

SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

BY

THE LATE HENRY KOLLOCK, D. D.

WITH

A MEMOIR

OF

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

SERMONS.

SERMON LXXIV.

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PARENTAL ANTICIPATIONS AND DUTIES ON THE BIRTH OF
A CHILD.

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LUKE i. 66.

What manner of child shall this be?

THESE words were originally uttered on observing the miracles connected with the birth of John the Baptist, the illustrious forerunner of our Redeemer. The high hopes of his future eminence that these miracles excited, were accomplished. He was indeed “a burning and a shining light.” His career was short, but important and glorious.

It is not my intention, however, to confine myself to the history of the Baptist. Language similar to that in the text is used on the birth of every infant. The parents anxiously desire to lift the veil which covers futurity, and would wish to have the prophetic vision of Zechariah, that they might discern the future character of their child.

This desire is natural, and even laudable, when it proceeds from proper motives and feelings, and incites to proper actions. But it frequently springs

from a vain curiosity, or a wordly temper. Parents ask, "What manner of child shall this be?" not with solicitude that it may adorn the doctrine of the Redeemer, but only with an anxious wish that it may be encompassed by all that the world idolizes.

If we would render the question beneficial to us, we must ask it,

I. With a submissive temper.

II. With a sense of the importance of the future character of the child.

III. With a recollection of the awful charge it imposes upon us, and,

IV. With a persuasion of our dependence upon the blessing of God, to render it holy and happy.

This question should be asked,

I. *With a spirit of unfeigned submission to God*: submission exercised both as to the *bounds* he prescribes to our knowledge of the future, and as to his righteous government and *disposal* of the child.

1. Many are desirous to know more of the future than God has thought fit to reveal, and they are disposed to murmur that the events that shall befall their children are hidden from them. But while with the natural solicitude of parents you make the inquiry in the text, repine not at the narrow limits of your knowledge. A perfect acquaintedness with the future conditions of your *offspring* would not tend to your real good; it would serve only for curiosity, and not for use. Nay, it would be disadvantageous to you.

You would be *prevented from performing present duty*, and diverted from your daily work, by the continual and unprofitable ranges of your mind to and fro in that futurity, which would then lie open, and present so vast a prospect to you.

Your *afflictions would be inconceivably multiplied.* Every sorrow of your whole life that shall result from your children would be felt in every day. If the bare possibility of their misery sometimes severely afflicts you, how keenly would you feel the certainty of this misery, without the ability to avert it! Could you at once perceive all the tears that this child shall shed, all the woes that he shall endure, all the agonies that shall wring his heart, what a melancholy gloom would settle on your soul! How speedily would that joy, with which you now caress your infant, and form the dearest hopes concerning him, be withered, were the veil of futurity suddenly withdrawn, and he presented to you perhaps an early corpse, perhaps a profligate sinner, perhaps the victim of poverty, affliction, or reproach!

The *sweetness of mercies would be diminished* by this clear knowledge of the future. All the delight which results from the unexpectedness of blessings would be wrested from you. If the future presented you a dark and gloomy prospect respecting your child, you would raise no tribute of gratitude for present blessings. Did you, on the contrary, see before you brighter joys, an anxiety to possess them would make you indifferent to the pleasures which now encompass you.

With a clear view of the future, *the Christian graces would be impaired or entirely prevented from exercise.* Then there could be no trust in God under the most frowning aspect of his providence; no faith in the midst of gloom and perplexity; no hope, since, as the apostle remarks, "hope that is seen, is not hope;" no energetic and fervent prayer for deliverance and support, no exercises suited to the situation of those who are to "walk by faith, and not by sight." While

then, nature prompts you to cry, "What manner of child shall this be?" submit without murmuring to the disposals of the Ruler of the universe, who has hidden the future from you; and in this, as in all the dispensations of his providence, admire his wisdom and his mercy.

2. This submission must be shown also by a contentedness of heart to *leave the government of your offspring, and the regulation of their lot in the hands of the All-Wise and All-Good God*. Christian parents, the language of your hearts should be, "Though from those principles which nature has implanted, and grace has strengthened, we cannot but be solicitous what manner of children these shall be," yet we are comforted when we remember that we have committed them to Him, who is at once the God of our fathers, our God, and the God of our children. Should he have resolved that these, like so many infants, should only glance upon the coasts of life, and after only a few weeks, or months, or years, fall victims to death, yet still we will remember that God has removed them; will submit to his rod, and show that these children, though tenderly loved, were not idolized, were not regarded as our chief good, and that our supreme felicity was not attached to their lives. Should they, by the guardian providence of God, be safely conducted through the dangers of infancy and youth, though we desire and supplicate for them temporal felicity, yet, should it please the Most Merciful to visit them with affliction, we will submit; knowing that all which God does is wisest and best. To him we have devoted ourselves and ours; we wish not that the regulation of our own lot, or that of our children, should be in any other hands than those of our Father. Only let them be the children of

God, the followers of the Redeemer, the heirs of glory, and we will be happy, whether they be rich or poor, honoured or contemned by men, surrounded by earthly enjoyments, or destitute of them. If we pass before them unto the eternal world, we will leave them with confidence, to the protection of that God whom they have chosen as their portion; or if they precede us in the descent to the tomb, we will resign them to that Redeemer who has washed them in his blood, and “sorrow for them, not as those without hope.” “What manner of child shall this be?” This is a question which should be asked, not only with a submissive temper, but also,

II. *With a deep and solemn sense of the importance of the future character of every child.*

The feeblest infant is not born like inferior animals, merely to eat and drink, to walk up and down upon the earth, and enjoy the light of the sun for a few years, and then to lie down for ever in the dust. It is not born merely to engage in the occupations of earth, although even the temporal events that may mark its life, render it an object of importance. Helpless and ignorant as it now is, knowing not its parents nor itself, nor its wants, nor the world of which it has become an inhabitant, it may hereafter be enrolled, either with those blessings or curses, of mankind, who once lay thus feeble. But it especially swells into consequence when we consider the sublimity of the future destination of man.

Yes, parents; solemnly ask, “What manner of children shall these be?” when you remember that they are embryo angels, or infant fiends, that through eternity they will either continually rise higher in glory and felicity, or sink deeper and deeper in the gulfs of despair. There is an immortal

spark within them, which shall hereafter mingle and blaze with the seraph, that “adores and burns” with holy love before the throne of God; that shall still flame when the sun and the stars shall be torn from the heavens; or that shall be quenched in everlasting darkness, or only give that fearful light, which renders more dreadful the regions of horror and despair.

And not only will they themselves dwell in heaven or in hell, but they will also be the means of conducting others to one of these abodes. Every person has a circle whom he influences to good or evil. Every spirit that is now blest or lost, has not only received impressions from others which tended to lead him to glory or misery, but has also given similar impulses to those with whom he associated. Of what infinite consequence then is the feeblest child? Thus feeble once was Paul, and those who, like him, are now in glory, surrounded by those whom they were the instruments of plucking from ruin: thus feeble once were the blasphemer, the infidel, the profligate, who groan in torments, while the curses of those whose principles they subverted, and whose morals they overthrew, and who have followed them to the regions of despair, pursue, and for ever shall pursue them.

Yes, could we have a proper idea of the intensity and duration of future punishments or joys, we should, when we remembered that another birth awaited these children when they should open their eyes on the unchanging world, cry with the utmost solemnity, “What manner of children shall they be?”

Parents should ask this question,

III. *With a serious and habitual recollection, that according to the ordinary course of God’s providence. the*

eternal happiness of their children greatly depends upon them.

God works by means. His providence excludes not human agency; and if you wish that your children should be holy in this life, and happy in that which is to come, carefully attend to their religious education. This he commands you in his word. To the faithful performance of this duty he has given the most precious promises. These promises we see constantly accomplished: for who are those who ordinarily are members and ornaments of the church of Christ? Are they not those generally who can recollect the early instructions of a pious father, or the tears and prayers of a mother solicitous for their everlasting welfare?

Parents, you have seen the importance of the charge committed to you. These children are God's; he has intrusted them to your keeping; but he will require an account of them from you. For these immortal souls that are in your care, Jesus died: he will from his throne of judgment demand of you the purchase of his blood. Feel then your responsibility, and to the question in the text add another, 'What manner of parent shall I be? Shall my conduct be so conscientious and holy that I may hope, through the divine blessing, to see my child the friend of Jesus and the heir of glory: or shall I here abandon him to sin and Satan, and hear his curses and reproaches poured upon me throughout eternity?'

If you desire to see your children holy and happy, begin *early* to instruct them. In the very first periods of life, they are susceptible of those religious impressions that may decide their future character. Speak to them of God and the Redeemer, of heaven and hell,

before their minds receive false impressions. Those only who have never been in the habit of conversing with children on divine things, will maintain that such subjects are either uninteresting or unintelligible to them.

Persevere in this religious instruction and admonition. Continue to watch, lest the good seed that was sown in infancy be rooted up. There are many who are attentive to the *child* while they neglect the *youth*, who instead of cherishing the impressions that were early made, and endeavouring to fasten them upon the heart and conscience, suffer them to be effaced : who become “weary in well-doing;” and abstaining from the pious admonition, the tender exhortation, and the heart-felt entreaty, drop “the staff of domestic authority, and neglect the book of domestic wisdom :” who as their children advance in life, seldom advise them how to obtain everlasting blessedness, but speak to them only of the road that conducts to temporal wealth, or honour, or wisdom : who eagerly reprove them for a breach of fashionable manners, but are silent when they violate the law of God. It is not difficult to say “what manner of children those will be,” who are thus educated. They will be neglecters of their God, strangers to serious piety, and the heirs of sorrow. They may be caressed and applauded by the world, but will not have that “honour which cometh from God only.”

Remember too that the character of these children is to be formed, not only by good instructions, but also by *good examples*. This is the most lively and effectual mode of instruction. There are few parents so awfully wicked and utterly abandoned to sin. as not to wish that their children should love

and practise virtue, as never to exhort them to the love and fear of God. But if your exhortations and admonitions are contradicted by your examples, they will have no effect but to upbraid and reproach yourself, and to increase both your condemnation and theirs. But on the other hand, when a pious parent shall not only, with the most affectionate and tender words that love can dictate, instruct his children in the ways of holiness, but also walk before them in those ways; not only by admonitions show it to be most rational, but also by constant practice show it to be most pleasant and delightful, he has surely cause to hope for the divine blessing upon his offspring. This blessing such a parent anxiously seeks; for when he asks, "What manner of child shall this be?" he does it,

IV. With a deep persuasion of his dependence upon God for that holiness and felicity that he desires for his child.

Without the blessing of God, in vain is the tender and assiduous watchfulness of the mother, and the enlightened care of the father. And there is no reason to expect this blessing, if our efforts are made "with a proud independence, or a careless neglect of his providence and grace." Sensible that it is God alone who can renew the heart of this child, and raise him to glory, the pious parent, solicitous for his welfare, offers him to the Lord in the only spiritual ordinance of which he is capable; and esteems as a precious privilege the seal of the promise of the covenant, the sign of the grace of the Spirit, the initiating sacrament of the church. He observes this not as a bare empty ceremony, but as a dear pledge of the kindness of God to his child, and of his readiness to receive and bless him.

His sense of his dependence upon God causes him also, whenever he comes to the throne of grace, to bring his children upon his heart with him. He earnestly beseeches his heavenly Father to adopt them into his family; to bestow on them a large portion of "spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus," and to bring them at last to "the inheritance of the saints in light." Such prayers frequently and fervently offered for and with his children, shall not be in vain. He will probably have the consolation of seeing his offspring walking in the ways of goodness and religion.

1. *Parents*, this discourse has peculiarly been addressed to you. Feel the importance of the truths which have been announced to you, and reduce them to practice. In your hands are deposited the hope and blessing, or the curse and plague of the next age. Your families are the nurseries both of the church and state, and according to your cultivation will probably be the fruits hereafter. Are your children yet young? Save them from wretchedness, and yourselves from remorse, by endeavouring early to lead them to the Redeemer. Are your children more advanced in life, and do they give evidence of true holiness and piety? Pour forth your thanks to God that he has blessed your efforts and answered your prayers; and that he has given your children the best, an everlasting inheritance. Are your children careless of the Redeemer, or disobedient to you? Examine your past conduct to them; see whether you have not been remiss in the discharge of your duty to them, and whether God is not punishing you by them for your transgressions. Implore from your heavenly Father forgiveness for the past,

and still importunately supplicate him to save your children from sin and from despair.

2. This subject addresses all the *children* who are in this assembly. My dear young friends, I have been pleading your cause with your parents, and now let me entreat you to listen to the admonitions and instructions of these parents, to remember and to practise them. They speak to you from a tender concern for your everlasting happiness. They are qualified to instruct you, for they have the wisdom and experience of many years. They are commanded by Him who made and preserves them and you, to admonish and instruct you. They dare not neglect to obey this command: can you refuse to listen to them? The subject they are chiefly anxious to impress upon your minds, is the most important, the mediation and death of Jesus Christ, through whom alone you can be forgiven and saved. By your perverseness and neglect of their instructions, you will become hardened in sin, and prepared for that world of torments where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Hear then, ye children, the instructions of a father: let your hearts retain his words; keep his commandments, and live."

3. Finally, this subject addresses us all. Over each of us our parents cried, "What manner of child shall this be?" Have we answered their expectations and their hopes? There are some of you who by your piety have cheered their hearts, and rewarded them for all their cares. Let your thanksgivings rise mingled with theirs for the grace that has been displayed to you. There are others who by their irreligion have filled the hearts of their pious parents with anguish. If these parents still live, they shudder while they contemplate your present cha-

racter and your future doom. If they are dead, you perhaps planted thorns in their dying pillow. Turn at last unto the Lord, and these parents, if living, shall rejoice in you; or if dead, their happy spirits shall cry in glory, "Our child was dead, but is alive again; he was lost, but is found." Since he has given himself to God, we know "what manner of child he shall be;" we know that he shall ever dwell with us in the kingdom of blessedness.

SERMON LXXV.



SALVATION OF INFANTS.



2 SAM. xii. 23.

Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

MILLIONS of the descendants of Adam expire in infancy. They just open their eyes upon the world, excite the hopes and affections of their parents, and then are tortured, convulsed, and in agonies sink into the tomb. While fastening our eyes on their little corpses, or hanging over their graves, there are two questions which we naturally ask; Why did these infants die? and, What is their present state? To the first of these questions, neither unassisted

reason nor bold infidelity can afford a satisfactory answer. Incapable of actual transgression, these departed children could not personally violate any of the commandments of their Creator. How then was it consistent with the justice of the Lord, and with the goodness of the Most Merciful, to inflict upon them the sufferings of disease, and make them the victims of death? This difficulty appeared so great to many of the ancient schools, especially the Platonic, that they supposed these persons existed and sinned in a former state of being, and that their sufferings in the present world are a punishment for former transgressions. This opinion we know to be unfounded. This difficulty is answered only by the volume of revelation; only by that voice from heaven, which cries, "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death reigned over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."

But it would be of little avail to explain to mourning parents the cause of the bereavements they endure, if we could not, at the same time, answer the interesting inquiry which bursts from their bleeding hearts, 'What is now, and what will ever be, the situation of our departed babes?' Here, again, infidelity is dumb, or can give only wavering hopes; and the only light that can cheer you, beams from the word of God. Close the holy volume, and what consolation have you left. Extinguish the torch of revelation, and then, looking at the mouldering corpse of your infant, ask, "Can these dry bones live?" To this question there is no answer. Reason alone can never show that this sleeping dust shall wake from the long slumber of the grave, at the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Reason alone

can never show that this “corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal, immortality;” that this tender plant, cut down, and apparently withered, shall hereafter spring up, beautiful and immortal, in the paradise of God. This is a doctrine peculiar to revelation; taught only by him who has “the keys of death and the grave;” and who cries, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Unassisted reason is equally unable to decide what is the state in which the *spirits* of infants enter at their death. Are they plunged into the gloomy gulf of annihilation, to be heard of no more, and their existence for ever terminated? Since they were incapable of moral good or evil, are they not also incapable of reward or punishment in the future world? Since it appears to be the general plan of Divine Providence to place intelligent creatures in a state of trial before they are crowned with glory, or sentenced to misery, are not children in the world of spirits undergoing such a probation? To these, and a thousand similar questions, mere reason can afford no conclusive answer. It is only in the precious “gospel of the grace of God,” that the bereaved parent can be assured that his departed babes are in the regions of glory; it is only from the decisions of revelation that the believer, when anticipating his own salvation, is enabled confidently to say, ‘I shall go to that child who was early torn from my embraces; although he will not return to me upon earth, I shall meet him again before the throne of God.’

It is to this interesting doctrine of infant salvation that I devote the remainder of this exercise. Do not suppose that it is an unnecessary subject. The universality of this salvation has been denied, not only by individuals of distinguished reputation, but

also by whole churches. And, besides, in those who embrace the doctrine that I am about to establish, I have generally found that their belief was rather the expression of their wishes and their hopes, than the result of a cool examination of the testimony of God. And, finally, nothing is more common than to hear even Christian parents defending infant salvation on grounds inconsistent with the scriptures; on principles that oppose, not only the doctrine of original sin, which is so plainly taught in the word of God, so fully confirmed by experience, and so evidently recognised in the initiating ordinance of our religion, but that also overlook the absolute necessity of the atonement and sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of every child of Adam. It is in perfect consistence with both these doctrines, that we maintain that God has ordained to confer eternal life on all whom he has ordained to remove from this world before they arrived at the years of discretion.

The following are the chief sources of argument in defence of this doctrine :

1. The interesting history of which our text forms a part.
2. The conduct and discourses of the Saviour with regard to infants.
3. The attributes of God, and his relation to infants.
4. The declarations that he has made concerning them.
5. The nature and extent of redemption through Christ.
6. The nature and design of the ordinance of baptism.
7. The mode of procedure at the final judgment.
8. The nature of the torments of hell.

9. The nature of the heavenly felicity, and the grounds of its conferment upon men.

You immediately perceive, my brethren, that I shall be able only to glance at these several points.

1. If ever there were a child, concerning whose future state we should doubt, in consequence of the sin of his parents, that child is the one, of whose salvation David expresses his full assurance in the text. He was the fruit of adultery, and the proof of the deep fall of the king of Israel. He was smitten with death, as a punishment for the guilt of his parents, and as a testimony of the divine indignation against sin. Yet, though the Lord in his sovereignty "visited the iniquity of the father upon the child," in *this* world, David knew that he would not do it in the world which is to come : and therefore, since his own pardon was now pronounced, expressed his confident belief that he should meet it in a happier state. Do you say this is only a solitary example of the child of one who, notwithstanding his awful departure from God, was still within the bonds of the covenant, and had been reclaimed by divine grace ? Look then,

2. To the general conduct of the Saviour towards little children, and listen to his discourses concerning them, and then you can scarcely doubt of their felicity ; since it is his hand that removes them from earth, and his voice that awards the crown of blessedness. Whose heart has not burned within him, as he has contemplated the Redeemer, at one moment exercising the power of divinity, and at the next, taking little children in his arms, and blessing them : at one moment conversing with lawgivers, prophets, and apostles on Tabor, while the testimony given to him by the Father, resounds on this mount of transfiguration, and at the next, uttering the

language of the most melting tenderness towards the feeble infant? It is this touching union of greatness and goodness, that so endears the Saviour to the soul of the believer. Remember that incident which has been recorded by three of the evangelists, and which I merely repeat to you; for the heart alone can comment upon it. "They brought young children to Jesus, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." (Mark x. 13—16. Matt. xix. 13, &c. and Luke xviii. 15.) On another occasion, in order to reprove the pride and ambition of his disciples, "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven: and whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven." (Mat. xviii. 2—5. 10.) Parents, need you tremble to commit your departed infants to such a Redeemer? He who became the babe of Bethlehem is ready to receive the spirits of your babes, when their bodies sink in the dust. Of him, the Shepherd of Israel, it was predicted, "He carrieth the lambs in his arms;

he beareth them in his bosom :” a declaration that is accomplished, when infant souls rest in his embraces.

3. Consider also the attributes of God, and his relation to infants. Mercy is his darling attribute ; he delights to exercise it, where it can be displayed in consistence with his character as the moral Governor of the universe. “ He willeth not the death” even of the most atrocious “ sinner.” He pardons our numberless actual sins, when we flee to him through the Redeemer. He has raised to felicity millions who had long defied his power, and trampled on his laws. He pities us in our wanderings, and cries after us, “ Why will ye die ?” With infinite forbearance and long-suffering, he sustains us in being, even while we are in rebellion against him, and repeats to us those offers of salvation which we have so often rejected. And will such a tender lover of souls banish infants from his presence ; those infants of whom he is the Creator, and for whom he gave his Son to die ? It is not concerning infants, but obstinate and incorrigible sinners, that he declared, “ he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour :” (Isa. xlvii. 11.) a declaration that is indeed most awful, but which at the same time implies that he has an affection for the work of his hands, until the infliction of misery becomes inevitable. Behold the tenderness of the affectionate mother for her child ! Can God, who implanted these feelings in the heart of the mother ; God, whose tenderness as far exceeds that of mortals as he is elevated above them ; God, who by the precepts of his religion, and the influences of his Spirit, gives greater warmth and deeper energy to those parental feelings, which he origi-

nally interwove in the very constitution of man ; can God cast from him these helpless infants, his workmanship, into everlasting burnings ? Reject the thought with indignation ! To entertain it for a moment, is to reproach God.

4. In numberless passages of scripture we find the Lord expressing so tender a regard for infants, that we cannot suppose that he would banish them to outer darkness when he withdrew them from earth. When Israel entered into covenant with him, he showed his kindness for the feeblest babes : “ Ye stand this day before the Lord *your God*, your captains, your elders, your *little ones*.” (Deut. xxix. 10.) When the Jews, seduced by the nations around them, immolated their offspring to Moloch, the Lord, in the reproof that he addresses to them, shows his tender regard to infants : “ Thou hast sacrificed thy sons and thy daughters to idols, and hast slain *my children*.” (Ezek. xvi. 21.) When Jonah, jealous of his own reputation as a prophet, was angry that Nineveh was not destroyed, God assigns as one principal cause of sparing the city, the number within its walls who were in the state of infancy : “ Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between the right hand and the left hand ?” (Jon. iv. 11.) And will he, who from pity to them withheld temporal afflictions, make them endure everlasting agonies ? When the Israelites for their frequent rebellions against God were sentenced to perish in the wilderness, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, their children were exempted from this doom : “ Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, save Caleb and Joshua ; but your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and

your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it." (Deut. i. 35—39; Num. xiv. 30, &c.) These words not only attest in general the regard of God to infants, but have additional force from the consideration that Canaan is constantly represented in the scriptures as typical of heaven, and the entrance into it through the wilderness made emblematical of our passage to it through this world. Considered in this view, it teaches us that while the rebellious perish, infants shall enter with those adults who, like Caleb, "follow the Lord fully," and like Joshua are believing and fearless, into the true land of promise; the Jerusalem that is on high.

5. A consideration of the nature and extent of redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ, authorizes the fullest assurance that those who die in infancy are received to glory. The atonement of our Saviour removed every obstruction on the part of God to the salvation of the sinner; and now in consistence with his law, his holiness, and his truth, eternal life is offered to every child of Adam. That all do not partake of this eternal life is owing, not to any defect in the sacrifice, but to the rejection of it by unholiness of life, by impenitence, or unbelief; but of this rejection those who die in infancy are incapable; and we may therefore, confidently believe, that as they became guilty by the offence of the first Adam, so they obtain everlasting felicity through that second greater Adam, who came from heaven to repair the ruins of the fall. The scriptures uniformly teach, that as all mankind were condemned in Adam, so under the gracious covenant of the gospel, they may be reconciled in Christ. It is, especially,

the great object of the apostle to prove this, in the comparison which he makes between Adam and Christ, in the fifth chapter to the Romans. I have not time to illustrate the whole passage. It will be sufficient for my present purpose to quote a single verse, (18.) "Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." These words surely imply that all who were condemned by Adam, have an opportunity under the gospel, of obtaining righteousness and eternal life: but this evidently would not be the case with those who die in infancy, if they were not, in consequence of this atonement, received into glory.

Do you ask, how is this salvation of infants through Christ consistent with the declarations of the gospel, that we become interested in the Saviour only by faith? How can this faith be exercised by infants who are yet without understanding? Without remarking that those passages of scripture, which require explicit acts of faith, relate to adults, it will be a sufficient answer to this question, that although infants may not exercise the same acts of faith with adults, they may have what the apostle calls "*the same spirit of faith*;" (2 Cor. iv. 13.) a temper of soul in consequence of its renewal by the Holy Ghost, to receive, with proper dispositions, every truth that God will reveal: and this is the most important part of faith, for it is "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness."* (Rom. x. 10.)

6. The nature and design of baptism lead us to the belief of the salvation of infants. It is an ordi-

* See M^r Knight on Epis. I. 197. 262.

nance in which the Lord meets children at their first entrance into the world, and offers to them the blessings of the new covenant; which blessings they shall enjoy, except they afterwards wilfully reject them. The water of baptism, applied in the name and by the authority of God to the child, is a standing token of his tender and parental regard; denotes the blood of Christ poured out and sprinkled upon the soul for its justification; and also the sanctifying influences of that Spirit, who was promised in the figurative language of the old dispensation, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you." When the seal of God, betokening the two great blessings of the covenant, is by his authority applied to the child, shall we doubt of its salvation, if in infancy it is removed from earth?

But, you ask, Are those children received into heaven who die without baptism? That they are not, is the general sentiment of the Romish church; and has been maintained by a number of protestants, from whom we should have expected more liberal opinions. "It is," says good Bishop Hall, "the hard sentence of a bloody religion." It is true, that those parents who neglect it, where they have an opportunity of having it administered, are criminal, and treat with contempt a precious ordinance of God. But the grace of God is not inseparably attached to the sacraments. Baptism is necessary now, as circumcision was of old; and yet many Israelitish infants died without this in ordinary times, and especially during the forty years it was neglected in the wilderness, and yet were not lost. If every unbaptized child were banished from heaven, the infant would eternally bear the sin of the father, contrary to the express assertion of God; (Ezek.

xviii. 20. Deut. xxiv. 16.) and the everlasting doom of the babe would depend upon a mortal like itself.

7. The accounts that are given us of the proceedings of the judgment-day, prove that infants will not then be condemned. These accounts are numerous and varied, but they without exception concur in representing those who are banished from the presence of the Lord as his enemies by wicked works, and rejecters of the great Redeemer. Every one there bears his own burden; no one is punished except for personal sins, or sentenced to misery except for actual transgressions.

8. The scriptural representation of the torments of hell conducts to the same conclusion. These torments are all connected with the recollection of the past. The remembrance of despised mercies, of neglected opportunities, of a refused Saviour, of sins committed and duties omitted: this remembrance excites the lashes of an enraged conscience, and constitutes the "worm which never dieth." But of such suffering he who died in infancy is utterly incapable.

9. Finally: the doctrine which I have been defending perfectly harmonizes with the gospel plan of salvation. The papist, who looks for heaven as the reward of human merit; the Arminian, who acknowledges no election that is not founded on good works foreseen; cannot, without opposition to their respective systems, defend infant salvation; since these departed babes possessed no merit, and since in them no good works could be foreseen. But the advocate of the doctrines of grace, who believes that salvation is the gift of undeserved mercy, and that election is founded only on the good pleasure of

God, can consistently maintain the proposition with which I began this illustration, that God has ordained to confer eternal life, through Jesus Christ, on all whom he has ordained to remove from earth before they arrived at years of discretion.

Having thus given you a rapid sketch of the arguments which lead to the belief of infant salvation, I must, with similar brevity, present to you a few inferences from this subject.

1. Learn from it the preciousness of the word of God. The scriptures are indeed the book of the unhappy. They alone can present sufficient consolations under the multiplied afflictions that we experience on earth. In the loss of children, on the death of friends, in poverty, reproach, sickness, or dissolution, they afford consolations no where else to be found. Then prize them more; esteem them your treasure; they are calculated to be "your song and rejoicing in the house of your pilgrimage." Bless God for the sublime prospects they give, and the precious promises they contain; secure an interest in these promises, and you can never be unhappy.

2. Praise God for his unutterable grace. This is the occupation of these departed infants. Who can conceive the sudden and rapturous expansion of their minds when they entered into that glory, with which they now are and ever will be surrounded? Though they had no knowledge of Christ, nor of the plan of salvation through him, till they beheld the displays of his glory, and had a ravishing sense of his salvation in heaven; yet they then perceived the mercy of God, and the duty of eternal love and gratitude to that Jesus who had saved them by his blood, with as much clearness as though this knowledge

had previously been communicated to them on earth.

3. Bereaved parent, rejoice in the dignity and elevation of thy child. To have this child in heaven, is greater cause of triumph than if he swayed the sceptre over prostrate nations. Bless God, who has honoured thee by making thee the parent of one who now mingles with the angels, and beholds the unveiled face of Immanuel. What though his mortal remains still slumber in the tomb, He who came to ransom us from the grave, will raise him glorious and immortal. To thee the Father of mercies speaks, as he did to an ancient parent bereaved of her children: "Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears, for thy children shall come again from the land of the enemy." Anticipate that time when death, this last enemy, shall be utterly destroyed, and thy children spring from the grave, clothed in heavenly bodies: and in the mean time, view the happiness of their spirits, freed from every mortal pain and wo, saved from the possibility of perdition. When they died, they were born; they died out of this mean earth, and were born into one infinitely more glorious: heaven rejoiced at their entrance into it; and if we are related to heaven, we should bear part in this joy.

4. Bereaved parent, art thou ready to meet this child? In thy name he has taken possession of the tomb: has he also in thy name taken possession of heaven? Art thou following the Redeemer, and living devoted to him? Then thou shalt soon be

reunited to thy child, in a world where there will be no possibility of separation again. But if thou art still Christless and careless, thy child beholds thee with pity; and, could grief be felt in heaven, would feel it for thee. Turn then unto the Lord : at thy repentance all the angels will rejoice; and surely, among them, thy glorified infant will feel a peculiar sensation of bliss, even in the paradise of God. Between thee and him there is a great gulf; but, blessed be God, this gulf is not yet impassable.

5. And you who have passed through the period of infancy, remember, that to your salvation are required explicit acts of faith in Jesus, and lives devoted to him. Flee then in time to this Redeemer, lest death surprise you, and you for ever be filled with agony, that you were not removed from earth before you arrived at years of discretion.

SERMON LXXVI.



YOUTH CLEANSING HIS WAY.



PSALM CXIX. 9.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto, according to thy word.

WE are born in a state of depravity; our affections by nature are alienated from God, and we are prone to evil. This is a truth that does not rest merely upon the unequivocal testimony of the scriptures, though nothing can be more explicit than their language on this point: it is proved also by daily observation and universal experience. It is recognised in all the restraints, the punishments, the vigilance, that are found necessary in the education of those, even of the tenderest years.

But this depravity, perceptible even in infancy, becomes more perceptible in youth. The seeds of evil germinate as we advance in life; and not only the heart, but the "*way*," the general course of conduct, becomes polluted. Not that all, who are not the subjects of renewing grace, are equally sinful. Some rush to excesses at which more modest sinners tremble: such are those young persons who pour

forth their blasphemies against the God of heaven, and deride the faith of the Christian, and the sacrifice of the great Redeemer: such are those who early plunge into every scene of vice, and before they have attained the years of manhood, drink the cup of sensual pleasure to its dregs: such are those whose conversation is marked by obscenity or profanity; who alternately wound modesty, and sport with the name of the tremendous God, or in profane levity imprecate upon themselves that “damnation which slumbereth not.” Though the “way” of these and similar heaven-daring youth has a peculiar awfulness and depth of guilt, yet it is not they alone who need to be cleansed: it is necessary, indispensably necessary, for all who have not experienced the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit. Though by the restraining grace of God you may have been kept from these gross sins; though your external deportment may have been decent; though you may have many moral virtues and amiable qualifications; though you may resemble that interesting young ruler who came to the Redeemer, to whom but “one thing was wanting;” yet you still need to be cleansed by the Spirit, and the blood of Jesus, and without it you must for ever be undone.

Is it not true, my dear young friends, that the greater part of you must be placed in one or the other of these two classes? I know, and from the bottom of my heart I bless God for it, there are some of a different character; some who remember their Creator and Redeemer in the days of their youth; some whose early years are sanctified by vital piety; some, the hope of this flock, and the future pillars of this church, who, instead of laying up a store of anguish and remorse for the time to come,

are, under the influences of the Spirit, preparing for usefulness, when the heads of the older followers of Jesus shall be mouldering in the dust. On such may the dearest blessing of God Most High ever rest! May they enjoy the peculiar benediction of that Saviour who delights in the early convert! May their number be augmented! But, my brethren, how few are these, in comparison with those who are either indulging in gross vice, or occupied only with the world? How many of our youth, over whom we must weep while we see them regardless of eternity, careless of maintaining communion with God in prayer, neglecting his word, "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," unaffected by the dying love of Jesus? How many who, like that unhappy young prodigal in the gospel, have left their heavenly Father's house, have endeavoured to withdraw from him and to shake off his authority, and forgetful of the plenty and felicity which he is ready to bestow, are endeavouring, vainly endeavouring, to satisfy themselves with the husks of earth?

Oh! that at last, you, my young friends, would like him, "come to yourselves;" would feel your guilt and your misery; would resolve to retrace your steps; would desire the renewal of your hearts, the reformation of your lives, the salvation of your souls! Oh! that you would cry, with a deep sense of the importance of the question, "Wherewithal shall the young cleanse their way?"

This is to be done,

I. By "*taking heed to their ways*;" by circumspection and serious consideration.

God, in our conversion, deals with us as reasonable beings. Those who are savingly brought to

him, are first made to pause in their career, and solemnly consider their character and conduct.

And is it not fit and proper, my young friends, that you should seriously inquire of reason, of conscience, and of religion, "What is the path in which I am treading; who has directed me to it; who are my companions in it, the saints or the neglecters of God; those with whom I would wish to stand or not in the judgment-day? Have I assurance that the path in which I walk conducts to felicity and glory, or have I not cause to apprehend that it leads to darkness and despair? Am I acting according to the end of my creation, and the immortality of my destination, aiming habitually and supremely at that which constitutes the true interest and the chief felicity of man, and living in a manner correspondent to the solemn relations which connect me to my Maker and my Judge?"

I appeal to yourselves, my young friends; does it not become accountable and mortal creatures, who to-morrow may be in the grave and at the awful and decisive bar of the Eternal, thus to "take heed to their ways?" If "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib," should not these shadows of thought and gratitude in irrational creatures, fill those endued with understanding and immortality with shame, if they "will not know" the hand that feeds, nor "consider" their everlasting interests? Does not your repugnance to "come to the light," and your indisposition to examine the grounds of your hope, show a consciousness that they will not bear examination, and that your title to the peace you enjoy is false and deceitful?

Yet, simple and evident as are these truths, how many of you are there, my young friends, who live

as though you thought *either* that everlasting concerns are so trifling, as not to deserve a place among those objects that should exercise your reason and understanding; *or else*, that without reflection or consideration, you were to be carried to heaven by the operation of chance, or the necessary current of things? In vain are you assured, that although without reflection or exertion you may be borne to hell; that although in order to enter that doleful region, you have only to yield to your corruptions, and resign yourselves to slumber; yet that serious thought and consideration are necessary before you can become an heir of heaven: still you refuse to listen; still, while you "take heed" to your fortune, your health, your worldly pleasure, human science, or political events, you will not "take heed to your way." In vain do we cry, that by such inconsideration you lie at the mercy of your tempter and your corruptions, and become the certain victims of those subtle enemies of your salvation, who are watching to destroy you. Still you go without forethought or serious reflection, wandering "like blind men upon the narrow summits of deep and dismal precipices, in the midst of a thousand dangers, which if seen would make the stoutest heart to quake." [Gale.] If consideration, at some lucid intervals, forces itself upon you: if by some means of grace or affecting providence, some solemn discourse, or the death of a friend, or your own sickness, you are made to pause, and ask, "Where am I, and whither am I going?" how soon do you succeed in shifting this salutary conviction, and hardening your hearts. You close your eyes, as though by refusing to see your peril, you could annihilate it. You sustain yourself by a fond presumptuous expectation, that in

some mode, you think or care not how, you will be rescued from misery and raised to glory. Oh! how awful are the consequences of this neglect to take heed to your ways. Hence the *gross ignorance* of divine things, that with surprise and grief we find in so many young persons who have been educated in a Christian land. Though means of instruction abound, they are in vain, for the want of consideration. Hence that deep *insensibility*, that security in sin which we see and lament in so many. Refusing to reflect on the nature and consequences of sin, they mock at danger, they make a jest of admonitions, they laugh at those who pity them. Hence the *blind submission* to appetite, and lust, and passion, and the readiness with which they yield to temptation. Hence the *false peace*, that so many derive from grounds of hope that cannot sustain the scrutiny of reason or of revelation, that will “perish when God taketh away the soul,” and that they will too late find delusive, when its foundation shall be searched by the fires of judgment, and by the sanctity and omniscience of the Most Holy.

Awake then, immortal souls! Use the faculties which God has given you, for the purposes for which they were bestowed. Attend to your principles, your affections, your lives. Bring this great question to a determination, “Am I treading in the way that conducts to heaven, or in that which leads to hell?” And that you may properly decide on this momentous subject, and be taught in all respects how “to cleanse your way,” have recourse

II. *To the word of God.* This is the second great means pointed out by the inspired Psalmist.

Would you then, my young friends, be holy here and happy hereafter, receive this sacred volume, not

as the work of man, but as the voice of the Eternal to you. In it your *Lawgiver* and your *Sovereign*, whom you are bound to obey by every consideration of reason, duty, and interest, utters his commands; and opposes the most venerable and awful authority to the impetuosity of passion. Listen to his laws with as much solemnity as did those who stood at the foot of Sinai, when it trembled at the special presence of its Creator. In it the voice of the tenderest of *Fathers* is directed to his wandering children, expostulating with them on their folly and ingratitude, and inviting them to return to his bosom, that is open to receive them. Listen to him with the sentiments of the erring, but repentant prodigal, and cry, "I will return again to my Father." In it the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* declares to the perishing children of Adam the infinite value of that victim for our sins, which he has provided. Believe the record which God has given of his Son; and with faith, with gratitude, and joy, accept the atonement.

Every thing in this word of God has a tendency to cleanse the way of the young: its *doctrines*, its *directions*, its *examples*, its *promises*.

Can your hearts, my young friends, be affected by all that is most sublime, most awful, or most tender? all this is presented in the *doctrines* of the scriptures. The infinite perfections of the All-perfect; the creation and providential government of the universe by him; the ineffable glories of the third heaven; the deep and eternal agonies of the lost; the fearful splendours of the judgment-bar; and above all, the cross of Immanuel; these are some of the doctrines that are calculated to touch and rouse the soul of

him whose way is polluted, and make him desirous that it should be cleansed.

When this desire is formed, we are in this same holy volume supplied with the clearest *directions* in what manner to obtain this inestimable blessing. It points to that Lamb of God who alone can atone for our sins; in the fountain of whose blood we can be washed from our guilt. It directs us to the grace of that Spirit who alone can sanctify our hearts, and inspire us with holiness. It shows us the mercy-seat accessible through the atonement and intercession of Jesus, and directs us to prayer, as the channel of the divine mercies to us. And when after repairing to the blood of Jesus by faith, committing our souls into his hands, looking to his righteousness for justification, and his Spirit and grace for sanctification, we have resolved henceforth to live to God, here we have “a light to our feet and a lamp to our path,” “a sure word of prophecy, whereunto we may take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day” of everlasting glory “dawn.” Here we are taught the arts of our enemies, and furnished with armour of celestial proof, whereby we may obtain the victory over them.

Lest you should be discouraged by a sense of your weakness, the word of God adds *examples*, to convince you, that by the grace which God has bestowed upon others, and is willing to bestow upon you, your way may be cleansed, your souls renewed, and your lives devoted to him. He animates and encourages you by the example of a Joseph, who rose superior to youthful excesses, and repulsed with holy indignation solicitations to sin against his God; an Obadiah, who feared the Lord from his youth; a Samuel, from the tenderest years serving and loving

his heavenly Friend; a Timothy, acquainted with the scriptures from his youth, and early by them made wise unto salvation; a John, the youngest and most beloved of the disciples: these, and other names, shine with honour in the sacred oracles. They invite you to tread in that happy path in which they walked: they show you that grace can cleanse the heart of the young, and make them the devoted servants of God.

And, finally, this holy word gives you the most precious *promises*: promises to support you under weakness, to deliver you from enemies, to preserve you here, and crown you hereafter; promises common to you, and those of all ages, who truly flee to the Redeemer; and, also, promises peculiar to the pious youth. “If you seek him early, you shall find him.” “Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.”

And now, my dear young friends, what effect shall this discourse have upon you? Shall it be added to the number that have been heard without improvement, and that have been forgotten when you have returned from the house of God to the world? I beseech you not to regard the address which has been made to you as merely words of course. They are solemn and serious truths which have been announced to you; truths, the unspeakable moment of which you will hereafter feel. You were early and solemnly dedicated to God as your Father, your Saviour, your Sanctifier, in the holy ordinance of baptism. Alienate not yourselves from him, whose seal is upon you, and trifle not (for you do it at your peril) with your sacramental consecration to the Eternal. The whole of your time and life is little

enough for the great work you have to do : it was all given you by God, and all bestowed upon you for the purpose of glorifying him, and adorning your souls with the beauties of holiness. You cannot, without the utmost ingratitude and danger, spend any part of it in rebellion against him : you cannot devote any part of it to vanity and sin without perverting the end and design of your being. Though in the bloom of youth, you have no assurance of life for a day, for an hour. The greater part of those, whose bodies are waiting in the repository of the dead for the resurrection-day, died in youth. Many of your youthful associates have fallen by your side. And have you ever seriously thought how dreadful a thing it is to die in an unholy state, and in the guilt of unpardoned sin ? An unsanctified soul, that has lived here but to the world and the flesh, must ever suffer the flames of the abyss, and the avenging justice of the most holy God. Ought not the bare possibility of such a doom excite you to instant solicitude and care ? Either you will repent and live to God or not. If not, you are undone for ever. You will through eternity curse the day when you were born, and cause the arches of the world of horrors to resound with your execrations of yourselves for your indulgence in sin, and your neglect of the Redeemer. But if God should bring you to repentance after your youth has been wasted at a distance from him, with what agony will you think of that precious season which you madly cast away in sin ? With what pain will you think, ‘What knowledge, what holiness might I have then obtained ; how happy and how heavenly a life might I have then led ; what days and years of mercy did I throw away for nothing !’ And when God has given you the taste of his

love, and the hopes of heaven, it will deeply wound your hearts to remember, that you so long, so unthankfully, so heinously offended so good a God, and neglected so merciful a Redeemer, and trampled upon infinite divine love. And even though God in mercy convert and save you, yet the bitter fruit of your youthful sins may follow you in this world to the grave : ever affecting your body, your reputation, your conscience, and your mind. If you wish to possess much spiritual wisdom or usefulness in the world, your preparation must be made in youth. Oh ! that you knew how much of the safety, fruitfulness, and comfort, of your future life depends upon this precious season : upon the wisdom and the grace you may now obtain ! If you would avoid doing an irreparable injury to others, and drawing them into sin by your solicitation and examples, and plunging them into eternal despair, then early seek the Lord. When they have joined with you in vicious indulgences and sinful pleasures, it is not in your power to turn them, that they may join with you in sound repentance. And if they do not repent, they must lie in agony for ever. Oh ! have you the heart to make a sport of your own and other men's damnation ? Yes, of your own as well as theirs ; for there is the utmost danger lest your youthful sin become remediless, and custom harden you, and deceivers blind you, and God forsake you for your wilful resistance of his grace. Then you will be left to a deluded understanding, to a seared conscience, and a hardened heart, to oppose grace and your own salvation, till death and hell convince you of your madness. Oh ! trifle then no longer with sin and with the unquenchable fire. But cry, "What shall we do to be saved ? Wherewithal shall a

young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto, according to thy word."

2. This subject leads us to felicitate those young persons who have devoted themselves to the service of God. "You have chosen the good part." The wisdom of your choice will be more and more displayed every future year, and will be especially manifested at death, and in the judgment-day. Blessed indeed are ye, to be thus early secured from the greatest danger, the danger of perdition; to be thus early rescued from the reigning power of sin, from spiritual blindness and madness; to attain thus early the delights of faith, and hope, and love, of holy knowledge and communion with God and saints, of peace of conscience, and anticipation of glory. Blessed indeed are ye in the joy that ye communicate to your parents, in the happiness that ye give to the pious, in the service, that by beginning thus soon, ye may do to the church of God. Still, then, persevere; and let "your path be like that of the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

3. Finally, my brethren, though this discourse has been addressed principally to the young, yet let those who are more advanced in life and still unrenewed, remember that many of the observations that have been made apply with double force to them. If youth should weep for mispent time, how much more should you? If they should consider their conduct, and the certain and speedy consequences of sin, how much more should you? Thousands who began the career of life with you, are now past warning, past all hope and help for ever. They once laughed at judgment and perdition; they are now feeling what they would not believe. Through

the unspeakable mercy of God you are still alive, and after so many sins and dangers you still hear a warning voice, and have salvation offered to you. No longer trifle. Review your whole lives. Ask yourselves what you have done. Consider seriously whither you are going, and whether your life has prepared you for your journey's end, and how your way will appear to you at death, at judgment, and in the world to come. Listen, then, at last, to the voice of grace. Having wandered so long in sin, it is surely time to "turn unto the Lord, that he may have mercy upon you; and to our God, that he may abundantly pardon you."

SERMON LXXVII.



BRUISED REED AND SMOKING FLAX.



MATTHEW xii. 20.

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.

THE ministers of the Lord Jesus would unfeignedly rejoice, could they always, in consistence with their duty, hold up before you the tender and consolatory doctrines of the gospel; could they always utter the accents of peace, and the declarations of pardon; could they always cause the temples of God to resound only with hallelujahs and thanksgivings. If at times they uncover the pit of despair; if they exhibit the agonies of the lost; if they speak of the thunders of the law, and the avenging justice of the Almighty; it is not because such subjects are more correspondent with their feelings, but because they dare not abstain from declaring the whole counsel of God, and because they hope, from the terrors of the Lord, to persuade men, and prepare them for the consolations of the gospel.

To-day, my brethren, our text leads us to a subject on which we love to speak, and to which believers will ever listen with new delight. This subject is, the abounding grace, the unspeakable compassion, of the

Redeemer. To-day, we present this Redeemer to you, not as he shall appear when he shall come to "take vengeance on those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son," terrible in his indignation, and armed with thunders; but as he is now held out to you in the gospel, the refuge of the penitent, the support of the feeble, the consolation of the desponding. Listen to this subject, so intimately connected with the peace and everlasting happiness of your souls, ye confirmed and assured believers, and retrace your obligations to that Saviour whom you adore. Listen, ye trembling penitents, ye "tossed with tempest and not comforted," and let the grace of Immanuel cause hope to beam upon your souls. Listen, ye lambs of the flock, that your apprehensions may be dissipated, and a full confidence be fixed on that heavenly Shepherd, who knoweth his sheep, who layeth down his life for them, and who will permit no one to pluck them out of his hands.

And do thou, compassionate Redeemer, make us to experience thy grace while we are meditating upon it. We ask not to speak of it as it deserves; this is beyond the power of angels; but may we have such a touching and tender sense of it, of its preciousness, of its freeness, of its extent, that our hearts may burn within us, and our souls rise with adoring gratitude to thee.

These consolatory words, together with the context, are quoted from the prophet Isaiah, and form one of the many striking representations of Messiah, which were given to support the faith and confidence of the Jewish church. In the preceding verses, in order to uphold the trembling spirit and cheer the desponding penitent, the whole sacred Trinity are represented as engaged in the redemption of man:

the Father, choosing, commissioning, delighting in the Mediator; the Son, joyfully undertaking the office assigned to him; and the Spirit, poured out upon him without measure, to qualify him for its discharge. "*Behold my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.*" Lest guilty men should still be terrified at a messenger from heaven, or lest they should form false ideas of the nature of Messiah's kingdom, or the manner of his advent, the inspired prophet declares that the execution of his office should be marked by meekness, benignity, and peace. "*He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.*" Instead of bearing in his hands thunders to crush the rebellious; instead of coming as a proud and haughty temporal conqueror, subduing nations by the force of his arms, and exhibiting "the battle of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood," he shall not "*strive*," except by the secret and invisible influences of his Spirit; he shall aim at no conquests but those that are unbloody. He shall not "*cry*" out in the accents of wrath, of contention, of fury; "*his voice shall not be heard in the streets*," clamorously pronouncing woes, tribulation, and anguish upon the children of men. If he cry, it shall be only to invite the weary and heavy laden to rest; if he lift up his voice, it shall be only to point the perishing to everlasting glory, to give the most precious consolations to the wretched and forlorn. Ah, brethren! do not your hearts begin to melt within you, and flow out in thankfulness, in joy, and in love to such a Saviour? What, then, must be their emotions, when this new trait of his character is added, "*A bruised reed shall*

he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory ?”

The *bruised reed* beautifully represents the character of the penitent sinner. He regards himself, not as the firm cedar of Lebanon, nor as the stately “palm tree flourishing in the courts of the Lord :” but as the poor, feeble, shaking reed ; and even this not in its best condition, but crushed and broken. Such bruised reeds are all who are humbled under a sense of guilt, mourning over their weakness and misery, “poor in spirit,” feeling themselves wounded, afflicted, and distressed by that sin in which they have indulged. Such a bruised reed was the poor prodigal, crushed not so much by the burden of his afflictions as of his sins ; was the dejected publican, smiting upon his breast, and scarcely daring to lift up his eye or his voice to heaven for mercy ; was the weeping Mary, detesting herself for her iniquities, and bending at the feet of her Saviour ; was the fallen David, pleading for the life of his soul ; was the penitent Peter, pierced to the soul by the silent but intelligible reproach which the look of Jesus conveyed to him, and “weeping bitterly” for his base denial of his Master. Such a bruised reed wast thou, my Christian brother, when the Spirit of God convinced thee of thy true character, caused thee to look upon him whom thou hadst pierced by thine iniquities, and to mourn as one mourneth for a first-born.

Are there any such persons now in the house of God ? The Lord speaks peace unto you ; Jesus has compassion on you. He will surely, and he may suddenly, give you a sense of pardoning love. Were there no other promise of mercy, or declaration of grace, in the word of God, besides that contained in

the text, it alone ought to encourage and cheer you ; for it is the declaration of him, “ one jot or one tittle of whose words shall not fail till all be fulfilled.”

I urge you not to a *blind* and *presumptuous* reliance upon the promise. There are many who appear to others and themselves to be these bruised reeds, who are not penitents ; many who have some sudden terror or short grief, which causes them to tremble, to shed tears, and, in the language of the prophet, “ to bow their heads like the bull-rush,” who have yet no proper sense of sin. Search then deeply into your own souls. The more accurate and profound this examination is, the more will it prepare you for a stable peace. Have the proud and self-righteous thoughts of your hearts been humbled ; and have you, feeling yourselves justly condemned sinners, been brought on your knees to the throne of grace, there to plead for mercy ? Does this mercy appear to you more valuable than all the world ? Have you been so bowed down by your iniquities, and been so convinced of your misery and helplessness, as to consider sin the bitterest, and Christ the sweetest, of all possible objects ? Do the gospel and salvation by grace sound as music in your ears ? If these things be indeed so, notwithstanding your lamented coldness, notwithstanding the weight and burden of your sins, notwithstanding your doubts and apprehensions, “ be of good cheer ; the Master calleth you.” He says to you, “ *The bruised reed I will never break.*” ‘ Mourning, trembling, dejected soul, instead of crushing thee by my power, as unworthy ; instead of rejecting thee with contempt, as beneath my regard ; the treasures of my compassion, the riches of my grace, shall be opened to thee. O thou of little faith, wherefore then dost thou fear ?’

Go then, humbled sinners, with confidence to your Redeemer. Distrust not his compassion; disbelieve not his promise. He is a "high priest, who has been touched with a feeling of your infirmities;" for "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief." He who was bruised for sin, will not reject you when bruised by sin. For such as you, he received his commission and his unction. Hear his own words. "The Lord hath anointed me to bind up the broken-hearted." Know you not that "a contrite heart is a sacrifice which God and the Redeemer will never despise?" Know you not that the heart of Jesus is more full of sympathy than you conceive? If he died for you when you were rebels, will he reject you when you come to him as suppliants, pleading the merits of his blood? Let not Satan then, and an unbelieving heart, and a reproaching conscience, longer rob your souls of the comfort that Christ is willing to bestow, and the Saviour of that glory which his grace will receive from your songs of praise. Say not, poor dejected soul, "I am unworthy." We know it; but was it for the worthy that Jesus bled? Is it only to the fertile olive, or productive vine, that promises are made? Shaken, shattered reed, is it not also made to thee? Say not, "It would be presumptuous in me to rely upon the Saviour." Ah! is it presumption to believe that his word is everlasting truth; that his grace is ineffable, infinite, and worthy of God; that the merits of his death can reach even to thee? No; it is glorifying his truth, his goodness, and the fulness of his atonement. "Only believe, and it shall be unto thee according to thy faith; and thou shalt find, as all the redeemed in heaven, as all the saints on earth have found, that "the bruised reed he will not break."

And if this text gives consolation to the mourning penitent, it is also calculated to communicate comfort to the *feeble and trembling believer*. His character is represented under the emblem of *smoking flax*; giving but a little, indistinct, and faint light, and apparently liable to be easily extinguished. Thus grace, at its first implantation, appears but a little spark, scarcely discernible, and mingled with much corruption. But this the Saviour "*will not quench*;" he notices the first faint emotions of piety; he beholds with pity the returning prodigal, while "yet a great way off;" he cherishes the new-born sentiments of goodness in the meanest and most insignificant subjects; he fans the almost expiring spark into a flame that shall blaze throughout eternity, and mingle its lustre with that of the burning seraphs round the throne of God.

Hear this, and rejoice, ye *babes in Christ*. We know that there are some who have not attained to maturity in the divine life; that in the church, as in the world, there are weak and feeble infants, as well as vigorous adults. We know that the kingdom of Christ in the soul, as well as in the earth, is at first only as the minute grain of mustard seed, which must gradually extend and develop itself; that the "trees of righteousness planted in the courts of the Lord," do not, like those of paradise, arrive at their perfection at once. We know that these feeble believers are often filled with dismay, and suppose that they are beneath the regard of Jesus, and that they shall be destroyed by their spiritual foes. Lambs of the flock! we sympathize with you, and would direct your attention to that good shepherd, whose kindness, whose power, and whose vigilance are unlimited.

But before we press upon you the consolations of the text, we again call upon you to descend into your hearts, and inquire whether you are indeed weak Christians, or only persons who, though they powerfully feel the *common*, are destitute of the *special*, operations of the Holy Spirit. Can you be satisfied with a low degree of grace, because Christ has promised not to quench it? Are you contented with such a degree of piety as will merely secure you the favour of God, and procure you admission into heaven? Does the firm persuasion of the compassion and care of Jesus produce and encourage in you remissness in known duties? Ah, brethren! if these be your feelings, you are the enemies of God; not smoking flax, but smoking firebrands. *He* never felt the grace of the Redeemer, who makes this grace a plea for negligence and an encouragement to sin. But can you on the contrary say, that, with all your weakness, with all your guilt, in the midst of your fears, in the midst of your sorrows, your chief desire is to be under the government of Christ; your chief prayer and labour is to grow in grace and conformity to his image; your chief burden the remains of indwelling corruption; and that the remembrance of his infinite compassion melts your soul, and fills you with regret that you make so unworthy a return for such goodness? Then lift up your drooping heads, for to you the promise in the text is as expressly spoken as though you were addressed by name.

Smoking flax, the Lord will not quench you; feeble believers, the Saviour beholds you with pity; and, instead of extinguishing, will cherish your graces. Faint as may be the light which is shed in your soul, it is light which came from heaven. Did

God kindle it in your soul, and will he then blot it out and leave you in darkness? Will He who is the author, renounce the glory of becoming the finisher, of your faith? Small as may be the degree of your grace, it is inestimably precious. We judge not of things merely by their magnitude, but their nature. The smallest diamond is of more value than a clod of earth. The faintest aspirations of grace are worth more than a thousand worlds: they could be purchased by no less a price than the blood of Jesus, and implanted within you by no less a power than the omnipotent energy of the Holy Spirit. Will they then be viewed with indifference by your Saviour? At the first infusion of grace in your soul, there was joy in heaven; the angels exulted at your repentance: will He, of whom "the family both in heaven and earth is named," permit this joy to be turned into sorrow, and these angels to lament the precipitance of their songs of praise to Jesus, in blessing him for plucking you from despair? The Saviour expressly prohibits men from offending his "little ones," little in their opinion of themselves and in the degree of their graces, and declares that the highest angels have a special regard for them. Will he himself then cast them off? The weakest saint has his name written in the "Lamb's book of life," in as legible characters as the greatest apostle; as the infant is enrolled in your family records as well as the adult. Will Jesus blot out this name that his own hand has inscribed, and lose this soul that his Father hath given him? The care and pity of Christ extend particularly to the feeble. Weak grace is a proper ground of humiliation and sorrow, but not of distrust. The helpless infant peculiarly claims the attention of the mother; the tenderest

plants are most solicitously watched by the gardener; the feeble lambs are with the greatest sympathy borne in the bosom both of the earthly and heavenly shepherd. Weak as you are, the foundation on which you rest is strong as Omnipotence, the everlasting covenant, and the power of Jesus. "It is not our hold of Christ so much preserves us," says an old divine, "as Christ's hold of us: though the faith *we* hang by is a weak thread, Christ hath a strong hand. The weakest grace has a throne of grace to supply it, a God of grace to delight in it, a Mediator of grace to influence it, a Spirit of grace to cherish it." The most triumphant grace was once weak as yours. The glories that encircle Paul or Peter in heaven, sprung from these comparatively low beginnings, and your grace is capable of equal expansion with theirs.

Are you still trembling, and apprehensive that Jesus will extinguish you in everlasting darkness? Ah! could I paint to you all the tenderness of this Redeemer; could I present to you the endearing titles which he bears, and the gracious characters which he assumes; could I recount to you all the precious promises that he has uttered; could I show him descending from heaven, and expiring upon the cross to save you; could I retrace all his conduct on earth, and show him never repulsing the feeblest believer, and bearing with the multiplied weaknesses of his disciples; could I follow him on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, and exhibit him removing with tenderness the unbelieving doubts and undutiful fears of the two, who had once "hoped that it was he who would have redeemed Israel," or to the upper chamber where he confirmed the faith of Thomas; could I show him to you

after his ascension to glory, still equally compassionate, supporting, directing those Asiatic churches that had but a "little strength;" could I exhibit to you the history of all who are now on earth, exulting in the Lord as their portion; or in heaven, rejoicing in the immediate communications of his love: could I have time to do all this, you surely, unless you fought against the consolations of God, would be compelled to acknowledge that he never rejects the weak and feeble, that he never "quenches the smoking flax."

1. Shall not this subject *endear to us the blessed Jesus*? Infinitely elevated in his divine nature above the brightest and purest created intelligences, it is an infinite condescension in him to communicate himself to angels, or to bestow benedictions upon the highest seraph in heaven. But he stoops to earth! he sympathizes with worms of the dust! He places his glory and his delight in binding up the broken spirit, in consoling the bursting heart, in wiping the tears from the eye of the penitent, in giving the pledges of everlasting glory to the disconsolate, and in tenderly cherishing the weak and feeble! Christians, often retrace his kindness, often meditate on his grace, that your love may be inflamed, and your gratitude invigorated; that you may be animated to new zeal in His cause, who has done so much for you. And you, thoughtless and impenitent men, will you still reject him? I speak not to you now of his majesty and power, of his judgment-bar, of the decisive sentence, of its irrevocable execution: but I ask you, has he not done enough to secure your love; has he not benignity and compassion enough to move your hearts; is he not the most sympathizing friend to whom you can have

recourse under the pressure of your woes and the burden of your guilt? Why, why then will ye still neglect him, and die?

2. Let us *imitate the example of our Redeemer*, and, like him, regard with sympathy and love the penitent and the feeble, the bruised reed and the smoking flax. Wo to that man, who regards with contempt those trembling spirits who are peculiarly under the guardianship of Immanuel! Let us bear with their weaknesses; let us compassionate their sorrows; let us endeavour to lead them to that fountain of consolation, the efficacy of which we have experienced, if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

3. Finally: in concluding this discourse, let me again call upon the *bruised reeds and the smoking flax*; the mourning, the faint, and the weak, to look "to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world;" to believe his promises, and rejoice in his grace. Let not Satan blot your evidences, or make you think unworthily of the mercy of Christ. Compare your groaning, your self-abasements, your desires, your complaints, your sense of sin, and feeling of helplessness, with the office of the Redeemer to the penitent and the weak, and the promises he has made to them; and reject not the comforts of Jesus; refuse not thine own mercy. Cast yourselves into the arms of Jesus, resolved, if you perish, to perish there: He will speak peace to your souls, and "give you the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

SERMON LXXVIII.



THE WICKED CONTEMNERS OF GOD.



PSALM X. 13.

Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?

WAS there ever a more afflictive or discouraging commission than that which was given to Jeremiah? "Thou shalt speak unto the people," thus God addressed this prophet, "thou shalt speak unto the people, but they will not hearken unto thee; thou shalt call unto them, but they will not answer." I ask again, was there ever a more afflictive or discouraging commission? To be obliged to present to sinners the truths of religion, and at the same time to be fully persuaded that these truths will be rejected with contempt; to declare to them the laws of God, and at the same time to be perfectly assured that they will not submit to these laws; to point to them the road to heaven, and at the same time to be able to predict that they will continue in that which leads to perdition: how painful, how disheartening an employment to a feeling soul! I am not surprised that Jeremiah shrunk from these duties, that he entered upon them with trembling, that

he discharged them with weeping eyes, and a bleeding heart.

But, my brethren, distressing as was this situation of the prophet, it is that in which the ministers of the gospel are generally placed. When we see so many sinners slumbering on the brink of eternal despair, we cannot, without betraying our duty, and hazarding our souls, neglect to cry unto you, "Awake, ye that sleep, and arise from the dead! Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Yet what fruit is produced by these admonitions? Are we not almost always constrained to take up that sad lamentation: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, that they cannot hearken. Behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach, and they have no delight in it." (Is. liii. 1. Jer. v. 10.)

Shall I say it, my brethren, I expect that this will in a peculiar manner be my situation to-day. If you have fully assented to the declarations of scripture, when I have preached to you from this sacred desk the more mild and consolatory tenets of religion, yet now that I have to announce to you the deep pollution of your souls, I expect to "spend my strength for nought," I expect that my words will have no other effect upon the greater part of my hearers than to serve for their condemnation at the judgment-day. Yet, notwithstanding these distressing fears, it is a duty from which I cannot be released, to show to you your iniquity, and to lift up a warning voice. Who knows but that God may be better to us than our fears? Who can tell but that he may accompany this discourse, and bring some careless sinners to a conviction of their guilt? O God, our only hope! let thy truth thus triumph; let it thus

penetrate the hearts of the secure and presumptuous; and to thy powerful grace shall be ascribed the glory. Amen.

“Why doth the wicked contemn God?” In discoursing from this text we shall confine ourselves to a proof and illustration of the following proposition:

The wicked contemn God; they scorn and despise this glorious Being.

And I beseech you carefully to remark, that when I use this expression, *the wicked*, I do not mean merely those who, by the most atrocious and abominable crimes, have brought down on their heads both the wrath of God and the indignation of mankind; I do not mean merely those Cains who have slain their brethren; those Naboths who have oppressed the innocent; those Rabshekahs who have vomited forth their blasphemies against the God of heaven; those Judases who, under the mask of a disciple, have betrayed the Saviour: such monsters as these do, we grant, manifest their contempt of God in a more marked and decided manner: but yet these are not the only persons of whom we speak, when we say, *The wicked contemn God*. We speak also of those Gallios who, with a decent external deportment, “care for none of these things;” of those Felixes, who tremble at the solemn doctrines of religion, and stifle their convictions; of those Agrippas who are “almost persuaded to be Christians;” of those who, like the young ruler that came to Christ, possess many moral virtues, and amiable qualities, which secure our love, but who cannot resolve, though they have some imperfect desires to be pious, to make those sacrifices which piety demands; of those who, whilst they have “the form of godliness,” and are diligent in their attendance upon the ordinances of

religion, have never cordially assented to the gospel method of salvation, nor made an act of holy self-resignation to God. In one word, we speak of every child of Adam that is in his natural state; of every individual in this assembly, whether rich or poor, young or old, who has not been regenerated by the Blessed Spirit. Of all such, without a single exception, we assert that they condemn God, that they despise and scorn him.

I well know, sinners, that your hearts revolt against this charge. I well know that you are ready to exclaim, 'This is not our character; these are not our sentiments; you wrong us by such odious suppositions. We acknowledge that we often violate the laws of God; we acknowledge that we do not love and serve him as much as we ought to do: but still we respect and venerate him. No, no: though we are guilty, we have not yet sunk to such an excess of guilt.' My brethren, if this matter were to be decided by bold and confident assertions, this plea would acquit you: but you have to do with a God who disregards all assertions that do not accord with the emotions of the heart, which he reads, and the actions of the life, which he observes. Let us then examine our hearts, our lives, and the scriptures of truth. Let us be impartial in this examination: false conclusions may nourish a carnal security, and destroy us; but they cannot deceive God. Let us be solemn; for the eternal destinies of our souls are involved in this matter.

What proof of the assertion in the text will be satisfactory to you? What evidence would you require in a similar case? If you had a servant, (favour me with your attention to this remark,) if you had a servant, who permitted his mind to be ever running on the

most frivolous objects, and seldom thought of you ; who chose rather to converse of the merest vanities, than to speak of you ; who esteemed your favour so little, that he made no exertion to secure it ; who gayly laughed, and sportively sang, while you uttered the severest threatenings against him ; who turned his back upon you, when you made him the most encouraging promises ; who habitually slighted your commands, and obeyed your enemies ; who was noted, among those who knew him, for despising you : if you had such a servant, would you not think yourself authorized to say, ‘ This servant contemns me ; he despises me, and treats me with insult ? ’ Would you not think yourself authorized to say thus, even though he should with his lips profess the utmost respect and veneration for you ? Now, sinners, we shall prove that every trait which we have supposed in this servant is to be found in you.

1. Look at your mind, and you will be forced to acknowledge that you seldom *think* of God. If you were to attempt to examine the thoughts of your whole life, their multiplicity would perhaps confound you : fix then your attention upon those of the week past ! How often in this period have you thought of God ? How often have you in the midst of business, directed a glance of the mind, towards him ? How many hours have you retired from the concerns of earth, that you might meditate on this blessed object ? Ah, my brother ! you must acknowledge, that God has had but a very small proportion of your thoughts. Consider also, that the few thoughts which you have given to him were constrained. When your mind is left to itself, without any outward circumstances to impel it in one direction rather than another, it does not run to God as its centre. Nay, even if you at-

tempt to pull it to God, it immediately recoils, and declines all converse with him. Propose to it some method of adding a few pounds to your estate, or of acquiring a little more reputation: it immediately fastens upon this object, and rests upon it with pleasure. But propose to it the excellences of God, as the theme of meditation, it instantly recoils, and draws back from this blessed object. Now, do not these things prove, that whatever your speculative opinions of God may be, yet in your practical judgment and estimation of him, he is contemned? Would you not frequently think of him, if you supposed him worthy of frequent thoughts? Would you suffer the merest trifles to occupy a place in your mind, which you refuse to him, except you preferred these trifles before him?

