repeated provocations. One would think one day's sinning against so holy and gracious a God, by a creature so deeply obliged to him, would make your case desperate, and that the evening of such a day would be the hour of your execution. But he has patiently borne with you for days, for months, for years, perhaps for scores of years. And all this time he has followed you with his blessings every moment, and granted you the means of preparation for glory. And yet you have been thoughtless, disobedient, ungrateful, rebellious still. How justly then may he inflict punishment upon you! And how industriously will his goodness and severity, his mercy and justice, be displayed in his treatment of you! What could you have desired more, in point of time, opportunity, persuasives, than you have enjoyed? Will it not

then appear evident, that your destruction is entirely of yourself, and that, as I have told you before, God and his throne will be guiltless forever?

3. Consider how dreadful will be your punishment, if you should perish at last by your present wilful negligence. My text tells you what will be the design of your punishment; it will be to shew the wrath of God, and make his power known. Such will be your punishment, as will be fit to shew that it is almighty power that inflicts it, and that it is an almighty God who is angry with you. It will be his professed design to display the dreadful glory of his vindictive attributes upon you, particularly his justice, as the supreme Magistrate of the universe: and even his justice deserves to be displayed; for justice is not that ugly, grim, horrible thing, which criminals imagine. In a ruler, especially in the supreme and universal ruler, justice is not only a majestic and terrible, but it is a lovely, amiable, ingratiating attribute, essential to his character, and to the public good, and so it appears to all competent judges; that is, to all who are not self-flattering criminals, and therefore parties. The display of this attribute, therefore, upon proper objects, is necessary, to give a full view of the Deity to the world; to represent him as he is.

Now, whatever attribute of his he intends to display in any of his works, he always does it in a manner worthy of himself. When his design was to display and glorify his creative power, wisdom, and goodness, see! what a stately, well furnished universe he spoke into being! What a magnificent, God-like building! When his design was to shew the riches of his grace towards our guilty race, what wonders did he perform! What inimit-

able exploits of condescension and love! His only begotten Son must become a man, must struggle with all the calamities of life for three-and-thirty long and painful years, must expire in torture upon an ignominious cross, and redeem the guilty with the blood of his heart. This was Godlike love and grace indeed, beyond all example. O! *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?* Micah vii. 18. He is as much distinguished from all other beings by the wonders of his love and grace, as by the eternity of his existence, or by that wisdom which planned the universe, or that power which produced it out of nothing. When in prosecution of the same design, he intends to give a farther display of the riches of his glorious grace upon the vessels of mercy, what godlike provisions hath he made for them! *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things he hath prepared for them.* He hath prepared for them a city, such a glorious residence, that he is not ashamed to be called their God. He is not ashamed to own the relation, because he has acted up to the character, and worthy of himself. Heb. xi. 16. And when his design is to shew his avenging wrath, and make his punitive power known; when it is to shew what Godlike punishments he can inflict, such as may, by their terror, declare him to be the author, and serve as loud warnings to all present, and, perhaps, future creations, to deter them from the breach of his sacred laws; and when the subjects of the punishment are strong capacious vessels of wrath, fit for nothing but destruction; I say, when this is the case, what Godlike vengeance will he execute! what signal, unexampled punishment will he inflict! The design of punishment, which is not the reformation of the criminal, but the benefit of others, and the

display of his perfections, require that he give a loose to all the terrors of his power. And what miracles of misery, what terrible illustrious monuments of vengeance will that perform and erect? As far surpassing all the punishments inflicted by mortals, as the creation of the world out of nothing exceeds all the works of human art.

And are you proof against the energy of such considerations as these? Then you are dreadfully fitted for destruction indeed! For the strongest persuasives to deter you from it, which God himself can reveal, or the human mind conceive, have no weight upon you!

But may I hope that I shall succeed at least with some of you this day to fly from this tremendous destruction, into which you are this moment ready to fall? Alas! it is hard, if even a stranger cannot prevail with so much as one soul, in so large an assembly, and in a point so reasonable, and so strongly enforced by your own interest. But I must leave this warning with you, and if you do not remember it now, you will remember it millions of ages hence, when the remembrance of it will torment you with intolerable anguish.

There are sundry in this assembly, I doubt not, who, by comparing their dispositions with the nature of heavenly happiness, may make the welcome discovery, that they are, in some measure, prepared for it. To such happy souls I have time only to say, that if this be your character, you may be sure that immense happiness shall be yours: your present heavenly temper is a certain pledge and earnest of it. You may be sure God would never make you fit for it, and then exclude you from it.

And, on the other hand, if you find that the dispositions of hell are subdued in you, assure your-

selves God will not doom you to it. Can you think he would gain your hearts and allure your love, and then bid you depart from him, to languish and pine away with the eager anxious pantings of disappointed bereaved love? Will he doom you to reside forever among those whose works you detest, and whose society you abhor? No; he will thoroughly prepare you, and make you holy, and then advance you to dwell forever in that presence which you love, in the element of holiness; to breathe in that clear refined air; to live in that wholesome climate, so agreeable to your constitution; to be employed in those services in which you delight; to enjoy that sublime and delicate happiness which you relish, and to converse in that society which you affect, and which is of the same temper and spirit with you.—And for that blessed region may we all be prepared, and there may we all meet at last, to enjoy that endless felicity which awaits those who firmly put their confidence in God, through Jesus Christ! Amen.

SERMON XLIV.

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

ACTS XVII. 30.—*And the times of this ignorance God winked at: but now commandeth all men every where to repent.*

WE here find St. Paul in as learned an assembly as perhaps he ever appeared in. We find him in Athens, a city of Greece, famous all over the world for learning; a city where Socrates, Plato, and the

most illustrious philosophers of antiquity, lived and taught. We find him in the famous court of Areopagus, or Mars-Hill, where the wisest men and best philosophers of this wise and philosophical city were met together; in the same court where Socrates, the most likely candidate in all the heathen world for the honours of martyrdom, had been accused and condemned, and for very much the same crime, namely, introducing a foreign religion, and bringing the gods of the country in contempt. And how does the apostle conduct himself in these critical circumstances? Why, instead of amusing them with a learned harangue: instead of confirming them in their idolatry, and vindicating himself, by publicly professing, with poor Socrates, that he worshipped the gods of the country, and sacrificed at the established altars; instead of this, I say, the apostle boldly, though in a very handsome and genteel manner, exposes their superstitions, calls them off from their idols to the worship of the one true God, the Maker and Ruler of heaven and earth; and, having asserted these fundamental articles of natural religion, he introduces the glorious peculiarities of revelation, and preached Jesus Christ to them, as the Saviour and Judge of the world.

In my text he inculcates the great gospel duty of repentance as binding upon all mankind, (philosophers and judges, as well as the illiterate vulgar,) in Athens, as well as in the most barbarous countries of the earth.

The times of this ignorance God winked at. By the times of ignorance, he means the times previous to the propagation of the gospel in the heathen world, who for many ages were sunk in the most gross ignorance of the true God, and in the most absurd and impious superstition and idolatry,

notwithstanding the loud remonstrances of the light of reason, and the various lessons of the book of creation, so legible to all. When it is said that God winked at these times of ignorance, it may mean, as our translators seem to have understood it, that God seemed to connive at, or not to take notice of this universal ignorance that had overspread the world, so as to send his prophets to them for their reformation. In this view, there is a strong antithesis between the first and the last parts of my text, *q. d.* "God once seemed to connive at the idolatry and superstition of mankind, and to let them go on, without sending his messengers to call them to repentance; and in these dark times their impenitence was the less inexcusable. But now the case is altered; now he has introduced a glorious day, and he plainly and loudly calls and commands all men every where to repent; and, therefore, if you now continue impenitent, you are utterly inexcusable." Or the word may be rendered, *God overlooked* these times of ignorance: he overlooked them by way of displeasure: he would not favour such guilty times with a gracious glance of his eye: and in righteous displeasure, he did not so much as give them an explicit call to repentance: or he overlooked them by way of forbearance. Ignorant and idolatrous as the world was, he did not destroy it, but bore it from age to age, with a design to publish a more explicit command to repent: and now that time is come; that time, for the sake of which a long-suffering God had borne with a guilty world so long. Now he commands all men every where to repent; all men, Gentiles as well as Jews: every where in the dark heathen lands, as well as in the enlightened spot of Judea.

Repentance is indeed a duty enjoined by our natural reason, and strongly enforced by the Jewish religion; but it is the gospel that affords the strongest motives and allurements, and the best helps and advantages for repentance. The gospel was first introduced by a loud call to repentance: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, was the united cry of John the Baptist, of Christ, and his disciples. And St. Paul sums up the substance of his preaching in these two articles, *Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.* Acts xx. 21.

Repentance is universally acknowledged to be an essential ingredient in the religion of a sinner.—They who deny the christian religion, and particularly the necessity of Christ's death to make atonement for sin, they deny it upon this supposition, that the light of nature teaches us the necessity of repentance, and that alone is a sufficient atonement. Thus, even infidels, Jews, Pagans, and Mahometans, agree in asserting the necessity of repentance. It is this grand catholic uncontroverted duty, and not the little disputable peculiarity of a party, that I am now about to inculcate upon you: *And he that hath an ear to hear let him hear.*

But here, I hope, you are ready to request me, “Pray let us know what repentance is, before you exhort us to it. How may we know what it is to repent, and whether we have truly repented or not?”

If this be your desire, it directly coincides with my main design: and I shall endeavour, with the utmost plainness and faithfulness, to tell you what gospel repentance is, and help you to determine whether ever you have been the subjects of it.

Now it is evident both from scripture and common sense, that every pang of sorrow for sin, and every instance of reformation, is not that repen-

tance which we have now under consideration. If horror of conscience, and fears of hell, could constitute true repentance, then Judas was a true penitent; for his horror and fear were so great that he could not live under it. If sudden pangs of terror and remorse, with some resolutions to amend, could constitute true repentance, then Felix, the heathen governor, was a true penitent; for we are told, that, *while Paul reasoned before him, concerning temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come, he trembled, Acts xxiv. 25,* and seemed resolved to give him another hearing on these subjects. If a reformation in many instances were the same thing with repentance, then Herod, the murderer of John the Baptist, was a true penitent; for we are told, *he heard John gladly, and did many things at his exaltation. Mark vi. 20.* These knew nothing of repentance unto life; and, therefore, we may feel what they felt, and yet remain impenitent.

I scarcely think there are any of you so hardy and reprobated of God, as never to have experienced any sort of repentance. It is likely there is not one in this assembly but has sometimes been scared with dreadful apprehensions of death, hell, and the consequences of sin: and perhaps you have cried and wept to think of your sinful life, and trembled to think what would be the end of it. You have also prayed to God to forgive you, and resolved and promised you would reform. Nay, it is possible, the terrors of the Lord and a sense of guilt, may have almost overwhelmed and distracted you, haunted you from day to day, and disturbed your nightly slumbers. On these accounts you conclude, perhaps, that you are true penitents: but, alas! after all this, you may be but impenitent sinners. True evangelical repentance has the follow-

ing distinguishing characteristics; by which I request you to examine yourselves.

I. It extends to the heart as well as to the practice. Every true penitent, indeed, has an affecting sense of the many sins and guilty imperfections of his life; but then his repentance does not stop there, but he looks into the horrid arcana, the secrets of wickedness within. He traces up these corrupt streams to the more corrupt fountain in his heart, from which they flow. A blind mind, a stupid heart, a heart disaffected to God, that could live content for months, for years without loving God, a heart dead to his service, a heart insensible to eternal things, a heart excessively set upon things below, a secure conscience, a stubborn ungovernable will; these, to the true penitent, appear the greatest crimes, while, by a thoughtless world, they are hardly noticed as slight imperfections.—Hence when his walk in the eyes of men is unblameable, and even imitable, he still finds daily occasion for repentance and humiliation before God. For O! his heart, or his inward temper, is not such as it should be: he does not love God nor man as he knows he should: he does not delight in the service of God as he should: every thought, every motion of his heart towards forbidden objects alarms him, like a symptom of the plague, or the stirring of an enemy in ambush; and he is immediately in arms to make resistance. The world in general are very well pleased if the matter of their actions be good, and if they abstain from what is materially evil: but this does not satisfy the true penitent: he narrowly inspects the principles, the motives, and the ends of his actions; and there he finds sufficient cause for mortification and sorrow, even when his actions in themselves are lawful and good. In short, every true penitent is a critic upon

his own heart; and there he finds constant cause for repentance while in this imperfect state.

The proof of this is so evident, that I need hardly mention it. Can you suppose it will satisfy a true lover of God and goodness, just to have a clean outside, while his heart is a mere mass of corruption? Will it content such a one, that he performs all the outward duties of religion, if there be no life or spirit in them? Will God account that man truly penitent, who thinks it enough that he is not guilty of open acts of wickedness, though he indulges it, and loves it in his heart? No; such repentance is a shallow, superficial thing, and is good for nothing. David's repentance reached his heart. Hence, in his penitential psalm, (li.) he not only confesses his being guilty of the blood of Uriah, but that he was shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin, and earnestly prays, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.* Psalm li. 5, 6, 10. And he is deeply sensible of the want of truth or integrity in the inward parts.

Now, my brethren, if this be an essential ingredient in true repentance, do not some of you see, that you are destitute of it? and, consequently, that you are still impenitent sinners, and ready to perish as such? A dreadful conviction! But do not shut your eyes against it; for, until you see your error, you cannot correct it.

II. In evangelical repentance there is a deep sense of the intrinsic evil of sin, and a hearty sorrow for it as done against God.

Many that think they repent of sin, have no proper sorrow upon the account of sin against God, but only on account of the punishment it is like to bring upon themselves. It is not sin they hate, but hell. Were it possible for them to enjoy their sins, and yet be happy, they would never think of re-

pening; and hence repentance is really an hardship in their view. Need I tell you that such a servile, forced repentance, is good for nothing? If the criminal is very sorry, not because he has offended, but because he is to be executed for it, would you call him a true penitent? If your slave cries and trembles, not from a sense of his offence against you, but for fear of the lash, do you think he truly repents of it? No; it is self-love, and not the love of duty; it is fear of the punishment, and not hatred of the crime, that is the principle of this servile, ungenerous repentance.

Hence you may see you may be very sorry for your sin, because it may fix a scandal upon your character, because it may have injured your temporal estate, or because it may ruin you in the eternal world: I say, you may be very sorry for sin on such servile reasons as these, and yet know nothing of true repentance. True repentance is a more kindly, generous thing; it proceeds from an affecting sense of the baseness and malignity of sin in itself. Sin appears to the true penitent, as some sorts of poison to us; that is not only hateful because it is deadly and destructive, but hateful and nauseous in itself. I do not mean that the fear of punishment is no ingredient in true repentance: the love of God and self-love are very consistent if the latter is kept in a due subordination to the former; and therefore the fear of punishment has great weight even with the evangelical penitent. But I mean the fear of punishment is not the principal, much less the only spring and motive of true repentance; the true penitent hates sin, even when he is not thinking of heaven or hell, but only viewing it in its own nature. Though it were allowed him to go to heaven in the ways of sin, he would by no means choose it. Heaven itself would be the

less acceptable to him, if it were the end of such a course.

He is also deeply sorry for sin, as against God, or as contrary to him. As rebellion against his authority, as a contrariety to his holiness, as an opposition to his will and pleasure, as a most base, ungrateful return for all his goodness, and as the cause of all the agonies of the blessed Jesus; he hates it, he mourns over it with ingenuous and kindly relentings of heart. It was sin in this view, as against God, that lay heaviest upon David's heart. He seems to have forgotten the injury he had done to Uriah and his wife, while all his attention was engrossed by the horror of his crime, as against God. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.* Psalm li. 4. It was this view of sin that armed Joseph, in the heat of youth, with power to resist the solicitations of his mistress. *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Gen. xxxix. 9. O! the thought of sinning against God, against so glorious, so gracious and excellent a being, pierced him to the heart, and he could not bear it. Thus it is with every true penitent. It wounds him to the heart to think that he should treat so good and holy a God so basely. This thought would break his heart, even though sin should be attended with no danger to himself; and it does in fact grieve him, and melt down his soul into generous sorrows, even when he has not one thought of his own danger.

Nay, of so generous a nature is evangelical repentance, that the penitent soul never melts so freely, nor bursts out into such a flood of ingenuous sorrows, as when it has reason to hope that a gracious God has freely forgiven it. Then it sees the base ingratitude and complicated vileness of sin.

as committed against so gracious a God. God's forgiving the penitent is a reason to him why he should never forgive himself. If God had concealed the glory of his grace, and rendered himself less lovely, he would be less sensible of the evil of sinning against him, and less sorry for it. But O! that he should sin against a God who is so gracious as to forgive him after all! This thought cuts him to the heart. Hence the evidences of pardon, and the hope of salvation, do not put an end to true repentance, but, on the other hand, promote it. This blessed hope indeed abates the terrors of a slave, and mixes many sweets in the bitter cup of repentance; but it is so far from putting a stop to the flow of generous, filial sorrows, that it opens new springs for them, and causes them to gush out in larger streams!

How different is this from the general temper of the world! If they repent, it is while hell stands open before them, and the load of guilt oppresses them. But could they believe that God has forgiven their sin, and that they shall notwithstanding be saved, they would be very easy about it; nay, they would most ungenerously, from this very consideration, take encouragement to sin the more boldly! This is more than the secret sentiment, it is the avowed profession of multitudes. Ask them how they can go on impenitent in sin, and be easy in such a course? their answer is, *God is merciful; and they hope he will forgive and save them after all.* What is this but an explicit purpose to sin against God, because he is good, and to abuse his mercy, if he will be merciful? Nothing but the lash can keep such sordid, slavish souls in awe. Their hearts are dead to gratitude and every generous passion. If God will have them to repent; he must give them no hope of pardon and

happiness; for as this hope rises, their repentance ceases, and sin appears a harmless inoffensive thing. But how different is this from the generous temper of the true penitent! It wounds him more to offend a sin-pardoning than a sin-punishing God. And never does his heart melt so kindly, as when under the warm beams of divine love; never does he repent so heartily as with a pardon in his hand, and with the prospect of heaven open before him. Do not think this an excessive refinement of repentance, for common sense may tell you, that God will never accept of that repentance, which has the punishment and not the crime for its objects; and this generous temper is assigned to the true penitent in the sacred scriptures. See Ezek. xvi. 63. After God has promised many blessings to the Jews, this is mentioned as the consequence, *Thou shalt remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.* So, (Ezek. xxxvi. 31.) After many promises of rich blessing, it is said, *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations.* You see this shame and confusion, this penitential remembrance and self-loathing, are the effects of God's being reconciled. When he is pacified, then they are ashamed, confounded, and loathe themselves.

Brethren, does your repentance stand this test? Examine and see; for if it does not, it is only a repentance to be repented of.

III. True repentance extends to all known sin, without exception.

If sin, considered in itself, or sin, as done against God, be the object of true repentance, then it fol-

lows, that whatever is sin in itself, or against God, must be the object of it. Every sin, whether it consists in neglecting what is commanded, or doing what is forbidden: whether it be immediately against God, against our neighbour, or ourselves; whether it be fashionable, constitutional, pleasing, or painful; every sin, without exception, as far as it is known, is hated and lamented by the true penitent. He should indeed regard them according to their different degrees of aggravation; but he should not except any of them, even the smallest. They are all forbidden by the same divine authority; all contrary to the holy nature of God; all opposite to the obligations of duty and gratitude we are under to him; and, therefore, they must be all repented of. This was the character of David, *That he hated every false way.* Psalm cxix. 128.

Now, does not this consideration prove some of you impenitent sinners? Do you not except some sins out of your repentance, and plead for an indulgence to them? If so, you may be sure your hearts are not right with God.

IV. True repentance always includes reformation.

There are many whose whole life seems to be one continued struggle between the strength of sin and conscience; and they run round in a circle of sinning and repenting, repenting and sinning, all their days. Sin is so strong that it will prevail, in spite of all the struggles of conscience; and conscience remains so vigorous, that it still continues to struggle, though without success. They commit sin, then are sorry for it; then commit it again; and in this vicissitude they spend their lives. Nay, the repentance of some is so far from reforming them from sin, that it rather encourages them to

return to it; for now, they think, they have cleared off the old score, and they may venture upon a new one; till that also swells very high, and then they have another fit of repentance to clear off this new account.

Alas! brethren, is this repentance unto life?—What does that sorrow for sin avail, which leaves the heart as much in love with it as ever? The only reason why sorrow is a necessary ingredient in repentance, is, because we will not, we cannot forsake sin, till it be made bitter to us; and, therefore, when our sorrow has not this effect, it is altogether useless. Can that repentance save you, which is so far from being an ingredient of holiness, that it is a preparative to sin? A repentance that answers no other end but to make conscience easy after a debauch, and prepare it for another surfeit!

Is this the nature of true repentance? No; it is the character of every true penitent, that sin has not an habitual dominion over him. Rom. vi. 14. Remember that maxim of the wise man, *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy.* Prov. xxviii. 13. Observe, not only confessing, but also forsaking them, is necessary to the obtaining of mercy. The same thing appears from the various expressions used in scripture to describe repentance. To repent, in the language of the bible, is to depart from our evil ways; to cease to do evil, and learn to do well; to cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts: which expressions signify not only sorrow for sin, but especially reformation from it. In vain, therefore, do you pretend to repent, if you still go on in the sins you repent of. If you indulge yourselves in any one known sin, however small you may think it, you are utter strangers to true

repentance. I do not mean by this, that true penitents are perfectly free from sin in this life: alas! their painful experience makes the best of them sensible of the contrary. But I mean two things, which deserve your notice: the one is, that every true penitent has an habitual dominion over sin: the principles of religion and virtue are prevailingly uppermost in his soul, and habitually regulate his behaviour. As for gross, overt acts of sin, he is habitually free from them, and, indeed, generally this is no great difficulty. To him it is no such mighty exploit to abstain from drunkenness, swearing, injustice, or the like. And as to his daily infirmities, they are contrary to the habitual, prevailing bent of his soul, and the matter of his daily lamentation. And this introduces the other remark I had in view; which is this, that it does not appear a kind of privilege to the true penitent that he cannot be perfect in this life: but it is the daily grief and burden of his soul that he is not. Many seem well pleased that this is an imperfect state, because they think it furnishes them with a plea or an excuse for their neglect of the service of God, and for their sinful indulgences. In short, sin is their delight, and, therefore, freedom from it would be a painful bereavement to them; and they are glad they are in such a state as will admit of their retaining it. Now such persons, as I observed, do really esteem it a privilege to be imperfect, and they rejoice in it as their happiness, that they are able to sin: but it is quite the reverse with the true penitent: perfection in holiness, and an entire freedom from sin, is the object of his eager desire and most vigorous pursuit; and he can never be easy until he enjoys it. If he cannot enjoy the pleasure of serving God as he would in the present state, he must, at least,

enjoy the pleasure of grieving over, and lamenting his guilty imperfections. If he cannot get free from sin, his old enemy, he will, at least, take a kind of pleasing revenge upon it, by hating and resisting it, and loathing it, and himself upon the account of it. In short the remains of sin, all things considered, and taking one time with another, afford him more uneasiness, perplexity, and sorrow, than all other things in the world. O! if he were but delivered from this body of death, he would be happy, however oppressed with other burdens; but while this lies upon him, all the world cannot render him easy and happy.

From the whole, you see that reformation is an essential ingredient of true repentance; and in vain do you pretend that you repent of sin, if you still indulge yourselves in it. You may try to excuse yourselves from the frailty of your nature, the imperfection of the present state, or the strength of temptation; but in spite of all your excuses, this is an eternal truth, that unless your repentance reforms you, and turns you from the outward practice or secret indulgence of those sins you are sorry for, it is not repentance unto life.

V. And lastly, Evangelical repentance implies a believing application to God for pardon only through Jesus Christ.

Evangelical repentance does not consist in despairing agonies and hopeless horrors of conscience, but is attended with an humble hope of forgiveness and acceptance; and this hope is founded entirely upon the merits of Jesus, and not of our repentance and reformation.*

How opposite to this is the prevailing spirit of the world! If they repent, it is to make amends for

*See the foregoing Sermon.

their sins, and procure the divine favour by their repentance; and thus, even their repentance becomes a snare to them, and one cause of their destruction. In this sense, a bold saying of one of the fathers may be true: "That more souls are destroyed by their repentance than by their sin;" that is, sin is evidently evil, and they are in no danger of trusting in it to recommend them to God. But even their superficial, servile repentance has the appearance of goodness, and therefore they make a righteousness of it; and upon this quicksand they build their hopes, until they sink into remediless ruin.

Thus I have endeavoured to open to you the great gospel duty of repentance, as distinguished from all counterfeits and delusive appearances. I hope you have all understood me: for I have laboured to make myself understood, and spoke as plainly as I could. If you have experienced such a generous, evangelical repentance as has been described, you may venture your souls upon it, that it is repentance unto life; but if you are strangers to it, I may leave it to yourselves to determine, whether you can be saved in your present condition.

I have only two or three remarks more to make for the farther illustration of this subject. The first is, that all the principles of degenerate nature can never produce this generous and thorough repentance, but that it is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit. Self-love, and the other low and slavish principles of nature, may produce a servile, mercenary repentance, proceeding from the fears of punishment; but only the love of God, and the noble principles of the new nature, can bring you to a kindly, ingenuous repentance, from noble motives; and it is the Holy Spirit alone that can

shed abroad the love of God in your hearts, and implant these generous principles of the new nature.—The second remark is, that this generous, supernatural repentance, is not the first repentance of an awakened sinner. No; he is first alarmed with terror and dreadful apprehensions of punishment; and all the springs of nature are put in motion before these nobler principles are infused, and he is brought to a genuine, evangelical repentance.—Therefore, thirdly, The only way to attain to this supernatural repentance is, to use all proper means to excite the springs of natural repentance, particularly, to reflect upon your sins, upon their number and aggravation, and your dreadful danger. While you are destitute of the love of God, let self-love excite you to be sorry for your sins. While you cannot see the intrinsic evil of sin as against God, see at least the insupportable misery it is like to bring upon you. If you have not such generous souls as to mourn over sin as against a sin-forgiving God, at least mourn over it as against a sin-punishing God. And while the principles of nature are thus exerted, who knows but God may work in you diviner principles, and give you repentance unto life!

My subject is now ripe for an application; and this shall be nothing else but a short illustration of the other parts of my text.

Let me then, in the first place, publish the royal edict of the King of heaven in this assembly: *God commandeth all men to repent*; he commands you in various ways; commands you with the motions of his Spirit striving with you, and by the voice of your own consciences, which is the voice of God; commands you by his providence, which tends to lead you to repentance, and especially by his gospel, which he has sent to you for this end. He now

commands you by my mouth; for while I speak what his word authorises, it does not lose its efficacy, nor cease to be his word by passing through my lips. Remember, he commands you, he lays his authority upon you, to repent. You are not left to your discretion in the case. Dare you reject the known, express command of the divine Majesty? Should a voice now break from the excellent glory, directed to each of you by name, saying, *Repent! repent!* would it not startle you?—would it not shock you, to set yourselves in opposition to so express and immediate a command of the God that made you? Well, his command to you in the gospel is as real, as authoritative and binding, as an immediate voice from heaven. And dare you disobey it? Dare you go home this day with this additional guilt upon you, of disobeying a known command of the supreme Lord of heaven and earth? Dare you provoke him to jealousy? Are you stronger than he? Can you harden yourselves against him, and yet prosper? I again proclaim it aloud in your hearing, The King of kings, my Master, has issued out his royal mandate, requiring you, by these presents, to repent, upon pain of everlasting damnation. This day it is proclaimed in your ears, therefore, this day repent. If you refuse to repent, let this conviction follow you home, and perpetually haunt you, that you have this day, when you were met together under pretence of worshipping God, knowingly disobeyed the great gospel-command. And to the great God you must answer for your disobedience.

In the next place, my text tells you, he commands all men to repent: all men, of all ranks and characters. This command, therefore, is binding upon you all. The great God cries to you all, *Repent! Repent,* young and old, rich and poor,

white and black, free and bond;—Repent, ye young sinners, now, while your hearts are soft and tender, and your passions easily moved, and you are not hardened by a long course of habitual sinning: Repent, ye grey-headed veteran sinners, now at last repent, when the load of sins, heaped up for so many years, lies so heavy upon you, and you are walking every moment on the slippery brink of eternity:—Repent, ye rich men; ye are not above this command:—Repent, ye poor; ye are not beneath it:—Repent, ye poor slaves; your colour, or low state in life, cannot free you from this command:—Repent, ye masters, for your sins against your Master, who is in heaven. In short, God commandeth all men, kings and subjects, the highest and the lowest, and all the intermediate ranks, to repent.