2. From a consideration of your thoughts, let us pass to an examination of your *words*. If you highly venerate and esteem a person, you are delighted with those societies where this person is spoken of, and where you may join your testimony to that of others in his favour; you are frequently speaking of his excellences to your acquaintance, your friends, and your family. If you condemn a person, your conduct in these respects is entirely opposite. Now can conscience testify that it is delightful for you to be in company with real Christians, and to join with them in talking of the excellences of God? Or does it not declare, that such conversation is disagreeable to you, and that you had far rather be conversing on the most frivolous topics? Can your intimate friends witness, that in your intercourse with them you habitually introduce something of God; or must they not declare that for weeks and months you do not mention his name with reverence, solemnity, and

love? Can your family, your children and servants witness, that you often recommend God to them; and point him to them as a portion; and dwell on his perfections and glories: or must they not declare, that all your instructions to them regard only the present world; and that if you ever mention the name of God to them, it is with a freezing indifference, which renders it useless? My brethren, could these things be, if you esteemed God? If you did not inwardly condemn him, would not the mouth speak from the abundance of the heart?

3. Let us pass to your *actions*. You undeniably prove your contempt of God by the manner in which you treat his proffers of reconciliation, his offers of favour. God has been entreating you all your days to be reconciled unto him: he has presented you with the strongest reasons, reasons weighty as eternity; yet you have closed your ears to them: he has afforded you the most engaging calls, calls which displayed the infinity of his love; yet you would not be persuaded by them: he has showered upon you the richest blessings; yet they could not draw you unto him: he has visited you with weighty afflictions, and whilst his hand was pressing hard upon you, has promised you the most liberal relief, if you would yield, and address yourselves to him; yet, though you have “cried because of the oppression of the mighty, you have not said, Where is God my Maker?” (Job xxxv. 9.) you have chosen rather to perish under your burdens, than to be assisted by him. Now, how is it possible that you could hold out so long against these offers, and these means of reconciliation, except you despise God? If the servant, who should exhibit a total disregard of your favour, would be thought to despise you; you, who

display not merely such a disregard, but such an aversion, to a reconciliation with God, must surely be supposed to scorn and contemn him.

4. This same truth is established from considering the *manner in which you treat the threatenings of God*. When the eternal God utters against you the severest denunciations, you pay no more regard to his word than you do to that of a child or a fool; you pay not half the regard to his word which you would to that of a respectable man. If one of your fellow-creatures, in whom you at all confided, were to meet you on an unfrequented road, and seriously to assure you, that an assassin was in pursuit of you, would quickly overtake you, and would deprive you of life, unless you left the place in which you were: alarmed at your danger, you would instantly flee for safety. But when God solemnly declares unto you, that the whole weight of his wrath is hanging over you, that his justice shall shortly sink you in the flames of woe, unless you flee to the Saviour of sinners, you disregard these thunders; they affect you no more than the rattling of a withered leaf; you jocosely sport and laugh; you coolly prosecute your designs, and scorn the threatened vengeance of the Lord. After this, dare you say that you do not contemn and despise God?

5. To be more fully convinced, think for a moment what is *the regard you pay to the promises of God*. He assures you, that if you will take him as your God, and live in obedience to his commandments, he will bestow on you felicities infinite in degree and eternal in duration; felicities, a moment's enjoyment of which will far more than counterpoise all earthly sorrows. Yet, notwithstanding these assurances of God, you will not be persuaded to seek

happiness in the path to which he directs you : you prefer the transient and unsatisfactory pleasures which sin and Satan offer to you before the full enjoyment of God. Ardent in pursuit of happiness, you nevertheless prefer the toys of earth before all that he can offer you. You say by your conduct, ‘ Let others seek their felicity in God ; for my part, I esteem the pleasures, the riches, the dignities of the world, capable of affording higher pleasure. I would wish to enjoy them both ; but if God or mammon is to be renounced, let me cling to mammon, and let God depart.’ Sinners, does not your conduct plainly speak this language ; and could you in a more decided manner testify your contempt of God ?

6. Your contempt of God is manifested by your *disobedience to his commandments*. Is it possible, that if you revered and esteemed him, you could constantly live in an opposition to his laws ? He commands you, he commands you under penalty of eternal damnation, to renounce your iniquities, to lead heavenly lives, to submit yourselves to his Son : and yet you embrace sin, and press it with delight to your bosom ; your lives are sensual and earthly ; the agonies and dying pangs of Jesus have not induced you to take him as your Lord. And yet you dare to say you respect him ! As well might the traitor plead that he revered the prince against whose life he conspired : as well might the murderer assert that he respected the law, for the violation of which he suffers.

7. Finally, *the declarations of one who perfectly knows you*, place this matter beyond a doubt. Man might be deceived in judging of your sentiments : unable to read your heart, he might refer your actions to unreal motives. But God assuredly cannot mistake ;

God, who originally framed you, who “sees your thoughts afar off,” who perceives the most hidden recesses of your heart: this God declares in the text that you condemn him. Do you believe his declaration? You then confess that you scorn him. Do you disbelieve it? You then charge him with falsehood, and thus prove that you scorn him.

My brethren, unite all these arguments, and you will be forced to acknowledge that the wicked do condemn God. Nevertheless, this truth is too mortifying to the unregenerate to be easily received. and they will not fail to say, ‘I am not sensible that I condemn and scorn God; and surely if this sentiment prevailed in my heart, I should feel and know it.’ To this objection we briefly answer:

1. Nothing is more common than to see men the slaves of passions and vices, from which they believe themselves entirely free. Go to the avaricious, the envious, the implacable, and a thousand other classes: you will find they are ignorant of the chains with which their passions have fettered them. They and you are deceived from the same cause. This cause is, you are desirous to think well of yourselves, and are therefore unwilling to believe what must mortify you and humble you in the dust. As their unacquaintedness with their own character does not prove that they are not avaricious, envious, implacable; so neither does your ignorance of your own heart prove that you do not scorn God. We answer.

2. If you will be candid with yourselves, you must acknowledge that your thoughts, and words, and actions, are such as we have described. Now as these are plain proofs and manifestations of scorn. it follows undeniably, that if you thus think, and speak, and act. you must scorn him. whether you

are sensible of the existence of such a principle in your heart, or not. I answer,

3. It is easy for man to mistake, but impossible for God to lie. When, therefore, the matter is reduced to this alternative, that we must assert, either that you are unacquainted with your own sentiments, or that God has spoken falsely, we do not hesitate which part to embrace.

Sinners, you see what is your true character. Differing in age, in outward circumstances, in external morality, you all agree in contemning and despising God. It is no less astonishing than horrid, that you should do so; and we should willingly believe that you did not, if scripture and experience did not force us to embrace a contrary conclusion. Suffer us to expostulate a moment with you; suffer us affectionately to inquire, "*Wherefore* do you condemn God?" What is the cause of this odious conduct? Is it because God has not those perfections on which reverence and fear are founded? Answer, cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, whose fervent love is mingled with the profoundest reverence; who veil your faces, fearful to look upon and unable to sustain the flashes of glory and brightness issuing from the throne of Jehovah! Answer, exalted intelligences, does not the God whom you serve possess perfections sufficient to secure the respect of mortal worms? Ah, my brethren! the conduct of the heavenly host renders the answer unnecessary.

"Wherefore do ye condemn God?" Have you found any thing more deserving of your regard and attachment? Let us examine what those things are for which you neglect God. A heap of gold and silver, all of which in a few years must be left, except so much as will purchase you a shroud; extensive

lands and possessions, but six feet of which you will shortly be able to occupy; an airy fame, a fallacious and fleeting pleasure; these are the things for which men sacrifice their God. Ah, sinners! I know not whether most to be astonished at, that wickedness which can reject the Lord, or, that folly which can exchange him for such vanities.

“Wherefore do ye condemn God?” Is it because you are stronger than he; because you can resist that irresistible arm which controls heaven, earth, and hell; because you can conquer omnipotence or oppose infinity? Ah! a worm raising its head in defiance against the heaven, or a straw opposing the whirlwind which has overthrown forests and torn mountains from their bases, affords but an infinitely feeble emblem of the arrogance and vanity of such pretensions.

“Wherefore do ye condemn God?” Is it because you fancy you will never have need of his protection and assistance? But know you not that death is at hand? In that dreadful hour, when your soul shall be torn from your convulsed body, and enter upon a new and unknown eternity, would you not desire to find in God a friend who could recompense you for the enjoyments you had left on earth? Know you not that judgment is approaching? And would it then be worth nothing to have this condemned, though Almighty God, stand up as the advocate of our naked and unprotected soul, and rescue it from eternal perdition? Know you not that eternity is near? And would it not be happy for us when separated from temporal blessings, to find in this God an eternal portion for an eternal soul?

“Wherefore then do ye condemn God?” Must

not you yourselves be forced to acknowledge that you condemn him “without a cause.”

Think, I pray you for a moment how great is the guilt of indulging such sentiments! Contemners of God, what a dreadful thought! that the source of excellence, the perfection of beauty, the fountain of goodness, should be scorned and insulted by his own offspring! That you should despise him, who gave you life, who nourishes and supports you, whose air you breathe, whose earth you inhabit, from whose mercy you receive every blessing; him, who holds your life in his hands, and who has only to speak the word, and your bodies will crumble into dust; him, at whose bar you must in a very short period appear to have your endless destination assigned to you; him, who has prepared a heaven of infinite joy for those that love and reverence him, and a hell of inconceivable torture for those that condemn him: what wonderful guilt! what astonishing folly! Miserable condition! in comparison with it, it would be rapture to condemn and be condemned by every individual of the human race. And will you tranquilly continue in it? Will you not blush and bewail that odious depravity, under the influence of which you can love your flesh, your ease, your wealth, your friends, nay even your sins, your God-provoking sins; at the same time that you love not God, that you refrain not from scorning infinite perfection? I beseech you to remain no longer in this condition. Aspire to those sentiments which animate the arch-angels; or if this model be too high, at least emulate the piety of the damned, and instead of *scorning, trembling* at almighty power and vengeance.

Believers, let me add one word of exhortation to you. You see what you once were: “But you have

been washed, but you have been sanctified, but you have been justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." It is only rich, free, sovereign mercy, which "has caused you to differ." Live under an habitual sense of the goodness which has been exercised towards you; fall lower in humble admiration of sovereign mercy; rise higher in fervent praises of the forgiving God. By your diligence in celebrating the divine perfections, redeem the time which was spent in contemning them. As you daily advance nearer to that heaven which is now secured to you, catch more of the spirit of those ten thousand times ten thousand, who lose themselves in contemplating God, who delight to vanish from observation, that the divine glory may shine the brighter.

SERMON LXXIX.



DESIRE TO BE PRESENT WITH CHRIST.



2 COR. v. 8.

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

SUCH were the feelings, such the temper of soul which distinguished the great apostle of the Gentiles. United to the world by a mortal body, and united to the Lord by a fervent love, he felt attractions from opposite objects; he found in his soul desires that contended with each other. On the one hand, nature wished a prolongation of life, recoiled from the stroke of death, and shuddered when it fixed its view upon corruption and the grave. On the other hand, *faith* lifted the curtain which hangs over the future world, pointed to the eternity of being, the consummation of holiness, the perfection of joy, which are reserved for Christians in the Jerusalem on high, and dissipated the gloom of the grave, by showing that it is the path to heaven, the gate of glory.

On the one hand, *nature* spread all the pleasures of earth before him, and, with persuasive accents,

urged him to fix his ultimate desires upon them, to enjoy them, and be at rest. But on the other hand, *faith* presented to his view the ravishing, the ineffable beauties of Immanuel; beauties, from the clear vision and full enjoyment of which he was separated by this interposing wall of clay: and bade him sigh and groan, and long for a deliverance from these fetters of flesh, which held his soul in thralldom, and prevented it from mounting and winging its flight to the bosom of its Redeemer.

The apostle deliberately listens to these opposite pleadings of nature and of faith; calmly weighs the force of the motives which each presents to him; places side by side the pleasures of earth and the high raptures which flow from an intimate communion with Jesus in heaven; the terrors of death and that vast weight of glory which it confers upon the Christian; and, whilst the pleasures of earth and the terrors of death shrivel into insignificance, vanish into nothing before the overpowering lustre of celestial joys, he cries out, "We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Fortified by strength from on high, "*we are confident*," (*θαρροῦμεν*) and ready with an holy courage to endure the combat with the king of terrors, rather than continue at this painful distance from the Saviour whom we love. Earth has no joys to make us wish to stay: for "*we are willing*," we are well pleased and desirous, as the original word is often translated, (*ευδοκούμεν*) rather to be absent from this world of sin and pain, and this body of flesh, and to be admitted to the immediate and satisfying presence of the Lord. This is our desire, springing not from a blind impulse of passion; not from a contempt or hatred of the body, or a disdain-

ful aversion to this present state ; not from an indisposition to perform the duties or undergo the trials which God appoints to us on earth ; not from a mutinous rebellion against his disposals ; but from a cool consideration, an enlightened judgment. This is our desire ; and nothing but an acquiescence in the will of God, a submission to the disposals of his providence, and a wish to please him, could make us contented to remain below.

Such is the spirit and import of these words. They were uttered, it is true, by an apostle ; by one who was elevated above the rank of ordinary Christians, and called to the performance of duties in which we are not required to engage. But nevertheless, my brethren, it is equally true, that the motives which led Paul to form this particular desire were not derived from his apostolic office, but were such as are common to him and all believers ; the reasons which led him thus to determine are such as ought to affect us as much as they did him. Though therefore we are not bound to imitate every action and cultivate every feeling of Paul, because some of his actions and feelings were appropriate to the apostleship, yet still we are bound to imitate and cultivate the sentiments expressed in the text, because they are sentiments which he uttered, not in the character of an apostle, but in that of a Christian ; and vital Christianity is the same in kind through all ages, and in all stations. We are, therefore, authorized to lay down the following proposition ; to prove, defend, and apply which, shall be the sole object of the present discourse.

PROPOSITION. *It is the duty of every Christian to cultivate an ardent, yet submissive wish, to be separated from the body, that he may be with Christ.*

I am sensible, my brethren, that this will appear a strange doctrine to many who call themselves Christians. There are many who suppose that they have the temper and spirit of believers, and that they have a right to expect the reward of believers, although their hearts are so fastened to the earth, that, merely out of love to earthly objects, they shudder at the thoughts of dying, and would be willing to live for centuries in the world. There are many who flatter themselves that they will safely arrive at the Paradise of God, although their hearts, insensible as the clods on which they tread, never pant and languish for the vision and enjoyment of God, although they act and feel as though earth were their true country, and they inhabitants, instead of pilgrims, upon it. Let me beseech all those of you, who are animated by this worldly spirit, to silence the voice of the passions, those eloquent pleaders for corruption, and to listen coolly to those reasons which we shall produce in favour of our doctrine; and I think that you cannot but be convinced that you are strangers to the Christian temper.

But before we present these reasons, it is necessary, clearly and explicitly, to state the meaning of the proposition. Observe, then, that we do not say, that the Christian is bound to desire death for its own sake. Death, in itself, is an evil. Separation from the body in itself is painful. These, then, do not constitute the object of the Christian's desire, except as they are connected with the presence of the Lord; with that presence, which infinitely more than counterpoises all the pangs of dissolution which must be suffered, and all the felicities of earth which must be relinquished, to attain it. It is this presence

which is the primary object of desire, and death becomes desirable only because it introduces us to this presence. This desire should be strong. The infinitude of those joys which flow from the unveiled glories of Immanuel, from the rich emanations of his grace and love, surely deserves something more than a faint, cold wish, which does not agitate the heart, and which freezes upon the lips. Believing and feeling that the perfection of our felicity is to be found only with Christ, our wishes for that better state should be most fervent. But this fervour should be submissive and resigned; these desires should be mingled with no murmurs at the prolongation of our pilgrimage; and whilst for our own sakes, and from a regard to our own happiness, we would wish immediately to be separated from earth, we should for the sake of God, and in obedience to his will, though not from any worldly inclination or temper, be willing to postpone our happiness yet for some time, and remain upon earth.

After these observations, you will understand the true sense of the proposition which we have laid down, and which we repeat:

PROPOSITION. *It is the duty of every Christian to have an ardent, yet submissive desire, to be absent from the body, that he may be with Christ.*

The arguments to confirm this proposition shall be drawn from these four sources:

- I. From the principles of our nature;
- II. From the principles of our religion;
- III. From the declarations of scripture; and,
- IV. From the examples of the pious.

I. Is it not contrary to every principle of our nature *to be pleased with misery, to fail to desire happiness?* And yet this must be the strange disposition of every believer who does not wish "to be absent from the body, that he may be present with the Lord."

Consider for a moment, my brother, the evils which in this world press upon thee, and then tell me whether it is not rational that thou shouldst sigh to be delivered from them. Continually duped or disquieted by thy passions; pained by the withering of thy fondest hopes, by the blasting of thy tenderest expectations; weighed down by personal sorrows, and wounded to the heart by the woes or the treachery of those whom thou lovest; perpetually pursuing airy shadows, and mocked with a phantom where thou expectedst felicity; exposed to losses, poverty, and shame; contending with sickness, envy, and reproach; afflicted by the remembrance of past follies, and trembling at the apprehension of future woes: oh! is this a condition in which a reasonable man should be satisfied to remain, when the sacred calm, the holy peace, the ineffable joys of the New Jerusalem are proffered to him? Is it wise in thee to prefer the thorns planted around Paradise before the fruits of the tree of life? But if thou art a believer, these sorrows which we have mentioned are the lightest which thou feelest; are far more tolerable than those spiritual distresses which oppress thee. The blindness of thy mind, the treachery of thy heart, the inconstancy of thine affections, the sins which thou committest, the clouds which so often obscure the face of thy God: do not these, and a thousand other circumstances, lie as a weight on thy soul, and make thee long to drop so oppressive a burden of sins and sorrows, though the body

should drop together with it? Is it not reasonable that they should make you exclaim, with an holy anxiety, ‘Oh! when will the happy period arrive, when I shall be loosed from earth; when I shall no longer have any cross to bear, any corruption to combat; when I shall be perfectly happy, since I shall see my Lord; when I shall be perfectly holy, since I shall be made like unto him!’

Is it not then certain, that when the sentiments of our nature cry to us, *not to be pleased with misery, but to desire happiness*, they require the Christian to cherish a desire to be absent from the body, that he may be present with the Lord? But,

II. This truth is still more strongly confirmed by considering the *spirit and the principles of our religion*. True religion gives to the soul a *holy and a heavenly temper*: but can such a temper be inwrought in that soul, which contentedly settles down on earth, and fastening with avidity on terrestrial pleasures, forgets the throne above the skies? Can such a temper be inwrought in that soul, which, enamoured by the objects of time and sense, exclaims, “It is good for us to be here,” instead of crying, with the groaning church, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly?” *A holy love to God and the Redeemer* lies at the very foundation of true religion. But what kind of love, I pray you, is that which is satisfied to remain at a distance from the object of its affections, which looks with calmness at the immense interval between the blessed God and itself, and desires not to pass over this interval, and to rest in his bosom? What kind of love is that which thirsts not after a more intimate union and communion with the Source of light and joy? What kind of love is that which had rather be absent from the Lord than be absent from the

body? Surely it is that kind which our Saviour denounced when he declared, "He that loveth father or mother, yea, or *his own life*, more than me, is not worthy of me." *A love to the children of God*, and a delight in their society, are essential to the Christian character. But can the soul of that man be warmed with this love, who sees the pious, one by one, departing from earth, and joining the innumerable company of the pious in heaven, and yet desires not to die with them, and go with them to join the holy host of the redeemed of the Lord; who is not yet wearied with the world, and who had rather spend some years longer in the company of earth, than instantly go and associate with the purified children of God? *Hope* is one of the Christian graces; but hope includes desire: we hope not for an object which we do not desire. What a contradiction then to say, that we hope for the presence of the Lord when it is not the object of our wishes, when we had rather that he would delay his coming. Finally, there is no religion in that heart which does not long after greater degrees of holiness, and continual increase in grace. But is this the character of him who prefers a sinful world to a holy heaven; of him who desires, it is true, that he may enter into the region of purity, when God will no longer permit him to remain on earth, but who does not desire now, instantly, to go to that world of purity, if the entrance into it is to be made through the gate of death, and at the price of a separation from the body; of him who had rather for the present live in the midst of sin and iniquity, and carry about with him a polluted soul, than depart and be with Christ, and be thoroughly sanctified?

III. The *representations of the Scriptures* confirm this same truth. They uniformly represent those whose

affections are so fixed on earth that they are unwilling to quit their eager grasp of it, as the enemies of God : they uniformly declare that those who “ mind earthly things,” “ who look at the things which are seen and temporal,” who do not continually sigh after heaven, who do not look and wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus, as without any right to hope for eternal blessedness. It would be easy to quote many texts speaking this language, but our time will not permit, and your memory will supply them.

IV. Finally, the *examples of saints* teach us to cultivate this disposition which we are recommending. Look at David : he casts his view forward to the period of his death, and, cheered by the prospect, breaks forth into exulting strains, and cries, “ My heart is glad, my glory rejoiceth, my flesh also shall rest in hope, for thou wilt show me the path of life.” Listen to Paul, whilst, panting for celestial joys, he cries, “ I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” View the delight of Peter, when he is permitted to tell the churches, “ I must shortly put off this tabernacle, even as the Lord Jesus hath showed me.” Hear the joyful response of John, when the Saviour tells him, “ I come quickly :” “ Even so, Amen ; come, Lord Jesus.” Ah, my brother ! thou who art contented with earth ; thou who longest not for a better portion ; thinkest thou that thou wilt dwell with these men, from whom thy temper is so discordant ?

Unite all these ideas, and I think you cannot but be convinced of the truth of our proposition ; you cannot but be convinced that those men who, from their attachment to the objects of earth, prefer the world before the presence of Christ, have but little of the temper of the followers of the Redeemer.

But perhaps you have some objections to this doctrine, and some excuses to palliate the neglect of this duty. Let us then pause a moment, and examine into them.

Do you say then, for I expect that some of you will thus say, "I am unwilling to die, because I am not assured of the love of God towards me?" This is not an objection against our doctrine, for we have already said, that the Christian desires *death as connected with the presence of the Lord*; we have not been endeavouring to persuade you to be willing to die; whilst you know not but that the next moment you may wake in hell; but, we have been labouring to induce you to shake off that worldly spirit which makes you prefer earth before the enjoyment of Christ; which prevents you from esteeming the presence of the Redeemer, the greatest blessing which you can now as well as hereafter enjoy, and therefore, the most worthy of your present as well as your future desires. This is then no objection against our doctrine: but let me ask you, my dear friends that present this plea, why do you not tremble when you make it? What! you yourselves acknowledge that it is a matter of uncertainty whether you are bound to heaven or hell, whether when you enter into the presence of the Lord you shall behold an angry Judge, or a tender Redeemer; you acknowledge that you are in this dreadful uncertainty, and yet can be cool and tranquil! Where is your reason, where is your prudence? And what have been the employments of these years which have flown from you, and which should have been spent in putting this great question out of all doubt? We have just proposed to your imitation the sentiments of the primitive Christians. Ah! do you think that when they

went so cheerfully to the stake, when they so joyfully thanked the executioners for freeing them from the pains of earth, do you think that it was then a matter of uncertainty to them whether they would be borne by death to the embraces of Jesus, or to the society of the damned? No, they were confident of their title to the eternal inheritance: and what have you been doing, that you have not acquired this confidence? Wake from your slumbers, drowsy Christians, and labour with diligence, till you have obtained a comfortable hope of your title to eternal glory!

Do you object again, ‘I am not willing to depart and be with Christ, because I wish yet to remain some time longer in the earth, to serve and glorify God?’ But what, my brother, do you suppose that you cease to serve and glorify God, when you depart from earth? Think you that the disembodied spirits of the Abrahams, the Davids, the Pauls, and all the other holy men now with God, when they left this little speck of earth to enter the more extensive regions beyond the skies, lost either inclination or opportunity of serving God: think you that their service is fainter, or less important, or less constant than that which you pay? Think you that this assembly of the first-born glorify the Being of beings less than you do, that their celebration of the divine perfections is less loud, and their admiration of the glories of Jehovah less elevated? What then do you mean, when you say that you are unwilling to die, because you wish to serve and glorify God? Are you afraid that if you go from earth you will serve him too purely, or glorify him too much? Take care that your heart does not deceive you, while you suppose that this is the motive which animates you. Take

care lest a love of the world is cloaking itself in this specious garb. Pant for the presence of Christ: this sentiment is not in the smallest degree inconsistent with a wish to serve and glorify him, and with a perfect willingness to exercise our duty and love towards him, in whatever part of his dominions he shall please to appoint.

Do you say, finally, ‘I am not willing yet to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord, because I have friends, relatives, children, to whom I may be of advantage?’ But still, is not God the supreme object of our pursuit? And is it right for us to put the dearest earthly connexions in competition with him? And has not the Saviour declared, “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me?” (Matt. x. 37.) And do you not fall under this denunciation, if you prefer their society and intercourse before the vision of the Lamb?

Do you object, finally, that ‘such a desire is *unnatural*?’ But have you considered what is the nature of man before you urged this objection? Remember that we are compounded beings; and that an inclination is not, therefore, unnatural, because, while it accords with the tendencies of our superior part, it is opposed to those of our inferior part. Sensitive nature shrinks from death: but rational nature, especially when the soul is renewed, longs for that period when it shall be delivered from corruption. And by what law of nature is it that the superior part is bound thus to submit to the inferior part?

My brethren, this discourse leads to reflections that are full of solemnity. If such be the Christian

temper, how few real followers of the Saviour are to be found in our assemblies! Where are the men who are disentangled from earth? Who are longing for the presence and enjoyment of the Lord? On whichever side I cast my eyes, I behold those whose thoughts, affections, and desires, are centered on the world; who had rather be in the body than be with the Lord; and who prefer this temporal life to the holy life to be enjoyed with him. Unhappy men! do you not tremble when you see how distinct is your character from that of all the people of God? how different your temper from that of those who have a portion beyond the grave? Unhappy men! whose felicity consists in an abode in the body; an abode which they know can continue but a little time: for who could ever, by their love of this bodily life, cause it to be perpetuated? or, by their dread of mortality, make themselves immortal? Others, in every age, like you, have loved the body and the world, but death has levelled them with the dust, and dragged them, reluctant and shuddering, from earth!

Unhappy men! who have all your felicity bound up in what you cannot retain! who are in a continual dread of what you cannot avoid! who are engaged in a contest with necessity, in which you must be vanquished; and are perpetually recoiling from a determination that admits of no repeal! and who at last, instead of freely resigning your souls, must have them reluctantly drawn from your bodies! Unhappy men! to whom the presence of the Lord, the highest hope and joy of all the pious, is the supreme object of dread, and who have no better fortress to hide yourselves from His presence than

this body of clay ! Ah ! how easily can he beat it down, and leave you naked and defenceless !

Fly, I beseech you, from this perilous state ! Make it your instant business to acquire that solid and fervent piety which alone can reconcile you to the grave, and make separation from your body the matter of a rational choice : then you cannot but be happy. Not fearing death, you need fear nothing. You will then have one sure hope, of the accomplishment of which, all the art and malignity of your enemies cannot disappoint you. Let it then be the study of us all to acquire such a temper, that life may be the matter of patience and resignation ; and death, of desire and joy.

SERMON LXXX.



HEAVEN A STATE OF PERFECTION IN KNOWLEDGE.



1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face : now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.

OH! how cheering and animating is it to the Christian to look above this world of ignorance, of sin, and of sorrow, to that kingdom of light, of holiness, and of joy, in which he hopes to dwell for ever. There he will find the perfection of the intellectual, the moral, and the social life. It is to the first of these that our thoughts are directed by the text. Come then, and let us meditate on that immortal state where our intellectual powers will appear worthy their high original, and the most pure and exalted happiness flow from the discovery and contemplation of the sublimest truths.

In the preceding verse the apostle declares that our highest attainments in knowledge in this world, when compared with the light of the world to come, are only as the trifling and incorrect conceptions of childhood to the mature powers of the man whose

mind has been strengthened by reasoning, observation, and experience.

Now, (he adds in the text) we see indistinctly and obscurely, as though we viewed distant objects only by their reflections in a mirror; but *then* "face to face," as we fixedly contemplate the countenance of a friend with whom we converse: "Now we know in part;" we have but a slight acquaintance with God or his works; but "then we shall know even as we are known:" our knowledge will in a degree resemble that which God has of us; not derived merely from reasoning, deduction, or testimony, but from intuition; not wavering and mingled with error, but free from all doubt and mistake.

That we may be more deeply affected with the contemplation of this part of the future felicity, let us,

I. Attend to some considerations which show the high attainments that we shall then make.

II. Inquire what will be the principal objects of our knowledge.

III. What will be its chief properties.

I. There are many considerations which show how vast will be the attainments of the glorified spirit.

1. *All causes of ignorance and error* will then be entirely removed. The *animal part of our nature* is here a clog, an incumbrance, frequently checking us in our pursuit of truth. The feebleness, the languor, the decay, the sicknesses of the body, often check our meditations, arrest the flights of the soul, and weigh it down to earth. But at death, the soul shakes off these fetters, and springs into liberty and light, and can range 'trough the boundless fields of knowledge that are opened to it, unretarded by the frailties, the imperfections, or the exhaustion of its companion. And at the resurrection, the body that

it receives will be spiritual, calculated to assist it in all its exercises. It shall be like the glorified body of our Lord ; with senses that shall never, as in this world, deceive us ; that shall not, as here below, be confined within a narrow sphere of operation ; but shall in their action be enlarged in a degree proportioned to the expansion of the soul.

Here below, not only the body of flesh, but still more the *body of sin*, darkens our understandings : “ Because we are alienated from God, there is ignorance within us, and blindness in our minds.” Here numberless *prejudices*, resulting from education, from the incidents of our lives, from the persons with whom we associate, from party or from interest, obstruct the admission of light into our souls. Here our *passions* destroy that tranquillity of mind necessary for the discovery of truth, disguise it from us, and lead us astray. Here the *objects of sense* divert our mind. The cares of this world, the necessity of providing for our support, our temporal callings, our relations in life, engross our attention. But in heaven, *sin*, utterly abolished, will no longer becloud our minds ; *prejudices* will be eradicated, and all objects be viewed in their real character ; the *passions*, refined, purified, and directed to their proper object, will only aid us in the pursuit of truth ; and the *cares* and *pleasures* of a world which we have left, and which even if they were present, would shrivel into nothing before the overpowering glories of heaven, can no longer affect us.

2. There our intellectual faculties will be greatly strengthened. We see that they are capable of continual progression. Trace the expansion of the feeble powers of a child, until this child becomes a profound philosopher, unveiling the secrets of nature.

or unlocking the treasures of revelation. Yet has he still reached that point, has he approximated to that point where the utmost limits of the intellectual faculties are fixed? Can we even in imagination set bounds to the improvement of the understanding, or conceive of a state in which we have learned so much that we can learn no more? In heaven, "the spirits of just men are made perfect." There our capacities will be so enlarged, that, according to the image of the apostle, we shall look back upon the profoundest of our speculations on earth as we now do upon the notions of childhood. Our faculties shall ever be in vigorous exercise, never requiring to be relaxed, always penetrating and active; our imaginations ever unclouded; our memories never losing the knowledge we have acquired.

3. Much of our improvement depends upon the society with which we associate. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Who then will be the companions and friends of the redeemed in the world of felicity? All the various orders of pure and holy intelligences who have lived for so many centuries, who have beheld so many displays of the divine perfections, and have so long "in God's light seen light." But besides the angelic host, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, cherubim and seraphim, the spirits of the blest, shall associate with all the redeemed from among men; with those who walked with God in patriarchal ages; with those who looked through the types of the ceremonial law to "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" and with those who, living in the splendour of gospel-day, rejoiced in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. And can we associate with these: with Abraham and Moses, with Isaiah and Paul; with the

Christian philosophers who have laid their literary laurels at the foot of the cross; with the holy poets who have lighted in the souls of others the sacred fires which burned in their own hearts; with those who chose the word of God as their heritage, and searched deeply into the mysteries of grace? Can we ever associate with them in that world where they are purified from every imperfection, and delivered from every error; where they speak only on subjects worthy that heaven where they reside, and accordant with the sublimity and majesty of the objects which surround them; where they delight to communicate those discoveries which wake their songs to praise, and animate their hearts to bless, that God who there unveils his presence: can we thus associate with them, without towering to a height of knowledge which cannot be imagined till we mingle with them?

4. It is a still more ennobling thought, that there the redeemed shall be instructed by the All-wise God. "I saw no temple therein," in the New Jerusalem; "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." (Rev. xxi. 22.) "The Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift," who even while we are on earth "giveth wisdom liberally to them that ask," will there communicate to the redeemed the most sublime instructions, in modes not to be described by us in this land of distance and of darkness. There too the blessed Redeemer is still the Instructor of that church which he has purchased with his blood. And that Holy Spirit, who was given us to "abide in us and be in us for ever."

as he was our enlightener upon earth, shall still enlighten and lead us into all truth in the world of glory. Add to this,

5. That the knowledge of the saved will be increasing throughout eternity. We know what advances have been made in human and in divine science by many of our race, notwithstanding the narrow limits of human life, and all the obstructions that are necessarily found while we are in this world. Trace then the progress of an exalted spirit in that world into which death can never enter, and where every thing within it and around it is calculated to pour new light upon it. Trace the progress of this deathless soul for millions of ages; see its faculties continually dilating; follow it till its powers become as far superior to those which Gabriel now has, as those of Gabriel are superior to the most illiterate believer upon earth; behold it through eternity still rising higher and higher in excellence and perfection: and acknowledge, with adoring wonder, how ineffable is the grace of God; how valuable the soul of man; how sublime the destination of the believer!

II. But what shall be the objects of our knowledge? What shall engage the exalted minds of the redeemed throughout eternity? In general, we may answer, God himself and his works.

In God is to be found all that is lovely, and all that is august, all that is attractive, and all that is majestic. The glorified saints shall know him in his *nature*. We shall understand the divine essence, not indeed fully, but according to the capacity of our highly exalted, though still finite nature; we shall understand it in the manner which Paul here terms, "seeing him face to face, and knowing as we are known." Those

unions and distinctions in the Godhead, those sublime and mysterious relations of the sacred Trinity, which we now believe without comprehending the manner of them, will be more clearly unveiled; and though we may not even then be able thoroughly to comprehend them, (for “who,” even in heaven, “by searching can fully find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection?”) yet every shadow of contradiction shall vanish; and, filled with reverence, we shall wonder and adore.

We shall *know God in our nature*. We shall have a brighter display of the Redeemer’s glory than the favoured disciples had on the mount of transfiguration; and our hearts will burn within us, while he instructs us in the mystery of the incarnation, and the union of two natures so widely different.

We shall study the *attributes of God*; his wisdom and his love, his power and his faithfulness, his holiness and grace, his eternity and all-sufficiency; these and his other boundless perfections we shall contemplate in themselves and in their operations; we shall see their harmony, and shall find in them subjects for our eternal research and eternal praise.

We shall know him in his *works of creation*. If it be pleasant to us now to contemplate these works, how much more so shall it be when nature shall be fully open to our view! We shall behold “their immensity, their variety, inimitable structure, admirable uses, and their subserviency, even in their minutest parts, to the regularity and order of the whole natural system, and the general good of the moral world.” We shall perhaps see new worlds, and be filled with admiration and love, while we every where trace in them the wisdom, goodness, and power of our Heavenly Father, the universal Lord.

“Though we are very little acquainted, while we are on earth, with any of the planetary worlds besides that which we inhabit,” says good Dr. Watts, “yet who knows how our acquaintance may be extended hereafter among the inhabitants of the various and distant globes? And what frequent and swift journeys we may take thither, when we are disencumbered of this load of flesh and blood, or when our bodies are raised again, active and swift as the sun-beams? Sometimes we may entertain our holy curiosity there, and find millions of new discoveries of divine power and divine contrivance in those unknown regions; and bring back from thence new lectures of divine wisdom, or tidings of the affairs of those provinces to entertain our fellow-spirits, and to give new honours to God the Creator and Sovereign.”* We shall become acquainted, too, with the *intelligent* creation. We now know but little of our fellow-spirits, of their numbers, their ranks, the occupations, the extent of their ministry to us or other worlds; but when we shall have associated with them, and contemplated the spiritual and external creation, we shall join that celestial hymn of praise, “Thou art worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

We shall there understand the works of *Providence*. The conduct of God to his church or to individuals is often incomprehensible to us; but then light will be shed upon all that is mysterious, and we shall perceive that which now appears intricate and evil, displaying unerring wisdom and paternal kindness. Here we behold but a few unconnected links of the

* Happiness of Sep. Spirits.

great chain of events; there we shall view it from beginning to end. And with what joy shall we make this review of the conduct of God to the universe in general; to our world; to the church; to each particular believer; and to ourselves! With what delight and wonder shall we look back upon the events of our own lives, and see that "all things have wrought together for our good;" that a gracious Providence was presiding over the minutest event that occurred to us; that every temptation, and trial, and bereavement, as well as every blessing, flowed from covenant love! With what delight shall we see saints of every age making the same review; and listen to the proofs of divine wisdom and goodness given us by patriarchs, by prophets, by apostles, by martyrs, by the early Christians, by the heroes of the Reformation, by the pious who were our contemporaries! With what union of soul will we then fall before the throne, and cry, "Thou hast done all things well!"

But there is another subject which we shall study with still greater delight, and of which our increasing knowledge will fill us with still more sacred transports. Christian, you know what is this subject; it is your joy and your triumph upon earth; it will be your joy and your triumph in heaven: it is *redemption* through the blood of Jesus. Oh! how lofty and how touching will be our speculations on this mystery of grace! How shall we delight to lose ourselves, to be absorbed and swallowed up in that boundless love of the Saviour, which is unfathomable even by an angelic mind, or the enlarged powers of the glorified immortal! With what inexpressible emotions shall we contemplate the God-man, and hear him tell of the everlasting covenant of redemption and the eter-

nal purposes of peace ; and speak of the woes which he endured when he bore the wrath of God due for our sins, and of his victories over our enemies ! While we feel the happiness he purchased for us, and see the memorials of his sufferings in that glorified body which is the monument of redeeming love, with what rapture shall we join the heavenly host, in crying, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing ! ” With what delight shall we ever meditate on this astonishing display of mercy, and exclaim, with admiration increasing in proportion to the increase of our knowledge, “ Oh the height, the length, the depth, and the breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge ! ”

Finally, the *word of God* shall continue to occupy us even in heaven. There, in the presence of the objects of which it speaks, we shall discover in it new beauties, and find a solution for all its difficulties. Its prophecies, its doctrines, its promises, all its contents will be clearly understood, and will afford matter of delightful converse among the blest.

Such are the objects which shall engage the contemplations of Christians in the future world.

III. What will be its chief properties.

1. Our knowledge of them shall be *immediate* and *intuitive*. Instead of the labour, cares, processes of reasoning, that are here necessary, we shall have only to open our souls for the reception of that celestial light which will flow into them from God, the source of light. As in nature the beams of the rising sun immediately present to us those objects which before were hidden in darkness ; so in the light of eternity we shall look upon the unveiled face of

truth, and pass with ease and rapidity from discovery to discovery.

2. Our knowledge shall be *full* and *adequate*, both in variety and degree, as far exceeding our present knowledge, as the full splendour of the meridian sun excels the first faint rays of light which are yet struggling with darkness. It shall be *certain* and *infallible*. Here, many mistakes are mingled with our knowledge, and in most things we can only rise to probable conjectures : there, every error shall cease, and the smallest doubt shall not remain.

3. Our knowledge shall be *transforming*. “Beholding the glory of God, we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory.” “Seeing him as he is, we shall be made like unto him.” The displays of the divine perfections and works will not merely amuse us, or serve as objects of barren speculation or surprise, but will make us more like the All-Perfect, will augment our holiness, and inspire us with devotion and love. None of the inhabitants of that world sin against the light, or “hold the truth in unrighteousness;” but each new discovery of the divine excellency affects anew all the faculties of their souls.

4. This knowledge is *beatifying*. Even here, intellectual pleasures as far excel those of sense, as the soul exceeds the body; and of all intellectual pleasures, those that relate to God are the most pure and exalted. There is little comparison between the feelings of the mere philosopher, who contents himself with the discovery of the secrets of nature, without observing the presiding Deity; and of the Christian philosopher, who every where perceives the traces of the All-Wise and All-Merciful, and “looks through nature up to nature’s God.” And

still more rapturous are the joys resulting from the contemplation of the mysteries of redemption, and our interest in it. The exclamation of an Archimedes is cold, in comparison to the language of the assured believer: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." What, then, will be our delight, when, looking at the wisdom, the power, the love, all the attributes of God in their source and in their operations, we can cry, 'This God is ours; these perfections are engaged for our felicity; he who forms, sustains, and blesses so many worlds, is our Friend!'

5. Finally, this knowledge is *unfading* and *eternal*. Our understandings shall not for a moment be clouded; there shall be no "follies of the wise;" the mind shall not be enfeebled by age, but ever vigorous, ever advancing.

(1.) Christians, this subject is calculated to animate and comfort you. With such glorious prospects before you, will you still cleave to the earth, love your dark prison, and not long for the world of light? Will you not often with joy anticipate that period when you shall enter upon so exalted a state? The expectation of it should encourage you while you remain on earth, and give you the sweetest consolation. You now lament that you know so little of God and the Redeemer; you lament that such contentions are found among Christians: wait till the light of eternity shall burst upon your view, and then these contentions shall cease, the causes of ignorance shall be removed, and you "shall know even as you are known."

(2.) This subject leads us to lament the doom of men of unsanctified genius and learning. They condemn weak but good men; but they are the true objects of compassion. How lamentable, that such endow-

ments should be quenched in everlasting darkness, when they might have mingled with the knowledge of angels and glorified saints!

(3.) This subject should give us consolation on the death of pious friends. When they are removed from us, we cry, "they are lost." This is the hasty voice of nature, but faith corrects it; they are lost to this world, but not to the world of glory. Look not at the coffin, the worm, and the shroud, the cold ashes and mouldering bones; but at the triumphant and glorified spirits. They live, believers! Those intellectual powers which charmed you, still exist, freed from all imperfection; and you may again meet your friends, advanced in knowledge and perfect in bliss.

SERMON LXXXI.



VISION OF GOD IN HEAVEN.



MATTHEW V. 8.

They shall see God.

CHRISTIANS, did we more frequently think, and speak, and meditate, on heaven; did we more habitually live in the believing prospect of the inheritance of the saints in light; our graces would not be so languishing, nor our consolations so feeble. He, whose conversation is in heaven, will have a lofty and elevated mind, that will spurn the low and sordid pleasures of sense; will have a shield against the temptations that would seduce him from duty; and a refreshing spring of consolation amidst the multiplied sorrows of life. He who feels himself the heir of immortal joy, can never forget his obligations to that God who has provided a Redeemer from hell, and to that Saviour who purchased heaven for him.

We need not be apprehensive of fatigue or repetition in meditating on this subject. The views of heaven are so diversified, the images under which it is exhibited are so various, the representation of its occupations is so magnificent in the word of God, that we shall ever find new circumstances to affect

our imaginations and our hearts. After being warmed by one view of that better world, we have only to change our position, and new prospects will present themselves, that are calculated to make us holier and happier.

In our text, this felicity is represented by a single trait; but how affecting and impressive is this trait! how much does it include! "*They shall see God.*" So many other passages of scripture describe the future glory in a similar manner, that we are authorized to consider this beatific vision as the chief source of happiness in the redeemed.

To understand its nature, attend to the following remarks:

1. God is a pure spirit, and invisible. It cannot then be with our bodily eyes that we shall see him. However exalted may be the resurrection-body, with whatever celestial qualities it may be endowed, yet God cannot be the object of our corporeal senses. It is indeed probable that God will give to the redeemed some brilliant manifestation of his presence. Such visible and brilliant representations were afforded, even upon earth, on Sinai, at the tabernacle, and the temple. It is probable, and strongly intimated in scripture, that the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all blessings are conveyed to the saints on earth, and who is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," will be the medium whereby God will manifest himself in a visible glory to the saints in heaven. But this is not the vision which is spoken of in the text: "*They shall see God,*" his nature, and the lustre of the divine perfections; not with the bodily eye, but with the mind, the eye of the soul.

2. "They shall *see* him." This word expresses not the laborious and gradual deductions of reasoning, nor the notices of faith realizing an absent object; but the immediate intuition of what is plainly offered to our view. The glory of God will then so clearly be presented to the redeemed, and their minds so enlarged, that they will comprehend at one glance (not all that is in God, for finite can never comprehend infinite; but) as much as the Lord is pleased to display to them. Thus they may be said, in a degree, "to know even as they are known;" since the blessed God comprehends all things at once, by one simple act of knowing; not that the state of glory shall exclude all reasoning, any more than our present state does all intuition. As the knowledge of the saints never is infinite, their reasonings may be pleasant and useful; but as God shall continually afford a clear discovery of himself, so shall the chief exercise and felicity of the glorified soul consist in admitting and entertaining those free beams of voluntary light by a joyful intuition: for it is this mode of knowing which most accords with the term *sight*, or *beholding*.

To realize more sensibly the felicity resulting from this source, trace the liberated spirit of the believer to the courts of heaven: it enters the presence-chamber of the King of kings, and is instantly surrounded by the encircling beams of divine glory. God is no longer seen "through a glass darkly," by reflection from his creatures, through an obscuring medium, but the direct beams of his glory; of the glory which he both enjoys and affords, which forms his own felicity, and which emanates from him to his saints, encompass the happy spirit. This

glory, which renders happy the Being of beings, surely will beatify a worm.

Child of God ! there is not one of the divine perfections which, by its lustre, will not cheer thee, when, in heaven, thou shalt see God. Wilt thou behold his *self-existence* ? With what reverential awe wilt thou view the everlasting *I AM* ! who being, and necessarily being, of himself, is the cause of causes, the source of all the springs of nature, the fountain of universal life, the stay and support of all the creation in heaven and on earth : then thou wilt acknowledge that he is properly designated, *All in all*. Wilt thou contemplate his *wisdom* ? How grateful to look into the very source of truth, and, in God's light, to see light ! to see the wisdom which made and governed the world, not merely in its effects, but in itself ; to read the records of eternity ; to see the darkness which now often covers the procedures of Providence, dissipated ; and to behold the profoundest wisdom in every act that related to the universe, to this world, to the church, and to thyself ! If Paul was filled with so much rapture at the contemplation of the wisdom of God, when he was upon earth, and was constrained to cry out, “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! ” What was his language when, in heaven, a perfect model of the divine counsels was presented to open view ? How delightful to contemplate his *power*, that essential and self-originated might, which stretched out the heavens, established the earth, and sustained all things ! which rolled the mighty wheels of providence through all the successions of time ! which showed its “ exceeding greatness in redemption and

the new creation of man! With what ecstasy wilt thou then join the song of heaven: "Allelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!" Wilt thou contemplate his *love*? What joy, to see this attribute in its plenitude and perfection, without a veil, unattended by a frown! to feel the full force of that expression, "God is love!" to look into that heart where the thoughts of love were lodged from eternity! to see what clothed a Deity with human flesh! what led the Son of God to the cross; and why thou didst not perish in thy sins! why God bore with thee, notwithstanding thy many unkind repulses of a merciful Saviour! why he at last touched and renewed thy heart. Heaven, which shall give thee the feeling, can alone give thee a proper conception of the joy thou wilt feel from this view of love—of love as extensive as thou canst bear or wish to see! Wilt thou contemplate his *holiness*? Already thou "givest thanks at the remembrance of his holiness;" thou criest, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness?" Already every glimpse of this perfection is lovely to thee; thou rejoicest when thou findest it in an ordinance, or meetest it in a Sabbath. With what transport then, when thou contempest the infinite holiness of God, and findest thyself formed into its image, wilt thou join the happy spirits, and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty?" Review in like manner the other divine attributes, and you will perceive that they are all calculated to give the noblest joy.

Especially will it have this effect, since it will be a *united and entire* glory, which you will behold. We have some glimpses of this glory upon earth; but here we view it in dispersed rays: from the feebleness of our powers we must consider attribute after

attribute ; but there they shall beam upon us in their full and combined lustre.

It is an eternal *glory*. Many objects which delight us on earth are torn from us, or we from them ; and to the enjoyment which they afforded us, succeed tears for their loss. But there the source of pleasure is as stable as the divine Being ; subject neither to decay in itself, nor to injury from external causes. And as the glory cannot fade, so neither can the believer become weary of viewing it. The sun would sooner be weary of shining, than a soul, in which the love of God is perfected, be weary of beholding him. “Thy God shall be thy glory, and the Lord thine everlasting light.”

It is an *appropriating* vision of this glory. The redeemed look upon it, not as unconcerned spectators, but as persons interested in it. To it they have a real right. It is theirs by the gift of the Father, by the purchase of the Son, by the sealing of the Spirit, and the first fruits of it which he shed in their hearts ; by their faith’s acceptance of the offer of it made in the gospel, by their forerunner’s possession of it in their name. While therefore, the accursed view with agony this glory which they have lost, the redeemed cry, “God our own God, shall bless us. This God is our God forever and ever.”

It is an *assimilating* vision. “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” “As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.” This divine glory shall not only be revealed *to* us, but also *in* us. The likeness of God shall be transfused and wrought in our souls. This is the great work which is begun in regeneration ; but, alas ! the remains of corruption within us show how imperfect it still is. It is cherish-

ed even by the feeble views we have of God upon earth; a sight of God's purity making us more pure, a view of his love melting us into love. "We all, with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." But the likeness will be perfect only in heaven, where we shall be holy as God is holy.

This vision is *satisfying*. The soul then rests in God. Its vast and enlarged faculties are perfectly filled, for it has the perfect enjoyment of the most perfect good. Solacing itself in these ineffable joys, it can desire no change. Unlike the sullen rest of despair after frustrated hopes, it is the free, rational, chosen rest of the soul that ever cries, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee!" "Heaven and earth have not a single object that can tempt me from thee." It is the active, vigorous rest of a soul that is exercised in, and satisfied by heavenly fruitions and sensations; not that of a soul incapable of these joys, or bound up in stupifying sloth.

Such is the condition of the saints when

"Heaven lifts its everlasting portals high,
And bids the pure in heart behold their God."

1. How excellent and dignified is the soul of man, which is capable of such felicity. Though now wrapt in flesh, and grovelling on the earth, yet so eminent are its powers and faculties, that it may attain this high perfection: the foundations of so glorious a state are laid in its very nature. It is capable, not only of surveying the creation of God, but of ascending to the Being of beings, of contemplating the divine excellences, of beholding the bright and glo-

rious face of the blessed God himself, till it have looked itself into his likeness, and have his image impressed upon it. Cultivate then a generous disdain for that servitude to sin and Satan, to which so many subject themselves. Look with heroic scorn upon those objects that would make thee forget thy sublime destination. Consider, my brother, that many myriads of spirits, of no higher original excellence than thine own, are now in the presence of the Eternal, viewing the divine glory, contemplating the perfections of Jehovah, beholding with rapture the unveiled face of God. This state thou also mayest attain; the Sovereign Lord of all things calls thee to it; his *goodness* invites thee, his *authority* enjoins thee, to seek it. Oh! remember that thou must render an account to thy Judge, not only for all the spiritual privileges thou enjoyest, but for all that he made thee capable of, and that thou mightest have attained. Deform not then thine own soul. Quench not in everlasting darkness that spark which, if cherished, may blaze with seraphs and the glorified immortals throughout eternity.

2. If such be the nature of the future blessedness, then a change of heart is requisite to enable us to enjoy it. If the Christian heaven were like a Mahometan paradise, the unconverted might there enjoy felicity: but since it consists in the vision of God, since its delights are holy, it is evident that those who are destitute of love to God and of holiness, could find no satisfaction, even if they were placed in the midst of the shining host of angels. There would *there* be found no objects suited to the taste and dispositions of their souls. By the very nature of things, then, as well as by the express and reiterated declarations of God, we know that except we

be converted, except we be born of water and the Spirit," we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Undeceive yourselves then, ye who, while ye never seek communion with the Lord upon earth, expect to be happy at death. Either God must lay aside his nature, and change the happiness of heaven, or the temper of your spirits must be changed to render you blessed. Except then you abandon your hopes of heaven, seek his regenerating grace.

3. What gratitude do we not owe to that God who has provided such a felicity for his children! We are sinners; we deserve hell; and not only do the accents of pardon sound in our ears, but a state of inconceivable glory is offered to us. Shame to the cold and insensible heart that can be unaffected by this consideration; that can be unmoved by this rich provision of our Father for worms, for rebels! Cry then with the Psalmist, "Who are we, O Lord God, and what is our house, that thou hast brought us hitherto! But this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God! for thou hast also spoken of the prosperity of thy servants for a great while to come," even throughout the ages of eternity. "Blessed then be thy holy name for ever and ever." "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, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." "Blessed also be our risen Saviour, who loved us, and gave himself for us."

4. What a source of consolation under the afflictions of life! These afflictions must be endured by all the children of men; and while we pass through this world, its griefs and disappointments must be

felt. But how light do they all appear when we live in the faith of eternal joys? Then sickness and poverty, pain and reproach, are borne without a murmur or a sigh: since we know they will so speedily terminate, and lead us to a world whence calamity will for ever be excluded. Then we can part with our pious friends, knowing that they have gone before us to behold God, and that we shall soon be engaged in the same rapturous employment with them. Then, instead of recoiling with horror from the tomb, we can view death as the gate of heaven, as the path which conducts to immortality. Instead of having the soul reluctantly torn from the body, it will go forth with its own consent, allured by these high delights. It will go, as the redeemed of the Lord, with everlasting joy upon its head; knowing whither it goes, to a state worthy its desires and choice, and where it is best for it to be. It will joyfully surrender and resign itself, rather putting off this earthly tabernacle, than having it rent or torn away.

5. Finally, this subject calls us to mourn for the folly of the children of men. For what toys and vanities do they barter away glory, honour, and immortality! What is the whole world, what are ten thousand such worlds, in comparison with perfect and full felicity throughout eternity! Oh! then, thoughtless mortals, at last awake. Act not so inconsistently with the character of rational, immortal beings. Every thing that can excite hope or fear, calls you to prepare for eternity. If you lose these joys, if you are found unqualified for this felicity, you shall also see God; but God terrible in his indignation to the finally impenitent. God, who might have been yours in covenant, but who then will reject you.

and bid you depart from his blissful presence. In the horrors of eternal darkness thou shalt meditate on what thou mightest have been, and wilt weep that thy heart cannot break and thy being for ever end, when thou rememberest what thou art.

SERMON LXXXII.

DEGREES OF GLORY IN HEAVEN.

1 COR. XV. 41, 42.

One star differeth from another star in glory. So also, is the resurrection of the dead.

How pleasant and animating is it to the Christian, to turn his thoughts occasionally from the sins and follies, the misery and anguish, which are found in this world, and fix them upon that blessed state reserved for the pious, into which guilt or woe shall never enter! How cheering, to meditate on the high occupations and sublime joys of those who, "having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," now shout hallelujahs to his praise!

And are all these redeemed sinners perfectly equal in splendour and felicity? Are there no different degrees of glory in heaven? This is the single question which we propose to examine in the ensuing discourse, and to which we are naturally led by

the words of the text. "One star differeth from another star in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead."

That there will be different degrees of glory among the redeemed, is a truth which is established alike by scripture and reason, and which, far from being a merely speculative point, must, when firmly believed, have a strong influence on our practice. Let us,

I. Explain and prove it.

II. Answer the objections which have been made against it, and,

III. Apply it for the regulation of our affections, and the conduct of our lives.

I. When we maintain that our future glory will differ in degree, according to our holiness in this world, we are far from embracing the proud opinion of the papists, that this felicity, and these degrees of glory, are at all merited by our works. Even an innocent creature, much less a sinner, can merit nothing from the holy God. Our salvation must be entirely of grace. But we say, that as the Lord has displayed his abounding mercy and his love to holiness, by rewarding a short and imperfect obedience by an eternal and inconceivable glory, so it is accordant with these perfections, to confer higher degrees of this glory on those whose obedience has been more constant, and whose piety more ardent. We say, that while every temporal as well as celestial blessing flows from sovereign grace, through the blood of the cross, God has been pleased in his wisdom, to establish a certain chain and order in the distribution and the degree of his gifts; so that those who are most zealously engaged in his cause, and who do most for the Redeemer, shall wear a brighter crown, and be elevated to a higher glory than those who,

though sincere, are more cold in their love, less engaged in his service.

While we maintain that there will be different degrees of glory, we allow that all will nevertheless be perfectly happy, and receive that degree of felicity which is commensurate with their faculties, and power of enjoyment; so that there shall be no grief, no envyings, no uneasy and distressing desires, in any who shall surround the throne of God, and of the Lamb.

While we maintain that there will be different degrees of glory, we also maintain that in many things their felicity will be common. It will be common in its *object*, the blessed God and adorable Redeemer; in its *subject*, all the powers of the glorified body and soul; in its *duration*, which will be eternal; in its *security*, since all the blest are sustained by the divine promise and faithfulness; in the *full satisfaction* of soul which all will possess.

After this explanation of the doctrine, let us confirm it. It is proved,

1. By all those passages of scripture which lay down, in general terms, the great rule of God's proceedings with the children of men. Thus says the apostle Paul, (2 Cor. v. 10.) "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (Rom. ii. 6.) God "will render to every one according to his works." In 2 Cor. ix. 6. in speaking of benevolence to poor Christians, he lays down a general maxim: "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth liberally, shall reap also liberally." That he here refers to the rewards of the future world, is evident from the man-

ner in which he uses the same figure in Gal. vi. 7—9. “Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Indeed, in most instances where this figure is used, our good or our bad actions are represented as the seed whence our future felicity or misery must spring. But if such be the general rule of God’s conduct, if there will be a proportion between the future world and the present, there must be degrees of glory; there must be a higher station for the fervent and seraphic Christian, than for those who drag heavily along in the path to heaven, and are by their walk scarcely distinguishable from the men of the world.

2. We argue from the account which this same apostle gives of the different rewards which will be given to the ministers of the gospel. This remarkable and figurative description is found, 1 Cor. iii. 12—15. He speaks of those preachers who preserve the only foundation which is laid, Christ Jesus; and he compares them to architects, who build upon this good foundation materials very different. The exhortations of some are like “gold, silver, or precious stones,” and are calculated to animate, encourage, and cheer, those who hear them. Those of the others resemble “wood, hay, and stubble,” and injure more than advance edification. In the awful day of scrutiny, when “every man’s work shall be tried as with fire,” the first of these classes, adds the apostle, “shall receive a reward,” evidently implying, one proportioned to his faithfulness, zeal, and usefulness in the gospel. The others, “having their

work burnt, shall suffer loss ;” but having been founded on Jesus, the rock of ages ; having preserved the essential truths of religion, notwithstanding the errors they may have taught through ignorance or mistake, they shall be saved, yet so as by fire ; with a difficulty and danger resembling that of a person who escapes from his dwelling in flames, and only preserves his life, while his house is consumed, and his goods destroyed. In this representation of the apostle, do we not perceive that there are persons who obtain salvation, and yet have not the recompense which the wiser administrators of the word receive ? And are we not authorized to conclude, that there will be the same difference between those who are hearers, according to the manner they have profited by the instructions given to them ?

3. Is not this truth taught in Dan. xii. 3. ? The prophet, having spoken of the two great classes into which men shall be divided at the general resurrection, when “ some shall wake to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt,” then declares the difference that shall appear even among the pious ; “ They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, for ever and ever.” As there is a difference between the general brilliancy of the firmament, and the lustre of the stars, so there shall be a difference between those ordinary Christians who obtain felicity, and those zealous persons who have been the instruments of the conversion of many sinners.

4. Read the parable of the pounds in Luke xix. Our Saviour appears there fully to have decided this point. Under the emblem of a nobleman going into a far country to receive a kingdom, and giving to

his ten servants ten pounds, to trade therewith till his return; he represents himself ascending into heaven to assume his kingdom, and committing to his servants many gifts with which to profit for their own salvation, and that of their neighbour, till he should return to judgment. Though nine of them had been diligent, they had been so in different degrees: they were all magnificently rewarded; and “because they had been faithful over few things, were made rulers over many things;” yet their reward was different. While he whose pound had gained ten was appointed over ten cities; he who had gained five was placed over five only. What could more fully show that while all believers shall “enter into the joy of their Lord,” shall be surrounded by happiness and glory, there shall yet be various degrees of this glory?

5. The apostle Paul treating of the resurrection says, 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42, “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.” Though he here speaks only of the difference in the glorified body, yet the same causes which render it fit for God to cause the glorified bodies of the saints to differ in brilliancy and lustre, make it proper for him to give different degrees of glory to their whole persons.

6. In perusing the scriptures, we find the patriarchs, the prophets, and the apostles, uniformly represented as occupying a more conspicuous situation in glory than ordinary believers. Are the felicities of heaven represented as a feast? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, there hold the most honourable station. Is it exhibited as a kingdom? The apostles are there to sit conspicuously upon twelve thrones, judging

the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. viii. 11—19. 28. Luke xxii. 30. Numerous similar expressions are used concerning them; and if these are to differ from other believers, because of their zeal and fidelity, must not believers differ from each other? If a Paul shall shiné more resplendent than a Watts, shall a Watts only occupy the station of one in whom the pulse of spiritual life scarcely beats?

7. It is doubted by none that there will be degrees of punishment in hell; that some will there suffer more excruciating torments than others. But if the wicked are more punished in proportion to their crimes, must we not suppose that the saints are more rewarded in proportion to their virtues?

8. Let us carry still further this reasoning from analogy. Look at *nature*; and in what an infinite variety of methods do you see the Creator displaying his perfections? Look at the *operations of grace*; you see that “there are diversities of gifts, though but one Spirit.” Look at *Christians*; how various in their attainments, their knowledge, their holiness, and joy, though all beloved by God! Look at the *heavenly host*; though all holy and happy, there are various orders among them—archangels, and angels, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Should we not then suppose, that in analogy to the other works of God, there would be degrees of glory among the blest?

9. Finally, the transactions of the judgment-day, and the nature of the future felicity confirm this truth. We learn from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, that in the decisive day the Lord will with approbation publish the works of believers to the universe. Must not this approbation be various? Does not the sense and remembrance of it constitute

one of the joys of heaven? Can the soul that has heard it from the Saviour whom he loves, ever forget it? One of the chief sources of heavenly felicity is the glorifying of God. But if his glory be dear to us, must we not be happier in proportion as we have glorified him here below? Can a Christian, that is “saved as by fire,” have the same raptures of soul that are felt by Paul and his associates, to whom, as the instruments in the hand, is owing the introduction of Christianity in Europe; the ten thousand times ten thousand believers, who have in successive ages there flourished through the instrumentality of those taught by him and their descendants; and the disciples of Jesus in this new world, which received the light of the gospel from that quarter of the globe which was taught by the apostle?

Let us very briefly, in the

Second place, consider the objections that have been made against this doctrine.

Perhaps the most plausible has been drawn from the parable of the labourers in Matt. xx. 1—15. You recollect that in that parable the householder sent labourers into his vineyard at different hours, all of whom, however, received at last the same recompense. But surely those who make this objection have never attended to the circumstances of the parable. How can the reward signify eternal life, since it is given to the murmurers and envious; to those who, in verse 14, are ordered to depart from their Lord; to those who were not satisfied with the portion given to them? The great scope and design of the parable are to repress the pride of the Jews, and show the propriety of the vocation of the Gentiles. It has no reference whatever to the future rewards of the pious.

“But,” it has been said, “we are saved by grace, and not by works; our only title to glory is the purchase made by the atonement of the Redeemer. How, then, can our glory be proportioned to our works? Are not all believers, through the merits of Christ, alike justified and adopted, and must they not therefore be alike glorified?”

My brethren, the Scripture is perfectly consistent with itself. It asserts the doctrines of grace, the only refuge of the perishing sinner. It asserts, also, the inequality of future glory. And do the blessings of God spring less from grace, because he has established a wise order in the distribution of them? We are called, justified, adopted, only through the merits of Christ; yet notwithstanding this, there are different degrees of holiness and comfort enjoyed by Christians upon earth; notwithstanding this, then, there may be different degrees of glory in the world which is to come. The objection is precisely as strong against a difference in sanctification, a fact which comes daily under our eyes, as against a difference in glorification.

“But,” say the opposers of this doctrine, “as all the blessed are perfectly holy, they must all be perfectly and alike happy.” The conclusion by no means follows. Are the angels alike elevated, because they are all perfectly holy? We know that there are distinctions among them. Would it not be almost blasphemy to say, that any creature was as happy as the blessed God, provided like him it could be perfectly holy? If two diamonds are of the same water and perfection, does it follow that there may not be a difference in their weight and value?

“But they all derive their felicity from the same source, the beatific vision of God, and therefore their felicity must be equal.” Though one of the chief constituents of hell is the deprival of the vision of God, are therefore the punishments of the accursed equal? May we not view the same sun, and receive its rays differently? When vessels of different capacity cast into the same ocean, are filled by the same mass of waters, must the quantity they receive be alike?

“But the titles given to the redeemed are the same; they are all called kings, the sons of God, the spouse, the members of Christ.” And are not these names given to believers, even while they are on earth? and, notwithstanding, do we not see a great diversity among them? Are all kings equal in power? Have all sons the same inheritance? Is not the robe of the spouse more richly embroidered in some parts than in others? Have all members of the body equal honour?

These, my brethren, are the principal objections against this doctrine. Let us now proceed, in the

Third and last place, to a practical improvement of it.

1. It addresses the *young*. There is not one of you, my young friends, who does not intend to turn unto the Lord before you leave this world. There is not one of you that has formed the mad and guilty resolution to renounce the joys of heaven, and embrace the agonies of hell. But you resolve at present to devote yourselves to the world, and hereafter to think of religion. Let us suppose, (and how many improbabilities are included in the supposition!) that these intentions are realized; that, after living many years in sin, you are not, like so many others, given

up to judicial hardness; that, after long contemning the offers of grace, and grieving the Holy Spirit, you are not abandoned by him; that, in a dying world, you are preserved in life by that God against whom you are in rebellion; that you are not surprised, as so many thousands now in hell have been surprised, before their promised and purposed return to God was accomplished: suppose all this, though I repeat, how many improbabilities are included in the supposition—yet still what irreparable losses will you have sustained, what sacrifices will you have made during your years of folly and vice! Instead of preparing for a higher glory, for a nearer approach and assimilation to God, you will have employed yourselves in plucking the jewels from that crown which might have sparkled on your brow, in diminishing the elevation to which you might have attained. Trifle no longer with things of eternal consequence; but in youth begin to aspire after high degrees of glory, honour, and immortality.

2. Let this subject solemnly address all who defer their repentance. You cry, To-morrow, and to-morrow; and thus many of you will continue to cry, till your last sickness seizes you, till you are laid on the bed of death. Even if you then preserve your reason and are sensible of your danger, what answer will you be able to give to conscience, when it shall ask you, what preparations you have made for eternity, what graces you have acquired, what holy duties you have performed? Is it not to mock God, to sin now with boldness, from the hope of conversion in our last hours? Is it not to trifle and sport with his grace, to expect from it a harvest, when we have never sown? I mistake; you have sown, and you shall reap; you have sown to the flesh, and of the

flesh shall reap corruption; you have sown iniquity, you shall reap torment; you have sown sin, you shall reap death. Insult not the sanctity of God's attributes, by supposing that, after a criminal life, you will enjoy the rewards promised to holiness. Even if, by a miracle of grace, you should then be converted, (and such miracles are indeed rare, inconceivably more rare, than is ordinarily supposed,) yet still, how much glory and felicity will you have lost, by neglecting, during so many years, to lay up treasures in heaven! Defer not then, I beseech you by your everlasting interests, defer not for a moment longer your return to your God and your Redeemer.

3. This subject teaches us the unspeakable value of time, and the necessity of employing it in good works. Look at life in itself; it is but a shadow. Look at it as connected with a future world; it becomes of unutterable importance. Every thing we do gives a complexion to our eternal state. Here we receive the stamp and impression that shall endure for ever. Shall we then spend our days in idleness, in folly, in sin? Shall we not diligently improve every passing moment? Shall we not continually be scattering that seed, from which so glorious a harvest will spring? Yes; whilst we are cultivating our graces, mortifying our corruptions, instructing the ignorant, comforting the afflicted, protecting the oppressed, relieving the poor, and performing other acts of piety or benevolence, from Christian principles, we are doing that of which we shall hereafter reap the fruit; we are, in a sense, giving stability to our flying, vanishing hours, by employing them for the augmentation of our eternal happiness. But forget not, that, to produce this effect.

these actions must proceed from proper and Christian principles. If our labours are attended with pharisaical pride; if we expect to merit heaven by our good deeds; if we are animated by a self-righteous spirit; we shall at the final day reap no harvest except that of shame and disappointment. But if, unfeignedly believing in Jesus, and renouncing our own righteousness, we perform these works from love to God, and gratitude to the Redeemer, we shall obtain so rich a recompense, as to display the immensity of divine grace, and the riches of divine goodness.