To render the call still more pointed and universal, it is added, *He commandeth all men, every where, to repent.* Every where, in city and country; in palaces and cottages; in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, wherever the trumpet of the gospel sounds the alarm to repent; in Virginia, in this very spot where we now stand. Here the command of God finds you out, and calls you to repent. Repentance is not a local duty, but it extends as far as human nature, as far as the utmost boundaries of this guilty world. Wherever there are sinners under a dispensation of grace, there this command reaches. It reaches to the busy merchant in his store, to the laborious planter in the field, and to the tradesman in his shop; to the sailor tossing on the waves, and to the inhabitant of solid ground; to the man of learning in his study, and to the illiterate peasant; to the judge upon the bench, as well as to the criminal in the dungeon; to the man of sobriety, to the unthinking rake, and

to the brutish debauchee; to the minister in the pulpit, and to the people in their pews; to the dissenter in the meeting-house, and to the conformist in church; to husbands and wives; to parents and children; to masters and servants; to all the sons of men, whatever they are, wherever they dwell, whatever they are doing; to all these the command reaches. And do you not find yourselves included in it? If you are men, if you dwell any where upon this guilty globe, you are included; for let me tell you once more, God commandeth all men, every where, to repent.

Nor are you allowed to delay your compliance. Repentance is your present duty: For *now he commandeth all men every where to repent*: Now, when the times of ignorance are over, and the gospel sheds heavenly day among you: Now, when he will no longer wink, or connive at your impenitence, but takes strict notice of it with just indignation: Now, while the day of grace lasts, and there is place left for repentance: Now, before you are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and while his spirit is striving with you: Now, while his judgments are in the earth, and your country is surrounded with the terrors of war: Now, while he is publishing his command to a guilty country to repent, by the horrid sound of trumpets and cannons:* Now, while you have time, which may be taken from you the next year, the next week, or perhaps, the very next moment: Now, while you enjoy health of body, and the exercise of your reason; and your attention is not tied down to pain and agony: Now, and not to-morrow; not upon a sick bed; not in a dying hour: Now is the time, in which God commands you to repent: he does

*This Sermon is dated New-Kent, May 22, 1757.

not allow you one hour's delay; and what right have you to allow it to yourselves? Therefore, now, this moment, let us all repent: all, without exception. Why should there not be one assembly of true penitents upon our guilty globe? And, O! why should it not be this? Why should not repentance be as universal as sin? And, since we are all sinners, O! why should we not all be humble penitents? Repent you must, either in time or eternity, upon earth, or in hell. You cannot possibly avoid it. The question is not, *Shall I repent?* for that is beyond a doubt. But the question is, "Shall I repent now, when it may reform and save me; or shall I put it off to the eternal world, when my repentance will be my punishment, and can answer no end but to torment me?" And is this a hard question! Does not common sense determine it in favour of the present time? Therefore, let the duty be as extensively observed as it is commanded: Let all men every where repent. Blessed God! pour out upon us a spirit of grace and supplication, that there may be a great mourning among us, that each of us may mourn apart, and our wives apart; that we may *mourn, as one that mourneth for an only son; and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for a first born.* Zech. xii. 10. Grant this for Jesus sake! Amen.

SERMON XLV.

THE TENDER ANXIETIES OF MINISTERS FOR THEIR PEOPLE.

GALAT. IV. 19, 20.—*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*

NOTHING could be more agreeable to a generous spirit that loves God and mankind, than to be fully satisfied of the real goodness and happiness of his fellow-creatures; and nothing is more painful than an anxious jealousy and fear in a matter he has so much at heart. Some profess themselves very easy in this respect, and they glory in this easiness as a high pitch of charity and benevolence. They hope well of all—except, perhaps, their personal enemies, who, for that very reason, must be very worthless and execrable creatures. Though scripture and reason do jointly declare, that men of bad lives, who habitually indulge themselves in sin, and neglect the known duties of religion and morality, are no objects of rational charity at all, but must be judged destitute of true piety by all that would judge according to evidence; “yet, God forbid, say they, that they should judge any man. They are not of a censorious spirit, but generous and benevolent in their hopes of all.” They can venture to hope that the tree is good, even when the fruit is corrupt: that is, that a good man may lead a bad life. But this temper ought not to be honoured with the noble name of Charity. Let it be called ignorance, gross ignorance of the nature of true religion; or infidelity and avowed disbe-

belief of what the scripture determines concerning the character of a good man; or let it be called indifferency, an indifferency whether men be now good or bad, and whether they shall be happy or miserable hereafter. Where there is no love or affectionate concern, there will be no uneasy jealousy. Or let it be called a mere artifice for self-defence. Men are often cautious of condemning others, not from benevolence to them, but out of mercy to themselves, not being willing to involve themselves in the same condemnation; since they are conscious they are as bad as others, they must be sparing to others, in order to spare themselves. These are the true names of what passes current under the name of Charity in the world.

St. Paul, whose heart was capable of the kindest sentiments to mankind, could not enjoy the pleasure of this promiscuous charity. He could not thus conclude well of all, not even of all under the christian name; not of all whom he once hoped were his spiritual children; no, not of all the members of the once flourishing churches of Galatia, where he met with so friendly a reception, and had so much promising appearance of success. *I stand in doubt of you*, says he.

The state and character of these churches, we may partly learn from this epistle. A considerable number of Galatians had been converted from heathenism to christianity by St. Paul's ministry; and in the transports of their first zeal they made a very promising appearance: hence he puts them in mind that they had begun in the spirit, (ch. iii. 3,) that when they first started in the christian race, they had run well, (ch. v. 7,) that they had suffered many things in the cause of the gospel; (ch. iii. 4,) and as to their affection to him, it was very extraordinary. *Ye received me,*

says he, *as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ.* *I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.* (ch. iv. 14, 15.) But alas! how naturally do the most flourishing churches tend to decay! How frail and fickle is man! How inconstant popular applause! These promising churches of Galatia soon began to decline; and their favourite, St. Paul, their apostle and spiritual father, appeared in quite another light, appeared as their enemy, because he told them the truth. There was a spurious set of preachers in that age, who corrupted the pure gospel of Christ with Jewish mixture. The ceremonies of the law of Moses, and the traditions of their elders, they held as of perpetual and universal obligation; and as such they imposed them even upon the christian converts from among the Gentiles, who never had any thing to do with them. Had they been recommended to their observance as indifferences or prudentials, it would not have had such bad influence upon christianity. But they continued to impose them as absolutely necessary to salvation, and represented the righteousness revealed in the gospel as insufficient without these additions. Thus they laboured to corrupt the great doctrine of a sinner's justification by faith alone, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that grand article upon which the church stands or falls, according to an old observation of Luther. These judaizing teachers had artfully insinuated themselves into the Galatian churches, and spread the poison of their legal doctrines. This sunk St. Paul in the esteem of his converts, and they exchanged his pure gospel for another, more adapted to their taste. In consequence of this, religion was declining fast among

them; and St. Paul is alarmed lest he should have bestowed labour in vain upon them.

This epistle is an affectionate attempt to recover them. It is for the most part argumentative; for its author was not fond of moving their passions without enlightening their understandings. But sometimes he melts into the most pathetic strains, and gives the most affecting touches to the heart. Such a tender, passionate address is this in my text. *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.* What a tender, moving, paternal address is this!

My little children—This is a fond affectionate appellation; the language of a tender father. It strongly expresses his paternal love and solicitude for the Galatians. The same style he uses to the Thessalonians—*You know how we exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.* 1 Thess. ii. 11. He may also call them his children, to intimate that he had begotten them by the gospel as spiritual children to God: or rather as the following words suggest, he alludes to the sickness and anxiety of a mother in conception, and the pangs and agonies of child-bearing; and by these he illustrates the pangs and agonies of zeal, and the affectionate solicitude he had felt for them while Christ was forming in them under his ministry, and they were in the critical hour of the new-birth. He might well call them his children, because he had suffered all the pains of a mother for them. He adds the epithet *little, my little children*, because the fond language of a parent affects such diminutives, or perhaps to intimate their small progress in christianity. They were but little children in grace still.

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again—I have just observed this is an allusion to the painful disorders and pangs of conception and birth; by which the apostle strongly represents the agonies of affectionate zeal, and tender anxieties he felt for the Galatians. But what rendered them doubly painful to him, was, that he was obliged to feel them more than once—*I travail of you in birth again.* He had cheerful hopes that Christ was indeed formed in them, and that they were born from above, and consequently that he should have no more occasion to feel those agonies and throes he had suffered for them. But alas! he had now reason to fear the contrary, and, therefore, he must again feel the same pangs and agonies: he must *travail in birth again,*

Until Christ be formed in you; that is, until they are made new creatures after the image of Christ, until the sacred fœtus be formed in their hearts; until the heavenly embryo grow and ripen for birth, or until they be conformed to Jesus Christ in heart and practice; till then he can never be easy. Though they should retain the christian name, though they should make great proficiency in other attainments, though they should become as much attached to him as ever, yet he must still feel the pangs of birth for them, till Christ be really formed in them.

I desire to be present with you now. In his absence they had been corrupted by the judaizing teachers; and he hoped his presence might have some happy influence to recover them. He was impatient of the restraints of a literary correspondence, and longed to pour out all his heart to them in a free address.

I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice. When he left them they were in a flour

ishing state, and therefore he took his leave of them in the warmest language of affection, approbation and confidence. “*But now, says he, I wish to be present with you, that I may alter my address; that I may change my voice into more severe and alarming strains; and instead of congratulating you upon your happy state, warn you of your danger.*” Or his meaning may be, “*I find myself obliged to use severe language with you in this epistle, which is by no means agreeable to me. I therefore desire to be present with you, that I may in person use means for your recovery, that thereupon I may change my voice, and speak to you in a soft approving strain, which is always most pleasing to me, as it would be to you. It is quite contrary to my inclination to use such chiding language to my dear little children.*” Or perhaps he may mean, “*I desire to be present with you, that I may know the different characters of your members, and that I may be able to change my voice, and address them accordingly; that I may warn, admonish, exhort, or comfort you, as your respective cases may require. I would willingly speak comfortably to you all promiscuously, but this I cannot now do.*”

For I stand in doubt of you. When I parted with you last, I had great confidence in you, and hoped that you would persevere: but now I stand in doubt of you, and therefore must alter my voice to you if I were present with you. While I am thus doubtful of you, I cannot speak comfortably to you all promiscuously; but I must honestly tell you my suspicions of you, and, until there appear a change in you, I cannot change my voice into more pleasing strains.

My dear hearers, the charge is entrusted to me by the great Shepherd, for which I must give an

account: you and I are too nearly concerned in this text to consider it merely as a piece of history, referring only to St. Paul and the Galatians seven-teen hundred years ago: I must bring it nearer home in a particular application. God forbid so vain and proud a thought should ever find place in my heart, as to set myself upon the footing of equality with St. Paul, the chief of the apostles. I will not tell you how much and how often I have been mortified, especially of late, at the thoughts of my vast inferiority, not only to him, but to the ordinary ministers of Christ of a lower class. You seldom hear a sermon from me but what fills me with shame and confusion in the review; and I almost cease to wonder that the gospel has so little success among you, while managed by so unskilful a hand. Yet I hope I may truly profess so much sincere affection and concern for you, as to warrant me to borrow the words of the apostle, though in a much lower sense: *My little children, of whom I travail in birth, till Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you, and to change my voice, according to the variety of your cases; for I am in doubt of some of you.* And I hope you are disposed to give me a serious hearing, and a serious hearing is justly expected from you; for, remember, the day of death and the day of judgment will come, and that you must die, you must be judged, you must be doomed to your everlasting state.

I stand in doubt of some of you. I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. And if there be no ground for it, you will forgive me; for if it be an error, it is the error of love. Though I was an entire stranger to you all, I might justly harbour this jealousy of some of you, upon this general principle, that there never yet was so pure a church met in one place, as not to have one insin-

cere, hypocritical professor in it. Even the apostles, the most select society that ever was formed, had a Judas among them. And can we expect more than apostolic purity in such a large, promiscuous crowd as generally frequents this house? In every church there are, alas! some suspicious characters; and my present design is to describe such characters, and then leave it to yourselves to judge whether there be not such among you.

Forgive me, if I suppose some of you live in the greatest neglect of family-religion. You lie down and rise up, perhaps, for weeks, months, and years, and yet never call your families together morning and evening to worship the great God who has placed you in families. If this be the character of any of you, then I must plainly tell you, I stand in doubt of you. I really doubt you have no relish for the worship of God; for if you had, how could you, as it were, excommunicate yourselves from the precious privilege of drawing near to God with your dear families, and devoting yourselves and them to him? I really doubt you have no deep, affecting concern for the salvation of your domestics, nor consequently for your own, otherwise how could you neglect a duty that has so direct a natural tendency to make religious impressions upon their minds? Can any thing more naturally tend to make them sensible of their obligations, their sins, their wants and mercies, than to hear you solemnly mention these things every day, in the presence of the great God? Your character in this is opposite to that of good men in all ages. You will find in the history of the patriarchs, particularly of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, That, wherever they had a dwelling for themselves, they had an altar for God. You find David returning from the solemnities of public worship to bless his house, 2 Sam. vi. 20, and

saying, *Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray.* Psalm lv. 17. You find Daniel praying, as he was wont, three times a day, even when the penalty was not only the loss of his place at court, but his being thrown as a prey to hungry lions. You find St. Paul saluting some of the primitive christians, *with the church that was in their house.* Rom. xvi. 5. 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Coloss. iv. 15. Philem. 2. which is a strong intimation that they made their families little churches by celebrating the worship of God in them; for a church, without the worship of God, would be an absurd society indeed. I had almost forgotten the example of Joshua, who bravely resolved, *That whatever others should do, he and his house would serve the Lord.* Joshua xxiv. 15. You see then, your character in this important instance is the opposite to that of the saints in all ages. And have I not reason to stand in doubt of you, especially as you cannot now plead ignorance; since you have been so often instructed in your duty on this head? You may plead your incapacity or hurry of business, or that your neighbours would point at you as ostentatious Pharisees. But this is so far from clearing you, that it renders you still more suspicious. If these be the reasons of your neglect, I greatly doubt you love your reputation and the world more than the honour of God, more than his service, and more than the immortal interest of your children and servants. How would it shock you if God should authoritatively lay that restraint upon you which you voluntarily put upon yourselves? Suppose he should say, “I will allow all the families around you to worship me every day, but I lay your family under an interdict; from them I will receive no worship:”—how would this shock you? And will you of your own accord take this curse upon yourselves? O!

think of it, and this very evening consecrate your houses to God.

Again, I will suppose some of you generally observe the outward duties of religion: you pray in secret and in your families: you attend upon public worship: you receive the sacraments, and you sometimes fast: but generally this is but a dull round of lifeless formalities. Even a judicious christian may suspect that your whole hearts are not engaged, that the vigour of your spirits is not exerted, and that there is no spiritual life in your devotions. This man may suspect; and He who searches the heart may see it is so in fact. Now if this be your character, I must tell you, *I stand in doubt of you.* If you are really lukewarm Laodiceans, the case is quite plain: it is not a matter of doubt, but of sure belief, that you are the most odious creatures upon earth to Jesus Christ. He could wish you were cold or hot, or any thing rather than what you are. And where the appearances of such formality are found, where there is a dull uniformity in all your devotions, without any signs of those divine changes which the gracious presence of God produces, your case looks very suspicious, even to men. I really stand in doubt of you; and you have great need to look to yourselves, lest the suspicion should be well grounded.

Some of you perhaps think you can easily clear yourselves from the suspicion of formality, for you have often had your hearts melted, your passions raised, and you find a great change in your dispositions in devotion: sometimes you are cold and dull, and at other times all zeal and ecstasy: but notwithstanding this, there may be great reason to doubt concerning some of you. I doubt these are only warm flights of the passions, under

the influence of a heated imagination, and not such rational emotions of the heart as proceed from a well-enlightened mind, that sees the nature, importance, and excellency of divine things. I fear these warm passions have no effectual tendency to make you better; that is, to subdue your favourite sins in heart and life, to make you more watchful against them, and to long and labour after universal holiness. I am afraid they have no tendency to humble you, to degrade you in your own eyes, and make you appear mean and vile to yourselves, but on the other hand, that they tend to set you off to advantage in your own view, and to make you think highly of yourselves. I am afraid they are shallow and superficial, and never reach deep enough to transform the settled temper of the whole soul, and give it a prevailing, habitual bent towards God. I am afraid, among your various exercises of heart, you have none of those humbling, heart-breaking sensations which a poor believer often feels, when lying helpless before God, and casting his guilty soul upon Jesus Christ. I am afraid your exercises are of a more selfish, haughty, and presumptuous kind. I am afraid of some of you, my dear people, in this respect, because this has been, in fact, the case of multitudes, and therefore it may be yours.

I also stand in doubt of some of you, that you have worn off your religious impressions before they ripened to a right issue. This is a very common case in the world, and therefore it may be yours. I am afraid some of you are farther from the kingdom of God to-day, than you were some months or years ago. Formerly you were serious and thoughtful, but now you are light and vain; formerly you had some clear, affecting convictions of your sin and danger, which made you

pensive and uneasy, set you upon the use of the means of grace with unusual earnestness and diligence, and made you more watchful against sin and temptation. Had you but persevered in this course, your case would have been very hopeful; nay, you might ere now have been sincere christians, happy in the favour of God, and the joyful expectation of a blessed immortality. But, alas! now you are become more thoughtless and secure, more negligent and careless, more worldly-minded, more bold and venturous as to temptation, and particularly ensnaring company; less sensible of your sin and danger, less afraid of the divine displeasure, less solicitous for a Saviour, and less affected with eternal things. I stand in doubt of you that this is the case of some of you; and if it be, it is very dismal: *the last state of that man is worse than the first.* Perhaps your religious impressions went so far, that yourselves and others too began to number you in the list of sincere converts. But, alas! you have relapsed, and now your case is dismally dark; it is very doubtful whether ever you had one spark of true piety. Like the Galatians you did once run well; but the corruptions of your own hearts, the cares of the world, the influence of bad company, and the temptations of the devil, have hindered you and made you turn back, and now you are got into the easy, slippery, descending road of apostacy; from whence, as from a precipice, your feet will, ere long, slide, and let you fall into the fiery gulf below. You are every day running farther and farther from God and heaven, and so much nearer to the chambers of eternal death. Your consciences, by repeated violences, will be stunned into insensibility, your hearts will harden more and more, like moistened clay in the sun. Your corruptions are gain-

ing the victory in repeated conflicts, will grow more strong and insolent, like veteran troops inured to war and conquest. In short, your case grows every day more and more discouraging; and I stand in doubt of you, lest you should never recover your religious impressions, nor enter into the kingdom of God.

I am also in doubt of some of you, that the world has your hearts: your thoughts seem to be engrossed by it, and your affections fixed upon it as your supreme good, and hence your mouth is full of it; for *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* Now if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Covetousness is idolatry; and you know that no idolater has eternal life. I fear this is the character of some of you.

Is there not also reason to doubt of some of you, from the discoveries you give of an unchristian spirit towards mankind? You may perhaps make a specious profession of religion, and punctually attend upon divine ordinances; but do you not discover insufferable pride, and unchristian resentment, and an unforgiving spirit under injuries, a disposition to overreach and take the advantage in your dealings? Such a temper, when predominant, is utterly inconsistent with the spirit of christianity, and proves you entirely destitute of it; and the appearances of the prevalence of such a temper render your case very suspicious.

Let me add farther,* Suppose that in this day of blood and slaughter, when the Lord of Hosts calls you to weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth; when the wounds of your bleeding country, and the streams of blood that are running by sea and land, call for your sorrowful sympathy;

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when your everlasting state stands in a dreadful suspense, and you know not whether heaven or hell will be your residence, if you should die this night; or, when the evidence lies against you, and you have good proof, that you are utterly unprepared for eternity in your present condition, when the spirit of God seems withdrawn from us; and consequently but few are pressing into the kingdom of God, and general languor and inefficacy run through the ministrations of the gospel; when your conduct may encourage others to run into extravagancies, and forget God and their souls, as well as throw yourselves causelessly into the way of temptation, and cherish that levity of mind which directly tends to wear off your religious impressions; when at a time in which you pretend to commemorate the birth of the holy Jesus, who came to destroy the works of the devil and the flesh, and particularly revellings, and to make you sober and watchful to prayer, and to shun all appearances of evil; when in your transition from the old year to the new, in which you may die, and never see the close of it; and when one would think it would better become you solemnly to recollect how you have spent the year past, and devote yourselves to God for the future with new vows and resolutions:—suppose, I say, that at such a time, and in such circumstances, you indulge yourselves in feasting and carousing, that perhaps you presecute and chase the diversion from house to house, in order to prolong it, and guard against the returns of serious, retired and thoughtful hours; as if laughing, dancing and frolic, were proper expressions of gratitude for the birth of a Saviour, and as if there was nothing in time or eternity of sufficient moment to make you serious, and check your growing levity.—What

shall I say of such a practice? The mildest thing I can say is, that I stand in doubt of you, who promote, or willingly tolerate, or join in such entertainments. I have no business at present to determine, whether music, dancing and feasting, be lawful in themselves. Granting them to be as lawful as you could wish, I am sure that, at such a time, and in the circumstances that generally attend them, they are utterly unlawful to every christian, and have a natural tendency to banish all serious religion from among us. You are but little acquainted with me if you think I say this as a sour ascetic, or an enemy to the lawful pleasures of mankind, or that I place religion in morose, mopish, melancholy austerities. Such of you as are acquainted with me must know the contrary. But after all I must declare, I shall have very little hopes of the success of the gospel among you, if once I should have a congregation of dancing, frolicking christians. Alas! they are not like to dance and frolic themselves into heaven.--It is with great reluctance I touch upon such a subject, though with a gentle hand; but duty commands, and I must obey: and I wish the admonition may be so effectual, as to prevent all occasion to repeat it in time to come.

Thus I have delineated sundry dubious characters, and now I leave you to judge whether there be not many such among you. Examine yourselves thoroughly, that you may have the judgment of God in your favour; for by that you must stand or fall.

Some of you, perhaps, may think it strange I have omitted so many characters that are frequent among us. I have said nothing of the profane sinner, the drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, the thief, the knave confessed: I have said not

ing of the infidel and scoffer, who affect to disbelieve the religion of Jesus, and relapse into heathenism; and who openly make a mock of things sacred: I have said nothing of the careless creature, who lives in the general neglect of even the forms of religion: I have said nothing of the stupid, thoughtless creature, who never troubles his head, as he may affect to speak, about religion; and whose heart has hardly ever received any impressions from it; but who lives like a brute, merely for the purposes of the present life: I have said nothing of such as these, because they do not come under the class of doubtful characters; I have no doubt at all about such; I am sure they are utterly destitute of all true religion, and must perish forever, if they continue in their present condition. If you would know how I come to be sure as to them, I answer, Because I believe my reason and my Bible; for both put the character and the doom of such beyond all doubt. Common sense is sufficient to convince me, that such are unholy impenitent sinners; and I am sure, both from reason and revelation, that an unholy impenitent sinner, while such, can never enter into the kingdom of heaven. Let such as harbour a wider charity for them, point out the grounds of it. Indeed there is one thing lamentably doubtful as to such; it is very doubtful whether ever their present condition will be changed for the better. The most promising period of life is over with them; and even in that period they continued impenitent under all the means of grace they enjoyed; and is it not more likely that they will continue so in time to come? O! that they would take the alarm, and lay their danger to heart in time, that they may use proper means for their deliverance!

Nothing can turn the full evidence against them in their favour, and nothing can render the doubtful case of the former class clear and satisfactory, but the formation of Christ within them. This alone can put it beyond all doubt that they are christians indeed, and prove their sure title to everlasting happiness. This shall be the subject of the remainder of this discourse.

Here you would ask me, I suppose, what it is to have Christ formed within us?

I have already told you briefly, that it signifies our being made conformable to him in heart and life, or having his holy image stamped upon our hearts. This is essential to the character of every true christian. *Christ dwells in the heart of such by faith, Eph. iii. 17, and if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Rom. viii. 9. He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked, saith St. John. 1 John ii. 6.— Let the same mind be in you, saith St. Paul, which was also in Christ Jesus. Phil. ii. 5. Whom he foreknew, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Rom. viii. 29.* The temper of a christian has such a resemblance to Christ's, that it may be called Christ in embryo, spiritually formed within us. It is indeed infinitely short of the all perfect original, but yet it is a prevailing temper, and habitually the governing principle of the soul. That filial temper towards God, that humble veneration and submission, that ardent devotion, that strict regard to all the duties of religion, that self-denial, humility, meekness and patience, that heavenly-mindedness and noble superiority to the world, that generous charity, benevolence and mercy to mankind, that ardent zeal and diligence to do good, that temperance and sobriety which shone in the blessed Jesus with a divine incompar-

able splendour; these and the like graces and virtues shine, though with feebler rays, in all his followers. They have their infirmities indeed, many and great infirmities; but not such as are inconsistent with the habitual prevalency of this Christ-like disposition. You may make what excuses you please, but this is an eternal truth, that unless you have a real resemblance to the holy Jesus, you are not his genuine disciples. Pray examine critically into this point. Have you a right to take your name Christian from Christ, by reason of your conformity to him?

Again, if Christ be formed in your hearts, he lives there. The heavenly embryo is not yet complete, not yet ripe for birth into the heavenly world, but it is quickened. I mean, those virtues and graces above mentioned are not dead, inactive principles within you, but they operate, they shew themselves alive by action, they are the governing principles of your practice. You are not like him in heart, unless you are like him in life too; and if your life be conformed to his, it will plainly distinguish you from the world, while it continues so wicked. If you are like to him, you will certainly be very unlike to the generality of mankind; and they will acknowledge the difference, and point you out, and hate you, as not belonging to them. They will stare at you as an odd unfashionable stranger, and wonder you do not copy their example.

If ye were of the world, says Christ, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. John xv. 19.

I hope you now know what it is to have Christ formed within you. And in what heart among you is this holy thing conceived and growing? Where

are the followers of Jesus? Surely they are not so like the men of the world, the followers of sin and Satan, as to be undistinguishable. O! how many impostors does this inquiry discover, false pretenders to christianity, who are the very reverse of its great Founder! And as many of you as continue unlike to Him now in holiness, must continue unlike to him forever in happiness. All Christ's heavenly companions are Christ-like; they bear his image and superscription.

Before I dismiss this head I must observe, that the production of this divine infant, if I may so call it, in the heart, is entirely the work of the holy Spirit. It is not the growth of nature, but a creation by divine power. It is the hand of God that draws the lineaments of this image upon the heart, though he makes use of the gospel and a variety of means as his pencil.

But you would inquire farther, "In what manner does this divine agent work; or how is Christ formed in the hearts of his people?"

I answer, The heart of man has a quick sensation. Nothing can be done there without its perceiving it, much less can Christ be formed there, while it is wholly insensible of the operation. There is indeed a great variety in the circumstances, but the substance of the work is the same in all adults. Therefore, if ever you have been the subjects of it, you have been sensible of the following particulars.

1. You have been made deeply sensible of your being entirely destitute of this divine image. Your hearts have appeared to you as a huge, shapeless mass of corruption, without one ingredient of true goodness, amidst all the flattering appearances of it. In confidence of this discovery your high conceit of yourselves was mortified, your airs of pride

and self-consequence lowered, and you saw yourselves utterly unfit for heaven, that region of purity, and ready to fall, as it were, by your own weight, into hell, that sink of all the pollutions of the moral world. This is the first step towards the formation of Christ in the soul. And have you ever gone thus far? If not, you may be sure you have never gone farther.

2. You have hereupon set yourselves in earnest to the use of the means appointed for the renovation of your nature. Prayer, hearing the gospel, and other divine ordinances, were no more lifeless, customary formalities to you; but you exerted all the vigour of your souls in them. You also guarded against every thing that tended to cherish your depraved disposition, and hinder the formation of Christ within you. Then you durst not play with temptation, nor venture within its reach. This is the second step in the process. And have you ever gone thus far? If not, you have never gone farther; and if you have never gone farther, you can never reach the kingdom of God in your present condition.

3. You have been made sensible of your own weakness, and the inefficacy of all the means you could use to produce the divine image upon your hearts; and that nothing but the divine hand could draw it there. When you first began your endeavours you had high hopes you would do great things; but, after hard strivings and strugglings, after many prayers and tears, after much reading, hearing and meditation, you found no great effect followed; nay, the corruption of your heart appeared more and more, and hence you concluded you were growing worse and worse. Thus the blessed Spirit convinced you of your own weakness, and the necessity of his influence to work this divine change.

He cleared away the rubbish of pride and self-righteousness from your hearts, in order to prepare them, as a clean canvass, to receive the image of Christ. And have you ever been thus humbled and mortified? Have you ever been reduced into this medicinal self-despair? It is the humble heart alone that is susceptible of the image of the meek and lowly Jesus. Pride can never receive its lineaments, nor can it be carved on an insensible stone.