4. Let this subject, then, inspire us with a high and holy ambition. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," said the apostle; and in the spirit of his exhortation, we say to you, covet the highest places in heaven; aim to sit next to cherubim and seraphim; nay, if it were possible, strive to get in heaven the same place which John, the beloved disciple, held here on earth, to lean on the very bosom of Christ himself. By that increase of grace, which will proportionably increase glory; by continually exercising holiness, strive continually to adorn your crown, to irradiate your diadem of stars with a lustre that shall outshine the sun in its brightness; and to acquire much of that glory, the least measure of which is precious and inestimable. And with these high aims, mingle the deepest humility. Aspire to the greatest of God's blessings; but at the same time confess that you are unworthy of the least of them. Seek to shine like the seraphim in splendour and glory, and emulate them in deep prostration of soul, under a sense of your unworthiness before the holy God. Acknowledge, in the midst of your high anticipations, that it is only through the abounding grace of God, and the infinite merits of Jesus, that heaven has been opened for you, or for any of the children of men.

SERMON LXXXIII.



THE SAINTS KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN.



1 THESSALONIANS ii. 19, 20.

What is our hope or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? for ye are our glory and joy.

IT is natural for those who are travelling to an unknown land, in which they are about to make their residence, to inquire frequently concerning its manners, its customs, its modes of intercourse: and it is therefore not surprising that Christians, pilgrims on earth, travellers to the kingdom of God, frequently endeavour to lift the veil which covers futurity, and to learn what are the holy delights of that heavenly world in which they hope to dwell for ever. These endeavours are made especially in those seasons when, bereft of the friends who formed their felicity on earth, they are left in solitude and affliction. They look with anxiety at the pale bodies of these friends, and solicitously inquire whether they shall know them no more: whether their intercourse has ceased for ever?

To these inquiries the gospel gives an answer that affords the most precious consolation: it teaches that the friendship founded on piety is imperishable; it teaches that those who were friends to the Redeemer, as well as to each other, shall have mutual knowledge and recollection in the future world, and shall have an intercourse with each other, and with the whole church triumphant. It is this single idea to which, as we judge from the context and connexion of his words, the apostle alludes in our text, that we propose to illustrate and apply in this discourse.

That the holy and happy inhabitants of heaven will recollect and know each other, is a point which appears to me to rest upon such firm foundations, that I am surprised that it has been disputed by any Christians. Though I would not say with Irenæus, one of the earliest fathers of the church, that "separate souls retain the likeness and figure of their bodies, so that they may be still known thereby in the other world;" though I would not even assert, that at the resurrection itself, our remembrance of the *face* and *features* of our friends will enable us to recognise them, because I know not the nature of the changes which will then be made in our bodies; though I cannot tell the *precise manner* whereby the glorified immortals will attain a knowledge of each other: whether by revelation, by information, by recollection, or by mutual discourse: yet still I am confident they will obtain this knowledge, in that mode which infinite wisdom shall prescribe.

Let us open our scriptures: we shall every where find intimations of this cheering truth.

1. The enjoyments and occupations of heaven are uniformly represented as social: but where is the charm of society, without mutual knowledge?

2. Heaven is uniformly represented as perfecting all our faculties: is it then probable that it will diminish, nay, entirely abolish, *memory*, one of the most important of them?

3. The chief grace that will be exercised in the regions of the blest, next to love to God, will be, love to our companions in glory. But what kind of love is that which is felt for an object which we know not?

4. In the general judgment which is appointed to vindicate the ways of God to man, it is certain that every individual will be known to the vast assembly, as distinct from all other persons. Is it probable that God, after thus making the blessed acquainted with each other, should, immediately afterwards, obliterate this knowledge?

5. It is certain that we shall see and know the glorious manhood of our blessed Saviour, elevated above all the heavenly powers; and if we shall know one body, why not more? If our elder brother, why not the rest of the heavenly fraternity?

6. It is promised to the twelve apostles that they shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and if these thrones be conspicuous, shall we not know these apostles? And if them, why not more?

7. During our Saviour's abode on earth, he afforded to three favoured disciples, a glimpse of the heavenly glory: he himself was transfigured, and Moses and Elias descended in celestial brilliancy: the disciples immediately knew Moses and Elias as distinct from the Saviour, and each as distinct

from the other : and if the disciples knew them upon Tabor, why do they not know them in the New Jerusalem ?

8. Our Saviour, in one of the most impressive of his parables, represents the rich man in torments, knowing Lazarus and Abraham in glory : though it be a parable, yet parables convey no ideas inconsistent with truth ; and we may therefore safely conclude, that if the accursed can know the blessed, much more shall the blessed know one another.

9. And, finally, we find the apostle Paul very frequently consoling himself under the sufferings and persecutions which he had to endure, by the prospect of meeting in heaven those who had been converted by his ministry on earth.

These are some of the reasons which lead me to suppose that, in heaven, the saints shall know each other. I might add many other similar considerations, but your own knowledge of the scriptures will supply them. Perhaps no single one of the arguments which have been offered, when taken separately, is conclusive ; but when they are united, they present a mass of evidence not easy to be resisted.

I know but one plausible objection that can be urged against this sentiment. It is this : ‘ Heaven is a state of perfect happiness ; but how can he, whose heart was bound to another by the tenderest cords of affection, be happy, when he sees this person whom he loved consigned to woe ? How can the bosom of a father be calm, when he beholds his son loaded with the chains of darkness ? How can the friend be satisfied with a happiness which he does not divide with his friend ?’

In answer to this objection. I make three reflections :

1. It *proves too much* : for it is precisely as strong to show that we shall not know each other at the day of judgment, as to show that we shall not know each other in heaven. Yet it is certain that we shall know each other in the day of judgment ; that we shall then be assured that this object of our affections, that this son, that this friend, shall be forever severed from us ; and that, nevertheless, we shall be perfectly happy. Even then, if we can find no answer to this difficulty, it ought not to shake our belief in the sentiment I am illustrating, since it is a difficulty which lies with equal force against a fact which the scriptures place beyond dispute. But,

2. We find a solution to this difficulty in the consideration, that *in heaven our wills will be perfectly accordant with the will of God* ; we shall no longer have separate desires and inclinations from him ; we shall see that all which he does is wisest and best, and deserving of our full approbation. On earth, we sometimes revolt against his appointments, because we bear within us the remains of depravity ; or because we do not perfectly comprehend his designs ; or because in our hearts the affection for God has not that superiority over our affection for the objects of earth which it ought to have. But in heaven, where not only the dominion, but even the existence of depravity, shall be destroyed in our souls ; in heaven, where we shall so far comprehend the reason of God's conduct as to perceive that his attributes must be destroyed if he acted otherwise ; in heaven, where love to the creature will justly be subordinated to love to the Creator, our wills will be so absorbed and swallowed up in God's, as to form but one will with it ; and, of course, no murmur

will escape our lips, no pang rend our hearts, for any of his dealings with those whom we loved. But,

3. The *nature of that love which is required of the Christian*, and which burns with a pure and vehement flame in the bosoms of the blest, affords another answer to this objection. It is required of us that we love God supremely, and that we love nothing else, except *in him* and *for him*. This frame of soul is never found in its perfection on earth. Natural affection and spiritual affection are always, in some degree, mingled together. But in heaven, this frame of soul is found in its perfection. The love which the inhabitants of that blessed world feel for each other, is freed from all earthly mixture; and all the bonds of nature are spiritualized. As there will be no marriage, so no matrimonial affections; the child and the friend are loved, not because they are our child and our friend, but because they are the creatures of God, the receptacles of his mercies, the objects of his affection, the partakers of his image. God, I repeat it, is loved supremely, and nothing else is loved, except in him and for him. Now as this is the temper of the heavenly host, as God is the centre of their love, as it is exclusively from affection to him that affection to other objects emanates, it is easy to conceive that the blessed may bear, without a diminution of their felicity, a separation from the persons that possessed their hearts; since their love for these persons will then return to its centre, and be again confounded with the love that they bear to God.

I conclude then, notwithstanding this objection, that the blessed in heaven shall know each other.

My brethren, this is not one of those cold truths to which the mind may assent whilst the heart remains

unaffected, and from which no incitements can be derived to a holy, heavenly life and conduct. It is full of the most sublime consolations and the most animating instructions. Let us select some of these for our consideration during the remainder of this exercise.

1. What a delightful idea does this truth give us of *the felicity of the heavenly world!* Surely nothing, except the vision and enjoyment of God and of the Lamb, can equal the joys of knowing and being known to all the church triumphant above; of living in an eternal brotherhood; of forming an indissoluble connexion with all the pious men that ever have existed, or that ever shall exist, till the trump of the archangel shall shake the earth to its centre. Who can even conceive the raptures of such an intercourse? No ignorance, no unkindly affection, no irregular passion, no blind zeal, no narrow and selfish views, no divisions in sentiment, no slanderous tongue, shall impair their bliss; but the most exalted wisdom, the most spotless purity and innocence, the most tender benignity and love, shall be found in their highest perfection in each one of the vast society. Throughout all of them there will be a perfect harmony in judgment, in will, and in practice; all of them will be united in love to that God, in gratitude to that Saviour, whose throne they encircle: all of them will be so completely cemented in affection to each other, that the happiness of each becomes a common felicity. Wicked and censorious world! what have you to compare with this ennobling and rapturous intercourse, where every mind thus shines with light, and every heart thus burns with love?

Oh! how cheering is this prospect to the soul pained by the contemplation of that frivolity, that

contention, that guilt, which is so often to be found in human associations, in earthly societies! Let us examine this idea more closely: the heart rests upon it with so much delight, that it is worthy of more than a casual observation. To have some conception of the joy resulting from this circumstance, I image to myself a believer who has been loosed, by the liberating hand of death, from these fetters of earth, and who, borne on the wings of angels to his home, begins to breathe the air of heaven. Methinks I behold his arrival hailed, first, by those pious friends and relatives to whom his soul was bound, but who entered before him into glory, and left him in tears. He meets again that father, that mother, whose wisdom and tenderness directed him during all the vicissitudes of life, who forgot him not in their last moments, but poured upon him their dying benediction! He sees once more that child who was torn from his reluctant arms; that wife, over whose tomb he has wept; that friend, whose loss made the earth a joyless desert for him! There the mothers of Bethlehem find their martyred infants, in a land where Herod does not reign, and where his malice cannot reach! There Jacob sees his Rachel, and, in the transports of re-union, forgets the sorrow with which he raised the monumental pillar on the plains of Bethlehem! There David presses again his friend to his breast, and expresses his joy in accents still more impassioned than those in which he lamented his fall upon Gilboa!

Judge ye, who have felt the power of friendship or affection, and who have also felt the pangs of separation from those who possessed and deserved your attachment; judge of the felicity that is to be derived from such a meeting, when these friends shall

again mingle together their hearts and souls, with a full assurance that death shall never again tear them asunder! Ah! if good old Jacob, in meeting again his son, after a long and painful separation, threw himself into his arms with such delight, and uttered with such rapture, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, my son; because thou art yet alive!" who can even conceive the joy of meeting our friends in that better state, alive, though they have been the victims of the grave, and clothed with dignities and honours, infinitely greater than Pharaoh could bestow?

But those that were immediately connected with him on earth, are not the only personages whom the believer perceives with joy on his entrance into paradise. He finds himself surrounded with a multitude which no man can number, selected from every period of the world, and gathered out of every nation, and tribe, and kindred, and people. *Here* he beholds the patriarchs, whose example had stimulated him to diligence in the service of his Lord, and whose memory he had honoured. There stands Abraham, who so many thousand years ago rejoiced to see this day, though afar off; whose "faith was accounted to him for righteousness: and lo! Isaac, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved, is restored to him, beyond the possibility of another separation: for God had himself provided a Lamb for an offering. There is Noah, sheltered in a better ark than that which saved him from the fury of the deluge. There is Lot, no longer vexed by the sins of Sodom, and fixing his thankful looks on the angel of the covenant, who pulled him from that devoted city. And Joseph, rejoicing in the sight of that God, the sense of whose invisible presence with him rendered him victorious

over the severest temptation. And Moses, again singing his sublime song, once more calling upon the heavens to give ear, and ascribing mercy and majesty to God. And Job, delivered from all his pains, changing his expressions of sorrow into accents of praise, and crying, "Blessed be the day in which I was born, the night in which it was said, there is a man-child conceived: for now God does not hide himself from me: I can come even to his seat!" But are these, and the numberless other *patriarchs* who lived devoted to God, the only persons whom the believer contemplates on his admission into heaven? No! next them stands the illustrious band of prophets, surrounded by a splendour infinitely brighter than the prophetic ray. There David, satisfied with God's likeness, pours forth diviner strains than those which he raised on earth. There Elijah, led by the Lamb to the fountain that flows from the throne of God, and feasting on the hidden manna, has no longer need of the failing brook of Cherith, and of the ministry of ravens, to provide him food. There the hallowed lips of Isaiah chaunt, with still more heavenly fire than burns in his predictions, the glories of Immanuel, and the peace of his kingdom. There Jeremiah, having every tear wiped from his eyes, no longer needs to weep; no longer wishes for some lodge in the wilderness, whither he might retire from the iniquities of those who surround him. There Daniel needs no angel to tell him that he is greatly beloved; no longer needs to fear a den of lions, or a seven-fold heated furnace.

But see, the glorious band of apostles still succeeds. There John contemplates the First and the Last, in a more effulgent glory than he appeared at Patmos, and yet strengthened by divine power to

behold divine glory, falls not down as dead. Hark ! he begins his favourite theme : hark ! he cries with still warmer emotions than when on earth, “ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God. God is love. Beloved, let us love one another ! ” There Peter sees the new heavens and the new earth for which he looked ; and is more anxious than when upon Tabor, here to build his tabernacle, and make his abode for ever. There Thomas, lost in an ecstasy of wonder, astonishment, and rapture, can find no utterance for his feelings but in his expressive exclamation, My Lord, and my God ! There Paul still stands, gazing at the abyss of love, and still exclaiming, O the height, and the depth, and the length, and the breadth, of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge ! And there the rest of the apostles stand ; acknowledging their wisdom in not abandoning the Redeemer, and finding that he has indeed the words of eternal life.

And see next to them the glorious company of martyrs and confessors,

“ who lived unknown,
Till persecution dragg’d them into fame,
And chased them up to heaven : ”—

who waded through seas of blood, who submitted cheerfully to every torture, upheld by the Spirit of Jesus and the hopes of glory. Behold how they stand, clothed in white, and having palms in their hands, confessing that their afflictions, which were but for a moment, were indeed not worthy to be compared to this exceeding weight of glory ! But the blessed company thickens on the view. See all those pious men in the old world or the new who

have quickened us by their writings or their examples : see all those whose lives have deservedly been held up as models for us to follow : see those lamented pastors who once addressed you from this sacred desk, but who have now entered into glory : see ten thousand times ten thousand followers of the Lamb, of whom we have never heard, whose names history would have suffered to perish, had they not been inscribed in the Lamb's book of life, a record more durable than brass or marble. See all this vast assemblage hail the believer entering into paradise as a brother, and feel for him the affections of a brother : see they form with him ties more strict and tender than those which connected him to the darling of his soul on earth ; ties pure as the eternal mind, and durable as the existence of God : see, they afford him in an intercourse with them, that substance, of which our most delicious earthly intercourses are but the shadow. O my God ! dost thou destine such joys as these to sinful, to rebellious man ? O Christians ! when such felicity is proposed to you, shall your souls still cleave to earth ; will you not more pant and languish for the joys of heaven ; will you not be willing to leave this unkind and unsatisfying world for the enjoyment of this intimate fellowship with the church triumphant ? You surely ought, since, and this is our

2d. *Reflection*, this doctrine, that in heaven we shall know each other, and all the pious that have preceded us, affords *one of the sweetest consolations to the Christian against our natural fear of death*. To a soul that has made its peace with God, death has nothing so terrible as those agonizing adieus which are to be given to those whom we love. But is not the anguish arising from this source removed, when

the dying believer can strain his closing eyes upon those who surround his bed of death, and say to them, ‘ Ah! my friends, my children, and you who were the object of my tenderest love, receive the last proof of an affection, the testimonies of which in these closing moments cannot be suspected. Let my tears, let my tremulous accents, let these prayers in your behalf, which rise from the centre of my soul, testify how much I love you? But yet retain me no longer upon earth. Suffer me to go and meet that friend, who was bound by cords stronger than death; those ancestors, whose memory was dear to me; those children, the loss of whom tore my soul. Suffer me to go and meet the redeemed of every tribe, and kindred, and people, and tongue; the venerable society of the patriarchs, “ the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy church triumphant,” who, having fought under the standard of Jesus, now partake in his triumph. Suffer me to go, and join this heavenly company, after having formed one more wish, after having uttered one more prayer. It is that you may shortly be gathered to this heavenly society, that you may shortly participate in this glory.’

Oh, my brethren! what powerful consolations are these in our closing hours! Surely they are sufficient to elevate the soul of a Christian above the fear of death. If Socrates looked at death without terror, merely from the *hope* that it would introduce him to the society of Homer and Hesiod, of Orpheus and Musæus; if Cicero, though a pagan, could cry out with so much delight, “ O glorious day! when I shall retire from this low and sordid scene to associate with the divine assembly of departed spirits:”

with what holy impatience should the Christian long for that period when he shall be introduced to the church of the first-born in heaven, to mingle his voice with theirs, and to dwell for ever with them !

3. This subject teaches *relatives and friends how they should act*, in order that the sentiments of affection which they entertain for each other may have their greatest force, and they be saved from the severest pains. Form your attachments for eternity ; build them on the basis of religion ; strive to cement the ties of blood and affection by the more indissoluble bonds of grace ; and then your hearts, while your friends are continued to you, will experience raptures inexpressible ; and when they are torn from you, the pang of separation will be mitigated by the most consolatory prospects. Ah ! think you not, that the soul of a Christian swells with higher joy than the world can conceive, when, pressing to his heart those who are united to him by grace, as well as by nature or friendship, he exclaims, ‘ I shall love this friend not merely for this little span of life, but throughout eternity. When millions of years shall have succeeded to millions of years, my heart shall still beat with tenderness towards him ; I shall still enjoy an intercourse with him : even after the universe shall be laid in ruins, our voices and our souls shall mingle together in the kingdom of light.’ Speak, Christians ! is it not this reflection which gives the chief energy to your friendship ? “ I must profess from the experience of my soul,” says the excellent Baxter, “ that it is from my belief that I shall love my friends in heaven, that my love to them on earth is principally kindled : and if I thought I should never know them more, and consequently not love them

after death, I should love them comparatively little, as I do other transitory things; but now I converse with them with delight, as believing that I shall converse with them for ever." And if you should attend to the concerns of piety, to secure these present joys, so also ought you to do it that you may not be overborne with sorrow at that moment when death shall tear these friends from you, or you from them. Death will surely dissolve all these dear and intimate relations; the time is certainly coming, when in anguish you shall see all your mutual affection, all your pleasant intercourse ending in ghastly looks, and in dying pangs; when one of you shall see with anguish the other's last struggles: when his final groan shall vibrate in your ear. Oh! in such a situation, what comfort has the survivor, except in the hope that has been presented to you? and if he cannot rationally and scripturally entertain this hope, what can exceed his anguish? Oh! what a sword pierces through the souls of those who weep for wicked, though near relations and friends: and who, instead of the cheering expectation of seeing them again, behold nothing in the future but what is dark, dismal, and afflictive! Since then there must be so great a difference in the feelings of the friends who survive you, according as they are permitted or not, to entertain the hope of a reunion with you, let me exhort you to live together as heirs of eternal life, uniting your prayers, and giving mutual examples of piety, that so you may fit each other for heaven, and leave a testimony in each other's bosom of your preparation for eternity. Then whoever of you die first, the parent or the child, the brother or the sister, the husband or the wife, the survivor in imagination can trace you to heaven, and

safely lodge you in the embraces of the Saviour. When they have laid your body in the grave, they will be solaced by sweet hopes that your soul is with the redeemed of the Lord, and is waiting to hail them on their deliverance from earth. Are you unaffected by this motive? pretend not then to the sacred name of friendship or affection.

4. Finally, this subject teaches us in the strongest manner, the barbarity and cruelty of the infidel, who endeavours to shake our faith in the principles of Christianity. We have seen that our sweetest joys and firmest supports are derived from this religion, and that the prospects which it presents to us can alone uphold us in those hours of dereliction and distress, when we weep over the lifeless corpses of our friends and relatives. Even then, if Christianity, which is eternal truth, which we can prove to be eternal truth: even, however, if it were only a solemn cheat, would it not be the most inhuman of acts to deprive the believer of that happy delusion, without which nature is comfortless, the world melancholy, and death terrible? Would it not be brutal to disturb us in our sweet dream, if we were in a dream, and designedly awake us to truth and sorrow? Would it not be base and unfeeling to rob us of our truest peace, of our prospects for eternity, of our hope of an immortal union to our departed friends?

Go, go, cruel infidel! Why will you attempt to deprive me of the joy of my heart; to rifle my bosom of its felicity; and to persuade me that there is no futurity, no redeeming love, no immortality for me to enjoy with God and in the society of the pious? Go, barbarous man! enjoy your guilt and gloom alone; breathe out your wretchedness in solitude

and the desert, and infect not the world with the poison of your principles ! Go, herd with the brutes, whose death you are willing to die ; but curse me not with your tenets, kill me not with your sentiments ! O tear not from me my God and my Saviour, the only rock I find to rest on ; tell me not, that the cords which tie my soul to my friends must in a little time be irretrievably snapt in sunder ; and if they and myself are to be annihilated, do not, oh ! do not push us down the precipice of destruction before our time !

SERMON LXXXIV.



SECRET PRAYER.



MATTHEW vi. 6.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet ; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret ; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

WHAT nation has ever existed, so savage ; what form of religion has ever been heard of, so corrupted ; as not to acknowledge the necessity of prayer ? Reason, feeling, and revelation, concur to teach us the obligation to this duty. Can we think of our situation, exposed to calamities which we cannot avert, polluted by sins which we cannot expiate, tyrannized by passions which we cannot subdue ; and not confess that it is both our duty and our privilege to implore the aid of the Almighty and All-Merciful ? Can we recollect in what manner we are related to God, as creatures to their Creator, as subjects to their Ruler, as the receivers of countless and unmerited mercies to their Benefactor, as accountable creatures to their Judge ; and not feel that prayer is an act of homage due unto him, and that

by it we ought to acknowledge his sovereignty, his providence, his goodness, and our dependence? Can we remember that we are soon to pass into the eternal world, and not be found in the exercise of devotion which, by now connecting earth and heaven, and removing that alienation and distance from God, in which we were as sinners, prepares us for his immediate presence?

Without prayer there is no religion. When the impenitent man is first awakened to a sense of his guilt and his danger, he flees to his closet, and pours out his supplications unto God. While the Christian passes through the world, his spiritual life is supported by the exercises of devotion; and in joy or sorrow, in sickness or health, in youth or in age, he still pours out his soul before his heavenly Father. And when the believer is stretched upon the bed of death, if his reason is preserved, prayer is his last employment upon earth, he expires, like Stephen, with supplications upon his lips; his soul ascends with his petitions to the throne of God, and the humble prayer of earth is succeeded by the rapturous hallelujah of heaven.

Prayer is divided into *public*, when we unite with the people of God in the temple; *social*, when with our family or friends we kneel before the mercy-seat; and *private*, when, retired from the world and those dearest to us, we alone pour out our supplications to the Lord. These various modes of prayer are all obligatory upon us; we cannot neglect any of them without violating our duty, and injuring our souls. But it is of the last only that the Saviour speaks in the text. My sole design in addressing you from these words is, to

Present some motives to the habitual exercise of private prayer.

From the many motives that might be urged, I select only four :

1. *It affords one of the best tests and strongest proofs of the sincerity of our religion.*

In all external duties, there can but little difference be observed between the child of God and those moral men, who, although their hearts are not renewed, yet feel the restraining grace of God, and the beneficial effects of a pious education. These, as well as the believer, abstain from gross crimes, attend the public ordinances of religion, and study the word of God. Wherein then do they differ? Follow them to their retirements, and you will see. The one has the spirit of prayer and a devotional temper; in secret he cultivates communion with his God; desirous not merely of seeming, but of being holy, he performs with as much solicitude those duties, in the discharge of which no other eye is fixed upon him but that of his Lord and his conscience, as those in the performance of which he is in the view of the world. The other either entirely omits these secret duties, or performs them with reluctance, as a task and a burden.

Many causes besides true piety may lead persons to the discharge of the public duties of religion, and may give an apparent warmth to the feelings while engaged in them. We may be found regularly in the house of God, from the habits of education, from a regard to our pious friends or to the preacher, from many other motives besides true and vital piety. We may unite in social prayer, that our gifts may be admired, and that we may be commended by men. But how is it with our hearts in retire-

ment, where ostentation can have no influence, where there are no external impulses or aids to excite our emotions, and the soul is left to itself to exercise its feelings? Do we then become cold and indifferent, seeking excuses to evade this duty, or performing it without emotion? There is then great cause to apprehend that, although we may have “the form of godliness,” we are destitute of “the power;” that we belong to the class of those insincere men, of whom Job asks, “Will they delight themselves in the Almighty? will they always call upon God?” On the contrary, does our closet habitually witness the depth of our penitence, the warmth of our devotion, the fervour of our aspirations for holiness? We may then cry, “This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity,” we seek communion with God. From these secret transactions between him and our souls, we derive a cheering evidence of our earnest desire for holiness, and of our sincere devotedness to the Lord.

2. *The examples of believers in every age, and that of the blessed Saviour*, should incite us to the duty of private prayer.

The happy spirits who now, washed in the Redeemer’s blood, stand before his throne triumphing and adoring, were those who upon earth, “walked with God,” and held communion with him in prayer. They are represented in scripture as the generation of those that “seek God and that “call upon the name of the Lord.” In perusing both the Old Testament and the New, you find continual instances of private prayer. Thus, *Abraham* prayed, and received the promise; thus he interceded with the Lord for Sodom: thus in the fields, *Isaac* meditated and

prayed ; thus *Jacob* prayed, and obtained a blessing ; thus *Moses* prayed, and the people were spared ; thus *David* prayed, and received a pardon ; thus *Manassah* prayed, and his soul was renewed. It was while engaged in private prayer, that *Peter* beheld his vision ; that *Cornelius* enjoyed the presence of the angel ; that *Paul* was caught up into the third heaven. I do not multiply these examples ; from your own acquaintance with the scriptures, you can add many other instances. If then, you would enjoy the glory to which they are raised, or partake of the blessings which they received, imitate their example, and be men of prayer.

But why need I speak of inferior models ? Behold your blessed Redeemer. He not only prays in public, as at the tomb of Lazarus, and with his disciples, as in his sacerdotal prayer ; but he also retires from the world to converse with his Father. After employing the day in works of charity, he retires to the mount of Olives, to the garden of Gethsemane, to other private places, to hold communion with heaven. Dare we call ourselves his disciples, and hope to be acknowledged as his followers, if we live neglectful of this duty ?

3. The habitual performance of private prayer is absolutely necessary *for the cultivation of our holiness.*

Look at the records of scripture, at the annals of the church, or at the circle of your acquaintances, and you will in vain seek a solitary example of one who, living in the neglect of private prayer, was yet noted for his growth in grace. It is in the closet, that the most permanent spiritual blessings are obtained. It is there that God makes his most precious communications to the soul. It is there that the Sun of Righteousness sheds those rays upon the

heart which enlighten and warm; which dissipate the clouds and vapours of earth which had rested upon it, and paint his own image there. It is there that power is obtained over our spiritual foes; that our corruptions are subdued, temptations weakened, and strength for the discharge of duty bestowed. It is there that faith, and hope, and love, are invigorated: the Christian returning from his closet to the world, bears with him a sense of the presence of his God. He cannot easily forget a friend with whom, morning and evening, he enjoys delicious converse. He feels an invisible hand sustaining him: a heavenly voice is heard speaking to his heart, which cheers, supports, and renders him victorious in his conflicts. His soul shines, as did the face of Moses, when he came down from the mount, after conversing with God; and the world cannot immediately cloud the heavenly lustre.

On the contrary, let the duties of the closet be neglected, and the life and power of religion in the soul will immediately decline; the sense of divine things will be gradually lost; the Christian graces will imperceptibly wither; the public services of religion will lose their sweetness and their efficacy; the holy familiarity of the soul with heaven will be gone; and a worldly spirit will be substituted for the noble and elevated temper that corresponds with the sublimity of our hopes, and the eternity of our being. Could we read the secret history of those who have departed from their duty and their God, we should find, almost without a single exception, that their backsliding and apostacy began at the closet; that they became more irregular and cold in their private prayers before those falls which wounded their consciences, and violated their engagements; and that

when they rose again from their falls, it was by returning to their closets, that they recovered their strength. If, therefore, you wish to grow in holiness, and glorify your God, and your Redeemer, be conscientious in the discharge of this duty.

4. The habitual practice of secret prayer produces *the purest pleasure*.

Much of the felicity of heaven consists in the vision and enjoyment of God. He who is prayerful, in a degree anticipates this blessedness. Approaching the All-Perfect, he cries with the Psalmist, "It is good for me to draw near unto God." While spreading before his Father all his wants, and cares, and fears, and expectations, he enjoys the united pleasures of friendship, and love, and gratitude, and trust, and hope. The experience of all real Christians will attest that there are in secret prayer, "pleasures which pass all understanding, joys that are unspeakable;" that their thirst for felicity is satisfied, while their Heavenly Father there reaches forth to them "the water of life, that proceedeth out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb."

But especially is this cheering efficacy felt in the season of affliction. St. James directs, "Is any man afflicted, let him pray;" and David "thought upon God in his distress, and felt joy spring up in his soul." Oh! how consolatory is it when bereft of earthly enjoyments; when suffering under sickness, sorrow, or reproach; when watching the last agonies of our friends, or weeping over their graves! How consolatory is it then to throw ourselves into the sympathizing bosom of our God, and there pour out our tears. Resting there, our sorrows expire, and our apprehensions cease. The world around may appear dark and melancholy as did Egypt; the prayer-room

is our Goshen, where all is light. It is true, even the prayerless at such seasons are driven to God; under the pressure of calamity, unwilling cries for the divine aid are extorted from them. But how different are their feelings from those of the believers to whom prayer is familiar; who come with holy boldness, and filial confidence, to that throne which they have often visited; to that Father whose kindness they have often experienced. Those who have been thus prayerful will declare, on a review of their lives, that the season of affliction has been to them the peculiar season of divine consolation, and spiritual joy. And even on the *bed of death*, we shall find consolation from remembering that we have walked before God; from seeing in this course of private prayer a proof of our sincerity; from recollecting that in that solemn moment, we have not first to find the way of access to our God; from recalling times of communion with God in our closet, which still remain fresh and sweet upon our hearts, and console us in the agonies of dissolution. Thus it was with dying Jacob. He looked back to that secret manifestation to his soul, which the lapse of so many years had not made him forget. "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz, and blessed me." And thus it has been with many expiring Christians. Dying, they have recalled scenes in the closet, which still warmed their souls; which were pledges to them of the love of God; and which could only be exceeded by those joys into which they were entering.

Since such are the obligations to secret prayer, and the benefits resulting from it, how deeply should we lament that so many neglect it; how many thousands, whose lives are prayerless! Sustained by the guardian providence of God through the night, they

wake; but they kneel not to him. Supported by his goodness, and encompassed by his mercies during the day, they yet seek no intercourse with him. Dependent entirely upon his will, whether their beds shall not be their graves, they yet lie down insensible. Suffer me briefly to expostulate with those of you who thus act. Why is it that you neglect secret prayer? Will you say that God has not commanded it? You dare not make this assertion! You cannot be so ignorant of the scriptures, as not to recollect some of the innumerable commandments to pour out our hearts before God, and call upon his name; to “pray always;” to “continue in prayer.”

Will you say that you have no need of the spiritual blessings that are to be obtained by prayer? You dare not! Your conscience cries within you that without grace and glory it had been better for you never to have been born.

Will you say, (for this is a common plea,) “I have no time for prayer?” For what was time given you, but to work out your salvation, and glorify God? You find time for a thousand frivolous pursuits and vain conversations; and can you find no time to speak to God? You have then, no time to be a Christian, to secure the glories of heaven, to avoid the agonies of hell!

Will you say, ‘I attend on the public worship of God, and perhaps on family devotion; surely then, private prayer is not essential.’ It is essential, since it is commanded by God; since it is necessarily prompted by the pious heart; since religion is a personal concern; since there are peculiar circumstances in the state of every individual, which can be unbosomed only to God; since without private prayer,

public devotion will have no saving influence upon us.

Let me then, exhort and charge you, as you value your duty, your happiness, your salvation, and your God, no longer to neglect secret prayer. And that your prayers may be effectual, think before you kneel, of the majesty and holiness of him, before whom you are about to present yourselves; of the indispensable necessity of the blessings for which you are about to supplicate; of the danger and guilt of mocking the Lord by unfelt petitions, and insincere expressions. It will tend much to compose and prepare your minds to read some of the devotional parts of the scripture. Let your prayers be *humble* and *reverent*. Consider what God is, and what you are. Remember that he is your judge; and think what you have merited; and with Abraham confess that you are but “dust and ashes,” and with the publican, acknowledge that you are not worthy to raise up your eyes, or your voices to heaven. But let not this reverence degenerate into a *slavish fear*. It is under the character of a tender and affectionate Father, that the God whom you address, is exhibited to you; approach, remembering not only your guilt, but his unspeakable mercy, and the abounding grace of his Son. Let your prayers be *earnest* and *ardent*. “Your Father seeth you; the sense of his omniscience should animate you; wrestle like Jacob; seek the holy fervour of Elijah; let fire be mingled with these sacrifices; pray in the name of Jesus. Do not be satisfied with merely mentioning his name at the close of your services; but let it be deeply impressed upon your heart, that you have access to the Father only through him, as your mediator; that you cannot hope for the acceptance of your imperfect

worship, except through his advocacy and intercession. Pray in submissive reliance upon *the aid of the Holy Spirit*; feeling that “the Spirit of grace and of supplication” can alone “help our infirmities.” Pray with *constancy* and *perseverance*. Some who dare not totally omit this duty, perform it only occasionally. On the Lord’s day, before the Lord’s supper, under some striking dispensations of providence, they will retire to their closet; but at other times they are strangers there. Others feel that they are bound daily to attend to this duty; but they neglect it for every slight excuse of business, company, or amusement. This is not the conduct of those who “delight themselves in the Lord,” and have the temper of his children; who find prayer a privilege as well as a duty. These omissions lead the way to greater neglects; they chill the spirit of devotion, and produce a disrelish for the exercises of the closet. *At least*, twice in each day converse with God. Redeem time from other occupations for this purpose. Thus earnest and constant in devotion, you shall pass through life, not with a feeble and tottering step, but strong in the power in the Lord, and cheered by the prospect of immortality.

And ye, who have conscientiously observed this delightful duty, still persevere “Your Father who seeth in secret, will reward you openly.” You have enjoyed much felicity in your closet, when speaking to the Eternal as your Father and your Friend, and receiving the testimonies of his love. But all this is only the earnest of that joy reserved for you in heaven. “There, petitions for mercy and grace, will be exchanged for praises that God has heard them; and the blessed effects of a life of prayer will be experienced in a fulness of divine love and glory throughout eternity.”

SERMON LXXXV.



FAMILY PRAYER.



JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

THESE are the words of Joshua, the worthy successor of Moses, an illustrious type of Christ. I regret that I have not time to illustrate the interesting circumstances under which they were uttered. But in even superficially examining the subject to which they principally lead, I fear that I must exceed the ordinary limits of these exercises. To two things Joshua here binds himself: to personal piety, and to family religion. ‘I have devoted myself unto God; and besides this, I am resolved to use all my influence, to make every exertion, to strive by practice, by precept, and by authority, to cause my family to unite with me in the service and love of God.’

Family religion, to which Joshua here resolves to attend, does not consist of one single act, but comprises many most important duties. If you would imitate his example, you must instruct the ignorant members of your household in the principles of piety and virtue; you must pour religious knowledge in

the minds of your children, by frequently conversing with them on their most important concerns, and by carefully catechising them; by the salutary restraints of discipline, and the proper exercise of authority, by the reproof and punishment of vice, you must endeavour to preserve from sin and to lead to virtue, those committed to your care; you must in your own life set before them an example of holiness; you must establish family worship, and daily join with them in adoring your common Lord. All these acts are necessary, if you would attend to family religion: to the performace of them all Joshua obliges himself, when he says, "As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord."

It would be agreeable and useful to consider all these branches of family religion; to show you on what principles your obligation to perform them is grounded, and in what manner you should discharge them: but it would be impossible to do justice to such a subject without writing a volume instead of a discourse. We shall therefore confine our attention to one single branch of this extensive subject. We shall select for our meditation that important, but, alas! that neglected duty of *family prayer*. Do you ask, Why we believe it to be neglected? Not from prying into your domestic arrangements, and the secrets of your families; you know that this is not our character: but we are assured of its neglect from the gross ignorance concerning divine things that we find in so many young persons; from the comparatively little effect of the ordinances of religion; and from similar circumstances. Favour me then with your attention while,

I. I endeavour to lead you to the performance of this duty by the most plain and simple arguments:

II. Answer the objections you may make against it; and,

III. Give you some directions for the proper performance of it.

And may God himself give efficacy to our instructions! May God himself vouchsafe so to speak to your hearts, that those of you who have hitherto neglected this duty may be led sincerely to bewail and reform; and that those of you who have already established the worship of God in your families, may be encouraged to persevere.

I. From the innumerable *motives* enforcing this duty, I select a few, which I will illustrate with all possible brevity.

1. So plain and so powerful is its obligation, that even unassisted *reason* urges us to its performance. and we cannot neglect it without sinning against the light of nature, as well as against the dictates of revelation.

Lay aside for a moment the volume of inspiration; inquire not into its testimony; but ask what are the injunctions of cool and unprejudiced reason.

It is a plain dictate of reason, that God is to be acknowledged in all those societies of which he is the founder and preserver. But you cannot, unless you deny the attributes of God, fail to acknowledge that his agency and providence are as real in joining together the different members of a family, as in joining together your soul and your body. Nature itself is sufficient to teach you, that "he setteth the solitary in families, and that children are his reward." And as he first founded, so he guards and defends the family; preserves it from peril, and saves it from destruction. Now then is it not most reasonable, that he who is the instituter and preserver of the fa-

mily, should by the family be acknowledged and adored? You dare not say, ‘God has indeed created and preserved me; but he has not created and preserved mine; he has no interest in my family, as such; he has no right or authority there.’ But if he has this interest and authority, ought it not to be acknowledged: and ought not you, whom he has set over the family, see that this obligation be properly answered?

It is a plain dictate of reason, that if there be blessings which the family needs, it is proper for the family to pray to God for them. But there are many mercies of this class: such as the preservation of the family in being and happiness; such as the direction of the essential members, the prospering of all family affairs, and a thousand other things which might easily be mentioned. Now, since these blessings must flow from the liberality of God, is it not reasonable that we should ask him for them? Do you say that we may individually petition him for these mercies? But remember, that it is not as individuals, but as a family, we receive them; and therefore, as a family, together and unitedly, we must pray for them. Deny this, and you reject the principle on which the whole system of social and public worship rests.

It is a plain dictate of nature, that those who have a common interest in favours received, should together express their thanks to the bestower of these favours. Look then at your families: behold the enjoyments which the beneficent hand of God has showered upon them; and then say, is it not reasonable, conjunctly to render a tribute of gratitude to the Author of your common mercies? If an indigent family were supported by some generous benefactor.

would it not be chargeable with ingratitude, if the different members of it, and especially the head, as the organ of the rest, did not express their thankfulness? Is it God alone that is thus to be treated?

It is a plain dictate of reason, that they who sin together, should together seek pardon from God, and deprecate those judgments which they have deserved. And where is the family, the members of which are not chargeable with common sins? Surely if personal sins require personal confession, and general sins general confession, family sins also demand family confession. You cannot then be consistent with yourselves, without acknowledging the duty of family prayer, or denying that prayer is ever a duty.

These reflections (and many similar ones might be added) are sufficient to show that unperverted reason teaches us the necessity of attending to this duty. But even if these remarks were inconclusive, the *conduct* of the heathens would fully establish this doctrine. Amidst all their darkness, they had still sufficient light to perceive the obligation to family devotion; amidst all their errors, this great principle, though mingled indeed with superstition, was preserved among them. They had their household gods, and domestic divinities, and worship was paid in a family, as well as an individual capacity. And now tell me, my dear brethren, do we ask too much of you when we beg you to act as reasonable beings? Do we propose to you too high a model when we ask you to emulate the benighted pagan? Shall they pay higher honours to vain idols than we bestow on the living and true God? Shall Tyre and Sidon, and the whole heathen world rise up against us at the day of judgment? I pass to a

2d. *Motive*, which shall be drawn from *the declarations of the scriptures, and the example of the saints.*

If you ask me to give you an express declaration of scripture, in which family prayer is directly and in so many words enjoined, I confess that I recollect no such declaration; but if you make this an argument, as it is often done against the duty, you thereby betray a lamentable and gross ignorance of the manner in which instruction is conveyed in holy writ. The scripture addresses us as rational beings, and therefore is satisfied with laying down *general* rules of conduct, leaving it to common reason and the light of nature to apply these rules to particular cases. Thus, for example, God tells us in scripture, “He that provideth not for his own, especially those of his house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” But he leaves it for natural light and common reason to tell us who are our family, and what particular provision we should make for them. What would you say to that man who should assert, ‘I am not bound to provide for this child, or that servant, because, though God gives me a general rule, he does not tell me precisely who are my family, and what is the provision to be made for them.’ Would you not answer, ‘Nature and reason are God’s light as well as his word: and if nature and reason teach you to apply this general rule to this particular case, you are as much bound by it as though God had particularized this circumstance in his word.’ This answer would be conclusive; and it is equally conclusive against the objection of you who say, ‘God has no where declared in his word, ‘Thou shalt worship me in thy family.’ I answer, God has in numberless places of scripture laid down the general rule, that we should pray in all places, at all times, and on all occasions that are proper for prayer. Natural light and common reason teach us,

that families afford most fit times, place, and occasions for prayer. Now, since nature and reason are God's light, as well as his word, and since they teach you to apply the general rule to this particular case, you are as much bound to this duty as though God had said in so many words, 'Thou shalt establish family prayer.'

But in order to give this observation all its force, it will be necessary to mention to you a few of these general rules.

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, (1 Tim. ii. 8.) says, "I will therefore that men pray *every where*:" that is, wherever prudence and opportunity will allow. And can we pray every where without praying in our families? The same apostle writing to the Thessalonians, has this injunction, (1 Thess. v. 17, 18.) "Pray without ceasing: in every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." And can we pray without ceasing, if we are strangers to family devotion? Do we in every thing give thanks, if family mercies are received, and no acknowledgments made, suitable to them and according to their nature?

It is worthy also of special remark, that in almost all those places of Scripture, where the mutual duties of domestic relations are urged, there is almost always added a charge to pray, or at least some mention is immediately made of prayer. Thus, when Paul, in the fifth and sixth chapters of the Ephesians, had spoken of the duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, and given some general directions to arm ourselves against spiritual conflicts, he immediately subjoins, (vi. 18.) "Praying always, with *all* prayer and supplication in

the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication." And if, to discharge these relative duties, we must pray always, and watch against hindrances, and for fit opportunities, then surely we are not to overlook the singular advantages for devotion which are to be found in families. Thus also, in Colossians, having given a summary of the same relative duties between all the members of a family, the exhortation immediately follows, (Col. iv. 2.) "continue in prayer;" evidently implying that there must be a continued course of family prayer between these several relatives, if they hoped to discharge their duties. Thus also when Peter had treated on the same subject, he enforces all by this consideration, (1 Pet. iii. 12.) "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." That is, act according to these directions, if you expect that those prayers shall be answered which rise from your families.

Instead of mentioning many other similar passages, let me merely quote to you a few texts which relate to the same subject. The promise which our Saviour made to his afflicted disciples, and through them to us before his departure from earth, though with propriety extended to public devotion, yet seems more immediately applicable to social and family prayer: "I say to you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." What an encouragement do these words contain, and what an obligation do they impose on us. Can we with such a promise fail to assemble with our household, without despising the offered presence and favour of our

Lord? Remember too those terrible words in Jeremiah, (x. 25.) "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, and upon the families that call not upon thy name." In this alarming passage, are not prayerless families plainly ranked with the heathen, and pointed out as being like them, the objects of divine indignation? I will close my quotations by that passage of the apostle, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This is the Christian duty and the Christian character. Where then is the neglecter of this practice, who dare appeal to the searcher of hearts and say, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I abstain from family prayer in order to promote thy glory?' Brethren, there is not one of you who would not shudder to make such an appeal.

Let us pass from considering the injunctions of the scripture, to an examination of the *lives of the saints*, whose history is there recorded: their examples show the nature and the requisitions of our religion. Look at the sacred volume, and you will find that Noah, and Abraham, and Job, and Joshua, and David, and Daniel, and all the greatest ancient worthies, who are held up for our imitation, are noted for their attention to domestic religion. Our Saviour had no household, but the apostles were his family: with them he prayed, "leaving us a pattern that we should follow his steps." And since his ascension to heaven, all those noted for the fervour of their piety, of whatever age, or whatever denomination, have esteemed it not only a sacred duty, but also an inestimable privilege. Follow the steps of these holy men, if you desire to dwell with them. Like them resolve that whatever others do, as for you and your house, you will serve the Lord."

I present you with a

3d. *Motive* : By a faithful and regular performance of this duty, *you will secure to yourselves the richest pleasures and most invaluable benefits.*

The richest pleasures. How joyous, to leave the closet, and assembling with our family, to change the solitary, My Father and my God, into the social, Our Father and our God. What satisfaction, to acknowledge together with those we love the divine blessings, and thus see the the mercies of God multiplied in each dear object of our affections! What happiness, to see ourselves instrumental in implanting the seeds of piety and virtue in the youthful minds of the children who join with us! What felicity, to add a communion in devotional feelings to our communion in situation and interests! What a serene pleasure will be felt during the day, from considering that we have committed our families into the hands of a merciful God, and secured in their behalf the guardianship of Providence, to save them from unnecessary dangers and trials! With what composure can we lie down at night, when we remember that we have afresh had access to the blood of sprinkling for the pardon of the sins we may have committed during the day; and have implored the protection of the Shepherd of Israel during the night-watches! How will it smooth the bed of death, to remember how often in our family we had fellowship with God; to recollect that we have sincerely and perseveringly, though feebly, performed this important duty. Oh! my brethren, could you feel the sweetness of these pleasures, you surely would not voluntarily reject them.

Besides, a variety of important *benefits* will result to you from the practice : blessings for the body and

the soul for time and eternity. "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich." And if you daily and devoutly seek it, you have a right to expect this blessing, so far as shall be consistent with your greatest good, upon your secular affairs. Your parental authority will be strengthened by presiding in these solemnities, and religion will afford its aid in increasing the respect and veneration of your family for you: the affection of your children and domestics will be highly excited towards you, when they observe the interest which you take in their happiness, and the warmth with which you spread their necessities before God: family dissensions will be prevented or healed. How can they be bitter or malignant towards each other, who, morning and evening, unite in their prayers to a common God, and supplicate for common blessings? The ties of conjugal affection will more firmly be knit together. "This affection can never have so lasting a basis as when it is founded on religion. In numberless instances, when the charms and novelty of beauty have lost their power to please; when the clouds of adversity have thickened around, this principle has discovered its energy in strengthening the mutual attachment of those in this relation, and in reconciling their minds to their condition; joint prayer has inconceivably increased their attachment, has alleviated their cares, and given double relish to their enjoyments.* Besides, the presence of your family, while you are employed in these solemn exercises, will tend to increase your own fervour, to warm your heart, and to engage you more earnestly in the performance of duty and in opposition to sin. Have you no need of these incentives? Are you already so zealous towards God, that you may neglect these means of growth in grace?

* Hunter in Sc. Pr.

Let your own happiness, your own interest then, urge you to attend to this duty.

Consider as a

4th Motive, the happy effects which this practice may have on all the members of your family.

My dear brethren, do not consider this merely as an awful duty ; it is an inestimable privilege. To be convinced of this, make for a moment the fearful supposition that God should forbid *you* to pray in your family ; imagine a particular interdict upon your house ; that by some special and immediate signification of the mind of God from heaven, it were declared, “ From all the other houses in the place, from every other habitation in the street where you reside, I will permit prayer to rise to me ; I will hear and accept the family supplication : but from your house, I will accept no domestic sacrifice ; I will hear no prayer.” Were a voice from the throne of the Eternal to declare this to you ; were the finger of God miraculously to inscribe over your door, “ Here shall be no prayer ; no kneeling by the family before the most High God ;” say, my brethren, would you regard this prohibition as a privilege, or as a dark, an awful, and terrible doom ? Would not your hearts almost break, while looking at the poor forlorn members of your family, you exclaimed with those ancient Jews, (Amos vi. 10.) “ We may not make mention of the name of the Lord ?”

Blessed be God, this is not the case with any of you ! the mercy-seat is open to your families : you may pray ; and your wives, if pious, may by this exercise be cheered and animated ; or if unholy, may through the blessing of God, be converted. It is not unusual for God in this way, “ by the believing husband to sanctify the unbelieving wife.” Your children, in-

stead of being hardened by belonging to prayerless families, may perhaps early be brought to the Redeemer; and at any rate, the instructions received during these exercises will not be useless. Many an eminent believer dates his first serious impressions from the family prayer. At all events, you deliver your own soul, and need not fear their reproaches when you stand together at the bar of God.

I reluctantly pause in the consideration of motives to this duty: I have been obliged but imperfectly to exhibit a few, and to omit many highly impressive: but still I trust enough has been said to convince you, if you are open to conviction; enough to deliver me from your blood, if you are obstinately resolved to persevere in the omission of so plain, so important, so sacred a duty.

But perhaps the objections resting upon your minds may render this whole discourse useless, if they are unanswered. Renew your attention then, my brethren, while in the

Ild. Place, with a studied brevity, I examine these objections, and show their weakness and insufficiency.

1. The first objection that is made is this: 'I am in such a hurry of business, and my avocations are so numerous, that I have no time for family prayer.' But where do you find it mentioned in the scriptures that family prayer is the duty only of the idle and unemployed? Do not all the motives that have been urged apply as strongly to you as to the most unoccupied person in this assembly? Is it not your duty to contract your business, if it is so extensive that you cannot attend to the concerns of piety, and the everlasting interests of your soul?

‘Your business is so extensive!’ This, instead of being an excuse, should be a strong incentive to this duty. What but this can be a sufficient guard against those temptations which increase as your business increases? What but this can preserve you unspotted amidst the allurements and seductions which your multiplied avocations oblige you to meet? What but this can prevent you from being led astray by the illusions of those passions which would have laid dormant in retirement, but which are called into action and exercise by the hurry of the world? But extensive business not only multiplies your temptations, it also augments your trials and your cares. And what but this daily and solemn acknowledgment of the overruling Providence can enable you to sustain these with patience and without sin? Think how inferior is earth to heaven, time to eternity, and then you will confess that it is no loss to devote a half hour, morning and evening, in preparing for death, judgment, and everlasting realities. Ask yourself for what other purpose time was given you, but to glorify God and save your soul, and then say, whether it ought all to be bestowed on the transitory toys of earth. Look over your life: do you not daily find time for vain thoughts, for trifling occupations, for frivolous conversations, which neither mend the heart nor improve the mind: and yet, great God! they want time to acknowledge thee, to deprecate thy vengeance, to implore thine eternal mercies! Remember how Joshua, amidst his numberless public occupations; and David, who had the care of a whole kingdom; and Daniel, notwithstanding the multiplicity of his engagements; and a thousand others, whose moments were as fully and as well occupied as you, found time to worship God with their

households. You would find time also, if you loved God as much ; for believe me, my brother, it is not want of time, but want of inclination, which prevents you. I pass to a

2d. *Objection* : ‘ I am not able to engage in this exercise ; words and expressions fail me when I kneel down with my family.’ I acknowledge, my brethren, that fluency in prayer is not always proportioned to the piety of the heart ; that there are good men, who nevertheless are unqualified to lead the devotions of our public assemblies. But I believe there are few, who are in the habit of praying frequently in their closets, who may not in an edifying manner pray in the bosom of their families ; for prayer does not require us to display great acquirements of mind, profound penetration into the mysteries of God, or an elegance of language ; but only that we should reverently acknowledge the perfections of God, humbly confess our sins, fervently petition for his favours, gratefully speak of his goodness, and ask for the different orders of mankind those things which they need. There is nothing in all this beyond the attainment of the most common person. In disease, in poverty, in affliction, you have found it easy to reveal your situation to those who could relieve you. The feeling of your wants gave you a natural and persuasive eloquence ; and did you feel equally for the wants of the soul as for those of the body, you would find it easy to reveal them. Let your heart be warmed by the sacred flame of religion, and from its abundance your mouth will speak. By a diligent study of the scriptures, you may lay up a store of proper and touching expressions. And if you are timid and trembling at first, take some of those excellent forms of prayer for families, of which we have so many in

our language, and assembling your family, kneel down with them, and read these reverently and solemnly. You will soon outgrow the necessity of such helps, and in the mean time the duty, if your heart be engaged, will be acceptably performed. For, though I ordinarily do not approve of forms of prayer for families, yet I fully agree with the excellent Dr. Doddridge, that “if any had rather that a family should be prayerless, than that a well chosen form should be solemnly and gravely read in it, he judges as absurdly, as if he had rather see them starving to death, than fed out of a dish whose materials or shape are disagreeable to him. And now,” (I am still quoting from Doddridge,) “if the matter be come to this, that you will rather sacrifice all the benefits of family prayer, than submit to the trouble of reading a well composed address, which, with a small portion of Scripture before it, would not perhaps take up more than a quarter of an hour’s time; indeed, indeed, you must be condemned by God and your own conscience. In such a view, both must testify, that it is neither want of leisure, nor want of ability, which prevents you from discharging your duty, but a stupid indifference about it, or rather, a wretched aversion to it: the natural consequence of which might, if a little reflected upon, be sufficient to throw the most careless and arrogant sinner into an awful alarm, if not a trembling consternation.” I know not whether I need mention a

3d. *Objection*: ‘This duty is so generally neglected, that by attending to it I should expose myself to derision and ridicule.’

I should hope that there is no individual so utterly base and lost to feeling, as to present this plea. What! to forsake God because the world forsakes

him; to abandon the exercises of religion because others disregard them; to cleave to him only when it is fashionable; and fly from his standard as soon as the enemy makes a vigorous assault! It is a mean cowardice, equally repugnant to every principle of honour, and every sentiment of piety. I can conceive no address more calculated to lay hold on the heart, than the words which our Saviour directed to the apostles when he was forsaken by the multitude, "Will ye also go away?" That others neglect it, should only impel us to this duty. We must exercise a holy singularity; and he must lay his account to undergo eternal perdition who will renounce the duties of religion for fear of the sneer of a profligate, or the jest of a fool. Remember the words of our Redeemer, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." (Mark viii. 38.) I have sometimes heard a

4th *Objection* urged: 'I am convinced of the propriety of the duty, and I should rejoice if it were introduced into the family; but I cannot prevail on myself to introduce it after so long a neglect.' That is to say, in other words, you are too proud and too obstinate to confess and amend what you know and acknowledge to be a sin. Is this an excuse that you dare present to God? The essence of repentance is to turn from our evil ways; and surely you can never expect the blessings of penitents, if you refuse to go forward in your duty, because you may meet with some difficulties and mortifications. The adversary will endeavour to magnify these difficulties and mortifications, and cause them to appear much greater than they really are. But granting them as

great as you suppose, still know you not that we cannot be the disciples of Christ except we will deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow him? It is a false shame that deters us from duty: it is shameful that we have so long neglected this practice: it is honourable to be convinced of our guilt, and resolved to correct it. Instead of diminishing, it must greatly increase the esteem of your family, if you tell them with solemnity that God has been pleased to teach you how wrong you were in failing to acknowledge him, and that henceforth you are resolved to establish his worship. Act thus, I entreat you, for be assured that there is scarcely a more dangerous symptom, than to be convinced of the impropriety of our conduct, and yet to persevere.

5. I can recollect but one objection more that has any plausibility: ‘There are female heads of families, who may plead their sex as an excuse for the omission of this duty.’ I grant that it is more proper for the man to lead the devotions on such occasions; but if there be no man in the family, I can perceive nothing in the least degree inconsistent with decorum in your attention to it. You are forbidden by the apostle, you are forbidden by propriety, to speak in the church; but neither of them forbid you to kneel down in the bosom of your families, and reverently pour out your prayers to the Lord. Thus let the widowed mother implore the divine blessing upon her children, and early teach them to reverence and adore God. I can scarcely conceive a more interesting spectacle, than to see a mother, from whose embraces her partner has been torn by death, kneeling with her offspring at the throne of grace, and pouring out their united prayers to the Judge of the widow, to Him in whom the fatherless

find mercy. And let those mothers, whose husbands are prayerless, while they exercise all Christian prudence and courtesy, often retire with their children, to pour out before God the warm sentiments of religion and of maternal affection.

I have answered all the objections which deserve notice. Bear with me a few moments more, while,

III. I give you a few brief directions for the performance of this duty.

1. Let it *daily* be performed: each morning and evening let your prayers ascend to God. It is the custom of some families, who have not entirely neglected this practice, to attend to it only on the Sabbath. This is a shameful trifling with sacred things; it is saying, in effect, that religion deserves our attention only when we cannot attend to worldly things. All the ends of this practice are thus defeated. Our souls, as well as our bodies, need frequent refreshment; and the prayer of the Sabbath will do little good, if the whole week is to be given to the world. Nature itself teaches us that when we rise in the morning, free from weariness and worldly care, it is a proper season to thank God for the rest and preservation of the night, and to supplicate his guidance and protection through the day; and that evening is a proper season to bless him for the mercies of the day, to pray for the pardon of the sins committed during its course, and to implore his guardianship during the night. Be careful, then, to begin and close each day with the worship of God in your families.

2. Before engaging in prayer, *read a portion of the word of God*. This is paying but a decent respect to the scriptures; and besides, this will render your mind solemn, and will afford instruction to you and

your family. Reading will prepare you for prayer, and prayer will render your reading useful. An intimate acquaintance with the scriptures will also afford you much instruction, both as to the matter and form of prayer; will suggest proper ideas to present to God, and a proper dress in which to clothe them.

3. Seek an affecting *sense of your wants and miseries*. A deep feeling of our needs, of our guilt, of the unmerited mercies which God has bestowed upon us, is the best preparation for prayer.

4. Finally, engage in it *with fervour and sincerity*. Like Joshua, unite personal with family religion. If you would have this duty tend to the comfort of your souls, to the glory of God, or the benefit of your families, watch diligently against formality. You will never be accepted by God, if you merely bring your bodies before him, while your minds are wandering after the enjoyments or vanities of earth.

And now, my brethren, what effect shall this discourse have upon you? I am so convinced of the importance, of the absolute necessity of this duty, that I confess I am more than usually solicitous that this address should not be without some fruit.

Ye who worship God in your families, persevere; urge to the performance of the duty your friends who neglect it; and especially be careful to walk suitably to your profession, and let there be no contradiction between your prayers and your conduct.

Ye who have hitherto neglected it, let me importunately and affectionately entreat you this day solemnly to introduce it. To-day, call together your family; tell them that God has been pleased to convince you of your duty, and that you are resolved henceforth to worship him in your houses. Kneel

with them; beg forgiveness for your past omission, and ask for strength to persevere in your pious resolutions. I beseech you thus to act this very day; put not off the execution of this plan till the morrow. If while the motives are fresh in your minds, they fail to draw you to God, they will never be able to do it: and if in this assembly there should be a single communicant who is the head of a family, and who has hitherto neglected this duty, let me especially entreat him no longer to omit this practice. On the next Sabbath, you will again surround the table of the Lord. Let it be a part, and it will be a noble part, of preparation, to rear that domestic altar which ought long since to have been erected in your houses.

O brethren, if you all act thus; if the worship of God be generally and sincerely established among us; with what joy will this day be ever remembered by you and by me; with what confidence may we then look forward to an effusion of the Holy Spirit upon us! But if you are resolved still to persevere in your omission, I leave you to your conscience; I leave you to that God where we must soon appear—I, to answer for this address; you, for the effect that it has had on you.

SERMON LXXXVI.



TEMPORARY FAITH.



LUKE viii. 13.

They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy ; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

IN those places where the gospel is preached, we generally find a few unhappy men, deserving our pity and our prayers ; who scoff at the truths of revelation, and madly and impiously reject that great atonement, without which there can be for us no solid hope of felicity. But this is very far from being the case with the great majority of those who enjoy the light of the scriptures. Constrained by their consciences, by the evidences of truth which beam from the holy volume, by the wonderful and exact adaptation of the gospel to the state and condition of man, and by the influences of the Holy Spirit, accompanying the word which he inspired ; by far the greater part in gospel lands acknowledge the Lord Jesus to be the only Saviour of sinners, and profess to believe the sacred volume. But have they all that faith which is connected with salvation ; by

which we are interested in the promises of God ; obtain pardon, and a title to eternal glory ? Ah, no ! my brethren. Many have merely that faith which consists only of a naked assent of the understanding to the truths contained in the scriptures, while the heart is unaffected, and the life unchanged. This faith, which St. James teaches us is possessed even by the devils, and which therefore cannot lead us to heaven, is termed *historical faith*. By this name, it is not meant that an assent is given only to the historical parts of the scriptures : this assent is bestowed also on the doctrines, the promises, the threatenings of the word of God : but it bears this title because the faith which is thus exercised, is like that which we give to the histories of events in which we have no concern, and by which we are little affected. Oh ! how different is it from that *justifying faith*, which unites us to Christ ; which is the foundation of communion with him ; which animates and purifies the heart, and is the vigorous spring of holiness and spiritual life. Intermediate between historical and justifying faith, is that faith which is called *temporary* ; unlike the former, it is not a mere cold assent of the mind, but is attended by ardours of soul, by delightful emotions of joy, by some reformation of the life. Unlike the latter, it is not accompanied by regeneration, by the implantation of an abiding principle of holiness, by an interest in the covenant of God, and the righteousness of Jesus.

It is of unspeakable importance to us, my brethren, to understand the nature of this faith. Many have perished for ever, who had hoped for heaven, because they had substituted this for saving faith. Many still upon earth, who are only temporary believers, are expecting future glory, while the curse

of the law impends over their heads. Let us then, search our souls, and see our true characters; and while we are thus employed, may God himself enlighten us, and save us from fatal self-deception. "Search us, O Lord, and know our hearts; try us, and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting."

Let us,

I. Consider some of the scriptural examples of temporary faith; and,

II. Compare it with justifying faith.

I. In the parable of the sower, the character of the temporary believer is strikingly delineated. Indeed, it is from this parable, that the name itself is derived: the Saviour says, (Matt. xiii. 21.) "he hath no root in himself, but *dureth for a while*." In the original it is, (*προσχαίρος εστι*,) "*is temporary*."

You recollect that the design of our Redeemer in this parable is to represent four different classes of hearers: the careless; the enthusiastic, deluded, temporary believers; the worldly-minded; and the sincere. The second class are thus described: "Some seed fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprang up; but because they had no deepness of earth, when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had not root, they were withered away." These words he thus expounds: "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy, receiveth it, and for a time believeth: yet he hath not root in himself, but *dureth for a while*; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." Nothing can be more precise or accurate than this delineation. These persons are com-

pared to *stony* or *rocky* ground, totally unfit for the purposes of cultivation, and unable to bring forth fruit to maturity. In vain will the husbandman employ his labours, and the rain of heaven descend upon it. It is an impenetrable rock, into which the seed cannot enter. Nevertheless, over this rock is cast some rich and luxuriant *mould* or *earth*, which receives the seed, nourishes it for a time, and causes it to put on the most promising appearance ; but which has so little depth, that though the seed suffers no detriment while the refreshing dew is on the earth, yet it withers and dies so soon as the sun rises and shines upon it with force. This *rock* is the unrenewed heart, averse to God and holiness, indisposed to all that is good. The scriptures in a thousand places use this emblem to denote its hardness and insensibility, till it is changed by the Spirit of grace. This *luxuriant earth*, spread on the surface of the rock, receiving the seed, causing it to expand and produce a beautiful and promising, but transient and inefficacious verdure, finely represents those lively and impetuous *passions*, that are easily moved by the objects of religion, and that produce effects which, though they are in reality, but the glows and ardours of natural feeling, yet so nearly resemble many exercises of real piety as to be often mistaken for these exercises by these persons themselves, and by others. You see then, their character. Their depraved wills and unsanctified hearts render the instructions of the gospel of no avail to them ; yet their warm imaginations and lively passions are so easily impressed, and so powerfully moved, that the best effects would be produced, were there only a principle of solid piety in the soul. Such is the great outline of their character : what is their conduct ? “ They receive the

word ;” or, as St. Luke expresses it, “ they believe for a season.” Unlike the infidel, who rejects with disdain the messages of heaven ; unlike the careless hearer, who scarcely deigns to listen to the declarations of God, he gives the assent of his mind to the truths of religion, and his imagination being excited, and his passions inflamed, he displays such earnestness and zeal, while he affirms that he believes us to impose upon himself and others. For after all, this faith, not being wrought by the special operation of the Spirit of God, not being connected with a renewed mind, will profit him nothing. He receives the word, adds the Saviour, “ *immediately.*” Unembarrassed by any doubt, indisposed to inquire, to examine, to compare, without that deep and painful combat, which the believer has to sustain, he is impetuously carried forward, he knows not how or wherefore, and looks with pity and scorn upon those who calmly, steadily, and surely, are advancing in the Christian course. He receives the word, says the Saviour, “ *with joy.*” Yes, it is not uncommon to behold these deluded men, indulging in ecstasies and raptures, for which they have no warrant, and which are founded only on natural passions, the illusions of self-love, or the sentiments of pride. It is not uncommon to behold them casting a disdainful eye upon the meek, and lowly, and humble Christian ; charging him with hypocrisy and insincerity, and crying, “ Stand at a distance ; we are holier than thou !” Such is their character and their conduct ; they sometimes continue this course till death, and find not, until their error is irretrievable, that they have been deluding themselves with false hopes, and unfounded confidences. But generally they remain not long in the profession of that faith to which they

appeared so devoted. “ They have no root within them ;” no solid principle of piety in their hearts ; and their passions being exhausted, and their imaginations fatigued, they by and by relapse into their former insensibility. Their goodness, like the early cloud, and the early dew, vanisheth away ; they neglect the exercises of religion ; they forsake the society of the pious, and substitute the customs, the maxims, and the sentiments of the world, in the place of their former zeal, their boasted confidence, and their solemn professions : or, if persecution for the sake of religion should assail them, instead of thus silently withdrawing, they will openly disavow their Saviour, and laugh at the precepts of piety.

The character of temporary believers, and the high and glittering attainments that they may make, without any real piety, are represented also by Paul, Heb. vi. 4, 5, when he speaks of the deplorable situation of such persons, when they openly apostatized from religion, although they had once “ been enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.” They were not, it is true, the children of God, through the special operation of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is said in the traits by which they are described, of their saving faith in Christ, nor of their love, nor of their regeneration, nor of their being sanctified by the Spirit, and justified by the righteousness of the Saviour ; nor of those other characteristics which are peculiar and appropriate to the child of God ; yet how far had they apparently advanced ? They had been *enlightened* ; they knew what were the truths of God ; and as they doubted not of the divinity of the scripture, so they were acquainted

with its doctrines. They had "*tasted of the heavenly gift*," had some delight from contemplating the blessings offered through Jesus Christ, the unspeakable gift of God; they had been *partakers of the Holy Ghost*, in his common graces, and his extraordinary and miraculous gifts; they had "*tasted the good word of God*," had been pleased with the prospects it presents, with the offer of pardon, and deliverance from hell; they had tasted the *powers of the world to come*, had been charmed to think of the joys of heaven, and with satisfaction anticipated the possession of them.