4. Hereupon the holy Spirit enlightened your minds to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and the method of salvation revealed in the gospel. The bright beams of the divine perfections shining in that way of salvation, the attractive beauties of holiness, and all the wonders of the gospel, struck your minds with delightful astonishment: and you viewed them in a light unknown before. Hereupon you were enabled to cast your guilty, corrupt, helpless souls upon Jesus Christ, whom you saw to be a glorious, all-sufficient Saviour; and with all your hearts you embraced the way of salvation through his mediation. The view of his glory proved transformative: while you were contemplating the object, you received its likeness; the rays of glory beaming upon you, as it were, rendered your hearts transparent, and the beauties of holiness were stamped upon them. Thus St. Paul represents the matter. *We all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord in the gospel, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord.* 2 Cor. iii. 18. Thus your hearts retained the image of his glory, like the face of Moses after he had been conversing with God in the Mount. You contracted the temper of Jesus Christ, and imbibed his spirit: he was formed in your

hearts, and began to live and act there. The life you lived in the flesh, you lived by the faith of the Son of God. Now your minds took a new turn, and your life a new cast; and the difference began to appear even to the world. Not knowing the divine original, they knew not whose image you bore. *Therefore the world knoweth us not,* says St. John, *because it knew him not.* 1 John iii. 1. This, however, they knew, that you did not resemble them; therefore they looked upon you as odd sort of creatures, whose tempers and manners were as different from theirs as if you were foreigners: you soon became as speckled birds among them, and they were weary of your society, and you of theirs. Brethren, have you ever been the subjects of this divine operation? Has Christ ever been thus formed in your hearts? I stand in doubt of some of you, though, blessed be God, there are others who give good grounds for a charitable hope concerning them, by their apparent likeness to Christ.

5. If Christ has ever been formed in you, it is your persevering endeavour to improve and perfect this divine image. You long and labour to be fully conformed to him, and, as it were to catch his air, his manner and spirit, in every thought in every word, and in every action. As far as you are unlike to him, so far you appear deformed and loathsome to yourselves. While you feel an unchristian spirit prevail within you, you seem as if you were possessed with the devil. And it is the labour of your life to subdue such a spirit, and to brighten and finish the features of the divine image within you, by repeated touches and re-touches.

By this short view, my brethren, you may be assisted in determining whose image you bear; whether Christ's or Satan's, whether Christ's or

the world's, whether Christ's or your own. And let me tell you, if you cannot determine this, you know not but you may be in hell the next hour; for none shall ever find admittance into heaven who are not formed after the image of Christ. The glorious company upon Mount Sion are all followers of the Lamb: they are like him, for they see him as he is. A soul unlike to him would be a monster there; a native of hell broke into heaven; a wolf among lambs; a devil among angels. And can you hope for admission there, while you are unlike him? The two grand apartments of the eternal world are under two opposite heads; the holy Jesus presides in the one—and the Prince of devils, the prime offender and father of sin, in the other. Both apartments are thick settled with colonies from our world; and the inhabitants of both are like their respective heads. Therefore if ye resemble the Prince of Heaven, with him you shall dwell forever; but if you resemble the tyrant of hell, you must forever be his miserable vassals. Therefore push home the inquiry, is Christ formed in my heart, or is he not?

If he be, then rejoice in it, as a sure earnest of the heavenly inheritance. None ever went to hell that carried the image of Christ upon their hearts; but the heavenly regions are peopled with such. His image is the grand passport into that country, a passport that was never disputed; and, if you bear it, the celestial gates will be flung wide open for your reception, and your human and angelic brethren, who have the same looks, the same manner, the same spirit, will all hail your arrival, and shout your welcome; will own you as their kindred, from your visible resemblance to them; and you will immediately and naturally commence a familiarity with them, from the conformity of your

dispositions. The Father of all will also own the dear image of his Son, and the blessed Jesus will acknowledge his own image, and confess the relation. Blessed moment! when wilt thou arrive, when all the followers of the Lamb shall appear upon Mount Sion, in his full likeness, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing? When no stranger of another countenance and another spirit shall mingle among them, but be all cast in the same mould, and all be clothed in uniform, with the beauties of holiness, and the robes of salvation! O! my brethren, must not your eager hearts spring forward to meet that day!

But amid all the joy which that transporting prospect affords, it must humble you to think, that though Christ be really formed in your hearts, it is but very imperfectly, as an unfinished embryo. His image as yet is but very faint; you still carry the traces of some infernal features about you. Let this consideration constrain you to put yourselves daily under the operation of the blessed Spirit, till he finish the heavenly picture by repeated touches, and diligently attend upon all the means which he is pleased to use as his pencil.—Guard against every thing that may deform the divine draught, or delay its perfection. Go on in this way, and the glorious picture will daily catch more and more the likeness of the divine original, and soon come to complete perfection.

But I must speak a concluding word to such of you in whom Christ has never yet been formed. Pray turn your eyes upon yourselves, and survey your own deformity. Do you not see the image of the devil upon you? Have you not forgotten God, and refused to love him, like a devil? Have you not loved and practised sin like a devil? or have you not wallowed in sensual pleasures, and

confined all your concern to the present life, like a beast, and thus made yourselves the most horrid monsters, half beast, half devil? And can you love yourselves while this is your character? Can you flatter yourselves such can be admitted into heaven?

Since it is possible your deformed spirits may yet receive the image of Christ, will you not use all possible means for that purpose, while there is hope? This day begin the attempt, resolve and labour to become new men in this new year.

But alas! exhortation is but feeble breath, that vanishes into air between my lips and your ears; something is wanting to give it force and efficacy. We have the gospel, we have preaching, we have all the means of salvation; but something is wanting to give them life, to make them efficacious, and bear them home upon the hearts of sinners with that almighty energy which they have sometimes had. Something, alas! is wanting for this purpose: and what is it? It is Thou, eternal Spirit! Thou, the Author of all good in the hearts of the children of men: thou, the only former of Christ within; thou art absent, and without thee neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth; they are all nothing together. Come, thou life of souls! thou spirit of the gospel! thou quickener of ordinances! thou assistant of poor ministers! thou opener of their hearers' hearts! Come, visit this congregation. Come to-day: O! come this moment! and Christ shall be formed in us, the hope and the earnest of glory!

SERMON XLVI.**THE WONDERFUL COMPASSIONS OF CHRIST TO THE
GREATEST SINNERS.**

MATT. XXIII. 37.—*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

THERE is not, perhaps, a chapter in the whole Bible so full of such repeated denunciations of the most tremendous woes as this. Certainly there is none like it, among all the discourses of Christ, left upon record. Here the gentle Jesus, the inoffensive Lamb of God, treats the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees with the most pungent severity.—Wo, wo, wo, breaks from his lips like repeated claps of thunder. He exposes them with an asperity and indignation not usual in his mild addresses. He repeatedly calls them hypocrites, fools, and blind, blind guides, whited sepulchres, children of hell, serpents, a generation of vipers, who could not escape the damnation of hell. But in my text he melts into tenderness, even in this vein of terror, and appears the same compassionate, gentle Saviour we are wont to find him. His most terrible denunciations were friendly warnings, calculated to reform, and not to destroy. And while denouncing the most terrible woes against Jerusalem, in an abrupt flow of passion he breaks out into the most moving lamentation over her; *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen*

gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

This is one of those tender cases which requires a familiar and moving, rather than a grand illustration; and that which Jesus has here chosen is one of the most tender, familiar, and moving that could be devised. *How often would I have gathered thee, O Jerusalem, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.*—As much as to say, “As the parent-bird, when she sees some bird of prey hovering over her helpless young, gives them the signal, which nature teaches them to understand, and spreads her wings to protect them, resolved to become a prey herself rather than her tender brood; or, as she shelters them from the rain and cold, and cherishes them under her friendly feathers, so, says the compassionate Redeemer; so, O Jerusalem! I see thy children, like heedless chickens, in the most imminent danger; I see the judgments of God hovering over them; I see the Roman eagle ready to seize them as its prey; I see storms of vengeance ready to fall upon them; and how often have I invited them to fly to me for shelter, and give them the signal of their danger! how often have I spread the wings of my protection to cover them, and keep them warm and safe as in my bosom! But, O lamentable! O astonishing! ye would not! I was willing, but ye would not! The silly chickens, taught by nature, understand the signal of approaching danger, and immediately fly for shelter; but ye, more silly and presumptuous, would not regard my warnings; would not believe your danger, nor fly to me for protection, though often, O how often, warned and invite . . .”

His compassion will appear the more surprising, if we consider the object of it. “Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest

them that are sent to thee, though upon the kind design of reforming and saving thee, and who wilt, in a few days, crucify that Saviour who now laments thy doom, how often would he have gathered even thy ungrateful children and received them under his protection, with an affection and tenderness, like the instinctive fondness and sollicitude of the mother-hen for her brood! Here is divine compassion indeed, that extends itself even to his enemies, to his murderers! Strange! that such generous benevolence should meet with an ungrateful repulse! that the provoked Sovereign should be willing to receive his rebellious subjects into protection, but that they should be unwilling to fly to him for it!"

The important truths which my text suggests are such as these:—That sinners while from under the protection of Jesus Christ, are in a very dangerous situation—that they may obtain safety by putting themselves under his protection—that he is willing to receive the greatest sinners under his protection—that he has often used means to prevail upon them to fly to him, that they may be safe—that, notwithstanding all this, multitudes are unwilling to fly to him, and put themselves under his protection—that this unwillingness of theirs is the real cause of their destruction—that this unwillingness is an instance of the most irrational and brutal stupidity—and, that it is very affecting and lamentable.

1. The text implies, that sinners, while from under the protection of Jesus Christ, are in a very dangerous situation. As the hen does not give the signal of danger, nor spread her wings to shelter her young, except when she sees danger approaching, so the Lord Jesus would not call sinners to fly to him for protection, were they not in real

danger. Sinners, you are in danger from the curse of the divine law, which is in full force against you, while you have no interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can answer its demands: You are in danger from the dread arrest of divine justice, which guards the sacred rights of the divine government, and will avenge itself upon you for all the insults you have offered it: You are in danger from the various judgments of God, who is angry with you every day, and whose judgments are hovering over you, and ready to seize you, like hungry birds of prey: You are in danger from your own vile corruptions, which may hurry you into such courses as may be inconvenient, or, perhaps ruinous to you in this world, may harden you in impenitence, and at length destroy you forever: You are in danger from your own conscience, which would be your best friend; but it is now ready to rise up in arms against you, and, like an insatiable vulture, prey upon your hearts forever: You are in danger from the arrest of death, which is ready every moment to stretch out its mortal hand, and seize you: You are in danger from the malice and power of devils, who, like hungry lions, are ready to snatch away your souls, as their helpless prey. In short, you are surrounded with dangers on every hand, and dangers rise still more thick and dreadful before you. You are not sure of an hour's enjoyment of one comfort: nay, you are not sure there is so much as one moment betwixt you and all the miseries of the damned.—This minute you are upon earth, thoughtless, secure and gay; but the next may be—I tremble to tell you where—in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, tormented in flames. Yes, sinners, one flying moment may strip you entirely naked of all the enjoyments of earth, cut you off from all

hope of heaven, and engulf you in remediless despair. Some of you whose very case this is, will not, probably, believe me, nor take the alarm. But here, alas! lies your principal danger. If you would take warning in time, you might escape; but you will not believe there is danger until it becomes inevitable.—Had Lot's son-in-law taken warning from him, they might have escaped; but they saw no sensible appearances of the impending judgment, and, therefore, they continued blindly secure, regarded the good old man as a mocker, and, therefore, perished in Sodom. Had Jerusalem been apprehensive of its danger in time, it might have flourished to this day; but it would not be warned, and, therefore, became a ruinous heap: and this will be your doom, sinners, unless you be apprehensive of it before it breaks upon you like a whirlwind. Indeed it may make one sad to think how common this danger is, and how little it is apprehended, to see crowds thoughtless and merry on the brink of ruin; secure and careless while hanging over the infernal pit by the frail thread of life. This is sad; but, alas! it is a common case in the world, and I am afraid, it is too common among you, my hearers. And whither shall you fly for safety? Is the danger inevitable? If so, where is the friendly arm that can guard you? where the wing that can shelter you from those judgments that are hovering over you, like ravenous birds, to make a prey of you? Blessed be God, I can shew you a place of safety; for,

2. The text implies, that if sinners fly to Christ, and put themselves under his protection, they shall obtain safety.

The beautiful allusion to the protection a hen affords her young under the shelter of her wings, implies thus much, as we may learn from the mean-

ing of the same allusion in other places. So in that beautiful passage, Psalm xci. 1—4. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, and my fortress—Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler—He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; that is, he shall protect thee in safety, and thou shalt trust in his guardian care. This is David's meaning, when he prays, Lord, hide me under the shadow of thy wings. Psalm xvii. 8. And when he resolves, yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be over-past; just as the hen's helpless brood hide under her wings until the storm be blown over, or the bird of prey has disappeared. Psalm lvii. 1. I will trust, says he, in the covert of thy wings. Ps. lxi. 4. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. Ps. lxxiii. 7.**

How great and seemingly inevitable your dangers; yet, if you place yourselves under the protection of Jesus Christ, you are safe forever; safe from the deluges of divine wrath, that are ready to rush down upon you; safe from the sword of justice, and the thunders of Sinai; safe from the intestine insurrections of your own conscience, and from the power and malice of infernal spirits; safe from the oppression of sin, and you shall be gloriously triumphant over death itself, the king of terrors. These may disturb and alarm you, they may give you a slight wound, and put you in great terror; but none of them can do you a lasting, re-

*See the same metaphor, used in much the same sense, in Psalm xxxvi. 7. Exod. xix. 4. Deut. xxxii. 11, though, in the two last places, it includes conduct as well as protection.

mediless injury; nay, the very injuries you may receive from them in this life, will, in the issue, turn out to your advantage, and become real blessings to you. If ye are Christ's, then, saith the apostle, *all things are yours, whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours.* 1 Cor. xiii. 21, that is, you have a kind of property in all things that you have any connexion with, so that they shall work together for your good, as if they were all your own, by a private right. Brethren, if we are covered with the righteousness of Christ, the sword of divine justice cannot reach us. All its demands are answered, and justice itself becomes our friend. If we are sheltered under the wings of his guardian care, the most threatening dangers of time or eternity cannot affect us with real injury. How happy then, how safe are such of you as have put yourselves under his protection! Now every blessing is yours, and nothing can do you a real injury. You shall never fall a prey to your various enemies, but shall at length obtain an illustrious victory over them all, through the blood of the Lamb. To you I may apply those sublime words of Moses, *As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone does and will lead you,* Deut. xxxii. 11, 12, defend you, cherish you, and bear you along to your eternal home. You have, therefore, reason, with David, amidst all the peculiar dangers of this life, to rejoice under the shadow of his wings. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and you have fled to it, and are safe. Amidst all your fears and terrors, have you not some secure and delightful hours, when you, as it were, feel yourselves gathered under the wings of your Redeemer? In such hours, do not even such

weaklings as you dare to brave all your enemies, and bid defiance to earth and hell? O how happy, how secure is your situation!

But here a grand question rises in the minds of some of you, “How may I know whether I have fled to Jesus for protection? How may I know whether I have placed myself under his guardian wings?” This is a question of the utmost importance: and I must offer a word or two in answer to it. Observe then, if ever you have fled to Jesus for safety, you have been made deeply sensible of your danger. If ever you have sought shelter under his wings, you have seen your sins, the curses of the law, and the powers of hell, as it were, hovering over you, and ready to seize and devour you as their prey. You have also been made deeply sensible, that Jesus alone was able to save you. You found you could not shelter yourselves under the covert of your own righteousness, and were constrained to give up all hopes of saving yourselves by any thing you could do in your own strength. Hereupon, as perishing, helpless creatures, you have cast yourselves entirely upon the protection of Jesus Christ, and put your souls into his hands, to be saved by him in his own way: And you have also submitted freely to his authority, willing to be ruled and disposed of entirely according to his pleasure. These few things must suffice to determine this grand inquiry; and I hope you will make use of them for that purpose: If they help you to discover, that you have fled to Jesus for refuge, rejoice in your happy lot, and let your mouths be filled with praise. But alas! are there not some of you that have made the contrary discovery, and, consequently, that you are exposed to all the dreadful dangers of a sinner without Christ? And is there no place of safety

for you? Yes, under those wings where believers have sheltered themselves. In Jesus Christ there is safety, if you fly to him: but you may perhaps inquire, “What encouragement have I to fly to him? I, who am so vile a sinner; I, who have nothing at all to recommend me! Can I hope that he will stretch out the wings of his mercy, and receive me into protection?” Yes, poor trembling creature, even you may venture; for remember what my text farther implies, namely:

3. That the compassionate Jesus is willing to receive the very greatest sinner under his protection. Can you question this, after this moving lamentation of his over Jerusalem! Jerusalem, that killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto her, though upon messages of grace; Jerusalem, upon whom should come all the righteous blood of the prophets, through a length of near four thousand years, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias; Jerusalem, the den of those murderers, who, he well knew, would in a few days imbrue their hands in his own blood; Jerusalem, that had abused so many mercies, been incorrigible under so many chastisements, deaf to so many invitations; yet, of this very city, the compassionate Saviour says, *How often would I have gathered thy children under the wings of my protection: thy children, obstinate and ungrateful as they are! O what gracious encouragement is here to the greatest sinners among us! Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; the same compassionate, all-sufficient Saviour. He did not lose his pity for Jerusalem after he had suffered death by her bloody hands; but after his resurrection he orders his apostles to make one trial more with her obstinate children: Go, says he, and preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, Luke xxiv. 41, as much as to say, “Though Jeru-*

salem be the ungrateful city, where so much pains have been taken in vain, and where I have just been crucified with cruel hands, yet do not give them up; try once more to gather them under my wings; yea, let them have the very first offer of grace under this new dispensation; make the first offer of pardon through my blood to the wretches that shed my blood; invite them to me as a Saviour, who nailed me to the cross as a malefactor and a slave." O what melting overpowering mercy! What overflowing and free grace are here! This exemplifies his own declaration, that *he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*: and sinners of the vilest characters are welcome to him. He took care, at the first introduction of the gospel, to select some of the most daring sinners, and make them the monuments of his grace to all ages, that their history might give the strongest assurance of his grace to sinners of the like character, from that time to the end of the world. Such an instance was the famous St Paul. *This is a faithful saying, says he; a saying that may be depended upon, and worthy of all acceptance; worthy to be received as true, and embraced with joy by all the sons of men, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which I am the chief,* 1 Tim. i. 15. This chieftain, this king of sinners, was made a happy subject of Jesus Christ. And for this cause, says he, *I obtained mercy, that in me first, or in me the chief, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him.* Blessed be God, there are many such instances now in heaven, in the glorious company of angels! "There, as one observes, is murderous and idolatrous Manasseh among the true worshippers of God; there is oppressing Zaccheus among the spirits of just men

made perfect; there is **Mary Magdalen**, possessed by seven devils, among the saints of the Most High, filled with the Holy Spirit of God. In a word, there are the betrayers and murderers of our blessed Lord and Saviour, receiving eternal life and happiness from that precious blood which their own guilty hands did shed.** And what farther

* Dr. Grosvenor, in a sermon, entitled, "The Temper of Jesus Christ towards his Enemies, and his Grace to the chief of Sinners, in his commanding the Gospel to begin at Jerusalem," has the following very lively and striking passage:—"It is very affecting that the first offers of grace should be made to those who, of all people in the world, had done it the most despite! That the heavenly gift should be tendered to those first, who least deserved it; not that any can deserve it all, for then it were not grace; but they of all people had most deserved the contrary: That they, who had abused Christ to a degree beyond the most pitiful description, should yet lie uppermost in his care, and stand foremost in his pity, and find so much mercy from one to whom they showed none at all!

"One would rather have expected the apostles should have received another kind of charge, and that Christ should have said, Let repentance and remission of sins be preached, but carry it not to Jerusalem, that wicked city, that has been the slaughter-house of my prophets, whom I have often sent. After them I sent John the Baptist, a burning and a shining light; him they killed in prison. Last of all, I myself, the Son, came also; and me, with wicked hands, they have crucified and slain. They may do the same by you; the disciple is not like to be better (treated,) than his Lord; let not the gospel enter those gates, through which they led me, its author, to crucifixion.

"I have been preaching there myself these three years; I have mingled my tears with my sermons, I have supported my pretensions and character from the scriptures of Moses and the prophets, I have confirmed them by divine miracles, and sealed all with my blood, yet they would not give ear: *O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!* all that I have left for thee now is, what I have before dropt over thee, viz: a compassionate tear, and wish, *that thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belonged to thy peace! but now they are hid from thy eyes,* and so let them remain; for I charge you, my apostles, to

arguments need I produce of the willingness of Jesus Christ to receive the vilest sinner among you, upon your coming to him? I might prove the same joyful truth from his repeated declarations, from his indefinite invitations, and especially from that kind assurance which has kept many a soul from sinking; *him that cometh unto me I will in no*

preach repentance and remission of sins to all other nations, but come not near that wicked city.

“But God’s thoughts are not as ours, neither are his ways as our ways; but as far as the heavens are above the earth, so are his thoughts and ways above ours. Our way is, to make the chief offenders examples of justice, to avenge ourselves upon those who have done us personal injury and wrong; but Christ chooses out these to make examples of mercy, and commands the first offer of eternal life to be made to them, and all the world are to wait till they have had the first refusal of the gospel salvation.

“As if our Lord had said, It is true my sufferings are an universal remedy, and I have given my life a ransom for many, that the Gentiles afar off might be brought nigh, and all the ends of the earth might see the salvation of God, and therefore *go into all nations*, and offer this salvation as you go; but, lest the poor house of Israel should think themselves abandoned to despair, the seed of Abraham, mine ancient friend, as cruel and unkind as they have been, go, make them the first offer of grace, let them have the first refusal of gospel mercy; let them that struck the rock, drink first of its refreshing streams; and they that drew my blood, be welcome to its healing virtue.

“Tell them, that as I was sent to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*, so, if they will be gathered, I will be their Shepherd still. Though they despised my tears, which I shed over them, and imprecated my blood to be upon them, tell them it was for their sakes I shed both, that by my tears I might soften their hearts towards God, and by my blood I might reconcile God to them.

“Tell them I live; and because I am alive again, my death shall not be their damnation; nor is my murder an unpardonable sin, but that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin, even the sin by which that blood was drawn.

“Tell them you have seen the prints of the nails upon my hands and feet, and the wound of the spear in my side, and that those marks of their cruelty are so far from giving me

wise cast out. John vi. 37. But this argument from matters of fact is sufficient. Therefore come, sinners, fly to Jesus, however deep your guilt. Had you been murderers of fathers, or murderers of mothers; nay, had you come hither this day with hands reeking in the blood of the Son of God, yet, if you repent and believe, he is willing to receive you under the shadow of his wings. I may therefore invite you in the language of the following lines:

Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves;
He spreads his arms t' embrace you all;
Sinners alone his grace receives.

vindictive thoughts, that every wound they have given me speaks in their behalf, pleads with the Father for remission of their sins, and enables me to bestow it; and by those sufferings which they may be ready to think have exasperated me against them, by those very wounds, court and persuade them to receive the salvation they have procured.

“Nay, if you meet that poor wretch that thrust the spear into my side, tell him, there is another way, a better way of coming to my heart, even my heart's love, if he will repent, *and look upon him whom he has pierced*, and will mourn, I will cherish him in that very bosom he has wounded; he shall find the blood he shed an ample atonement for the sin of shedding it. And tell him from me, he will put me to more pain and displeasure by refusing this offer of my blood, than when he first drew it forth. In short,

“Though they have gainsayed my doctrine, blasphemed my divinity, and abused and tormented my person; taken away my life, and, what is next valuable to every honest man, endeavoured to murder my reputation too, by making me an impostor, and imputing my miracles to a combination with Beelzebub; however go to Jerusalem, and by beginning there, show them such a miracle of goodness and grace, that they themselves must confess too good for the Devil to have any hand in, too Godlike for him to be assisting to; that may convince them of their sin, and at the same time that nothing can be greater than their sin, except this mercy and grace of mine, which, where their sin has abounded, does thus much more abound, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Come, all ye Magdalens in lust:
Ye ruffians fell, in murders old,
Repent and live: despair and trust!
Jesus for you to death was sold.

Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin!
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His wounded side shall take you in.
He calls you all, invites you home:
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!.....WESLEY

To encourage you the more, and even to constrain you, consider what my text implies farther, namely:

4. That the Lord Jesus has often used means to prevail upon you to fly to him for safety. What he says to Jerusalem may be applied to you, *how often would I have gathered thy children together!* How often has he given you the signal of danger, that you might fly from it! how often has he spread out a friendly wing to shelter you! as often as the law has denounced his curses against you; as often as the gospel has invited and allured you; as often as conscience has checked and warned you, or prompted you to your duty; as often as the Holy Spirit has moved upon your hearts, and excited some serious thoughts and good purposes and inclinations: as often as providence has allured you with its profusion of blessings, or chastened you with its afflictive rod; as often as you have seen a good example, or heard a pious word dropt in conversation; in short, as often as any means of any kind have been used with you, that had a tendency to make you sensible of your danger, or your need of Jesus Christ, so often has he used means with you to engage you to fly to the shelter of his wings.

for protection. O! how frequently, and by what great variety of means, has he called you in this congregation! This is the very business of one day in seven, when you are called away from the noise and bustle of the world to listen to the voice of his invitation. But this is not the only time when he calls you. While you are at home, or following your business through the rest of the week, you have a Bible, a Providence, a conscience, and the Holy Spirit, still with you; and these are still urging you to fly to Jesus, though their voice may be disregarded, and lost in the din and confusion of the world around you. The gracious call of a compassionate Saviour has followed you ever since you were capable of hearing it to this day. But *Alas!* does not the next remark hold true as to some of you, viz.

5. That, notwithstanding all this, multitudes are unwilling to fly to him for protection! It was not of Jerusalem alone that he had reason to say, *I would have gathered you, but ye would not!* I was willing, but ye were unwilling. This is strange indeed, and might seem incredible, were it not a most notorious fact. That the Judge should be willing to pardon, but the criminal unwilling to receive pardon—that the offended Sovereign should be ready to take a perishing rebel under his protection, but the rebel should stand off, and rather perish than fly to him—this is a most astonishing thing; and it is the hardest thing in the world to convince sinners that this is their conduct towards the Lord Jesus. They are generally more suspicious of his willingness to save them, than of their own to come to him. Where he but as willing to save them as they are to be saved by him, they think there would be no danger of their salvation; but the case is directly the reverse; the unwilling-

ness lies entirely upon their side. To convince them of this, let it be considered, that we are not truly willing to be saved by Christ at all, unless we are willing to be saved by him in his own way, or upon his own terms. We are not willing to be saved, unless the nature of the salvation offered be agreeable to us. Now one principal part of the salvation which we need, and which Christ offers, is deliverance from sin: deliverance from the power, the pleasures, the profits of sin, as well as from the destructive consequences of it in the world to come. And are sinners willing to accept of such a salvation as this from Christ? No, this appears no salvation to them; this seems rather a confinement, a loss, a bereavement. They are willing to indulge themselves in sin, and therefore it is impossible they should in the mean time, be willing to be restrained from it, or deprived of it. This is the thing they struggle against, and to which all the means used with them cannot bring them. To tear their sins from them is to rob them of their pleasures; and they rise up in arms against the attempt. And are these willing to be saved by Christ, who abhor the salvation he offers them? The truth of the matter is, the conduct of sinners in this case is the greatest absurdity: they are willing to be happy, but they are not willing to be holy, in which alone their happiness consists: they are willing to be saved from hell, but they are not willing to be saved from those dispositions which could create a hell within them, even according to the nature of things: they are willing to go to heaven when they can live no longer in this their favourite world; but they are unwilling to be prepared for it in their temper and disposition. An eternity spent in holy exercises would be an eternal drudgery to them, unless they have a relish for holiness. Free-

dom from sin would be a painful bereavement to them while they take pleasure in sin, and how then could they be happy, even in the very region of happiness, since the sordid pleasures of sin never mingle with those pure rivers of living water? In short, they act as absurdly as if they were willing to recover their health, and yet were unwilling to part with their sickness, or to be restrained from those things which are the causes of it. They are willing to go to heaven, but it is in their own way; that is, in the way that leads to hell. The only way of salvation, according to the divine appointment, is the way of holiness. Indeed Christ came into the world to save sinners; but these sinners must be made saints before they can enter into his kingdom; and he makes them holy in order to be happy. And this is not an arbitrary appointment, but necessary, in the very nature of things: for, as I observed, till they are made holy, it is impossible in the nature of things they should be happy in heaven, because the happiness of heaven consists in the perfection of holiness. To be saved without holiness is as impossible as to be healthy without health, or saved without salvation. Therefore, for God to gratify the sinner, and gratify him in his own way; that is, in his sins, is an impossibility; as impossible, as for a physician to heal an obstinate patient in his own way; that is, to heal him by letting him retain and cherish his disease; letting him cool a fever with cold water, or drink poison to cure a consumption. God is wise in all his constitutions, and therefore the way of salvation through Christ is agreeable to the nature of things; it is in itself consistent and possible: and if sinners are not willing to be saved in this possible way, they are not willing, in reality, to be saved at all.

Again, the way of salvation by Christ is all through grace. It is adapted to stain the glory, and mortify the pride of all flesh, and to advance to the mercy of God, and the honour of Christ, without a rival. Now haughty, self-righteous sinners are unwilling to be saved in this humbling, mortifying way, and, therefore, they are unwilling to be saved by Christ. If they would be saved by him, they must be saved entirely upon the footing of his merit, and not their own; they must own that they lie at mercy, they must feel themselves self-condemned, they must utterly renounce all dependence upon their own righteousness, and receive every blessing as the free unmerited gift of grace. And it is the hardest thing imaginable to bring a proud sinner so low as this; but till he is brought thus low, he cannot be saved upon the gospel-plan. Nor is this part of the constitution arbitrary any more than the former. It would be inconsistent with the honour of the great God, the Supreme Magistrate of the universe, and with the dignity of his government, to receive a rebel into favour, on any other footing than that of mere grace. If after sinning so much the sinner still has merit enough to procure a pardon, in whole or in part, or to render it cruel or unjust for God to condemn and punish him, certainly he must be a being of very great importance indeed; and sin against God must be a very small evil. To save a sinner in a way that would give any room for such insinuations as these, would be inconsistent with the honour of God and his government; and, therefore, the plan he has constituted is a method of grace, of pure rich grace, in all and every part. Now, while sinners are not willing to be saved in this way, they are not willing to be saved at all. Here lies their grand mistake: Because they have

a general willingness that Christ should save them from hell, they, therefore, conclude they are really willing to come to him according to the gospel-constitution, whereas there is nothing in the world to which they are more averse. There are many that think, and perhaps declare, they would give ten thousand worlds for Christ, when, in reality, they are not willing to receive him as a free gift: they are not yet brought to that extremity as to fly to him. No, the sinner is brought low indeed before he is brought to this. He is entirely cut off from all hope from every other quarter; particularly, he sees that he cannot shelter himself any longer under the covert of his own righteousness, but that he will be overwhelmed with a deluge of divine vengeance, unless he hides himself under the wings of Jesus.

I beg you would examine yourselves impartially on this point, my brethren, for here lies the grand delusion that ruins thousands. If you are really willing to fly to Jesus, and be saved by him in his own way, you may be sure he is infinitely more willing than you are; nay, your willingness is the effect of his, for he first made you so. But if, when you examine the matter to the bottom, you find, that notwithstanding all your pretensions, you are really unwilling to fly to him, consider your dangerous situation; for,

6. The text implies, that this unwillingness of sinners is the real cause of their destruction.

Sinners complain of the want of ability: but what is their inability but their unwillingness? Coming to Christ is an act of the will, and, therefore, to will it heartily, is to perform the act. To be unable to come to him is to be so perverse, so disaffected to Jesus Christ, as not to have power to will to come to him. This, by the way, shews the

vanity of that popular excuse, "I am not able to fly to Christ, and, therefore, it is not my fault if I do not." That is, you are so wicked that you can do no good thing; you are so disaffected to Jesus Christ that you have no will, no inclination, to choose him for your Saviour; you are such an obstinate enemy to him, that you would rather perish than take him for your Friend; therefore your not coming to him is no crime. Is this consistent reasoning? Is it not all one, as if a rebel should think to excuse himself by pleading, "I have such an inveterate hatred to my sovereign, that I cannot love him:" Or a robber, "I have such an aversion to honesty, that I cannot possibly help stealing?" Would not this be an aggravation of the crime rather than an excuse? Is the invincible strength of your disaffection to Christ, a vindication of it? Are you the more excusable, by how much the more you hate him? Sinners, give up this foolish reasoning, for the matter is too important to be trilled with. Your inability in this case is nothing else but your unwillingness; and your unwillingness is the effect of nothing else but your disaffection to Jesus Christ; therefore own that this is the true cause of your destruction.

In short, whatever pleas and excuses you make, you will find at last that your destruction is entirely the effect of your own perverse choice. *Ye will not come unto Christ that ye might have life,* John v. 40, and, therefore, you must perish without it. This reflection will forever torment you, that you wilfully destroyed yourselves, and were guilty of the most unnatural self-murder. Jesus was willing but you would not. God has even sworn that *he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn and live.* To you therefore, I may properly address that exhortation, *Why will*

ye die? Why will ye? why do ye most wilfully destroy yourselves? why do ye ruin yourselves by your own free choice? why will you die? you, whom Jesus is willing to save, whom he has so often invited, why will you, above all men in the world, causelessly die by your own act? Are you capable of so much stupidity? It is a stupidity that is a dreadful peculiarity of your own, for,

7. Unwillingness to fly to Jesus is the most irrational, and worse than brutal stupidity.

This is implied in my text. No sooner does the hen give the signal of danger, than her little family, taught by instinct to understand the alarm, immediately fly under her wings. “So, says Christ, I gave you the alarm, but you would not regard it; so I spread out the wing of my guardian care to defend you, but you would not shelter under it.” What more than brutal stupidity is this? In this light, the conduct of sinners is frequently exposed in the sacred writings. *The ox knoweth his owner, says Isaiah, and the ass his master’s crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Isa. i. 3. Every one turneth to his course, says Jeremiah, as the horse rusheth into the battle; yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people, more stupid than they, know not the judgment of the Lord. Jer. viii. 6, 7.* To refuse the offer of eternal salvation, when proposed upon the most reasonable terms—to rush into hell, rather than be saved by the friendly hands of Jesus Christ—to suffer the most terrible execution, rather than accept a free pardon—to reject all the bliss of heaven when freely proposed—to choose the pleasures of sin for a season, rather than an eternity of the most exalted happiness—to resist the calls of redeeming love, and all the friend-

ly efforts of divine grace, to save a sinking soul—is this the conduct of a reasonable creature? No; shew me the brute, if you can, that would act so stupid a part in things that come within the sphere of his capacity. Would it not be better for you to be a cat or dog, (to use the language of the Earl of Rochester,) than that animal Man, who is so proud of being rational, if you make so irrational a choice? Let me endeavour to make you sensible.

8. And lastly, that this conduct is extremely affecting and lamentable.

It is on this account, that Jesus laments over Jerusalem in such pathetic strains in my text. He knew the truth of the case; his all-seeing eye took it in all its extent, and viewed it in all its circumstances and consequences. And since he, who knew it best, deeply laments it, we may be sure it is lamentable indeed; and it cannot but appear so even to us who know so little of it. An immortal soul lost! lost forever! lost by its own obstinacy! lost amidst the means of salvation! how tragical a case is this?—God dishonoured! Jesus rejected! his love defeated! his blood trampled upon! his spirits grieved! how lamentable is this?—And yet are there not some of you in this lamentable condition in this assembly? It was over such as you that Jesus wept and mourned. And shall he weep alone? Shall not our tears keep time with his, since we are so much more nearly concerned? *O that our heads were waters, and our eyes fountains of tears, that we might weep along with the Saviour of men!* But, alas! our tears are too much reserved for dying friends, or some less affecting object, while immortal souls perish around us, unpitied, unlamented!

SERMON XLVII.**THE NATURE OF LOVE TO GOD AND CHRIST OPENED AND ENFORCED.**

JOHN XXI. 17.—*He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

THERE is nothing more essential to religion, or of more importance in it, than divine love. Divine love is the sole spring of all acceptable obedience in this life, and the grand pre-requisite for complete happiness in the enjoyment of God in the world to come; and without it, all our religion, all our gifts and improvements, however high and miraculous, are vain.

And as it is of the utmost importance in reality, it is confessed to be so by all mankind, who acknowledge the existence of a Deity. Whatever be the religion, or whatever be the object, still it is universally acknowledged, that love is an essential part of it. And indeed the evidence for this is so very glaring, that it is no wonder mankind have not been able to shut their eyes against it. Religion without love, is as great a contradiction as friendship without love. To worship a God whom we do not love, to adore excellencies which we disaffect, to profess a religion founded by an enemy, this is the greatest absurdity imaginable.—Such a religion must appear abominable to God and man.

Now divine love is the subject of my text, which I have chosen for your present meditation; and you

see I have not chosen a subject that is trifling in itself, or the disputed peculiarity of a party. You need not, therefore, be under apprehensions, that I would proselyte you to any thing but the sincere love of God and Jesus Christ. However, I would not have you judge of my design by my verbal declarations, but by the apparent tendency of my discourse, of which you will be able to form a judgment when I have done.—Therefore entertain no prejudices or suspicions till you see reason, lest you deprive yourselves of that benefit you might otherwise receive from your present attendance.

There is so little solicitous inquiry among men concerning the sincerity of their love of God, that it would seem self-evident, and beyond all dispute. Whatever sins they indulge themselves in, however much they practically neglect God and religion, yet still they insist upon it, they love him sincerely. This piece of merit they all claim, as belonging to them beyond dispute. But is divine love indeed a thing so common, so universal? We read that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*. Rom. viii. 7. And is there no such thing as a carnal mind now to be found upon earth? We are told of some that were *haters of God*, Rom. i. 30, *enemies in their minds by wicked works*. Col. i. 21. And are there none such to be found among us? The heart-searching Jesus, while conversant among mortals, told the Jews, who made so great a profession of their love to God, and suspected their own sincerity as little as any of us, *I know you, that you have not the love of God in you*. John v. 42. And were he now to pass sentence upon us, would he not make the same declaration with regard to sundry of us, who, perhaps, are least apprehensive of it? Is it a needless thing for us to enter into a serious conference with our own

hearts, and ask them, "Do I indeed love the ever blessed God, and the only Saviour? Will my love stand the test? What are its properties and effects?" Is this, my brethren, a superfluous or impertinent inquiry? I am sure it did not seem so to Christ who put Peter to the trial upon this point no less than thrice.

Our Lord made a meal with his disciples, to convince them of the reality of his body after his resurrection. When it was finished, he turns to Peter, and asks him a very serious question, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* The very proposal of the question seems to suppose that Peter had given some reason to suspect his love to him, as he had really done, a few days before, by denying him thrice, with shocking aggravations; and with this reference the inquiry was very cutting to Peter, and no doubt made him think thus with himself: "Ah! it is no wonder my Lord should call my love in question, who so lately most ungratefully denied him." The question is put to him openly, before the whole company, which might perhaps increase his confusion; but it was prudently ordered, that he might declare his love to Jesus as openly as he had denied him, and that his brethren might be satisfied of his sincerity, and recovery from his late fall.

The first form of the question implies a comparison: *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?* that is, more than these thy fellow-disciples? "It is not long since, Peter, that thou didst declare, Though all should forsake thee, yet will not I; though all my fellow-disciples should prove treacherous, yet I am determined to adhere to thee, come what will; and art thou still of the same mind?" Peter modestly replies, *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee:* as much as to say, "Lord, I own

that I have fallen more foully than any of my brethren, and I dare not say I love thee more than they do: I dare say nothing of the high degree of my love, in comparison with others; but, Lord, I must assert the sincerity of my love, weak as it is, and I humbly adventure to appeal to thee, who knowest all things, and canst not be deceived with fair pretensions, for the truth of my profession.”*

Peter, no doubt, hoped this declaration would satisfy his Lord. But Jesus, after a pause, puts the question to him again, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* And Peter insists upon his former answer, *Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*

Now he hoped to escape all future questions upon this point. But Jesus, as though he were still suspicious of him, puts it to him a third time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* Peter was grieved that this inquiry should be put to him successively no less than thrice; it cut him to the heart with the remembrance of his base denial of his Master as often, and perhaps with a fear that he would not now be convinced of his sincerity, but was about to expose him as a traitor, and discard him. Upon this he grows warm, and replies with the most passionate vehemence, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.* As much as to say, “Lord, why dost thou try me so often upon this point? Look only into my heart, which lies all open to thy view, and be thou judge thyself, whether I do not sincerely love thee. I must confess my late

*Or the comparison in the question may refer to the provision they had just fed upon, and the employment they had just been in, q. d. “Lovest thou me more than thou lovest these fish and thy fishing trade? Peter replies, *Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.* Well, says Christ, if thou dost really love me, leave this employment, and feed my sheep; let that be thy business for the future, and shew thy love to me, by thy tender care of my sheep; that is, of my church.”

conduct looked very suspicious: and I reflect upon it with shame and sorrow: I am unworthy to be ranked by thee among thy friends. But, Lord, unworthy as I am, and base and suspicious as my conduct was, I must insist upon it, that I do love thee; and it wounds me to the heart that thou shouldst seem so jealous of me. I cannot give up this point; and I appeal to thyself for the truth of it." Jealousy in love, my brethren, suspicion among friends, is a very painful and anxious passion; and never so much so to a pious heart, as when the sincerity of our love to God is the object of it. Such a person cannot be easy while a matter of so much importance lies under suspicion, but must put it beyond all doubt.

And let me tell you, sirs, this is a question in which we are all most nearly concerned. Are our conduct and temper towards God so entirely and uniformly friendly and dutiful, as to put it beyond all doubt that we do truly love him? Alas, are there not many things that look very suspicious in our case? Should Jesus now call each of us by our names, as he did Peter, and ask us, one by one, *Lovest thou me?* what could we answer? Could we honestly desire him to look into our hearts, that he might see that sacred principle there? and could we produce the genuine evidences of it in our lives? My brethren, if there be an inquiry within the compass of human knowledge that deserves the most solicitous attention, certainly this does. And it is my present design to assist you to come to a determination upon it. I say, we are now going upon this search, "Do I really love the Lord Jesus?" Come, sirs, let us all join in it; let us all resolve to be determined in this point before we leave this place. For this purpose I shall point out some plain marks of genuine love, and then, supposing that you will

have discovered your real character in this respect, I shall address you as divided into two different classes; the friends, and the enemies of Jesus. And as love to God, and love to Jesus Christ, who is God as well as man, are substantially the same, and cannot be separated, I shall not nicely distinguish between them, but speak upon the one or the other, as may be most conducive to my design.

1. I am to point out some plain, genuine marks of divine love; and these I shall derive either from plain scripture, or from the apparent nature and inseparable properties of that passion.

I need hardly tell you, that while there is so much hypocrisy, flattery and compliment in the world, a man's professing the Christian Religion, and a supreme regard to its Founder, is no certain evidence of divine love. Insincerity and treachery, which have done so much mischief in private friendships, and betrayed so many kingdoms, has diffused itself, like a malignant poison, into the affairs of religion; and men dare to compliment and flatter even the heart-searching God. Judas betrayed his Lord with an *Hail, Master, and a kiss*; and his conduct before that had the appearance of friendship, otherwise the disciples would have suspected him for the traitor upon the first hint. Therefore there must be something more substantial to evidence the truth of our love, than a mere profession, or the external forms of religion.

Nor does true love consist in a speculative, languid esteem, or a careless, unaffecting good opinion of Jesus Christ. We may think and speak highly of him, and believe very great things concerning him, while the heart is dead and cold towards him; yea, full of enmity against him. All this may be the effect of education, or cool reasoning, and may hover in the head, without sinking deep into the

heart, and becoming a governing principle in practice. It is this speculative good opinion of him which, I am afraid, the generality mistake for divine love. They cannot but know that their hearts are habitually careless and indifferent towards God, that they do not feel those affectionate emotions and strong tendencies of soul towards him, which they feel towards all other objects of their love. However, when they happen to think of him, it is sometimes with a kind of high esteem; and this they take to be a genuine love to him, though it has no correspondent effects upon their temper or conduct.

I may add farther, that some may love God upon a mistake; that is, they love him upon supposition that he is quite another kind of being than he really is; and did they conceive of him as he is, he would appear to their depraved hearts rather an object of terror and abhorrence, than of love and delight. For example, they may suppose him so soft, easy, and passive a being, as not to resent their rebellious conduct: so merciful as hardly ever to execute justice upon sinners; so careless of the honour of his law and government, as to pass by all their disobedience; and so foolishly fond of his creatures, as to advance them to happiness promiscuously, without any regard to their moral character, or the honour of his perfections. Such a deity as this is formed exactly according to their taste, to encourage them in sin, and relieve them from horrors of conscience and the fears of futurity; and no wonder they should love such a being as this, so like themselves; even criminals would love a judge of this character. But this is not the true God, but the creature of their own foolish imaginations. This is not that God before whom the celestial armies cry, *holy, holy, holy; who is of*

purser eyes than to behold iniquity; who is a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he: who turns the wicked into hell, and all the nations that forget God; and who will not admit one soul into heaven but what is made holy in temper and practice beforehand. And did they view him in this light, they would be so far from loving him, that their carnal minds would rise in enmity against him. Now to love God upon such a supposition, is not to please him, but to reproach and affront him; and he resents it as the highest indignity. How would you take it, if a rake or a villain should love you upon a mistaken notion, that you were a libertine, a thief, or a liar, like himself? Would you thank him for such a friendship? No; you would esteem it the basest affront. And when you had convinced him of his mistake, his love would be turned into hatred. My brethren, we must love God for what he is, otherwise we do not love him at all. We must, therefore, know him in some measure as he is, before we can rationally love him; and particularly we must know and delight in those perfections which are most unacceptable to guilty and depraved creatures, his justice, holiness, and infinite hatred of sin, before we can truly love him.

Having cautioned you against these plausible and popular mistakes, I now resume my purpose, and shall point out some undoubted marks of genuine and sincere love. And that I may not perplex you with too many particulars, I shall only mention these four: that it is of a divine and supernatural original; and that it produces frequent and affectionate thoughts of its object; a delight in communing with him; and an earnest study and endeavour to please him, by a life of universal obedience.

1. If you would determine this important inquiry, "Do I really love the Lord Jesus Christ?" you must previously inquire how you came by your love? whether it be the mere effect of nature, of education, or of any thing within the power of man? or whether it was wrought in your hearts by the almighty power of God, after many rebellious struggles and insurrections, and a full conviction of the innate enmity of your carnal minds against him? If it be the spontaneous production of your own hearts, or of natural causes, if you have always been possessed of it, and never found it difficult to obtain or cherish it? If you have not been sensible of a supernatural power working it in you, you may be sure it is all delusion. For though the passion of love be innate in our nature, and is easily excited by a thousand created beauties, yet, alas! it has no natural tendency towards God. Human nature in its present state is strangely indisposed and disaffected in this respect, as experience has abundantly convinced us, unless we have been stupidly unobservant with regard to ourselves. A state of nature is uniformly represented in scripture as a state of enmity against God. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh*, John iii. 6, and therefore, by nature, we are all flesh in the scripture style. *Now they that are in the flesh cannot please God*, says St. Paul, *because the carnal mind is enmity against God, &c.* Rom. viii. 7, 8. The scripture every where represent us as being saved in the way of reconciliation; now reconciliation supposes a previous variance and enmity. Nay, St. Paul expressly tells us, that *we were enemies, when we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*. Rom. v. 10. By nature we are *children of wrath*, Eph. ii. 3; and surely we cannot be children of wrath and lovers of God at one and the

same time! Here then you must all plead guilty.— Whatever you now are, it is beyond all doubt that you were once enemies to God. It is sufficient conviction against you that you are men, and belong to a race universally disaffected. And now have you ever been brought out of that state? If not you are enemies to God still. You could not pass from death unto life in a dream, or an entire insensibility; for you must have experienced a great change, and you must have been sensible of, and may now recollect a great many deep and affecting sensations that attended it. You must have seen and been shocked at your disaffection: you must have been brought to cry in the most importunate manner to God to give you a better temper, and to shed abroad his love in your hearts by the Holy Ghost. Rom. v. 5. In short, you are made new creatures; old things are passed away, and all things are become new; and all these new things are of God, who hath reconciled you to himself. 2 Cor. v. 17, 18. Now if this be the test, what would you say to this question, *Lovest thou me?* Some of you, I trust, could answer, “Lord, I am afraid of the truth of my love; but this I am sure of, a great change hath been wrought in my soul. Whether I am now a sincere lover of God or not, I am sure I am not what I once was; not only my outward practice, but the inward temper of my heart towards thee is vastly altered; it is more filial, affectionate and dutiful.” If any of you can advance thus far in your answer, my brethren, it looks comfortable, though you should still be jealous of yourselves. But, sirs, let conscience now deal honestly with you: Are there not many of you who are still in your natural state? All your religion is an earth-born, self-sprung thing. You have never been the subjects of a su-

pernatural work of divine grace, nor felt such a great change in the temper of your minds; and if this is your case; I must pronounce, that, however many amiable qualities you may be possessed of, and however fair a profession you make of religion, you have not the love of God in you; for how should you have it, when it is not natural to you, and when it has not been implanted in you by an operation above nature? Indeed, my brethren, if this be your case, you are plainly convicted this day of being destitute of the very first principle of all religion; and pray admit the conviction: you may as well expect to be men without being born, as to love God without being born again. But,

2. If we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, we frequently and affectionately think of him. This you know is the genius and tendency of love in general, to fix our thoughts upon its object; and the Psalmist often mentions this as an attendant of his love to God. *How precious are the thoughts of thee unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake I am still with thee.* Psal. CXXXIX. 17, 18. *I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches.* Psal. lxxiii. 6. *My meditation of him shall be sweet.* Psal. civ. 34. Isaiah represents the whole church as saying, *The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee: with my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.* Isaiah xxvi. 8, 9. This you see is the character of the lovers of God. And on the other hand, his enemies are characterized as persons who do not like to retain him in their knowledge, Rom. i. 28; *who forget God,* Psalm ix. 17, and 1. 22. *God is not in all their thoughts,* Psal. x. 4, but they practically say unto the Almighty, *depart from*

us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Job xxi. 14. The thoughts of an enemy are always ungrateful, especially if he is unable to avenge himself of his adversaries; and the mind will turn every way to avoid them. But the thoughts of one we love, how sweet, how welcome, how often do they return! how often does the dear image of an absent friend rise to the mind! and with what affectionate endearments! Unless you are entire strangers to this generous passion, you know, by experience, this is the nature and tendency of love.

And do not these things enable some of you to give a comfortable answer to this question, *Lovest thou me?* You are often jealous of your love; but if you love him not, why do your thoughts make so many eager sallies to him? Once your thoughts could dwell within the compass of created nature, and fly from vanity to vanity, without attempting a flight to heaven. But now do they not often break through the limits of creation, in eager search after God as that supreme good? And with what affectionate eagerness do they at times dwell there? How do your souls delight to survey and gaze at his perfections, and contemplate the wonders of his works! And how often do your thoughts hover round a crucified Jesus, and, as it were, cling and cluster to his cross, like the bees round the hive! You do not indeed think of him so frequently, or with such affectionate endearments as you should. But can you not appeal to himself, that the thoughts of him are welcome to your minds; that you do at times dwell with pleasure in the delightful contemplation, even when your hands are busy about other things; and that it is your daily sorrow that your hearts are not more intimate with him, and pay him more frequent visits? Does not your ex-

perience tell you, that you cannot always let your thoughts grovel in the dust, or run out in an endless chase of things below, but that, in some happy hours, they rise on the wings of love, and most affectionately cleave to your dear Redeemer? And your thoughts are not the cold speculations of a philosopher, but the warm, passionate, and heart-affecting thoughts of a christian. If this be your case, my brethren, take courage. You love the Lord Jesus Christ, and you may be sure he loves you, and will treat you as his friends.

But are there not many of you who may be convinced by those things, that you have not the love of God in you? For are you not conscious that your affectionate thoughts are prostituted to some trifle in this lower world, and hardly ever aspire to him? Nay, are not the thoughts of God, and things divine and eternal, unwelcome to you? and do you not cast them out of your minds as you would shake a spark of fire from your bosoms? Do you not find yourselves shy of him, and alienated from him? Do not those things give you pain which would turn your thoughts towards him? You do not affect such subjects of meditation or conversation, and you soon grow weary and uneasy when your minds are tied down to them! And what can be the cause of this, but a strong disaffection to God, and a secret consciousness that he is your enemy on this account? O, sirs! what can be more astonishing, or what can be a stronger evidence of enmity to God, than that men should live in such a world as this, and yet hardly ever have one affectionate thought of their great Author, Preserver and Benefactor! His glory shines upon them from all his works, and meets their eye wherever they look; his word exhibits him to their view in a still more bright and amiable light. It represents

the Lord Jesus in all the love and agonies of his crucifixion, and in all the glories of his exaltation; they are receiving mercies from him every moment of their lives; for, in him they live, and move, and have their being: their own reason and consciences tell them that he is the most excellent and lovely being, and worthy of supreme and universal love, and they profess to believe it; and yet he cannot; after all, gain so much as their frequent and affectionate thoughts! Their thoughts, those cheap and easy things, are ungratefully denied to him, who gave them a power of thinking! O what stupid indifferency about the supreme good, or rather what prevailing enmity is here! Can you pretend to be lovers of Jesus Christ while this is your case? Can you excuse or extenuate this under the soft name of infirmity? No, it is rank, inveterate, sullen enmity; and a righteous God resents it as such. But,

3. If you love God and the Lord Jesus Christ, you delight in communion with them. Friends, you know, delight to converse together, to unbosom themselves to one another, and to enjoy the freedoms of society. They are fond of interviews, and seize every opportunity for that purpose; and absence is tedious and painful to them. If you are so happy as to have a friend, you know by experience this is the nature of love. Now, though God be a spirit, and infinitely above all sensible converse with the sons of men, yet he does not keep himself at a distance from his people. He has access to their spirits, and allows them to carry on a spiritual commerce with him, which is the greatest happiness of their lives. Hence God is so often said, in the scripture, to draw near to them, and they to him, James iv. 8. Heb. vii. 19. Psalm lxxix. 18, and lxxiii. 28. Heb. x. 22. Lam.

iii. 57—and St. John, speaking of himself and his fellow-christians, says, *Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.* 1 John i. 3. This divine fellowship is promised by Jesus Christ to all his friends. John xiv. 21, 23. *He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him;—we will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* This mystical fellowship is peculiar to the friends of God; and others know nothing of it. They are represented as poor strangers and aliens, that have no communication with God. Eph. ii. 12. Col. i. 21. He is shy of them and they of him: they keep at a distance from one another like persons disaffected.—This communion on God's part consists in his communicating to his people the influences of his grace, to quicken them, to inflame their love, to give them filial boldness in drawing near to him, in assuring them of his love to them, and representing himself to them as reconciled and accessible. And on their part it consists in a liberty of heart and speech in pouring out their prayers to him, a delightful freedom of spirit in all exercises of devotion, in returning him love for love, and dedicating themselves to him. Thus there is a kind of interchange of thoughts and affections, mutual freedoms and endearments, between them. And O! how divinely sweet in some happy hours of sacred intimacy! This indeed is heaven upon earth: and, might it but continue without interruption, the life of a lover of God would be a constant series of pure, unmingled happiness. But, alas! at times their Beloved withdraws himself, and goes from them, and then they languish, and pine away, and mourn, like the mourning turtle that has lost his mate. This intercourse with God may be a strange thing

to some of you; and to vindicate the want of it, you may give it some odious name; enthusiasm, fanaticism, or heated imagination. But I must tell you, if you know nothing of it, your temper and experience is entirely different from all the friends of God, and, therefore, you cannot rank yourselves in that happy number.

Now the ordinances of the gospel are, as it were, the places of interview, where God and his people meet, and where they indulge those sacred freedoms. It is in prayer, in meditation, in reading or hearing his word, in communicating at his table; it is in these and the like exercises that God communicates, and, as it were, unbosoms himself to those that love him; and they enjoy the freedom of children and friends with him: and on this account they delight in those ordinances, and take pleasure in attending upon them. The workings of their hearts in this respect, you may discover in David, when, by the persecution of Saul, or the rebellion of his son Absalom, he was banished from the stated ordinances of public worship. Ps. xlii. 1, 2, 4, and lxxxiv, throughout, and xxvii. 4.

And now, my brethren, to come nearer home, have not some of you experienced the sacred joys of communion with God? And were not those the sweetest hours of your life? Have you not found it good for you to draw near to him? And when he has withdrawn his presence, how have you languished and mourned, and could never be easy till he was pleased to return to you? Do you not also find a sacred pleasure in the institutions of the gospel, because there you hope to meet your God, and enjoy communion with him? Is this the principle that prompts you to pray, to hear, and perform every religious duty? Then you may appeal to a

heart-searching God, *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*

But does not this view of the matter give the conscience of some of you reason to condemn you? You have neither known nor desired this fellowship with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. Alas! you know nothing of those freedoms of divine friendship: and you have no prevailing pleasure in devotion. You either neglect the duties of religion, or else you perform them from custom, education, constraint of conscience, or some other such principle. Let me point out one instance as a specimen; and that is secret prayer and closet devotion. Nothing can be more expressly commanded than this is by Christ, Matt. vi. 6, and is this your daily practice? Is this the most pleasant exercise of your life? Or is it a mere formality, or a weariness to you? My brethren, inquire honestly into this matter.