I intended to have presented other scriptural representations and examples of temporary believers; but the limits of these exercises will not permit me, and I must hasten,

II. To compare together this temporary and justifying faith.

1. He that has only a temporary faith, may have as full and connected a view of the doctrines of religion as he who possesses saving faith. He may see the force of the arguments which prove the divinity of the scriptures; he may illustrate the difficulties in the holy volume; he may defend its peculiar sentiments against heretics with greater ability and success than many an humble child of God; he may speak on these subjects with sincerity, for he is not a hypocrite when he asserts his full persuasion that the gospel is heavenly and divine; he may be the instrument of convincing the sinner; of instructing, animating, and consoling the pious: but still there is a difference even in the mode in which he and the true believer receive those truths of which neither of them doubt. The child of God sees in them a glory, an excellence, and a loveliness, principally as the perfections of God and the excellences of Jesus shine in them. To this

true beauty revealed by the Spirit, and the ground of holy love and esteem, the temporary believer is a stranger. He can prove that God is holy, but he feels not as the saint or the angel feels that exclaims, "Glorious in holiness;" and so with respect to other truths. In comparing together the truths of the gospel, these two classes of men are differently affected. True believers doubtless rejoice at the promise of deliverance from hell, and the enjoyment of celestial felicity; but they have incomparably more joy at the promise of deliverance from sin, and the acquisition of perfect holiness: on the contrary, temporary believers principally rejoice in the prospect of deliverance from misery, and are comparatively little moved with the promise of spotless purity. The child of God, when thinking of the great salvation, is filled with gratitude and wonder; but is especially touched and affected with that ineffable love from which this salvation proceeded: while the blessings included in this salvation principally engage the temporary believer. It would be easy, in other respects, to point out a difference in the mode in which they regard divine truth.

2. They may be compared in respect to the *duration* of their faith. It is to saving faith alone, that perseverance is promised. I do not assert that all who have temporary faith, return to open vice; on the contrary, as I have already asserted, I am persuaded that many die in this faith, and find, alas! too late, that they have deceived their own souls; nay, I doubt not that many who for a long time had only this counterfeit of piety, have been finally elevated by the grace of God to the exercise of true faith: but there is no principle of perseverance in temporary faith; no promise that it shall be maintained; many have

fallen from it; and that all do not fall, is owing not at all to its nature, nor to the engagements of God.

3. These two species of faith may be compared in their *origin*. Both indeed proceed from God; but the one proceeds from that common grace which, though it indeed confers some spiritual as well as temporal blessings, is enjoyed both by the wicked and the good; the other, from special grace, which is bestowed only on the heirs of glory: the one from the Holy Spirit acting as the Spirit of illumination; the other from him acting as the Spirit of adoption and regeneration.

4. They differ in the *joys* which they communicate. Oh! what an opposition between the true spiritual joy of Christians, and this delusive counterfeit of it. The one is sober, rational, substantial, collected; the other is the wild, airy, unauthorized dream of a madman, who supposes himself great and powerful. The one fills the heart with humility, and causes him who is animated by it to lie low before God; the other inflates the heart, and causes the imaginary favourite of heaven to forget the station which he ought to hold before the Lord. The one is attended by candour, meekness, benevolence; the other deals the thunders of God with unsparing hand, and stigmatizes all who have not precisely the same raptures, and who do not entertain precisely the same sentiments as hypocrites, formalists, or impostors. The one is a torrent, impetuous, rapid, devastating, transient; the other is a mighty stream, steadily rolling its waves along, and instead of failing, growing deeper and wider till it empties itself into heaven, the region of joy. The one is the heat of a fever which impairs the constitution and endures but for a season; the other is our natural warmth,

tranquil, equable, and lasting. The one finds in this joy the proof of its justification ; the other derives its joy from scriptural evidences of justification.

5. I add but one more point of comparison. Justifying faith is always attended by real *sanctification*. Not only is the outward man reformed, but the love of sin is expelled from the heart, and a holy principle implanted there ; and it becomes the great object of the believer's life to live and die for Christ. The temporary believer may, like Herod, do many things gladly ; may outwardly reform his conduct ; may have transient purposes and endeavours after a stricter piety ; but still the heart itself is not purified ; new habits of holiness are not there introduced. No wonder then, that he frequently grows weary in well doing, and returns again to the paths of sin.

Let this subject lead to self-examination. Are there none of those now living in open sin, who might have served as originals of the picture which we have drawn after the word of God ? Remember your engagements on your sick beds. Remember the vows and the external reformation which we observed with joy when God visited you with afflictions. Remember the seasons when you apparently forsook the ways of sin, and spoke with gratitude and affection of the Saviour. Then so warm, fervid, engaged in the exercises of religion, you excited the hopes of the church and the expectations of the pious, that you would be their eternal companions. Why is it that you have blasted these hopes ? that you have wrung the hearts of the pious, and caused them, instead of rejoicing at your felicity, to weep and tremble at your lamentable situation ? Why is it that, instead of advancing in holiness, you have receded into the path of sin ? It is because you had no root ;

because you were a stranger to renewing grace ; because, notwithstanding all your splendid appearances, you never felt the power of true religion ; because you had only temporary faith.

Professors of religion ! deeply examine your souls : many have been as confident as you, who have declined from the right ways of the Lord : many appeared to shine as bright as you, who yet set in darkness. Search then your souls ; apply the tests given in the holy scriptures. In the day of judgment, many will be rejected as the utter enemies of the Lord, who were thought by themselves and others to be his friends. Zealous professor ! see that your zeal be according to knowledge : strange fire, as well as that which descends from heaven, may burn upon the altar. Dull and slothful professors ! there is cause for you to fear ; and the subject should rouse you and quicken you in the pursuit of holiness.

Open and daring sinner ! whose whole life has been a course of rebellion against God, if the righteous scarcely be saved, and if even the temporary believer shall be destroyed, where wilt thou appear ? What will be thy doom when, in the retrospect of thy life before the holy tribunal of God, there shall be found nothing but sin ? Oh ! in time be wise : seek grace from God to become, not merely a temporary, but a real believer ; not only almost, but altogether a Christian.

And thou who, after prayerful, and conscientious, and minute scrutiny of thy heart and life, findest reason to believe that thou hast a true faith on the Son of God, fear not ! notwithstanding thy weaknesses, and dangers, and enemies, thou shalt be preserved ; while the self-confident and those that have no root, shall be awfully disappointed : thou art feeble, but

thy Redeemer is mighty; “the Lord of Hosts is his name.” Praise him for the grace he has shown to thee, and trust him for the accomplishment of all his promises.

SERMON LXXXVII.

FAITH OF THOMAS.

JOHN XX. 29.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

YOU recollect, my brethren, the occasion on which these words were uttered: Jesus had risen from the tomb; he had appeared to all the apostles except Thomas; their united testimony to this great truth could not convince him; he had insisted on the testimony of his own senses, exclaiming, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Jesus might justly have left him in his unbelief, but he condescends to satisfy his desires. Thomas, convinced by his own senses, was confounded at his former unbelief, and adored Jesus as his Lord and

his God. The Redeemer then addressed him in the words of the text: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Faith, resting upon the word of promise, upon a divine testimony, is more noble, spiritual, and ingenious; displays more candour and humility, and brings more glory to God, than that which is the result of sensible manifestation.

In illustrating these words, let us,

I. Examine the nature of that faith which is here commended by our Saviour; and,

II. Show that those who possess it are blessed.

I. What is the nature and what are the properties of that faith, to which a peculiar blessing is here promised by the Saviour?

Faith, in its most general sense, is the strong persuasion of any truth, the firm assent of the mind to it. This persuasion may be founded on the evidence of our senses: thus Thomas believed that Jesus was risen, because he saw, felt, and heard him; thus I believe there is a sun, because I behold it, and am warmed by its beams. Sometimes this persuasion is founded on the deductions of reason: thus, because I discover in the universe so many effects, to produce which there must have been an intelligent First Cause, I believe there is a God. Thus our Saviour says to the Jews, (John x. 37.) "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works;" where he calls upon them to rely not merely upon his testimony concerning himself, but to consider rationally the quality of his works, and to ground their assent to his claims not merely upon authority, but upon principles of reason.

But though the word faith is thus used, both in common language and in the scriptures, to signify that persuasion which is founded on the evidence of the senses or the deductions of reason, yet, in its more strict and proper sense, it denotes that assent of the mind which is founded on testimony. It is in this manner we believe, although we do not see. Thus I am told that there is such a city as Rome, such a river as the Nile; and though I have never seen them, I am persuaded of their existence, because it is confirmed to me by witnesses who had opportunities of knowing, and who had no interest in deceiving me. Their testimony fully supplies the place of the evidence of the senses or the deductions of reason. If the testimony be that of man, there results from it human faith; if the testimony be that of God, there results from it divine faith; if it be of God through Jesus Christ and his apostles, there results Christian faith. Thus, in their general nature, that human faith, whereby we are regulated in our worldly pursuits, in our studies, and our sentiments; and that divine faith, whereby the life of the Christian is directed, agree; although they differ in their objects. They both consist in crediting facts past or to come, facts authentically attested, facts which we believe without having seen them, and which we cannot refuse to believe, without rejecting or invalidating the authority of the witnesses and the certainty of their testimony. It is true the scriptures sometimes use the word faith in a more vague sense, but this is its natural and proper signification: an assent of the mind to all revealed truths, which we believe without having seen them, on the testimony of God. Thus it is exhibited by the apostle when he declares, (John iii. 33.) “ He that hath received

his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true ;” while “ he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he hath not believed the record which God gave of his Son.” (1 John v. 10.)

But that we may more fully understand the nature of this faith, let us consider a few of its properties :

1. It is *enlightened*. To believe without seeing, is very different from believing without evidence or proof. The declaration of our Saviour only shows us that faith, instead of being supported merely by our senses or our reasonings, rests upon a different and a firmer foundation, the testimony of that God “ who cannot lie.” The believer is not a weak being, receiving every thing without examination ; nor an enthusiast, assenting without motive or light. He is commanded to “ prove all things, as well as to hold fast what is good ; to search, to examine, to try the spirits ;” he has been illumined by a celestial light ; he has seen the clearest evidence that the scriptures are the word of Him who can neither be deceived nor deceive ; he devotes the powers of his mind to the examination of the divine testimony ; and is “ ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him.”

2. This faith is *humble*. A thousand objects connected with the being, attributes, and purposes of God, with the schemes of providence, or the plan of redemption, necessarily present to him abysses which no finite mind can fathom ; but, filled with veneration and wonder before the Infinite, the incomprehensible, he submits his understanding ; he strives not to break through those barriers which the Eternal has placed around his throne ; with the seraphim he veils his face while he cries, “ O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of

God !” Instead of disputing when God has clearly pronounced ; instead of forgetting his nothingness, and citing before the tribunal of our feeble reason Him, “ whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain,” he submits his understanding to the instructions of the All-Wise, and answers every objection by remembering, “ the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

3. Thus humble, it is also *firm*. The foundation of his belief is more stable than the heavens and the earth. Instead of being shaken by every wind of doctrine, the sport of every illusion, he rests upon the decisions of Him who is immutably faithful and true ; in the midst of conflicting human systems, he has an anchor entering within the veil. It is not a mere probability, a wavering hope, an uncertain guess ; but the declaration of God, on which he rests his assured belief, and his everlasting interests.

4. This faith is *universal* in its object : receiving as true the whole of the sacred volume, its histories, its predictions, its doctrines, its precepts, its threatenings, its promises. Since all the scriptures proceeded from God, and since when he speaks there can no longer be any doubt, there can be no event so surprising, no doctrine so mysterious, no prediction so improbable, as to be rejected. In this manner the believer is distinguished from those inconsistent men who, while they acknowledge the scriptures to be the word of God, and receive part of it as true, reject all that they cannot fully comprehend. It is true, indeed, that while faith extends to the whole revelation of God’s will, it especially centers on the Lord Jesus Christ, and on the plan of redemption ; but though it rightly regards this as the

most important point of the scriptures, there is nothing in the holy volume which it disregards.

5. Finally, this faith is *active, efficacious, purifying*. It is not confined to a barren admiration of the truths and facts that are revealed ; it descends into the heart, and sanctifies all its powers ; it receives the precepts and commands of God as well as his promises ; it requires the sacrifice of corrupt passions, as well as the submission of our reason. No, brethren ; all the predictions, types, shadows, holy examples, of the Old Testament ; all the miracles of Jesus, his sublime instructions, his sufferings, his death, his glory, the triumphs of his gospel ; the display of the attributes of God, the revelation of the joys of heaven and the agonies of hell ; could not have been intended merely to attest to us some facts, to announce to us some truths, and at the same time to leave our hearts unholy, and inaccessible to all the sentiments of piety and divine love ! Let us not deceive ourselves ; the conviction of the understanding must pass to the heart, and then be manifested in all the actions of a holy life. See the believers of all ages : armed with the shield of faith, they have quenched the fiery darts of Satan, have overcome the world, and borne the fruits of holiness. Imitate their example, or suppose not that you have that faith which animated them.

Such is the nature of that faith which is here commended by our Saviour. Let us,

II. Inquire why those who thus believe, although they do not see, are blessed.

1. They are so because they display true wisdom, both in the choice of objects to occupy their mind, and in the rules they follow in giving their assent to them. They select for their belief, their confidence,

and contemplation, the most important truths. A God, sovereignly perfect, all whose attributes fill them with veneration, wonder, and love; the august works of creation and providence; the ineffable mystery of redemption, into which even the angels desire to look; the statutes of heaven; the realities of eternity. Such are some of the objects which faith presents. Place by their side the most sublime human sciences; and in comparison, these sciences, to him who judges without prejudice, and with a reference to the eternal duration of man, will appear only a vain and pompous ignorance. How trifling, in reality, are the pursuits of the greatest earthly philosopher, if he is ignorant of the science of salvation! But if the choice of objects justifies the wisdom of believers, so also do the rules which they follow, in order to give their assent to the things which they believe, though they see them not. Inquire of those great men, who have elevated themselves above the rest of their species by the certainty and extent of their knowledge, what path they have pursued in their investigation of truth; they will answer, that, in subjects susceptible of mathematical evidence, they are contented only with rigorous demonstrations; that in physical science, they require sure and satisfactory experiments; that in examining facts, they seek for witnesses, whose capacity and fidelity, in giving their testimony, they investigate. They would blush to say, I do not believe that Cyrus, that Alexander, have lived, because I have not seen them. They would regard as ignorant of the very first principles of reasoning, the man who would refuse to assent to proper testimony, and who would believe nothing which had not been subjected to his senses, or for which he could not give conclusive reason. Nay,

further, they would acknowledge, that in all things, in the minutest insect, in the smallest atom, there are difficulties, to explain which mocks all their sagacity. Those who have most profoundly investigated are those that have most felt the weakness and the bounds of the human mind; and with one voice they would tell you, that what is clear and evident cannot be destroyed by what is obscure; that a truth cannot be denied, merely because there is connected with it some unanswerable difficulty. Such is the path in which the true philosopher treads; and such is precisely the path of the believer. He is assured of the existence and perfections of God by reason and by feeling. He knows that this God, the Father of spirits, as well as the sustainer of our bodies, can make known his will, not only by visible and natural means, but also by extraordinary and supernatural modes. He has weighed and considered the internal and external evidences which give to the volume of revelation the impress of divinity. The types, the prophecies, the miracles, those truths, so transcendent that they could not have entered into the heart of man; those laws, so calculated to promote the perfection of our nature and to elevate us to communion with God; the stupendous and harmonious display of the divine attributes in redemption; those motives, so noble, so energetic, so touching; those consolations so abundant; the inward illumination and testimony of the Spirit of God; banish from them every doubt that this book is the testimony of Jehovah. And then, whatever mystery or darkness may rest upon any subject, does not reason itself imperiously command them to believe, although they do not see? Is not their conduct far more rational than that of those persons, who, be-

cause religion opposes their vices, declare it is false and contradictory; or of those who, while they reason correctly on other subjects, abandon their principles when they come to the consideration of the truths taught in the scriptures, and because they cannot comprehend and exhaust infinity, believe nothing; who, compelled to admit the force of testimony on other subjects, reject it in these; and refuse to believe miracles, or a resurrection, or judgment, or heaven, or hell, because they have not actually seen them? More happy and more wise are they who are contented to behold with the eyes of God what they cannot behold with their own; who submit to be directed by the infallible Father of lights; who, "though they see not, yet believe."

2. Happy also because they act not only in the wisest, but also in the most advantageous manner, since they thus avoid misery, and secure felicity.

On this part of my subject I need not dwell long; it has often been illustrated before you.

Without this faith, what overwhelming doubts, what cruel uncertainties, what multiplied fears, surround us! Whence am I? why was I called into being? what will be my future destiny? are questions which are unanswerable.

Without it, what hope has the penitent? Can God forgive the rebel, in consistence with his holiness? May all sinners obtain pardon? In what mode can the remission of our sins be secured? These and a thousand other questions are unanswerable.

Without it, what adequate consolation is there to the persecuted and oppressed? What relief to the bereaved? What comfort to the dying?

I conclude, my brethren; but let me first speak one word to those who believe only what they see.

Let me press and conjure them by all that our religion has most sacred, most tender, most touching, again to examine, calmly and without prejudice, the principles of our faith, their certainty, their connexion with temporal and eternal felicity. O God, Father of all thy creatures, exhaustless source of light, of grace, and of love, tear the veil from their hearts; let not their souls, the work of thine hands, be degraded and perish! Let not the souls created for immortality be constrained to envy the lot of the brutes. Lord! give them faith.

And let us, who call ourselves Christians, indulge gratitude and love for the glorious light of the gospel. May we experience more and more the exceeding greatness of his power in us who believe. Since, whatever is mysterious in the objects of faith, our duties are clearly displayed, let us so act that the unbelieving may never cry to us, with an insulting tone, "Show us your faith by your works." Let us fix our hearts in heaven. After a short period of darkness, all veils shall be rent; faith changed into distinct vision, and we be made to comprehend all the extent of our happiness. Days of glory! Light of the New Jerusalem! blessed are the eyes that shall behold you; blessed the hearts that shall there ever be inflamed with divine love; blessed all they who, having here believed, although they saw not, shall there receive the rewards graciously promised to faith, and, with heavenly spirits and glorified saints, adore Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb that was slain!

SERMON LXXXVIII.



CAUSES AND CURE OF MELANCHOLY.



PSALM xlii. 11.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul ! and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

THIS psalm was probably written at the time when David was obliged, by the rebellion of Absalom, to flee from Jerusalem. From the land of Hermon he looks back upon the holy city, where he had enjoyed the ordinances of religion: where, instead of the taunts and jeers of the profane, which he now had to suffer, he had gone with the multitude and held communion with God. This retrospection, together with the external afflictions he was suffering, filled him with pain; but his chief distress arose from the cloud of spiritual desertion: he had no longer a sense of the favour and love of his God. (ver. 7.) But instead of yielding to his grief, he reasons, he expostulates, and endeavours to rouse up his former confidence: “ Why art thou cast down, O my soul ! and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou

in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

My brethren, there are always two classes of men in the church whom we regard with pity. The first consists of those unhappy men who, though the slaves of Satan, and the heirs of sorrow, have a false comfort and an unfounded hope; who have a peace nurtured only by presumption, that shall perish when God taketh away the soul." Such are not interested in this text, or this discourse. They must be disquieted and alarmed before they have any warrant to use these words. On the contrary, there are many pious but timid believers, who are always full of fears; who live below their privileges; whose souls are ever "cast down and disquieted within them." Though the Lord is the "God of comfort," though the Saviour died that they might have peace, though the Spirit is so often termed "the Spirit of grace and consolation," though all the ordinances of religion were appointed that "their joy might be full," yet they still remain dejected and afflicted. Let them learn from David their duty; let them imitate his example; and like him experience again "the joy of God's salvation."

Our discourse shall have three parts:

I. What are the causes why the pious are sometimes, like David, afflicted with religious melancholy and distress of soul, which cause them to be dejected and cast down.

II. Why should they, with the Psalmist, endeavour to rise from this state. And,

III. What are those means whereby they may again obtain peace, comfort, and a calm trust in God.

I. The causes of religious melancholy are various. Sometimes they spring from without us, and from the

agency of other beings upon us; sometimes they arise from within, and solely from ourselves.

1. Sometimes our *compassionate Father*, who in mercy visits us so often with external afflictions, is pleased, for the same benevolent reasons, to make us suffer internal sorrows. The beams of his countenance no longer shine upon his children; the witness of the Spirit is withdrawn; the sense of the love of God is intermitted; and then the strongest and most confirmed Christian must droop and be disquieted. Then he will understand in a degree the feelings of his Saviour, when he exclaimed, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” As when the sun is eclipsed, all nature appears to mourn, so every thing is gloomy to the believer, when any thing interposes between his soul and the gracious countenance of his God.

2. Sometimes *Satan* is permitted to disquiet and distress the children of God. This apostate spirit, hating holiness and happiness, delights to harass and torment those that are escaped from his bondage; as he cast down innocent man, so he desires to depress the pardoned sinner; as he withered the beauties of Eden, so he endeavours to bring trouble into the calm and approving conscience, the paradise of the soul. And the Lord, who from intended evil can educe good, permits the adversary sometimes to depress the souls of his followers: and then wisely, powerfully, and mercifully, overrules his designs for their increase in the divine life, and their preparation for richer joys.

3. With Satan, *wicked men* often concur to depress and cast down the pious. This was the case with David on the present occasion. They sneered at his religion, at his hopes, and at his God. “As with

a sword in my bones mine enemies reproach me; my tears have been my meat day and night, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" (vers. 3 and 10.) Alas! do we not still see the same efforts made by the ungodly, by sneers and scoffs, by reproaches and ridicule, to shake the peace of those who have walked comfortably with their God?

But the great causes of our dejections and melancholy are to be found in *ourselves*. If there were nothing within us on which Satan and wicked men could operate, their assaults would be harmless. And if there were no corruptions within us that needed to be mortified, no feeble and languishing graces that needed quickening, the light of God's countenance would never be withdrawn. Were we perfectly holy, like those in heaven, like theirs, "our sun should never go down, but the Lord should be our 'unceasing' light." Let us then consider what are those circumstances in ourselves which so often cause Christians to go mourning and bowed down.

1. There can be no doubt, that in many persons, religious melancholy arises from the temperament of *the body*. As those of a sanguine disposition are too apt to entertain hopes unwarranted by the word of God, so those of a melancholy frame too often "write bitter things" against themselves, and reject those comforts to which they have a title. And when the body is disordered by disease, from its intimate and mysterious sympathy with the soul, *this* also is frequently affected. So common did the experienced and excellent Richard Baxter suppose this ground of melancholy, that he remarks, "Of a hundred melancholy persons of real piety, with whom I converse, I find ninety-nine who have more need of the physician than of the divine." Painful and distressing as

is the gloom resulting from this cause, it is not sinful. "The Lord knoweth whereof we are made; he remembereth we are dust;" and he will no more impute to us as a crime, what results from the power of a bodily disease, than he will condemn us for wandering thoughts or idle words in the delirium of a fever, or in raging madness.

2. *Ignorance* and *error* are very frequent causes of religious melancholy. Every part of the gospel is calculated to give comfort to the sincere believer; but, alas! there are many who, from misconceptions of its general tenor, or some of its particular doctrines, pass their lives in sorrow. Intellectual as well as natural darkness, is the parent of many false fears. This one is bowed down from mistakes as to the nature of *godly sorrow for sin*. Because his grief has not been so profound, attended with so many tears, and continuing for so long a time as that of some others with whom he is acquainted or of whom he has heard, he supposes he is still impenitent; although he has had such an humbling sense of his sin, his danger, and his misery, as to make him feel his indispensable need of Christ and mercy, and bring him to an unfeigned desire and consent to be the disciple of the Saviour, and be saved on the terms of the covenant; and though his humiliation and self-loathing continue and increase. This one supposes he has no right to hope, because he is not always *full of joy*: as if a weeping Mary was not dear to the Redeemer as well as a rejoicing Thomas. This one will receive no comfort, because he is a *babe* and not a father in Christ; because he has not attained to the same maturity of grace as older and more experienced Christians: as if there were not different ages in the church as well as in the world;

as if the “bruised reed and the smoking flax,” were not objects of our Saviour’s regard, as well as the stately palm-tree and the cedar of Lebanon. In one word, (for it would be impossible to enumerate all the particular errors that produce disquiet,) the want of a full and clear view of gospel truth frequently mars the joys which we otherwise might feel.

3. The *sins* into which the people of God have sometimes fallen, have often caused their “souls to be cast down and disquieted within them.” At such times the Lord has fulfilled that declaration concerning them: “If my children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes; nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.” (Ps. lxxxix. 28, &c.) Sin, committed against light, like Jonah in the ship, or Achan in the camp, will cause a storm and commotion in the conscience. It has often driven persons to the verge of despair; and though after many tears and pains, and much wrestling with God, they may have obtained pardon, yet the conscience still has trembled: as the sea still is agitated after the storm has ceased.

Such are the principal causes of religious dejection and melancholy. Let us now inquire,

II. Why, like David, we should endeavour to rise from this state.

There are many whose piety appears to consist only in groans, and fears, and doubts, and lamentations. To such God cries, as he did to Joshua, “Get you up, why lie ye thus upon your face?” To such Jesus cries, “Let not your hearts be troubled;

ye believe in God, believe also in me." Let such therefore, with the Psalmist, expostulate with their own soul, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Your duty to God, as well as your own happiness, requires this. How imperfectly are all the Christian duties performed by you, when you are thus "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow:" how unfitly do you worship Him who loves a cheerful and a thankful giver? Your melancholy hinders your *faith*; your troubled, dejected spirit, will not receive with full trust and confidence those great tidings of joy contained in every page of the gospel; and though you dare not in direct terms contradict the Lord, yet do you believe as you should, his full and free promises, and his readiness to embrace and crown all returning prodigals? And is not your *hope* destroyed by this temper; that hope which gives so much glory to God, and communicates so much felicity to the believer; that hope which might serve as an anchor to your soul amidst the storms and commotions of earth? Instead of this, we behold in you only fears, and apprehensions, and gloom. It inspires you with injurious *thoughts of God*, and destroys that sense of his infinite goodness and love, which would animate you to obedience. And after all he has done for you; after all the kindness with which he has followed you, and the mercies with which he has loaded you, do you thus requite him? Where is that *joy in the Holy Ghost*, and that *peace* which constitute so large a part of the kingdom of God; that *delight in the Lord and his works and ways*, which he so often enjoins, and which he so much approves? Where that satisfac-

sion in the *word of God*, which should be experienced by you? Instead of deriving from it comfort and peace, every promise is rejected, and every threatening applied to yourselves. If *mercies* are bestowed on you, they are diminished in your esteem, since you consider them only as increasing your sin, and marked with no impression of a Father's love. You receive not *the gospel* with that temper which becomes it. Angels and men rejoiced together when Jesus was manifested as the deliverer of the captives, the Saviour of the perishing, the refuge of all who would flee to him; but these glad tidings of everlasting joy are heard by you with sadness, and melancholy, and doubt; the *ordinances* of religion become unprofitable, or at least, lose their sweetness for you; prayer becomes a mere complaint, and not a child-like supplication; preaching carries no peace to your heart; the sacrament fills you with terror; the anticipation of *death* causes your heart to faint within you; under your dejection, you regard it as the certain entrance to everlasting misery; instead of cheering and animating your *fellow-travellers* to Zion, you damp their spirits and deject them; and you give a false idea of religion to the *careless world*, causing them to believe it the parent of sorrow, instead of the source of joy.

Surely then, you will not contentedly remain in this state; you will strive to acquire such a frame of mind, that you may praise the Lord "as the health of your countenance and your God." Do not, with so many, suppose that a dejected and an humble spirit are always the same; they are so indeed, when we are abased in the dust under a sense of unworthiness, and at the same time, lifted up by a sense of the divine mercies, and the fulness of the atonement.

This was the humility of Paul, who, while he terms himself “the least of all saints, and the chief of sinners,” could yet add, “I know in whom I have believed.” Ah! how different is this from the temper of those who neglect the consolations of God.

But what are those means, in the use of which melancholy and dejected believers may hope again to obtain peace, comfort, and a calm trust in God? We are to answer this question in the

III^d. division of our discourse.

1. Imitate here the example of David, instead of yielding to a vague grief; cite your soul; *inquire* of it the particular cause of your sorrow: different remedies will be requisite, according to the different sources of your distress: and be careful that you trifle not with God, and your comfort, and your salvation, while you inquire of your soul, “why art thou cast down?” Be impartial; there is another and more solemn judgment to succeed: be persevering; like the Psalmist, return again and again to the investigation: be prayerful; self-love, or the delusions of your heart, may otherwise deceive you. Pray then to God, to “search you, and see if there be any wicked way in you.”

If on this examination, you find that it is some sin in which you have indulged that has separated between God and you, that has darkened your evidences, and implanted sorrow in your bosom, attempt not to seize on comfort till you have renewed your repentance. The examples of Peter and David may show you that God will not speak true peace unto you, till you have first been humbled before him. Abase yourselves then before God; flee afresh to the blood of atonement; spread your iniquities, with all their aggravations, before the Father

of mercies and the compassionate Redeemer; and for ever renouncing them, plead for their forgiveness that sacrifice which is the only hope of the sinner. The peace which a conscience, troubled by its guilt, obtains in any other manner, is the most awful judgment which God can inflict, and is only the prelude to everlasting despair.

Do you find, on examination, that it is not from the ravages of any gross sin in the conscience, that your heart is disquieted within you; but from the perplexity of your mind, concerning religion, or doubts respecting the state of your souls and your spiritual condition? Other remedies then must be applied.

2. Be careful to *understand the gospel-scheme of salvation*; especially the nature, the terms, the intent of the covenant of grace. Ignorance, it cannot too often be repeated, is a great cause of distress of soul to the godly; and frequently they mourn when they are invited to “draw water with joy from the wells of salvation.” Remember that the very intent of the covenant of grace, is to exalt the riches of God’s infinite mercy above all the sin and unworthiness of man.

3. Study also the *promises* of God; view them in their variety, their extent, their application to you. Do not be content with reading them in your scriptures, but consider the promise and Christ in it, and plead it before the throne of God. Often the believer walks in darkness, when there is a declaration suited to his very case, which he disregards from ignorance or neglect; but which, were it pleaded before the Lord, would cause light to spring up in his soul.

4. In your devotions, be much employed in *praise and thanksgiving*, instead of principally occupying

yourselves with lamentations. If you cannot do this with all the joy that you would, do it as well as you can. You have many mercies; God demands the tribute of gratitude for them; and whilst you are paying it, your trust in him will be more confirmed, and thanksgiving will excite thankfulness in your heart. In your meditations, confine not yourselves to your own distempered hearts, but dwell much on the ineffable mercy of God; on the unmeasurable compassion of the Saviour; on the love displayed in redemption; on the perfection of his merits, and of the covenant sealed with his blood; and on the full and free salvation which hath been accomplished, and which is offered to all who do not obstinately refuse it. While you frequently muse on these and similar subjects, your hearts will burn within you, and you will be enabled to rejoice in God. In your conversation, do not accustom yourselves to complaints and lamentations: reserve these for your secret counsellors and friends. To speak of your fears perpetually, will only nourish your melancholy and discourage others: but converse of the love of God; of the riches of grace; of the preciousness of the Saviour. This will animate and enliven you.

5. Be not unacquainted with your own hearts; *examine* them, to see the marks of conversion, and to "make your calling sure" to yourselves. Whilst on the one hand you guard against presumption, on the other, suffer not Satan to blot your evidences; and do not, by a false humility, rob God of the glory due for his renewing grace: instead of at once listening to your fears and doubts, and relinquishing all hope, come to the word and to your consciences, enlightened by the Spirit, and make an impartial examination.

6. But do not confine yourselves to this self-examination ; be also engaged in *active duties* ; many persons remain year after year, looking only at themselves, and still uncomfortable. Instead of this, be engaged in active duty, and add grace to grace. The growing and fruitful Christian, will be a comfortable one ; a degree of peace and satisfaction will follow every good action ; and your graces, acquiring maturity, will shine by their own light.

Do you say, ‘I have endeavoured to do all this, but I still fear lest I be not interested in the favour of God ; I still doubt of the sincerity of my faith and other graces ?’ If so ; now, this day, this moment, terminate your doubts by giving yourselves up to Christ. You know not whether you have hitherto been a true believer ; but you know that Christ is this moment offered to you ; that he is ready to receive, to pardon, and bless you. Consent to the terms of the covenant ; accept the offer ; and you are certain that he is yours.

Use these and similar means prayerfully, and in humble dependence upon the Lord ; and then, though you have “sown in tears, you shall reap in joy.”

SERMON LXXXIX.



OFFENCES.



MATTHEW XVIII. 7.

Wo unto the world because of offences ! for it must needs be that offences come ; but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh !

THE apostles, to whom these words were addressed, found the fulfilment of them in the whole course of their ministry. Every where they met with opposition to the gospel, sometimes from the schools of the Gentiles, and sometimes from the synagogues of the Jews. When, notwithstanding all opposition, Christian societies were formed by them, new offences rose in the very bosom of these churches, and the apostles saw, with pain, disputes, heresies, divisions ; they were witnesses of the apostacy of many, and beheld churches that had received the gospel with joy corrupted by false teachers. It was to prevent them from being surprised by such events, and to fortify them in such trials, that our Saviour uttered the prediction and denunciation in the text.

But was it only to the apostolic age that Jesus had reference ? Is it only to the combination of Jews

and Gentiles against the rising gospel? Is it only, to the Hymenenses, the Ebions, the Cerinthus, who then troubled the church, that the text is applicable? No, my brethren; it also is addressed to us, and from it we may derive the most solemn and important instructions.

The word *offences*, not only in the text, but also in by far the greater number of passages in the New Testament where it occurs, is used to signify those hindrances to piety and inducements to sin which some men lay in the way of others. The original term primarily denotes *stumbling blocks*, and means, when used in a moral sense, “whatever actually makes or has a manifest tendency to make men fall, or be remiss in the ways of duty.” Whatever is calculated to lead them into error or vice, to seduce them from the true faith, to weaken in them the fear of God and the love of religion.

In the further consideration of this text, let us,

I. Inquire why “it must needs be that offences come.”

II. Examine what are the chief offences against which we should guard.

III. Illustrate the propriety of the double wo denounced by our Saviour.

I. Let us then inquire why “it must needs be that offences,” obstructions in our path to heaven, seductions to sin, occasions of falling, must “come.”

1. Not from any defect or fault in the gospel of the Redeemer. On the contrary, when we consider the beauty and excellence of this system, the love that it breathes, and the charity that it displays, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, the grandeur of its motives, the sweetness of its consolations, the tenderness of its promises, the majesty

and glory of the prospects that it unveils to us, the firmness of its proofs, and its evident tendency to promote the happiness of individuals and communities; we should at first suppose that none would ever be found who could endeavour to obstruct its progress, or hinder its efficacy.

2. Not that God necessitates men to lay before others these hindrances in the path to heaven, and these encouragements to sin. He is a God who hateth iniquity, and who calls us to holiness. He has given his Son to save us from our sins, and he offers to us the riches of his grace. Yet he foresaw that, notwithstanding this his goodness, unless he continually interposed his almighty power to prevent offences from arising, they must come: and this, no doubt, for reasons infinitely wise, he determined not to do.

3. Why then must "it needs be that offences come?" A sufficient answer to this question is given in our Saviour's words to Nicodemus: "Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." It is the very excellence of the gospel, not any defect in it, that causes men to oppose it, and offences to come. Had it been announced only to angels, to saints, or to men without prejudices or unholy passions, it would never have met with opposition. But it is too pure and spiritual to suit corrupted and carnal man: it forbids indulgences which he loves; it requires duties not conformed to his taste and disposition; it too strongly enforces those obligations to God which he endeavours to forget; it too plainly presents that judgment-bar at which he shudders; it too terribly reveals the wrath of God against all unrighteousness and ungodliness: and it too impressively exhibits to

the sinner the dreadful sentence to be pronounced at the last day, and the everlasting punishment to be inflicted on those sins which he is unwilling to renounce. From the corruption, the prejudices, and the passions of fallen man, it must then needs be that offences come.

And God has thought proper to permit them: the entire prevention of them, by the immediate exercise of his omnipotence, would not have been accordant with the state of trial in which we are placed; it could not then have been shown who received the truth in the love of it. This is the reason which the apostle Paul assigns for the permission of one great class of offences: "There *must* be heresies among you, that those who are approved may be made manifest;" and in all other offences, there is a similar trial of sincerity and uprightness. Besides, if these offences had never been suffered, we should have had less glorious displays of the wisdom of that providence which now "makes the wrath of man to praise" the Lord, and which brings the richest blessings to the church and to the pious, from the most malignant designs of their enemies. We should have found incomparably less sweetness in the promises, if trials and temptations had not obliged us to flee to them for support. We should have seen far less of the care of God, in defending his church; of the tenderness of Jesus, in guarding his children; of the power and grace of the Spirit, in cherishing our graces and carrying us to the world of glory, if there were no impediments in the path to holiness and heaven. For these, and similar reasons, God has permitted offences to come.

II. Let us examine what are the chief offences against which we should guard; what are some of

the most common modes by which men are led to neglect religion, or to practise sin.

1. False sentiments in religion, and doctrines inconsistent with the word of God, often prove an offence, and tend to lead others away from God and from felicity. There is an intimate connexion between correct opinions and holiness of life. God requires of us the subjection of the mind to him, as well as of the affections and conduct. Jesus will be a king to protect and bless, and a priest to atone and intercede only for those who humbly acknowledge him as their prophet, and seek instruction from him. Do you then reject the holy volume, and endeavour to propagate your cold, and heartless, and degrading, and destructive sentiments? Or, professing to receive the scriptures as the word of God, do you nevertheless reject any of its essential doctrines, or pervert its practical precepts, and teach men to disbelieve the solemn truths or sacred mysteries which it announces, and to form to themselves a lower standard of morality and holiness than it enjoins? By you the offence cometh. You may be successful in deluding others; you may find many unable to unravel your sophistry or resist your sneers; you may harden their hearts, and sear their consciences: from the false principles that you infuse, and the fatal persuasion which you give them that their state is already safe, you may render them inaccessible to all the charitable reproofs of men, to all the merciful or alarming providences of God. But woe to you for the dreadful victory you have gained! a victory, the sad consequences of which you shall feel when the light of eternity bursts upon your disembodied spirit; a victory that shall ever be deplored both by you and your wretched victims.

2. But even where the religious principles are unshaken; where men, though they hate the truth, cannot doubt it; they frequently give offence, lay snares and occasions of falling before others, by the influence of unholy example, or direct seductions to sin. From the mutual dependence of men, from our union in society, and the influence of example, our conduct must have some effect on each other. If our light does not shine and lead others to glorify our Father in heaven, we shall render them contented with the darkness in which they are enveloped. There is not a happy spirit in heaven that has not animated others in their progress thither; there is not a lost soul in hell that has not contributed to drag others to that doleful abode. Unholy examples have peculiar influence, because they find within us an enmity to the holy restraints of the gospel, and passions ready to be inflamed; and seductions to sin too often prove fatal when urged, as they frequently are urged, in the tone of pretended affection, or dressed with the persuasive charms of eloquence. And if, in addition to all this, these are the examples of those distinguished by their talents, their wealth, their situation in society, who can calculate their fatal effects? Oh! how many have we seen undone by this offence, this hindrance to their salvation! At first they shuddered at the vices of the unholy with whom they associated; they gradually became familiarized with sentiments and conduct which once filled them with horror; they at last blushed at the scruples which they once felt, imitated the vices of their guilty seducers, and were lost, for ever lost! Wo unto *them* for their criminal compliance! but wo also unto *those* by whom the offence came!

Let me add, that unholy examples especially become a snare and an offence, when they are exhibited by those to whom we are united by the tenderest relations. Fathers, mothers, who have so fondly cherished your offspring during their infancy, and in whose life your own is now wrapt up, let this consideration reach your heart! By an irreligious example, by a neglect of Jesus, by the indulgence of vice, place not a stumbling-block before these children, over which they may fall into guilt, into ignominy, into perdition. Give them not occasion hereafter in hell to lift up their eyes, and curse you as the authors, at once of their being and their ruin.

3. There have been seasons when persecution of all who were the disciples of the Redeemer, and opposition to the gospel by outward violence, formed a common class of offences. Thus it was in the time of the apostles; thus it has frequently been since: often has the attempt been made to drown religion in the blood of its followers; and though such endeavours have been unavailing, though new glory has been reflected upon the gospel from the patient sufferings and triumphant raptures of those martyrs who “counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might win Christ:” yet at such periods, others have resembled the stony-ground hearer, who “receiveth the word with joy, yet hath not root in himself; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, by and by he is offended.” It is true, my brethren, this is a trial from which we are exempted. We are not called to choose between the renunciation of our religion, and the sacrifice of our fortunes and our lives; but though we have not to fear “bonds, scourging, and imprisonment,” we have often to endure what the apostle joins with

them, and what is frequently as difficult to be sustained, "cruel mockings." How many, whose convictions are stifled, and whose holy resolutions are destroyed, in consequence of "the world's dread laugh;" and who, though they appeared for a moment to be awaking to a sense of the importance of eternal things, are driven back into folly and guilt, by the sneers of the wicked, and the sarcasms of the enemies of God.

4. You have doubtless, my brethren, anticipated me in thinking of another class of offences: those which result from the unsuitable walk of professing Christians; from a conduct corresponding, neither with their privileges, their engagements, nor their hopes. There are few unregenerate men who do not, at times, feel, while reading or hearing the word of God, that a great and radical change must take place in them, or they be for ever undone: but, alas! how often are these salutary convictions crushed, when they look around and observe the little difference that there is between themselves and those who bear the name of Jesus. They behold the covetous professor, as eagerly pursuing the treasures of this world, as though he had never heard of everlasting riches: the wordly-minded professor, mingling with shameful avidity in every scene of gayety and dissipation, and giving no evidence of that spirituality and heavenly-mindedness which must distinguish all who are "crucified with Christ:" the censorious professor, who thinks better of himself, in proportion as he speaks worse of his neighbours; whose conversation abounds with invective, with reproach, with slander; and in whom we in vain seek any resemblance to that Jesus who wept over the errors of men: the bigoted professor, who would confine the

affection and the interest of Jesus upon earth to his own particular sect, and who feels no sympathy nor love for believers of any other name. When the impenitent behold such characters, (and would to God they were rare spectacles in the world!) is it wonderful that they feel encouraged and confirmed in their evil courses? And oh! tell me, is it not a circumstance that deserves to be lamented with tears of blood, that the Saviour should thus be wounded in the house of his professed friends; that those who call themselves his disciples, should alienate others from him, and be accessory to their everlasting ruin!

The observations which have already been made, in a great degree,

III. Illustrated the propriety of the double wo pronounced by our Saviour.

Wo to the world, because of offences; for many in all ages will be seduced by them from the ways of truth and piety; many will become the victims of those who imitate the great enemy of God and man, “going about and seeking whom they may devour;” and though others have contributed to their destruction, yet this will not save them from the merited punishment of their iniquities, since they voluntarily yielded to sin and Satan, in opposition to the entreaties and commands of their God and their Redeemer.

But especially, “*wo to that man by whom the offence cometh.*”

1. Because he frustrates, as far as in his power, the end and design that the Saviour proposed to himself in coming into the world. Jesus came to free men from the slavery of sin and Satan, to render them holy, to make them “meet for the inheritance of the

saints in light," to "destroy the works of the devil." But the design of him, by whom the offence cometh, is to seduce others to pervert them, to plunge them into the gulf of despair. It is for this reason that Paul, in speaking of those who offend the weak, says, (1 Cor. viii. 11, 12.) that "they sin against Christ, and cause the brother to perish, for whom Christ died."

I know, my brethren, that there are few who formally and deliberately propose to themselves the black and horrible design of destroying the soul of their neighbour. But what then? Does this excuse you from guilt? If the offence that we give, naturally produces this effect, and if we cannot be ignorant of this; if by our conduct or our language, we show to others the path of vice and disobedience; if we induce them by our example, to walk in it; nothing more is necessary to expose us to this anathema of our Saviour, "Wo unto that man by whom the offence cometh."

2. Wo, because he renders himself guilty of all the crimes that he has led others to commit. He renders himself responsible before the Judge of all, for all the souls that shall be lost through his fault. With his own burden he shall bear also that of others. And who can calculate the extent of evil that may be done by those through whom offences come? Those seduced by us, may seduce others; and they again, still infecting others, our guilt may be growing ages after we are dead. "The souls of those by whom offences have come, whether having repented and believed, they are lodged among the spirits of the blest, or confined in the mansions of misery, now look back to these offences, and their long consequences, either

with a solemn sigh of penitence, or with the pangs and groans of an overwhelming remorse for them."

3. Wo, because the reparation of these evils is morally impossible. Even should you yourself be converted and forgiven, yet still the acquaintance, the friend, whom you have perverted, may be lost for ever; and the venom of sin, with which you have infected them, may be extensively propagated, and burn on to other ages and in other worlds.

Surely then, we should be careful that offences come not by us, lest the blood of souls lost by our means, be required of us. Let us cry with David, "Deliver us from such blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of our salvation; and our tongues shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. Then will we teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." Let the threatening of our Saviour fill us with a salutary fear, and lead us to circumspection and diligence. Let us oppose to the torrent of offences and seductions, the light of our good works, the force of pious examples, the fervour and perseverance of our prayers. Let us never suffer ourselves to be shaken by the temptations of worldlings and sinners. Let us always remember that the religion of Jesus is not less heavenly and divine, though it does not produce the same effects upon all hearts, and though it should be even dishonoured by the conduct of some who profess to believe it. Let us resolve, depending on strength from on high, to adorn it ourselves by the holiness of our conversation, and the fervour of our piety. Let us wait patiently, and strengthen our hearts; since the day cometh in which the Son of man shall send forth his angels, who shall gather out of his kingdom all things which offend, and those which do iniquity; and shall

cast them into a furnace of fire, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; while the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

And now, to this God who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XC.



FORM AND POWER OF GODLINESS.



2 TIM. iii. 5.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

EVERY thing connected with the judgment-day is calculated to excite solemnity and reverence. Who can meditate without emotion on that trump which shall awake the dead; on the splendour in which the Judge shall appear; on the dissolution of worlds; on the vast assembly of intelligent spirits collected from heaven, earth, and hell? But there is another circumstance connected with that day, which, though less striking to the senses, is as interesting to the soul. It is the day in which the true characters of all shall be unveiled; in which the consciences of all shall

be developed; in which we shall be made perfectly acquainted with ourselves, and perfectly known to others. Then many, who once entertained no doubt of their salvation, will perceive with surprise and horror that they fatally deceived themselves, and will shudder while they acknowledge that, notwithstanding the false security in which they lived, and perhaps died, they were the enemies of God. Many, who deluded their fellow men, will then see that God could not be deceived, and will not be mocked. On many who were commended on earth, and on whose grave-stones was inscribed the eulogy of their piety, the Judge shall pronounce, "Ye are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting." Many who assumed "the form of godliness," shall then appear to "have denied its power."

This *form* is a profession of religion; the outward appearance of piety; the external performance of holy duties. Its *power* is the inward experience of its saving efficacy and grace; that is attested by a holy, heavenly walk and conversation. This power *is denied*, not merely by the declarations of the lips, but by all those actions which are inconsistent with it, and which prove that we do not feel its influence.

Brethren, "let us now judge ourselves, that we may not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.) Let us see whether we have both the form and power of godliness. Let us not fear to look fixedly upon our consciences, our hearts, and our lives. Let us see whether the foundation of our hopes can sustain the trial of the storms of death and the fires of judgment. Let us not madly purchase a false peace upon earth, by everlasting agonies in the world to come.

To assist us in this self-examination, let us seriously attend to the illustration of these three important truths :

I. A form of godliness is absolutely necessary, if we would be saved.

II. But this form is insufficient, unless it be united with the power of godliness.

III. Yet notwithstanding the clear evidence of this truth, there are many who satisfy themselves with the form, while they are destitute of the power.

I. A form of godliness is absolutely necessary, if we would be saved. We cannot reasonably hope for future felicity unless we externally worship God in the way of his appointment.

I commence with this proposition, that those who are utterly careless of their obligations to God and the Redeemer, may feel, that if the false professor must perish, they shall not escape. When the ministers of religion remonstrate with those "who have named the name of Christ," there are always some in our congregations who are inwardly congratulating themselves that none of these censures affect them. But are you therefore more secure? Because those, who insincerely profess themselves to be friends, shall be punished, does it follow that open enemies shall escape? Because those will be undone who falsely pretend to have the seal of the Lord upon them, shall those be delivered who treat with contempt this seal, and bear the mark of the foe of God and holiness visibly impressed upon their foreheads?

We are plainly and unequivocally commanded to assume the form of godliness; to testify by external acts our allegiance to the Lord; and to attend on those ordinances and sacraments which he surely did

not appoint that we might with impunity neglect and condemn them. On this subject God has spoken; we must obey, or expect the recompense of our disobedience.

Would we imitate the pious of all dispensations and of all countries? We cannot walk in the steps of patriarchs or prophets, of apostles or martyrs, except we have the form of godliness. If, like Nicodemus, we come only to the Saviour by night, and secretly, we are not esteemed his disciples. Would we resemble the inhabitants of heaven, redeemed sinners, and holy angels? They do not merely worship God in their hearts, but aloud pour forth their praises and thanksgivings, and express their obedience and love.

Would you imitate the blessed Redeemer? In Him there was the form of godliness; at all times and in all possible modes he externally testified his affection, and his delight to do the will of his Father.

Say not, that you secretly, and in your hearts, worship and love him. It is impossible that there should be internal piety without some outward manifestation of it. "From the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak." If "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, with the lips confession will be made to salvation."

Besides, what right have you to withhold the acts of external worship from Him who is "the God of all flesh," as well as the "Father of spirits;" who made your body as well as your soul; who confers upon it daily mercies; who purchased it by the sufferings of his Son, who when he was offered a sacrifice, not only endured agonies of soul, but was also crucified in his body; and who offers at the last great day to raise it up from the grave and crown it with immor-

talities and glory. "Glorify Him therefore in your body and your spirit, which are his."

Without the form of godliness, you will probably render yourselves guilty of the blood of souls; be accessory to the eternal perdition of some who are dear to you. There is no one, whose example has not some influence on those with whom he associates. Think then, that by openly neglecting God, by refusing to profess his religion, by turning your back upon his ordinances, you are hardening in guilt that child, that relative, that friend, who, deriving confidence from your example, may live and die careless of the blessed Redeemer, and may spend an eternity in the world of despair!

But suppose not that I am urging you to a cold and insincere profession of religion, for we are taught by the text,

II. That the form of godliness is utterly unavailing for our salvation without its power.

Though your observance of all outward ceremonies be unintermitted; though you often kneel before God; and diligently study the holy scriptures; and are constantly seen in the sanctuary; and seize every opportunity of approaching the sacramental table; yet if you rest in these external forms, if your soul be not engaged, if the vital power and transforming efficacy of religion be not felt in your heart, what doth it profit?

1. This mere outward service is a worship *not conformed to the nature of God*. This is taught us by our Saviour, "God is a spirit; and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John iv. 24.) The service that is the act merely of the body, is no more suitable to his spiritual nature than

are the statues that are sometimes placed in kneeling postures and devotional attitudes upon tombs.

2. It is not conformed *to the commands of God*: “My son, give me thy heart,” is his great injunction. (Prov. xxiii. 26.) That sacrifice in which the heart is wanting, though offered with pomp, with external reverence and devotion, never can rise acceptably before him.

3. It is not conformed *to the design of the mission of the Saviour, and the gift of the Holy Spirit*. If all that God requires is the form of godliness, it was not necessary that Jesus should become incarnate, and expire upon the cross: it was not necessary that the Holy Ghost, the promise of the Father, and the purchase of the Redeemer, should descend. Without the atonement, and without the influences of the Spirit, the form of godliness may be observed, and outward services paid.

4. It is not conformed *to the nature of that covenant which is the foundation of our hopes*. “This shall be the covenant that I will make, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts:” it is of such only that he declares, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jer. xxxi. 33.)

5. It is not conformed *to the examples of the pious*; all of whom have used language the same in substance with that of Paul, “The God whom I serve in my spirit.” (Rom. i. 9.)

6. It is not conformed *to the example of the blessed Redeemer*; concerning whom none can be so blasphemous, as to doubt whether his whole soul was engaged in doing and in suffering the will of God.

7. It is not conformed *to the great ends of religion*. These are to deliver the soul from guilt, to renew it,

to re-impress upon it the image of God, to make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. And how certain is it, that for these great purposes "bodily exercise profiteth little?" (1 Tim. iv. 8.)

III. Yet notwithstanding the clear evidence of this truth, there are many who satisfy themselves with the form without the power of godliness.

The testimony of scripture declares that it will be so; for it is not concerning the period when he lived, so much as the latter days, that the apostle speaks when he assures us, that the characters mentioned in the text shall be found in the church. The examples of the scripture prove that it has been so: that in every age "there has been a generation that are pure in their own eyes, though they have not been washed from their filthiness." (Prov. xxx. 12.) Who can, without a holy jealousy over himself, without solemn "searchings of heart," remember the foolish virgins, (Matt. xxv.) or those confident professors, to whom our Saviour directs our attention, and who will be filled with astonishment, when he shall say unto them in the judgment-day, "I never knew you;" (Matt. vii. 23.) or Ananias and Sapphira, Hymeneus and Philetus, Alexander and Demas?

Who can remember the deceitfulness and treachery of the human heart, the awful power of self-delusion, the subtlety and force of our spiritual foes, the ten thousand times ten thousand, who, after assuming the form of godliness, have "made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience," and not be convinced that an external profession is not necessarily connected with the power of religion?

But who are the persons to whom the dark traits in the text may be applied? I can only mention a few of the classes into which they may be divided.

At their head must be placed the *intentional hypocrite*, who knows that he is utterly destitute of love to God and the Redeemer, who has no desire for holiness, but who assumes the mask of religion to cover his sinful purposes. Than this character, none is more hateful to God and to man; none secures a deeper damnation. It would be trifling with your understandings formally to prove to you, that the greatest strictness and frequency of external performances will not recommend him to God. His hypocritical designs convert his prayers into blasphemy; his communions, into sacrilege.

The *cold formalist* has the “form of godliness without the power.” His intention is not to delude men; he has felt, in some degree, the importance of securing future bliss. He is, therefore, strict in the performance of the external duties of religion; and to this he may add a blameless walk with men, and many moral virtues. But examine nearer, and you find that he has forgotten that Christianity is emphatically the religion of the heart. You find that, amidst this round of duties, he knows not what it is to enjoy communion with God and the Redeemer, through the Spirit; that he knows not what it is to be born of God, raised from the death of sin, quickened and led by the Spirit, created in Christ Jesus to good works. He attends the ordinances, not as a motive and assistant to vital piety, but as a substitute, which he hopes God will accept instead of the piety of the soul. He attends them as awful duties, rather than as privileges and delights. With all his external strictness, he is only a beautiful corpse, without a vivifying principle; and his religious performances and “moral virtues are only sweet flowers strewed over this

corpse, which hide the loathsomeness of it, but inspire not life into it.”*

The vain *enthusiast* has “the form of godliness without the power.” You will not here misunderstand me; you will not suppose that I am adopting the wicked and contemptible cant of those enemies of God and holiness, who stigmatize as enthusiasm all ardour in the cause of the Lord, all warmth for the blessed Redeemer. Only let your zeal be well-founded, and it cannot be excessive. I am speaking of the stony-ground hearers, mentioned by our Lord, who received the word with *joy*; whose passions were all on fire, though their souls were unrenewed; who produced a beautiful but deceptive verdure, which withered when the sun arose, because they had no root in themselves. I am speaking of those mentioned by Paul in the sixth chapter to the Hebrews, who were strangers to regenerating grace, and who perished; but who, nevertheless, “had tasted of the heavenly gift,” had some relish of the excellence and preciousness of Christ, and “of the good word of God,” in which they had found some sweetness; and “of the powers of the world to come,” having had some transports and ecstasies of soul in meditating on that future felicity which they supposed was their own. I am speaking of those who substitute ardours and glows of soul, which arise from natural causes, for supernatural grace; who live, not by faith on Christ, but on their spiritual frames; who invert the order of the gospel, and derive the only evidence of their peace with God from the joys they feel, instead of deriving their joy from the scriptural evidence applied by the Spirit, of their

* Flavel I. 351.

peace with God. Oh! how many such have glittered for a time, as meteors, in the church, and then have set in darkness!

The *worldly-minded professor* has the form of godliness without the power. How many, who, while they observe the exteriors of devotion, yet show that the world, in some of its forms, has the first place in their hearts.

Perhaps he is a *covetous* man; and then, though he may often deplore the corruption, the frivolity, and dissipation of the age, yet the love of wealth will engross his affections, produce an eagerness to acquire it, a proud trust and confidence in it, and a resolution to preserve and increase it by any means.

Perhaps he is devoted to *worldly pleasure*; and, while he acknowledges the inconsistency of a covetous heart with the power of godliness, sees not how remote his own life is from that spirituality, that heavenly-mindedness, that superiority to earth, which mark the child of God. A circle of perpetual amusements, an immoderate pursuit of vain diversions, banish serious thoughts, render it unfit for communion with the Redeemer and the exercises of piety, lead to those vices and follies which mark the character of those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Perhaps he bows at the shrine of *ambition*, and intent only on earthly dignities, shows that he cannot be satisfied with that honour which cometh of God only.

The *bitter sectarian* has the form of godliness without the power. He thinks his zeal for a party a zeal for God; denouncing all who differ from him, he would confine the interest of the Redeemer upon earth to his own little sect. He forgets that unhal-

lowed passions may mingle with the defence of the most sacred truths ; that strange fire may be offered even on the true altar of God ; and that with the temper of hell we may combat for the doctrines of heaven. Such was Jehu ; zealous against idolatry, though destitute of piety. Such were the pharisees, who would compass sea and land to make one proselyte, though they were the children of Satan. Such were those, who thought they did God service by killing his children.

The *ensorious professor* has the form of godliness without the power. He thinks better of himself, in proportion as he speaks worse of others. He cries, with a proud elation of soul, "Stand by thyself; I am holier thou!" He has the temper of the pharisee, who exclaimed, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men!" Instead of being occupied with his own heart, and exercising upon it all his severity, he is watching every little irregularity of conduct or temper in others. Oh ! how much does he want the humility, the meekness, the candour of the gospel ! how little does he resemble that Redeemer, who has given us, as the test of our attachment to him, mutual love ! Alas ! the censorious professor acts as though Jesus had said, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye *hate* and *revile* one another.' "If any man among you," saith the apostle, "seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." (James i. 26.)

Finally, the *unfruitful professor* has the form of godliness without the power. He is the undutiful son in the parable, (Matt. xxi. 28.) who outwardly professes reverence for his father, but neglects his commands. His whole character is delineated by de-

claring of what he is *not* guilty ; but what does he for God, for his Redeemer, for the cause of religion, for the benefit of his fellow-men ? To these questions no answers can be given. He satisfies himself with crying, “ Lord, Lord ;” but not doing the will of God, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And now, my dear brethren, let us, in the presence of that God who beholds us, examine ourselves ; let us apply to our own hearts the truths to which we have listened. Are there any of us who have hitherto lived destitute alike of the form and the power of godliness ? Let such blush and be confounded, that, though created, redeemed, supported by God, they have yet lived lives of practical atheism ; lived precisely as they would have done, had the Saviour never become incarnate, nor the blood of atonement been shed. Oh ! for such disregard to their obligations to the greatest and best of Beings ; for such ingratitude to the blessed Jesus, let them be filled with penitential sorrow, and humbled in the dust ! And let those of us, who have the form, fear not to probe our own souls. If we are reluctant to examine, to search the sincerity of our profession, it is indeed an unfavourable symptom. Let us not dream away our lives in false security, and indulge a vain hope which will perish when God taketh away the soul. Let us see whether we have indeed understanding, and deliberately chosen God as our portion ; whether his will is our rule, and his glory our end ; whether Christ is “ formed in us the hope of glory ;” whether we are renewed by the Holy Spirit ; whether our conversation is in heaven ; whether we are rich in good works ; more careful of *being* holy than of *seeming* so ; lowly

and humble in our thoughts of ourselves; gentle and meek in our intercourse with others; faithful in the discharge of our relative duties; as attentive to the secret services as to the public offices of religion; whether, in one word, we are "the living temples of the living God, in which the Deity is both resident and worshipped."

May the Lord assist us in this examination; may he make us real Christians, whom he will openly acknowledge in the day of judgment, and on whom he will confer everlasting glory and felicity!

SERMON XCI.



REPENTANCE OF AHAB.



1 KINGS xxi. 28.

And the word of the Lord came unto Elijah, the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?

To understand these words, it is necessary to attend to the history of which they form a part. Naboth, of Jezreel, had a vineyard near to the palace of Ahab, king of Israel. The king, desirous to possess it, offered either to purchase it, or to give him for it one more valuable. Naboth refused to sell or exchange it, not through want of respect to his prince, but because it was the inheritance of his fathers, which the Mosaic law forbade him to alienate. Ahab returned to his house, "heavy and displeased" that his proffers had been rejected. Jezebel, his wife, having perceived his vexation, and learned the cause of it, corrupted the judges of Jezreel, caused Naboth to be brought before them as a criminal, suborned false witnesses, and procured the death of this pious Israelite. All obstacles being thus drowned in his blood, they took possession of his vineyard, and

gave themselves up to joy. But the joys obtained by guilt are of short duration. Elijah was commissioned by God, to go to this sanguinary oppressor and his impious partner, and denounce against them the judgments of heaven. The prophet, fearless of danger, hastened to execute his commission; and finding these royal spoilers in the vineyard, which was the witness and the price of their iniquity, thundered in their ears the denunciations of the Lord. "Behold I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male, and him that is shut up, and left in Israel. And I will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin; and the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." What effect was produced upon Ahab by this address of Elijah? Did he not cause the menacing prophet to share the fate of the innocent Naboth? No; agitated by conscious guilt, smitten by the terrors of the Lord, he grows pale, and trembles at the words of the feeble and unarmed prophet. For "it came to pass, that when Ahab heard these words, he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." Though this humiliation was not founded on holy sentiments, and proceeded not from a renewed heart, yet it nevertheless was effectual in averting, during his life, the miseries which had been threatened. "Seest thou," said God to Elijah, "how Ahab humbleth himself before me?"

Such was the occasion of these words. They lead to a variety of interesting observations.

I. *A person whose heart is unchanged, and who is totally*

destitute of real piety, may perform many outward religious duties, and have inward sentiments and affections, somewhat resembling the Christian graces. Look at Ahab; he displayed external marks of the profoundest humiliation; and probably very few real penitents have felt greater horror and agitation of mind than he experienced. Yet his repentance was not a holy act, was not that grace which God requires, was unavailing for all spiritual purposes. This is evident, from a variety of considerations; true humiliation has, as its source, a sense of the odiousness of sin, and of the excellency of that God whom we have offended, and that law which we have broken: but the humiliation of Ahab proceeded from a hatred of misery, not of sin; from a fear of the judgments of God, not from a sorrow for having displeased him; from a sense of the strictness, not of the excellence of the law. True humiliation causes us to repair the injury done by our sins, “to restore the pledge, and give again that we have robbed;” but Ahab thought not of restoring the vineyard acquired by crime. True humiliation is permanent; but Ahab returned again to his evil courses, despised the word of the Lord, uttered by Michaiah, and his black character is thus delineated in the inspired volume: “There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work iniquity in the sight of the Lord.” It is then evident that, notwithstanding his fair semblances, his apparent repentance, his heart was unrenewed, and he a stranger to true religion.

And would to God, my brethren, that there were none besides Ahab, who, by an appearance of piety, and by counterfeit graces, deceive themselves, and deceive others into a belief that they are holy, while in the unerring estimation of God, they are the slaves

of sin, and the heirs of perdition. But, alas! persons of this character are to be found at all times, and in all places. Open your scriptures, or look around in the world, and you will perceive numberless proofs of the truth I am illustrating. In the holy volume, behold Jehu throwing down the altars and destroying the priests of Baal: would you not say he is a man zealous for the God of Israel? Behold the punctilious regard of the Pharisees to the rites and ceremonies of the law: would you not say they were true disciples of Moses? Behold Herod hearing John Baptist gladly, and doing many things; behold the moral and amiable young ruler, who came to Christ anxiously inquiring the way to salvation; behold the five virgins holding their lamps in their hands, openly professing the true religion: would you not say, that all these were not far from the kingdom of heaven? Behold Judas after his treachery: he is oppressed with the sense of his guilt; he cries in agony, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood;" he throws from him with indignation, the wages of iniquity: would you not say he was a sincere penitent? Yet these persons, and numberless others that will readily occur to you, were in a state of alienation from God, were destitute of true religion, were exposed to the divine indignation. There are a thousand different causes which may produce these delusive semblances of piety. In some they are the effect of *restraining grace*, which binds up their corruptions, but does not destroy them; which chains up their sins, but does not crucify them; in others, by a *hypocritical desire* to be esteemed for their holiness, and obtain the reputation of piety; in some, a *pious education*, in which the duties of religion were enforced both by precept and example. has caused them

diligently to attend upon the public ordinances of religion, to perform many of its secret duties, to abstain from the gross pollutions of the world, and to lead a moral and regular life. Although no real change of heart may have taken place in these persons, yet they will probably be commended by Christians, who always desire to think as favourably as possible of others; and then this commendation of Christians will induce these persons to think favourably of themselves, and to suppose they have the "power" while they have only "the form of godliness." Others are affrighted by the *terrors of the Lord*, and the *threatenings of scripture*. These may induce them to pour forth floods of tears, to bewail their guilt, which has exposed them to such woes, to abandon many of their sins, and to resolve to reform in future. Persons who perceive these effects, will judge that these men are true converts; they themselves may judge so: but, alas! if they have advanced no further, they are humbled, but they are not converted; for though nothing but the evangelical virtue of the word can beget true and spiritual obedience, yet outward conformity may be produced by the terror of it. As nothing but vital principles can organize a living and true man, yet the violence of hammers and other instruments can fashion a dead stone into the shape of a man. Finally, the *common operations* of the Spirit on the minds of enlightened, but unrenewed professors, may produce effects nearly resembling his saving and special operations on the minds of the real children of God. Hence they may have strong and piercing convictions for sin; as Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Judas, and Festus had. Hence they may have a great excitement of affections in reading or hearing the scriptures; like the stony-

ground hearers, who, though they had no root, no nourishment of grace to support them, yet received the word with joy. Hence there may be a great outward reformation, a relinquishment of many sins, a performance of many duties; for Herod not only heard John gladly, but did many things which he enjoined. Hence may spring a delusive trust; for we read in the prophet Isa. xlviii. 2, of those who "stayed themselves upon the God of Israel," though they did it "not in truth and righteousness." Hence may arise a false hope; for Job acknowledges that hypocrites even may have this, although it disappoints them. "The hope of the hypocrite shall perish." If Christians feel a combat between corruption and grace, the unregenerate have something analagous to it. One lust or passion may struggle within them with another. Like Balaam, who, on the one hand, had strong desires for the wages of unrighteousness, and, on the other, was warned by his light and knowledge of the danger of taking them: thus arose a struggle in his heart, somewhat resembling the struggle in the Christian between the law of the members and the law of the mind. If Christians have *good desires*, so had Esau, who earnestly sought the blessing with tears; and Baalam, who exclaimed, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" and Simon Magus, who importunately requested the prayers of the apostle for him.