4. And lastly, If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you earnestly study and endeavour to please him by a life of universal obedience. Love is always desirous to please the person beloved; and it will naturally lead to a conduct that is pleasing. This, then, you may be sure of, that if you love Jesus, it is the labour of your life to please him. The grand inquiry with you is not, will this or that please men? will it please myself? or will it promote my interest? but, will it please my God and Saviour? If not, I will have nothing to do with it. This is the standing rule of your practice: Let others consult their own inclinations, or the taste of the age; let them consult their own secular interest, or the applause of mortals; you consult what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Rom. xii. 2. See also Eph. vi. 6. 1 Pet. iii. 17. Heb. xiii. 21—and if you may but please him.

it is enough. But are there not some of you who are hardly ever concerned with this dutiful solicitude? If you can but please yourselves, and those whose favour you would court, if you can but promote your own interest, you are not solicitous whether you please God, or not. This proves you destitute of his love.

The only way to please God, and the best test of your love to him, is obedience to his commandments. This is made the decisive mark by Christ himself. *If a man love me, he will keep my words—He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings.* John xiv. 23, 24.—He repeats it over and over in different forms: *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.* ver. 21. *If ye love me, keep my commandments.* ver. 15. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* John xv. 14. *This is the love of God,* says St. John; that is, it is the surest evidence, and the natural, inseparable effect of your love to God, *that you keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous,* 1 John v. 3; that is, they will not seem grievous to one that obeys them from the generous principle of love.

Here then, you that profess to love the Lord Jesus, here is an infallible test for your love. Do you make it the great study of your life to keep his commandments? Do you honestly endeavour to perform every duty he has enjoined, and that because he has enjoined it? And do you vigorously resist and struggle against every sin, however constitutional, however fashionable, however gainful, because he forbids it? And is the way of obedience pleasant to you? Would you choose this way to heaven rather than any other, if it were left to your election? What does conscience answer to this? Do not some of you stumble and hesitate

here? If you should speak the truth, you must say, "I cannot but confess that I do wilfully indulge myself in some things which Jesus has forbidden, and leave unattempted some duties which he has commanded?" Alas! is this the case? Then his love does not dwell in you: you are undeniably his enemies, whatever be your pretensions. But if you can say, "Lord, I own that in many things I offend; in many things I come short of my duty, but, if I know myself, I think, I can honestly declare, that it is my sincere and earnest desire to do thy will, and that it is my real endeavour in every instance in which it is made known to me;" I say, if you can make this declaration, your case looks encouraging; this is the dutiful temper and modest language of genuine love.

And now, my brethren, if Jesus should put this question to each of you, *Lovest thou me?* are you prepared to answer him? Can you desire more plain, or more certain evidences than have been given? Surely, no; and, therefore, if you are still quite undetermined, it is owing to the real obscurity and perplexity of your case, or to your carelessness and inattention, or to your wilfully shutting your eyes against conviction. My brethren, if you have these characteristics of love to Jesus, away with your painful jealousies, and believe that your hearts are upright before him. But if you are destitute of them, be assured you are equally destitute of his love. Love can never be separated from its natural fruits and effects; and, therefore, without these, it is the greatest absurdity to pretend to it. Can you rise up now, and tell the Lord Jesus to his face, "Lord, it is true, I have not the fruits and evidences of love, but I love thee notwithstanding; I love thee above all, though I have no frequent affectionate thoughts of thee: I love

thee, though I hate to think of thee; though I have no pleasure in conversing with thee, nor any concerns to please thee, and keep thy commandments; that is, I love thee, though my temper and conduct towards thee be those of an enemy!" Alas! sirs, will you presume to impose upon an omniscient God, with such absurd contradictory pretensions as these? Would such a love as this pass current among men? Offer it now to your governor, your father, or your friend, and see if they will accept of it. Tell your friend, "I most sincerely love you, though I do not love to think of you, or converse with you; I love you, though I care not whether I please you;" would he not discard you from his friendship, as an inconsistent pretender, and highly resent it, that you should think to impose upon him by such absurd pretensions? And shall that pass for sincere, supreme love to God, which would not be accepted as common friendship among men? Shall enmity, disguised under hypocritical pretensions, be offered to him, under the name of friendship? With horror I mention it; and yet I must mention it, that you may be shocked at your conduct! Do you think he wants understanding to be thus imposed upon? It is a plain case you have not the least spark of true love to him; you are enemies to him in your minds, by wicked works, therefore pass sentence upon yourselves: "Here is a soul so perverse and wicked, that it has never yet loved its divine Parent and the supreme excellency; has never loved the blessed Jesus, the Friend of sinners." And now, should all the enemies of God in this assembly walk to one side, and crowd together by themselves, how thin would they leave this congregation! How few would be left behind! Well, the day is coming, when you must be separated, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the

goats. To the left hand, sinners, the left hand of your Judge, you must go, who continue destitute of his love. Then you will know the truth of your case; but, alas! it will be too late to correct it. But now the discovery of it is the first step towards the amendment of it. And therefore, let your consciences now anticipate the proceedings of the great judgment day, and draw a line of separation betwixt you, that I may address you, according to the classes in which you are found. This leads me, pursuant to my proposed method,

II. To address myself to you who have now discovered that you are sincere lovers of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding your many imperfections. And my time will allow me to offer only two things to you.

The one is, your heaven is sure. I repeat it again, your heaven is sure; as sure as the sincerity of your love. Love is the grand qualification for the enjoyment of God. You can be happy in his presence, because you love him; happy in his service, because you love him; happy in the contemplation of his glories, because you love him. In short, love renders you fit for heaven, and all its employments and fruitions, and therefore you shall certainly be admitted there; for God never will exclude one soul that is fit for it, or that could relish the happiness there. Love is the substance of all religion and obedience; love is the fulfilling of the law; and that love you have in your hearts. O happy souls, "rejoice in hope of the glory of God:" for, as the apostle reasons, *your hope will not make you ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost.* Rom. v. 4, 5. Love is an immortal principle. *Charity, or love, never faileth.* 1 Cor. xiii. 8. It is, therefore, not only your privilege, but your duty, to rejoice; and how can you

refrain, when in a few years, at most, you will be with that Jesus whom you love unseen, in all the glories, and in all the felicities, of the heavenly world.

The other thing I would mention to you is, alas! how faint, how imperfect is your love! And what great reason have you to cherish it, and labour to raise it into a vigorous flame? I need not offer much for your conviction on this head; for alas! you cannot but be sensible your love bears no suitable proportion to the excellency of the divine nature, the dying love of Jesus, and your obligations to him. Alas! it is but a feeble spark, and sometimes so buried and suffocated under the weight of your corruptions, that you can hardly discern it at all, and fear it is entirely extinguished. O then, I beseech you, love your God more: love your dear Redeemer more. Do not affront him with such a languid love: think over his excellencies, his relations to you, his unbounded love and grace to you; and these considerations may fire your hearts, cold as they are. Cry to him to kindle the sacred flame in your breasts, and avoid every thing that tends to damp it: guard against the friendship of this world, which is enmity against God; and against all the workings of sin: avoid all causes of variance and distance between God and you, and labour to maintain a settled peace and a constant correspondence. But the other class of my hearers stand in greater need of immediate relief, and therefore,

III. I shall address myself to such of you as may have discovered, by this day's trial, that you are destitute of the love of Christ: and what I have to say to you, my dear fellow mortals, may be reduced under two heads, your sin and danger; and the most proper means of deliverance.

To convince you of your sin and danger in not loving God and his Son Jesus Christ, consider,

1. It is the supreme excellency that you have refused to love. The most venerable Majesty, the most consummate wisdom, the most rich goodness and grace, the most amiable justice; these are the things you disaffect, while you are disaffected towards God: for these are his very nature. You neglect and disgust faithfulness, candour, veracity, mercy, benevolence, and every moral beauty in the highest perfection. You are enemies to the origin, the sum total of all excellency. Now this may strike you with conviction in various views—as first, how depraved and corrupt must your souls be, that can be disaffected to such a glorious object? How must your taste be vitiated, that cannot relish the supreme good? You can love the faint shadows of these perfections in your fellow-creatures: you can love generosity, benevolence, mercy, justice, and such virtues, in mortals, and may you not fall down overwhelmed with astonishment, and cry out, “Lord, what is this that has befallen my soul, that I cannot love thee? that I can love any thing else that is lovely, and yet cannot love thee? O! what a perverse, depraved, abominable soul is this!” Sirs, must you not be shocked to think you have such souls within you? If your bodies were all over-run with rotten ulcers; if your features were all convulsed and distorted into the most hideous forms; if your limbs were all shattered and dislocated; if your taste were so vitiated that you loathed all healthful food, and you should crawl upon the earth, feeding on its mire and dirt; all this would not render you half so odious and horrible a monster as a soul disaffected towards God. Again, what an aggravated wickedness must this be? Your obligations to love him are just in pro-

portion to his loveliness and excellency; and the wickedness of breaking these obligations is in exact proportion to their strength. And as his excellency and your obligations are infinite, your wickedness in not loving him must be so too. What illustration shall I use to represent this crime in its proper infernal colours! If you should commence an enemy to the whole creation; prosecute men and angels with implacable abhorrence; detest the father that begat you, and the breasts that gave you suck; nay, if you should commence a direct enemy to yourself, be perpetually plotting against your own life, all this would not equal the crime of hating the ever-blessed God; for all these beings together have no excellency compared to him, and your obligation to love him is prior and fundamental to all others. Here your love should begin, here it should centre, and then extend its lines to all parts of the circle of creation; therefore no more plead your innocence. If you had never committed one sin beside in all your life, this one of not loving God is sufficient to condemn you forever to the lowest hell.—Further, this sin will appear more aggravated, if you consider, that, by not loving God, you do in the strongest manner declare, that he has not these excellencies, but is a worthless being, undeserving of your love. When you do not love him, after all the discoveries he has made of himself to you, it is plain that this is the habitual sense of your hearts, that he has no excellency worthy of your love. This is the language of your hearts; and this language is much more strong and expressive than that of your lips. You may speak things inadvertently, which your second thoughts would retract; but by being all your life destitute of the love of God, you have all your life been declaring that you look upon him

as a worthless being, far inferior to a thousand things upon earth, to which you have given your love. Now you would not dare to utter such blasphemy as this, and how can you dare to declare it, much more strongly, by the temper of your hearts, and stand to it as a truth? O! will you never retract it by becoming a lover of God? My brethren, can you imagine a more shocking, insolent wickedness than this? And what an hateful soul must that be that has been guilty of it all its days! What is this but to say, with the atheistic fool, No God? for he is not God, if he be not supremely excellent and amiable? and if you wish there were no God, what do you do but wish universal desolation, and imprecate destruction to yourself, and every other being? for were there no God, there could be nothing else; there would not have been one spark of being through infinite space in any point of duration.

2. Your not loving God is a most unnatural wickedness. He is your Father; and that in a higher sense than your earthly parents can be.— He is the Author of your bodies, because it was he that first established, and still continues in force, those laws of generation, by which they were produced; and had it not been for this, men could no more produce one another than a stone or a clod of earth. As to your souls, the nobler part of your persons, they are his immediate offspring, produced by him without the instrumentality of secondary causes, of any pre-existent materials. Thus he is your Father in the highest sense; and yet you have not loved him! You have not loved him who gave you the power of love! You have not loved him from whose creative hands you came a few years ago! What an unnatural wickedness is this? What were you an hundred years ago?

You were nothing; and you would have continued so to all eternity, had he not spoke you into being. And yet you have not sincerely loved him to this moment! Most astonishing! Must you not tremble at and abominate yourselves as the vilest and most unnatural monsters? Should the child that received his being from you in a subordinate sense, the child you dandled upon your knees, and for whom you are now laboriously making provision, should he hate the sight of you, shun your company, and do nothing to please you, how would you take it? Would you not think the unnatural miscreant unworthy of life? And yet thus you have treated your heavenly Father, to whom you were under much higher and more endearing obligations. You have treated him as only a despised broken idol, in whom you could take no pleasure. And are you pleased with yourselves notwithstanding? shall not such a shocking prodigy, at which angels gaze with horror, be struck with horror at itself?—Should all the world treat God as you have done, what would be the consequence? Why, there would not be one lover of God to be found among all the numerous race of man. And yet, if you have a right to hate him, they have too. Have you any peculiar indulgence in this case? Can you produce an exemption from that universal law, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart? &c.* You see then whither your conduct leads, and do you not shudder to think of it? And can you imagine yourselves innocent still? Do you think you have tolerably good hearts for all? I am sure your reason, if it be not entirely lost, will not allow you to think so.

3. This is a most ungrateful wickedness. Think what God has done for you; how many mercies he has given you, as many mercies as moments; think

how many deliverances he has wrought for you; see what a well-furnished world he has formed for your accommodation.—Think, O think, of the love and sufferings of Jesus; see the abasement, the labours, the hardships of his life; see the agonies of his crucifixion; see the crown of thorns, the mangled visage, the disjointed limbs, the flowing blood, the bursting heart, the dying pangs of your blessed Redeemer. O! think upon, and view these things, and then say, what do you think of your enmity against him after all this? Can ingratitude rise to a higher pitch? O! is this your return for all the kindness of God? for all the love of Jesus? There was something very cutting in his question to the Jews, *Many good works have I done among you. I have never provoked you by any thing but good works; and for which of these do you stone me?* John x. 32. This may be easily accommodated to you. Many kind actions has he done to you, many grievous sufferings has he undergone for you; and for which of these do you hate him? O must not such an expostulation wound you to the heart, and melt you down at his feet in the deepest repentance? O! can you continue enemies to the very cross of Christ? Must not that disarm your resentment, and dissolve your hearts, hard as they are, into the most tender love?

4. This is a most comprehensive wickedness.—You are repeatedly told, that love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom. xiii. 8, 10, James xi. 8. The first and great commandment upon which (with a like precept with regard to our neighbour) the whole law and the prophets depend, is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c.* that is, love is the root, the principle, the substance of all obedience, because it constrains a man to a cheerful observance of every divine precept, and natu-

raily disposes him to a dutiful conduct. Now if love be the fulfilling of the whole law, it follows, that the want of love is the breach of the whole law: it is dashing the two tables of the law in pieces at once. As love is the principle of all obedience, so enmity is the principle of all disobedience; and while this reigns in your hearts it diffuses a deadly poison through every thing you do; and you cannot perform one action acceptable to God. All your endeavours are but the treacherous flattery of an enemy, or the forced homage of a rebel obliged to feign submission. In short, the want of love to God is the want of every thing that is morally good: it is the root of all evil; it is a complication of all wickedness; a summary, nay, I may say, the sum total of all disobedience and rebellion. And can you any longer build your hopes on the fewness or smallness of your sins? Alas! while you are possessed of this temper, your hearts are full of every evil. This renders not only your actions, your words, and thoughts of every kind, guilty and vile, but the stated, settled, bent, and disposition of your minds, most wicked and abominable.* And must you not fall on your faces before your injured Sovereign, and cry guilty, guilty? But,

5. This is a most inexcusable wickedness. Your mouth must be stopped, and you have no plea left to excuse or extenuate it. You cannot plead here, as you do in some other things, "there are so many different denominations in the world, so many different opinions about religion, that I know not what to choose;" for here, as I told you, all are agreed. They are all unanimous in this, that love

* When the omniscient God views you asleep, when all the powers of action are suspended, what can he say of you but this, "Here lies an enemy of God?"

to God is essential to religion. Not only all denominations of christians, but Jews, Mahometans, Heathens, and all that believe the existence of a God, confess this. And are you of a religion that does not include the love of God in it? It is the religion of devils, or rather it is the most diabolical irreligion. I insist the more boldly upon this point, because it is a catholic truth, free from all suspicion of party. You cannot plead that you have no time for the exercise of love to God; for love is not the work of the hands, but of the heart; and may be performed while you are engaged in other business. Can you not think affectionately of a friend behind a counter, or over a plough? So you might love God, and yet follow your daily employments.—Nor can you excuse yourselves from your inability; for God has implanted the passion of love in your nature, and you find it easy to love other things: you can love the world, you can love a child or a friend, and why cannot you love God? The act of love is the same in both cases, and one would think it would be an easier thing for you to love him who is the Supreme Excellence, than imperfect creatures, whose excellency is limited, or mingled with many hateful qualities.—Whence then is your inability in this case? It is nothing else but the strength of your enmity; that is, you are so disaffected to the ever-blessed God, that you cannot love him; and does this lessen your crime? Do the inveteracy and rancour of your enmity excuse it? Alas! that is its most dreadful aggravation. O! how wicked must you be when you are so disaffected to the God that made you, and the Saviour that died for you, that you cannot prevail upon your hearts to love him! Farther, Have you tried what can be done to root out and subdue this enmity by the power of the Holy Spirit? Have you

cried to God in earnest prayer, and used all means for that end? If not, it is plain you are an enemy to God, and love to continue so: you hate him, and practically insist upon it you do right. Nor can you pretend ignorance in this case; for your own conscience tells you, it is your duty to love God. In short, you are entirely inexcusable: you sin against the full conviction of your own minds, and you must join with God, angels, and men, in your own condemnation.

6. This temper, if it continue, will certainly exclude you from the kingdom of heaven. Alas! what would you do there with your disaffected hearts?—Heaven would be an enemy's country to you. What pleasure could you have in the society or service of that God whom you hate? in those exercises and enjoyments for which you have no relish? Could you be happy in the practice of eternal flattery, bowing and singing insincere complimentary praises to an enemy? Could you affect the society there? There is not one like you in all that innumerable assembly: they all love that God whom you disgust. And with what pleasure could you mingle among them? How could you live in a country where the laws, the customs, the employments, the disposition of the inhabitants, are all contrary to your temper? O! you need no sentence from your Judge to exclude you, you would exclude yourselves, and choose to mingle with your fellow-devils:—Which leads me to add,

7. This temper, if it continue, will certainly lead you to hell. You are fit for no other place. Where should the enemies of God be, but in an infernal prison? There is the same propriety in it as in shutting up madmen in bedlam, or rebels in a dungeon. Why, you are devilized already; you have the very temper of devils: enmity to God is the

grand constituent of a devil; the worst ingredient in that infernal composition; and this you have in your hearts, and, as it were, incorporated with your habitual temper. And what do you think will become of you? Judge yourselves, must you not be doomed to that everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels, whom you resemble?

Here I must subjoin, that if ever you are brought to love God it must be in this world. In heaven and hell no new dispositions are planted; but those that are found prevalent in the soul will ripen and grow to perfection. None begin to grow wicked in hell, or to love God in heaven: the seeds are all sown in the present state, which then spring up to maturity. Therefore, if you would ever have the love of God shed abroad in your hearts, now, now is the time; now or never.

But, “What means, (you will say,) shall I use for this purpose?”—Here I must be short: but if you are really in earnest, you will easily understand the shortest hints.

1. Labour to be deeply sensible of the aggravated sinfulness and danger of your present state. Deeply impress your minds with this. Check the levity of your minds, and indulge a serious, anxious, sorrowful temper; for your case really requires it.

2. Be deeply sensible of the necessity of divine grace to change your hearts, and inspire you with divine love. The disease is so far gone, you cannot heal yourselves; but, blessed be God, He is able, He is able to make such an enemy as you his hearty friend and dutiful subject. Therefore,

3. Betake yourselves to earnest prayer; and confess your guilt, your vileness, your liableness to divine displeasure: cry for his Spirit to shed

abroad his love in your hearts: here let your petitions centre; for this is the main thing. Endeavour to devote yourselves to him, to give up your disaffected hearts to him, to bow that rebellious soul at his feet.

4. Meditate upon the glory of God, his kindness to you, the love and sufferings of Christ, and such subjects as tend to beget and inflame your love to him.

5. Be not weary in the use of these means, but persevere, hold on, until you find a thorough change produced in your hearts. Your eternal All is concerned; therefore be not remiss and careless; be not soon tired or discouraged. Never give over until your last breath; and who knows but that hostile spirit of yours may soon become the friend of God, and at length shine among his celestial friends in all their transcendent glories and ineffable and eternal felicity! Amen.

SERMON XLVIII.

THE NATURE AND AUTHOR OF REGENERATION.

JOHN III. 7. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

THOSE doctrines are not always most absurd in themselves, nor strange to a well-informed mind, which are most wondered at in the world. Ignorance is apt to wonder, where knowledge discovers nothing amazing or unaccountable. To support our observations, proofs might be given; but it is to my present purpose to take notice only of one, one that excited from Nicodemus wonder, about seven-

teen hundred years ago, and is still wondered at; nay more, is ridiculed in an ignorant world: I mean the doctrine of Regeneration or the New Birth.

Nicodemus comes to Christ with a conviction of his high character as a Teacher from God, who attested his commission by the strong and popular evidence of miracles. From such a Teacher he expects sublime instructions; and from his own improvements in Jewish learning, he, no doubt, flatters himself he shall be able to comprehend them; but when, instead of gratifying his curiosity by telling him strange and great things of the kingdom of the Messiah, as a secular prince, and a mighty conqueror, as he and his countrymen expected, or discoursing like a Rabbi on the Jewish law; I say, when, instead of this, Jesus opens the conference by a solemn and authoritative declaration of the necessity of something under the name of another birth, how is Nicodemus surprised! This he cannot understand. This seems strange, new doctrine to him; and he has an objection ready against it, as an absurdity and an impossibility: *How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* This objection, which was altogether impertinent, and founded upon a gross mistaken notion of the doctrine, may serve as a specimen of all the objections that have been made against this doctrine ever since; they have all proceeded from ignorance; or from gross mistaken notions of an evident truth; and hence men have imagined, like this master of Israel, that they reasoned strongly against it, when in reality they were saying nothing at all to the purpose, and did not so much as understand the case.

Our condescending Lord took a great deal of pains to give Nicodemus right notions of this doc-

trine. For this purpose he presents it before him in various views. He tells him, he did not mean a second natural birth, but a birth of water and of the spirit; a birth that renders a man spiritual, and consequently fit for that spiritual kingdom he was about to erect; and that the free and sovereign Spirit of God, the Author of this new birth, operated like *the wind, which bloweth where it listeth*. Nicodemus still continues gazing at him, and wondering what he should mean. He is puzzled, after all, and asks, *How can these things be?* Jesus tells him the wonder did not lie in the doctrine, but in his ignorance of it, when he was a teacher of the law; *Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?*

The connexion of my text is this: *That which is born of the flesh, is flesh: and that which is born of the spirit, is spirit: therefore, marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.* That is to say, “the doctrine you are so much surprised at, is not at all absurd, so as to make you wonder to hear it from my mouth. You cannot but know, that all mankind are born of the flesh; that is, propagated in a way that communicates a depraved nature to them; and hence, they are flesh; that is, corrupt and carnal; and therefore wholly unfit to be admitted into my kingdom, which is pure and spiritual. But that which is born of the spirit, is spirit, that is, spiritual and holy; and therefore fit for that spiritual and holy kingdom, which I am come to set up. Now, if this be the case, you have certainly no need to marvel at this doctrine: can it seem strange to you that impure, unholy creatures must be changed, before they can be fit members of so holy a society? Can you marvel at this? No; you would have more reason to marvel at the contrary.

It is one part of my design to-day to inquire, whether the doctrine of the new birth be indeed such a strange, absurd, or impossible thing in itself, as to deserve the amazement, and indeed contempt, which it generally meets with in the world: or whether it be not rational, necessary, and worthy of universal acceptance? But before I enter upon this, it will be proper to inquire,

What the new birth is? And,

Who is the author of it?

And in what way does he generally produce it?

Remove your prejudices, my hearers, against this doctrine, suspend your disbelief, and cease to wonder at, or ridicule it, till these points be explained, lest you be found to speak evil of the things you know not.

I. Let us inquire, What it is to be born again?

To gain your attention to this inquiry, I need only put you in mind, that whatever be meant by the new birth, it is not an insignificant speculation, not the disputed peculiarity of a party, not the attainment of a few good men of the first class, but it is essential to every good man, and absolutely necessary to salvation. You cannot doubt of this, if you look upon Jesus Christ as a person of common veracity, and worthy of credit in his most solemn declarations; for he has declared, over and over again, with the utmost solemnity, that *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.* John iii. 3, 5, and 7. Attend then, if you think your eternal salvation worthy of attention.

The phrase, *to be born again*, like most other expressions used upon divine subjects, is metaphorical, and brings in natural things, with which we are familiarly acquainted, to assist our conceptions of divine things, which might otherwise be above our comprehension. We all know what it

is to be born; and our knowledge of this may help us to understand what it is to be born again. As by our first birth we become men, or partake of human nature; so, by our second birth, we become christians, and are made partakers of a divine or spiritual nature. As our first birth introduces us into this world, and into human society, so our second birth introduces us into the church of Christ, and makes us true members of that holy society. As by our first birth we resemble our parents, at least in the principal lineaments of human nature; so, by our second birth we are made partakers of the divine nature; that is, we are made to resemble the blessed God in holiness; or, as St. Paul expresses it, *we are renewed after his image, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.* Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10. The effect is like its cause; the child like the parent. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.** In our first birth we are endowed with child-like and filial dispositions towards our human parents; and when we are born of God, we are inspired with a child-like and filial temper towards him as our heavenly Father. By our natural birth we are placed in an imperfect, but growing state. We have all the powers of human nature, though none of them in perfection; but from that time they grow and improve, till they at length arrive to maturity. In like manner, in our second birth, all the principles of virtue and grace are implanted; but their growth and improvement is the work of the christian life: and from that time they continue gradually growing, though with many interruptions, till at death they arrive at maturity and per-

* *Flesh of flesh, and spirit of spirit.* This is according to the established laws of generation, by which every thing begets its like.

fection. In our natural birth we pass through a very great change. The infant that had lain in darkness, breathless and almost insensible, and with little more than a vegetative life, enters into a new state, feels new sensations, craves a new kind of nourishment, and discovers new powers. In like manner, in the second birth, the sinner passes through a great change; a change as to his view of divine things: as to his temper, his practice, and his state; a change so great, that he may with propriety be denominated another man, or a new creature. As I shall adjust my discourse to the narrow limits of an hour, I must pass over, or but slightly touch upon all the particulars suggested by the metaphor in my text, except the last, which is the most comprehensive and instructive; namely, that the new birth implies a great change in the views, the temper, the practice, and the state of the sinner; and under this head, sundry of the other particulars may be reduced.

The various forms of expression, which the scripture uses to represent what is here called a second birth, all conspire to teach us, that it consists in a great change. It is represented as a resurrection, or a change from death to life: *You hath he quickened, saith St. Paul, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* Eph. ii. 1. It is represented as a new creation: *If any man be in Christ, says the same inspired author, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; and behold, all things are become new.* 2 Cor. v. 17. *Put on, says he, the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.* Eph. iv. 24. These and like expressions signify a very great change: and such forms of speech are very commonly used in the same sense; which shews they are so far from being ridiculous, that they are agreeable to the common

sense of mankind. When we see a man that we once knew, look, and speak, and act as he used to do, it is customary to say, "He is the old man still." But if we see a great alteration in his appearance, his temper, or behaviour, we are apt to say, "He is a new man;" or, "He is quite another creature." When we see a rugged boisterous man become meek and inoffensive, we are apt to say, "He is become a mere child." These forms of speech are so significant and popular, that they have even passed into proverbs, and that in various countries and languages; and hence they are used in the scriptures as plain and familiar representations of this great truth. And hence we are bold to use them, in spite of that senseless ridicule and contempt, which some would cast upon them; but which rebounds upon themselves, for censuring modes of expression that are not only sacred, but agreeable to common sense.