If Christians take great delight in religious ordinances, attend punctually upon them, and seem greatly affected by them, so did those of whom Isaiah speaks in his fifty-eighth chapter, and whom the Lord represents as utter strangers to vital piety; yet notwithstanding, says he, "they seek me daily,

and delight to know my ways; like a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of their God; they ask of me the ordinances of justice, and take delight in approaching to God." Yet under these fair appearances were concealed vile hypocrites, or miserable self-deceivers.

Unite the remarks that have been made, and you will be convinced of the truth of our first proposition, "That a person whose heart is unchanged, and who is totally destitute of real piety, may perform many outward religious duties, and have inward sentiments and affections somewhat resembling the Christian graces." Yes, my brethren, many stars in the church, which for a while glitter and shine, set in darkness; many, who have been esteemed by men to be eminent saints, have been accursed by God; many, who in their prayers thanked God for their hopes of glory, are now bewailing their miseries in the regions of wo! What a motive should this be to us, my brethren, diligently to examine the foundation of our hope, the ground of our confidence! Let us not be satisfied with those appearances of piety which will not stand the test of the judgment-day. Let us daily and impartially try our souls; and, sensible how apt we are to flatter and deceive ourselves, let us lift up our voice to Him who must finally and decisively examine us; let us implore his light and direction; let us cry to him with David, "Search us, O Lord, and know our ways; try us, and know our hearts, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting."

What terror should be excited in the openly profane, by the consideration of the truth which I have illustrated! If those who have such semblances of

holiness shall nevertheless perish, what must be the doom of you, who neglect the form as well as the power of godliness; of you who sit in the seat of the scorner; who mock at the ordinances, the people, and the word of God? Surely, against such Ahab himself shall rise up in the day of judgment; his humiliation, imperfect as it was, shall oppose your daring profanity, and shall draw down upon your heads the deepest vengeance. And finally, if those who are destitute of true piety sometimes perform such splendid acts, let those who are really renewed by the Spirit of God, be animated to diligence and activity; let their real and heaven-inspired graces be more frequently and exemplarily exercised, than the counterfeit graces of hypocrites and self-deceivers; let the real diamond shine more brightly than the false brilliant; let the reality of religion in them be more fruitful in outward acts than the semblance of it in the others. If these glow-worms shine so brightly, why should the holy lamps of believers, though fed with oil from heaven, burn so dim?

I present you with a

IId. Observation, deduced from the humiliation of Ahab. *How powerful is the word of God, which can humble the haughtiest oppressors, and make the most hardened of mortals tremble.* Notwithstanding the power of Ahab, notwithstanding his deep depravity, notwithstanding the hatred against Elijah which had long rankled in his bosom, yet no sooner did the prophet deliver to him a message from God, than he shakes with apprehension. The words fall like thunder upon his soul; his festivity is succeeded by horror and dismay; his royal robes are exchanged for sackcloth; his merriments and sports are con-

verted into groans and tears. Do you wish for other instances of the power of the word of God; other examples of sinners, obstinate and hardened like Ahab, who like him have, by its efficacy, been filled with terror and remorse? Behold the impious Saul surrounded by his troops, and elated by the victory which he has just acquired, terrified at the words of Samuel! Behold the debauched and profligate Felix, pale, appalled, trembling, while Paul, a prisoner in chains at his bar, announces the truths of God! Behold the executioners of Jesus assembled in the temple; their hands yet red with his blood; their eyes sparkling with rage and fury against his followers: behold, at the voice of St. Peter, how they are melted into repentance, agitated with remorse, and compelled to own him as their Lord whom they had crucified as a criminal; to flee for forgiveness to that blood on which they had trampled! Behold, in the history of the church, innumerable instances of barbarous monarchs yielding to its power; of furious persecutors subdued by its influence; of the most depraved reformed by its efficacy! Nay, we need not go back to distant periods to be convinced of the power of the word of God: how many have we known, even in our own days, who, by its almighty energy, have been made to change their lives, their habits, their sentiments! whose obdurate hearts have been broken by it, so that they have felt, in all its force, that declaration of the Lord, "Is not my word as a hammer, which breaketh the rocks in pieces?" And yet, my brethren, is not this word, thus powerful, heard by many of you with indifference and disregard? It made Ahab tremble, but you listen to it with unconcern! Though its threatenings have terrified the

most courageous, and its promises and annunciations of grace melted the most obdurate hearts, yet these threatenings are heard by you with indifference! these promises are treated by you as unworthy of the slightest regard! The king of Israel humbled himself when *temporal* calamities were denounced against him. More hardened than he, you slight the denunciations of *eternal* agonies! Though we uncover the gloomy abyss where the impenitent must for ever abide, and show you the chains of darkness which for ever bind the accursed; though we tell you of that world where groan responds to groan, where shriek echoes to shriek throughout eternity; yet we are not cheered by hearing God declare, "Seest thou how this people humble themselves?" On the contrary, we behold you jocund and gay, as though no threatenings had been uttered by God, as though no miseries were in reserve for you! Awake from your lethargy, insensible men! and if you will not emulate the zeal of Christians, at least imitate the piety of the impious Ahab. "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast," says the apostle, "and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect" that gospel, "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost?" Think not that, by refusing to listen to the calls of the word of God, you render it inefficacious. Though you resist it, still it displays its power, still it has its effect; if it does not soften, it hardens you; if it does not prepare you for glory, it aggravates your guilt; it increases your condemnation: it heaps up stores of

wrath, which shall at last descend upon you, and press you deep into perdition. What alarms and apprehensions should this thought excite in many of you, my brethren! For years the word of God has sounded in your ears; for years the most alluring promises, the most tremendous threatenings, have by turns been exhibited to you; since by them you have not been converted, you will by them be judged and condemned. Every invitation to holiness, every call from God, that you have enjoyed, and that you have resisted, has been ripening you for destruction. At last then receive the word of God with humility and trembling; acknowledge its authority, submit to its influence, and live in conformity to its precepts.

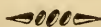
Finally, the terror and distress of Ahab leads us to a

IIId. Observation, which we shall most briefly illustrate. *Sin is always succeeded by sorrow and remorse.* It promises us unvaried delight and pleasure if we will walk in its forbidden paths: but its deceptive promises are always violated; it always fills the eyes with tears, and the heart with anguish. Ahab flattered himself that his desires would be satisfied could he obtain possession of the vineyard of Naboth; he supposed that the tomb would silence the remonstrances of this pious Israelite, and prevent him from disturbing his festivity and joy. Alas! his sackcloth and his tears, the lashes of his conscience, and the apprehensions of the impending vengeance of God, teach him his error, and prove that no human art or power can associate together sin and felicity. Is it not always thus, my brethren? Speak, ye who, after having indulged in sin, have seen your guilt and danger, and been enabled truly to repent

of your crimes. Did not your deep abasement, when you contemplated your vileness and ingratitude; did not the quakings of your soul, when the flashes from the infernal pit, and the glitterings of the avenging sword of justice, met your eyes; did not your anguish and apprehension counterpoise, far more than counterpoise, all the unhallowed pleasures of sin? Did they not concur with the humiliation of Ahab, with the agonizing cries of David, with the bitter tears of Magdalen, in proclaiming that the promised joys of sin pierce the soul with sorrows? Speak ye, who, having spent a whole life violating the commandments of God, came at last to your final hour, saw yourselves just about to take the plunge into eternity, beheld death just ready to tear your shuddering and reluctant soul from your body, and bear it to its last account; did ye not, at that terrible moment, when ye saw above you the flaming tribunal of your offended Judge, and below you the seat of misery where you were for ever to dwell: did ye not then curse yourselves for your folly, in listening to the seductive voice of sin? Did ye not acknowledge that its flatteries, its caresses, its promises, lead only to eternal despair? Shall I go further: shall I summon up the damned to attest this truth? Shall I show them to you sinking under almighty vengeance, bound by the chains of darkness, encircled by the consuming flames, and proving, by their agonies, this eternal truth, that sin and misery are inseparably linked together by the hand of Omnipotence? Since then, my brethren, we must weep for our sins, in this world or the next, let us, by a salutary and timely repentance, avert eternal despair; let us enter immediately on those courses which will pro-

duce no grief; let us cultivate those pure and holy joys which conscience never embitters, which will smooth the pillow of sickness, cheer the hour of dissolution, and conduct us to the region of unspotted holiness and unmingled joy.

SERMON XCII.



VARIETY IN THE CONDUCT OF MEN AT DEATH.

JOB XXX. 23.

I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.

THE certainty of death; the uncertainty of that hour when we shall feel its stroke; and the solemn and eternal consequences connected with the state of our soul when we close our eyes upon the earth: these are subjects on which you have often been addressed in the house of God, and when you stood by the mouth of the grave, open to receive the cold corpses of your relatives and friends. It is not my intention at the present time, to re-urge upon you these important truths; but I have selected these words to lead us to the consideration of a subject which, if properly improved, will tend much to augment our holiness, and prepare us for the inevitable hour of our dissolution. This subject is *the variety in the feelings, expressions, and conduct, which we observe both in good and bad men on the bed of death.* To illustrate.

explain, and apply this one point, is the sole design of the ensuing discourse.

I. Let us then consider those whom we esteem *pious*, whom we have reason to regard as the real children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Recall the scenes which you have witnessed when you have stood by the death-bed of such persons; and add to your own observation the knowledge which you have derived from the information of others, or the biographies of the pious. You will find three classes, widely differing from each other in their dying experiences; some are *agitated by terror*, and doubts, and apprehensions; some are *exulting and triumphant*; some, without any extraordinary raptures, have a *sweet calm, and tranquillity of spirit, a filial confidence and trust in their Redeemer*.

You perceive that I am speaking only of those who have the exercise of their reason; among those who are deprived of it, there are some, who, in the most unconnected wanderings of their mind, show what is the object of their chief affections, and where their heart and their treasure are fixed: and there are others, whose wild ravings give no indication of those sentiments, the truth and strength of which have been attested by their past lives. It is painful indeed to see our pious friends expire in this manner; but it is consolatory to recollect, that our "God knoweth whereof we are made; ever remembereth that we are dust;" and will not impute to us as crimes the involuntary wanderings of delirium.

I return to those whose rational powers are unimpaired. Among them, I have said,

1. There are some whom we believe to be the children of God. whose death-beds are marked by

doubts, and *terror*, and *apprehension*. I need not point you to the closing hours of the excellent Cowper, in illustration of this remark; you yourselves have probably beheld similar scenes.

Sometimes this darkness continues to the very termination of life; but more frequently it is dissipated before dissolution.

If we consider the *causes* of this darkness, we shall only be surprised that it is not more frequent. These causes are various.

The first and most common is the *coldness* and *lukewarmness* of those who experience it; by a life inconsistent with their engagements and their privileges, they made an assignation with terror to meet them on their bed of death. They had the Christian graces, but they suffered these graces to wither. Instead of continually cultivating spiritual mindedness, they had been too much attached to the pleasures, or riches, or honours of the world: instead of a close walk with God, and of keeping the things of eternity fresh upon their souls, they lived too much as do those who have never tasted the grace of the Redeemer; they have indeed built upon Christ as the only foundation, but they have placed much "hay and stubble" upon this foundation; and therefore, in the language of the apostle, though they are saved, "it is so as by fire." (1 Cor. iii. 10, &c.) Though they are among the wise virgins, they have slumbered, and are therefore filled with alarm at the unexpected coming of the bridegroom. Such persons as these can look for no special cordials in their last hours; no peculiar supports in the moments of dissolution: recalling their many neglects of duty, the little that they have done to glorify their Redeemer or advance his cause; having lived without daily self-

examination, and constant converse with God and the Saviour through the eternal Spirit, it is not wonderful that their last hours should be clouded with doubt, and that they should depart from this world trembling, uncertain whether they are going to heaven or to hell. Since such is often the just punishment of God upon the slothful Christian, let us rouse ourselves, my brethren; instead of lying thoughtlessly "at ease in Zion," let us endure hardships as good soldiers of Christ," "quit ourselves like men," and fight courageously the battles of the Lord; let us secure the blessing promised to him "whom, when his Lord cometh, he shall find watching!"

But there are lively and active Christians who expire in terror and alarm. For this no doubt God has reasons which we do not always understand. Frequently we must bend and adore, reverencing the darkness in which he shrouds himself, confessing that his wisdom is unsearchable, and acknowledging that

"He moves in a mysterious way

"His wonders to perform."

But we may suppose that he sometimes permits (to use an expression of Flavel) "a bright sun to set under a dark cloud," in order to teach us *not to judge of the future state of a man merely by his death-bed exercises*. This is an error to which we are far too prone; an error, that in its consequences, is most pernicious. The Lord, therefore, for the benefit of survivors, suffers him whose life gave the most splendid proofs of piety; whose "path was like that of the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day;" of whose salvation we can entertain no doubt, to go down in darkness, that we may feel

that it is from a holy and devoted life that we must derive our best hopes of the happiness of the pious.

The Lord permits this to teach us our absolute dependence upon the freeness and riches of his grace, for our spiritual comforts. If these were always connected with a holy life; if every one who died safely, died also triumphantly, we should imagine that the communication of these special joys to the pious, was necessary and unavoidable. To teach us that they are dispensed "according to the good pleasure of his will," and to inspire us with gratitude for that portion of them which we or our friends feel, he sometimes withholds them from those who are the objects of his dearest affection.

The Lord permits this in order to alarm the careless, and bring them to repentance. If many a sinner has been attracted by the triumphs of a departing Christian, and compelled to exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" so also, many have been terrified, and brought to serious reflection by the doubts and apprehensions of the expiring believer. They have gone from the sick chamber exclaiming, 'If death be so awful to one who has lived as the servant of God, what must it be to me, a rebel against him? If one who has glorified the Redeemer, finds "the swellings of Jordan" so dreadful, when just beyond them is for him the promised land, what must be the fury of those waves with which I must contend, and which will bear me, if I die in my present state, to the gulf of eternal despair? "If the righteous scarcely are saved, where, oh where! will the wicked and ungodly appear?" Such reflections are calculated deeply to impress the sinner, and cause him to "flee from the wrath which is to come."

May we not suppose also, that this is sometimes permitted, in order to make us properly and gratefully *estimate the grace of Jesus in submitting to that mysterious dereliction of his Father upon the cross*, under which he cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" When we view the pangs and the agonies of these pious men; their longings and pantings after the light of God's countenance; the readiness with which they would renounce all created joys for this blessing; can we fail to raise our grateful praises to Him, who, that we might have joy and triumph, underwent a desertion far more grievous; consented to have the light of that countenance, of which from eternity he had made his only joy, eclipsed for a season, and to have all those infinite delights intermitted, the full value of which he only could appreciate?

But if these are probably some of the reasons why, at times, the pious are permitted to expire in apprehension and in doubt, there are also inferior causes to account for this dispensation.

It sometimes is produced by the *violent assaults of evil spirits*. As they most furiously assailed the Saviour in the garden just before his death, so do they also act towards his members; as they most violently tortured the demoniac just before they were ejected, so do they endeavour to harass and distress the believer the more, as they perceive the hour is at hand, when he shall be entirely free from their malice and seductions; and they now make this assault with the more readiness, because from the state of the soul, distracted in its powers, they hope for more success.

Imperfect views of divine truth; of the scheme of redemption; of the nature. the extent. the freeness,

and the grace of the Christian covenant, may produce the same effect. A man may be a sincere believer, and yet from prejudice, from education, or other causes, may have erroneous sentiments, which, without dissolving the union of his soul to Christ, may mar his comforts and overshadow him with gloom.

Sometimes it results from *a habit too frequent even among good men, of building their comfort only on sensible joys and manifestations*, instead of deriving it from the grace and stability of the covenant, from its everlasting promises, and from the steady adherence of the soul to Christ. This was the case with a good man oppressed with melancholy, who cried to a pious minister who came to visit him, "O what will you say of him who is going out of the world, and can find no comfort?" "What will you say;" (was the satisfactory and impressive answer,) "what will you say of our Saviour Christ, who, when going out of the world, found no comfort, but cried out "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" The answer reached his heart; he felt that faith and the joy of faith are not inseparable, and became tranquil and composed.

In consequence of the *intimate connexion of the soul and the body*, and the operation of one upon the other, there is no doubt that the despondency of some pious persons upon their death-beds, has been the effect of a temperament constitutionally melancholy, or of the bodily languor consequent upon exhaustion.

And finally, there are some who recoil from the tomb, in consequence of the *natural fear of death* implanted in us; and who, because they are thus afraid

of dying, are filled with doubts of their sincerity, and fears that they have no interest in the Redeemer.

Such are some of the reasons why there are persons, whom death introduces into the joy of their Lord, who yet go down trembling into the grave.

But I turn with pleasure to a

2d. Class of good men, who on their death-beds are *exulting* and *triumphant*. Instances of this kind you have seen, if you have been in the habit of attending the sick chambers of departing Christians; you have beheld all the pains of sickness vanishing before their overpowering raptures; while they fix a steady eye upon the atonement, not only are the accusations of conscience silenced, and the fears of future wrath subdued, but they also taste of joys which they never felt before, and pant for the moment that shall dissolve their connexion with earth and earthly objects, and put them in possession of the crown of righteousness: they have had temptations and combats with their spiritual foes, but these have already ceased; and “the purity which had struggled with imperfection and sin, as the morning contends with the lingering darkness, shines with all the lustre of the perfect day.” They need not seek comfort from others; they bestow it upon all who surround them; “the spirit feels itself free, even in the grasp of death; the opening of the portals of bliss to receive their departing souls, sheds upon their pale countenances the light of eternal glory, dazzling the spectators with its ineffable radiance;” their faces, like that of Stephen, when he saw his glorified Redeemer, appear “as it had been the face of an angel;” their souls are encompassed with a lustre more brilliant than the splendour which surrounded the ascending Elijah; their ecstasies are not the vain

glows of a deluded imagination, nor the mere raptures of enthusiasm, but the natural and reasonable effect of that bright vision of eternal joys, vouchsafed to them by the Holy Spirit, and of the assurance which he gives them, that these joys are theirs. Not only is their heart warmed ; their mind also is enlightened and strengthened. Attend to their conversation, you remark an energy which they never before exhibited : “ you discern the high pulsations of mental health ; ” you perceive a warmth of feeling, a vigour of understanding, a brightness of imagination, that were never before displayed by them ; listen to the fervour, the holy eloquence, the touching earnestness and comprehensiveness of their prayers, and then confess that he must be a poor and miserable fanatic in the worst of causes, who will dare to sneer at this as enthusiasm.

Such dying exercises, though not unknown among us, are more frequently found in times when the church is persecuted, and when the friends of the Redeemer seal their attachment to him with their blood. In the history of the martyrs, you have met with many examples of this triumphant departure from earth.

This exalted privilege, is also granted not unfrequently to those good men who have gone mourning and dejected through life. There are few pastors who cannot recollect some trembling, humble, timid, but deeply conscientious and zealous Christians, whose death-beds were thus animating and glorious. It is often the case too, with those young persons whose hearts glowed with love to the Redeemer ; and on whom the church fixed its brightest hopes and fondest expectations ; but who, in the flower of their days, were removed from earth. By such a

triumphant departure, God gives consolation to the hearts wounded by their loss.

3. There is a *third* class of good men, who on the death-bed have not these raptures, but who on the other hand are *not oppressed by doubts and apprehensions*. They have a *steady composure, a calm and serene reliance upon their Redeemer*. They look with holy confidence and tranquillity to heaven as their home, and without anxiety submit their interests for time and for eternity to the disposal of their covenant-God. They feel that the foundation on which they rest their everlasting all, is secure and immoveable. They believe and relish the precious promises of God. Rejoicing in the fulness and perfection of the covenant, in the love of the Father, in the grace and atonement of Jesus, in their past experience of divine mercy, and of the influences of the Spirit, they sweetly compose themselves on the bosom of their Redeemer, and in the tender language of scripture, “fall asleep in Christ.” This, if I mistake not, in ordinary states of the church, is the general temper of those more mature and advanced believers who have long walked with God, when they approach the hour of their dissolution. Such was the serenity of Jacob: “I die; but God shall be with you. I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.” Such was the composure of Joshua: “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you.” And such was the temper of many other distinguished saints of the Old Testament. How many thousands in more modern times have displayed the same calm serenity! When Baxter was asked, just before his dissolution, how he was:

looking up to heaven, he replied, "Almost well." When Watts was near the eternal state, he said, "I bless God, I can lie down with comfort at night, unsolicitous whether I wake in this world or another." "I have nothing," said Gill, when dying, "to make me uneasy; my Father, O my Father!" Examples of the same kind might be multiplied without number; but they are unnecessary; for such death-beds who of us has not seen? Let me only further remark, that perhaps this temper in our last hours is most correspondent to the example of our Redeemer. It is true that at times we hear him expressing a desire to pour out his blood for our salvation; declaring that he had a baptism to be baptized with, and was straitened until it was accomplished; and rejoicing that the last passover which he was to celebrate with his disciples had arrived. It is true also, that we behold him at one period upon the cross experiencing darkness and distress; but I speak of the prevalent temper displayed upon the cross, and in that last conversation with his disciples, and prayer for them, that are preserved by St. John. What can exceed the confidence, the composure, the serenity, and tenderness, that appeared in his actions and shone in his discourses! Oh! that we may imitate him in life and in death!

We have marked the last hours of the children of God. We have exhibited to you three classes of expiring Christians: those who expire in doubt and alarm; those who leave the world in triumph and rapture; and those who, with a sweet and calm composure, yield up their spirits into the hands of their Redeemer.

II. In approaching now the death-beds of those who have lived *impenitent and unbelieving*, without God

and without Christ in the world, we behold no less diversity. Of these some are *filled with agony and horror*; some have a *false joy*, and an unwarranted exultation; and some are *stupid, insensible, and unconcerned*.

Let us rapidly describe these three different classes.

1. Some, who mocked at the restraints of religion during their health, who neglected the offers of salvation made them by the Redeemer, who lived as though there were no God, no soul, no eternity; are in their last moments filled with horror, anguish, and despair. They feel the lashes of an enraged conscience, which at last has waked from its lethargy. By the new and terrible light which God sheds down in their souls, they perceive those overpowering and eternal realities with which they have hitherto trifled, and some drops of the wrath of the Almighty afford an earnest of that woe which shall never end, and excite terror and agony that give a solemn and impressive warning to those who have lived like them. In vain do they look for consolation to the past, the present, or the future; every where only images of horror start up around them. Life and death fill them equally with dismay: life is agony; and when they would rush forward to death to escape, they behold the world of darkness and the gulf of horrors yawning to receive them. They find earth impotent to comfort them; and they receive no ray of consolation from heaven. Those around their bed are pierced by the look of supplicating anguish which they raise to heaven; and shocked by the imprecations of rage and fury with which it is not unfrequently succeeded. But the tempest at last has spent its fury; the head falls back; the king of ter-

rors sits on his throne : the survivors scarcely breathe, and dare not think of the future : all is still and cold.

Such horrible spectacles are often exhibited ; they freeze the blood ; but constrain us to cry out, “ O my soul ! come not thou into their secret ; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united.”

2. But do all sinners die thus ? No ! there are some who, after the most careless and profane lives, leave the world with the most rapturous *expressions of triumph* upon their lips. They have an air of exultation, when we would desire to see tears ; they talk of joys unspeakable, when we would rather witness the sighings of the contrite heart ; they depart full of joy and confidence ; they are often eulogized, canonized by their friends ; but, alas ! many who thus die are sentenced by God to perdition ! and could we follow the soul into the eternal world, we should hear “ from the darkness in which it vanishes, instead of its expiring raptures, the shrieks of surprise and terror, and the overpowering accents of the messenger of vengeance.” Think not that in speaking thus, we are uncharitable ; we decide not concerning particular individuals : God has judged them, and their doom will be announced to us at the decisive day. But that many are thus deceived, we know from the lives of thousands, who, after expressing all these raptures, were unexpectedly restored to health, and too unequivocally proved by their walk and conversation, that these joys were a delusion ; that they were utter strangers to regenerating grace ; and that had they died even in the midst of their transports, their souls with equal surprise and horror would have found themselves in the world of despair. We know it from the want of the Christian graces, of deep humility, of self-loathing

for their past sins, and of unfeigned repentance; of a holy self-distrust and jealousy over their own hearts. We know it from the plain testimony of the word of God; which in many places, and in various modes, by parable and direct assertion, teaches us that many, who confidently expected to enter into the kingdom of glory, shall be addressed by the Saviour in those terrible words: "Depart from me; I know you not."

"We frequently," says the excellent Dr. Scott, "hear of persons that have lived strangers to evangelical religion and the power of godliness, dying with composure, resignation, and even triumph; and such instances are brought forward as an objection to the necessity of faith and a devoted life. But what do they prove? what evidence is there that such men are saved? Is it not far more likely that they continued to the end under the power of ignorance and self conceit; that Satan took care not to disturb them; and that God gave them over to a strong delusion, and to perish with a lie in their right hand? Men who have neglected religion all their lives, or have habitually for a length of years disgraced an evangelical profession, being when near death visited by pious persons, sometimes obtain a sudden and extraordinary measure of peace and joy, and die in this frame. This should in general be considered as a bad sign: for deep humiliation, yea, distress, united with some trembling hope in God's mercy through the gospel, is far more suited to their case, and more likely to be the effect of spiritual illumination. But when a mere visit from a minister of any sect, a few general questions, and a prayer with or without the sacrament, calm the mind of a dying person whose life has been unsuitable to the Chris-

tian profession; no doubt, could we penetrate the veil, we should find him meeting with an awful doom."

We have not time to illustrate the various causes contributing to this delusion. Among them are a *false system of religion*, leading to unscriptural hopes of divine mercy. We have seen that erroneous views of divine truth sometimes produce fear in the pious: it as often causes presumption in the ungodly. A *sanguine temperament under the exaltation of fever*; the *vain flatteries of self love*; *counterfeit graces*, having some resemblance to real ones; these are other causes producing this lamentable effect.

3. There is a third class of the impenitent, who die with a *stupid unconcern*, and with the insensibility of brutes. They show neither agony nor joy; "they have no bands in their death." Like Hume, they can jest and laugh when just about to plunge into eternity. I know not whether to call such conduct folly or frenzy; this gayety is the sport and jesting of the malefactor, as he advances to execution; is the dancing of the prisoner in his chains; a spectacle which fills the soul with horror and anguish.

It is a dreadful price at which this fatal peace in sin, even when death approaches, has been bought. Reason, conscience, the incitements of grace, the impressions of early education, the lessons that were nourished by the prayers, and watered by the tears, of parents: these and much more have been immolated in order to obtain the awful privilege of dying like a brute; and of forgetting in the moment of dissolution their God, their Redeemer, their duty, and that eternity which will so soon burst upon them. The heart shrinks with horror at the tranquillity of such persons. It is a sight far more appalling than even the agonies of the despairing sinner who sees

no hope in his last hours. Could angels weep, their tears would flow in contemplating the carelessness and insensibility of such undone, ruined beings.

I have not time to dwell on the causes of this insensibility. Sometimes it is the result of judicial hardness: God has said to conscience and to the Holy Spirit, "Let him alone." Sometimes it is an affectation: they are acting a part; the heart is racked while the deportment is calm; but they resolve, like many a criminal on earth, to go decently to that execution at which they inwardly shudder. Sometimes it is from a belief, that death in reality is not near; frequently from a strange persuasion, which is evident in all their conversation, although perhaps they would not explicitly avow it, that their belief or disbelief altered the nature of truth. "But let them know that though heaven, hell, and eternity, are blotted out of their mind, they do not therefore cease to be realities: they will find at last to their shame and confusion, that their infidelity made no change in the nature of things; that though they were "deceived, God was not mocked."

SERMON XCIII.



CHRIST GLORIFIED.



2 THESSALONIANS i. 10.

When he shall come to be glorified.

WHAT a difference between the first and the second advent of the Redeemer ! In his incarnation, he appeared in the deepest humiliation, “lower than his angels,” breathing only peace and love, shedding tears over our miseries, and impatient to pour out his blood for our salvation. But when he shall come again, the indwelling Godhead will no longer be hidden by the veil of humanity ; the universe shall behold and acknowledge its Maker ; the heavens shall flee from his presence ; the earth shall be consumed, and before his awful judgment-throne all mankind shall stand ; and all the intelligent creation shall behold him with admiration and wonder, while he confers upon his children the crown of everlasting glory, and sentences the pale, trembling, agonized despisers of his grace to everlasting despair. One great reason for the appointment of a judgment-day, was thus to manifest the glory of Jesus. This day was not necessary, in order to decide the destinies of

men: this is done whenever we depart from earth. Our souls then stand immediately at the bar of God. Hell receives its victims; heaven, its heirs; sin, its merited punishment; piety, its reward of grace. But that the splendours of Immanuel's glory, that the honours of the despised Nazarene, might be manifested to the universe, the "Lord hath appointed a day in which by him he will judge the world in righteousness."

The whole verse, of which my text forms a part, speaks particularly of the display of the Saviour's glory in the redeemed; but that portion which I have selected, while it includes this idea, will also lead our reflections to a consideration of his glory, manifested in the perdition of those who now despise and refuse him:

Jesus in the judgment-day glorified in the salvation of the redeemed, and in the perdition of the ungodly. The development of this single idea then, is the sole intent of this discourse.

Spirit of Jesus, enable me to speak on this solemn subject with tenderness, with energy, with effect! Under this influence may the gospel trumpet raise us from spiritual death, so that when the trumpet that shall wake the dead shall penetrate our tombs, we may rise exulting from our dust, and appear with joy before our Saviour.

Jesus shall be glorified alike in those who are saved, and those who are lost.

I. He shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in them that *believe*.

1. How great, how majestic, will he appear, when we shall contemplate the *countless number* of the blood-bought throng! Little as the flock of Jesus now appears, yet when it is all collected by the great Shep-

herd, from different regions and different ages of the world, it will swell to such a multitude, that we shall no longer apprehend that the extensive paradise of God, the better Eden, where they shall eternally reside, will be untenanted. Numerous, as in all ages have been the enemies of God, yet he has never left himself without witness. In the darkest seasons he has always had a church of faithful worshippers in the wilderness, overlooked perhaps, by the great, contemned by the powerful, unnoticed by the historian; but having their names inscribed in the Lamb's book of life. And the period is assuredly coming, when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ;" when his authority shall be universally acknowledged, and his grace felt by all the inhabitants of a world now deluged with sin; when every heart shall glow with love to him, and every tongue celebrate his praises. When he shall appear at the final day, encircled by this multitude, which no man can number, all of them casting their crowns at his feet, and ascribing their salvation to his precious death, will not his glory be ineffable?

2. Will he not be glorified by the *diversity of character, of nation, of age, and of time*, of which that blessed company shall be composed, who will then glow with the same feelings, and have the same holy image impressed upon them? Here will stand a profligate sinner, reclaimed by his grace, by one who, though preserved from gross enormities and pollutions, renounced his own righteousness, and felt his need of atoning blood: here a renewed, persecuting Paul, by the side of a martyred Stephen, in whose death he rejoiced: here a Christian, who swayed the sceptre over nations, while his own heart was subject to

the Redeemer, by the side of a holy beggar, who had been viewed with contempt by men, though clothed with the righteousness of Immanuel, and an heir of eternal glory : here one, whose name was emblazoned with the honours of science, but who laid his literary laurels at the foot of the cross, and esteemed it his greatest privilege to sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus, and there receive instruction; by the side of him whose talents were feeble, and whose acquirements were small, but who was instructed in that best of sciences, the knowledge of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." In short, some will there appear, of every different character and disposition, "washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God." And will not this spectacle cause all heaven to resound with adoring wonder at the power and grace of the Lamb that was slain ! There too shall stand some of every nation and age, and of every period of time ; the converted Greek, and the believing Jew ; those that obeyed the gospel in lands where the Sun of Righteousness shone in all his splendour, and the pagans covered with thick darkness, who eagerly drank in the words of life, which the zealous heralds of the cross carried to them ; those who walked with God in the patriarchal ages ; those who, in the levitical dispensation, looked through the prefigurative victims, to their great antitype ; and those who enjoyed the full beamings of gospel day : those who just opened their eyes upon the world, closed them in death, and soared to heaven ; and those aged believers who, having long fought under the banners of the cross, descended full of years, and full of the fruits of righteousness, into the tomb. Oh ! when this vast assembly shall be collected, and shall fix their grate-

ful eyes on Jesus, and without one discordant voice hymn his praises and his grace, will he not be glorified!

3. Will he not be glorified when this happy company shall *retrace their past lives*, and with humble and thankful wonder declare his goodness, his wisdom, and his power, in safely conducting them, notwithstanding their weakness, their enemies, and their afflictions, to that complete salvation which he had promised to them? Then the might of that arm, which drew so many thousand feeble creatures to heaven through a host of ungodly men, of raging corruptions, and of furious devils, shall be displayed. Then the noble army of martyrs and of confessors, shall proclaim the power of that grace which enabled them not to count their lives dear unto them; and the sweetness of those supports, upheld by which, they could shout hallelujahs on the rack, and in the flames. Then the consolations given to every individual in the hours of sorrow and of wo, the spiritual joys communicated when the heart was bowed down with distress, the strength from on high under powerful temptations of the adversary of souls, shall be declared to the universe. Then the darkness which now hangs over so many scenes of providence, shall be dissipated, and it shall be seen that all, even those events which now tear our hearts, were ordered by covenant love, unerring wisdom, and inviolable faithfulness. And will not this retrospect by so many millions, when each individual shall perceive that his interests have been promoted with as much vigilance and tenderness as though he were the only happy creature under the care of Jesus, bring glory to this great Ruler and King of Zion?

4. Will he not be glorified by the *perfection and hap*

piness to which all his children shall then attain? Their bodies, no longer weak, suffering, and dying, but made like unto his own glorious body; their souls, no longer averse from God, dark through ignorance, cold and lukewarm in duty, but shining with light, and burning with love. When rebels, when worms of the dust are thus exalted by him; when they shine like so many suns in the kingdom of our Father, while he, the central sun, beams with transcendent and infinite lustre; will he not be glorified? Oh! when he shall present these redeemed souls “without spot or blemish” to his Father, as ransomed from hell by his blood, rescued by his grace from the dominion of sin, inspired with holiness by his Spirit, and preserved by his power unto salvation, will not the name of Jesus be pronounced with ecstasy, not only by these happy souls, but by the blessed angels, and the inhabitants of worlds that never fell, and needed no atonement?

II. Brethren, it is with regret that I leave this delightful part of my subject; and would to God, that all who hear me were so interested in the righteousness of Immanuel as to render it unnecessary to present to them more awful subjects of consideration! But, alas! are there not many who hear me, in whose salvation Jesus will not be glorified, if they die in their present condition? Yet, even in their just destruction, he will be glorified in that day when, according to the words immediately preceding my text, “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the

presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power!"

1. *All authority* has been committed unto Jesus: and we are commanded, under penalty of everlasting misery, to submit to his government, and take him as our king. But, alas! how many, whose conduct cries, "We will not have him to reign over us!" How many, who neglect his laws, and bow not to his sceptre! In the final day he shall be glorified as your *king*; then he shall be exhibited as your sovereign. "We shall all stand," says the apostle, "before the judgment-seat of Christ; for it is written, every knee shall bow to me." Though you now treat him as though he were possessed of no dignity, you shall then confess his awful majesty. Though the works of his hands, calling you to adore your Maker, are now unheeded; yet the ruins of the world shall then declare to you his power, and the eternal night resting on the globe, shall have a voice that will reach your heart. Though you will not bow to him, when from the tombs opening around you, he teaches you the vanity of earthly things, and the necessity of securing his protection, yet you shall feel this necessity when the tomb of the whole world shall address you; when, with respect to the earth itself, "the place which now knows it, shall know it no more." Though you now refuse to listen to the voice of his mercy, yet you shall then be constrained to tremble at the voice of his indignation. Though you now refuse to acknowledge him; then, if you can, refuse to confess him to be the great God. Though you now hope for impunity from the number who, like you, disregard him, yet with what awful despair will these hopes be succeeded, when you shall see all the impenitent, pale and shuddering.

before the throne of his glory, and appearing weak and powerless before the Infinite, the Almighty! Great Redeemer! how will thy power be glorified in that day, when all human might shall wither! when sinners shall be crushed by that sceptre to which they now refuse to yield! when the idols which they substitute in thy place, and to which they give the throne of their hearts, shall be consumed, and the everlasting destinies of all decided by thee!

2. Will not his *faithfulness and truth* be glorified when he shall fulfil, not only every promise made to his children, but also every threatening to his enemies: when they shall find that every tittle of his declarations is everlasting truth, and shall be accomplished, though the heavens and the earth have passed away? that those awful denunciations, at which perhaps they mocked; that damnation, which perhaps they profanely imprecated upon themselves or others, are strictly awarded, according to the decisions of the gospel? Ah! then be unbelieving; then sit in the seat of the scorner; then expect salvation, in opposition to the declarations of your Judge; then laugh at the threatenings of Jesus, and suppose that he will falsify his holy word, rather than condemn you—if you can.

3. How will the *holiness* of Jesus then be glorified? It will shine not only in the purity of heaven, and of those happy souls who shall be admitted into his joy; not only in his own person and that of the angelical attendants who shall accompany him to judgment: it shall also blaze in the flames of the abyss! it shall be displayed in the tremendous sentence pronounced upon the unbelieving! it shall be attested by that cry which shall be extorted from the agonized con-

sciences of the ungodly themselves, “Who can stand before this holy Lord God?”

4. How will the *omniscience* of Jesus then be glorified! Though your crimes are hidden in darkness; though you say with those wicked men of old, “God doth not see, neither doth the Most High consider;” though you deceive yourselves or deceive others; yet then it will be seen that a true estimate of your character was formed by Him who cannot be deceived; that he saw every criminal desire and passion; that he recorded every iniquity; that he read the bottom of your soul!

Yes, my brethren, the Saviour will then be glorified, even in the ungodly. If his grace be now refused, it will then be avenged; if the glories of his person be now contemned, they shall then dazzle and confound the ungodly; if his children now be despised, they shall then be beheld with envy.

SERMON XCIV.



EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.



JOHN XIII. 15.

I have given you an example.

AMONG those rules for his daily conduct, which the pious, though visionary Lavater, suspended in his study, and seriously read every night and morning, the following is far from being the least important: "I will not do nor design any thing which I would omit, if Jesus Christ were standing visibly before me, or which I suppose he would not perform, if he were in my situation. I will, with the assistance of God, accustom myself to do every thing in the name of Jesus Christ; and as his disciple, to sigh every hour to God for the blessing of the Holy Ghost, and be always disposed to prayer." Happy the believer who acts in this manner! He performs his duty, and he secures his felicity; he takes Christ as his model, and enjoys that peace which must always result from a compliance with his commands.

This interesting subject: *the imitation of Jesus*, I have chosen as the ground of our present meditation. We are naturally led to it by the text, which, though

primarily referring to one single affection, the humility of the heart, as expressed in a particular action, yet contains a general maxim, suited to all periods of the Christian life.

That it is *our duty* to imitate the example of the Redeemer, is easily proved.

1. *For what reason was the history of his life written?* Not that it might gratify an idle curiosity; not that it might amuse us by its wonderful events, and produce a barren admiration; not that it might afford scenes on which we might carelessly gaze, and subjects on which we might coldly converse. Ah no! for far more important designs were the sacred evangelists inspired. They recorded the actions and the words of Jesus, that a living, lustrous, obligatory rule of conduct; that a visible commentary on God's law might be presented for our imitation; that a light, unerring as the pillar of fire and cloud that led the Israelites, might be given to us to conduct us through this wilderness to the promised land, the Jerusalem that is on high. Let us not, by neglecting this example, frustrate, as far as in us lies, these gracious designs of our heavenly Father.

2. In your scriptures you are constantly and unequivocally *commanded to imitate the Redeemer*. "Learn of me," is the injunction of the Saviour himself; and he declares that it is the universal duty of his disciples, "If any man serve me, let him follow me." "Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ," is the admonition of Paul, (Phil. ii. 5.) "He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to walk as Christ also walked," is the declaration of John, (1 John ii. 6.) The scriptures not only teach us in *general* terms the necessity of cultivating a resemblance to our Redeemer, and assure us that with-

out an imitation of him our faith is vain; but they also descend into *particulars*, and press this motive when enjoining each peculiar virtue. Do they exhort us to *holiness*? "As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." (1 Pet. i. 15.) Do they incite us to *charity*? "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us," (Eph. v. 2.) "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you," (John xv. 12.) Would they arm us with *patience*? "We must consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds," (Heb. xii. 3.) Would they teach us to *condescend* to our neighbour for his benefit? "Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification, for even Christ pleased not himself," (Rom. xv. 2.) Do they urge us to *forgiveness*? "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye," (Col. iii. 13.) Similar language is used with regard to all other duties. If then we pay respect to those scriptures which we have professed to receive as the rule of our conduct, we must study and imitate the life of our Saviour.

3. The sacred *vows* that are upon us, the tender and solemn relations that we sustain to Jesus, enforce this duty. To him we were early and solemnly dedicated, and many of us in maturer years have publicly professed our subjection to him. Unless we are willing to wipe from our foreheads, as a foul blot, the baptismal consecration unto him; unless we traitorously renounce the allegiance we have sworn unto him, it is our duty to imitate his example. He is our *Sovereign* and our *Lord*, to whom we unreservedly belong; and by his authority over us he demands that we imitate him. He is our great

Teacher, who alone can conduct us to immortality : will we call ourselves his disciples, and not copy him ? He is the “ *Captain of our salvation* : ” can we expect from him the crown of victory, if we flee from his banners, and refuse to follow him in the holy warfare ? He is our generous *Redeemer*, our tenderest *Friend*, who pitied us in our forlorn and desolate state, and rescued us from miseries inconceivable : shame on the cold, the insensible, the ungrateful heart, that is not melted by this love, and constrained to imitate that goodness which he displayed for our benefit !

4. A regard to the best *interests of our fellow men*, should induce us to follow the example of the holy Jesus. If all who profess his name were deeply imbued with his spirit and temper, what a light would they shed upon the darkened world, and how many would they attract to the Redeemer ! It is from the character of those who call themselves Christians, rather than from the pure and benevolent precepts of the gospel, that the men of the world will ever judge of the nature of religion. Oh ! let us be careful not to alienate them : let us imitate Jesus, and then perhaps we will draw them to the Saviour, or if not, we shall be “ pure from their blood.”

5. A regard to *our own spiritual improvement and salvation*, should induce us to study and imitate the example of Jesus. How many, who could with difficulty understand an abstract reasoning on duty, or if they understood it, would be but little affected by it, who are forcibly and compendiously taught by example ? And if example at all times has an astonishing influence, there are many circumstances which show the superiority of that of the Redeemer to all others.

There is no other example so *comprehensive* : from that wonderful union of greatness and humiliation, which was never found in any other being, there is no situation in which a view of him will not teach us our duty. Dignified, rich, elevated men ! he can instruct you, since he had uncreated dignities, and could command at his will the treasures of the universe. Poor, humble, afflicted Christian ! he can instruct you ; since he was reduced to the lowest sorrows. Dying men ! he can teach you by the mode in which he met death. Living men ! he can show you by his life how to prepare for your last hour. Young persons ! the youth who dwelt at Nazareth, and who, at the tender age of twelve, reluctantly left the consecrated hill and the holy services of Zion, can urge you to early piety. Other lives afford instruction to men in particular circumstances and relations ; though they are burning and shining lights, they dissipate the gloom but for comparatively a short distance around them : but he, like the sun, is set in a higher orb, and with an everlasting and uncircumscribed light illumines the universe.

Other lives may be excellent examples of some *particular virtues* : as Job, of patience ; Moses, of meekness ; Paul, of zeal. But in Jesus there is a beautiful and attractive harmony of all the virtues ; and from their perfect combination results the spotless lustre of his character, as the purest white is the effect of the union of all the primitive colours. And how advantageous is it, to have our whole duty exhibited in one single character, instead of being obliged to select particular virtues from different individuals, and unite them so as to form a consistent whole ? If there were some few duties which Christ

could not exercise, because they result from relations which he did not sustain, yet even with regard to these he instructs us, by those dispositions which he exercised, and which are the foundation of these duties.

Other examples present us with only a *short period of time*, reaching merely from the birth to the death of those who exhibit them; but the history of our Redeemer extends backward before the foundation of the world, and stretches forward after he expired upon the cross, into that eternity which they only who inhabit it can comprehend. We are taught by him not only when he tabernacled in flesh, but also when he first raised the hopes of fallen man: when he appeared to the patriarchs and prophets; when he comforted his martyrs, and cheered his children in every age; when he now sheds down into the souls of his followers joys unspeakable.

Other examples communicate *no quickening influence*—give us no new strength to follow the splendid career of those we have admired. But the example of Jesus has a transforming efficacy upon the heart. He who diligently and prayerfully studies it, is “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of our God.”

Other examples are of persons who are *not united to us by such endearing bonds* as is Immanuel. Though we are warmed by the burning zeal of Paul, and the touching love of John, yet “was Paul crucified for us? Are we baptized into the name of” John? Can we be as much affected by their example as by that of Him, to whom we owe all that we have, and all that we are?

Other examples bear the stamp of *imperfection*. There are always many defects in the most holy of

mortals. Even the children of light have a light only like that of the moon, borrowed, and subject to decays and eclipses. It is the Sun of Righteousness alone which has a full, a self-originated, an inexhaustible, and unchanging light. It is the example of Jesus alone, which is at the same time a powerful *encouragement* to holiness and virtue, and the very *standard* of holiness and virtue. Since then, when we wish to attain to eminence in any art or science, we always propose to ourselves the most exalted models, let us do the same when we aim to acquire the art of holy living, the science of practical godliness.

It is then our duty and our interest, our privilege and our honour, to be followers of the Lord Jesus. Would we wish thus to follow him? Let us remember, that a conformity in our *internal* principles of conduct forms the first step of this imitation. Hence we are exhorted by Paul, to "have the same *mind* which Christ had," [Phil. ii, 5.] and by Peter, to "arm ourselves with the same *mind*." [1 Pet. iv. 1.] Without this inward resemblance, all our external conformity to his example will be in vain; it will be destitute of a soul. We shall only be pictures without breath, gilded statues destitute of a vivifying principle, beautiful corpses with paint upon the cheek, but death at the heart.

We must then, in order to imitate Jesus, be animated by the same Holy Spirit that he possessed. Though in his divine nature the Redeemer was holy by essence, and underivedly, yet in his human nature, in which we are called to resemble him, he was holy by consecration and unction from the Spirit. Though we cannot have the *plenitude* of this spirit, as he had on whom it was poured out without mea-

sure, yet we must have him in *reality*, dwelling in us, renewing our natures, and being the principle of our holiness, if we would follow Jesus.

We must also receive the *same system of divine truths*, otherwise our obedience will spring from different motives. The infinite holiness and unspotted purity, as well as the abounding grace and ineffable mercy of God; the guilt and corruption of fallen man; the absolute need of an atoning sacrifice and of the influences of the blessed Spirit; these and similar truths lay at the foundation of the mediatorial work of the *God-man*; and these were perpetually regarded as the springs of action by the *man* Christ Jesus. In vain will we pretend to follow his example, if these truths are disbelieved or lightly regarded by us; if they are not cordially embraced by us.

But in what particular instances must we take Jesus as our model, and conform ourselves to his example? Here so extensive and delightful a field opens before me, that I regret that I only touch on some of those graces and virtues of which he is our illustrious pattern.

1. Imitate him in his *piety towards God*. It was *constant* and *unwearied*. In no single instant did his heart cease to glow with affection to his Father. Ye who present in your lives a perpetual vicissitude of attention to the duties of religion, and a pursuit of the vanities of the world, or the indulgence of sin, Jesus is not your model. His course was steady and uninterrupted. Even in his tender youth he occupied himself with the business of his Father, and till his last groan his devotion was never intermitted. Young persons, behold your duty! Can you wish a more illustrious example than that of the Son of God, who came down from heaven to purchase felicity for you,

and to show you the path which conducts thither? Ye who "did run well for a season," and once appeared solicitous and engaged in the concerns of eternity, but who have lost your warmth, blush when you contemplate the steady path of Jesus, and return from your wanderings.

His piety was *zealous*. He does not coldly and heartlessly engage in the duties of religion. He announces the truths of God on all occasions, in cities and villages, in fields and the desert, on the ocean and in his journeyings, in life and during the agonies of death. To save sinners, he disregards the insults of the proud pharisee, and the reproaches of a deluded people. To bring back to the fold the lost sheep, the good Shepherd knows neither obstacles nor dangers. So delighted is he with his Father's business, that when faint and weary he pauses at Jacob's well and requests water of the Samaritan woman, the conviction which pierces her heart, and causes her to inquire after Messiah, makes him forget the thirst which had oppressed him, and the food for which his disciples had gone.

He never can see with insensibility religion neglected or dishonoured. If at any time he appears to lay aside his meekness, it is only when he sees his Father's house profaned, or when he beholds the hypocrisy of the pharisees. Imitate this zeal, ye who talk of God, of the atonement, of eternity, with a freezing indifference which chills, instead of warming the heart of those who hear you.

His piety was attended with *frequent prayer*. Nay, "his whole life was a kind of prayer, a constant course of communion with God; since if the sacrifice was not always offering, yet was the fire still kept alive." [Scougal.] In the midst of the world

he was still with God. He often retired to converse with him, and consecrated often to this office those hours which men devote to sleep. He appeared to have no necessity to pray, but yet he was always engaged. And in these prayers, how does his heart appear penetrated with devotion, confidence, and love! What soul so insensible, as not to be touched when we listen to him at the tomb of Lazarus, in his sacerdotal prayer, or at the mount of Olives? Imitate him, ye who seldom pray; who scarcely ever think of God in the tumult of the world, and whose closets seldom witness your tears and your prayers! Often raise your hearts in ejaculations in the midst of business and cares, and have seasons of privacy and places of retirement to converse with God. There you may expect a permanent blessing; for “though the dews of divine grace fall every where, they lie longest in the shade.”

2. He is an example to us in his *benevolence*. This is exhibited in all his conduct, as it breathed in all his discourses. On the wings of charity he descended from heaven, and his whole life proved that he had lain from eternity in the bosom of everlasting love. By a single trait he is painted in the scriptures; but how majestic, though simple, is this trait! “He went about doing good.” Wherever he went, he bore blessings with him, relieved indigence, consoled affliction, restored joy to the countenance of a desolate father, to the heart of a tender mother, to the bosom of a family plunged in wo. He rejected none who applied to him. All his miracles bore the impress of charity, and though sometimes refused to the vain curiosity of the great, were always granted to the woes, the necessities, and the tears of the unhappy. See him expiring: his strength is exhaust-

ed ; death clouds his eyes ; his soul is just ready to depart ; but charity cannot die in his heart, and the last accents of his expiring voice bear to heaven the most ardent supplications for his executioners ! Behold your model, Christians ! Like your Master, pity the afflicted ; relieve the indigent ; “ weep with those that weep ;” and let unfeigned benevolence dwell in your soul ; or else renounce the name of the Redeemer.

3. He is an example to us in his *humility*. I speak not here of his wonderful condescension in assuming our nature ; for *that* no creature can ever imitate ; but of his lowliness during life. Never were such endowments as he possessed ; yet, with celestial wisdom, he never was assuming. Wielding almighty power, he never trampled on the meanest creature, nor wrought a single miracle for ostentation and vain glory. He would even have suppressed the fame of his miracles, had not the glory of God and the benefit of mankind required their publication ; and when his works were noised abroad, it was every where told that he was as humble as he was mighty. If he was transfigured upon Tabor, it was when he was on his way to Calvary, and that he might fortify his disciples against the scandal of the cross. If he listened to hosannas, it was when he was about to humble himself to an ignominious death.

Here also imitate your Redeemer ; let it be your aim and desire to cultivate, not fame, but holiness. Seek not your own praises, but God’s glory. Cherish lowly thoughts of yourselves and your performances. Stoop to the poor and the despised ; perform to them the offices of benevolence, and then like Jesus you shall be exalted.

4. He is an example to us of *superiority to the world*. He might have enjoyed all that the world idolizes; his renunciation of it was voluntary. In vain were the kingdoms of this world and their glory spread before him by the tempter: he answered only, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" He showed his superiority to earth, not by retiring from it like the monk or the anchorite, to the obscurity of a cloister, or the solitude of a desert; (for his is a religion of active benevolence,) but by living in the midst of the world, that he might benefit others by his instructions and his example: and yet repelling all its temptations, and showing that his heart was above it.

Ah, brethren! do we all here imitate Jesus? Are there none who, instead of being crucified to the world, are in danger of being eternally killed by its close embraces; of being pressed down to everlasting death by the weight of that silver and gold, the pursuit of which almost alone occupies them, and which are poured upon them? Do we imitate Christ when we mingle with delight in those circles of dissipation in which only a worldly spirit reigns: in which it would be an unpardonable offence against decorum to speak of a bleeding Saviour, or of the mysteries of redemption; at which even the thoughtless and the gay are surprised to behold the professed followers of the Lamb? I examine not the abstract question, how far these in themselves are lawful? but I only ask, and let the answer be made by conscience, would your Saviour have attended them? Do you in your heart think that at such times you are following him?

5. He is an example to us in his *patience and forgiveness*. His patience in suffering was as great as his diligence in performing the will of God. Under

all his trials there was no murmuring word, no impatient thought. Ever acquiescing in the dispensations of God, he cries under the severest afflictions, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" And this proceeded not from a stoical apathy, or stupid insensibility: his body, exquisitely organized, was probably more sensible to pain than that of ordinary men; and since he was perfectly innocent, the union between soul and body, which would never have been dissolved but by sin, was more firm, and its dissolution must have been attended with greater agony.

And if thus patient, he was also *forgiving*. Under reproaches, slanders, and contumelies, he was always gentle: "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." When termed a devil, he refuted the odious charge, only by showing the benevolence of heaven, and proving that he was free from any diabolical passion. When termed an impostor, he replied only by working more splendid miracles, and more powerfully declaring the truth. When called a traitor, he answered the charge by meekly subjecting himself to death. Never did he discharge the thunders which he held in his hands to crush his enemies, but always pitied and prayed for them. In these virtues imitate his example, ye who are murmuring at far lighter afflictions, and internally charging Providence with cruelty; ye who, while ye easily forget the mercies of God, firmly remember the unkindnesses of man, and breathe out threatenings against your enemies. Ah! how unlike are you to the meek and lowly Jesus!

6. He is an example to us in *tolerance* and *forbearance*. Though zealous, his zeal was never cruel and malignant; though perfectly innocent, he tenderly

compassionated the errors and the follies of men. Though his censures were faithful, they were ever meek and gentle. Hear him, when his disciples, irritated at the unkindness of the Samaritans to him, would have called down fire from heaven to consume them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Behold his condescension, in listening to the prejudices of the Samaritan woman, and refuting them! Behold him bearing with the presumption of Peter, the unbelief of Thomas, the prejudiced ambition of the wife of Zebedee, and the frequent errors and doubts of all the disciples! Behold him, when unjustly and ignominiously smitten before the high-priest, replying in the spirit of meekness, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

Ah, brethren! do those who cruelly and bitterly revile their erring brethren, or even open sinners, here imitate Jesus? "Will he, who has learned of Jesus, be disposed to talk harshly of defects in others, as though he himself were free from defect? Will he view with an eagle eye, and condemn with the moroseness of a censor, every little irregularity of temper, or even of conduct in others? Be not deceived, this cold and lofty spirit is the fruit of spiritual pride; and those who indulge it forget that Jesus bore with meekness the infirmities of men, and that they themselves are children of infirmity and folly." This forbearing spirit of Jesus, mingled as it was in him with zeal and love for souls, and displayed in our conduct and our censures, may reform, when dignified contempt or frigid neglect would only harden. "No oratory is so powerful as that of mildness. The drops that fall easily upon the corn ripen and fill the ear; but the stormy showers that fall with violence

beat down the stalks flat to the earth, and lay whole fields without hope of recovery." [Hall.] Oh! that we could see more of that temper of Jesus, who pitied and prayed oftener than he censured!


Brethren, it is with pain that I pause on a subject on which I love to meditate; but I must leave to your retired thoughts the further development of it. Review the whole of your Saviour's life, contemplate all his virtues, and while you are musing, may the fire burn, the Holy Spirit descend, and impress upon this his likeness.

How few real Christians are there in the world! High professions, sanguine hopes, angry zeal for a particular system of doctrines; these do not constitute Christianity; but the temper of Christ inwrought in the soul and displayed in the life. Where do we see such believers? If a person who had never seen or heard of the gospel history, were to behold us, could he learn with any accuracy from our deportment, what was the conduct of Jesus upon earth? Brethren, we all must be abased in the dust under a sense of our imperfections.

But, Christian, if thou art really engaged in the service of God; if, like the eagle who fixes his eye upon the sun and soars aloft, thou fixest thine eye on the Sun of Righteousness, and ascendest to him in thy desires and wishes, do not relinquish thine hope, though thou must pour forth thy tears, when thou considerest the amazing interval between thy model and thyself; for know, that though thou must aim at the perfection of Jesus, this perfection is not the condition of salvation; but the soul that renounces sin, that embraces the sacrifice of Immanuel, that conscientiously aims to arrive at the stature of the fulness of Christ, shall, through the righteousness of

the Redeemer, be brought to unite with the "spirits of the just made perfect;" to see Jesus as he is, and be made like unto him.

SERMON XCV.

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BENEFITS OF SICKNESS.

JOHN xi. 3.

Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

WAS there ever on earth, my brethren, a more privileged family than that of Lazarus? All the members of it were united in love to each other, and in love to the Redeemer, and were honoured, in return, by his most tender friendship. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." They resided at Bethany, a small village about two miles from Jerusalem; and to their hospitable roof the Saviour often retired from the tumult and noise, the vices and follies, of the city, and gave them the most sublime instructions, the most tender consolations, which they received with eager attention and with full faith. Who, then, would not have supposed that the dwelling of Lazarus, so gloriously distinguished by the frequent presence of the Son of God, would be inaccessible to those calamities and afflictions which embitter the lives of mortals, and would ever be blest by peace, by prosperity, and felicity? If these

precise hopes were not entertained by this pious and amiable family; if, instructed in the school of Jesus Christ, the members of it had learned that his kingdom was not of this world, and that therefore it is not in this world that the believer must expect a perfect felicity; they seem at least to have flattered themselves that their intimacy with him, who by a single word cured the sick, would avert from a household, to which he was so much attached, the pains of sickness and the languors of disease. We may infer this from the message which the sisters of Lazarus send to Jesus Christ: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." We may infer it from the words which Martha addressed to the Redeemer, when she met him approaching to Bethany: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Their faith in the power and goodness of Jesus was unlimited; but it must be confessed, it was not sufficiently enlightened and submissive. The surprise which they express because the friend of Jesus is sick, and because the Redeemer does not immediately fly to his relief, ought at least to have been balanced by the persuasion that this sickness was for the benefit of Lazarus, and that it was permitted from motives equally wise on the part of Jesus, and useful for his friend. If the first emotion of nature made them exclaim, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;" religion should have induced them immediately to add, 'Lord, thy will be done. Thy wisdom so perfectly knows what is necessary for us, that we are fully persuaded that all thy dispensations are right. Thy love for the men whom thou camest to redeem, is so tender and enlightened, that we do not for a moment doubt, that the afflictions which thou sendest are useful to them;

and that therefore, if Lazarus thy friend is sick, it is because thou lovest him.'

Yes, my brethren, the great design of the religion of Jesus is the salvation of our immortal souls. Every thing, then, which tends to produce this effect, is a blessing; and as the afflictions which Providence sends to us may powerfully tend to produce it, we should consider them as proceeding, not from the anger of God, but from his mercy and love: he afflicts the body, only to heal the soul, and prepare it for glory. It is under this point of view, that we propose to consider *the advantages of sickness*, and the influence which it may and ought to have upon us.

Favour me with your attention: the subject is interesting to us all. Do you, who have been laid on the bed of disease, listen, and inquire of your own hearts, whether you have derived that benefit from this dispensation of Providence which you ought. Do you, who are still in health, listen; that when the time of sickness comes, as it will surely come, you may know to what duties and exercises God calls you.

It is impossible, in a single discourse, to mention *all* the benefits which may result from sickness. I can only mention a few of the leading advantages which believers derive, and which we all ought to derive, from it.

1. By sickness, God designs to *discover to us our true character, and make us know ourselves*. I need not tell you of what infinite consequence it is to be acquainted with the real state of our souls; to know whether we are the children of God, or the children of Satan; the heirs of heaven, or the heirs of hell. I need not tell you, believers, of what infinite consequence it is, even after you suppose you have devoted

yourselves to God, to trace the most secret recesses of your hearts; to examine constantly what you are and what you ought to be, what you do and what you ought to do; to search what vices and errors you have which need correction; what virtues you have yet to acquire or strengthen; what temptations have most power over you; what weak places in your heart require to be fortified. Unless we habitually try ourselves on these and similar subjects, we act not as reasonable men, much less as Christians. Unless we constantly thus descend into our own souls, we shall not only not advance in holiness, but besides this, we are in danger, through the deceitfulness of our hearts and the illusions of self-love, of making the most fatal and irretrievable mistakes as to our true character. There are thousands in the regions of eternal despair, who, whilst they lived, doubted not of the love of God towards them, of their interest in the Redeemer, and their title to heaven. Neglecting to search deep into their souls, to test themselves by the word of God, to try themselves thoroughly and impartially, they lived in hopes of future felicity, and on leaving this world, with as much surprise as horror, found themselves enwrapped in the eternal flames! But, all-important as is this accurate knowledge of ourselves, yet experience and observation teach us that nothing is more difficult than to acquire it in the hurry of an active life, and amidst the occupations of the world; when the soul, busied with the scenes around it, fixes upon *them*, and is prevented from turning inwards upon itself, and concentrating its reflections upon its own state and circumstances. But when disease lays us down on the bed of infirmity, when it removes us from our ordinary course of life, when it obliges us to interrupt our

business and pleasures, then man is restored to himself, and led to re-enter into his own heart. Then all those objects which prevented him from fixedly looking at his soul, his conscience, his situation—vanish from observation; and no longer occupied solely by his profession, his commerce, his family, his schemes of aggrandizement and fortune, he remembers himself, God, and eternity. He has now *leisure* to attend to these important subjects, since to the noise and tumult which surrounded him, succeeds the most profound tranquillity. He has the strongest *motives*, since he sees just before him that judgment-bar, at which he must appear; that God, who cannot be deceived, who searches his heart, and discerns his true character, and who will regulate his eternal destiny in conformity with this character. Ah! how many has our heavenly Father led by this painful but benevolent means of sickness, to study and to know themselves, to awake from that stupid forgetfulness of themselves in which they had lived, and to reject those illusions which had hitherto deceived them! Are there none of you, my brethren, who can attest, from your own experience, this beneficial effect of disease and infirmity? Some of you, perhaps, can tell us that you formerly lived, as so many foolish men still live, in a perfect indifference to religion, never seriously examining it or seeking to know its nature, neither rejecting nor believing it, neglecting its duties, and regardless of its sanctions; living, as to a future world, without principle and without system; never meditating on the end of your creation, on the state of your soul, or your future prospects. Sickness opened your eyes; it roused you from this neglect of yourselves; it made you feel the folly of

a man who, endowed with a reason and conscience, and surrounded by the light of revelation, lives without thinking of death, without reflecting on the destiny which awaits him, without solemnly asking himself, 'Is there a future world and a judgment? Shall I spend an eternity in heaven or hell?' You then began, for the first time, to meditate on these truths and on yourselves. Sickness, like the affliction of the prodigal, caused you to "come to yourselves;" to turn your eyes inward upon your own hearts. Like him, you saw your guilt and your misery; like him, you cried, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." Was it not in love that this sickness was sent? Was it not the only means which could awaken you from your deep insensibility and disregard of yourself?

Others of you, perhaps, can tell us that you supposed yourselves the children of God, and imagined that you had performed your duty when you had outwardly professed Christianity, diligently attended the means of grace, participated of the holy sacrament, and lived exempt from gross crimes and immoralities. You were visited with a dangerous sickness; you supposed you were nigh the eternal world, and you began to examine your preparations for it. You found then that the mere name of a Christian does not constitute Christianity; that a mere profession of religion and a regular walk will not fit the soul for heaven. Your hopes were shaken; your confidence was abandoned; you felt that a sound and thorough conversion unto God was something more serious than you had hitherto imagined, and that you had never been vitally united to the Lord Jesus. Though you had supposed, with the church of Laodicea, that you were spiritually "rich and increased

in goods, and had need of nothing ;” yet you now found that you were “ poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.” Was it not in love that this sickness was sent to you, whilst you still had time to flee to the cross of Jesus, and obtain from him the remission of your sins, and the renewal of your hearts ?

Others of you, perhaps, can tell us that you had lived in a cold and lukewarm state, yet were insensible how far you had gotten away from God, how much your holy dispositions had languished, and your Christian graces withered ; for your conscience had lost that nice sensibility and delicacy, that force and energy, which it once had. Sickness seized you ; conscience woke from its lethargy ; your eyes were opened on your wanderings ; you shuddered as you considered the weakness of your faith, the coldness of your love, the waverings of your hope, and the strength of your attachment to the world. You found that, through disuse, you could scarcely manage the armour of God, and you saw the king of terrors apparently advancing towards you. Your backslidings reproved you ; you were humbled in the dust at your coldness, your unfruitfulness, your decay in grace ; you lifted up your cries to God, and he inspired you with renewed zeal and engagedness in his service. Was it not in love that this sickness was sent, which thus made you compare your present state with days that were past, which taught you your declensions, and led you to God “ to strengthen the things which were ready to die ?”

2. Sickness is designed, not only to make us know ourselves, but also to *know God*. When do we better know, than in severe disease, the *authority of God*, and our *dependence* upon him ? We feel then that we are creatures sustained by his sovereign pleasure ;

that in a moment he can crush us in the dust; that our struggles against his appointments are vain; and that on him alone we rely for life and felicity.

When do we better know his *holiness*, which cannot endure sin, and his *wrath* against sinners, than when we feel those pains, which, without guilt, would never have entered into our world; than when we look forward to that death which is the wages of sin, and to that awful tribunal whence the impenitent shall be blasted by the thunders of the Lord?

When do we better know the divine *faithfulness*, than when we find our Heavenly Father supporting his children amidst their pains and weakness, accomplishing all his promises to them, proving that "his grace is sufficient for them," and making his strength perfect in their weakness?

When do we better know *how good* is God, than when we find him tenderly standing by us in our sickness, giving us the consolations of his grace, and lifting us above the pressure of outward sorrow, by letting down in our soul an anticipated heaven!

Yes, my brethren, I doubt not there are many of you who can attest that, in a week of dangerous and severe sickness, the believer often sees more of the compassion and kindness of God, than in months of health. How delightful is it then, to behold the hand of our Father pointing us to immortality, and leading the soul sinking under pain, to approach to the fountain-head of felicity, and to drink in delight from that stream which "makes glad the city of our God!" How delightful, to have him giving us a warm feeling of his love, a full certainty of our adoption, and an assurance of the heavenly glory! And these are blessings which he generally communicates to his children in severe sickness; through his overflowing

goodness, he generally then removes every fear and apprehension from the minds even of those believers who, in health, were overclouded by doubts and darkness.

3. Sickness is calculated to make us feel *the preciousness of Jesus*. Even in the time of health, the Saviour is to the believer the "chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely;" but his value is especially felt by us when sickness has brought us to look into the eternal world. With what lustre do the glories of the Redeemer then shine! with what ecstasy is his name pronounced! with what adoring gratitude is his grace remembered! Oh! what a mercy does it now appear, to have a Christ who hath disarmed death of his sting! who stands ready to conduct our separated souls to that kingdom, of which he hath taken possession for his followers! who will appear as our advocate before the eternal throne, and receive us to dwell in his embraces for ever! Yes, I repeat it, sickness renders the name of Jesus more dear, and causes us with more eagerness to press his cross to our hearts, as the only source of our felicity, the only basis of our hope, the only foundation of our triumph!

4. Sickness is beneficial, because it makes us more deeply to feel *the infinite importance of religion*. Yes, the heart that has been most obdurate, is then constrained to feel, and the mouth that has vented the boldest scoffs against vital godliness, is then constrained to acknowledge the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between a holy and a worldly life. The believer then feels more than he did before, under what unspeakable obligations he is to God for having softened, and humbled, and converted his heart; for having forgiven his sins, and

justified him by his grace, and sealed him by his Spirit. And you too, careless sinner, will then have different views and sentiments. The Saviour, whom you now neglect, will then appear to you more desirable than a thousand worlds; that futurity, which you now disregard, will break in upon your soul in all its overwhelming powers; and whilst you, standing on the isthmus which separates time from eternity, look on the one hand and behold the glories reserved for the pious, and contemplate on the other the agonies prepared for the impenitent, you will curse yourself for your folly in refusing to tread that narrow path, which terminates in endless joy!

5. Sickness is beneficial, since it shows us *the vanity of the world*. On the bed of sickness, honours, pleasures, riches, the pursuit of which occupies the lives of so many men, to the forgetfulness of their soul, their heaven, their God, lose their lustre, and appear but phantoms. What consolation would the acquisition of all earthly *dignities* afford to him who, from the bed of disease, as from a watch-tower, looks into the eternal world, and sees that the only true honour is that which cometh from God only? What support can power and authority give to the soul of him who is taught (oh! how convincingly!) by sickness, that he is a feeble, impotent mortal, whose honours will perish in the dust, whose authority will be disregarded in the eternal world? Does not sickness as forcibly teach us the vanity of earthly *pleasures*? The ghosts (if I may speak so) of many forbidden delights, in which the voluptuary has indulged, start up around his bed, and instead of tranquillizing his agitated mind, or affording a lenitive to the pains of his body, sting him with remorse, and point to that world where he will recompense.

ah! dearly recompense, for his guilty joys! And with respect to the *innocent* pleasures of life, the remembrance even of them can afford him no satisfaction. Whilst he considers that for them he neglected the one thing needful, he is forced to regard himself as a child running after shadows, and amusing himself with toys and playthings, that in a little time must be broken to pieces.

Do *riches* on the bed of dangerous sickness appear more valuable? Answer, you who have been accustomed to fix your trust in them, to consider them as the supreme good, as the source of all pleasures, as the antidote to all pains. Did not sickness break your idol, and discover to you its impotence? Did it not make you feel that your gold could then do nothing for you? that it could not assuage the burnings of that fever which scorched you, nor mitigate those bodily pains which oppressed you; much less refresh, support, uphold your soul, trembling on your lips, and ready to fly to the bar of God? Did it not make you feel that the beggar, lying at your gate, covered with sores and rags, expiring with hunger—but humble, resigned, patient, rich in faith—is incomparably more happy from his piety than you from your riches; and that this poor man, formerly the object of your contempt and scorn, becomes at this moment, and in your own eyes, an object truly great, truly worthy of your envy and respect? How useful are those disorders, which thus show how false and illusive is the glare of those earthly objects, an inordinate attachment to which destroys so many souls!

6. Sickness is beneficial, when our deportment under it is such as becomes Christians, since it then *benefits our neighbour, and glorifies God*. Thousands

of examples might easily be produced, of persons who received their first serious impressions from the conduct of Christians in dangerous diseases. Indeed, there can scarcely be found any person so profane and insensible, as not to be affected when he beholds Christians, amidst bodily pains and in the prospect of dissolution, calm, tranquil, rejoicing in the perfections of God and the all-sufficiency of Jesus, and saying with composure to their afflicted friends, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves!" Such spectacles prove to him that there is a great reality in religion; and even if they do not produce a true conversion, they will at least cause him to pause, and have more solemn thoughts of religion than he has hitherto had. And besides this, the hearts of the pious are cheered by such a deportment in sickness; their diligence in serving God is augmented; their fears are removed; they triumph in the faithfulness of their covenant God; and look forward without apprehension to the time when they too shall be stretched upon the bed of sickness and of death.

Since then your disorders may be the means of awakening the careless, of causing the praises of God to be celebrated by those who have hitherto neglected him, and his perfections to be enstamped upon hearts that have hitherto glowed with no affection to him; since they may inspire the children of God with thankfulness and joy, with confidence and trust, they may certainly be the effects of his mercy, and sent to you because he loves you.

I intended to have mentioned many other beneficial effects of sickness, but it is time for me to pause. Suffer me, however, before concluding, to entreat those of you who have lately been visited with sickness, to enter into your hearts, and inquire whether

you have derived these benefits from it. If you have, bless God for it, and consider it as a disguised mercy. If you have not, on leaving this house, retire to your private chamber, and then supplicate God for these advantages. This, like every other dispensation of providence, will produce some effect upon you. It is the rod of the Almighty ; it may be made like that of Aaron, to bloom with the fruits of righteousness. Beware lest, through your neglect, it be converted into a serpent, like that of Moses.

And may God grant, that all who have experienced these trials may learn those pious sentiments which they are calculated to teach ; and that those of us, whom he may shortly call to the same state, may then be supported by him, and find our sicknesses conducing to his glory and to our salvation.

SERMON XCVI.



PARTAKING OF OTHER MEN'S SINS.



1 TIM. v. 22.

Neither be partaker of other men's sins.

IT was a frequent petition of the illustrious St. Augustine, "Lord, forgive other men's sins!" It is a petition which we all, my brethren, should constantly and fervently present to God ; for we, all of us, in a greater or less degree, have been instrumental in producing that iniquity which deluges the world, and in pushing sinners into the burning lake. None of us can say, with truth, 'I am clean from the blood of all men ; I have never by my improper conduct, by my unguarded language, by my criminal temptations, seduced others into guilt, and pulled down upon them the vengeance of God !' What a dreadful reflection is this ! Our personal transgressions are so many and so aggravated, that the weight of punishment due to them, could be borne by none but Him who had the strength of Deity to support him : and besides all these, we are chargeable with countless iniquities which others, drawn or driven by us, have committed. Surely, if this consideration is properly felt by you, you will need no other motive to

induce you seriously to ponder the injunction of the apostle, "Neither be partaker of other men's sins."

I acknowledge that the place in which this injunction is found, seems at first to restrain it to a particular order of men, and to a particular occasion. St. Paul is instructing Timothy in what manner to discharge his ministerial functions: having given him many important directions and solemn charges, he adds, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins," that is, do not hastily and inconsiderately, without the most careful examination, lay your hands on any person to ordain him, lest through precipitancy you introduce unsound or irreligious men into the ministry, and thus become accessory to their unfaithfulness, and partakers of their guilt. This is the particular object of the text; but it has a much more general sense. You all know that nothing is more common than, on the occurrence of particular cases, to produce general maxims that apply to them; which general maxims, while they forcibly illustrate the points under consideration, do not become less extensive in their sense. What St. Paul therefore says to Timothy, to induce him to be circumspect in the ordination of ministers, he also says to us, to induce us to be vigilant in all our conduct.

To explain and illustrate this important precept, three things will be requisite. We must,

I. Show you by what means we may partake of other men's sins;

II. Give you some motives to induce you to comply with this injunction of the apostle; and,

III. Afford you some directions to assist you in obeying it.

I. We are to show you by what means we may

partake of other men's sins. And here, my brethren, we do not pretend to mention all the methods whereby we incur this guilt: they are numberless; and our limits will permit us only to give a rapid sketch of a few of the principal of them.

1. We are guilty of other men's sins, when we set before them an *evil example*, which induces them to plunge into guilt. By an irregular and unholy life, we may not only destroy ourselves, but cause the perdition of thousands who, strengthened in sin by viewing our life, go carelessly to perdition. "Why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" said Paul to St. Peter. How did Peter compel them? Not by any outward violence; not by any public preaching; but by his example. In like manner, my brethren, even though we use no compulsion to drive men to iniquity, even though we utter no seducing word unto them, yet still, if our unholy conduct confirms them in guilt, we partake of their sin. Ought not this truth to make those open and undisguised sinners who are amongst us, to tremble at their danger? You detest the character of the hypocrite; but do you not perceive that, in this respect, the hypocrite himself, odious as he is, is far less criminal than you. At the judgment-day, the hypocrite will have to bear his own burden, and will be crushed under its weight; but upon your heads will light not only your own iniquities, but those of many miserable wretches whom your example has undone. Unholy and profane parents! do you also seriously weigh this truth? If your children, imitating your conduct, live sinful, prayerless lives, indulge in iniquity, and "run to excess of riot," they shall perish; but you who, by your example, seduced them into sin, shall not be esteemed guiltless! Do you, who are dis-

tinguished in the world by riches, by talents, or by any endowments which give you weight in society, do you solemnly consider this; "you are as a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid?" Your virtues or your sins cannot be single: on you the eyes of your fellow men are fixed; your example they stand ready to imitate; and they quiet the clamours of an accusing conscience by considering that they act as you do. Unless you set before them the pattern of a holy life, a host of sins, to which your example impelled others, will in the last day encircle you around, and fill you with horror.

2. We are guilty of other men's sins when we *connive at, consent to, or conceal them*. The instance of Eli abundantly proves that he who winks at a crime, that by his office and power he is qualified to prevent or redress, becomes positively guilty of that very crime, as much as if he had been the single and personal transgressor. Think of this, you who patiently stand by, while the name, the authority, and cause of God are assailed; and through a time-serving fear, or a cruel complaisance, neglect to oppose these crimes. Your silence and connivance make you actual transgressors: not to speak, is esteemed by God to approve; not to act, is to commit; not to oppose, is to load yourself with a share of the guilt! Think of this, you who are equally insensible in beholding sins committed against your brother. Do you remain cool and passive when you hear your brother calumniated, his reputation aspersed, his good name assailed by slander? God marks you as a slanderer! Think of this, magistrates, and tremble while you recollect that God esteems you guilty of every crime, which by your post, you are able to repress, but which you timidly and criminally overlook.

3. We partake of other men's sins by uttering those *sentiments which tend to subvert morality*, or diminish our horror for guilt. If we propagate loose doctrines, if we scoff at serious piety, if we persuade men that an holy and heavenly life is not necessary, "if we call evil good and good evil," we are murdering souls, and accumulating for ourselves indignation and wrath. It makes my heart ache, to think what store of unavailing anguish a man is preparing for himself, when he derides the practices, or the truths of religion: corrupting the persons with whom he associates, they may convey the infection to others; it may be extended to generations yet to come; the effects that may be produced by one loose witticism or one unholy address, are incalculable, except by that God who will judge us. It makes my heart ache, to think that so many are using the talents which God gave them, in sneering at the truths, and the children of God; in deriding the ways of piety, and in employing sarcasms and sneers to induce men to relinquish heaven and to plunge into hell! There is an expression which one of the fathers uses concerning Arius, which should cause these advocates of loose principles to tremble: "As many souls as Arius has seduced into heresy or blasphemy, so many degrees of torments will he have in the regions of wo."

4. We partake of other men's sins by *alluring, inviting, tempting them to sin*. When we spread the net before our neighbour, and decoy him into it; when we solicit and incite him to iniquity, we partake of his sin; we adopt it as our own. Oh! how many are there, who, in this way, are guilty before God! How many, who, acting as the co-adjutors of Satan, have designedly tempted their neighbour to intemperance, to fraud, to uncleanness

How many, who have voluntarily provoked him to passion and rage ! Thoughtless men ! you may now laugh at these things ; you may exult at the ingenuity with which you spread your snares, and the art with which you drew your unsuspecting brother into them ; but God regards these as serious crimes, of which you must render a serious account.

5. We may partake of other men's sins even when we have not been instrumental in producing them, when we *flatter* them in these sins, and do not reprove them. "He that biddeth him God speed," says an apostle, speaking of a heretic, "is partaker of his evil deeds." When we encourage men in their iniquity ; when we commend their crimes ; when we give specious names to their iniquities ; when we reprove not at all ; or reprove like Eli, as though we were not in earnest, say what we please, think what we please, we are partakers of those iniquities at which we thus basely connive.

6. Finally, for my time obliges me to omit many other methods, even though we do not allure to sin or encourage men in it, yet if our *hearts love their conduct*, if we secretly rejoice in it and approve it, God, who looks chiefly at the heart, and esteems us impious or holy, according to its frame and disposition, esteems us to be guilty, and ranks us amongst the partakers of their sins. When St. Stephen was put to death by the Jews, Paul stood by as a spectator ; he assisted not the murderers, nor cast a single stone against the venerable martyr. Was he therefore guiltless ? No ! he himself confesses that he was guilty of murder, "because when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was consenting to," or as the original word [*συνευδονων*] is more frequently translated, "I was well pleased with his death." Ah,

my brethren ! how vast is the crowd of sins of which we have in this sense been partakers ? How many iniquities of others which we dared not openly approve nor publicly encourage, have yet afforded us secret pleasure ? When this slanderer has calumniated the good name of our rival ; when this fraudulent man has over-reached one whom we envied ; when this revengeful person has injured our enemy ; when this sinner has mocked at the obligations of religion, have we never said in our hearts, like the foes of David, “ Aha ! so we would have it.” If such have been our sentiments, we have been really guilty of calumny, fraud, revenge, impiety ; however closely these sentiments may have been confined in our own breasts.

Such are the principal methods in which we partake of other men’s sins ; and I am persuaded that if we candidly apply these observations to our own lives ; we shall find a black catalogue of other men’s sins, which are chargeable to us, and which merit deep repentance, and bitter tears. That we may in future be more guarded, let us attend to some of those motives which enforce the injunction of the apostle. This was our

IId. Division.

From the many motives which occur to me, I shall select only three. We should abstain from other men’s sins :

1. From charity to our brethren.
2. From pity to ourselves.
3. From piety to God.

1. *Charity to our brethren* should encourage us to the performance of this injunction of the apostle.

Is it consistent with that charity which we owe to our brother, and which should prompt us to the per-

formance of every kind office towards him : is it consistent with that charity which Jesus inculcated upon all his disciples, and enforced by the most alluring promises, and most dreadful threatenings ? Is it consistent with this divine grace, I do not say coolly to stand by and see our brother descending into hell, but to endeavour to plunge him deep into the infernal gulf ? Yet this you do, whilst you violate the precept of the apostle. Instead of elevating a warning voice, you lure him to ruin ; instead of guarding him against the power of his corruptions, you inflame them, and give them tenfold strength ; instead of reaching forth your hand to pluck him from the precipice, you advance before him, and break down the mounds which God has erected to save him from damnation. Is this charitable ; is it humane : is it not diabolical ? The scripture denominates the neglect of admonishing and instructing our brother, *hated* : “ Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart ; thou shalt not suffer sin to lie upon him.” (Lev. xix. 17.) If a mere omission to interest ourselves for his salvation, deserve this title, what terms can be found sufficiently strong to express the greatness of their enmity, who to this neglect, add positive exertions to seduce their companions into sin ? Tell me, or rather answer to your own consciences, does your conduct more resemble the benevolent Saviour, who went about doing good, healing the disorders of the soul, as well as the pains of the body, or the malignant fiend, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour ?

2. If you are insensible to this motive, yet still think of yourselves, and out of pity *to your own souls*, partake not of other men’s sins. Their destruction will not diminish ; it will inconceivably aggravate your misery. When you meet in the infernal pit

those whom you have seduced into sin; when you there behold those to whom you have performed an irreparable injury, will it charm the flames, to hear them address you, and cry in a voice of despair and rage, "Wretch, it is you who have brought me hither! it is you who, by your solicitations and example, pulled down this vengeance which oppresses me. My doom is remediless, but I will pursue you through eternity! I will continually present myself before you, enfettered by the chains which you have forged, surrounded by the fires which you have lighted: I will for ever pour into your ears, my shrieks and execrations!" Tell me, will such an address as this render the place of torment more pleasant; will such society as this sooth the anguish of your heart? The ungodly rich man well knew to the contrary: he had partaken in his brethren's sins, and he cried out in agony, "I pray thee, Father Abraham, that thou wouldest send to my brother's house; for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Sinner, a solitary punishment in those doleful regions will be sufficiently severe; why should you wish to aggravate it in this dreadful manner? Your own iniquities are enough to crush you; why should you be solicitous to increase the burden?

3. Finally, let me urge you by the *authority of God*. This God commands you not to partake of other men's sins: is it safe to despise his command? Can you contend with him, and prosper? What account will you give him at the judgment-day, of those souls of which he is the rightful owner, and which you are striving to seduce from him? Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and make them holy: is it prudent for you to do all that is in your power to frus-

trate this, his design? Ah! be warned in time, and since you cannot contend with Omnipotence, strive by a holy life, by an abandonment of your own sins, and by ceasing to partake of the sins of others, to secure the favour of God.

I might add many other motives, but these are surely sufficient to excite you, if you are not entirely insensible. Let us then pass to our

III^d. Division, in which we were to give you some directions, to enable you to comply with the injunctions of the apostle.

1. Be careful that *your own heart and life are holy*. Sin is infectious; and as long as you are polluted with it, you must communicate its poison to those with whom you associate. Besides, if your own life is unholy, your conscience will prevent you from faithfully reproving sin in others, or your ill example will render your reproofs inefficacious. Make sure, then, of a sound conversion unto God. Begin with personal reformation; let the polluted fountain in your own heart be purified, or it will send forth streams to poison your neighbour.

2. Cultivate a high value and *love for the souls of men*. That which we love, we shall not readily injure; and if we have a proper regard for immortal souls, we shall rather forego many pleasures, than give a wound to them. If you look at those who are most noted for partaking of other men's sins, you will find that they are those who know not the worth of a soul. If you go to them and say, 'Act not thus, it exposes your brother to perdition,' you will hear them answer with the spirit of Cain, "Are we our brothers' keepers?" or, like the malignant high-priests, "What is that to us? See thou to that." If you would, then, avoid the doom, avoid the sentiments of these men,

and ever remember that a soul will outweigh a world, that its eternal destiny is not to be trifled with.

3. *Mourn before God for the sins of your brethren.* When God passed through Jerusalem to smite it, he spared none but those who cried and sighed for the abominations that were done within it. (Ezek. ix. 4.) All others were esteemed partakers of the general corruption and were swept away with the overflowing scourge. Be careful, then, if your neighbours, and friends, and relatives, resist all other means, to lament their obstinacy, and bewail their wickedness before God. This has been the conduct of the pious: lest they should partake the sins of others, they mourned over them. Lot “vexed his righteous soul from day to day, in seeing and hearing” the “unlawful deeds” of the inhabitants of Sodom. David cries, “Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.” “If ye will not hear the word of the Lord,” says Jeremiah, “my soul shall weep in secret places for you, and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears.” “Many walk,” says Paul, “of whom I tell you *weeping*, that they are enemies to the cross.” And our blessed Lord himself, poured forth the tears of sorrow over rebellious Jerusalem. Thus must we act, if we would free ourselves from the sins of others; thus must we act, if we would have that tender compassion for the souls of men, which would animate us to diligence in admonishing and instructing them.

4. If we would not partake of the sins of others, we must *reprove* them. I have reserved this direction as the conclusion of my discourse, because there are few duties more important, and few so much neglected as this duty of brotherly reproof. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,

but reprove them," says the apostle: clearly intimating that we shall be esteemed to have a fellowship and participation in those sins which we do not reprove. Rebuke, then, profane swearing, intemperance, blasphemy, and Sabbath-breaking, and other vices which you see committed. "There is a holy silence under God's correction; Aaron held his peace: and there is a sinful silence under man's corruption; Eli held his peace also."

But whilst I solemnly urge you to this duty, I must caution you also to perform it in a Christian manner, and with Christian sentiments; or, instead of benefiting, you will injure religion and your neighbour. Be sure, before reproof, that your brother is guilty; conjecture, suspicion, rumour, are not sufficient ground for a reproof: be sure that your aims are holy; if you are animated by pride, by vain-glory, by a desire to contradict and control others, your reproof is a sin. Let God's glory, hatred of sin, and a love of your brother's soul, be the only principles which animate you. Reprove always in proper season, seriously, impartially, and with meekness.

SERMON XCVII.



THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN.



ACTS xxvi. 28.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

SUCH was the exclamation extorted from Agrippa, by the force of truth. He, with Festus, Bernice, and a large assembly of other persons, had listened with attention, while Paul, with eloquence and boldness, had displayed the firm foundations of the Christian faith; had shown the admirable accordance of the gospel with the Old Testament; and had proved that Jesus was the Messiah, from the predictions accomplished in him. The ignorant and prejudiced Festus derides the apostle as an insane man; but Agrippa, who was instructed in the scriptures of the Old Testament, cannot but feel the force of his proofs, and almost becomes a Christian; but, alas! his passions and his temporal interest prevent him from becoming so *altogether*. He cannot make those renunciations which the gospel requires; he therefore stifled the convictions of his conscience; closed his eyes to the light of truth, and lived and died, rejecting the Redeemer.

My brethren, there are still many Agrippas in the world; many who are almost Christians; but who yet will for ever perish. The majority perhaps, in gospel lands, resolve to be saved, and make some efforts for their salvation; but they cannot unreservedly devote themselves to the Lord. Like the amiable and moral young ruler, who was "not far from the kingdom of heaven," they "go away sorrowful," when some particular duties are enjoined on them; and they therefore, notwithstanding the hopes that had been entertained respecting them, perish as certainly as the more openly profane.

My sole design in the present discourse is, to draw the character of an almost Christian; to show you how far a person may apparently advance in the ways of piety, while he is uninterested in the blessings of the covenant, or the blood of Jesus. Favour me with your attention; the subject deserves it: listen with self-application; inquire, as did the disciples, "Lord, is it I? Is it I?" and supplicate that grace which can render you not only almost, but altogether a follower of the Redeemer, a member of his mystical body, an heir of his everlasting glory.

I. Let us then delineate the character of the *almost Christian*. Let us show how far a person may apparently advance in the ways of piety, while his heart is yet unrenewed, and he a stranger to God.

1. He that is only almost a Christian, may have much *speculative knowledge* of religious truths. He may receive the true doctrines of Christianity with a faith that is not true. In times of ignorance he may discern and pity the blindness of those around him. In times of error he may, as a champion for the truth, oppose heresy, convince gainsayers. He may be among the number of those mentioned by the apos-

the Paul, who, while they are not the children of the Lord, yet “ know the will of God, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and are confident that they themselves are guides of the blind, lights to them that are in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes; since they have the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law.” (Rom. ii. 18. 20.) He may be among the number of those servants mentioned by our Redeemer, who, though they knew their Master’s will, yet did it not, and therefore, are sentenced to be beaten with many stripes. Without such a knowledge of the truths of God, as will enable us understandingly to embrace the offers of salvation through the Redeemer, we cannot obtain heaven; but with much greater speculative knowledge than is possessed by thousands of humble believers, we may descend into hell. If the mere illumination of the mind could save us, the devils, whose powers are so much greater, and whose knowledge is so much more extensive than those of mortals, had long since left the burning abyss, and ascended to the regions of glory.

2. He that is only almost a Christian, may have great and splendid *spiritual gifts*. These result from the common, and not the special operations of the Holy Ghost, and have often been seen in those whose hearts were unrenewed. Do you pray with so much fervour and apparent earnestness, as to interest those believers who hear you? do you explain the word of God so as to enlighten the minds of others? Do you illustrate the truths of religion in such a manner as to warm and animate those who listen to you? For these gifts you owe your thanks to God, who gave them for the benefit of the church; but with them

all, you may be an unpardoned sinner. Suppose not that you are safe, because you have benefited others : the Lord can employ an unclean raven to nourish an Elijah. Paul supposes it possible that he, who preaches the gospel with the eloquence and force of an apostle, may himself be a cast-away; (1 Cor. ix. 27.) and the awful history of Judas confirms this declaration. The scribes and pharisees were not without spiritual gifts, which shone in the length and seeming warmth of their prayers; yet the most terrible woes were denounced against them by the Redeemer. Those possessed eminent gifts, who, at the last day shall cry, " Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" but they shall hear with horror that sentence of their Judge, " Depart from me : I know you not !" Yes, " though we speak with the tongues of men and of angels; and though we have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though we have all faith, so that we could remove mountains, and have not charity," true love to God and to man, " we are nothing."

3. He that is only almost a Christian, may make a high *profession of religion*, may unite himself visibly with the church, and be frequent in the worship of God. The foolish virgins, as well as the wise, carried their lamps in token that they waited for the bridegroom. There were leaves on that symbolical fig-tree which bore no fruit, and was accursed. In the field of the church, the wheat and the tares will remain intermingled, till the separation takes place at the judgment-day, when the Lord will "gather the wheat into his garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." There are many who

have "the form of godliness, and not the power;" (2 Tim. iii. 5.) who, like the Israelites spoken of by the prophet, "are called by the name of Israel, and swear by the name of the Lord; who call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves on the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness." (Is. xlviii. 1, 2.) But you not only profess religion; you are also frequent in worshipping God; so did the insincere and wicked Israelites, whose character is drawn by the Lord, in Is. lviii. 2.; notwithstanding their transgression and their sins, "yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God; they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." Ah! when you bring to God the sermons you have so often heard, you bring Uriah's letters, the ground of your death and damnation! Do you add to all this, frequent fastings, and the most humbling ceremonies of religion? So did these same Israelities, "bowing down their head as a bullrush, and sitting in sackcloth and ashes." (ver. 3.) So did that proud pharisee who "fasted twice in every week," and yet was not justified. (Luke xviii. 11—13.) So did Ahab, who "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." (1 Kings xxi. 27.) Do you macerate your bodies, and exercise much severity upon yourselves? So did the priests of Baal; so did those mentioned by the apostle, (Col. ii. 22, 23.) who inflicted the greatest sufferings upon themselves, "after the commandments and doctrines of men; in things which have a show of wisdom, in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

4. He that is only almost a Christian, may in some degree, *mourn* for his sin; from the common operations of the Spirit upon his mind, and from a fear of the wrath of God, he may lament his transgressions. Of this we cannot doubt, when we mark the anguish of Cain, of Esau, of Ahab, of Judas; when we observe the distress of those whose consciences are at times alarmed, but whose convictions pass away "like the morning cloud and the early dew;" when in imagination we descend into the regions of despair, and mark with horror the bitter weeping, the hopeless wailing among the damned. He may go further; and in the anguish of his mind, *confess* his sin: like Pharaoh, who cried, "I have sinned; the Lord is righteous; entreat the Lord for me;" (Ex. ix. 27.) but again hardened his heart, when the pressure of affliction was removed; like Balaam, who exclaimed to the angel who obstructed his progress, "I have sinned;" (Num. xxii. 34.) but who still sought to obtain the wages of corruption: like Saul, who, touched with the generous forbearance of David, acknowledged, "I have sinned; thou art more righteous than I;" (1Sa. xv. 24) but who soon forgot these emotions, and sought the life of him whose righteousness he had acknowledged: like Judas, who, agonized by the remembrance of his treachery, threw from him with abhorrence the reward of his guilt, and cried, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!" and then rushed forward to commit that last crime which cuts off every possibility of repentance, and "went to his own place."

He may often form the most solemn *vows* and *resolutions* against sin; as did the greater part of those whose histories have just been recalled to you; as did the Israelites on the shores of the Red Sea, and

on Mount Sinai; as many of you, who are yet at a distance from God, have done when you have been alarmed by some awful providence, or laid on the bed of sickness, and apparently brought near to the eternal world. He may *forsake* many of his sins, as did Herod: the unclean spirit may for a time appear to be cast out of his soul. (Matt. xii.) So great an alteration may take place in his conduct, that he may be supposed by others, even by the wisest and the best, to be converted; as was the case with Ananias, Sapphira, Nicholas the deacon, and many others, who were admitted even by the apostles into the church, but whose subsequent conduct showed that there "was no root in them."

5. He that is only almost a Christian, may have some *desires* of grace, and of the blessings which God communicates to his children; with the Jews, who, immediately after, murmured at the doctrine of Jesus, he may cry, "Lord, evermore give us of this bread;" (John vi.) with a profane Esau, may seek the blessing with tears; with the foolish virgins, may cry for the oil of grace; with a covetous Balaam, may exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" He may *tremble* at the word of God, like a Felix; like so many of you, my brethren, who at times have been alarmed by the denunciations of the Almighty, but who have not been converted. He may take some *delight* in the holy word, like the stony-ground hearers, who received the word with joy; like the Jews, who rejoiced in the light of John's ministry; like those described in Ezekiel, xxxiii. 31.; (and there are many in every age who would serve as originals of the picture :) "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before me as my people; and

they hear thy words, but they will not do them." He may have the most sanguine *hope* of future glory, and may look with pity and scorn upon the humble followers of Jesus, who sometimes are afflicted with fears lest they should have deceived themselves. Notwithstanding they were under the curse of the law, the pharisees "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Those apostates who are mentioned in the fifth chapter of Hebrews, had "tasted the powers of the world to come." He may *pray* often, like those "who drew nigh to God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him;" "who returned and inquired early after God; and remembered that God was their rock, and the High God their Redeemer; but who nevertheless did flatter him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues, since their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." (Isa. xxix. 13. Ps. lxxviii. 34.) He may feel something like *love* to God, not from the influences of the Spirit, and a view of the transcendent excellences of Jehovah, but from a mistaken belief that God is his friend, has conferred upon him the blessings of his grace, and has reserved for him the riches of his glory. He may feel some love for the children of God, not for their spiritual excellences, but for their gentle and courteous behaviour, and for those natural or acquired advantages which they may possess. Thus a heathen Pharaoh loved the pious Joseph; and the wicked Ahab was attached to Jehoshaphat. Thus those very Galatians, concerning whom the apostle feared that he had bestowed upon them labour in vain, had given him the strongest proofs of their love. "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record that, if it had

been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me."

Thus, my brethren, I have in a very brief and imperfect manner shown you how far a man may advance without being altogether a Christian, without having any interest in the promises of God, or in the merits of the Redeemer. Do you ask, What is still wanting to such a man, in order to constitute him a believer? I answer, Every thing that radically forms the Christian.

1. He wants the Holy Ghost to dwell within him; for (it is the language of inspiration) "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

2. He wants that *new birth* by which he must be made spiritual. From the first man, Adam, he has been made a living soul; but by the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, he has not yet been quickened in the spirit. He has not yet "put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." He is still a stranger to the "life of God," and has not been made a "partaker of the divine nature," of which all the children of God partake.

3. Though he has slightly confessed and felt his sins, yet he was never deeply *humbled in his heart*, nor made vile in his own eyes, nor contrite, nor broken-hearted, nor loathing himself for his abominations, nor weary, nor heavy laden with his sins.

4. Though he professes to believe he wants the *life of faith*, from education he calls himself a Christian, and coldly talks of the "mystery of redemption." But he does not with an humble, broken heart, betake himself to Christ, as his only refuge from the wrath of God and everlasting misery. The sense of the odiousness of sin, and of the damnation

threatened by the righteous God, has not yet taught him to value Christ as he must be valued by all who would be saved by him. He talks of him with cold respect; but he does not flee to him as to the only physician who can heal the deep wounds of his soul; he does not cry to him, as the sinking disciples in the tempest, "Save, Master, we perish!" Christ does not dwell in his heart by faith, nor does he long "with all saints to comprehend what is the depth and breadth, and length and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." He cannot truly say that he desires to know nothing but a crucified Christ, and that "the life that he lives in the flesh, he lives by faith on the Son of God." He has not that grateful admiration of the love of God in Christ which becomes a soul that is saved by him from the flames of hell, and that is reconciled to the Lord, and made an heir of everlasting life. He has not, understandingly, seriously, deliberately, and unreservedly, given up himself and all that he has to Christ, and thankfully accepted eternal life, as given to him on gospel terms. This living, effectual faith, is wanting to him.

5. He wants that serious *belief of the world to come*, which causes the soul to take it as its happiness and treasure; to place there its desires and hopes; to make it the principal business and labour of life to attain it; and to prefer it before all the honours, profits, and pleasures of the world. The almost Christian only takes heaven as a reserve, and regards it as a better place than hell. It is only the real believer who feels, that to "be with Christ is far better."

6. He wants a universal *hatred to all known sin*, and an actual victory over it, so far as to avoid all gross

iniquities. He is not weary and weighed down with his infirmities, and ardently desirous to be freed from all the remains of corruption, and to use the means appointed by God to obtain a victory over them.

7. He has not an unfeigned *love to a life of holiness*; a delight to meditate on the law of God, with an intention to obey it; a delight in the inward exercise of grace; in serious diligence for salvation; in fearing, loving, trusting, and knowing God.

Notwithstanding then the apparent progress he has made in piety, he must lie down in sorrow.

My brethren, these are solemn truths that have been declared to you. Let us be led by them,

1. *To examine our own state.* Professors of the religion of Jesus, are you real, or only almost Christians? Do any of you think this question unnecessary, and this examination useless? Your character is already decided: you want that holy jealousy, that self-distrust, that desire of converse with your own heart, which characterize the believer. Remain no longer in this state: none can be more uncomfortable. You renounce the pleasures of sin, and you have not the joys of religion; the profane hate you for your profession of religion, and God hates you for your insincerity. Your situation is most dangerous. The open sinner knows that he is not prepared for death, and his heart may be affected by the threatenings of the word of God. But these threatenings disquiet not you: the thunders of Sinai roll above you, and are just ready to burst upon your head! your calm is not disturbed, because you falsely suppose you are sheltered from them. Many, I doubt not, who are most interested in this discourse, have been felicitating themselves that it did not affect them; have been listening with as much com-

posure as David did to Nathan, before the prophet declared, "Thou art the man!" At last awake from this security; search deeply into the foundation of your hopes; make sure of a sound and thorough conversion unto God; cry not "peace, when sudden destruction may be" approaching; confide not in a building upon the sand: the storm is advancing which will try its foundation.

2. Salvation is *not so easily obtained* as the men of the world imagine. "Strive, therefore, to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." We can easily sink into hell, but the kingdom of heaven must suffer a holy violence. Think of this, you who are living in the neglect of God, from a belief that a few cries, and tears, and confessions on your death-bed, will secure you heaven. The almost Christian has done far more than this, and been rejected. Think of this, you (and how many thousand such persons are there!) whose religion consists only in an acknowledgment of the truth of the gospel, which you call faith, in a decent attendance on the ordinances of religion, and the heart of a moral heathen. Think of this, you whose piety consists only in contending for a particular system of opinions, or a particular mode of worship! Falling so far below the almost Christian, will you be safe when he is condemned?

3. If those that advance so far shall perish, *what shall be the doom of the openly profane?* If, after acknowledging and professing Christ, and forsaking many sins for him, persons may descend into despair, what woes must be reserved for those who despised and blasphemed this Redeemer, and indulged in every wickedness?

SERMON XCVIII.



THE EVIL OF JUDGING RASHLY.



MATTHEW vii. 1.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

ARE any of you, my brethren, surprised at the choice of the text that has been read to you? Do you say, that the prohibition contained in it is so well known by Christians, that there is no need to address them concerning it? Such a remark would indeed display little knowledge of the world: wherever we go, we see this precept violated. Every where we find persons hastily and malignantly judging their neighbours. No virtue is so spotless, no piety so ardent, no sex so tender, no age so venerable, no function so sacred, as to exempt from these assaults. Is it possible, that those who thus judge others, know the guilt of their conduct, and reflect on the rigorous doom which awaits them at the last great day? This is inconceivable. They cannot have made this truth the subject of their examination and reflections. In such circumstances, what is the duty of a minister of Christ? Is it not to call your attention to a subject so important; a subject which

our eternal Judge assures us is most intimately connected with our future destiny? Is it not to exclaim in the words of Jesus, "Judge not, that ye be not judged?"

These words present two points for our consideration :

I. The DUTY, Judge not, and,

II. The MOTIVE, That ye be not judged.

Listen to their illustration, with that attention which their importance demands.

I. From examining the context, it evidently appears, that the Saviour here speaks only of those judgments that we form concerning our neighbour. Even these are not without exception prohibited. There are *favourable judgments*, which so far from being forbidden, are commanded. As far as circumstances permit, we are bound to think advantageously of those with whom we live, to render to them the praise and the justice which is their due, to cultivate that charity which believeth all things, hopeth all things that can reasonably be believed and hoped. Nay, further, there are judgments *unfavourable* to our neighbour, which Jesus does not here prohibit: I mean those which the duty of our station obliges us to form, and those which the clearest evidence sometimes compels the most charitable to make. Civil and ecclesiastical judges, parents, teachers, and in general all those who are placed in any authority over others, must frequently, not only inwardly condemn a criminal, but also publicly censure, and inflict upon him that punishment which his crime merits. In such cases, silence, connivance, would not be virtues, but crimes. And besides, my brethren, there are a thousand cases in which the guilt of our neighbour is so clear and indubitable,

that to wish to justify him to ourselves or to others, would not be reason and religion, but weakness and passion. In such cases the Saviour has not required us to close our eyes against evidence, and to combat against the truth.

These are the cases to which the rule in my text does not apply. Far from wishing to extend this prohibition beyond its just limits, I enter upon its illustration with the most scrupulous precautions. Let this inspire you with renewed attention, whilst I show what is the true object of the prohibition.

When our Lord prohibits us to judge, he condemns two crimes which are both aggravated and common. He condemns first, that inward disposition of the mind and heart which inclines so many persons to judge the actions of their neighbour with precipitance, with malignity, and with rigour; and, secondly, the habit of communicating to others the rash and severe judgments we have formed, when no necessity engages us to it. Let us resume these two ideas, and whilst we are illustrating them, let each of us examine and judge himself in the fear of the Lord.

Do we not very frequently judge with *precipitance*? What precautions are not taken at human tribunals, before sentence is pronounced upon an accused person! The most exact investigations are made; the defence of him who is accused is received; those circumstances which appear favourable to him are attentively observed; he is confronted with the witnesses who testify against him; and complete proofs are required to condemn him. Would to God, my brethren, that in the ordinary intercourse of life we were as circumspect before condemning our neighbour! Would to God, that we always re-

flected, that when unjustly condemned by us, they will appeal, in a manner most terrible for us, from that tribunal, which we have without authority erected, to the tribunal of the Judge of men! Then we should not judge our brother on vague reports; then we should feel that, until we are assured of facts, of the principal circumstances connected with the conduct of our neighbour, of his dispositions and intentions, we are bound to suspend our judgment concerning him; then we should remember, that appearances are often deceitful, that a thousand actions seem censurable, which cannot be blamed when we know all their circumstances, and all the motives impelling to them: then, in one word, we should not judge with haste and precipitance.

Malignity is too often united with precipitance in the judgments which we form of our neighbour, and inclines the greater part of men to believe evil of him, and to put the least favourable construction on his words and actions. Envy, pride, hatred, and innumerable other motives, daily lead persons to convert the appearance of evil into reality, and the feeblest presumption into full certainty. Animated by such sentiments, they eagerly listen to every report, they supply all circumstances that are wanting; what is not found in the actions they seek in the intentions and motives; and of two explanations that can be given to the same fact, they always prefer that which is least advantageous. Do you wish to know, my brethren, whether you have been animated by this malignity in judging others? The point can easily be determined, if you will faithfully consult your souls. When you formed these unfavourable judgments concerning your neighbour, was it with a sincere pain, with a true grief, that you felt yourself compelled to do so? Or, on the other hand,

did you feel no repugnance: did you feel even an inward satisfaction, a confused sentiment of pleasure, although you would not acknowledge it, but strove to conceal it under the veil of an apparent regret, a studied compassion? If this be the case, be assured that your judgment was prompted by malignity; be assured that it is to you that the Saviour cries, "Judge not."

The Saviour, in these words, condemns not only precipitance and malignity, but also that *rigour* which is so often discerned in the unfavourable judgment of our neighbour. If after we are clearly convinced of his failings; if after thoroughly examining, we are reluctantly compelled to believe that he is criminal; if after this, we contented ourselves with inwardly esteeming that conduct blameworthy, which is so in reality, and with profiting from his fall to strengthen ourselves in duty, we should do nothing but what reason and religion approve. But look around you, my brethren, or rather look within you, and see whether this moderation is always observed. Do you not find, that those same persons who judge with precipitance and malignity, condemn without pity or charity? They add new rigours to the law of God; they exaggerate the crime committed; they consider him utterly inexcusable who has fallen into it; they display every thing that can aggravate his guilt. From this single failing, they deduce the darkest consequences with regard to his whole character and conduct; they make a merit of this rigorous severity; they deck it with the beautiful names of love to virtue, zeal for religion, regard to the glory of God. But what article of religion authorizes him, who has such need of mercy, to show none to others? What precept of the gospel justifies this inhuman severity? What part of the revelation of the God

of love teaches us, not to pity the unhappy wanderer from the paths of virtue, but to content ourselves with blaming and execrating him? Do we learn it from that infinite mercy of God which delivered up his only Son for sinners? Do we learn it from that ineffable grace of Jesus which led him to die for the guilty? Do we learn it from those exhortations to brotherly love which he so often repeated; from that forbearance, long-suffering, and kindness, of which he has given us both the precept and example? from that address, when urged to approve the punishment of a criminal, "Let him that is without sin, cast the first stone?" from the injunction of his most zealous apostle, "If any man fall, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness?" Ah! my brethren, I in vain search the scriptures to find a vindication of this rigour and severity.

Hitherto we have principally considered those judgments as formed in the heart. But they remain not there; almost always a second crime is added to this first. "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" and malignant conjectures, odious suspicions, and pretended discoveries, are communicated to others. This second crime is still more directly referred to by the Saviour than the first, and the evil resulting from it is incomparably greater.

Though when we inwardly judge our neighbour, we are very far from being as innocent as many persons imagine, yet when these judgments are produced to the world, we become doubly guilty. What before was a mere opinion, becomes a slander. We multiply the injury we do to our neighbour in proportion to the number of persons to whom we communicate our unfavourable opinions concerning him. And who can say how far this injury will extend? Who will be able to remedy it, should we afterwards dis-

cover that we were deceived, and had condemned the innocent? Nevertheless, my brethren, these reflections are incapable of arresting the greater part of men; and scarcely has their mind formed an unfavourable judgment of their neighbour, before they hasten to communicate it to others. Some act thus from the habit they have formed of paying no attention to their discourse, and of uttering whatever they think; others propose to themselves—what? The important business of filling up the voids of a conversation, which would be burdensome to them or to those to whom they address themselves, if the real or pretended failings of their neighbour were not the subject of it! Others wish to appear persons of penetration; they know more than others; they have secret intelligence; they are able to discern the intentions, to discover the true motives of action. Appearances do not deceive them, the mask of a false virtue cannot impose on them. Add to these motives those of pride, envy, hatred, revenge; and you will have seen most of the sources of this crime.

Experience teaches us that it is a crime too common. Every one is thus judged; no one is exempted. Rank, dignity, virtue, do not prevent persons from being cited to this tribunal: what is uncertain is judged, as well as what is indubitable; what is supposed, as well as what is known; the heart and intentions, as well as the actions and external conduct. Almost every one yields to the torrent; few can lay their hands on their hearts, and say, “I am guiltless of this crime;” few indeed have not violated this command, and judged their neighbour in opposition to duty and truth. It is then necessary to press upon you this exhortation, “Judge not:” it is necessary to show you the motives which should induce

you to comply with it; it is necessary to prove to you, that if you judge, you also shall be judged. This is our

Ild. Division.

Observe the general manner in which the Saviour speaks, to teach us that there is more than one Judge, at whose tribunal we shall be condemned, if we thus condemn our brethren; to teach us that men, as well as God, will recompense, ah! dearly recompense, our cruel conduct.

And is not this declaration of our Lord confirmed by universal observation? Is it not true, that those who heap merciless censures upon others, find for themselves judges without pity? Is it not true, that those children of Ishmael, whose hand is against every man, find every man's hand against them? Every one fears that he himself may be injured by that odious temper which leads them to give an unfavourable interpretation to every circumstance, and then to publish their injurious suspicions or malicious discoveries. There is ordinarily but a small interval between this fear and hatred; and those who are thus dreaded, are rarely spared by others. These rigorous judges are then menaced by an almost universal conspiracy of society against them. And by how many different methods may they not be made to feel the effects of that indignation that is excited against them? especially what have they not cause to fear from those whom they have personally offended? After their reputation has been wounded, and their hearts torn by you, malignant censurers, will they not render to you with usury the pains you have inflicted on them? With what a critical eye will they examine your life! How will they blazon abroad your least failings! How ready will they

be to attribute to you evil intentions, and to give unfavourable interpretations to your most innocent conduct ! This is what our Lord has declared, and his declaration is daily verified : “ With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Even then, if we regard only our temporal interests, prudence will urge us to avoid a conduct which will draw after it so many pains and afflictions ; which will cause the sharp and poisoned arrows which we have cast at others, to return with double force against our own breasts.

But, my brethren, there is another circumstance which ought infinitely more to affect us : it is the just and terrible apprehension of the rigours of that judgment, which must at the last day be undergone by all who have without cause, and with malignity, judged their brethren. Every thing proves to us, that for persons who violate this command of the Saviour, that day will be most awful. What ! will not God punish him who attacks his authority, and impiously usurps his prerogatives ? And are not those, who thus judge their neighbour, chargeable with this crime ? When we see them deciding on the actions and intentions of others, dispensing blame and praise, loading with infamy those whom they are pleased to regard as criminal ; would it not seem that they supposed that the Judge of the earth had conferred on them his omniscience and omnipotence, and descended from his tribunal, that they might seat themselves upon it ? “ But who art thou, O man ! that usurpest the place of God ? Who art thou, that judgest another’s servant ? To his own Master he standeth or falleth. To Jesus is committed all judgment ; but why dost thou judge thy brother ?”

Tremble, lest when thou shalt appear shuddering before his bar, thou shalt sink under the indignation of him to whom alone belongeth judgment, and who will not give his glory to another.

If God will punish those who have thus encroached upon his rights, he will also manifest his severity against those who in their conduct have trampled under foot the rules of *justice* and *equity*. And is not this the character of those who thus judge their brethren? What more unjust, than to usurp over our equals a right which we do not possess, and the exercise of which is expressly forbidden to us? What more unjust, than, after erecting this tribunal without authority, to disregard in its decisions every rule of equity; to condemn on the most vague reports and frivolous surmises; to condemn without investigation, and from the impulse of the basest passions? What more unjust, than thus without reason to tear from our neighbour his good name, and the esteem of the worthy? What more unjust, than constantly to do to others, what would overwhelm us if they did it to ourselves? Say, accusers of your brethren, would you desire to be treated as you treat others? Would you be pleased, if they should suppose you guilty when you were innocent? Or, even if you were overtaken by a fault, would you approve their conduct, if instead of concealing it, or excusing it as far as possible, they should publish it with a trumpet, and load you with anathemas?

But, my brethren, *charity* as well as justice is deeply wounded by such conduct; or rather, it cannot subsist in the hearts of those who thus inhumanly judge their neighbour. And what is a Christian without charity? Can he stand unappalled before the tribunal of Christ? Destitute of this, will he not

be cast for ever into outer darkness? Why do you not make these reflections, you who are perpetually occupied with the real or imaginary failings of your neighbour? Why do you not once turn your eyes to your heart, destitute of that love which is the badge of Christianity, and weep? Why do you not sometimes fix your views upon the fatal consequences of your unjust suspicions, of your rash judgments, and bewail your cruelty? Here you would see a brother, carrying every where with him the dart with which you have pierced him, and groaning to the end of his days under a reproach which, without you, would perhaps never have covered him. There the soul of another, a prey to the most violent passions, and a thousand sins, of which he renders himself guilty, produced by your single sin; on all sides, distrusts, coldnesses, animosities, quarrels, of which you are the cause. Do you not tremble at the view of such a complication of evils? Do you not feel, that a heart which can reproach itself with them, has violated all the obligations of charity? Do you not think, that your time and your cares ought henceforth to be employed in repairing, as much as possible, the evils produced by you; in cherishing in your souls the sentiments of charity; and in striving to secure the favour of that God to whom the obdurate and unfeeling heart is an abomination?

Finally, for I must hasten to a conclusion, let me recall to your remembrance, and may God himself impress upon your souls that awful passage of St. James: "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy." Can we, my brethren, hear this passage without emotion? What! we who have all so urgent a need of the divine mercy! Without it the most righteous must despair of sal-

vation; without it the repentant sinner would in vain flatter himself with hopes of forgiveness; without it those even who shall be justly condemned would experience an aggravation of misery, which the mercy of a compassionate God alone can mitigate. And shall we voluntarily renounce this mercy? Shall we arm against us all the indignation of God, and heap up wrath against the day of wrath? No, my brethren, no! let us not be such cruel enemies to ourselves. Let us repair our errors by our repentance, our humility, our charity; "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; rejoicing not in iniquity, but rejoicing in the truth; loving one another with a pure heart fervently;" and showing ourselves to be endued with that "wisdom which is from above, and which is indeed first pure, but then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

SERMON XCIX.



THANKSGIVING SERMON, 1817.



1 SAMUEL xii. 23, 24.

But I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart : for consider how great things he hath done for you.

“ To every thing,” says Solomon, “ there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the sun.” A time when we should pour out our tears, and another when we should utter the accents of joy ; a time when we should “ sit in sackcloth and ashes,” and another when we should “ anoint our head with the oil of gladness ;” a time to cry “ Hosanna, save, we beseech thee !” and another to sing, “ Hallelujah, praise ye the Lord !” When the church, the state, or the community with which we are more particularly connected, is in affliction, it would display a criminal disregard to Divine Providence, and a cruel and insensible heart, not to “ weep with those that weep ;” but when God has conferred upon us signal mercies, we are justly chargeable with the basest ingratitude, if we do not, with the Israelites on the

borders of the Red Sea, raise the thankful song of praise to our Deliverer; if we do not, with Moses, erect our altar, and inscribe upon it, "Jehovah-nissi, the Lord is my banner;" if we do not, with the holy prophet, whose words have been read to you, publicly rear some memorial of his kindness, and write upon it, "Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us."

To a discharge of this duty we have been invited by the civil authority of this place; and with minds convinced of the propriety of their advice, you have entered into the temple of the Most High. United in his presence in external acts of homage, may we also be united in the gratitude of the soul! May He, who reads our inmost sentiments, perceive no heart that is not warmed by a fire from heaven; no heart from which the incense of thankfulness does not rise before him. "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his praise together!"

The words of my text were uttered by the prophet Samuel, who so long and so illustriously acted as the teacher, the governor, and the deliverer of Israel. When his nation, ungrateful to the God who had so signally blessed them, and to this his faithful minister, to whom they were under such great obligations, wished to renounce the theocracy, and to "have a king to rule over them, that they might be like all the surrounding nations," Samuel at first remonstrated with them on the folly and guilt of their designs. When however they persisted in their resolutions, instead of indulging any anger because they had deposed him, he only appeals to them that no oppression or extortion had stained his administration; assured them that his prayers in their behalf should still continually rise before the Lord; and exhorts them with all the fervour of a patriot, and all the

piety of a saint, to that course of conduct which would preserve their state, flourishing, happy, and beloved by God. Among other directions, is that given in our text: "I will teach you the good and right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you."

In applying these words to ourselves, and to the occasion which assembles us together, let us,

I. Briefly review some of those great things which God hath done for us.

II. Show what is the return which feeling, gratitude, religion, require of us.

III. Prove to you, that the discharge of this duty is good and right.

I. You will not expect, my brethren, that I should retrace to you the long succession of benefits which, as a nation and a community, we have enjoyed from the time that our fathers first entered upon this favoured country to the present time; grateful as would be such a retrospect, it would lead us into details inconsistent with the limits of the present discourse. These are recorded in the annals of our country, in almost every page of which we meet with instances of divine interposition and guardianship, which must compel him who loves his country or his God, to lift up his grateful and adoring heart to Him who ruleth over all. For these the warm effusions of thankfulness were often poured out before the Supreme, by many of your parents who now lie silent in the dust; and who have left to you their descendants the delightful employment of expressing new gratitude for constantly renewed mercies. Instead then of unrolling the annals of past generations, let us merely fix our eyes upon those blessings

with which our country and ourselves are at this moment surrounded. The restoration and continuance of peace to our land, with the exception of that Indian warfare, to be lamented, but not to be dreaded, demand our thanks. Our citizens can with confidence engage in the ordinary pursuits of civil life.

After beholding the tranquillity and peace of our beloved country, let us cast our eyes to Europe, and behold her bleeding at every pore: and while our hearts melt with sympathy and compassion for the sorrows of her inhabitants, while we supplicate the God of peace that the sword may soon return to its sheath, let us bless Him who has exempted us from these calamities. Often has the rod been shaken over us; often have we listened to the sound of the distant thunder, and, marking its apparent approach, supposed it would soon burst upon us. But our God has still preserved us in peace; has thrown his shield before us; and war has not been permitted here to light her torch, or destruction to unfurl her banner. Ye who have seen the "battle of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood;" the plains covered with carnage; the desolated fields; the temples of the Lord in ruins; the services of religion interrupted; the immorality always attendant upon a state of warfare; your habitations sinking in flames, and your families fleeing by their light, terrified and destitute, from a plundering and licentious foe: tell us what gratitude we owe for this mercy. Ye mothers, ye wives, who have waited with agonized suspense and with trembling hearts, to hear the result of every battle; who have had those, united to you by the tenderest ties of nature or affection, suddenly sunk in the dust; who bedewed with your tears their laurels moistened with their blood: ah! your hearts

tell you, with an energy which makes you feel the poverty of language, how much we are indebted to God for that peace which we still enjoy !

This is but one of our public mercies, which we should this day record. Still there is preserved that form of government in which we so deservedly rejoice ; a form of government such as the most wise and virtuous of ancient legislators laboured in vain to accomplish ; such as speculative statesmen of former ages rather delineated in idea than expected ever to see carried into execution ; a government, where the rights of the citizens are secured as far as they can be by any human institutions ; where the most elevated individual cannot with impunity openly injure *him* in the lowliest station in life ; where the laws are not arbitrary, depending only on the caprice, the interest, or the passions of a single man ; but fixed, made by yourselves, and to be suspended or changed only by those who enacted them : a form of government, which, by the admirable union of liberty and energy that is found in it, preserves us on the one hand from the horrors of despotism, and on the other hand from a furious licentiousness, more bloody and ferocious than despotism. Still our land continues the asylum of the oppressed of all nations ; still we behold a bright and glorious prospect expanding before us ; and advance with unexampled rapidity in population, strength, and all the arts which adorn and embellish life.

Still there is preserved unto us the inestimable privilege of worshipping God according to the dictates of our own consciences ; and religion is not polluted by the touch of the secular arm. The sacred rights of conscience, which knows no other master than God, are here still unassailed. No

emoluments are attached to a particular church; no penalties to enforce particular doctrines. Religion presents itself to you in its native charms, and relying upon Him from whom it proceeded, asks no other support. May this be ever the peculiar boast and honour of our country! If the truths which we preach are not of God, let them fall; if they have been taught by Him, we know that the gates of hell will not prevail against them.

It is another mercy which peculiarly calls for our praise, that the triumphs of the gospel during the last year have in our country been extensive. You have heard, and you daily hear from every part of our land, of extensive revivals of religion; and you every where behold temples rising for the worship of the Almighty, and institutions for the extension of pure and undefiled religion. Herein God indeed has done great things for us; myriads are now celebrating the praises of Jesus, who a short time since were "enemies to him by wicked works," and perhaps were open despisers of his grace and atonement. Thousands are now singing the song of the redeemed in heaven, who, had they been cut off a few years since, must have lifted up their eyes in torments! What a motive to gratitude! In a country in which, some centuries back, there existed none but the most blinded pagans, bowing down to stocks and to stones, not only has the cross of Jesus been erected, and his ordinances administered, but this cross has given comfort, hope, salvation, to thousands and tens of thousands; and the Redeemer is still daily seeing among us "of the travail of his soul," and is satisfied. In vain has infidelity raised its voice; in vain have many impious Rab-shakehs vomited forth their blasphemies against the Lord. "He who sitteth in the

heavens has had them in derision." Though they have vented their fury against religion, yet they have only resembled those ferocious wolves, who bark in impotent rage against the moon, which, undisturbed by their noisy clamour, still proceeds in its splendid course. And rapidly may thy gospel still advance, thou Redeemer of sinners! Long as the orb of day continues to roll, mayest thou, the Sun of Righteousness, shed down thy cheering beams more brightly and more extensively!

In passing from our country in general, to the city which we inhabit, we still see that God hath done great things for us. To whom have we been indebted for the almost unprecedented healthfulness of our city, but to that God who sends sickness or preserves life at his pleasure? Ascribe it not merely to natural causes—

"Nature is but the name of an effect,
Whose cause is God."

To talk of natural causes, without looking to the great first cause, is either to speak without ideas, or to be an atheist upon principle. Bless then, Him, "whose visitation preserveth our spirits;" that the grave has in comparison opened so rarely; that in so few of your families fatal breaches have been made. When you are partaking of a pure and serene joy in the bosom of your domestic circle; when you see the dear objects of your affection still spared to you, will not gratitude to God mingle with the indulgence of "the sweet charities of life," and give a new and holy charm to your union? Forgive me, ye bereaved and mourning families, if, in teaching others their duty, I am opening in your breasts wounds scarcely closed; I mean not to distress you: but you too may

preach to them ; and how eloquently will you urge them to thankfulness, when you tell them of the agony which you felt when the ties which had been cementing for years, were in a moment snapped asunder ; when your friends strained upon you for the last time their closing eyes ; an agony from which they, through the mercy of God, have been exempted. And even many of you, my bereaved friends, find abundant reason for gratitude in the Christian consolations and supports of your departed friends ; in the hopes you are permitted to entertain ; in the sympathy of surviving friends ; in a thousand mercies that have been mingled with your afflictions.

Need I also recall to you, my brethren, in order to excite your gratitude, your preservation from those judgments which have afflicted many of our sister cities ? The silence of repose has not here been disturbed, as in many other places, by the alarms of fire ; you have not had the hard earnings of many years in a moment swept from you, and been thrown upon the world houseless and destitute. Let the recollection of the distress that such calamities have often produced in this place, make you bless that God who has watched over you, and defended you.

What great things has God done for us as *individuals* ? Here, my brethren, your own meditations must supply what we can only intimate. Consider the numberless enjoyments with which you are surrounded ; those continued mercies which have never been intermitted ; those unexpected blessings which could not be anticipated ; those blessings of nature, of providence, and of grace, which encompass you : each of these has a voice intelligible to the grateful heart. Are you yet an unrenewed sinner, uninterested in the

righteousness of the Redeemer? Descend in imagination to the pit of despair, behold thousands who, a year since, like you were in the season of visitation; now their everlasting destiny is decided, while the offers of mercy yet sound in your ears; while Jesus yet offers you pardon and salvation. And shall not this consideration affect you? View their anguish! listen to their cries! and if you will not listen to the word of God, at least let the agony of the damned preach gratitude to you!

Are you renewed and quickened by divine grace? And can your hearts be cold when you remember the vast debt which you owe to God? Brands plucked from the eternal burnings! will you not praise and magnify Him who delivered you from thralldom to Satan, and introduced you "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God;" who stretched forth from heaven the arm of his power, and plucked you from the suburbs of hell; who sanctified your unholy hearts; who gave you the influences of his blessed Spirit; who adopted you into his heavenly family, and bestowed himself upon you as your portion, your protector, your father, your friend? Believer! look around thee upon the earth! consider the millions that are going carelessly to hell! remember the numerous descendants of Adam that lie there in agonies! and whilst thou, a child of God, beholdest these victims of eternal vengeance; whilst thou canst confidently look up to heaven as thy country; whilst thou rememberest that it was free and sovereign grace that prepared thee for this peaceful home; whilst thou rememberest the spiritual comforts which have been given thee on thy way to it, will not thy heart even burn within thee, and thy mouth overflow with thanksgivings?

But I forbear: thy mercies, Lord, are innumerable; and to reckon them up in order before thee, is as difficult as to count the stars in the heavens, or the sand which is on the sea-shore.

II. Shall our hearts be unaffected by this kindness of our God? Our blessings will then be converted into a curse, and at the judgment-day, we must answer for our misimprovement of them: the remembrance that they were given and despised, will aggravate our misery throughout eternity. Ingratitude, with respect to men, is ever considered by you as the evidence of a most abandoned character, as the unfailing mark of a total dereliction of every noble emotion; and yet how many of us, occupied by the cares of the world, engaged in the pursuit of a thousand frivolous objects, never feelingly remember the goodness of the Lord, and our infinite obligations thence resulting to love, to serve, and to glorify our benefactor? Were it a fellow-worm that we treated with such unthankfulness, we should blush and be confounded, and be regarded with scorn by others; but we are cool and unaffected; our conduct excites no surprise in the world, because it is not a mortal man, but only thou, great God, whom we outrage; because it is only the gift of every temporal blessing, every spiritual privilege, and every eternal hope; because it is only the gift of thy well-beloved Son, only the offer of his merit, his grace, his spirit, his heaven, and his Father, that leaves our hearts unaffected! What blindness! what guilt!

The exercise of gratitude for the divine mercies is certainly the most elevated of all the occupations of the believer; for it leads us, thus to speak, even to heaven, and attaches us immediately to God: it places in our heart the greatest object that can en-

gage it, in our mouth the greatest name which can fill it; it unites us to God in a manner the most tender and disinterested, by emotions of love, by emotions which have for their end the glory even of God. Many of our other graces spring from our indigence and need: our faith receives blessings; our hope looks for those that are to come; our prayers supplicate for them; these draw from the treasures of God to enrich ourselves: gratitude alone, asks nothing, but renders to the Lord its vows and praises; it does not always lie with empty hands at the throne of the Most Merciful, imploring succour. It is, thus to speak, the effect of our abundance: by it, we, in some manner, give to him who gives us all; it is the production, not of an empty heart, but of a heart overflowing with the blessings which he has conferred upon it. How noble! how elevated an employment! how deserving the ambition of the Christian and the man!

But how shall this gratitude be expressed? Is it sufficient for us coldly to bless God with our lips; unconcernedly to enter into his holy temple, and unite with his people in declaring our thankfulness? No, my brethren: this alone will not satisfy him who searcheth the heart; who trifles not with us, and will not permit us to trifle with him. We must "fear the Lord, and serve him in truth, with all our heart." *Fear him*; not with that servile dread which is the characteristic of those who are in bondage to sin, and are heirs of perdition; but with those emotions suited to the situation and hopes of the believer: with that filial fear, which, influencing the whole course of the life, will lead the Christian reverently to regard the divine goodness; will inspire him with a holy dread of offending so tender a Father, with a

sacred apprehension, lest he should displease so beneficent a God : with that fear which, unlike that terror of the ungodly, which is the consequence of their guilt, the terrible presage of their approaching perdition, the importunate troubler of their festivities, fills the believer with peace and joy, while he views with affectionate reverence the tenderest of Fathers : that fear which is attended by trust in the mercy of God, which, while it encourages circumspection, does not destroy peace ; which, while it opposes security, establishes the assurance of faith ; and which keeps the soul in close communion with God. This filial fear must necessarily impel us to “serve the Lord in truth, with all our heart.” It will not rest satisfied with the most splendid outward performances : since “God is a Spirit,” the believer will pay his thanks “in spirit and in truth.” If these be the sentiments of his soul, if this be the conduct of his life, his tongue cannot be silent. If, with the angels, he flies to perform the will of the Lord, with them he will delight to declare the praises of his Benefactor. Gratitude, which loosed the tongue of Zechariah at the birth of John the Baptist, will loose his also, and cause him to glorify God with a loud voice.

III. Such a mode of expressing our gratitude by devoting our lives to the service of God, is *right and good*. It is the *right* way enjoined upon us by the nature of things, as well as by the authority of God. Your own consciences attest that the multiplied and constantly reiterated mercies of the Lord demand these returns : render them to him, or expect hereafter the recompense of your ingratitude.

It is a way which is *profitable*, and will secure for us new favours. God wastes not his blessings : the

streams of his goodness will not always flow upon a barren and unfertile soil: he will at last turn them to those places that will be rendered by them luxuriant and productive. While "from him that hath not" improved what was originally conferred upon him, and been induced by divine mercy to serve God, "shall be taken away even that which he hath," to the thankful and obedient "there shall be given still richer mercies, "and they shall have abundance." Let no one then, by his ingratitude, arrest the mercies of God, and convert them into judgments. As many ungrateful persons as we have, so many obstacles are thrown in the way of our felicity, so many are injurers of their country. Unhappy men, do you envy us our prosperity?

This way is *pleasant and good*. How delightful to serve God from the impulse of gratitude; to approach him with an overflowing heart; remembering our blessings, and doubling them by recollection, and only lamenting that we can do so little for one who possesses our souls, and who has done so much for us. Oh! how sweet is this labour of love!

Yes, Christians! act thus, and every situation in life will be to you full of blessedness. Prosperity will not be to you as to the ungrateful, a snare for your virtue; it will never for you be turned into a curse; you will preserve in the midst of your enjoyments a heart humble, docile, detached from the vanities of the world. Adversity will not destroy your tranquillity: it will only try your fidelity, and display your patience and resignation. The divine light which surrounds you, the gospel which is announced to you, the succours of grace which are offered to you, will not rise up in judgment against you. The good use that you shall have made of them, will

assure you a favourable sentence, a glorious immortality. The blessings of earth shall be for you the earnest of that felicity which God prepares for you. Grace shall be followed by glory; and in that kingdom of joy into which you shall enter when you go from this world to the Father, you shall continue, but with gratitude infinitely more warm, with infinitely more ardent transports of love and of joy, to serve and glorify the Author of your mercies, and to sing for ever that song of triumph, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

SERMON C.



GUILT AND DANGER OF CONTINUING IN SIN AFTER CHASTISEMENT AND MERCIES.



EZRA ix. 13—15.

And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this ; should we again break thy commandments, wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping ? O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous : for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day : behold, we are before thee in our trespasses : for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

PURE morality and holiness are necessary, not only for the salvation of the soul, but also for temporal felicity. There are few who will deny its necessity in the former respect ; however corrupted men may be, their conscience dictates, that without holiness none can see the Lord ; and the most profligate do not dispute that piety has the promise of the life which is to come. But it is not less true, that it contributes to the happiness of this life ; that a general reformation is the surest foundation of public felicity, with-

out which all human means will be ineffectual; and that the more a people is favoured by heaven, the greater reason it has to tremble, unless it makes of these blessings a motive faithfully to serve that God from whom they are derived.

In accordance with these sentiments, the civil authority of our city has appointed this as a day, on which to bless God for the mercies he has showered upon us; mercies, so much more worthy of gratitude as they have been unmerited; and also to implore him for the continuation of his favours upon us.

In correspondence with their request, you have come into the temple of the Most High: and we, on our part, desirous that the public reformation may be promoted, present to your consideration the two great truths contained in these words of Ezra:

I. That to continue in sin after great chastisements and great mercies from God, is a circumstance which inconceivably aggravates the atrocity of our guilt, and,

II. That perseverance in so criminal a state is, for any community, the most fatal of all presages:

Two truths that we shall confirm and enforce in this address. These words of Ezra, when first uttered, produced a general reformation, that assured the happiness of Israel. Let us supplicate Him, who has put it in our hearts to seek Him this day, to produce the same effect now; and to turn us, that we may be effectually turned.

I. Chastisements and mercies are both intended to lead us to obedience, and prevent us from breaking the commandments of God: and nothing more aggravates sin than to indulge in it after we have experienced them both. This is evidently implied

in the language of Ezra, and how easily is its truth shown.

The consideration of the attributes of God, as well as the plain declarations of scripture, must convince us that the Most Merciful afflicts not the children of men, merely because he delights in their pains and sufferings; he does it that they may be made partakers of his holiness; that the poor prodigal, in the depth of his distress, may remember the Father whom he had forgotten in the season of enjoyment; that Manasseh, in his chains and in his dungeon, may become acquainted with that God whom he had disregarded in the splendour of royalty and the pomp of power. To neglect these chastisements, is a species of impious defiance to the God of heaven; to be unimproved by these afflictions, assimilates us to Ahaz, on whose character is impressed as so black a stain, that in his distress he "yet sinned more and more;" it is to load ourselves with the guilt, and expose ourselves to the punishment of Pharaoh, who "hardened his heart" against the judgments of the Lord.