Now, since it is evident the new birth signifies a great change; you are impatient, by this time, I hope, to know more particularly what it is. It is the change of a thoughtless, ignorant, hard-hearted, rebellious sinner, into a thoughtful, well-informed, tender-hearted, dutiful servant of God. It is the implantation of the seeds or principles of every grace and virtue in a heart that was entirely destitute of them, and full of sin. The sinner that was wont to have no practical affectionate regard for the great God, is now made to revere, admire, and love him as the greatest and best of Beings; to rejoice in him as his supreme happiness, and cheerfully to submit to him as his Ruler. Formerly his temper and conduct would better agree to the infidelity of an atheist than to the faith of a christian: but now, he thinks, and speaks, and acts, as one that really believes there is a God; a God

who inspects all his ways, and will call him to an account. The heart that was wont to disgust the holiness of the divine law, and murmur at the strictness of its precepts, now loves it; loves it for that very reason for which it was wont to hate it: namely, because it is so holy. This was the temper of the Psalmist: *Thy word is very pure; therefore, (that is, on that very account,) thy servant loveth it,* Psalm cxix. 140, and of St. Paul, *The law is holy, and the commandment is holy—and what follows? I delight, says he, in the law of God, after the inner man. And I consent unto the law that it is good.* Rom. vii. 12, 16, 22. The haughty, stubborn, deceitful heart, is now made humble, pliable, simple, and honest, like that of a little child. Hence Christ says, *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* Matt. xviii. 3, 4. This was also the temper of David: *Lord, my heart is not haughty—surely I have behaved myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.* Psalm cxxxi. 1, 2. The heart that used to have no delight in communion with God, but lived as without God in the world, now feels a filial desire to draw near to him, and address him with the humble boldness and freedom of a child. *Because ye are sons, says St. Paul, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts: crying Abba, Father.* Gal. iv. 6. That is, Father, Father: the repetition of so tender a name intimates the greatest endearment and affectionate freedom. The heart that had no realizing affecting views of a future state, now feels the energy of that doctrine, and looks upon heaven and hell as indeed the most important realities. The heart that was once earthly

and sensual, eagerly set upon things below, as its main pursuit, is now taught to aspire to heaven; in heaven is its treasure, and there it will be. The thoughts that were once scattered among a thousand trifles, are now frequently collected, and fixed upon the great concerns of religion. Now also the heart is remarkably altered towards the Lord Jesus: formerly it seemed sufficient to wear his name, to profess his religion, to believe him to be the Saviour of the world, to insert his name in a prayer now and then, and to give a formal attendance upon the institutions of his worship; but O! now he appears in a more important and interesting light. Now the sinner is deeply sensible that he is indeed the only Saviour, and he most eagerly embraces him under that endearing character; and intrusts his eternal all in his hands. Now he appears to him all lovely and glorious, and his heart is forever captivated with his beauty. Now he prays, and longs, and languishes for him, and feels him to be all in all. O! now the very thought of being without Christ, kills him. Thus, *God, who first commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into his heart, to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. iv. 6,* in that face where it shines with the fairest beams. Now also the man has very different views of himself: he sees himself to be a guilty, depraved, vile creature, all overrun with sin, and destitute of all goodness, but, as it is wrought in him by divine grace; how different is this from the proud self-righteous estimate he was wont to form of himself! His views of sin are also quite different from what they used to be: he used to look upon it as a slight excusable evil, except when it broke out into some gross acts. But now he sees it to be unspeakably vile and base, in every

instance and degree. An evil thought, a corrupt motion of desire, an indisposed heart towards God, appears to him a shocking evil, such as nothing but the infinite mercy of God can forgive, and even that mercy, upon no other account but that of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He sees it does most justly deserve everlasting punishment; and he is often lost in wonder that the gospel should open a door of hope even for him, who has been so deeply guilty. It breaks his heart to think that he indulged so base a thing so long; and he can never be fully reconciled to himself, while he feels the remains of it within him. His repentance now takes a new turn. Formerly he was entirely under the influence of self-love, and therefore, when he had any concern for his sin, it entirely proceeded from the servile principle of fear; fear of the punishment, and not hatred of the crime. But now his soul is ennobled with more generous principles: now he can mourn over sin, as a base ungrateful evil, even when he has no thoughts of the punishment: now he can mourn over sin as against God, and not only as against a sin-punishing, but as against a sin-pardoning God. Now he mourns with generous sorrow over pardoned sin; and God's being so good as to forgive him, is so far from lessening the evil of sin in his view, that this very consideration peculiarly affects him. O! that he should be so base as to sin against a God who is so gracious as to forgive him after all! This thought breaks his heart; and God's forgiving him, is a reason why he can never forgive himself. The heart has also a new temper in the duties of religion; it can no more indulge an habitual coldness or lukewarmness in them, but exerts its powers to the utmost; and, when it has a languishing interval, it cannot be easy in that condition, but tries to rouse itself

again. Experience teaches that it is good to draw near to God; and the ordinances of the gospel are not tiresome formalities, as they were wont to be, but the means of life and refreshment; and they are its happiest hours which are spent in attending upon them. Now the gospel is not that dull, stale neglected tale it once was, but the most joyful tidings that ever came from heaven. As a newborn babe, the regenerate soul desires the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby, 1 Pet. ii. 2, and it is esteemed more than necessary food. Now the careless, secure soul, that was always cautious of over-doing in religion, and flattered itself there was no need of being so much in earnest, is effectually roused, and strives in earnest to enter in at the strait gate, convinced both of the difficulty and necessity of entering. Now religion is no longer a matter by the by, but a serious business; and every thing that comes in competition with it must give way to it. The man is resolved to save his soul at all adventures; and this, he is now convinced, is no easy work. To sum up the whole, for I can only give a few specimens of particulars, the regenerate soul is changed universally in every part. I do not mean the change is perfect in any part: alas! no; sin still lives, and sometimes makes violent struggles, though crucified. The old man dies hard, but I mean, the change does really extend to every part. The soul is in no respect the same it was wont to be, as to the concerns of religion. It has new views, new sensations, new joys, new sorrows, new inclinations and aversions, new hopes and fears: in short, as the apostle tells us, *all things are become new*, 2 Cor. v. 17, and according to his inspired prayer, *the whole man, soul, body, and spirit is sanctified.*—1 Thes. v. 23.

By way of confirmation, let me add a few characters of a regenerate man, which are expressly scriptural. *Every one that loveth is born of God, saith St. John. 1 John iv. 7.* That is, every new-born soul is possessed with a generous love to all mankind, which prompts it to observe the whole law in its conduct towards them, (*for love is the fulfilling of the whole law,*) and restrains it from doing them any injury; (*for love worketh no evil to his neighbour.*) Rom. xii. 10. This love extends not only to friends, but also to strangers, and even to enemies. It is a friendship to human nature in general; it spreads over the whole earth, and embraces the whole race of man. But as the righteous are the more excellent ones of the earth, it terminates upon them in a peculiar degree: and the reason is obvious; they are, in a peculiar sense, the saints' brethren, the children of the same heavenly Father; and they bear a resemblance to him: and if he loves the Original, he must also love the Copy. Thus, says St. John, *every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. 1 John v. 1.*

Another character of regeneration the same apostle gives you, 1 John v. 4, 5. and that is, victory over the world by faith. *Every one that is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* That is, whatever temptations may arise from the riches, honours, or pleasures of the world, or from the society of mankind, the man that is born of God has such believing views of eternal things, as constrains him to conflict with them, and overcome them. He has not such a mean dastardly soul, as to yield to opposition. He is enabled by divine grace, to brave dangers, and encounter difficulties in so good a cause: he dares to be wise and happy,

though all the world should turn against him. O what a change is this from his former temper!

Another distinguishing characteristic of the new birth, is, universal holiness of practice, or a conscientious observance of every known duty, and an honest, zealous resistance of every known sin.—There is no known duty, however unfashionable, disagreeable, or dangerous, but what the true convert honestly endeavours to perform; and there is no known sin, however customary, pleasing, or gainful, but what he honestly resists, and from which he labours to abstain. This necessarily follows from what has been said; for when the principles of action are changed within, the course of action will be changed too. When the heart is made holy, it will infallibly produce habitual holiness of practice. A good tree must bring forth good fruit. This St. John asserts in the strongest manner, and in various forms. *We know, says he, that every one that doth righteousness; that is, that habitually practiseth righteousness, is born of God. 1 John ii. 29. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; that is, he sinneth not habitually, so as he may be denominated a sinner by way of distinction; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself; that is, keepeth himself from the infection of sin; and that wicked one toucheth him not. 1 John v. 18. Little children, says he, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous—But he that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; i. e. as I explained it before, he does not habitually sin in the general tenor of his practice, so as to make sin his distinguishing character; for his seed remaineth in him; that is, the principles of grace, implanted in him in regeneration, are immortal, and will never suffer him to give himself up to sin, as formerly; and*

he cannot sin because he is born of God: his being born of God happily disables him forever from abandoning himself to sin again.—In this the children of God are manifest; and the children of the devil; that is, this is the grand distinguishing characteristic existing between them, Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God. 1 Jo. iii. 7—10. You see then a holy practice is one of the most certain signs of regeneration; and, therefore, in vain do such pretend to it, or boast of high attainments in inward experimental religion, who are not holy in all manner of conversation, and do not live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world.

By this time, I hope, my brethren, you understand what it is to be born again. And now, upon a review of the subject, there are several things of importance, which I would submit to your consideration.

First, I leave you now to consider, whether baptism be the same thing with regeneration, or the new birth, in the scripture sense. I grant that baptism is a sacramental sign of regeneration, just as the Lord's Supper is a sacramental sign of the body and blood of Christ; and, therefore, baptism may be called regeneration, by the same figure which Christ uses when he says of the bread, *This is my body*. In this metonymical sense, this method of speaking has been used by many great and good men: and when they call baptism regeneration, they only mean, that it is an outward sign of it, just as the sacramental bread, for the same reason, is called the body of Christ. Were it always used in this sense, it would hardly be worth while to take notice of it as an impropriety; though, I must confess, I cannot find the same form of speech indisputably used concerning baptism in the Bible. But when men are taught that the whole of that

regeneration, or new birth, which the scripture requires as absolutely necessary to salvation, means no more than just being baptized; and when they that have been baptized, begin to think that they have no more to do with the new birth, the error is too dangerous to be passed over in silence. I shall just lead you into a track of thought, by which you may easily make yourselves judges in this controversy. If baptism be regeneration in the scripture sense, then; whatever the scripture says concerning persons regenerated, born again, or created anew, will also hold true concerning persons baptized. This is so plain a principle, that it is hard to make it plainer; for if baptism be the same with regeneration, the new birth, or the new creation, then the same things may be said of it. Proceeding upon this obvious principle, let us make the trial in a few instances. It may be truly said of him that is born of God, in the scripture sense, that he does not habitually sin, &c. Now substitute baptized, instead of born of God, and consider how it will read, "Every one that is baptized sinneth not; but he that is baptized keepeth himself; and the evil one toucheth him not." Has this the appearance of truth? Do not all of you know so much of the conduct of many who have been baptized, as to see this is most notoriously false? for where cand we find more audacious sinners upon earth, than many who have been baptized? Let us make another trial. *Whosoever is born of God, in the scripture sense, overcometh the world.* But will it hold true, that whosoever is baptized, overcometh the world? *If any man be in Christ, in the scripture sense, he is a new creature; old things are past away, and all things are become new.* But how will it sound if you read, *If any man be baptized, he is a new creature: old things*

are past away, and all things are become new? Does baptism universally make such a change in the subject, as that it may, with any tolerable propriety be called a new creation?—I might easily make the same experiment with many other passages of scripture; but these may suffice as a specimen. And now, must it not be as evident as any mathematical demonstration, that regeneration, or the new birth, in the scripture sense, is something else, something more divine, more intrinsical, more transformative of the whole man, than baptism? That man must labour to be deceived, who can work up himself to believe, after such a representation of the case, that if he has been baptized, he has all that regeneration which is necessary to his admission into the kingdom of heaven. I know no absurdity parallel to it, except the doctrine of transubstantiation, the characteristical absurdity of the church of Rome. Because Christ, in the distribution of the elements in the Eucharist, said of the bread, *This is my body*, putting the sign for the thing signified, therefore Papists conclude, the bread is substantially the very same with the body of Christ signified by it, though it still retains all the sensible properties of bread. Some protestants have fallen into the same error as to the other sacrament of baptism, and that with less plausibility. I can find no scripture that says of baptism, “This is regeneration:” and yet, they insist upon it, that it is the very thing; and make the sign and the thing signified one and the same.

Let me borrow a very plain and popular, and yet substantial argument from Limborch. “The great design of Christ’s coming into the world was, to renew and regenerate men; this is a work worthy of his own immediate hand.” And yet we are told, *Jesus baptized not, but his disciples.* John

iv. 2. “A plain evidence that he made a distinction between baptism and regeneration. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, *I thank God that I have baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius.* 1 Cor. i. 14. But if baptism be regeneration, his meaning must be, I thank God that I regenerated none of you. But is this cause of thanksgiving? Could he give thanks to God that he had not regenerated any of them? *Christ*, says he, *sent me not to baptize.* But can we think Christ did not send the chief of the apostles to promote the great work of regeneration? He elsewhere calls himself their spiritual father, *for*, says he, *in Christ Jesus I have begotten you, through the gospel.* 1 Cor. iv. 15. But if baptism be the new birth, he could not have been their father, or begotten them, unless he had baptized them. From which it is evident, that St. Paul made a great difference between baptism and regeneration.”

Therefore, let no man deceive you with vain words. Baptism is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, which you should think highly of; but do not put it out of its place, by substituting it for quite another thing. Believe it, this is not that kind of regeneration which you must be the subjects of, if you would enter into the kingdom of God.

Another thing which I would now leave to your consideration is, whether regeneration, or the new birth, in the sense I have explained it, be not a rational, noble thing? And whether so great a change in a man's temper and conduct may not emphatically be called a new birth? When a man is born again, the ruins of his nature are repaired, and every noble and divine grace and virtue are implanted in his heart. His heart is made capable of generous sensations; his understanding has suitable views of the most interesting and sublime ob-

jects; and his temper and behaviour are rightly formed towards God and man. In short, the mean, depraved, earth-born creature, is made an infant-angel; nay, St. Peter tells you, *he is made partaker of the divine nature.* 2 Pet. i. 4. What a glorious and surprising change is this! Should you see a clod of earth rising from under your feet, and brightening into a sun, it would not be so glorious a transformation. This change gives a man the very temper of heaven, and prepares him for the enjoyments and employments of that sacred region.

Therefore, *marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again.* Do not gaze and wonder at me, as if I told you some strange, new, absurd thing, when I tell you, you must be regenerated in the manner I have explained, if ever you would enter into the kingdom of heaven. Consult your own reason and experience, and they will tell you, that as heaven is the region of perfect holiness, and as you are indisputably corrupted, depraved creatures, you must be so changed, as to be made holy; or in other words, you must be born again, before you can enjoy the happiness of that holy place: or consult the Bible, which you must own to be true, or own yourselves to be the most gross hypocrites in professing the christian religion; consult your Bible, I say, and you will find the absolute necessity of being born again asserted in the strongest terms. Need I remind you of the solemn asseveration of Christ in my context, *verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven?* The same blessed lips have assured us, that, *except we be converted, and become as little children, we cannot enter into his kingdom.* Matt. xviii. 2. St. Paul speaks in the same strain: *If any man be in Christ, as we all must be before*

we can be saved by him, *he is a new creature, &c. We are his workmanship, says he, created in Christ Jesus to good works. Eph. ii. 10. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but the new creature. All external forms of religion, whether Jewish or christian, are of no avail without this new creation. Gal. vi. 15. This is also more than intimated in that comprehensive promise of the old testament, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. A new heart will I give you; and a new spirit will I put within you, &c.* And are not these repeated declarations sufficient to convince you of the necessity of this great change? Will you any more marvel, when you are told, you must be born again? No; rather marvel to hear the contrary: it may make you wonder indeed, to be told, that an unholy sinner, without any change, is fit for the presence of an holy God; fit to relish the holy enjoyments of heaven: and capable of being happy in what is directly contrary to his nature. This would be strange, absurd doctrine indeed! and wherever you hear it, you may justly wonder at it, and despise such nonsense.

Now if this be true, that *except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*, then it will follow, that just as many persons in this assembly as have been born again, just so many are in a state of favour with God, and prepared for the happiness of heaven. And, on the other hand, just as many as are unregenerate, just so many lie dead in sin, under the wrath of God, and liable to everlasting misery. Let each of you particularly admit this conviction: "If I am not born again, I have not the least ground to hope for happiness in my present state."

Upon this follows another inquiry, of the utmost importance; and that is, Whether you have ever

experienced the blessed change of the new birth? Have your views, your dispositions, and your conduct been changed in the manner described? and can you lay claim to those distinguishing characters of a regenerate soul, which have been mentioned? Pause, and think seriously; recollect your past experiences; look into your own hearts; observe the tenor of your practice; and from the whole, endeavour to gather an honest answer to this grand question, “Have I ever been born again?”

If you can answer this in your favour, St. Peter will tell you the happy consequence; and I shall only desire you to read those most comfortable verses, 1 Pet. i. 3—6. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope—to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time; wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, (if need be,) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.*

But if, on the other hand, you find you have never been born again, what is to be done? Must you lie still in that condition? or should you try to get out of it? I am sure my design in endeavouring to let you see your condition, is, that you may escape out of it and be happy; and if you are so kind to yourselves as to concur with me in this design, I hope, through divine grace, we shall succeed. This introduces the next inquiry, namely,

II. Who is the Author of this divine change, called the new birth?

The change is so great, so noble, and divine, that from thence alone we may infer it can be produced only by divine power. And the nature of man, in its present state, is so corrupt and weak, that it is neither inclined nor able to produce it. It is also uniformly ascribed to God in the sacred writings. The regenerate soul is repeatedly said to be born of God; *born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* John i. 13. *All things are become new,* says St. Paul, *and all things,* (that is, all these new things,) *are of God.* 2 Cor. v. 17, 18. *Every good gift, and every perfect gift,* says St. James, *is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights—who of his own will hath begotten us with the word of truth.* James i. 17, 18. The Spirit is repeatedly mentioned as the author of the new birth, in the chapter where my text lies. This may suffice for the truth of so plain a point.

Here then, sinners, you see to whom you must look for this blessing. You can no more regenerate yourselves, than you could beget yourselves at first. And this you must be deeply sensible of. But he that made you at first is able to new-make you, and to repair his own workmanship, which you have demolished. And it is he who has actually changed many a heart in our guilty world.—Here the next inquiry comes in very seasonably, namely:

III. In what way does this divine agent produce this change?

He is pleased to use such a variety, as to circumstances, that I cannot take time to describe them. But as to the substance of the work, which is the same in all adults, he generally carries it on in the following manner. The first step is, to convince the sinner of his need of this change, by dis-

covering to him his guilt and danger, and particularly the universal corruption of his nature. He is roused out of a state of stupid security by an affecting view of the holiness of God, of the purity of his law, of the terror of its penalty, of the great evil of sin, and of his own exposedness to the divine pleasure upon the account of it. Upon this he becomes sad and serious, uneasy in his mind, and anxious about his condition. He endeavours to reform his life; he prays, and uses the other means of grace with earnestness unknown before. And when he has gone on in this course for some time, he begins perhaps to flatter himself, that now he is in a safe condition. But alas! he does not yet know the worst of himself. Therefore the holy Spirit opens his eyes to see the inward universal corruption of his whole soul, and that a mere outward reformation is far from being a sufficient cure of a disease so inveterate. Hereupon the awakened sinner betakes himself to the use of the means of grace with redoubled vigour and earnestness, and strives to change the principles of action within. But alas! he finds his heart is a stubborn thing, and altogether unmanageable to him; and after repeated strivings to no purpose, he is effectually convinced of his own inability, and the absolute necessity of the exertion of divine power to make him truly good. Therefore he lies at the throne of grace, as a poor, anxious, helpless sinner, entirely at mercy, and unable to relieve himself. It would take up more time than I can allow, to describe the various exercises, the anxious fears, and eager pantings, the strong cries and tears of a soul in this condition. What I have hinted may put such of you in mind of them, as have never been the subjects of them. While the sinner lies in this desponding situation, it pleases God to pity

him. Now the important hour is come, when the old man must be crucified; when the divine and immortal principles must be implanted in a heart full of sin; and when the dead sinner must begin to live a holy and divine life. The great God instantaneously changes the whole soul, and gives it a new, a heavenly turn. In short, now is wrought that important change, which I have already described, which is called the new birth, and denominates the man a new creature.

Here again you may furnish yourselves with materials for self-examination. If you have been born again, you have thus felt the pangs of a new birth, and seen your guilty, sinful and dangerous condition in a true light. And can you put your hand upon your heart, and say, "Here is the heart that has been the subject of this operation?"

Hence also may be gathered some proper directions for such as are in a state of nature, how to attain the new birth.

Endeavour to be thoroughly acquainted with the corruption of your nature: it is from this that the necessity of a new birth proceeds.

Be fully convinced of the indispensable necessity of this change to your salvation.

Break off from, and forsake whatever tends to obstruct the new birth; as, excessive worldly cares, bad company, and in short, all sin.

Seriously use all the means of grace; as, earnest prayer, attentive hearing of the word, &c.

Persevere in so doing, till your endeavours are crowned with success. And particularly, do not grow impatient of those anxieties and fears that will at first attend your pursuit.

These short hints may suffice by way of direction, if you are sincerely desirous of being directed. And what do you determine to do? Will you

not resolve to seek after this important change, upon which your eternal All depends? O! let us part to-day fully determined upon this, that we will implore the power and mercy of God to create in us clean hearts, and renew within us right spirits.

SERMON XLIX.

THE DIVINE LIFE IN THE SOULS OF MEN CONSIDERED.

GAL. II. 20.—*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.*

THE principal design of St. Paul in this epistle, is to assert his divine mission, in opposition to the insinuations of the judaizing seducers that had intruded into the Galatian church; and to prove the justification of a sinner to be only through the merit of Christ's righteousness, and the instrumentality of faith. To confirm the latter he argues, Gal. ii. 15, 16, from the case of the apostles and Jewish christians in general: *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.*—And Gal. ii. 19, he explicitly declares his own case in particular, as agreeing with theirs. *I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God; that is, by the knowledge of the perfection*

of the law, as to its extent and spirituality; I am utterly unhinged and thrown off from all dependence on the works of the law for justification, and from expecting strength to yield obedience to be conveyed, according to the covenant of works;—and God's design in bringing me off from this dependence, and mine in relinquishing it, is not that I may turn libertine, and cast off all obligations to obedience, but that I may, by strength derived from Christ, devote myself wholly to him, and make my life a series of obedience to his will.

He goes on relating his own case in the text; in which you may observe these truths:

First, "That believers are endowed with spiritual activity; or, that they are enabled to serve God, and perform good works." This is intimated by two expressions, *I am crucified*, and, *I live*; which, though they seem contradictory, do really mean the same thing. *I am crucified*, signifies the mortification of indwelling sin, the subduction and extirpation of corrupt principles and inclinations; and he calls the mortification of these the crucifixion of himself, (*I am crucified*,) because of their intimate inhesion with his very nature; they were a sort of self to him. We have a like expression used, and explained by himself in Rom. vi. 6.—*Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* Now the mortification of sin is a part of the service of God, at least a necessary prerequisite. So the apostle reasons in Rom. vi. 2, 6, 11. *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.* The other expression, *I live*, signifies spiritual activity; a vigorous, persevering serving of God; a living unto God, (as it is explained, ver. 19, and Rom. vi. 11.) **Life, as**

ascribed to a rational being, imports not only a continuance in existence, in which sense inanimate things may be said to live, but especially a power of rational operation frequently exercised;—and when attributed to a morally upright being, as such, it imports more than some kind of power of operation, namely, a vital principle of spiritual and holy operation, and the frequent, persevering exercise of it. Such a principle or power is very significantly called life, to denote its intimacy in the soul, its vivacity, and permanency.

Secondly, We may observe, that “the vital principle of holiness in believers, whereby they are enabled to serve God, is communicated to them through Christ only as a Mediator.” This is intimated by that expression, *I am crucified with Christ*; that is, sin is crucified in me by virtue of the crucifixion of Christ; from the merits of his death my strength to subdue sin results: and the mortification of it is the certain consequent of his sufferings, because thereby divine grace was purchased and insured for his chosen, to be communicated at the time appointed. To the same purpose he speaks in Gal. vi. 14. Far be it from me *that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom [or by which,] the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.* This is also asserted in the emphatical epanorthosis, *I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:* that is, spiritual life is formally in me, but it is not self-originated; it does not result from my natural principles, (which are so essential to me, that I may represent them under the personal pronoun I,) but was first implanted, and is still supported and cherished by the power and grace of God through Christ; and it is in every respect so dependent upon him, and his influence is so intimately diffused through my soul, that I

may say, *Christ liveth in me.* A like expression is used in Col. iii. 3, 4, *Christ is our life.*

Thirdly, We may take notice, “that believers receive supplies from Christ for the maintenance and nourishment of their spiritual life.” *The life which I now live* (or, as it might be rendered more significantly, *what I now live*) *in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.*

So that the substance of the text is exhausted in these three doctrines, “That all true believers are endowed with an ability to serve God: That this ability was first communicated, and is still maintained through Christ only: and, That it is by faith they derive supplies from him, for the support and nourishment thereof.”

You may observe I here reason from a particular to an universal, and infer, that because these doctrines are true with respect to St. Paul, therefore they are true with respect to believers in general; and the scope of the text warrants this method of reasoning in this instance, which is confessedly fallacious in other cases: for St. Paul here introduces his own case with a design to represent and illustrate the case of believers in common; which he could reasonably have done, had not theirs been substantially the same with his in these respects. Besides, he declares these things of himself, not upon the account of any circumstances peculiar to himself; which might appropriate them to him: and therefore, though so eminent a saint might have peculiar degrees of them, yet as to their reality and kind, they equally belong to all true christians.

Nothing can be more profitable, nothing more necessary, than right notions about spiritual life. It is the main business of those that have it not, to seek it and of those that have it to cherish it; but how can they do either, if they know not what it is?

Without it our religion is vain; we cannot serve the living God here, nor enjoy him hereafter; we are exposed to the eternal agonies of the second death, and our souls are pining under a spiritual decay, that will at length consume our vitals. How necessary then is spiritual life! And the necessity of the thing infers the necessity of the knowledge of it. The profession of it is the source of all vital religion; it is the health of the spirit; the ornament and perfection of the human nature; the grand pre-requisite to everlasting happiness; the dawn of celestial glory; is it not then incomparably profitable? And must not the right knowledge of it be so too? Yet some are entirely ignorant of it; others, who say they see, are widely mistaken about its nature, the time and manner of its communication, its subjects, the author and meritorious cause of it, and the way in which it is supported and cherished: and therefore, for the instruction of the ignorant, the rectification of wrong sentiments, and the confirmation of our minds in the truth, it may be expedient briefly to attempt the solution of the following inquiries.

I. Wherein spiritual life consists?

II. When it is communicated?

III. Whether it be instantaneously communicated, or gradually acquired by repeated acts?

IV. Who are the subjects of it? or, in what extent is it communicated?

V. In what sense is it communicated and supported through Christ?

VI. How faith derives supplies from him for its support and nourishment?

I. "Wherein does spiritual life consist?" This inquiry, though necessary both to inform your minds and to repel the charge of unintelligibleness, so frequently alleged against this doctrine, yet is

exceeding difficult, both because of the mysteriousness of the thing in itself, and because of the blindness of the minds of those that are not endowed with it. It is mysterious in itself, as every kind of life is. The effects and many of the properties of animal life are plain, but what animal life is in itself, is an inquiry too sublime for the most philosophic and soaring mind. Now spiritual life still approaches nearer to the life of the divine Being, that boundless ocean of incomprehensible mysteries, and consequently exceeds our capacity more than any other. But besides, such is the blindness of unregenerate souls, that they cannot receive or know the things of the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. ii. 14, and therefore what is knowable by enlightened minds concerning spiritual life, cannot be apprehended with suitable clearness by them. The power of understanding it seems to be the effect of the thing understood, and cannot exist separately from it. So it is in other kinds of life. Nothing but reason can inform what is a rational life. Let the faculties of the most sagacious animal be ever so much polished, it can receive no ideas of it. So *he that believeth, hath the witness in himself*, 1 John v. 10, *and none but himself can hear its testimony.** But suppose we could form clear ideas, we should still be at a loss for clear expressions. I have a clear idea of many of the appetites, passions, and motions of animal life; but words may fail me to express them intelligibly to another, especially if he has no experience of them himself. It need not

*I do not mean that the unregenerate have the same degree of incapacity in the one case as beasts have in the other, but only that the one is as really incapable as the other. Reason in the unregenerate approaches nearer to spiritual life than the powers of animal life do to reason, and yet comes entirely short of it.

therefore, afford you any surprise, if after all that shall be said to illustrate this point, it still remains obscure. To design any more than to give you some faint glimmerings, some half formed, inadequate conceptions of it, would be a piece of arrogant vanity.

Now spiritual life supposes a living spiritual principle, and it implies a disposition and a power to serve God, or of holy operation.

1. It supposes a living spiritual principle. There can be no life, no vital actions, without a vital principle, from whence they flow: *e. g.* there can be no animal life, no animal sensations and motions, without a principle of animal life. By a vital principle I mean that from which life and its actions and passions immediately proceed: *e. g.* in the formation of our souls a principle of reason is con-created with them, which is the source, the immediate cause of their life and rational operations. I call this a principle, because it is the beginning of life. Now spiritual life must suppose a principle of holiness. A principle of life of any kind will not suffice; it must be particularly and formally a holy principle; for life and all its operations will be of the same kind with the principle from which they proceed. Now a holy principle is something distinct from and superadded to the mere natural principle of reason. By virtue of this a man can think and will; but experience assures us, that thinking and willing, abstractedly considered, or under sundry modifications which they are capable of, are very different from thinking and willing in a holy manner, or with those peculiar modifications which spiritual operations bear. I can will an indifferent or evil object, if it appears to me as good; but my willing that which is morally good as such, is a very different act; and the principle

from which the former act with its modification proceeds, may not be capable of producing the latter so modified. This may be illustrated by the case of the devils and their associates of the human race. They still retain the principle of reason, and are capable of thinking and willing; otherwise they would be incapable of torment, for without consciousness there could be no sense of misery, and consciousness implies thinking; and without willing there can be no desire of happiness, or abhorrence of penal evil; but yet they are utterly incapable of thinking and willing in a manner morally good, and therefore a principle of holiness must be something distinct from a mere rational principle.

It may be urged, "That all the acts of spiritual life may be resolved into the acts of reason, namely, thinking and willing in a holy manner: and therefore the principle of the former is the same with that of the latter." In answer to this, I grant that the principle of reason, when it implies a power of putting forth such acts, and about such objects, as holiness includes; when it implies a power of knowing and choosing those things which the divine law requires us to know and choose, that then it is the same with a principle of spiritual life; and this is the case of such reasonable beings as still continue in their original uprightness: but the principle of reason may be so maimed as to lose this power, and yet not lose its nature; that is, it may become incapable of that manner of operation which spiritual life produces, and yet continue a principle of reason still. This is evident from the case of infernal spirits, formerly mentioned. Now the principle of spiritual life supplies this moral defect; it adds to reason a capacity of exercising itself suitably about spiritual things. Such a capacity is a separable adjunct of reason, and by the

corruption of our natures it is actually separated from it: and consequently, till it be superadded to our rational powers, we are incapable of spiritual operation; I mean such a manner of spiritual operation as is morally good and acceptable to God. Our rational powers indeed can still exercise themselves about divine things, but then it is not in a fit manner: and therefore when a sinner is quickened by efficacious grace, a power of acting in a fit manner with respect to these things is superadded to his rational powers; and before this there is nothing in him out of which such a power may be educed.

To illustrate this matter, let us suppose a man deprived of the faculty of memory, and yet to continue rational, (as he might in a low degree,) according to this supposition, he will be always incapable of an act of memory, however strong his powers of perception, volition, &c. may be, till the power of exercising his reason in that particular way which is called remembering, be conferred upon him. So let a sinner's mere natural powers be ever so much refined and polished, yet, if there be no principle of spiritual life distinct from them infused, he will be everlastingly incapable of living religion. This gracious principle is called *the seed of God*, 1 John iii. 9, to intimate, that as the seed of vegetables is the first principle of the plant, and of its vegetative life, so is this of spiritual life, and all its vital acts.

2. Spiritual life implies a disposition to a holy operation, an inward propensity, a spontaneous inclination towards holiness; a *willing that which is good*. Rom. vii. 18. Every kind of life has some peculiar innate tendencies, sympathies, and antipathies: so animal life implies a natural inclination to food, to move at proper seasons, &c. There is

a savour, a relish for divine things, as essential to spiritual life as our natural gusts and relishes are to natural life. Hence gracious desires are often signified in scripture under the metaphors of hungering and thirsting; and to this St. Peter expressly alludes; *as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.* 1 Pet. ii. 2. By virtue of this disposition, believers set their affections on things above, Col. iii. 2, they relish, they savour, they affect things above. This is the spiritual mindedness, the savour of the spirit, which is spiritual life; and stands in opposition to the relish and propensions of mere nature. Rom. viii. 6. By virtue of this the strongest bent of their souls is God-ward; they tend, they gravitate towards him as their proper centre. *Their desire is unto him and to the remembrance of his name.* Isa. xxvi. 8. *Their soul follows hard after him.* Psalm lxxiii. 8. By virtue of this they incline to keep all God's commandments; they have an inward tendency to obedience; they love God's law; they *delight in it after the inner man,* Psalm cxix. 97. Rom. vii. 22, and their love and delight will habitually sway them to observe it: religion is their element, their choice. It is not in them forced and unnatural, as all those operations are which do not proceed from an intrinsic principle; and that reluctancy and indisposedness which they sometimes unhappily feel in themselves to religious duties, is preternatural with respect to this spiritual disposition; as the loathing of healthful food is to the human body: it proceeds from a disorder, a weakness in their spiritual life, occasioned by the stragglings and transient prevalency of contrary principles: it is owing to the lustings of the flesh against the spirit. Again, Their obedience is not servile and mercenary, resulting merely from the apprehension of the misery

which will ensue upon disobedience; but it is generous and filial, proceeding from a convictive view of the intrinsic reasonableness, congruity, and amiableness of the duties of holiness; from the pleasure and satisfaction which the performance of them, under this view, naturally produces; (so a man is excited to eat, not merely by his apprehension of the necessity of it for the support of his body, but also by the pleasure he finds in the very action,) and from a sense of the divine authority enjoining those duties. By this the genuine acts of spiritual life are infallibly distinguished from that low and ignoble devotion which flows from custom, education, horrors of conscience, and all the principles of mere nature.

It is true indeed, some persons by nature, and consequently without this supernatural disposition, may incline to and delight in sundry things that, as to the matter of them, are religious duties. So, *e. g.* some are naturally averse to intemperance; and sobriety is inwrought in their very constitutions. Yet still this gracious disposition is distinguished from such a natural inclination by these two marks: The first implies a distinct reference to and a sense of the authority of the divine Law-giver as enjoining those duties, and prompts a person to observe them formally as duties, as acts of obedience; but the latter prompts to the observance of them, considering them as things agreeable to the person's natural temper, without any distinct reference to God; and so they are rather acts of self-gratification than of obedience to the divine authority; and the person would incline to them, if they were not commanded at all. They are duties materially in themselves, but not formally, as performed by him: a regard to the authority of God, which is the constitutive form of

obedience, is left out. A generous temper may incline to give alms; for the Lord's sake is omitted.

3. Spiritual life disposes to all duties of religion and acts of holiness universally. It delights in holiness as such, and regards the authority of the law for itself; and consequently, whatever has the nature of holiness, whatever has the sanction of divine authority, it cannot but affect and relish, even though it should be very contrary to a man's natural inclinations and temporal advantage. But a natural propension is always partial and limited, and inclines to some duties only, neglecting others of equal or greater importance, which thwart the man's corrupt propensions. In a word, such a one's religion proceeds from the very same disposition that his sins proceed from, namely, a disposition to please himself. Hence it is always a maimed, imperfect, half-formed thing; it has not that amiable symmetry and uniformity, that congruous proportion and connexion of parts, which are the ornament and distinguishing characteristic of that religion which flows from a heart universally disposed to holiness.

4. Spiritual life implies a power of holy operation. A heavenly vigour, a divine activity animates the whole soul. It implies more than an inefficacious disposition, a dull, lazy velleity, productive of nothing but languid wishes. So every kind of life implies a power of operation suitable to its nature. Animal life, *e. g.* has not only an innate propensity, but also a natural power to move, to receive and digest food, &c. *They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, Isa. xl. 31; that is, they have strength given them; renewed and increased by repeated acts, in the progress of sanctification. They are strengthened with might, by the Spirit in the inner man. Eph. iii. 16. I do not*

mean that spiritual life is always sensible and equally vigorous; alas! it is subject to many languishments and indispositions: but I mean there is habitually in a spiritual man a power, an ability for serving God, which, when all pre-requisites concur, and hinderances are removed, is capable of putting forth acts of holiness, and which does actually exert itself frequently. So animal life is subject to many disorders, which weaken its powers of operation, but yet still it retains those powers; and they are in some measure active, even under the greatest indisposition, at least in resisting the disorder, though perhaps with faint struggles. Again, I do not mean an independent power, which is so self-active as to need no quickening energy from the divine Spirit to bring it into act, but a power capable of acting under the animating influences of grace, which, as to their reality, are common to all believers, though they are communicated in different degrees to different persons. There is no need of the infusion of a new power, which the Spirit might actuate; but they have a power already, which needs nothing but the suitable concurrence of other causes to educe it into act. So the power of reason is not independent, so as to be capable of operation without the concurrence of divine providence, common to mankind, to quicken it into act: yet it is a power of reason still, because it is capable of rational acts, under common providential influence. But should we suppose a beast the object of that influence, it would still continue incapable of rational acts, till a rational power be implanted in it. The illustration itself directs us to the application of it.

Thus I have briefly shewn you wherein spiritual life consists; but I am afraid it may be still wrapt in obscurity from the eyes of some. And indeed

it would require longer time, larger extent, and greater abilities to reflect sufficient light on so mysterious a point. Before we lose sight of this head, let us improve it to these purposes:

Let us improve it as a caution against this common mistake, viz. that our mere natural powers, under the common aids of divine grace, polished and refined by the institutions of the gospel, are a sufficient principle of holiness, without the addition of any new principle. You see a principle of spiritual life is supernatural; it is a divine, heaven-born thing; it is the seed of God; a plant planted by our heavenly Father. But alas! how many content themselves with a self-begotten holiness? They have formed to themselves a system of natural self-sprung religion. (I mean that it is natural, originally, and subjectively, though it be pretended to be divine objectively, because its patrons acknowledge objective revelation) in this they acquiesce as sufficient, as though they knew not that *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*. The cogitateness of matter appears to me a notion very like this; for I think it might be demonstrated as clearly, that our mere natural powers, in our present lapsed state, without the infusion of any divine, supernatural principle, are incapable of living, evangelical holiness; as it can, that mere matter, without the superaddition of a principle entirely distinct from it, is capable of thinking, however much it be polished, or however differently it be modified.

Let us also improve what has been said, to remove another equally common and pernicious error, namely, That gospel-holiness consists merely in a series of acts materially good. Some imagine that all the actions they do, which are materially lawful and a part of religion, have just so much of holiness in them: and as they multiply such actions,

their sanctification increases in their imagination. But alas! do they not know, that a principle, a disposition, a power of holy acting must precede, and be the source of all holy acts! That a new heart must be given us, and a new spirit put within us, before we can *walk in God's statutes and keep his judgments, and do them.* Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. That we must be created in Jesus Christ unto good works, Eph. ii. 10. before we can walk in them! That *the love of God must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost,* Rom. v. 5, before we can love Him! I do not say, that they that are void of spiritual life should not attempt to perform religious duties in the best manner they can, by virtue of their natural powers; for this is undoubtedly their duty, both because their sin is less when only the manner of their actions, is sinful, than when the matter and manner too are sinful; and because God, who has a right to appoint what methods he pleases, for the collation of his own favours, has constituted this as the way for them to obtain spiritual life. But I say religious and moral duties, however frequently and perseveringly performed, are not evangelical holiness, when they are not done from a gracious supernatural principle: they are but spurious fruits growing from the wild root of depraved nature; and we had best not please ourselves with the view of them, as though they were the fruits of holiness, lest we be consumed at last as fruitless and noxious briars and thorns.

Further, Let us improve our account of spiritual life, to inform us of a very considerable difference betwixt a mere moral and a spiritual life; or evangelical holiness and morality. Spiritual life is of a divine original; evangelical holiness flows from a supernatural principle; but mere morality is natural; it is but the refinement of our natural principles, under the aids of common grace, in the

use of proper means; and consequently it is obtainable by unregenerate men. Hence the same act may be differently denominated, according to the principles from which it proceeds; that may be a piece of mere morality in one, who acts from natural principles only, which is an act of holiness in another, who acts from a principle of spiritual life. So an alms, when given from a gracious principle, and for Christ's sake, is a gracious act; but when given from a principle of natural generosity only, it deserves no higher name than that of mere morality.—A mistake in this is a rock we may tremble to look at, and ought anxiously to avoid! for alas! how many have been dashed to pieces upon it!

Again, We may improve what has been said, to convince us, that a life of formality, listlessness, and inactivity, is far from being a spiritual life.—Where these things are habitual and predominant, they are infallible symptoms of spiritual death. It is true (as has been already observed,) believers are subject to many sickly qualms and frequent indispositions; yea, at times, their languishments are such, that the operations of vital principle within them are hardly discernible to themselves or others; and the vigour of their devotion, in their most sprightly hours, is checked and borne down by the body of death under which they groan. Yet still, there is an inextinguishable spark of life within which scatters a glimmering light in the thickest darkness, and sometimes shines with illustrious brightness. The pulse of the spirit, though weak and irregular, still beats. There is an active power that reluctates and struggles against the counter-strivings of the flesh: that under the greatest languor, puts forth some weak efforts, some faint essays, and under the actuating influ-

ence of the divine Spirit, invigorates the soul *to mount up with wings like an eagle, to run without wearying, and walk without fainting.* And O! the joy, the pleasure of such heavenly activity! We therefore may write *Tekel* on the dull, inoperative religion of many; it serves for no end, but to prove them dead in trespasses and sins. The design of the whole dispensation of God's grace towards fallen sinners, is their vivification to holiness, *that they may bring forth fruit unto God, Rom. vii. 4;* and sure, where that design is not obtained, there can be no true religion. Let us therefore beware lest we should have a name to live, while we are dead.

SERMON L.

THE DIVINE LIFE IN THE SOULS OF MEN CONSIDERED.

GAL. II. 20.—*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.*

We proceed to inquire,

II. **WHEN** spiritual life is communicated?—To this the scriptures direct us to answer, That it is communicated in that change which is generally called *Regeneration, or Effectual Calling.* This is more than intimated by the expressions used to signify the first communication of it. When spiritual life is infused, then it is that God is said to *beget us again to a lively hope, 1 Pet. i. 3, to beget us of his own will, James i. 18, to quicken us who were*

dead in sin, Eph. ii. 5, to give us a new heart, and put a new spirit within us; to take away the stony heart, and give an heart of flesh, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, and we are said to be created in Christ Jesus unto good works, Eph. ii. 10, born again, John iii. 3, born or begotten of God. John i. 13. 1 John iii. 9. Now it is evident that these metaphorical expressions signify what is commonly called regeneration, and that they express the first implantation of spiritual life. Several of them contain a direct allusion to the first communication of animal and human life, as regeneration or begetting, regeneration or being begotten again, creation, &c. And since these, taken literally, signify the first communication of natural life, they must, when used metaphorically and spiritually, signify the first communication of spiritual life. Life before generation, creation, &c. is an absurdity; and generation, creation, &c. without the communication of life suitable to the nature of the being generated, created, &c. is also an absurdity. The other expressions, as *quickenings us while dead in trespasses and sins, giving a new heart,* and the like, even literally signify this.

Hence, by way of improvement, we may be instructed to avoid a common mistake; namely, “That a power of living to God is universally conferred upon mankind in creation: and, therefore, that there is no need of a new supernatural principle to be infused, but only of the concurrence of common providence, and the institutes of the gospel, to polish and refine our natural principles.— And some say, “That God in creation infuses spiritual life into all, on account of Christ’s dying for them; and that if it be given without the merit of the recipient, it may as properly be ascribed to divine grace when it is a natural endowment bestow-

ed in creation, as it would be if it were a supernatural gift communicated by an act distinct from and posterior to that of creation.”

In order effectually to subvert this notion, consider, 1. If spiritual life were communicated in creation, there would be no propriety or significance in the expressions used to denote the communication of it. There would be no need of a new, a second birth, if we were spiritually alive by virtue of our first birth. Were we holy by virtue of our first creation, what necessity of being *created in Christ Jesus*, or of being made *new creatures*? 2 Cor. v. 17. Gal. vi. 15. There could be no opposition between the *old man and the new*. Rom. vi. 6. Eph. iv. 22, 24. Col. iii. 9, 10. The dispositions concreated with us cannot be called a new man.—2. The implantation of spiritual life is not only posterior to creation, but also to corrupt principles, which are innate. We are first *dead in sin before we are quickened*, Eph. ii. 5, we have a *stony heart*, which must be taken away before a *heart of flesh* is given. Ezek. xxxvi. 26.—Such expressions undoubtedly signify and act posterior to, and consequently distinct from creation.—3. The implantation of a principle of spiritual life is eminently an act of special grace, which the concreation of our natural endowments is never said to be. *The washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*, is an act of mercy and the effect of the *kindness and love of God our Saviour*. Tit. iii. 5. *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved.)* Eph. ii. 4, 5. It is according to *God's abundant mercies that we are begotten again unto a lively hope*. 1 Pet. i. 3. But what need I multiply instances? The entire tenor

of the gospel directs us to ascribe the regeneration and sanctification of sinners to distinguishing and peculiar grace. But though our natural powers are the free communications of divine goodness, yet we are never said to be “created according to the grace and mercy of God.” It is not agreeable to the sacred dialect to call the powers of reason, vision, &c. “the gifts of grace,” in the same sense that spiritual life is so called: nay, I cannot find that our natural powers are ascribed to mercy, grace, free grace, at all; and it seems more congruous to ascribe them to other perfections of the Deity, as creative wisdom, power and goodness.—To this I may add, that spiritual life is always represented as communicated “through Christ as Mediator, and for his sake;” but our natural endowments are not said to be given through him.—*The Holy Ghost is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Tit. iii. 5, 6. We are sanctified through the offering up of the body of Christ once for all. Heb. x. 10. It is in Jesus Christ that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Eph. i. 3. He is made sanctification to us, 1 Cor. i. 30, and of his fulness we all receive. John i. 16.* But we are never said to be created for Christ’s sake, or to be made rational creatures on the account of his righteousness. And when we are said to be created by him, it signifies by him as an efficient, not as a meritorious cause.

From all which it appears, that spiritual life in a fallen creature is wholly supernatural: it is of a divine extract, and heaven-born in a peculiar sense. *The sons of God are born of God, and not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.* If therefore any of us continue in our natural estate, we are dead in sin, however strict formalists or refined moralists we may be.—Let us inquire,

III. “Whether spiritual life be instantaneously communicated? Or, whether (as some allege,) it be gradually acquired by repeated acts?”

Here let it be observed, that we are not inquiring, how spiritual life is nourished and confirmed? for that is undoubtedly done gradually, by repeated acts, correspondent to the nature of spiritual life, and perfective of it in the progress of sanctification, as the power of reason is improved by a series of suitable exercises; but our inquiry is, how it is first obtained? Whether it be communicated in the instant of regeneration, as the power of understanding is in creation? And to this I answer affirmatively, for the following reasons.

1. “It is a contradiction that it should be originally acquired by acting, or a series of acts; for that supposes that it exists, and does not exist, at the same time: as it acts, it exists; and as it is acquired by acting, it does not exist. It will perhaps be objected, “That it may be acquired by the repeated acts of another kind of life, namely, rational; or the exercises of our rational powers about spiritual objects.” But this may be answered from what was observed under the first head, namely, that a principle of spiritual life, is something distinct from and superadded to our natural powers. Now the acts of one kind of life, however often repeated, will never acquire a life of a quite different kind: *e. g.* The longest course, and the most frequent repetition of animal acts, will never acquire a principle of reason. Let a blind man hear ever so well, and ever so frequently, that will not acquire a visive faculty. So let our natural principles be exercised about spiritual objects with ever so much frequency and permanency, that will never acquire spiritual life. They are so depraved, that there remains nothing in

them out of which it can be educed, without the communication of something supernatural. Be they ever so strong and active, they can contribute no more to our vivification, than the quick sensation of the auditory nerve can contribute to the acquisition of sight. Principles of action may be confirmed, and rendered more prompt to act, by frequent exercise; but can never be originally obtained that way.

2. The terms whereby the communication of spiritual life is signified, as begetting, creating, quickening, or raising the dead, &c. denote an instantaneous communication.

3. Spiritual life is represented as prior to, and the source and principle of, all acts of evangelical holiness: and consequently it cannot be gradually acquired by such acts, but must be implanted previously to the putting forth of any such acts; as reason is not acquired by reasoning, but is a prerequisite and principle of all the acts of reason. *We are created in Christ Jesus, to make us capable of good works. Eph. ii. 10. We must have a new heart and a new spirit, and the Spirit of God be put within us, that we may walk in God's statutes, and keep his judgments, and do them. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. We must be drawn of the Father, must hear and learn of him, before we can come to Christ. John iv. 44, 45. God gives his people one heart, and one way, that they may fear Him forever. He puts his fear in their hearts, before they cease to depart from Him. Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.* Now if all acts of holiness be the effects of a vital principle of holiness previously infused, then this principle is not acquired by a course of actions, and consequently it is not gradually acquired, but instantaneously infused; for that which is not acquired by acting, is obtained by immediate com-

munication from another, and therefore it does not take up time to obtain it, as a series of acts does. Again, There must be a first act of holiness; for if there be not a first, there cannot be a second, &c. Now since a principle of spiritual life is the spring, and the beginning of all acts of holiness, it must be, in order of nature, prior to the first act of holiness: and consequently it is not gradually acquired by such acts, but precedes them all, and therefore must be instantaneously infused.

Hence we may see the vanity of that religion which is gained in the same manner that a man learns a trade, or an uncultivated mind becomes knowing and learned, namely, by the repeated exercises of our natural powers in use of proper means, and under the aids of common providence. We have seen that a principle of spiritual life is not a good act, nor a series of good acts, nor any thing acquirable by them, but the spring and origin of all good acts. Let us then, my brethren, try whether our religion will stand this test.

Hence also we may learn a considerable difference between what is commonly called *Morality* and *Gospel-Holiness*. The one is obtained, as other acquired habits are, by frequent and continued exercises; the other proceeds from a principle divinely implanted.

IV. Our inquiry is, “Who are the subjects of spiritual life? or, In what extent is it communicated?”

The answer to this is easy, from what has been already offered; for since it is communicated only in regeneration, then the regenerate only are the subjects of it; and since all men are not regenerate, then all men are not the subjects of it. Again, Since it is something distinct from and superadded to our rational powers, then it cannot be proved that all that are endowed with rationality are the

subjects of it. Again, Since it is communicated by an act distinct from and posterior to creation, there is no reason to conclude that it is co-extended with creation, or with the bounds of humanity. And since all these things are so, we may safely conclude, negatively, that it is not communicated to mankind universally and positively; that it is communicated to all the regenerate, and to them only. Hence result two corollaries.

1. That there is no such thing as universal grace sufficient to qualify all men to serve God acceptably, without the supernatural communication of distinguishing grace; for *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* John iv. 24. Those acts which do not proceed from a principle of spiritual life, will no more be accounted by Him vital spiritual acts, than the chattering of a parrot, or the seemingly rational pranks of an ape, will pass with a man of sense for human actions: and without a principle of spiritual life there can be no spiritual acts, as there can be no rational acts without a principle of reason. And since, as has been shewn, spiritual life is not universally communicated, then there is no sufficient grace universally communicated; for the latter necessarily implies the former, and cannot be without it.

2. We may observe further, that the “best actions of the unregenerate are not properly and formally good, and acceptable to God.” It is true their performing the duties of religion and virtue in the best manner they are capable of, is less displeasing to God than the wilful neglect of them, or the commission of the contrary sins, and therefore they should endeavour to perform them; but yet it cannot be said to be positively pleasing to him. It is not the act materially, or in itself, that

is sinful, but formally, and as done by them, e. g. They do not sin as far as they pray, but as far as they pray in a sinful manner, without a gracious principle, without faith, and other requisites to acceptable prayer. *They ask and receive not, because they ask amiss.* James iv. 3. *So then they that are in the flesh, cannot please God.* Rom. viii. 8. A tremendous thought to the unregenerate! Their whole life is an entire series of provocation; one continued act of rebellion against the great King of Heaven.

V. Our next inquiry is, “In what sense is spiritual life communicated and supported through Christ.

To explain and illustrate this point, let these three things be considered.

1. That “by the sin of our first parents and representatives, our principle of spiritual life was forfeited, and the forfeiture is continued, and spiritual death brought on us by our personal sin.”

That Adam was constituted the representative of his posterity, and consequently that his sin is imputed to them, I shall take for granted, not having time to prove it. And if this be granted, then we are destitute of spiritual life; for, that disobedience may be punished, consistently with reason and justice, by the judicial privation of our power to obey, cannot be denied, if these reasonable *postulata* be concealed: That it is consistent with the justice and goodness of the Deity to suspend the continuance of the powers of upright moral agency conferred upon his creatures, on the condition of their right improvement of them: That when such powers are abused and misimproved, they may justly be withdrawn: And that, when withdrawn in consequence of their being forfeited by a criminal misimprovement, God is not obliged in

justice to restore them. Now these *postulata* imply no contradiction, and, therefore, may have been matters of fact; and they are implied in the scripture representation of the circumstance of Adam and his posterity, as related to him; and, therefore, were matters of fact, and consequently Adam and his posterity, on the account of his sin, actually are, at least justly might be, deprived of spiritual life.

As to our personal sin, it contributes two ways to deprive us of spiritual life, morally and physically; morally, in the same sense that Adam's sin does, as it involves us in guilt, and so infers the judicial privation of the imperfect relics of our Maker's moral image; and physically, as every act, and especially a series of acts, naturally tends to strengthen and encourage the principle from whence they flow; to acquire that facility in acting which is called a habit; and to weaken and extirpate all contrary principles, and so indispose for the exertion of contrary acts.

Hence it follows, that in order to the restoration of spiritual life, the moral influence of sin must be removed by making a competent satisfaction to divine justice, and to redeem the blessing forfeited; and its physical influence obstructed by purchasing and communicating divine influences, to weaken and extirpate the principles of sin, and that fatal promptitude and facility of acting which is contracted by the frequent exercise of them; and to infuse an opposite principle of holiness, and mature it into an habit. And this introduces the other two things intended; and therefore,

2. The Lord Jesus, by his sufferings, made a "complete satisfaction to divine justice;" and thereby redeemed the blessing forfeited; and by the merit of his obedience, purchased divine influ-

ence for the extirpation of the principles of spiritual death which lurk in our natures, and the implantation of holiness. Hence the regeneration and sanctification, as well as the salvation, of his people, are ascribed to his merits and death. We are sanctified through the offering up of the body of Christ. Heb. x. 10. And the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered up himself, without spot, to God, purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Heb. ix. 14. He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Titus ii. 14. Hence our old man is said to be crucified with him, Rom. vii. 6, and we to be quickened together with him. Col. ii. 13. Therefore it is only on the account of his righteousness that spiritual life is first given and afterwards maintained and cherished. God acts in the whole affair, as the God of grace, with a distinct reference to the mediation of Christ.

3. Christ, the Purchaser, is appointed also "the Communicator of spiritual life" to his people. *The Son quickeneth whom he will.* John v. 21. *He is exalted as a prince to give repentance to Israel.* Acts v. 31. *He is our life,* Col. iii. 3, 4, and the Author and Finisher of our faith. Heb. xii. 2. In a word, all power in heaven and on earth is given to him, Matt. xxix. 18; a sovereign empire of grace, founded in his own blood, is devolved upon him, and *He is given to be head over all things to his church,* Eph. 1. 22; a head not only of government, but of quickening influence; for *from him all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.* Col. ii. 19. It is therefore by his own hands that all the blessings purchased by his blood are communicated.

Hence for the particular improvement of this head, let believers be taught to look to the Lord Jesus, the great Treasurer of heaven, for the supplies of his grace to support and nourish their spiritual life. Poor things! You are weak in yourselves, but his *grace is sufficient for you, and his strength shall be made perfect in your weakness.* “Ye are complete in him,” therefore, “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might! Come up out of the wilderness, leaning upon your beloved. Be of good courage, and he will strengthen your hearts.” Do not indulge a dastardly temper, nor harbour diffident and desponding fears: For, “have you not known? Have you not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” If you “compass yourselves with sparks of your own kindling,” your devotions will be cold and languid, and a deadly chillness will benumb your spirit. Place yourselves, therefore, under the vivifying beams “of the Sun of righteousness, and you shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall.”

And let “the slain of the daughter of my people” apply to him for quickening grace. Behold, sinners! your Physician; cry after him, plead for him; plead for life. See the great treasury of vivifying influence: stand at the door knocking, begging and weeping, and never depart till you can say, “I return a living soul.” Here is a fountain of life opened, and *let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.* But I hasten to inquire,

VI. “How faith derives supplies from Christ for the support and nourishment of spiritual life?”

I shall proceed to the solution of this by the following gradation.

1. The communication of grace from Christ to maintain and nourish spiritual life in his people, is a peculiar and distinguishing communication. It is appropriated to them, and not promiscuously dispensed to mankind in general. So animal spirits and nervous juices, are communicated from the head to that particular body to which it belongs, and to none other. So a vine conveys nutritive and prolific sap to its own branches, exclusive of all others. It may, indeed be of service to other things, in other respects, as for shade, the entertainment of the sight, &c. but in this respect it supplies its own branches only. Thus Christ sheds his extensive influence on the whole creation; for *by him all things consist*: but that particular kind and degree of influence whereby believers are quickened and kept alive, is peculiarly appropriated to them.

2. It is fit and necessary there should be a peculiar union betwixt Christ and his people, as the foundation of this peculiar influence.

Spiritual life, as to its infusion and preservation, proceeds from the Lord-Mediator, both morally and physically. Morally, from the merit of his obedience and sufferings, whereby it was purchased; and physically, from his operation, whereby it is effected. And in both these views, it is congruous and necessary that it should suppose a special union with him.

As it results morally from his merit, it is fit there should be a special legal union, as the foundation of it. Christ and his people must be actually "one in law," before they can be actually entitled to or receive and enjoy the blessings purchased by his obedience to the law. So a wife must be made le-

gally one with her husband, by a conjugal union, in order to entitle her to and give her the possession of his estate. An insolvent debtor must be legally one with his surety, that the surety's discharge of the debt may procure his acquittance.