And such also is the design of the blessings of God. If we are unmoved by his threatenings, and remain insensible under the woes he inflicts upon us, he does not immediately abandon us; he punishes us less than our iniquities deserve; he gives us deliverance from affliction; he draws us with the cords of love; he tries whether blessings will melt these hearts that his terrors have not alarmed. Ezra, in the text, observing such conduct in the Lord, is filled with admiring gratitude, and regards it as the greatest enormity, if the Israelites, after having experienced such goodness, should again commit the same sins. And indeed, my brethren, is it not a hor-

rible ingratitude to rebel against our Benefactor, to irritate by new offences a tender Father, who is "giving us joy according to the days wherein he has afflicted us;" to employ, in violating his laws, a life which we possess only from his favour, and of which he would long since have deprived us, if he had treated us according to our merits? We are not surprised that devils should blaspheme God; they are subject to his inexorable justice, without hope of pardon; but that those who, notwithstanding their reiterated rebellions calling for punishment, have nevertheless been treated with a paternal kindness, should still offend him, marks such deep depravity, that we could scarcely conceive it possible, did not daily experience assure us of the lamentable fact.

Such are the principles on which this address of Ezra is founded; let us now apply them to ourselves. We, my brethren, as a people, have often experienced judgments from God: frequently disease and death have every where prevailed in our city. Has the time, since we were thus visited, been so long passed as to be forgotten? Can the lapse of little more than a year, efface from our minds the scenes of distress which were witnessed here? Alas, no! there are many wounds then inflicted on the soul, still unstanched; there are many hearts which still bleed at the recollection of departed friends and vanished joys; there are many who will ever retain the remembrance of those relatives and companions, whose last groan they then heard! But what was the effect produced by this chastisement? Did we see a visible reformation in the public morals? Was the word of God more valued? Was the torrent of dissipation arrested? Did we see less of that eager desire after wealth which, engrossing all the faculties and cares

of so many poor mortals, (truly poor in the midst of all their wealth,) makes them forget their souls, their Saviour, their everlasting destiny? Ah! brethren, we must penitently acknowledge that we heard not the rod, and Him who had appointed it.

God has therefore, before he casts us off, been trying us with mercies. He has given us unexampled health; the funeral procession and the gloomy hearse have been seldom seen in our streets; in few families has death made those fatal breaches, so common in ordinary years; in general, parents still embrace their children, and partners press to their bosoms the objects of their affection. We have not forgotten you, bereaved mourners; we have sympathized with you; by your grief God has reminded us that we live in a dying world: but we are speaking of the general state of the community.

And you, who have just returned among us, have you not shared with us in the mercies of the Lord? Who preserved you when upon the sea, in the bosom of which so many of your fellow-creatures have perished? Who but He whom the winds and the waves obey? Who has continually guided and blessed you; averting from you so many calamities; bestowing upon you so many blessings?

And what effect have these mercies produced? Where is the gratitude of the heart? Where is the evidence of reformation? Where are the weeping penitents? Where the increased zeal of Christians? Where is the abandonment of sin by the sabbath-breaker, or the impure, or intemperate, or profane man? Alas! we must lament that the kindness of God has produced as little effect as his chastisements.

It is a fact that should fill us with apprehension,

for we are taught in the text, that there is no more fatal prognostic of the ruin of a people, than their continuance in sin after having experienced by turns the judgments and the mercies of God. This is the
Ild. Head of our discourse :

“Should we again break thy commandments, wouldest thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there would be no remnant nor escaping?”

When we are equally insensible to the chastisements and favours of God, iniquity is at its height; the harvest prepared for the wrath of the Lord has reached its maturity; and it is time that the sickle be thrust in.

Besides, such an obstinacy in sin shows that transgressors are absolutely incurable. When the exhortations of God's word are neglected; when the strokes of his rod are slighted; when the displays of his mercy are contemned : all the external means of paternal discipline being thus ineffectual, the Lord often abandons them to themselves, delivers them up to their reprobate sense, cries, “Why should ye be stricken, or why should ye be allured any more?” and then smites them not to correct, but to punish; causes them to experience the anger not of a Father, but of a Judge. And so evidently just is he in this procedure, that he takes as the judges of his conduct, those even whom he punishes in so terrible a manner. “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard : what could have been done more to my vineyard, which I have not done to it? Wherefore then, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? and now I will take away the hedge of my vineyard, and it shall

be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste."

The whole history of the Jewish nation; that of the Asiatic churches formerly so flourishing; that of so many people once highly favoured by God, but now almost unknown; in one word, the whole history of divine providence teaches us, that it is from the neglect of the judgments, and the contempt of the mercies of God, that the vengeance is enkindled which leaves to a people neither remnant nor escaping. The attributes of God, the vindication of his glory, as well as a regard to his declarations, require the punishment of such a people.

These are the great truths contained in this prayer of Ezra. Sensible of their importance, he bewailed before God the guilt of Israel, and supplicated the spirit of reformation. God heard him; the hearts of the people were touched; they united with him in his efforts; and vices, that before had been open and allowed, were abandoned; they celebrated, with unusual solemnity, the feast of tabernacles; they renewed their covenant with God; and the blessing of heaven evidently descended upon them.

Would to God, my brethren, that the same effect might be produced to-day! Would to God, that this day, by his powerful operation upon our hearts, might be marked by a reformation so sincere and general, as to draw down upon us and our city his favour and benediction. We are before the Lord in our trespasses, let us penitentially bewail them; we have experienced chastisements, let us lament that we have so little improved them. We are encompassed with favours; and if after all this has come upon us, we still break his commandments, there will be little hope for us; we are assembled to ex-

press our gratitude, but if we are resolved still to retain our iniquities, our thanksgivings are solemn mockeries of God. Let us then, according to our several relations in life and our various characters, exert ourselves: let professing Christians display more zeal and piety; let the impenitent no longer trifle with Jehovah: parents, let us see more domestic discipline and holy instruction in your houses: youth, cheer the hearts of your parents by early devotedness to God: magistrates, bear not the sword in vain; your offices bring not merely honour, but also a solemn responsibility; as you will answer to God and your country, check public immorality, and allow not the open violation of the laws of God and man; especially check our most striking public sin, and that which draws after it the most fatal consequences, which is the fruitful parent of so many other vices, the indulged and permitted profanation of God's holy day. To prevent this sin engaged much of the attention of Ezra in his public character; let it also engage you.

Yes, brethren, I repeat it, if our reformation is sincere and general, God will shed upon us his richest blessings; our city will flourish and be respected; our souls will enjoy happiness upon earth; and death, whenever it arrives, will bear us to an eternal joy and triumph.

SERMON CI.



JUDGMENTS OF GOD.



ISAIAH XXVI. 9.

When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

MY brethren, we live in a most eventful and solemn period of the world. In none of the ages that have past since the creation, has history recorded such convulsions, such changes, such woes, as have been experienced in the times in which we live, and as are still experiencing on the earth. Providence, which neither effects nor permits any thing in vain; which superintends and directs all events; which from human affliction, passions, and crime, educes benefits to the church and people of Jesus: this Providence must be about to accomplish some end sufficiently great to require the use of such numerous and mighty means; sufficiently good to counterpoise the sufferings and the woes which have crushed so many of the children of men. In reviewing the present state of the world, does it not almost seem that the Saviour has pointed to it, when he described those events

that should precede his second advent? "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." (Luke xxi. 25, 26.) Rapidly retrace the judgments which within a few years have been poured upon the earth, and then say whether men were ever more energetically called upon to cultivate righteousness, piety, and the fear of God. Behold kingdoms overthrown; the sword drunk with the blood of thousands; the desolated fields bathed with the tears of the bereaved, covered with carnage, and burdened with the bodies of the dying and the dead; cities sacked and in flames, and the inhabitants fleeing by the light of their consuming habitations, in order to preserve their lives; the vulture and the beast of prey tearing the still palpitating limbs of the expiring; the course of nature reversed, and thousands in the bloom of life preceding their fathers to the tomb, and bringing down the gray hairs of their parents with sorrow to the grave; the bursting hearts of innumerable widows and orphans, shuddering as they contemplate the blood-stained laurels of their departed friends, and thrown without protector or support on a cruel and unfeeling world; the myriads suddenly cut off in the midst of their sins, and summoned red with unexpiated guilt to the tribunal of the Most Holy. Ah, Lord! who but must acknowledge, that thy judgments, thine awful judgments, are in the earth!

To be convinced of this, we need only look at our own country. Though God has exercised to us undeserved mercy, yet has he not visited us with many judgments and calamities, to show that in the midst

of mercy there was wrath, and that "Jehovah hath a controversy with us?" I speak not merely of the cloud which hangs over our country; of the critical situation in which we stand with the European nations; of the numbers who, from the unsettled state of the world, have been precipitated from affluence to want; but also of those elements which God controls, and which have so often been commissioned by him to punish our ingratitude and neglect of him. Of how many have we heard during the last year, who shrieked for help, but who shrieked in vain, as they sunk beneath the waves! How often has the tornado filled the mariner with terror, destroyed the hopes of the cultivator of the earth, and in an instant buried beneath the ruins of his habitation the inhabitant who was not dreaming of danger! But if these and similar occurrences were not sufficient to make us seriously reflect on the judgments of God, his heart must indeed be callous who can remain insensible when remembering that peculiarly mournful calamity in a sister city, of which we have lately heard.* I feel the poverty of language when speaking to you of it. For a moment imagine yourselves to be present. Behold the crowd immersed in pleasure, ignorant that death is hovering over them, their faces clothed with smiles, their hearts beating high with festivity, unconscious that the judgment-bar is erecting, the books opening, and their everlasting interests speedily to be decided! Listen, when a sense of their danger suddenly bursts upon them, to their cries, their shrieks, their lamentations, their imploring supplications, alternately to their friends and to their God! Behold the convulsive throes of

* Alluding to the burning of the Theatre in Richmond, Dec. 26, 1811.

their departing spirits, as their bodies become the food of the flames ! Conceive the unutterable agony of the heart-broken parent, or partner, or friend, as he tremblingly seeks among the smoking ruins the half-consumed remains of those who a few hours before gladdened him with their smiles, and gave a charm to life, but whose afflictive death has now inflicted on his heart a wound, the pain and scar of which must be carried even to the grave !

But, brethren, I forbear : enough has been said to show you the suitableness of the text to our present situation ; we should then meditate with solemnity on this important declaration : “ When the judgments of the Lord are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”

In explaining these words, let us,

I. Consider the *author* of those judgments and calamities with which we are visited ; the *ends* for which they are sent ; and their *fitness* to instruct us in righteousness.

II. Inquire why the judgments of God do not always have this happy effect, which they are designed and calculated to produce.

1. *Judgments come from God.* His providence rules over all the creatures that he has made, from the highest archangel to the creeping worm : it extends to all events, regulating the countless worlds that are scattered through the immensity of space, directing the motion of each mote that floats in the air. This is not only the language of revelation ; it is also the decision of reason ; and to deny it is to overthrow all the attributes of God, to subvert the foundation of all worship, and to tear every source of real consolation from the afflicted.

Yes, God presides over the universe; nothing happens without his knowledge and permission. "Is there evil in the city," says the prophet Amos, speaking of natural evil or affliction, "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" All second causes, animate and inanimate, are directed by him, are subject to his control, are overruled for the advancement of his glory, and the benefit of his children. He himself declares, "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: (that is, natural evil,) I the Lord do all these things." (Is. xlv. 6, 7.)

Ever let this truth be impressed upon your minds in your afflictions. Judgments that would crush us when proceeding from any other source, can be borne when viewed as coming from the hand of God. Imitate then the ancient believers, who, whatever may have been the inferior causes of their affliction, without justifying the instruments and leaving to God the punishment of the unrighteous, ever looked up to Him who ruleth over all. Joseph, sold by his brethren, looks beyond their treason, and says it is the Lord who sent him into Egypt. Job, robbed by the Chaldeans and Sabeans, suffering by the rage of the elements, says, it is the Lord who hath despoiled him of all. No, my brethren; "affliction cometh not from the dust; sorrow springeth not up from the ground;" it is ordered by him who ruleth over all.

2. But *why does God visit us with judgments?* Not that he delights in the miseries of his creatures: "He afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men." He would rather "draw them by the cords of love;" and "by his goodness lead them to

repentance." For this reason he encompasses them with his mercies, and confers on them benedictions which ought to raise their hearts to the Fountain of good, to the Source of enjoyment. If they continue unmoved by these benedictions, he still exercises forbearance; strives with them, waits for their return; but if they still continue unaffected, his wisdom, his justice, the vindication of his holiness, his goodness itself, require that he should visit them with judgments, that they may be humbled, convinced of their iniquity, and taught righteousness; that he should inflict upon them temporal calamities, that they may escape everlasting agonies!

3. A few plain considerations are sufficient to show that the judgments of God have a natural *tendency* to awaken men from their security, and to teach them righteousness.

Man is a depraved and corrupted creature. This truth, so frequently asserted in the scriptures, is in nothing more evidently shown, than in the effects of prosperity. The very multitude of divine favours hides the hand which confers them, and makes us forget our benefactor; intoxicated and blinded by enjoyment, in the bosom of peace and abundance, piety languishes, our passions are inflamed, and we cease to "hunger and thirst after righteousness." In this situation, what does the mercy, the compassion of our Father, require from him? To visit us with his judgments. Then we see the impotence of the idols which have seduced us; then conscience wakes from its lethargy, and retraces to us in accents awfully impressive, all our wanderings from God and righteousness. Like the Israelites, we often revolt when mercy succeeds to mercy; we verify also in our own experience, the effects of judgments upon them:

“When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer.” (Psa. lxxviii. 34, 35.) Like Jonah, when the ocean of life is smooth, and the gales of prosperity pleasantly blow, we flee from God, and slumber in our sin; but when the sky is obscured, when the tempest rises, when the thunder rolls, and the waves threaten to overwhelm us, then we awake “and call upon our God, if so be that our God will think upon us, that we perish not.” (Jonah i. 6.) Like the prodigal, we are impatient even under the gentle yoke of a Father, and wish to remove from him, till distress makes us think of his kindness; and return, acknowledging that we have sinned against heaven, and in his sight. Blessed then, are those judgments which God sends, thus to lead us to righteousness; though they may make our hearts to bleed, they are the fruits of mercy.

The judgments of God deeply affect us and lead us to repentance, because they are rarer than mercies. We are so constituted, that what is novel powerfully strikes us, and strongly arrests our attention. We gaze more earnestly on the sun, when for a few moments it is in eclipse, than we have done for months while it was steadily pursuing its course through the heavens: we are more roused by a storm for a day than by serene weeks. It is thus with mercies and with judgments: mercies perpetually are showered upon us by our beneficent Father; but their very uninterrupted continuance causes us to disregard them; God then interposes with judgment, “his strange work;” and our sins which have procured our calamities are brought to our remembrance, and we “learn righteousness.”

The judgments of God address powerfully that passion which has most influence on the greater part of mankind—the passion of fear. I know that we ought to be animated by more generous principles; that we ought to be attracted by mercy, and drawn by love; but the majority of our race can coolly consider even that amazing display of love which is exhibited in the cross of Immanuel. What then is to be done, to save them from perdition? There is no resource except the awful judgments of the Almighty. These may terrify their souls; may humble them under the mighty hand of God; and thus prepare the way for the operation of more generous principles, and for the mystical entrance of Christ into their hearts, as the denunciations and thunders of John the Baptist prepared the way for the mild instructions of Jesus, and for his entrance upon his ministry on earth.

These judgments of God lead to righteousness, because they teach in that most compendious and efficacious mode, by example. On beholding them we feel that the threatenings of God are not a mere dead letter, which need fill us with no dismay. Perceiving by their execution that they are everlasting truth, knowing that “we ourselves are in the same condemnation,” uncertain how soon the calamities which crush others may light upon us, we look around with anxiety for an asylum, a sanctuary against them.

Judgments lead to righteousness, because they present God in such a character, that even the most stout-hearted sinners tremble to oppose him. When he comes to plead with them, clothed with grace and compassion, they may abuse these attributes to their destruction; but to sport with him when “he maketh his way in the whirlwind and the storm;” when

he comes armed with the thunders of omnipotence, and dressed in the robes of vengeance, requires a depravity worse than diabolical; since, on such occasions, even "devils tremble." How well suited then, are the judgments of God to make men "humble themselves under his mighty hand," and "learn righteousness!"

But although judgments have thus a natural tendency to lead men to God, although they have often in an eminent degree taught righteousness, yet have they invariably this effect? Alas, no! there are some who can resist judgments as well as mercies: some who appear to emulate the character of that wicked king, who is marked with such a note of infamy in the sacred scriptures—"In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord; this is that king Ahaz:" (2 Chr. xxviii. 22.) some who imitate those insensible Jews in the time of Isaiah—"In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold joy and gladness, eating flesh, and drinking wine;" whilst they said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." (Isa. xxii. 12, 13.)

Would to God, my brethren, that examples of this kind were more rare; but, alas! are there not many of ourselves who exemplify this disposition? Where is the humility, the penitence, the righteousness, produced among us by those terrible judgments of God that are upon the earth? Ah! must we not with shame apply to ourselves the reproach which the prophet in this chapter utters against many of his countrymen, "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see?" But what are the causes of this strange insensibility? Why do not men more profit

by the judgments of God? These questions we are to answer in the

IId. Division of our discourse.

The limits of these exercises will not here permit me to enter into detail, or I might show you that disbelief of the declarations of God, false ideas of his character, unscriptural views of our own state and condition, a base inattention to the operations of Providence, frequently prevent the salutary effects which judgments are calculated to make on us. I will, however, call your attention only to two causes :

1. Judgments that light upon others are frequently rendered useless, because of our *insensibility*. We tranquilly behold the lightning flashing at a distance, and suppose that it will not blast us, as though we were of a different nature from those who are consumed by it; as though we had formed a peculiar league with Providence, and were perfectly sheltered from those calamities that have descended on so many of our fellow-creatures. Thus blinded, instead of regarding the woes of others as merciful monitions to ourselves, and being led by them to righteousness, we harden our hearts against instruction, and exclude reflection. If eighteen are crushed by the tower of Siloam, we view the event with little emotion if we are preserved, and heed not the warning voice of Jesus, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Has not this been the case with us, my brethren? When we have seen the judgments of God descending upon other nations, have we corresponded with his design in these afflictions? Have we learned righteousness, and listened to him while he cried, "I have cut off the nations; their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed. Then I said.

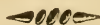
Surely thou wilt fear me ; thou wilt receive instruction, that thy dwelling may not be cut off." (Zeph. iii. 6, 7.)

When you heard of a scene of festivity suddenly changed into a place of mourning and anguish, did you, young people, learn righteousness from this judgment, and resolve to engage in no occupations, in which you would be unwilling to be surprised by death ; from which you would reluctantly pass to the judgment-bar ? Or have you since with the same eagerness rushed forward in the giddy round of pleasure, and never remembered that death may come to interrupt your gayety ; that the splendours of eternity may in a moment break upon your astonished eyes ?

2. But if we can thus be insensible when judgments fall upon others, we feel when they descend upon ourselves. Even then, however, we do not always learn righteousness, because, instead of being humbled and led to think of our sins, we vent our grief only in *vain regrets and useless lamentations*. Instead of raising our eyes to that Supreme Providence whose decisions are always wise and just ; instead of saying with holy Job, " Show me wherefore thou contendest with me," we with disquietude and murmuring look round to second causes ; to the negligence or wickedness of men, to the irregularity of the seasons, to a thousand similar circumstances. Ah, sinner ! the source of thy misery is in thyself : cease to declaim against others, or to murmur at thy lot. Remember that the Supreme Arbiter of all things can alone give efficacy to second causes ; that the elements, seasons, winds, waves, flames, are only angels executing his will. Instead of contending with the Almighty, of being filled with bitterness, of being discontented with heaven, men. every thing except yourself, hum-

ble yourself, and let that cry of penitence rise from a contrite heart, “the Lord is righteous, but I have rebelled against him!” Thus shall the judgments of God teach you righteousness.

SERMON CII.



FEAR OF GOD.



1 PETER ii. 17.

Fear God.

FEW duties are more frequently or solemnly enjoined upon us in the word of God, than that which is commanded in the text. From the beginning to the end of the holy volume, its importance and necessity are every where inculcated. When the Lord descended in majesty upon Sinai, and gave his laws to the chosen people, he said, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me.” (Deut. v. 29.) In the prophet Malachi, (i. 6.) he reproaches those who are destitute of this principle, by inquiring, “If I be a master, where is my fear?” In Jeremiah, when speaking of the privileges and blessings of that covenant of grace on which all our hopes are founded, one of his chief promises with regard to believers is, “I will put my fear in their hearts.” (Jer. xxxii. 40.) When in the Revelation

we behold an angel flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach, we hear him cry with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory unto him." (Rev. xiv. 6.) Inspired men upon earth correspond with God and his angels; and in numberless passages teach us, that, except we have this sentiment, we are yet unacquainted with even the beginning of wisdom, have no interest in the love of God, and are not authorized to entertain any hopes of future felicity. To quote all the passages which speak this language, would be to transcribe a large portion of the Bible.

But if a proper fear of God is found only in the pious, there is, on the other hand, a species of fear to which no promises are made, which is the characteristic of those who are in the bondage of sin, which is the earnest of everlasting punishment; that fear which was felt by Cain, and by Judas, which caused fallen Adam to fly from God, which will convulse the souls of the perishing at the judgment-day, while they call upon the rocks and the mountains to fall on them, and cover them, and which, according to James, is felt by the devils themselves, who, groaning under present anguish, tremble at future pains.

Every one will perceive that these two species of fear are perfectly distinct. What a difference between the fear of an *Adam* making him unwilling to meet his maker, and that of an *Abraham*, when God gave him that precious testimony, "Now I know that thou fearest me;" between the fear of a hardened, though affrighted *Cain*, and that of an *Isaac*, of whom it was recorded that God was the fear; between the fear of a *Pharaoh*, impenitent, though trembling under the rod of the Almighty, and that of a *Moses*, filled with solemn reverence and awe.

and not daring to approach the burning bush from which Jehovah spake unto him; between the fear of the *Philistines*, who were penetrated with dismay by the plagues which God inflicted upon them when they had taken the ark, and that of the *Levites* when they, with sacred veneration of soul, carried back this august symbol of the divine presence, “serving the Lord with fear, and rejoicing with trembling;” between the fear of the *fiend*, who curses, blasphemes, and despairs, and that of the *seraph*, who humbly veils his face before the Eternal, not daring to look upon the splendours of his glory!

Since, then, the fear of God is to be found both in the holy and the wicked; since it is good or evil, according to the different motives which produce it, the different emotions which accompany it, and the different effects which result from it, we should carefully examine into its nature, and inquire whether the fear which we possess is of the nature which God requires.

And this is the object of the ensuing discourse. It is a point of so much consequence, so closely connected with our dearest interests, that I may surely expect your solemn attention.

There are two principal species of fear, as we may readily perceive by consulting our own emotions: the *fear of apprehension*, and the *fear of respect*. The first has for its foundation that evil which he who is feared can inflict; the second arises from the high idea we have of him for whom we entertain this sentiment. The first is exercised towards a being who, we suppose, has the will and the power to hurt us; the second is felt when, apprehending nothing from his anger, we entertain respect, esteem, and veneration for him.

Let us consider these separately, and commence with the *fear of respect*.

This is always felt by the true believer. Can he avoid feeling it, when he views on the one hand the splendour of the perfections of God, and on the other, his own littleness and baseness? When we form the contrast between the strength and uncontrolled authority of God and our weakness; between his greatness and supremacy and our nothingness; between his holiness and our pollution; his light and our darkness; must we not be filled with reverence and awe? This is the proper homage of the creature before the Creator. These are sentiments which are felt, and through eternity will be felt, by the angels and the redeemed, who behold these perfections more illustriously displayed than they are to us. What then ought to be the conduct of men who are so far inferior to these exalted intelligences in elevation, in holiness, in wisdom and power? Ought they not in like manner to abase themselves before the Lord?

“There is no single perfection in the divine nature which is not a proper foundation, and may not suggest motives for this fear. Most holy, he abhors iniquity: Omnipresent, nothing can be hid from him: All-wise, he cannot be deceived: the Governor of the world, he observes and recompenses the actions of his creatures: Almighty, he can inflict on them what punishments he pleases: Eternal, they cannot, even by death, escape from him.”* Most good, he deserves our attachment. When the believer views all these perfections beautifully harmonizing, and

* Jortin, i. 308.

has a sense of the glorious majesty of Jehovah, will not his soul be humbled, and shrink into nothing before these infinite and uncreated splendours? Will he not be filled with the fear of respect?

But it is unnecessary to dwell on the justness of this duty: every rational being must immediately acknowledge it. But, alas! my brethren, how many are there who neglect it! Indeed, every sin is opposed to this fear, since every sin tramples on the authority and outrages the greatness of God. But though all iniquities violate the reverential fear of the Lord, there are some which do it in a more direct and explicit manner than others. Such are *blasphemy*, which denies his perfections; *murmurings* at his Providence, as though we were better or wiser than he, and could instruct him how with greater propriety to govern the universe; *perjury*, which solemnly calls upon him to witness a falsehood, and invokes him to punish it; *profane swearing*, which tosses about with profane levity his names and his attributes, which heaven adores, at which hell trembles, and which never should be thought or spoken of by mortals but with reverence and awe; and *sacrilege*, which alienates to common uses what has solemnly been devoted to the Lord. All such persons may without hesitancy know that the fear of God is not in them.

With respect to the *fear of apprehension*, which has as its foundation the evils which God can inflict on us, it is of two different kinds: we may fear *to offend and displease God*, and we may fear *to be punished for it*.

When the former is the motive of this fear, it is called *filial fear*, because it is the sentiment of an affectionate child towards its parent. Such a child

does what his father desires, not for fear of being disinherited if he disobeys, but because it would pain him to displease one whom he loves. In like manner the believer complies with the will of God, not merely because he fears hell, but because he fears to offend this merciful Father, to whom he is so much indebted. This fear then has as its source, love and gratitude. The mercy, the compassion, the grace of God, are the sources whence it is derived. This is the sentiment which David describes when he cries, "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared;" to this Hosea alluded when he predicted, that on peculiar displays of divine mercy, which were afterwards to be manifested, the pious should "fear the Lord and his goodness." This is indeed the most generous source of holiness and virtue. To abstain from sin that we may obtain the approbation of men, is the attainment of many of the unregenerate; to do so only from the fear of punishment, is the conduct of a slave who obeys his master only under the lifted rod; to do so because sin is degrading to our natures, was the motive even of some pagan philosophers; but, not to sin because we love God, and wish not to displease him, is ingenuous, generous, and affectionate. It was this fear, resulting from a display of the divine goodness, which Jacob felt on the consecrated field of Luz. When he had beheld that splendid vision, in which heaven was opened to him; when he had seen the Lord and his angels; when God had promised him protection, the choicest temporal mercies, and the richest spiritual blessings, to himself and his posterity, Jacob's soul vibrated between amazement and delight; for the historian immediately adds, "And Jacob was afraid, and said, How dreadful is

this place ! 'This is none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven.'" It was this that Moses felt, when that illustrious and cheering display of the divine goodness was made unto him ; (Ex. xxxiv.) for after the Lord had passed by, and proclaimed his name in accents ever calculated to give confidence and trust in him, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," we are immediately informed that "Moses made haste, and bowed his head to the ground, and worshipped." It is this fear, resulting from the divine goodness, which you, believers, have often felt, when, after special manifestations of the divine favour, after a full assurance of the love of God has been shed abroad in your heart, after you have had the Spirit witnessing with you ; you have shuddered at sin ; you have, more than ever, dreaded to displease God ; you have trembled at the ingratitude of violating the laws, or opposing the will of your benefactor.

With respect to the other kind of *fear of apprehension*, of which we have spoken, that which is founded only on the *dread of future punishments*, it is (considered absolutely and in itself) neither morally good nor evil. Not morally *good*, since we see it every day felt by the most wicked, and since the devils themselves tremble under it. Not morally *evil*, since it is a sentiment that reason would require ; since God has used the threatenings of this punishment to deter men from sin ; and since our Redeemer has expressly sanctioned it by his command : "Fear not them that can kill the body, and after that have nothing else that they can do : but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him who, after he

hath killed, hath power to cast both body and soul into hell: Yea, I say unto you, Fear him." It becomes morally *good*, only when united with filial fear. It is morally *evil*, when accompanied with love of sin, with distrust, and despair. It then acquires the name of *servile fear*.

My brethren, if you have faithfully attended to the reflections that have been made in this discourse, you may decide whether you have complied with the injunction in the text, and whether, in a holy manner, you fear God.

To you who have this disposition, the scripture speaks in the most engaging language: it presents you with promises calculated to support you in every situation, and fill your hearts with joy. No *temporal blessing* that is really useful, that will promote your best happiness, shall be wanted by you. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him." (Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10.) Are you in a lowly situation in life, and destitute of the outward enjoyments of many of the enemies of God? Be not disquieted, for "better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great riches, and trouble therewith." (Prov. xv. 16.) Are you encompassed by dangers? Providence has engaged to defend you, and his angels perpetually minister unto you. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about those that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. xxxiv. 7.) You are accepted by the Lord; your persons and your services through the Redeemer: "Of a truth," said Peter, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." (Acts x. 34, 35.) The Lord regards you with tenderness and compassion, and sympathizes with you in all

your trials and distresses: "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." (Ps. xxxiii. 18. ciii. 13.) The Saviour shall often come unto you with his light and consolation, with a sense of his pardoning love and mercy: for "unto you that fear my name, says the Lord, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. iv. 2.) Beyond the grave there is secured to you a felicity worthy of the tenderness of that God whom you fear and love, worthy of that Redeemer in whom you confidently trust: for "surely his salvation is nigh unto them that fear him;" (Ps. lxxxv. 9.) and "the Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before him for them that fear the Lord; and they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a Father spareth his own son that serveth him." (Mal. iii. 16, 17.)

These are but a small portion of the promises made to you; but are not these abundantly sufficient to make you cry out with David, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for those that fear thee?" (Ps. xxxi. 19.) Bless God, who by his Spirit and his grace has implanted this disposition within you; thank him for those privileges annexed to it; cultivate it by prayer and communion with the Lord; and, fearing God, rise superior to all other fear.

And you, whose consciences attest that you are destitute of this sentiment, at last awake to a sense of your condition. Does not God deserve these emotions from you? Does he not sustain to you all those relations that are calculated to excite a reverential and filial fear? Would it not make your life

more safe and happy, and your death more serene? Must you not hereafter tremble at his bar, if you now do not fear him? Oh! then, no longer trifle with the living God! earnestly implore from him this blessing, and use those means calculated to procure it in humble dependence upon him.

SERMON CIII.



LOVE TO GOD.

MARK xii. 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

SUCH, according to the declaration of our blessed Redeemer, is "the first and great commandment." The indispensable necessity of complying with it cannot for a moment be doubted by a reasonable man or a Christian. It is the compendium of all our duty; it is the object for the attainment of which both the law and the gospel are designed; it is at once "the old, the new, and the great commandment, and all the commandments, since it is, according to St. Paul, the fulfilling of the law." It is the

vital principle of every Christian grace and virtue ; it is love, beholding the combination of all that is great and glorious in God, which inspires holy *veneration* and *reverence* ; it is love, considering his mercies and promises, that prompts the ardent tribute of *gratitude* ; it is love, that leaning on the arm, and glorying in the goodness and pledged protection of the greatest and best of beings, inspires *confidence* and *trust* in the midst of dangers ; it is love, that in adversity creates *resignation* ; without it there could be only a servile and constrained submission ; but love smooths the brow of affliction, puts God in the place of the friends or the comforts we have lost, quiets all our griefs and our cares, and is contented with the portion that our Father has assigned us ; it is love, that, regarding the excellence of the Most Bountiful and Most Gracious, causes the tears of *godly sorrow* and evangelical repentance to flow for our offences against him.

It is also the *soul and the spring of obedience*. No sacrifice can be acceptable that is not kindled by this heavenly fire ; no offering is pure that is not preserved by this holy salt ; no action is agreeable to God that does not flow from this principle rooted in the heart ; no obedience is sweet and constant that has any other source ; for though fear may impel to the performance of some duties and hope to others, yet love alone can steadily and cheerfully influence the soul. However splendid may be our acts, however self-denying our performances, without love to inspire them, they are only a beautiful carcass without any animating principle ; the bestowal of all our goods to feed the poor, the submission to all the tortures of martyrdom, without love, says the apostle, would “ profit us nothing.”

Without love to God it is as impossible, from the nature of things, as from the appointment of the Lord, that we could enjoy the felicity of heaven. Even if the justice and holiness of the Eternal had not debarred those who love him not, from the kingdom of purity; even if they were permitted to mingle with the inhabitants of that blessed world, yet still they would be unhappy, if they carried thither a heart averse from God, uninflamed with love to him. All the occupations, pursuits, and enjoyments of heaven, would be so discordant to their feelings, so inconsistent with their moral taste, that in the midst of the raptures of seraphs and redeemed sinners, they would find nothing to delight them: for heaven is not so much a place, as the state of the soul, and in proportion to our love is the foundation of heaven laid within us, or rather, so much of heaven is already let down in our soul.

But why do I insist so much on the necessity of this precept? There is not one of you who will not acknowledge that reason requires it, that God commands it, that the scriptures enjoin it, under penalty of eternal perdition. Let us rather, since this duty is of such infinite consequence, carefully examine *its nature*, that we may discover our true state, and ascertain whether indeed the love of God be in us.

A true love to God has three principal constituent parts:

I. *The love of desire*, which terminates upon him as the sovereign good, as the author, the foundation, and the support of our happiness.

II. *The love of gratitude*; arising from a sense of the goodness and beneficence of God towards us; and,

III. *Disinterested love*, having as its motive and foundation, the moral beauty, the excellence, and the

perfections of God, considered in themselves, and without any reference to the advantages which we derive from them.

I. *The love of desire* takes its origin from the wants and necessities of man, and the fitness and willingness of God to supply these wants, and relieve these necessities. From the constitution of our nature, we are impelled to seek happiness; our desires of felicity are strong and unconquerable: they commence with our first breath; they endure till our last sigh. But our nature is so limited, our needs so multiplied, that we cannot find enough in ourselves to satisfy the capacities of our souls, to fill the void in our hearts, and to quench our raging thirst for happiness. To be self-sufficient is the prerogative of God, and belongs to no creature; especially to no sinful creature. Man then being animated by desires for felicity, and not finding within himself any thing on which his desires may fix as their rest and their end, is obliged to have recourse to outward objects as their rest and delight, and as props to the feebleness of humanity. And in observing the choice which is made among different and opposite outward objects, we find the first mark of discrimination between him who loveth God and him who loveth him not. The *latter* seeks among the creatures for that happiness after which he pants. In hopes thus to attain it, he labours for wealth, he pursues honour, he riots in sensual indulgences. Disappointed in his expectations, he does not desist in his vain attempt to extract felicity from earth; he does not say, “Where is God my maker, who filleth the soul with gladness, and giveth songs in the night?” he still eagerly follows those objects which are either difficult or impossible to be obtained. and which, were they attained, could

not render their possessor happy in time, much less in eternity. On the contrary, the man who loves God, looking beyond the pleasures of earth, in the midst of which he had always been restless and disturbed, convinced that God alone has a *fulness* to make him perfectly happy, and *immortality* to render him perpetually happy, fixes his heart upon the Lord, and exclaims, ‘Lo, I come to thee, the fountain of joy, the stay of the creation, the centre of rest, the fulness of all things. Nothing below can give me rest or quiet, for nothing below is commensurate with the powers of my nature; nothing below is itself at rest. I therefore choose thee as my portion, as the source of my blessedness, the spring of my joy.’

In the holy scriptures we find this love of desire very frequently represented in the exercises of pious men. “As the hart panteth after the water brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: Oh! when shall I come and appear before God.” (Ps. xlii. 1, 2.) “There be many that say, who will show us any” earthly “good: Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” (Ps. iv. 6.) “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” To the same species of love we are invited by the Lord in the 55th chapter of Isaiah, where he reproves the children of men for employing their labours and cares for that which satisfieth not, and invites them to come unto him, that they may enjoy real blessings.

Brethren, how astonishing is it, that the infinite Jehovah, whom the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain, should thus allow himself to become the portion of man, of that creature so abject and so vile; that this child of darkness should

be encouraged to approach to that immortal light, to appropriate it to himself, to make of it his treasure; that this worm of earth should be allowed, not merely some ray of the Creator's glory, but the fruition and possession of the Creator himself! But though these incomprehensible depths of grace astonish us, is it not still more surprising, that when God thus invites man, thus opens his arms and his bosom to receive him, and offers to pour forth upon him the streams of blessedness, man despises this prodigy of goodness, this depth of condescension; remains insensible and motionless; or if he move, only avoids and flees from his God!

Do you wish to know whether this is your character, or whether you are animated by the love of desire? Examine whether, in your practical judgment and estimation, you regard this world as an insufficient portion; if it has the first and best of your affections, if you are seeking your felicity principally from it, "the love of the Father is not in you." Examine whether you desire the means which unite us to God, and flee from those things which separate us from him, and grieve at those things which obstruct his presence, and wish for union and communion with the church to which his presence is promised, and look to heaven with joy, principally because there the union with him will be perfect. Examine also whether you have delighted yourself in God; for desire and delight are the same affection changed only by the different situation of the object; desire is love in motion, delight love at rest; the former the wings of love carrying it to God, the latter its arms whereby it embraces the object of its affection; the former moves to its object when it is

at a distance; the latter rests and rejoices in it when it is attained.

To this love of desire, we must add,

II. The *love of gratitude*, arising from the sense of the divine goodness and liberality to us. When we look up to our Father and Benefactor, whose power gave us being, whose watchful providence constantly preserves us, whose unceasing goodness crowns us with mercies, whose long-suffering bears with our multiplied offences, whose ineffable love provided so precious an atonement, whose exhaustless mercy forgives our iniquities, can our hearts remain cold? Scripture, and the best feelings of our nature, imperiously require the exercise of grateful love. "I love the Lord," says David, "*because* he hath heard my voice and my supplication." (Ps. cxvi. 1.) "We love him," says the apostle John, "because he first loved us." And in the gospels, our Saviour represents the greatness of the mercy displayed towards her who was a sinner, as the cause of the greatness of her love. "She loveth much, because much is forgiven her."

The blessings of God are conferred upon us with this very design, to melt our cold hearts, and inflame them with his love. Consider, then, the number and value of the favours you have received from him. He has given you all the blessings that you have ever experienced, that you now enjoy, or that you hope hereafter to possess. He has given his Son as your sacrifice, his Spirit to renew and sanctify you, and himself as your portion. He has given you all these, though he was so infinitely elevated above, and though immutably and infinitely happy in himself, you can add nothing to his felicity; though you repaid his first mercies with ingratitude, and, con-

verting his mercies into arms against him, fought against him under the protection of his loving-kindness.

Here we may confidently defy the most hardened rebel against God, and appeal to his own conscience without fear of opposition, whether God does not rightly demand this grateful love from him. Viewing ingratitude towards man as so atrocious a crime; will he defend ingratitude towards God? Dare he say that the blessings conferred by God are not more excellent in themselves, and more deserving of profound thankfulness, than any that can be conferred by our fellow-creatures? Does God require too much when, in return for these numberless benefits, he demands not painful sufferings, but the dear sentiment of love, which always bears with it its own recompense?

But though this second species of love is so just, yet, alas! when we examine ourselves, how negligent of it do we appear! How many never think of the beneficent hand which showers blessings upon them; how many never rise above his gifts to the Giver; how many regard him with stupid indifference, or profane coldness; how many, if they feel some emotion of gratitude for temporal favours, yet never are warmed with love for spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus! And who, even among the most pious, has not cause to blush for the coldness of his affections to such a Benefactor and Friend? Oh! let us cultivate a more proper temper; let us feel the benefits of God; let us thank him with the heart and the mouth; let us thank him also by our obedience! This is the gratitude he approves. "In heaven," says a good man, "actions consist in praises; on earth, the best praises consist in actions."

But these two species of love are not sufficient to constitute the divine grace enjoined in the text. Besides them, there is necessary,

III. A *disinterested love*, having as its foundation the excellence and perfection of God, considered in themselves, and without any reference to the advantages we derive from them. From the principles of our nature, goodness, benignity, and excellence, claim our love; and his heart must indeed be deeply corrupted who can regard with indifference those in whom they are found. But if our affection is excited by their feeble display in sinful creatures, how much more so should it be in viewing the Most Merciful and the Most Perfect! This is the most noble kind of love, and therefore should be exercised on the most noble of objects.

With desiring and grateful love to God, self-love is necessarily mingled. In disinterested love, self is forgotten, while we are enamoured with the glory and excellence of Jehovah. If we desire God as our portion, only because we cannot find happiness from other objects, a regard to our own felicity is evidently our ultimate end; and this is not inconsistent with an unrenewed heart. This is confirmed by what the Scriptures teach us concerning Job: Satan accuses him of loving God solely from a regard to his own happiness; God permits that he should be tried, resting the sincerity of his love on its disinterestedness. The love of gratitude may in like manner exist in a soul that is uninfluenced by supernatural grace. The Israelites continually murmured and rebelled against God, yet on their deliverance from the Red Sea, they could sing his praises with rapture. Our Saviour assures us that this love of gratitude may be felt by a wicked man: "If ye

love them that love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them." (Luke vi. 32.) It is necessary, then, that the chief motive to love should be his eternal glories and ineffable perfections; and that, without an immediate reference to ourselves, we should cordially acquiesce and rejoice in the infinite loveliness of his character.

And if in himself God appears so lovely to us, it is evident that we will imitate and copy in our lives that moral beauty which we admire in him; that we will rejoice in that holy law and just government which exhibit his perfections; that we will grieve to see his character outraged; that we will endeavour to spread the knowledge of it to those who know it not; and that we will frequently converse with him who has thus engaged our affections, and meditate upon him with sensibility and joy; will acquiesce in all his disposals, regarding him as the wisest and the best. Such feelings and conduct necessarily result from disinterested affection. Apply them as tests to yourselves: unless you correspond with them, you love not God; neither do you love him with this species of affection, if you are pleased with only so much of his character as is not opposed to the unsanctified heart; such as his mercy and readiness to forgive, whilst you wish that he were divested of his holiness and similar attributes; nor do you love him if you feel a certain glow of affection because you suppose he will not condemn you, though you continue ungodly: this is a blasphemy, instead of a love founded on a true view of his perfections.

Having thus shown the nature, let us now consider the *measure* of divine love; the *degree* to which it must be carried in order to be acceptable to God.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Some persons have given a particular distinct signification to each term in the text; without examining so minutely, let us remark that two things are evidently taught by them :

I. Our love must be supreme.

II. It must be ardent.

I. That we must love God *supremely*, and above every other object, is a truth, as you well know, constantly asserted in the scriptures. And is there any thing unreasonable or oppressive in this regulation? Ought not the chief good to be supremely loved with the love of desire? Ought not He, who gave you life, and breath, and all things; who redeemed you by the agonies of his Son, to be supremely loved with the love of gratitude? Ought not He, whose perfections are underived and infinite, be loved with disinterested affection, more than the objects whose excellences are borrowed and bounded? With what sentiments must a holy and jealous God behold a heart, in which the world is on the throne, and himself disregarded in comparison?

He permits us, it is true, to love other things: health, friends, and other temporal enjoyments, are mercies given by him; are intended for our comfort; are proofs of his goodness: and as it is our duty to thank him for them, so in a degree we may love them. Indeed, without some attachment to them, the love of gratitude would be feeble: from their excellence and usefulness we rise to the goodness of Him who bestowed them, and thus “love as well as reason from the effect to the cause.” Yet still it remains true, that “he who loveth father or mother, brother or sister, yea, or his own life, more than God, is not

worthy of him." We must love nothing contrary to God ; and our attachment to lawful objects must always be so subordinate and inferior, as to make us ready to resign them at his command. Love to God, unbounded in itself, must set bounds to our love to every thing else.

On this point, my brethren, deeply examine your souls ; God allows no rival ; if he is not loved by you above all things else, you are still the slaves of Satan, and advancing to everlasting ruin.

II. This injunction requires us also to love God with all the *ardour* and intensity of our soul. And is not this also reasonable ? If love is to be proportioned to the magnitude of the object, ought not our heart to burn with ardent attachment to this greatest of beings ? Ought it not to emulate the flames of the seraph ? In viewing such perfection and goodness, can it be excessive ? Will it be contented with a feeble, a languid, a lukewarm frame ? It is surely our duty thus rapturously to love him ; but, alas ! it is not a duty which we perform ; the holiest man has reason to complain of the coldness of his love.

Though where our love is sincere and supreme, the want of as much ardour as God deserves will not expose us to perdition ; though God in his infinite mercy will pardon us if we have really given him our hearts, though we do not absolutely and to all its extent, fulfil this duty, yet let us strive ; if we be indeed Christians, we shall strive to advance continually in this love. By the grace which God will bestow, we may advance many degrees in love ; and the smallest of these degrees is worth more than all the honours, all the riches, all the pleasures, all the knowledge, of the world. I am persuaded that such is the judgment of God and his angels. Though

many years were requisite to attain one of these degrees, they would be much more profitably employed than if in them we rendered ourselves masters of the universe. Behold, then, an object worthy of your ambition, and which you must pursue : for although, as I have said, you may be a Christian without perfect love, yet you cannot be a Christian without desiring, labouring, and praying for increase of love, and without aiming at perfection.

And now, my brethren, in concluding this discourse, let each one seriously examine himself, Do I supremely love God, or do I not? The decision of this question will be a separating line between the living and the dead ; between the souls that are alive to God and those that are “ dead in trespasses and sins.” Think not this examination unnecessary ; though there will be a general, an innumerable assembly of glorious angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, in which there will not one be found who is not a sincere lover of God, yet this is not the case with our assemblies upon earth. Remember, that indifference and carelessness on this subject show the greatest contempt for God and your own souls ; that the man who answers to the question, ‘ Dost thou supremely love God ?’ ‘ I know not, and I shall not examine ;’ instantly proves himself a stranger to this divine grace. Remember that you must be examined at God’s judgment-seat ; is it not wise then, to cite yourselves before the tribunal of conscience in this day of grace ? Proceed then solemnly in this business ; inspect your souls ; examine your life ; see what has been your habitual frame and conversation. Do this as in the presence of Him whose “ eye is as a flame of fire, and who searches

the heart." If thou prove guilty, acknowledge it. Say, 'It is true, my soul, the love of God is not in thee; whatever peace and quiet thou hast enjoyed, whatever men may have thought of thee, thou art destitute of this saving grace. Yes, Lord, I bring before thee a guilty, wretched soul; a reasonable soul, that hath refused to pay thee a reasonable service; a soul which thou formedst and redeemedst, but which still would not love thee; a soul which had love in its nature, but which never directed its love to thee, who art so worthy of it.' When thou hast thus brought thy soul before God, charge it with its guilt, its pollution, and its misery; cry with sincerity, 'What guilt have I contracted! I was made by thee, and I do not love thee; thou breathedst this immortal spirit into me, and it does not love thee; it is thine own offspring, and does not love thee! O what a soul have I! that can love trifles and vanities; that can love my wealth, my ease, my flesh, nay even my sins, and that loves not my God!' With this self-loathing and pity for thine own soul, let a salutary fear be mingled. Say to it, 'What, ah! what must be thy doom! where will be thine eternal abode! Without love to God, in what regions of horror, and darkness, and wo, must thou dwell! For what society art thou fit, except that of those lost spirits who are far from God, and on whom no beam of holy vital light shall ever shine. Tremble, my soul, in anticipating that judgment-bar where the vengeance of God must flame against all who carried in their bosoms hearts disloyal, rebellious, without love to that God who shall then be seated on the dread tribunal.' When thus humbled and trembling, do not however despair. God is in Christ, recon-

ailing the world unto himself, conquering the enmity of our hearts, and causing the most obstinate rebels to cry, "My Lord and my God!" 'We have hitherto been without love to thee, through thy grace we will be so no longer.' Despair of being safe or happy without love to God; despair of enkindling this love by your own power: but do not despair of his power and willingness to inspire the heavenly flame. You have to do with that God whose nature and whose name is love, and with that Jesus who is incarnate love; open then your souls to him; cry to him, Lord, enter with the power of thy love; soften this hard, dissolve this stony heart, and let it melt into love. Let the Spirit of love be shed abroad in my heart. that I may dwell in him who is love, and he in me.

Act thus: be importunate and frequent in these petitions; be sincere in feeling your want of love; penitent in lamenting your disaffection; urgent in besecching divine love: and the prayer-hearing God will confer upon you this heavenly grace.

A few words to those of you, my brethren, whose consciences testify that you truly love God, but who lament that this love is not more vigorous. Frequently chide your souls for their sluggishness; remind them that to love God was the end of their creation; that to inspire this affection, and show the loveliness of God, the Redeemer died; that the regenerating Spirit has been given thee to extinguish baser fires, and kindle the flame of heavenly love. Meditate often on the perfections and mercies of God; think not of the Lord, as at a distance from thee, but realize that he is as near thee as thine own soul, and that in his present love and goodness thou dost subsist; have a proper sense of the guilt

of want of love to God, and regard it as the heart of the old man, and the life of all particular sins ; strive to keep fresh upon thy heart lively conceptions of the goodness and excellence of God ; and trace him in his appearances to man in nature, grace, and glory ; often look by faith to the joys of heaven, and foresee what God will be there to his saints for ever. In meditating upon these and other incentives to love, preach them earnestly to thy heart, and expostulate and plead with it till thou feel the fire begin to burn. Be earnest in prayer for the increase of this grace ; associate most with those who have most love : from them you may catch warmth and animation. Be ready to speak for God. Endeavour to inflame others ; and while you are warming them, your own heart will burn.

SERMON CIV.



PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE OF GOD.



MAT. X. 29, 30.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father : but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

THE Creator of all things is our Father : he has not only formed us what we are, but through his power and goodness we are upheld in being. In the constitution of the world he has established general laws for the continuance of every species of plant and animal ; he has appointed numberless means for our preservation and support ; he has wisely connected all parts of the universe together ; and, the Infinite Monarch, his dominion extends over all the worlds which are known or unknown to us.

The conviction of these important truths is precious to the children of men ; but the belief of them *alone*, is not sufficient for our felicity. I would also desire to know, whether this exalted Creator attends to the works of his hand ; whether he observes and directs all changes in the material and spiritual world ; whether his providence extends, not only over the great whole, but also over every particular

part of his creation, however minute ; whether he wisely regulates the lot of all his unintelligent and intelligent creatures ; whether I myself, so inconsiderable an atom in the universe, may yet confidently believe that the least events and changes in my life are under the directing providence of my God ; and that, consequently, nothing can occur which he hath not ordained or permitted for good. Much, very much of my happiness, depends upon the answer to these questions : more than half my consolation and my hopes must be crushed, if I have a God, who, because he is so great, will not regard me, nor attend to my wants ; if, of consequence, my happiness is entirely dependent upon my own wisdom or imprudence, upon the passions of other men, upon a blind chance, or an unintelligent necessity, and not upon the paternal providence and direction of the Lord. Does he not, or will he not, know where my habitation is appointed ? what is my character and conduct ; whether I am surrounded by the enjoyments of earth, or pining in poverty, and weighed down by affliction ; whether I have friends who love and cherish me, or enemies who hate and persecute me ? Is he ignorant or indifferent, whether I become the victim of slander or of fraud ; whether the object of my tenderest affections be torn from my embraces and sunk into the tomb ; whether that child, whose opening virtues I have watched with transport, become the prey of death ; whether disease or pestilence shall cut me off in the midst of my days ? Ah ! if all such circumstances are not under the government of God, and wisely directed by his providence, what ground of consolation have I in my afflictions ; what motive for the effusions of gratitude to God in my joy ; what se-

curity for future happiness in this world, or the next? I should then be forsaken, like a child who, though he had a father, was early abandoned to strangers for his instruction or support; or like a poor orphan, early deprived of his parents, and left without guide or friend! Nay, I am worse than this orphan child; for he *may* find among strangers some benevolent heart that will exercise to him the love of a father, the tenderness of a mother; but I! where can I find another God who will direct my steps, regulate my lot, listen to my prayers, over-rule my afflictions for my greatest good; if my Creator and my Lord is regardless of the work of his hands, and is satisfied, when according to his established laws I have been born a man, with leaving me to be carried forward with the current of mortal things without his inspection, superintendence, and care? Where, where can I find another father, who will be what God is to me, if there be a Providence; who will watch over me amidst the thousand dangers which daily encompass me; who will reach forth his hand to sustain me when I totter, and raise me when I fall; who can guard my temporal happiness, and conduct me to the high felicity enjoyed by the redeemed?

It is then of unspeakable consequence to be convinced of the particular providence of God; to be able to look up to him, and rejoice in him, in every moment and in every circumstance of our lives, as our Father and our friend, constantly present with us. And, blessed be his name, he has not left himself without witness, but has given us the fullest proofs of this precious truth!

It would be useless formally to prove to you that God *has a right* to exercise this particular providence over his own works; and that *he is qualified* to exercise

it by his perfections, his infinite power, and wisdom, and love.

That he *does actually* exercise it, is proved by his attributes and relations to us, by the powerful impressions of nature, by the observation of the world, by the declarations of his holy word.

1. In viewing the attributes of God and his relations to us, there are two questions to be considered: *Has God the gracious will, the benevolent inclination, to observe and direct the works of creation? and has he sufficient power to discern all his creatures, and to regulate every thing respecting them according to his will?*

Has God the gracious will? O, my soul! canst thou for a moment, entertain a doubt of it? He who made thee in mercy, (for what but goodness could induce him to give thee life?) he who has displayed so many traces of his goodness in heaven and upon earth; he who has given life and feeling to the smallest insect, and so admirably provided for its nourishment and support; canst thou question whether this benevolent Parent wants the will to watch over his works? Shall he, after having so wondrously formed his work, throw it without care from his hand? Shall he, after having placed the first intelligent creature in the world and provided for the continuance of the race, no longer be attentive to him or his descendants? See the affectionate mother, how willingly she remains continually near her child! how solicitously she averts from it the dangers which threaten it! how carefully she relieves its distresses, supplies its wants, and promotes its happiness! And God, who implanted these feelings in the heart of the mother; God, whose tenderness as far exceeds that of mortals, as he is elevated above them by nature; God can be utterly careless and indifferent with re-

gard to his children? Reject the thought with indignation! My soul, thou reproachest God, if for an instant, thou doubttest his gracious will!

But *can* God exercise this particular providence? Has he sufficient *power* to observe all his creatures, and to regulate the smallest, as well as the most important events throughout the universe? I need not pause to prove to you that he has this power; you cannot deny it without denying his existence: he who created all, can govern all; he who is omnipotent and omnipresent, can, without exertion, preside over every change of the universe!

But if he has thus the will and the power, he must exercise this providence.

2. What is thus taught us from the consideration of God, is confirmed by an *attention to our own feelings*. A persuasion of the superintending providence of God is so incorporated with our very nature, so interwoven with the very principles of our being, that no nation has ever existed that has been able to eradicate the impressions of it. Hence in every country, savage or civilized, altars have been reared, temples erected, prayers offered, to the God who was supposed to be present, able to assist, and ready to hear. Can so universal a sentiment be explained, on a supposition of its falsity? It is true, a few men have been found who have denied it, and have endeavoured to believe irreligious systems which rejected it; but when these same men have been visited by unexpected affliction, and alarmed by some great impending calamity, nature, or rather the voice of God has spoken within them; their systems have been forgotten, while they have almost involuntarily implored the protection of the Lord.

3. An attention to the *history of the world* shows us

that the providence of God is universal. In how many instances does he interpose, so as to compel the most careless to acknowledge his presence and agency? How often does he display his providence by the means which he employs to produce effects? Sometimes making use of the *smallest* things to produce the greatest consequences; sometimes of instruments naturally calculated to produce the *contrary* effects to what they actually accomplish; sometimes making the greatest consequences to hang upon events which are *casual* with regard to us, though determined by him. How often do we behold his providence causing the most marked distinction in the success of persons of the same powers of mind, the same external advantages, the same industry? How often, to prove his superintendence, does he bestow upon men what they desired in a different way, and sometimes in an opposite method to what they had projected? How many thousand instances in which the passions of men have been restrained; or sudden changes made upon their spirits for the preservation of others; or the counsels of the wise infatuated, and made subservient to the very ends to which they were opposed? He must be little acquainted with the history of the world, and have been a most inobservant spectator of the events that have occurred during his life, who has not remarked ten thousand such circumstances, that can rationally be explained only by the acknowledgment of Divine Providence.

4. In the *holy volume*, there is scarcely a page in which we are not expressly taught the providence of God. Indeed it is the great intent of revelation to give the history of his providence, and show the manner and rules of his dealings with the children of men. The prophecies particularly show his super-

intendence of the concerns of earth, and his direction of all events. The Old and the New Testament concur in teaching us that "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed: the Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up." (1 Sam. ii. 6, &c.) "Riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." (1 Chr. xxix. 11, 12.) "God doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number: he giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields; he setteth upon high those that be low; he disappointeth the devices of the crafty; but he saveth the poor from the sword, from the mouth and from the hand of the mighty." (Job. v. 8, &c.) "Promotion cometh not from the east nor the west; but God is the Judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another." (Psa. lxxxv. 6, 7.) "He looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven." "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens when they cry." "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." These are but a few of the numberless passages which teach us that God's providence extends to the most minute, as well as to the most important concerns; to the death of a sparrow, and the number of our hairs, as well as to the rise of empires, or the fall of states.

Do you ask, if it is consistent with the majesty and dignity of God to attend to such minute events? Yes! it is not unworthy of him to govern what it is not unworthy of him to create. The continued and universal exercise of wisdom and goodness cannot be inconsistent with majesty. The sun, the

brightest natural emblem of its Creator, loses none of its excellence, because it not only enlightens powerful emperors, but also permits insects to sport in its beams. Those who would represent the providence of God as extending only to the great whole, without regarding the minute parts, have not only never attended to the great chain of nature, in which the most minute and most important events are so inseparably linked together, that one cannot be neglected, without neglecting the other; they have besides, never formed a proper conception of the glory of God. How great does he appear, when at once encircling in the arms of his providence, the highest angel, and the lowest worm; viewing the whole chain which connects a past and a future eternity from the first to the last, and holding it steadily in his hand; observing and directing every circumstance with all its consequences, throughout his vast dominion! How great does he appear, when, without effort or exertion, he directs the planets in their orb, marks out to the comet its course, upholds the numberless worlds which are scattered through the immensity of space; and at the same moment condescending, regulates my lot with as much care as though I were the only happy creature in the universe under his dominion, regards the necessities of a suffering Lazarus, provides for the feeble insect, hears the song of the nightingale, and listens to the sigh of the prisoner! At the contemplation of such a God I tremble: but it is with reverence, with love, with gratitude, and joy.

1. It is of unspeakable importance to keep the remembrance of God's providence fresh upon the mind; the forgetfulness of it is often mentioned in scripture as an occasion of sin. The wicked are represented

as violating the divine laws, because they suppose "God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it: This is also one great ground of our coldness in our religious exercises. Would our worship be so languid, our prayers so unfrequent, our praises so heartless, our trust so feeble, if we had a proper sense of the universality, the watchfulness, the tenderness of God's providence? If then, we would grow in holiness, let us often recall to ourselves that wherever we are, and whatever we do, the Lord is with us; and let us exercise those affections, and perform those acts which this remembrance is calculated to produce.

2. This subject excites deep melancholy, when we reflect how many oppose the providence of God, and sin against it; such are those who, desirous of continuing in that sin which they love, wish that this doctrine may be false; and trembling at the inspection and government of God, endeavour to lull themselves to a fatal security, while they cry with those guilty men in the prophet, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." (Zeph. i. 12.) Such are those who disregard the checks of Providence, and like Pharaoh, still proceed in their evil course, though God has thus manifested his displeasure: such are those who live in the habitual omission of prayer. The Psalmist gives it as one proof that fools deny God's government of the world, that "they call not upon the Lord." If we really believed his watchful providence over us, and his sufficiency to help us, we should not so neglect to pour out our prayers to him, and look to every thing for assistance rather than to him. If we were more persuaded of the care of our Father, we should more readily flee to his bosom in our distress. Such are those whose

chief trust for felicity is in other things than God; in the power of their friends, in their wisdom or prudence, in the wealth they have accumulated; this is practically to deny the providence of the Lord. Such are those who, on the reception of mercies never raise their hearts in gratitude to God, but confine their thanks to the instruments he has employed: who attribute their prosperity only to their friends, their health to their own care, or the skill of the physician, their learning to their own industry. This is a base requital for the providential care of Him, without whom all second causes would be ineffectual. Such are those who seek wealth or honour by unlawful means. This is to reject the providence of God, and to seek relief of hell; to imitate Saul, who, when the Lord did not answer according to his wishes, fled to Satan. Such are those who envy their brother the temporal blessings, or the spiritual gifts which God has bestowed upon him. What is this but to reflect upon the Author of these gifts, and treat his providential distribution of them unjust or unwise? Such are those who are impatient under afflictions; quarrelling with the providential will of God, and charging him with severity and want of goodness. Such are those who blame Providence for the sins they have committed, and thus reproach the Most Holy. All these classes of persons sin against Divine Providence, Alas, how many of us have then been guilty before God!

3. This subject is full of consolation to all the pious. Innumerable fears and anxieties must seize upon every considerate mind, if the government of the world were left to accident, to fate, or to mere human conduct and direction; but these fears and anxieties vanish, and the troubled heart is at rest, when we

are assured, that though blind and helpless in ourselves, there is an infinite wisdom to guide us, and irresistible power to defend us. We may then sing, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice."

Friend of Jesus! God is thy friend. Attending to all his works, he yet exercises towards thee a special providence. "The eye of the Lord" is "peculiarly upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy." "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways." Fear not then, the pressure of afflictions; not one shall befall thee, but by the providence of thy Father. Tremble not at the fury of thy enemies; the God whom thou servest, and who encompasses thee with his loving kindness, is omnipotent. Indulge no unbelieving apprehensions concerning thy future lot in life; but cast thy cares upon thy Heavenly Friend, assured that though "the young lions do lack and suffer hunger, they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing." If called to separate from those friends who formed the charm of your lives, pour forth those tears which nature requires, over their tombs; (thy God permits this sorrow;) but at the same time, bow submissively to the disposals of thy Father, acknowledge his wisdom and love; and cry, "Not my will, but thine be done." Let thy bereavements drive thee for consolation to thy God, and cause thee more anxiously to long, and more carefully to prepare for that world, where a heavenly light shall be shed upon all the providences of God, which here may appear dark and mysterious to thee; where, reviewing all his conduct to thee, thou shalt shout, "He has led me by a right way to the city whose builder is God; he hath done all things well."

SERMON CV.



PATIENCE OF GOD.



ROM. XV. 5. *The God of patience.* NAHUM i. 3. *The Lord is slow to anger.*

WITH what astonishment must an angel who has beheld the displays of divine power and holiness, regard worms of the dust contending with Omnipotence, and provoking the infinite justice and purity of God! But with greater wonder, with deeper indignation, must they contemplate ungrateful man, persevering in iniquity, because of the patience and forbearance of God. Yet, alas! this is not an uncommon spectacle to them. Man basely employs the kindness of God as an encouragement to sin. If the Lord were a rigid and inflexible tyrant, causing his fury to flame against transgressors for their first offence, we should tremble before him, and be filled with apprehension at the thought of sinning against him; but because he is "slow to anger, gracious and long-suffering," we sport with his laws, and trample on his authority.

But though the patience of God is thus abused, it is an attribute dear to the believer, and a serious

meditation on it is calculated to promote our holiness. Let us, then, in the ensuing discourse, consider,

I. The nature of this patience, or slowness to anger.

II. Some of the most illustrious manifestations of it.

III. The reasons why God exercises it. And,

IV. The effects that the belief and knowledge of it should produce upon our hearts and our lives.

I. The *patience* of God is that exercise of divine goodness and mercy to the guilty, whereby the Lord defers immediately to inflict the punishment due for their sins, abstains from instantly avenging the insults and outrages offered him by rebels, renews to them the offer of pardon and felicity, and encompasses them with undeserved blessings, to lead them to repentance. This attribute bears different names in the holy scriptures : sometimes it is termed *long-suffering*, from the period of its continuance ; sometimes *slowness to anger*, from the many provocations which it endures before the divine indignation flames against the guilty ; sometimes *keeping silence* ; (Ps. l. 21.) because the Lord does not, on their first offences, summon the rebels to his bar, accuse, and condemn them.

In every part of the sacred volume, this attribute is presented in terms the most impressive and interesting. It is exhibited as a foundation of hope for the penitent, as an incitement to holiness for the sinner, as a theme of triumph and gratitude for the believer. When the Lord declares his name and shows his glory to Moses, this is one of the perfections which endears Jehovah to him : “ *long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.*” (Exod. xxxiv. 6.)

When David calls upon his soul to bless the Lord, he regards him as "*slow to anger*," as well as "*plenteous in mercy*." (Ps. ciii. 8.) When Isaiah describes the proceedings of Providence, he cries, "Therefore will *the Lord wait*, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you." (Is. xxx. 18.) When Nahum paints in awful colours the majesty and terrors of Jehovah, the picture is relieved by this cheering attribute: "Though the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm, though he reserveth wrath for his enemies, and will not at all acquit the wicked, yet he is *slow to anger*." (Nahum i. 2, 3.) When Joel would urge the Israelites to deep humiliation for their sins, he expresses, by one of the strongest figures, the reluctance of the Most Merciful to punish them: "He is slow to anger, and of great kindness, and *repenteth him of the evil*." (Joel ii. 13.) When Paul warns sinners against the abuse of divine patience, he energetically speaks of "*the riches of the goodness and forbearance and long-suffering of God*." (Rom. ii. 4.) When Peter would vindicate the truth of God in his promises and denunciations against the objections of the profane, he declares, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. iii. 9.) When our blessed Saviour would lead us to the imitation of our Father in heaven, he is exhibited as bearing with the wicked, and sending the blessings of his providence on the evil and the unjust. (Mat. v. 45.)

But it would be endless to mention all those passages which speak of this perfection as an incentive

to duty, as a motive to adoration, and as a source of comfort. Let us rather make a few remarks illustrating its nature.

1. It is a modification of the divine *goodness*. But while goodness respects all creatures, patience has as its object only the sinner. Had sin never entered into the world, goodness still would have reigned over all the works of God, but patience never could have been exercised. It is goodness which sustains the irrational creation, which “hears the young ravens when they cry,” which crowns the angels: but it is patience which bears with the offences of the rebellious.

2. This patience is not the result of *ignorance*. God does not spare us, because he is unacquainted with our guilt. Every transgression we have committed, from the first exercise of our reason to the moment that is just flying from us, is in full view of him who is one Eternal Now. Every irregular thought, every unholy desire, every improper motive, every criminal word, every forbidden act, every neglected duty, is beheld by him with all its aggravating circumstances. Every sin, from the first faint thought of it, through all the steps of its progress to its final completion, is “naked and open to him with whom we have to do.” He cannot be deceived by false pretences, nor mocked by mere outward observances, for he reads the heart. He clearly beholds too the desert of this sin: the ingratitude it displays, the obligations it violates, the love it contemns, the value of the blood which it disregards, the hell which it has kindled. And yet, O riches of the forbearance and long-suffering of my God, the Lord delays his thunders!

3. This perfection does not result from *impotence*. Patience and forbearance in man are often supposed to proceed from inability or cowardice. But, thou great Omnipotent, who dare form such a blasphemous opinion of thy forbearance? Thou, whose word spake the world into being; who, by a single exercise of thy will, canst crush all creatures; thou, on whose arm hang heaven, earth, and hell, shall we doubt of thy power to punish thine enemies: or suppose that thou tremblest from apprehension of those who could not exist an instant without thy constant support? Nay, my brethren, this perfection is so far from indicating impotence, that we are taught by the scriptures to consider the divine power as most illustriously displayed in its exercise; for this reason, the two attributes are in numerous places joined together, "Slow to anger, and of great power." "What if God," says the apostle, (Rom. ix. 22.) "willing to make his *power* known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" It is remarkable, that when Moses (Num. xiv. 17.) is pleading for the pardon of the Israelites, he says, not let thy *grace*, thy *mercy*, be manifested, but, "Let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering." That power which restrains omnipotence, which holds in that infinite justice which can crush offending creatures, is far greater than that which made the universe.