And as the spiritual life proceeds physically from his agency, it is necessary there should be a previous special union, as the reason of the termination of that agency upon the believer rather than upon another. This must be a real, though spiritual union, as the communication of vital influences flowing from it, is real though spiritual. Whenever there is a special communication of influence, there is always a special union, as the source and foundation of it. So the peculiar influence of the soul upon the body, of the head upon the members, supposes that they are peculiarly united.

Accordingly the scriptures represent a peculiar union betwixt Christ and his people, which is not betwixt him and the rest of mankind, to whom he does not communicate spiritual life. *I am the vine, says he to his disciples, and ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.* John xv. 5. To the same purport elsewhere, *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.* John xvii. 23. This intimated when the relation betwixt Christ and his people is represented by a conjugal union. *They are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that they should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead.* Rom. vii. 4. *They are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.* Eph. v. 28, 32. But it is most plainly asserted in those passages where Jesus is represented as the head, the church collectively as his body, and particular believers as the members of his body. *As the body is one,*

and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ mystical. For by one Spirit we are all baptized, or initiated, into one body. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 1 Cor. xii. 12—27. God gave him to be head over all things to his church, which is his body. Eph. i. 22, 23. See also Eph. iv. 15, 16. Col. ii. 19.

3. It is fit that *that* grace which has a peculiar concurrence or instrumentality in the uniting of the soul to Christ, and in continuing of that union, should also have a “peculiar concurrence or instrumentality in deriving supplies of spiritual strength from him;” for since union is the true special ground of the communication, it is fit that that which is the peculiar instrument or bond of this union, should also be the peculiar instrument of receiving, or vehicle of communicating vital influences. Now,

4. Faith has a “peculiar concurrence, or, instrumentality in the first union” of the soul to Christ, and the consequent continuation of the union. It is the grand ligament whereby they are indissolubly conjoined. It is true, the spiritual man, as well as our animal bodies, consists of several essential parts. Repentance, love, and the whole system of evangelical graces and moral virtues are as necessary, in their proper respective places, as faith: But then faith has a peculiar aptitude, above all other graces and virtues, for performing the part we now appropriate to it. So heart, lungs, bowels, &c. are essential to the human body, as well as nerves and arteries; but the nerves are the peculiar vehicles to carry the vital spirits from the brain; and the arteries are the only conveyancers of the blood from the heart, through many labyrinths, to the whole body.

Faith, in a special manner, implies those things in its very nature, which reason directs us to look upon as suitable pre-requisites or concomitants of deriving vital influence from Christ. For instance, it is fit that all that receive spiritual life as a blessing of the covenant of grace, should submit to and acquiesce in the terms of that covenant. Now such a submission and acquiescence is faith. It is fit all that derive strength from Christ should be brought to place a humble, self-diffident dependence upon him for it, conscious of their own weakness. Now faith principally consists in such a dependence, and therefore is so often called *a trusting in the Lord*.

Moreover, the sacred oracles assert the peculiar instrumentality of faith in this matter. *Christ is said to dwell in our hearts by faith, Eph. iii. 17, and it is by believing in his name that we receive power to become the sons of God. John i. 12. He himself tells us, He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As I live by the Father, so he that eateth me shall live by me. John vi. 56, 57.* And by eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, is undoubtedly meant faith in him: and consequently it is by faith believers are nourished.

For the particular improvement of this head, I shall make these three remarks:

1. That a saving faith is always operative; and what renders it so is its constant dependence on Christ for quickening grace. It is designed by God, and has a peculiar aptitude in its own nature to derive strength for all acts of holiness from Christ, and he will not deny any of the influences it naturally craves. He is a living head, and will not suffer any of his members to languish under perpetual mortal decays, or drudge away their

lives in successful toil, or supinely waste them in sloth and inactivity. He will fail none that trust in him: but their dependence on him will be like the leaning of the ivy on the oak, or the radication of a tree in a fruitful soil, an assured method to obtain support and nourishment. So far is a dependence on him from leading to sloth and libertinism, as some slanderously surmise.

2. We infer, that *without faith it is impossible to please God*. It has been shewn that without union to Christ, we cannot have an actual interest in his righteousness, or be the special objects of that quickening influence, whereby the spiritual life and activity of his people are maintained; and without these, our persons or performances cannot be accepted, unless our own righteousness be sufficient, without an actual interest in his, to procure the pardon of sin, and reinstate us in the divine favour: and unless human nature, labouring under the maladies of its present degeneracy, be capable, without the special aids of divine grace, to yield suitable obedience to the law: neither of which can be asserted, without virtually renouncing the whole gospel. And we have seen, that faith has so important a place in the union of the soul with Christ, and consequently, in entitling us to his righteousness, and deriving vital influences from him, that without it we cannot be at all united to him, or share in the happy consequences of this union, no more than there can be a circulation of the blood without veins and arteries.

3. We observe that gospel holiness may be distinguished from all counterfeits, and particularly from what some dignify with the name of morality, by this criterion, that it presupposes a special union with Christ, and is cherished in the heart, and exercised in practice, by virtue of the quickening in-

fluences flowing from him, as the head of his church, and received by faith; whereas mere morality does not necessarily suppose such an union, but may result from our natural powers, under the common influences of divine providence.

I shall conclude with a short general improvement of the whole subject, in the following inferences:

1. That the reason why religion is so burdensome to many is, because they are “destitute of a principle of spiritual life,” and the “quickenings of divine grace.” Constrained by self-love, they drudge and toil in religious duties, and cry, “What a weariness is it!” Or impatient of so disagreeable a burden, they neglect them entirely. Religion is not natural to them, for want of a new nature. But to you that believe, *Christ is precious; all his ways are pleasantness, and all his paths are peace. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.*

2. Let us examine ourselves, whether the evidences of spiritual life, which may be collected from what has been said, give us reason to conclude that we are possessed of it. Let us cast the discourse into a form of interrogation, and propose the following inquiries to our consciences:

Do we feel, or have we felt, a supernatural principle working within? Is our religion heaven-born? or is it natural and self-sprung? Is the habitual bent of our wills God-ward? Do our hearts propend towards him as their ultimate scope? Do we *delight in his law after the inner man, and will that which is good, even when we cannot do it?* Do we perceive ourselves at times *strengthened with might in the inner man?* And that we can *do all things through Christ strengthening us?* Have we ever experienced the important change of regeneration? Are *old*

things passed away, and all things become new? Have we put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Is our religion more than a mere acquired habit, originally obtained by our own industry only, and the exercise of our natural powers, excited and assisted by education, custom, the means of grace? &c. Was it begun in the instantaneous infusion of a gracious principle, immediately by the Holy Spirit?

Do we derive our strength for obedience from Christ by faith? Is he *our life*? Are we generally crying, *Lord, we have no strength; but our eyes are unto thee?* Can we say with the apostle, *I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and what I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God?*

My dear brethren, let us search ourselves with these and the like inquiries: for many are destructively deceived in this matter. Living religion is wrapt in darkness from the eyes of most: they either place it in that in which it does not consist at all, or take the circumstances and appendages for the substance of it. *Great is the mystery of Godliness,* not only objectively as revealed in the scriptures, but also subjectively, as wrought in the heart of a believer. It ought therefore to engage our most serious and intense thoughts.

3. Let those who are made spiritually alive, “acknowledge and admire the distinguished grace of God, and act as it becomes their character.”

You have seen that spiritual life is not promiscuously dispensed to mankind in general, but only to the regenerate, who are comparatively few. And can you restrain your wonder, that you should be the chosen objects of sovereign grace? or avoid

breaking forth into extatic praises at so surprising a dispensation?

Moreover the design of your vivification, and the natural tendency of the principle of spiritual life is, that you may live to God; and therefore you are peculiarly obliged to make your whole life a series of obedience to Him. Indulge the propensities and tendencies of the new nature: obey and cherish all the impulses and motions of the divine principle within you. To offer violence to the new man, to cramp and fetter its powers, to resist its motions, and suffocate its heavenly aspirations, is the most horrid crime. It is to attempt to murder the child of grace in embryo; and sure, this is the worst of murder. *Reckon ye yourselves, then, to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. And if ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections upon (savour and relish) things above, not things on earth. And when Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

4. I request and importune those that are dead in sin, to “use all proper means for the obtaining of quickening grace.” The exhortation implies no contradiction or impossibility; for though they are spiritually dead, yet their natural principle of reason is still alive, and capable of exercising itself about spiritual objects; and God has enjoined them to make the best use they can of it, as the only way to obtain a better principle. God deals

with us according to our nature and circumstances? We are corrupted creatures, and, therefore, He exerts his exceeding great and mighty power to work principles of holiness in us; but still we are rational creatures, and, therefore, he uses the powers of moral suasion with us, and justly requires us to exert our rational faculties in all the institutions of the gospel.

Be persuaded then, sinner, no longer to lie still in security; but *arise, call upon thy God: if so be that God will think upon thee, that thou perish not.— Lazarus! come forth. Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light. Linger not, lest eternal death overtake thee. Methinks I see him just at thy heels, for thy damnation now of a long time slumbereth not. Arise, come forth at the call of the gospel; otherwise, how wilt thou stand the shocking terror of that final alarm, Awake, ye dead, and come to judgment? But I must conclude with my hearty wish, That the hour may come, and O! that this may be the hour, in which the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.—Which gracious prediction may the God of grace accomplish upon us all, for Jesus's sake. Amen.*

SERMON LI.

THE WAYS OF SIN HARD AND DIFFICULT.

ACTS IV. 6.—*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

YOU often hear of the narrow and rugged road of religion, which leadeth unto life; and some of

you I am afraid, have not courage enough to venture upon it. You rather choose the smooth, broad, down-hill road to vice and pleasure, though it leads down to the chambers of death. It must be owned, that a religious life is a course of difficulties, a hard struggle, a constant conflict; and it is fit you should be honestly informed of it: but then it is fit you should also know, that the difficulties arise not from the nature of religion, but from the corruption and depravity of the nature of man in its present degenerate state. A course of religion is disagreeable, is hard, is difficult to mankind; just as a course of action is difficult to the sick, though it is easy, and affords pleasure to those that are well. There are difficulties in the way of sin, as well as in that of holiness, though the depravity of mankind renders them insensible of it. This is the view of the case I would now lay before you. There is a sense, in which it is true, that it is a hard thing to be a sinner, as well as to be a saint: there are huge difficulties in the way to hell, as well as in the way to heaven. And if you are insensible of them, it is owing, as I just observed, to the corruption of your nature, and not to the real easiness of the thing in itself. It may be easy and pleasing to you to sin, just as it is easy to a dead body to rot, or pleasing to a leper to rub his sores. But to a reasonable creature, in a state of purity, with all his powers uncorrupted, it would indeed be an unpleasing, a hard, a difficult thing, to take that course which is so easy and so delightful to you; as it is hard and painful for a living man to suffer the mortification of his limbs, or for a healthy man to make himself sore. If it be hard, in one sense, to live a life of holiness, it is certainly hard, in another sense, to live a life of sin; namely, to run against conscience, against reason, against honour,

against interest, against all the strong and endearing obligations you are under to God, to mankind, and to yourselves: or, in the words of my text, *it is hard for you to kick against the pricks.*

This is a proverb, in use among various nations, which has received a sanction from heaven in this text. It is used by Pindar, Euripides, and Æschylus, among the Greeks; and by Terence, among the Latins; and from the sense in which they use it, we are helped to understand it. *To kick against the pricks*, is an allusion to a lazy or unruly plough-horse, or ox, that when pricked with a goad, (an instrument used in ploughing, in sundry places, instead of a whip,) refuses to go on, and spurns and kicks against the goad, and so wounds himself, and not the driver. In such circumstances, it is much harder to kick against the goads, and resist, than to go on; if he goes on, he need not fear the goad; but his resistance only hurts himself. It is to this that the phrase alludes; and it signifies a resistance injurious to the person that makes it, when it would be both easy and advantageous to obey.

Hence we may learn the precise sense in which it is used by the mouth of Christ, in this pungent address to Saul the persecutor, whom we now know under the higher name of Paul, the apostle.

Saul, animated with a furious, misguided, though honest zeal, against the disciples of Jesus, was now on his way to Damascus in pursuit of them; and had a commission from the highest court of the Jews to apprehend them: a commission which he was impatient to execute. This, in human view, was a very unpromising hour for his conversion; now it appears more likely that vengeance will arrest him as a criminal, than that grace will prevent him as a vessel of mercy. But O! what

agreeable exploits of grace has Jesus performed! At the first introduction of his religion, it was fit he should single out some great sinner, and make him a monument of his mercy, for the encouragement of future ages. Therefore he surprises this fierce persecutor in his daring career, darts the splendours of his glory around him, and pierces him to the heart with this irresistible exhortation, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Saul, in a trembling consternation, replies, *Who art thou, Lord?* He thought he was only bringing to justice a parcel of contemptible, blasphemous sectaries, unworthy of toleration; and little did he think that his persecuting zeal reached so high: little did he expect to hear one crying from the throne of heaven, *Why persecutest thou me?* But Jesus feels and resents the injuries done to his people, as done to himself. The head sympathises with its members; therefore he answers, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.* And then follows my text, *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. q. d.* “Since it is Jesus, whom thou persecutest, the injury done to me, will only rebound upon thyself: I am infinitely advanced beyond the reach of thy rage; and even my people, who now seem in thy power, can suffer no real or lasting injury from it in the issue: for under my management, all things shall work for their good; but thy persecuting fury shall prove ruinous to thyself, as the wild ox that spurns and kicks against the goad hurts himself and not the driver.” Thus, as I told you, this proverb signifies a resistance injurious to the person resisting, and harmless to him against whom it is made.—And is not this hard? Is it not an arduous, preposterous exploit, to break through the strong restraints of the innate principle of self-preservation, and ruin one’s self by a blow intended against

another, beyond the reach of injury? This, one would think, is a piece of folly and cruelty, of which a being that has the least remains of reason or self-love, would be incapable.

This proverb may signify more: *q. d. I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*; Jesus, the Lord of glory; Jesus the Saviour of sinners; Jesus, who has died for such sinners as thee; Jesus, who is all love and mercy, excellency, and glory; Jesus, who has given thee such sufficient evidence of his divine mission, and the truth of his religion: and canst thou persecute Jesus? O! is this an easy thing to one that has the least reason or gratitude? Art thou able to break through such strong and endearing obligations? Is it not hard for thee to spurn against one so great, so glorious, so gracious and condescending? Must not this be a horrid exploit of wickedness beyond thy power?

That I may the more fully illustrate the striking thought suggested by my text, I shall point out to you some seemingly insuperable obstacles in the way to hell, or some dire exploits, which, one would think, would be too hard for you to perform, which yet you must perform if you persist in a course of sin.

1. Is it not a hard thing to be an unbeliever, or a deist, in our age and country, while the light of the gospel shines around us with full blaze of evidence?

Before a man can work up himself to the disbelief of a religion attended with such undeniable evidence, and inspiring such divine dispositions and exalted hopes, what absurdities must he embrace! what strong convictions must he resist! what dark suspicions, what boding fears and misgivings, what shocking peradventures and tremendous doubts must he struggle with! what glorious

hopes must he resign! what gloomy and shocking prospects must he reconcile himself to! what violence must be offered to conscience! what care must be used to shut up all the avenues of serious thought, and harden the heart against the terrors of death and the supreme tribunal! How painful a piece of preposterous self-denial to reject the balm the gospel provides to heal a broken heart and a bleeding conscience, and the various helps and advantages it furnishes us with to obtain divine favour and everlasting happiness! How hard to work up the mind to believe that Jesus, who spoke, and acted, and suffered and did every thing like an incarnate God, was an impostor, or at best a moral philosopher! or that the religion of the Bible, that contains the most sublime and God-like truths, and the most pure and perfect precepts of piety and morality, is the contrivance of artful and wicked men, or evil spirits! These, brethren, are no easy things. There are many sceptics and smatterers in infidelity, but few, very few, are able to make thorough work of it, or commence staunch unbelievers. The attempt itself is a desperate shift. A man must have reduced himself to a very sad case indeed, before he can have any temptation to set about it. He has, by his wilful wickedness set christianity against him, before he can have any temptation to set himself against christianity: and when he proclaims war against it, he finds it hard, yea, impossible to make good his cause. He may indeed put on the airs of defiance and triumph, and affect to laugh at his enemy, and at times may be half persuaded he has really got the victory. But such men find the arms of their own reason often against them, and their own conscience forms violent insurrections in favour of religion, which they cannot entirely

suppress; so that they are like their father, whatever they pretend, they believe and tremble too. Alas! that there should be so many unhappy companions in this infernal cause, in our country and nation. They find it hard, even now; to kick against the goads: and O! how much harder will they find it in the issue! Their resistance will prove ruinous to themselves; but neither they nor the gates of hell shall prevail against the cause they oppose. Christianity will live when they are dead and damned, according to its sentence. It is a long-tried bulwark, that has withstood all the assaults of earth and hell for near six thousand years, and has still proved impregnable. Infidels may hurt themselves by opposing it; as an unruly stupid ox, their proper emblem, may hurt himself but not the goads, by kicking against them.

2. Is it not hard for men to profess themselves believers, and assent to the truths of christianity, and yet live as if they were infidels?

A professed speculative athiest, or infidel, is a monster that we do not often meet with: but the more absurd and unaccountable phenomenon of a practical athiest; one who is orthodox in principle, but an infidel in practice, we may find wherever we turn: and it would be strange if none such have mingled in this assembly to-day. To such I would particularly address myself.

If you believe christianity, or even the religion of nature, you believe that there is a God of infinite excellency; the Maker, Preserver, Benefactor, and Ruler of the world, and of you in particular; and consequently, that you are under the strongest, and most endearing obligations to love him, and make it your great study and endeavour to obey his will in all instances. Now is it not strange, that while you believe this, you are able to live as

you do? How can you live so thoughtless of this great and glorious God, who bears such august and endearing relations to you? How can you withhold your love from him, and ungratefully refuse obedience? Is not this a hard thing to you? Does it not cost you some labour to reconcile your consciences to it? If this be easy to you, what champions in wickedness are you! how mighty to do evil! This would not be easy to the mightiest archangel: no, it is a dire achievement he would tremble to think of. And if it be easy to you, it is, as I observed before, in the same sense, that it is easy to a dead body to rot. Your strength to do evil is your real weakness, or, which is the same, the strength of your disease.

Again, If you believe the christian religion, you believe the glorious doctrine of redemption through Jesus Christ; you believe that he, the Father's great co-equal Son, assumed our nature, passed through the various hardships of life, and died upon a cross for you; and all this out of pure unmerited love. And is it no difficulty to neglect him, to dishonour him, to slight his love, and disobey his commands? Does this monstrous wickedness never put you to a stand? Degenerate and corrupt as you are, have you not such remains of generous principles within you, as that you cannot, without great violence to your own hearts, reject such a Saviour? Does not at least a spark of gratitude sometimes kindle in your hearts, which you find it hard to quench entirely? Does not conscience often take up arms in the cause of its Lord, and do you not find it hard to quell the insurrection? Alas! if you find little or no difficulty in treating the blessed Jesus with neglect, it shews that you are mighty giants in iniquity, and sin with the strength of a devil.

Again, If you believe the christian religion, you must believe that regeneration, or a thorough change of heart and life, and universal holiness, are essentially necessary to constitute you a real christian, and prepare you for everlasting happiness. And while you have this conviction, is it not a hard thing for you to be only christians in name, or self-condemned hypocrites, or to rest contented in any attainments short of real religion? Is it an easy thing to you to keep your eyes always shut against the light, which would shew you to yourselves in your true colours? to keep such a close guard, as never to let the mortifying secret pass, that you are indeed but a hypocrite, and to harden yourselves against the portion of hypocrites, which will ere long be distributed to you?

Finally, If you believe christianity, or even natural religion, you believe a future state of rewards and punishments; rewards and punishments the highest that human nature is capable of. And is it not a hard thing to make light of immortal happiness, or everlasting misery? Since you love yourselves, and have a strong innate desire of pleasure and horror of pain, how can you reconcile yourselves to the thoughts of giving up your portion in heaven, and being engulfed forever in the infernal pit? Or how can you support your hope of enjoying the one, and escaping the other, while you have no sufficient evidence? Can you venture so important an interest upon an uncertainty, or dare to take your chance, without caring what might be the issue? Are you capable of such dreadful foolhardiness? Do you not often shrink back aghast from the prospect? Does not the happiness of heaven sometimes so strongly attract you, that you find it hard to resist? And do not the terrors of hell start up before you in the way of sin, and are you

not brought to a stand, and ready to turn back? The pit of hell, like a raging volcano, thunders at a distance, that you may not fall thereinto by surprise. You may perceive its flames, and smoke, and roarings in the threatenings of God's law, while you are yet at a distance from it. And is it easy for you to push on your way, when thus warned? O! one would think, it would be much more easy and delightful to a creature endowed with reason and self-love, to abandon this dangerous road, and choose the safe and pleasant way of life.

I might multiply instances under this head: but these must suffice at present. And I proceed to ask,

3. Is it not hard for a man to live in a constant conflict with himself? I mean with his conscience.

This obstacle in the way to hell has appeared in all the former particulars: but it is so great, and seemingly insuperable, that it deserves to be pointed out by itself. When the sinner would continue his career to hell, conscience, like the cherubim at the gates of paradise, or the angel in Balaam's road, meets him with its flaming sword, and turns every way, to guard the dreadful entrance into the chambers of death.

When a man goes on in the thoughtless neglect of God, and the concerns of eternity, or indulges himself in vice and irreligion, conscience whispers, "What will be the end of this course? thou shalt yet suffer for this. Is it fit thou shouldst thus treat the blessed God, and the Saviour Jesus Christ? Is it wise to neglect the great work of salvation, and run the risk of eternal ruin?" I may appeal to sinners themselves, whether they do not often hear such remonstrances as these from within? Indeed, in the hurry and bustle of business and com-

pany, and the headlong career of pleasure and amusement, the voice of conscience is not heard. But you cannot always avoid retirement; sometimes you must be by yourselves, and then you find it hard to close up and guard all the avenues of serious thought. Then conscience insists upon a fair hearing, and enters many a solemn protestation against your conduct, warns you of the consequence, and urges you to take another course. Whatever airs of impious bravery you put on in public, and however boldly you bid defiance to these things, yet, in such pensive hours, do you not find that you are cowards at heart? Is not conscience like to get the victory? Are you not obliged to break out into the world, and rally all its forces to your assistance, that you may suppress your conscience? Now, how hard a life is this! The life of the sinner is a warfare, as well as that of the christian. Conscience is his enemy, always disturbing him; that is, he himself is an enemy to himself while he continues an enemy to God.—Some, indeed, by repeated violences, stun their conscience, and it seems to lie still, like a conquered enemy. But this is a conquest fatal to the conquerors. O! would it not be much easier to let conscience have fair play, to pursue your own happiness, as it urges you, and leave the smooth, downhill road to ruin, from which it would restrain you? Conscience urges you to your duty and interest with many sharp goads, and will you still kick against them? O! do you not find this hard? I am sure it would be very hard, it would be impossible to a creature under the right conduct of reason and self-love. And before you can be capable of performing this dire exploit with ease, you must have acquired a prodigious, gigantic strength in sinning. This is what the mightiest saint upon earth

could not dare to do. No; he owns conscience is his master: long did he resist, but now he must submit: and he would not incur the displeasure of his conscience for all the world: O! that we were all weak in this respect! My time will allow me only to add,

4. Is it not a hard piece of self-denial for you to deprive yourselves of the exalted pleasures of religion?

You love yourselves, and you love happiness, and, therefore, one would reasonably expect you would choose that which will afford you the most solid, refined and lasting happiness, and abandon whatever is inconsistent with it. Now religion is a source of happiness. Yes; that dull, melancholy thing, religion, which you think perhaps, would put an end to all your pleasures, and which, for that reason, you have kept at a distance from; religion, which its enemies will tell you has made some intolerably precise, and dead to all the joys of life, and turned others mad and melancholy; religion, I say, will afford you a happiness more pure, more noble, more durable than all the world can give. Religion not only proposes future happiness beyond the comprehension of thought, but will afford you present happiness beyond whatever you have known while strangers to it. The pleasures of a peaceful, approving conscience, of communion with God, the supreme good, of the most noble dispositions and most delightful contemplations; these are the pleasures of religion. And ask those who have enjoyed them, those whom experience has qualified to be judges, and they will tell you with one voice, "There are no pleasures comparable to these." Besides, religion has infinitely the advantage of other things as to futurity. Those pleasures which are inconsistent with it, end

in shocking prospects, as well as pale reviews.—
But religion opens the brightest prospects; prospects of everlasting salvation and happiness; prospects that brighten the gloomy shades of death, and the awful world beyond, and run out infinitely beyond our ken through a vast eternal duration. My heart is so full of my subject, that I must borrow the more expressive words of another, to give it vent.*

“Let the proud Witling argue all he can,
 It is religion still that makes the man;
 ’Tis this, my friends, that streaks our morning bright;
 ’Tis this that gilds the horrors of our night,
 When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few;
 When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
 ’Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart:
 Disarms affliction, or repels its dart;
 Within the breast bids purest pleasures rise:
 Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies.
 When the storm thickens, and the thunder rolls;
 When the earth trembles to th’ affrighted poles;
 The pious mind nor doubts nor fears assail,
 For storms are zephyrs, or a gentler gale.
 And when disease obstructs the labouring breath,
 When the heart sickens, and each pulse is death,
 Even then Religion shall sustain the just,
 Grace their last moments, nor desert their dust.”

Such, my brethren, is religion; the highest, the most substantial, and most lasting happiness of man. And is it not a painful piece of self-denial to you, to give up all this happiness, when nothing is required to purchase it but only your choice of it! Is not this doing violence to the innate principle of self-love and desire of happiness? Can you be so

*See a Letter to Mr. Hervey by a physician, prefixed to his *Meditations*, Vol. I.

stupid, as to imagine that the world, or sin, or any thing that can come in competition with religion, can be of equal or comparable advantage to you? Sure your own reason must give in its verdict in favour of religion. And is it not a hard thing for you to act against your own reason, against your own interest, your highest, your immortal interest, and against your own innate desire of happiness? Do you never find it any difficulty to live for years in the world, without once tasting the sweets of the love of God, or the pleasures of an applauding conscience! Is it not hard, that while others around you, in the use of the very means which you enjoy, are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and are animated to endure the calamities of life, and encounter the terrors of death, by the prospect of everlasting glory, while they are now often lost in extatic wonder, while surveying the things that God hath laid up for them that love him: I say, is it not hard, that you should be destitute of all these transporting prospects, and have nothing but a fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation, or at best a vain self-flattering hope, which will issue in the more confounding disappointment? Is not this really hard? Must it not be a difficulty to you to live at this rate?

And now, sinners, will you with infernal bravery break through all these obstacles, and force a passage into the flames below? Or will you not give over the preposterous struggle to ruin yourselves, and suffer yourselves to be saved? O! let me arrest you in your dangerous career, as the voice which pronounced my text did St. Paul; and let me prevail upon you for the future to choose the highway to life, and take that course to which God, conscience, duty, and interest urge you. In that indeed you will meet with difficulties; it is a

narrow and rugged road; and it will require hard striving to make a progress in it. But then the difficulties you have here to surmount are in the road to happiness, with which therefore it is worth your while to struggle; but those in the other are in the road to destruction; and your striving to surmount them, is but striving to destroy yourselves forever. It may be worth your while to labour and conflict hard to be saved; but is it worth while to take so much pains, and strive so hard to be damned? Besides, the difficulties in the heavenly road result from the weak, disordered, and wicked state of human nature, as the difficulty of animal action and enjoyment proceeds from sickness of body: and consequently, every endeavour to surmount these difficulties tends to heal, to rectify, to strengthen, and ennoble our nature, and advance it to perfection. But the difficulties in the way to hell proceed from the contrariety of that course to the best principles of human nature, and to the most strong and rational obligations; and consequently, the more we struggle with these difficulties, the more we labour to suppress and root out the remains of all good principles, and break the most inviolable obligations to God and ourselves. The easier it is for us to sin, the more base and corrupt we are: just as the more rotten a limb is, the easier for it to drop off; the more disordered and stupified the body is, the more easy to die. To meet with no obstacle in the way to hell, but to run on without restraint, is terrible indeed; it shews a man abandoned of God, and ripe for destruction. Such an ease in sinning is the quality of a devil.

Upon the whole, you see, that though there be difficulties on both sides, yet the way to heaven has infinitely the advantage; and, therefore, let me again urge you to choose it. You have walked

long enough at variance with God, with your own conscience, with your own interest, and duty: come now be reconciled: make these your antagonists no longer. While you persist in this opposition, you do but kick against the pricks; that is, you make a resistance injurious to yourselves. For the future, declare war against sin, Satan, and all their confederates, and ere long ye shall be made more than conquerors; and for your encouragement remember, *He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son, saith the Lord God Almighty.*

END OF VOL. IV.