4. Neither does this patience result from a *connivance at sin*, or a *resolution to suffer it with impunity*. Who can even conceive, thrice holy God, thy deep detestation of those sins which thou endurest, towards which thou exercisest thy long-suffering? We quake with terror when we see this detestation glit-

tering in the lightnings, and hear it rolling in the thunders of Sinai, when we see it written in the denunciations of thy holy word, attested by the avenging strokes of thy providence, confirmed by all the miseries which have deluged the earth, shining in the flames of hell, and still more awfully displayed in the tremendous sacrifice of Emmanuel! No, no, thoughtless sinner; though the Lord is patient, he also is just; he will not, he cannot, view sin without abhorrence; he will not, he cannot acquit the finally and impenitently guilty.

5. Finally: ever remember that this patience is *grounded on the everlasting covenant, and the blood of Jesus*. Through this covenant, tinged with this blood, every mercy that we enjoy, every blessing that we hope for, flow to us. Why was not patience exercised to the fallen angels, as well as to fallen man? Why were they immediately "bound in chains of darkness, reserved for judgment?" Because Jesus had not engaged in the councils of eternity to atone for them, as he had engaged to become the surety of man: because when justice demanded their punishment, there was no victim that interposed in their behalf, as did the "Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world," in behalf of man. Oh! then, when you think of the divine patience, let your hearts swell with gratitude, not only towards the everlasting Father, but also to that Jesus, through whose atonement alone this patience could be extended towards you, in consistence with the attributes of God.

Having thus shown you the nature of this attribute, how easy is it,

II. To prove that it is illustriously displayed towards the children of men.

Every thing around you and within you, the history of the church, of the world, and of yourselves, prove the immensity of the divine patience. Unroll the annals of the world : at every step you perceive traces of this attribute. When our *first parents* sinned, it was exercised towards them. Did the earth immediately swallow them up, or fire from heaven consume them, or the flames of the abyss instantly enwrap them ? No ; patience held them in being, gave them an opportunity of securing a better Eden than that which they had lost, and pointed them to that Messiah who should repair the ruins of the fall. When the *old world* had corrupted its way before God, for one hundred and twenty years he bore with its enormities, sent his Spirit to strive with them, and his messengers to warn them, before the exterminating deluge swept them from life. When the *nations of the Canaanites* indulged in every abomination, and rioted in every crime, he delayed for four hundred years to inflict on them the punishments they deserved, till exhausted patience and abused mercy called for their extinction.

When the *Gentile nations* in general provoked Heaven by their cruel, impure, and abominable rites ; and instead of adoring the God of heaven, had placed the vilest passions and the grossest vices in the seat of the divinity ; and encouraged by such a system of religion, had without remorse “ run to every excess of riot,” the Lord “ left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts xiv. 17.) When the *Israelites* so often forgot his covenant, and notwithstanding his numberless miracles and amazing mercies, rebelled

against him, did he not bear with them, forgive their iniquities, and crown them with loving-kindness?

But why do I mention particular examples? There is not a spot on our globe, there is not an instant that has elapsed since the creation, there is not a human being that has existed, from the first created man to the infant that this moment has opened its eyes upon the light, that does not prove the forbearance of our God. The very continuance of the world proves that his patience is divine. Consider the number, the greatness, and the continuance of the provocations against him, the great Creator and most bountiful Benefactor, by creatures whom he hath made, whom he hath surrounded with blessings, for whose redemption he gave the Son of his love to agonies unutterable; and then fall down in adoring wonder that this polluted and rebellious earth has not long since been struck into everlasting darkness and final ruin. Yes, Lord, it is because thou art God, and not man, that it has not long since been consumed! Brethren, not merely men, but angels and glorified spirits could not bear the provocations which God endures; had they had the regulation of earth, they would long since have inflicted the vengeance for which they ask, while their souls, lying under the altar, cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. vi. 10.) If all the patience possessed by all the creatures that ever were made, were concentrated in the heart of the most benignant angel in heart, and the government of the world committed to him for a single day, fire must speedily come down from heaven and consume us all. Yet the holy God bears year after year, generation after generation, century after century, with these multi-

plied provocations : and this too when his very forbearance is basely misconstrued, and made an encouragement to new sin.

Consider too the conduct of God towards those whom he is compelled ultimately to punish. Before the judgments approach which they are bringing down upon their heads, he solemnly and affectionately *warns them*. He thunders at a distance before the bolt descends, that men may in time flee to the covert, the asylum that is opened for them. He sends message after message, that they may at last be induced to listen. If they are still obstinate, he *delays*, he *gives new mercies*, that their souls at last may be touched. If he must punish, he does it *by degrees*, leaving much if he deprive them of some blessings, letting fall only some drops of his anger, when the whole cloud of vengeance might justly be discharged upon them, “stirring not up all his wrath.” (Ps. lxxviii. 38.) If at last he must pour out his vengeance upon the incorrigible sinner, he appears to do it *with reluctance* : he stands over him and cries, “Why wilt thou die?” “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?” and seems still averse to pronounce the irrevocable sentence upon him. Brethren, have we hearts capable of any generous emotions, of any grateful feelings? shall they not burn within us at this touching forbearance of our God?

Let us forget for a moment the rest of the world, and the general conduct of God to our race; let us reflect on his dealing with ourselves, and we shall be constrained to bless him for his patience. There is not one of us who is not a monument of his forbearance; there is not one of us who would not long since have been rolling in those flames which never shall be quenched, agonized by the gnawings of that

worm which never dieth, had it not been for the patience of our God. Believers, you all acknowledge and feel this; and through eternity will bless him who lengthened out the season of your visitation, and preserved your lives till you were led to the cross of Jesus, to the fountain opened for transgression. And say, careless and impenitent men, why is it that the curse is still suspended, and does not descend upon you; that the thunders still linger; that salvation yet is offered; that the messages of reconciliation yet sound in your ears? Is it not because God is patient? Because the Intercessor yet pleads, "Spare him for another year, or month, or week; let him enjoy another season of grace, another offer of everlasting life?" And shall this forbearance be still abused? Shall this means of grace be added to those that have been abused, and that have gone before you to the bar of God, and are there accusing you, and pleading against you? Will you still continue unaffected till the dreadful sentence shall be pronounced, "Cut him down, why cumbereth he the ground!" God of patience and long-suffering, interceding Jesus, prevent this dreadful doom, and let the riches of thy forbearance lead these sinners to repentance!

After this view of the *patience* of God, we are naturally led to inquire into the *reasons why he exercises such long-suffering to the guilty children of men*. This we are to examine in the

III^d. Division of our discourse.

Lovely as is this attribute, its exercise has often appeared mysterious to the pious, and has been abused by the sinner. Asaph is not the only believer whose "feet had well nigh slipped" at beholding the prosperity of the wicked, and seeing them encom-

passed by the divine patience with "more than heart could wish." And on the other hand, how many impenitent men have there been "whose heart has been fully set in them to do mischief, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily?" Yet a little reflection, an entrance into the sanctuary, would have convinced them, that in this, as in all the other proceedings of his providence, the manifold wisdom of God is shown.

1. He is patient in consequence of the *benignity* of his nature. These two properties are necessarily allied : we see this in our fellow-men ; we see it in Immanuel. Who more benignant than the blessed Jesus ? and who more patient than he ? Like him, the Father, of whom he is the "express image," "afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men." (Lam. iii. 33.)

2. The Lord is patient to men that this perfection may *be glorified*. All his attributes are to be glorified and displayed, in their beauty and excellence, before all his intelligent creatures ; but his patience can be manifested only in this world ; there can be no exercise of it in heaven, since there will be nothing to require it ; none in hell, since *there* will be nothing but wrath to the vessels of wrath. "Mercy has a heaven, and justice a hell, in which to display themselves to eternity : but long-suffering and patience have only a short-lived earth on which to be glorified." This reason is assigned by God himself : "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain from thee that I cut thee not off." (Is. xlviii. 9.)

3. The Lord is frequently patient to the wicked, in consequence of the *prayers of pious ancestors* laid up for them in heaven, and of the promises made to

their holy progenitors, and their offspring after them. Ah! careless children of pious parents, whose counsels you have despised, and whose precepts you have refused to follow, you know not how much you are indebted to them. Though you grieved their hearts while they lived, by neglecting your God and your Saviour, yet they fervently and with tears pleaded for you at the throne of grace; and it may be that you had now been in hell, had they not in faith urged the promises, and laid hold on the divine omnipotence, and thus caused the judgments of God upon you to be stayed.

4. The Lord is frequently patient to the wicked, from their *mixture with the pious*, and the near relations subsisting between them. From love to his dear children, he spares his enemies. The family of Lot shall not all be cut off, that the soul of that holy man may not be torn with anguish. Desolating judgments shall not come upon Judah till good Josiah descend to his grave in peace. (2 Kings xxii. 18, 20.)

5. The Lord is patient, because the *number of his elect is not yet completed*, and because many of the descendants of these wicked men shall be trophies of his grace, and monuments of the Redeemer's power and love. Had a wicked Ahaz been cut off at once, a pious Hezekiah never would have lived, and pleaded the cause of God.

6. The Lord is patient with them, because the *measure of their sins is not yet filled up*. "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full," is the reason which he himself assigns for the delay of their extinction. When that period shall arrive, the decree shall instantly go forth, "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe." Zechariah, to illustrate this truth, by

a striking figure, represents an *ephah*, (the largest dry measure among the Jews, and therefore calculated to express the greatness of the divine forbearance,) into which the wickedness of the people was thrown; till it was filled God bore with it; but when filled, a mass of lead, denoting the firmness, immutability, and heaviness of the divine counsel, was placed upon it; and two women with wind in their wings, the swift executioners of God's vengeance, bore it to the land of perpetual desolation. (Zech. v. 6, &c.)

7. The Lord is patient, that *sinners may be brought to repentance*. "The long-suffering of God is salvation," says Peter, (2 Pet. iii. 15.) and in a text already quoted he assures us, "God is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Ah! had it not been for this attribute, there would not have been a saint on earth, a redeemed sinner in heaven. Jesus would have been without a church, and his blood would have flowed in vain.

8. The Lord is patient, that sinners who continue impenitent may at last be *without excuse*, and that his justice may shine the brighter in their condemnation. Ah! thou who triflest with the forbearance of God, will not thy mouth be closed, will not every excuse die upon thy lips, when in the light of eternity thou shalt see the number and the value of the means of grace, the public assistances and private helps which patience afforded thee, and the length to which thy neglected season of visitation was prolonged?

9. The Lord is patient to the wicked, that *his power may be displayed*; the greatness of his protection and providence be manifested in preserving the church in the midst of her enemies. Had there been

no Dioclesians and Neros, we should have had but a faint conception of the care with which God watches over his church and people.

Finally: the Lord is patient with the wicked, that he may *exercise the trust of his servants in him*, and the "patience of his saints;" that he may call forth the graces of the righteous, and drive them with Habakkuk into their watch-tower, with David into the sanctuary, to study the judgments of God; that he may try their sincerity, sins being borne as heresies are permitted, that those that are approved may be made manifest; that we might live by faith and not by sight. Were a flaming sword to descend immediately on the head of the wicked, were punishment instantly inflicted on the ungodly, to walk by faith, in hope of invisible blessings, and in expectation of an unseen state, would be impossible; and of consequence the whole nature of the gospel dispensation must be changed.

These are some of the reasons why God is patient and long-suffering.

The inferences from this subject are numerous and important: listen to a few of them.

1. Is God infinitely patient? With what *love to him* should the consideration of this attribute inspire us? It is a more endearing perfection even than his goodness. The goodness which made us, which endued us with such exalted faculties, deserves our affection; but still more so does his patience to us, as sinners, after we have deserved the severest wrath, and the benefits which he has conferred upon us while we were rebels. Shame to our ungrateful hearts, that they do not more ardently love such a God!

2. Is God infinitely patient? What a motive to the

deepest repentance. “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. ii. 4.) Surely we must be filled with shame and confusion of face, when we meditate on the amazing forbearance of our God; often have we broken his laws, often we have forfeited our engagements, and yet were not bound with the chains of darkness. At such a time, may we say in the retrospect of our past lives, ‘I provoked the Almighty by my sin, yet I felt not his sword; at such a time I blasphemed him, I scoffed at his word, or profaned his name; yet his thunder did not close my lips in death. For so long a time I remained in rebellion against him; yet he has not overwhelmed me with swift destruction.’ Oh! look back upon the whole course of thy life; in every step of it dost thou not see proofs of thy guilt, and of the forbearance of the Eternal? In the midst of thy transgressions, *He* stood over thee, who, while he bore with thee, poor sinner, had an infinite hatred to thy sin; *He* whom thou insultedst, and who by one breath could have turned heaven and earth and all the inhabitants of both into nothing; He has been thus patient with thee year after year: the condemned criminal hails a reprieve for a week or a month; how much longer hast thou been reprieved from that prison of eternal despair, to which the broken law condemns thee? In the writings of Paul you must often have been struck with the warm gratitude with which he speaks of the divine forbearance towards him. Paul was about thirty years of age at his conversion; are there none before me who have for a still longer season experienced the patience of God, and who still have never exercised holy thankfulness for it? Oh! at

last repent! the day of divine forbearance is rapidly wasting away; neglect to improve it a little longer, and the shades of everlasting night will soon overtake you! Hell is full of those who enjoyed once the patience of God, and who through eternity will be filled with agony at their remembrance of their abuse of it. Perhaps among these unhappy spirits are some of thy former associates; the destroying angel hath hewn them down, and passed by thee; the patience which still spares thee has ceased for them. Oh! no longer abuse it, and improve the season of thy visitation.

3. Is God infinitely patient? Christians, let us *imitate him* in this perfection of his nature. Ah! how little does he resemble God, who anxiously seeks revenge for every affront and indignity! How unlike the Most Perfect is the self-styled man of honour, who writes his revenge in wounds and death! His honour descends not from heaven, but bears the impress of hell. Since God has so long borne with us, we may surely bear with our fellow-men; they cannot insult and outrage us as much as we have outraged the Lord: as he is patient to us, so let us be to our enemies.

4. Is God infinitely patient? What a source of *comfort* is this to believers. If he has so much patience for his enemies, what treasures of mercy must he possess for his friends? If he is so slow to anger when his precepts are slighted, how ready must he be to give what he has promised, when his promise is believed? If he bear with the open sins of his foes, will he not bear with the lamented infirmities of his people in worship? Will he not bind up the bruised reed? Will he ever quench the smoking flax?

5. Is God infinitely patient? Then *how patient* should we be in all the afflictions with which he visits us? Even in the strokes of his rod we see his slowness to anger, and his forbearance; and in our greatest sorrows may find more occasion of thankfulness than repining. He sends us only temporal sorrows where eternal are due; and we may always say, "Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities do deserve." Our murmurs must be criminal against him who is so long-suffering.

6. Is God infinitely patient? Who then will not grieve at the reproaches and insults that are cast upon him? Among men, a patient sufferer, even though he is a deserved sufferer, excites our sympathy and pity. And wilt thou then, believer, have no concern for thy God, who patiently bears so many outrages? Arise then, Christian, range thyself openly on his side, who is thus basely treated by the works of his hands. Mourn for the sins of others; mourn for thine own sins against Him, who is so slow to anger.

SERMON CVI.



THE COVENANT OF GRACE, A SUPPORT UNDER SORROW.



2 SAMUEL xxiii. 5.

Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.

IT is animating and useful to stand by the dying-beds of believers, and listen to the expressions of hope and triumph, with which they terminate their lives. The text then deserves our attention, since it forms part of "the last words of David." Standing on the borders of the eternal world, he looks back to his humble original, and blesses that goodness which God had displayed to him, in elevating him to eminence both in the church and the state. He had been raised up on high, anointed of God, and made the sweet "Psalmist of Israel." But that object on which he most earnestly fixes his view, is the glorious and gracious Redeemer, of whose advent he speaks in the verses immediately preceding the text, declaring the equity of his government and the blessed influence of his reign, which should be cheering as the sun, when it dispels the darkness, and enlivens all nature ; and refreshing as the show-

ers, which, after long drought, renovate the face of the earth. "The Ruler over mankind," thus the words may literally be translated, "shall be the *Just One*, ruling in the fear of the Lord. As the morning, shall this Sun arise, a morning unclouded in brightness; as rain that waters the tender herbs of the earth."*

When he looked at his family, David saw much cause of grief. He had suffered from the sins of his children; he had followed some of them to the grave; and probably, by the prophetic spirit which inspired him, he foresaw the distress which his posterity would endure. Yet, even in these circumstances, he could rejoice in the grace of the Redeemer, and in the complete and inviolable covenant of his God, which was the foundation of his trust, and the object of his attachment. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire." In looking at himself, he was humbled at his sins, and at the slow progress he had made in the divine life. Yet, "although he make it not to grow," that is, although the grace of the covenant had not been in so vigorous a state within him as it should have been, he still trusted in the covenant faithfulness and love of his God.

To these declarations concerning the Redeemer, the covenant, and himself, he adds a description of the character and the end of the wicked; whom he represents as "sons of Belial," useless as thorns, fit only to be burned, reserved for the fire of God's wrath.

* See Bishops Chandler and Hales.

Having thus briefly paraphrased this dying testimony of David, let us deduce from that part of it which constitutes the text, these two interesting truths:

I. Even the children of God, those who are within the bonds of his covenant, may have to contend with domestic afflictions, may have to lament their errors and their falls, and must be extended on the bed of death.

II. In all these circumstances, they may find support in that covenant of grace which God has made with them.

Suppose not, my brethren, that we are unauthorized to extend to all believers that which was the ground of David's consolation. All the children of God are under the same covenant, and have a title to its promises and blessings. To us all, the invitation is given, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." As all the pious are then exposed to the same calamities with the royal Psalmist, there is open to them also the same rich fountain of consolation.

I. "*Although my house be not so with God.*" Well might David use these words, when he recalled the conduct of Amnon, of Absalom, of Adonijah; when he recollected the wickedness and ingratitude which had so often been displayed by his children. Is he the only one of God's people who has experienced similar trials; who has been compelled to weep over the sins of those to whom he was united by the

closest bonds! Alas! such examples are every where to be found. We need not go back to Aaron or to Eli. We have only to look around us to behold them. How many pious parents, who “water their couch with tears,” because of the guilt of their children; whose souls are distressed, when they see these dear objects of their affection dishonouring God and neglecting the Redeemer! Yes! there are more than one of you, my hearers, whose hearts have bled at beholding those under your roof, for whose holiness you pray, still living the enemies of God.

“Although my house be not so with God.” David, in using this language, recollected probably not only the sinfulness of some of his children, but also the death of those who had preceded him into the eternal world. And this is still often the lot of God’s covenant people. We need no laboured proof of this point; for in every part of this temple, we behold parents whose fond hopes have been withered, who have wept over the cold ashes of those children, whose opening virtues and expanding talents they had watched with tender solicitude, and who, they hoped, would have survived them, to bear their names, and to advance the cause of the Redeemer when they themselves were in the tomb.

But if bereavements are at all times painful, they are most exquisitely so when the surviving parent contemplates, with doubt or with shuddering horror, the eternal state of the departed child. And this was felt by David in his domestic trials; this was the chief source of his bitter lamentations over Absalom. Child of God! this excruciating sorrow thou mayest also experience; this anguish, than which thou canst scarcely conceive one deeper, may be felt

by thee. Many a pious parent is still constrained to exclaim, while hanging over the corpse of a dear, but irreligious child, "Would God I had died for thee!"

David acknowledges that not only his house, but also his person and his heart, were not so with God as they should have been; and that the grace of the covenant had not grown within him as it ought to have done, and which it would have done, had it not been for his criminal remissness. He remembers his imperfections and sins, the defects that had been mingled with his best services, and the dark cloud by which he had so long been obscured. Ah! how many here also resemble David, and, in looking at the past, recall sins for which, though forgiven, they must ever weep bitterly! Who is not constrained to cry, with him, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant?" Who is not compelled to lament the little progress that he has made in comparison with what he ought to have made in the divine life?

Finally, these are "the last words of David." He, though the servant of God, must die; his piety exempts him not from the pangs of dissolving nature. How unnecessary is it to prove that here also all the covenant people of God resemble him! With regard to temporal death, "there is but one event to the evil and to the good." The time is rapidly coming, when even the dearest children of God among us will be surrounded by weeping friends; when we shall be separated from the enjoyments of earth, and lie down with the worm for our couch, and the earth-worm for our covering.

We have seen the afflictions which David felt, and which the children of God in every age may feel; they are sufficient to crush us, if we have no support

except in ourselves, or in the objects which surround us ; but when sinking, the believer looks to the covenant of his God, and rises superior to the pressure of sorrow. Let us,

II. Consider the nature of this covenant, and show the rich consolation that flows from it.

It was primarily made with the glorious Redeemer, as the head and surety of believers ; but it is also made with all those who, by faith, accept that Saviour who has ratified it with his blood, and who make of this covenant thus sealed, “all their salvation and all their desire.” It contains numberless and precious promises, which God has condescended to make, securing to us pardon, protection, holiness, a victory over death, and everlasting glory. “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and will write them in their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

In order to be convinced of the support which a personal interest in this covenant can give us in sorrow, let us briefly consider the properties of it that are here mentioned.

1. It is *everlasting* : it was formed from eternity in the councils of God ; it is, in the language of the apostle, “The eternal purpose which the Father purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” All the manifestations of it in time, and all the blessings which constantly flow from it, are only the accomplishment of the gracious designs that were formed infinite ages before a creature lived : eternal in its *continuance* ; as it preceded the birth, so it will survive the destruction of time : eternal in the blessings which it be-

stows and in its glorious effects ; those interested in it, notwithstanding the sense of their weakness and unworthiness, may shout, “ This God is our God for ever and ever ! ”

2. It is “ ordered in all things ; ” planned and arranged by Him whose knowledge is infinite, and whose wisdom is unerring ; by Him rendered so comprehensive, that “ all things,” all possible exigences, all conceivable events that can befall the Christian, are provided for ; every difficulty, every trial, every tear, and every struggle, were foreseen ; together with the effects to be produced by them. Had it been planned by the wisest of our race, or by the wisest of angels, many things might have been forgotten ; but who shall blasphemously suppose that this is possible, when it is “ ordered in all things ” by the Most Wise ?

3. This covenant is *sure*. If there be any truth in the promise and in the oath of Jehovah ; if there be any strength in that mighty Redeemer, who is its surety, or any virtue in that blood which sealed it, then those who have a personal interest in it, may triumph in the stability of their hopes. “ The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed ; but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.” “ God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath ; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us ; which hope we have, as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast.”

Meditate now on these properties of the covenant,

and then say, ye who are interested in it, in what situation may you not derive support from it ?

Have you domestic trials ? Are your children unholy ; or have they descended to the grave ? “ Although your house be not so with God,” neither so holy nor so prosperous as you would desire, yet think of the covenant. You are permitted to weep at your trials, yet do not murmur ; the grace of the covenant is so rich, that it may yet reach the heart of your most hardened child ; and so permanent, that though you have outlived some of your offspring, and survived many earthly comforts, yet you cannot outlive the salvation of the covenant, which is eternal : your relatives die, and perhaps under circumstances which aggravate your distress ; but your best, your heavenly friends remain, and your God’s covenant mercies are eternal. All things are “ *ordered*.” None of these domestic trials were overlooked by Him, who is able to render them beneficial to you ; the disappointment of your hopes, the withering of your comforts, though they may appear to bear marks of wrath, are yet consistent with paternal love. The covenant is *sure* : you shall hereafter acknowledge that God has done all things well ; that he has led you by a right way to the city of habitation ; instead of crying with Jacob in his despondency, “ All these things are against me,” look oft from outward appearances of providences, to the promise and power of God, and say in the midst of your troubles, “ Why art thou cast down, O my soul ?”

When, like David, you shall be stretched on the bed of death ; like him, seek not support from any past dignities, or honours, or religious services, but clasp by faith the promises of the covenant ; let it be “ all your salvation and all your desire.” When na-

ture is decaying and earthly objects vanishing, then think of everlasting blessings, and shout, "I will sing of the mercy of the Lord for ever; thy mercy shall be built up for ever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens." Think that in the covenant, the time and circumstances of your death were ordered, and triumph in Him who is wise in his appointments, and sure in his promises.

When you recall your wanderings and your falls, weep for having violated covenant engagements; but seek the restoration of peace and comfort by a penitent and grateful recurrence to the grace of that covenant which is the only refuge of the sinner, which encourages the wanderer to return; where the law would pronounce only a curse, it cries, "Return, ye backsliding children; I will heal your backsliding and love you freely." And while it thus pronounces pardon, it also sheds down grace to enable you to walk more worthy your vocation: supported by the hold that Christ has of you, you shall find the truth of his declaration: "If my children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." You shall see that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."

SERMON CVII.



JUSTIFICATION.



GAL. ii. 16.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

THE doctrine of justification is the compendium and sum of revealed religion ; for this revelation is given to teach us how to unite man and God, and to form and preserve a commerce between heaven and earth ; and the true way of union and friendship with God is to be found only by a proper answer to this question, “How can I be justified before Jehovah ?” And as it is the great design of the scriptures to teach us how we may be pardoned and accepted, so to the convinced conscience and the awakened sinner, there is no instruction more cheering, no information more eagerly sought than that which relates to this subject. By the doctrine of justification we may judge of the essential correctness of any theological system. If an opinion be held on this sub-

ject honourable to God and his justice, worthy of the Redeemer and his sacrifice, suited to man and his condition, the whole system cannot be grossly erroneous; but if false opinions be entertained on this subject, the system, however plausible it may appear to carnal reason, jeopardizes the souls of those that embrace it, and removes the only firm foundation of our hopes, Christ Jesus.

Since this subject is so infinitely important, listen while I explain to you the scripture doctrine of justification.

Man may be considered in three different characters; as *innocent*, as a *penitent and believing sinner*; and as a *regenerate Christian, aiming to cultivate holiness*. According as we view him in one or the other of these characters, will the nature and grounds of his justification differ.

I. Had man remained in the state of innocence in which God created him, and fulfilled the laws which God had given him, he would not have needed pardon; he would have been pronounced from the holy tribunal to be innocent; and would from his own righteousness, have obtained a right to everlasting life; not indeed by his own merits, (for the creature can merit nothing from his Creator;) but in virtue of that covenant into which God had entered with him, and in which the Lord engaged to reward his obedience, and punish his rebellion. Thus the justification of innocent man would have been “a declaration of God as a judge, that he was holy and righteous, and a conferment of eternal life upon him, in consequence of these qualities.”

II. But, alas! my brethren, we have fallen from the state of innocence, and we are sinners. The two chief effects of sin are these: it pollutes our souls,

and it renders us subject to the punishments which divine justice owes to the guilty. To remove these two evils, God has provided two remedies : by *sanctification* he removes the pollution of our souls ; by *justification* he delivers us from the punishment which our sins have merited. Though these blessings always accompany each other, though the justified man always receives the Spirit of holiness ; yet, if we would have a correct and accordant system of divine truth ; if we would not impair the grace of the gospel, and diminish our obligations to Christ, we must carefully distinguish between justification and sanctification: the one is a relative, the other a real change ; the one alters our condition in the view of the law and the lawgiver ; the other is a change of heart and conduct. By the one we are brought into favour with God, and made his children ; by the other, we are made like unto him ; the one gives us a title, the other a meetness for heaven.

Justification may be defined “ a judicial act of God, who as a sovereign but merciful Judge, pardons penitent sinners their iniquities, and gives them a right to eternal life, through his grace, on account of the satisfaction and obedience of Christ, which he imputes to them, and which they embrace by faith.” Let us consider the several parts of this definition.

1. Justification is a *judicial act* ; the consciences of all men point to the holy tribunal of God, and acknowledge him as the supreme Judge, who must decide upon our actions, and from whose mouth we must receive the sentence. If this sentence seal our misery, it is condemnation : if it absolve us, it is justification.

2. It is *an act of God*. This is evident, because the power of pardoning sins supposes supreme authority,

and cannot be communicated to any creature; because he alone reads the heart, and has an exact knowledge of the conscience; because he alone, who has authority over heaven and hell, can in justification open the one and close the other; because he alone can dispense those blessings which follow the remission of sins—a sentiment of peace in the conscience, the assurance of the divine protection, and the Spirit of consolation and holiness.

3. It is an act of God as *Judge and Sovereign Governor of the universe*: it is in this character that he has a universal tribunal to which all creatures are responsible.

It is generally represented as an act of God the *Father*, who, in the economy of man's redemption, is considered as the guardian and defender of the rights of the Godhead. The *Father* devised the plan of justification, provided that righteousness which satisfies the law, absolves the guilty through the satisfaction of the *Son*, applied by the *Holy Spirit*. Yet at the same time, justification is not so to be appropriated and made peculiar to the Father, as to exclude from it the *Lord Jesus Christ*, who is sometimes represented as the Judge, who claims the power to forgive sin, and who will pronounce the final justifying sentence; not the *Holy Spirit* who applies and seals upon the conscience the sentence of justification. Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit; the ever-blessed Trinity, is the author of this glorious privilege.

4. Though it is the act of God as a Judge, it is nevertheless, an *act of mercy*; since it is the pardon of vile sinners, whom, without injustice, he might have consigned to everlasting ruin; since it is the conferment of infinite and eternal felicity upon worms of the dust.

5. This justification comprises two things: a *pardon of iniquity, and a title to eternal life*. The criminal is not only forgiven, but is loaded with honours. This is the constant language of the scriptures: "Christ was made under the law," says the apostle, "to redeem those that were under the law," to deliver them from its curse; here is the pardon of sins: and "that we might receive the adoption of sons;" here is eternal life, the privilege which flows from adoption. "That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified," is the language of the blessed Saviour. Indeed, the two blessings are every where united. When God delivers us from the pains of hell, he gives us a right to the glories of his paradise; when he washes us from our sins, he makes us kings.

6. Justification has for its foundation only the *obedience and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Here, my brethren, I pray your attention: no question is more intimately connected with your dearest, your eternal interests than this—On what shall I rely as the ground of my justification before God? Mistake here, and you are done for ever; build here upon a wrong foundation, and the superstructure that you rear, shall not defend you in the hour of death, shall fall and crush you in the judgment-day. When summoned now by conscience to the tribunal of God, or when appearing before it at the final day, one of these pleas must be presented by you, 'I am innocent; I have never sinned:' or, 'I have sinned indeed; but I have satisfied for my offences by my holy acts and my good deeds:' or, 'I acknowledge that I have sinned, but I rely upon thine infinite mercy:' or, 'I have sinned, I deserve hell, I have nothing of my own to plead; I renounce all dependence on myself, and

I dare not trust to uncovenanted mercy ; but I plead thy mercy through the blood of Jesus, his atonement and righteousness.' Let us examine for a moment, on which of these grounds we may most safely rest the happiness of our souls.

No one can be so ignorant of God, of the divine law, or of himself, as to say, 'I have never sinned ;' or, if he should dare to make this assertion upon earth, it would die upon his lips ; he would stand speechless and confounded, when before the "great white throne" the splendours of the divine purity showed his guilt and pollution.

But there are many who will acknowledge that they have sinned, but who still hope that in consequence of the good deeds they have done, the general morality of their lives, their sorrow for their offences, they shall be justified. Let us examine this plea : I repeat, Be solemn in the examination ; for heaven or hell depends upon its validity.

1. What then, is the decision of the statute-book of the kingdom of heaven, with respect to this plea ? What is the declaration of those scriptures, according to which we must be justified or condemned ? "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight." "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Say not that the apostle in these and similar passages speaks merely of works of the ceremonial law. He tells us that the law of which he speaks is that by which we have the knowledge of sin, and by which the whole world was subject to condemnation. You see then, the decision of your Judge on this plea ; dare you still rely on it ? It must fail you, unless God be false, and the scriptures a lie.

2. Are you more holy and devoted to God than was the father of the faithful ? Yet of him it is said, "If

Abraham were justified by works, he had whereof to glory, but not before God ; for what saith the scripture ? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

3. Do you not perceive that the great doctrine, that salvation is entirely of grace, which is written with a sun-beam in every page of the holy volume, which is the only refuge of the penitent, the triumph of the saint on earth, and the song of the redeemed sinner in glory, is entirely sapped and undermined by this plea ?

4. Do you not perceive, that by this plea you render the death of Christ of none effect, and make his sacrifice useless ? Do you not see that it is a contradiction in terms, to say that you can merit forgiveness ? Have you the insupportable arrogance to pretend that your works can merit the glories of heaven ? Just God ! should rebels, should worms of the dust, appear before thy dread tribunal with such pretences, would not thy violated holiness take hold on justice and blast them from thy presence ? I do not, my brethren, multiply such reflections ; you must feel that this is not a sure hope for your soul ; cling not to a covenant and law which utter only curses against you.

Will you then say, ' Though I dare not plead my own works for justification, yet I rely for pardon on the mercy of God : this mercy is infinite, and through it I hope for forgiveness and glory ?'

Yes ! this mercy is infinite ; is far beyond thy conception ; far beyond the conception of the most exalted intelligence in heaven : yet, remember, that this mercy flows to the children of men only through

Christ. The contemplation of an absolute God, of a God out of Christ, is enough to make the sturdiest sinner tremble : he that has no other reliance than unconvenanted mercy, must for ever perish. This is the constant testimony of the scripture ; you cannot deny it without denying your faith, your religion, your Saviour ! If you can be saved by the mere mercy of God, without the atonement ; if the Lord, in consistence with his attributes, can pardon your offences without a sacrifice, then every pang that Jesus felt was an act of useless cruelty towards him on the part of his Father.

My dear brother, after reading in the word of God that there is no hope for the children of men, except in Jesus, that mercy cannot be exercised towards the guilty, wilt thou have the madness at the decisive day to approach the holy tribunal, and say, ‘ Lord, I expect to be justified through mere uncovenanted mercy ; I hope that thy goodness is so great, that for my sake thou wilt falsify thy word, renounce thy holiness, undeify thyself !’

Oh ! then, my brethren, renounce all other hopes, and present as the only plea for your justification, *the obedience and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the only righteousness in which a sinner can appear before God ; a righteousness that answers all the demands of the law, and expiates all its curses. Hear your scriptures : “ As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,”—“ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” “ Christ is made unto us righteousness.”

“ This is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.”

7. This righteousness is *imputed* by God to the believer; by the obedience and the sufferings of Christ, the perfections of God, the excellence of his government, the holiness and purity of his law, are so fully displayed to the universe, that he can now, without derogating from his character as the moral Governor of the world, justify him who believeth in Jesus; forgive and crown him for the sake of what Jesus had done and suffered.

8. But in order thus to be justified by the righteousness of Christ, we must *by faith* be united to him. This is asserted in many of the texts which have been quoted to you. Let me add that expressive passage : “ Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God : to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” Faith justifies, not because it is accepted in the place of righteousness, not because it is a new condition of the covenant arbitrarily chosen by God, but solely because it is the means and instrument of communion with Jesus Christ. It is efficacious, not from its own dignity, but from the dignity of Him on whom it relies. It is the flight of the trembling soul to a secure ark of safety.

III. Having thus considered the justification of the penitent believing *sinner*, I have time to say but a few words on the justification of the *regenerate man*. This we are taught by the scripture is by *works*. Of two things the believer can be accused before God :

of having broken the law of God, and of not having a true faith. To the first accusation the believer pleads guilty; but flees for pardon to the merit of Christ, which he embraces by a lively faith: but to the second accusation he answers by justifying his faith, proving its reality by his works. It is thus that the sincerity of their faith will be justified by their works at the judgment-day. It is of this second justification that James speaks, when he says, "But wilt thou know, O vain man! that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect." There is not, as some have supposed, the smallest contradiction between him and Paul in the doctrine of justification. Paul speaks of the ground of a sinner's forgiveness, James of the proof of the sincerity of a professor's faith; Paul of imputed righteousness, James of inherent holiness; the one of the justification of the sinner, the other of the justification of the righteous.

And now, my brethren, let us solemnly inquire, Are we justified by faith in Christ Jesus? Let us bring this great question to an issue; it is too serious a consideration to be left in suspense: let us be impartial in our examination respecting it, since ours is not the final or supreme judgment. In order to decide whether we are justified or condemned; in the favour or under the wrath of God; the heirs of heaven or of hell, let us ask ourselves, *What knowledge we have of Christ, and of the gospel method of justification through his righteousness?* Has your mind been enlightened, so as to perceive that this method which is foolishness to the natural man, is honourable to the

perfections of God, exactly suited to your wants and necessities, and free from those defects that you have found in every other method that you have tried, or that has been invented by the wisdom of man? Are you disposed to say of it, with David in his dying day, "It is all my salvation and all my desire?" Have you actually accepted the offer which God makes you in his gospel, of Christ and his righteousness, and have you made that righteousness the sole ground of your pardon and acceptance in the sight of God? Have you, awakened to a sense of your guilt, and of your dangerous condition while exposed to the wrath of the Almighty and the curse of the law, heard the voice of God in the gospel, addressed to you in particular, as really as it ever was to any of Adam's lost family, offering you Christ and salvation; and in a day of divine power have you accepted the gracious proposal, and said in raptures of joy and love, "In the Lord have I righteousness?" Is this still your disposition; are you still disposed to renounce all dependence upon your own righteousness, and to rest only upon Immanuel? Are you inherently righteous, as well as righteous through the merits of Christ? No person is ever made the righteousness of God in Christ, in whose soul the Spirit of Christ does not take up his residence. Are you then a partaker of that Spirit? Is it your daily endeavour to "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" taking the law of Christ as your rule, the example of Christ as your pattern, the glory of God in Christ as your ultimate end? Do you endeavour to obey every precept of the divine law, and on every occasion? Do you obey in the strength of promised grace, and esteem yourself an unprofitable servant

after all you do? By these and by similar questions you may decide your true condition. Happy are those of you who are warranted to say, "Christ was made sin for us, and we have become the righteousness of God in him." Your iniquities are blotted out; you shall have a complete and final victory over all your spiritual foes, within you as well as without you; you shall have the gracious presence of God with you while you pass through earth; you shall receive all necessary strength and grace to perform duties and to bear afflictions; you shall obtain a triumph over death, and an unutterable felicity beyond the grave. Let these blessings animate you to warmer *gratitude*; bless God with ardour for Christ his unspeakable gift, and all the infinite mercies which he bears with him. In the midst of thy holy exultation, be *humble*; thou hast nothing which thou hast not received; boasting is excluded; by the sublimest *holiness* display thy gratitude to such a Benefactor, and evidence that thou art indeed united to Christ.

And you, my dear brethren, who are still in a state of condemnation, and uninterested in the righteousness of Immanuel, at last awake to a sense of your guilt and danger; renounce the refuges of lies in which you have hitherto confided. However little the consideration may have hitherto affected you, you are a guilty sinner in the sight of God. As such, you stand condemned while in your natural state, by the dreadful sentence of the lawgiver. There is no other possible way to escape the execution of that sentence but by having an interest in the sacrifice of Christ, as a full atonement for your sins. His righteousness is freely offered to you; though you

now may scorn it, a day is coming when you shall be sensible of your need of it. That same Saviour, who now stands among you with the arms of his mercy as widely stretched out as when upon the cross, making a full and free offer of his righteousness, and all the rich fruits of it, to every child of Adam that hears me; that same Saviour is constituted the Judge of quick and dead; he shall come with clouds, and thine eye shall see him; he shall then crush with his rod of iron all who on earth have rejected his offers. Will you then longer neglect him? The grave will shortly open for you, and no tenders of pardon are made there; but *now* there is hope; Jesus is again presented to you; if you reject him and perish, your blood must be upon your own heads; you must eternally curse yourselves for your obstinacy in unbelief. Oh! accept the gift of God; obey the call of the gospel; have mercy upon your own souls!

SERMON CVIII.



ADOPTION.



GALATIANS iv. 5—7.

That we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son : and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

ON the last Lord's day we considered the important doctrine of justification, and showed that the sinner might be accepted as righteous before God, through the merits of Christ received by faith. The privilege of adoption is closely united with justification; no one is pardoned who is not received into the family of God. At the same time that the precious blood of Christ blots out our offences, it writes down our names as heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ.

Yet as there is a difference between pardoning a criminal, and receiving him to favour; between delivering him from merited death, and adopting him into the family of the sovereign; we may regard adoption as a distinct blessing from justification, though inseparable from it.

Without attending to the context, let us consider the three points which the apostle presents to us in the text.

I. An exalted privilege; the adoption of sons.

II. A blessed effect of this privilege; we become heirs of God.

III. The evidence of our adoption; the reception and indwelling of the Spirit of the Son, crying in our hearts, Abba, Father.

I. The relation of believers to the great and glorious God. They have received the adoption of sons.

In one sense all men are the sons of God; for he is by creation the universal Parent; and the derivation of our life and all our powers from Him, renders us his offspring. Thus the prophet (Mal. ii. 10.) asks, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" But this is not the relation referred to in the text; indeed it is so far from being a distinguishing privilege, and an infallible security of our bliss, that devils, and the lost, who are groaning under the indignation of the God against whom they have rebelled, are thus related to him. Yes! there are those who are experiencing, and who ever will experience, the truth of that most awful denunciation, "He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour."

God is also said to be the Father of those to whom he has been a benefactor, preserver, and supporter, in the course of his providence. "Is he not thy Father that bought thee?" that delivered thee from slavery, and crowned thee with mercies? is the question of Moses to the Israelites. But this also does not constitute the relation to which the apostle

alludes; for many have thus been encompassed by the favours of God's providence, who have abused his mercies, and whose guilt and perdition will be aggravated by those kindnesses for which they have made so ungrateful a return.

The text speaks of those who are the sons of God, in a nobler, more spiritual, and peculiar sense; who are united to the Lord by a tenderer and more sacred bond than that which connects the Father of Spirits with the whole human race, or that which unites the munificent Benefactor, who causes his sun to rise and the rain to descend on the evil and the good, with all the objects of his bounty.

There are two special senses in which believers are the sons of God: they are so,

1. By regeneration: they are born from above; and a principle of spiritual life is implanted within them: they are so also,

2. By adoption.

These, though always communicated to the same persons, are yet distinct blessings: the one is a change of nature, the other is a change of relation; the one qualifies us for heaven, the other secures it to us; the one makes us like God, the other admits us to his family: it is the last of these invaluable blessings of which the apostle is speaking.

By adoption, we who were wandering about in this wilderness, desolate, ruined, perishing, without any covenant Father, are received into the family of God, and have a right to all the privileges, immunities, and blessings of his children.

It is an act of *God*; ascribed in the scriptures, like all the external acts of Jehovah, to all the persons of the blessed Trinity. Thus of the Father, Paul says, (Eph. i. 5.) "He predestinated us unto

the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will." Of the incarnate Redeemer, John tells us, (John i. 12.) "To as many as received him, to them gave he power or authority (*ἐξουσία*) to become the sons of God:" and it is the Holy Ghost who comes and dwells in believers as the spirit of adoption. (Rom. viii. 15.)

It is an act of God's mercy and free grace. Even in human adoptions undeserved favour is displayed; though the person adopted may possess lovely and attractive qualities, which will reflect honour upon his benefactor. What then must we say of God's adoption of those who had no loveliness to excite affection; who were polluted, guilty, rebellious? His grace appears both in the *general* purpose of God to adopt some of the race of Adam; for God might justly have left us all to perish in our guilt; and also in the conferment of this blessing upon each *individual* believer. Christian, when with holy boldness and sacred joy thou lookest up to God as thy Father; when thou seest the freeness and riches of adopting love illustrated by thine unworthiness; when thou beholdest so many as good by nature as thyself, still at a distance from God; dost thou not with a heart full of gratitude acknowledge, that thy privilege is the fruit of divine grace; and cry, while overwhelmed with wonder at the immensity of that mercy which the most powerful efforts of thy mind in vain labour to comprehend, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath showed unto me, that I should be called the son of God!'

Believe it, my brethren, this adoption is not a mere empty name; there is a solemn and a sweet reality in the *happiness* and *dignity* it confers.

What *felicity* to reflect that, as the sons of God,

we are under the peculiar protection, and enjoying the special favour and blessing of Him who, while he rules the universe, feels for us all the tenderness of a Father! What an unfailing source of consolation in our afflictions, which we receive as the corrections of our faithful God, knowing that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth!" What an encouragement to draw near with boldness to the throne of grace in all our doubts, and fears, and sorrows! What a warrant to look forward with composure to the future; knowing that all the vicissitudes of our lives are ordered by unerring wisdom, directed by a kindness infinitely more vigilant, more lively, more tender, than that which ever warmed the heart of an earthly parent!

And it is a relation conferring no less *dignity* than felicity. What an unspeakable honour to be thus related to the All-Perfect; to belong thus to the family of the God of heaven, and to be numbered with his children! It is a dignity superior, I do not say merely to human distinctions and honours, to the crown of monarchs, the laurel of conquerors, or the fame of philosophers; but to any of which the human mind can conceive! Range in imagination through the universe of God; contemplate "the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers," which are found among the sublime spiritual intelligences, whose faculties and state are so superior to those of men; after examining them all, you will acknowledge that nothing can be found or conceived superior to this glorious distinction—*the sons of God!*

But this is not all, my brethren; for the apostle teaches us,

II. The blessed consequences of this relation.

Those who are sons, are "heirs of God through Christ."

All our present enjoyments and dignities are only the earnest of our future inheritance; it is not a transient and perishable honour which is conferred upon them; but one which conducts to a glory that is now inconceivable, and that will still continue to shine when this world, and all its splendours, shall be destroyed. Their inheritance is secured to them, not by their own merits; they feel and acknowledge that they deserve it not: not by purchase; they had nothing to pay for it; but by the free gift and covenant engagements of their Father. It is sealed and confirmed to them by the blood of the Mediator; and the Spirit of adoption is in their souls as the earnest, the pledge, and the first-fruits of it. We cannot describe "the greatness of this inheritance, for it is infinite; nor its worth, for it is inestimable; nor its blessedness, for it is unspeakable; nor its duration, for it is everlasting. Here they are as heirs in their minority; but when they are of age, which with God is measured not by years, but by designation and fitness, they are translated into the full enjoyment of their estates. Death strips off the garments of corruption and bondage, and immediately they are clothed upon with life and immortality." [Serle.]

But the text points us to a privilege still more important than their enjoyment of all the glories of the third heaven: they are "heirs of God" himself, at whose will all the splendours of the celestial paradise sprung into being, and who is a treasure infinitely more valuable than ten thousand heavens. They have an interest in all the divine perfections. The Lord himself is their portion.

Since there are such blessings in reversion for the children of God, why should we repine when our pious friends are taken from us? The voice from heaven has cried to them, "Come up hither!" and they have gone to their true country, to their rich inheritance; they have gone to their Father's house, and they now know, what they so imperfectly conceived on earth, all the value of being "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

Do you ask whether you will share this felicity and glory? The apostle assists you in answering this important question, by giving you,

III. A test whereby to judge of your adoption. All the sons of God have the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, crying Abba, Father.

"Except we have the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his." This Spirit is termed the Spirit of adoption, when dwelling in the sons of God, he produces in them those dispositions suited to their filial relation.

Has he then wrought in thee *faith* in the Redeemer? There is no adoption, except through our blessed Saviour. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." (John i. 12.) Has he produced in thee filial love to God; hast thou those tender and reverential sentiments towards the Lord that are the characteristic of all his children? Dost thou cheerfully obey him, not with the temper of a slave, but of a son? "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God." (1 John iii. 10.) "As obedient children, we must not fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance." (1 Pet. i. 14.) Hast thou a desire of communion and

intercourse with God, and filial access to him? Hast thou deliberately and understandingly chosen God as thy Father and Portion, and dost thou adhere to thy choice? Is there in thee a resemblance to thy Father? Dost thou love thy fellow-heirs? (1 John v. 1.) Hast thou patience under afflictions? Dost thou frequently solace thyself by meditating on thy inheritance?

These are some simple tests whereby we may decide whether the Spirit of adoption dwells in us. I have not spoken of the high joys and the clear assurance which he sometimes communicates; but of those operations which are common to all the children of God. Examine, then, with seriousness and impartiality.

If, after this examination, you feel authorized to hope that you are indeed adopted into the family of God, then,

1. Meditate often and profoundly on the love of your Father, on your present blessedness, and your future glory. Doubtless the first care of a man who had experienced an astonishing and happy revolution in his circumstances, who, from a state of poverty, was raised to opulence, or who, after being condemned to death for his crimes, obtained the affection and favour of some great and good man, would be to know his benefactor, to whom he was indebted for so great a change, and to inquire into the motives which led him to think of him, and to relieve him from misery. He would often think of all the circumstances of the change, and would especially inquire what he must do to preserve the favour of him to whom he had been so much indebted. And we, my brethren, whom God has adopted for his children, whom the King of kings has delivered from

slavery to sin and death, has introduced into his family; upon whom he has bestowed spiritual riches, and to whom he has assured a heavenly inheritance: shall we not often and profoundly recollect this grace, be anxious to know every thing connected with it, and have ever present to our minds, our privileges, our obligations, our hopes? Shall we content ourselves with thinking of it, when the subject is presented by the ministers of the gospel? No; let us, like the angels, desire to look deeper into these things; let them be a sweet and habitual subject of our reflections.

2. But this alone is not sufficient. It is not enough that we often reflect on the adopting love of God, and feel wonder at the contemplation of his grace. We must besides correspond with the design of our heavenly Father in forming so strict and glorious a bond with his creatures. And what was the design, the end of God? You cannot be ignorant of it, my brethren. It was not merely to lead us to consider and to celebrate his goodness, but to make us holy, to transform us into his image, to attach us to his service by bonds stronger and more sacred than those of nature, to lead us to render to him the love, the reverence, the obedience, that children owe to a kind father. Let us ever, then, consider our adoption as obliging us to consecrate to the glory of God all the faculties of our bodies and our souls. Let us imitate, as far as in our power, the kindness of God; "be followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also walked." Let us nourish high and lofty thoughts, corresponding with the greatness of our hopes, the dignity of our characters, and the sublimity of our destination. Let us scorn the trifles of earth, when put in competition with the inherit-

ance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away. With this elevation of soul, let us unite the deepest humility. If earthly distinctions excite pride, spiritual blessings should abase us, since we have nothing that we have not freely received. Let us pity and pray for those who are yet at a distance from God; let us affectionately warn them, and endeavour to lead them to our Father. Let us be contented and resigned in all our trials. Children of God! can you not sustain sickness, affliction, reproach, the loss of your property, the death of your children, when you recollect your privileges? Learn to judge of yourselves, not by the relations you have with this world, but by those which you have with God and the Saviour; not by the occupations or riches that you here have, but by the great and magnificent hopes which religion presents to you; not by this little span of time that you have to pass upon earth, but by the eternity that you will spend in heaven; not by the pleasures that you here taste in the society of your friends, your relatives, your children, but by those everlasting delights that are prepared for you in the company of God, of Jesus, of saints, and angels. When these considerations are impressed upon the heart, there is no situation in which you may not shout that song of triumph, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or perils, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

And you, my unhappy friends, who are still aliens from the family of God, let me entreat you, with all the tenderness of my heart, to seek this privilege. Have you no ambition to acquire it? Is your heart

dead to the attractions of eternal glory; have you no desire to be advanced to the dignity of the sons of God? Oh! trifle not with your happiness; pour out your prayers to God: we also will pray for you, that your lot may be among his children, and that their inheritance may be your portion.

SERMON CIX.



THE LORD, A GOD THAT HIDETH HIMSELF.

ISAIAH XLV. 15.

*Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel,
the Saviour.*

WHEN the Holy Scriptures represent the Lord to us, or describe any of the more splendid manifestations of himself, we find united together the fire and the cloud, light and darkness. If God descends in majesty upon Sinai, you behold there these two tokens of his presence; the fire and the lightnings blaze before the eyes of the terrified people, and the cloud envelopes the mountain: if he displays his presence in the tabernacle, it is by a cloud covering it by day and a fire by night; if David describes to us his interpositions for his people, he exclaims, "Fire out of his mouth devoured. and brightness

went before him, while darkness was under his feet, and he made darkness his secret place." (Ps. xviii.) This is a proper representation of the Being of beings, both in his nature and in his conduct. An ancient philosopher with propriety said, "that nothing was at once so known and so concealed as God!" Do we ask, "Is there a God?" here is light; do we endeavour thoroughly to fathom his perfections? here is darkness. That he exists, is a truth that shines with a lustre brighter than that of the sun; but in endeavouring to comprehend his essence, to have a thorough knowledge of his attributes, to understand all the schemes of his providence, to comprehend his designs and aims, we find a profound and venerable darkness which we cannot penetrate. But still, from this darkness a light proceeds which discovers him who makes it his pavilion, and which justifies his providence. It is this admirable union which Isaiah exhibits in the impressive words of my text: "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour!"

We need not pause long in showing the connexion of these words with the context. The prophet had been predicting the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, and the re-establishment of the temple-worship by Cyrus, a pagan prince, who disregarded their religion; who had no interest in their return to their native land; who, from ambition, led his forces against Babylon, and who unconsciously accomplished the designs of Providence: filled with admiration at the surprising mode in which God fulfilled his purposes and promises, the prophet uses this impressive address to the Lord. In many passages of scripture, God is said "to hide his face from his people," when he withholds from them those spi-

ritual consolations and joys of which they had partaken. This is not, however, the import of the phrase in this place ; it here denotes the incomprehensibility of Providence, the obscurity of God's ways and dealings with the children of men. Two important and interesting truths are contained in the verse :

I. That God the Saviour of Israel, is a God that hideth himself.

II. That though he hideth himself, he is always the Saviour of his people. The illustration and improvement of these truths will occupy your attention during the remainder of this discourse.

I. That the Lord is a God that hideth himself; that his dispensations, though wise and merciful, are often mysterious, would be supposed by *reason*, and is proved by *experience*.

1. Reason, deducing her proofs from the nature of God, and from the character and situation of man, would conclude that the proceedings of Providence must often be incomprehensible to us.

For who is the God of providence? He whose wisdom is infinite; whose "thoughts are as much above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways," as the heavens which he inhabits, are above the earth on which we tread; who holds in his hands the chain connecting an eternity past with an eternity to come; whose vast plans have respect, not merely to a few persons of the present age, but to all generations, to all times, and to all worlds! And is this the Being whose purposes and counsels can be fully comprehended by short-sighted mortals, who "are but of yesterday, and know nothing;" whose philosophy finds insuperable difficulties in every pebble and every gnat, and who perpetually err in the opinions which they form in this their contracted sphere of the designs of lit-

tle mortals like themselves? Is it not to be supposed that, as the essence of God is incomprehensible, so his operations would frequently be inscrutable to them? Is it not the height of folly, as well as of profane arrogance, for them to summon the All-Wise to their tribunal, to judge him by their limited ideas, and to murmur or condemn him, if they cannot perfectly understand the wisdom or the goodness of his proceedings? Are we able certainly to tell the *end* which God proposes to himself in his mysterious dispensations? No; frequently what we suppose to be his ultimate design, is only a *means* which he employs for the attainment of some more important object. Are we able to assign the *reasons* of his procedure? To judge of the innumerable motives which can decide the Supreme Intelligence, we must evidently ourselves be omniscient. Can we know the *effect* which will be produced upon ourselves by his proceedings, and is the whole scheme of his government so developed to us that we can tell their effect on the whole system of beings? And besides the narrow limits of our knowledge, do not our corruption, our passions, our self-love, our attachment to earth, render us incompetent to be impartial judges of the rectitude or benevolence of many of the divine dispensations which relate to us? Ah! sink into thy nothingness, worm of the dust! Respect the darkness with which the Eternal surrounds his throne; and “when his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out,” humbly bend and adore.

Let me add, that since we are in a state of probation, in which we must “walk by faith and not by sight,” the wisdom of God requires him, in conformity with this condition in which he has placed us, often to

hide himself. If he never were incomprehensible in his proceedings, faith and trust in him would lose all their value. But it is the lustre of faith, and it glorifies God, to believe what we do not see, and thus elevate ourselves above the senses of a feeble reason. Then we truly believe, when we approve the wisdom, the justice, and the mercy of God, even in those events which contradict our desires, and transcend our understanding; when we rest upon his goodness, and rely upon his aid in those very occurrences in which he seems most directly to oppose our hopes. Besides, the mysterious dispensations of God tend to excite in us submission and reverence, to humble our proud but limited reason, and to teach us how little we are in comparison with Jehovah.

2. We should suppose, then, even before looking around us in the world, that God, the Saviour of Israel, would frequently hide himself; that the proceedings of his providence would often be mysterious: and little observation is necessary to convince us that this is actually the case. How often is "his way in the sea, and his path in the deep waters!" How many things occur, which we would suppose his tenderness and infinite love to his people would prevent, which yet are permitted by him.

Why does he suffer wickedness to prosper, and his church to languish? Why does he not heal the desolations of Zion, carry conviction to the hearts of the impenitent, cause the enemies of the cross to flee to it for safety, and gloriously revive his work in all places where his gospel is preached?

Why does he so often visit those children, whom he so tenderly loves, with calamity and distress;

now withdrawing from them the light of his countenance, and leaving them disconsolate and mournful; now causing their hearts to bleed by tearing their dearest friends and relatives from them; now laying them on the bed of sickness, or reducing them to poverty and want; when he might enable them always to rejoice in the Lord, and to live to a happy old age in the bosom of their family and connexions, surrounded by those enjoyments which he can so easily bestow?

Why does he carry to an early grave the child that promised so much usefulness; or cut off in the midst of his days him who was so beneficial to society; or remove the pillars of the house of God; while the profane and the impenitent are guarded by his providence?

In these, and ten thousand similar instances, we must cry with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are thy judgments, and thy ways are past finding out." And with the prophet, "Verily thou art he that hidest thyself; O God of Israel, the Saviour!"

Yes! he is a Saviour God to Israel, that is, to all his real people; and he hides himself for this very end, that he may bring them to immortal glory. This is to be shown in the

IId. Division of our discourse.

Listen to the brief illustration of this cheering truth, ye children of affliction, who are also the children of Jesus, who are crying, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God," that your tears may be dried, and your griefs composed; that you may look up to your Father, not with an eye overflowing with sorrow, and a heart

agitated with apprehension, but with composure and trust.

Though the dispensations of Providence towards you are inscrutable, believers, they have a certain connexion with your salvation. Can you doubt of this when you consider,

1. The *attributes of God*? His *love* you surely cannot question, when you recollect the numberless blessings he has bestowed upon you; when you remember that he gave the Son of his bosom to die for you, and his Spirit to renew you; when you look back to the precious communications of his grace which you have received from him, or forward to that crown of immortality which he reserves for you. His *power* you know is unlimited: he could have averted those strokes under which you groan. His guardian *care* is incessant: the “wakeful Shepherd of Israel” did not slumber, when those events were produced which are dark and inscrutable to you. And are you not satisfied that his *wisdom* is infinite; that none “can be his counsellor;” that he always uses the properest ends for the attainment of his designs? “Oh! thou of little faith, wherefore then dost thou doubt?”

2. Remember too his precious *promises*. Do they not call upon you to trust in him in seasons when his dealings with you are mysterious, as well as when they are more plain? Do they not engage his support and love to you at those times when he says to you, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter,” as well as when the reasons of his conduct are more manifest? Are you in a situation in which that comprehensive declaration cannot be applied to you, “All things shall work together for good to them that love God?”

3. If still unconvinced that God hides himself in order to become your Saviour, look to *experience* : the experience of others and of yourselves. Peruse the history of those holy men whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament and the New. See the dangers and afflictions of the patriarchs, the thousand events which appeared absolutely to prevent the accomplishment of the promises made to them ; God then hid himself. But these afflictions ceased, this darkness vanished, events were so arranged and combined, that those very circumstances which seemed to prohibit all hope, proved the means of the fulfilment of the promises ; here was manifested the Saviour God. And thus it has been in all ages : thus it has been with you. Speak, believers ; testify to the faithfulness of your God.

This one will say, ‘ God removed from me my children, my friends, those on whom my heart leaned with fondest love ; I thought as he had hid himself from me ; but my soul was thus attracted to him ; I was thus taught the vanity of earth ; and desolate and bereaved of earthly joys, I looked up and found a Saviour God.’

That one will cry, ‘ God appeared hidden from me ; his ways were mysterious ; when he deprived me of those worldly possessions for which I had laboured for so many years ; when he visited me with affliction or with sickness ; but he is a Saviour God : I was thus led to seek durable, eternal riches ; to look forward to that world where sorrow, or sighing, or sickness, will never come.

Let all thus review their past lives : and there are few believers who will not find scenes on which to pause, and repeat the language of the prophet.

And ye, blessed inhabitants of heaven, who once were groaning upon earth, while from the heights of bliss ye look back upon your pilgrimage on earth, and by the light of eternity see their connexion with your present felicity; with what holy wonder do you adore the depths of divine wisdom! with what rapture do you shout, "He has led us by a right way to the city of everlasting habitation!"

This subject is full of practical instructions; I can however only hint at a few of them.

1. It teaches us the guilt and the ingratitude of believers, when they murmur or repine at the dispensations of Providence; when they would prescribe to the Lord methods of acting, and as if they were wiser than he, direct him what mercies to give, and in what manner; and are impatient, instead of humbly adoring, if they cannot tell why they have been visited by this affliction, or deprived of that comfort. Yet, alas! this disposition is but too common; there are few who do not sometimes feel, even if they dare not say, "I do well to be angry." Let such remember the solemn words of Job, "Behold, he taketh away, and who can hinder him? Or who shall say unto him, What doest thou? Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it." To him you have committed the everlasting interests of your souls, can you not trust him with your property, your friends, your children? Often after seasons of darkness have you found him interposing for you, and then you acknowledged that he had been leading you to felicity "by a way you knew not;" why will you not still confide in him, though he hideth himself?

2. Let this subject make us long for heaven. Here there will ever be darkness; but there in God's light we shall see light. Then all the mysteries of his providence shall be explained; then the Lord will no longer hide himself from us; but we shall ever bless him as the Saviour God.

SERMON CX.

VISION OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH vi. 1—8.

- 1 *In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.*
- 2 *Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.*
- 3 *And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*
- 4 *And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.*
- 5 *Then said I, Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of*

a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

6 *Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar :*

7 *And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*

8 *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us ? Then said I, Here am I ; send me.*

God, the Father of our spirits, has an unlimited power over them. He can present to our minds objects which have no existence in nature, or impress upon our imaginations the images of things which are not present, with as much force and distinctness as though they were actually before our eyes. He frequently acted thus to his prophets and apostles : When they were to undergo some severe trial, or when some great truth was to be announced to the people, he often vouchsafed to his servants some symbolical representation, which was proper to console and instruct them : “ Hear now my words, saith the Lord ; if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision.” (Numb. xii. 6.) This mode of communicating the divine will was so usual, that the prophets were for a long time distinguished by the name of *seers*.

Isaiah, about to announce to the people some severe denunciations, is honoured by a vision that was well adapted to give him exalted ideas of God, and alacrity in the performance of his duty. We propose, in the ensuing discourse,

I. To explain the several parts of this vision ; and,

II. To show you the practical instructions that are to be derived from it.

Lord God Almighty, who, by the ministry of the seraphim, purified the lips of Isaiah, purify my lips, and instruct me in thy truth ! And forbid, gracious Father, that this people, like the nation to which thy prophet was sent, should “not understand with their heart, and be converted and healed ;” but do thou accompany this address by the power of the Holy Ghost, and in this place manifest that glory of which the earth is full.

I. We are to explain to you the nature and intent of this vision.

Isaiah is placed in vision by the altar of burnt-offerings, at the entrance of the temple : the veil separating the most holy from the holy place is removed, and God is seen seated upon his throne, above the ark, in the most holy place, appearing as a splendid monarch, whilst the train* of his robe, indicative of the overflowing of his glory, filled the temple.

St. John, in the twelfth chapter of his gospel, and forty-first verse, informs us that the Lord, whom Isaiah here saw, was the eternal Word, the second person of the Most Adorable Trinity, who afterwards became incarnate for our salvation ; and through whom the divine glory is especially manifested, not only to men, but also to the angelic hosts.

* Although the word *train* is equivocal in our language, and might here denote either a train of attendant spirits, or the train of a magnificent robe, yet the original (שָׂרָי) confines it to the latter sense.

VERSE 2.

The prophet proceeds in his description : " Above it stood the seraphims : each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." God is generally represented as attended by crowds of angels. The seraphim who here appear to Isaiah, surrounding the throne of the Most High, constitute one of the chief orders of these blessed spirits. The honourable name which they bear is derived from a word signifying *to burn*, and denotes the fervour of that zeal for the interests of their Lord, by which they are animated. They appear in human form, except that they have six mystic wings : with twain they cover their faces, not daring to look upon nor able to sustain the flashes of glory and brightness issuing from the throne of God ; with twain they cover their feet, in token of their profound reverence for the king of heaven ; and with twain they fly with rapidity and joy to execute the orders of God.

VERSE 3.

And what is the occupation of these exalted beings, whilst they surround the throne of the Lord ? Are they employed in vain contemplations of their own perfections, or in eulogies on the endowments of each other ? No ! their thoughts and their praises are all directed towards God ; their souls absorbed and lost in considering the immensity and glories of Jehovah, can rest on no other object. " And they cried one unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of his glory." These words give us an exalted idea of the Lord, and were perfectly adapted to that end for which he manifested himself to his prophet. God appeared to Isaiah in order to give him a commission

to the Jewish people, condemning them for their idolatry and guilt, and warning them of the inevitable destruction that would overtake them if they persevered in sin. It was then proper to show them that this Being, whose laws they violated, was infinitely pure and holy, and could not therefore view their transgressions with indifference. And lest they should imagine that his threatenings would be without effect, and that he could not punish so many sinners, the seraphim add, that he is the Lord of Hosts, who has myriads of angels at his command, and whose glory and power appear not only in the temple where there were then such splendid manifestations of them, but also in all the earth. How then shall the guilty escape, if they persevere in their rebellion? The immaculate holiness of God will demand their punishment, and his power will execute, by a single word, all the decrees of his justice.

VERSE 4.

The contemplation of the zeal and reverence of the seraphim, of the greatness and purity of the God whom they worshipped, had filled the prophet with humility; but when, in addition to these circumstances, "the posts of the door moved at the voice of" the seraphim's "cry, and the house was filled with smoke," he was overwhelmed with consternation and terror; he immediately perceived, from these emblematical representations, that God now appeared as a Judge, and threatened to overturn the temple, which had been profaned, and to pour out his fury upon the people. That the shaking of the posts and the smoke were signs of the approaching judgments of God, is rendered probable by the two following texts, which we select from numbers

of similar import. Amos, representing the Lord ready to exercise his vengeance upon Judah and Israel, says: "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar, and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake." (ix. i.) And David, recounting how God had utterly destroyed all his enemies, says: "There went a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured." (Ps. xviii. 8.) The shaking of the posts of the temple, and a cloud of smoke, are, then, prophetical emblems, indicative of approaching judgments. Isaiah, comprehending the sad signification of them, is filled with apprehension, and immediately cries out:

VERSE 5.

"Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts." The sight of the divine purity had penetrated the prophet with a deep sense of his own guilt, and of the guilt of the Jewish people, and he trembles lest he should perish with his criminal countrymen amidst the approaching desolation. "Wo is me, for I am undone," if thou, Most Holy Lord, comest forth to punish transgression, as these signals of impending judgments assure me: "for I am a man of unclean lips;" I am far removed from that purity of heart and life which would render me perfectly conformed to thee, or conformed even to these seraphim; neither can I hope that thy judgments will be averted by the purity of my nation, "for I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;" I know fully our deep guilt and desert of punishment, "for I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts;" and by contrasting our conduct with his holy cha-

racter, I perceive that we all deserve to sink under his vengeance.

Carnal security destroys men. Whilst they fondly believe that they are in the road to heaven, they do not think of seeking deliverance from that guilt which defiles them, and leads them to the second death; but as soon as holy fear seizes them, as their conscience is awakened, and they are humbled under a sense of their sins, the Father of mercy regards them with compassion, pardons their sins, and communicates to them his grace. This is what Isaiah experiences. God, touched by his humiliation, assures him instantly of the pardon of his sins, and of the powerful succours of his grace to support him, and enable him suitably to discharge the sacred ministry committed to him

VERSES 6, 7.

“Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar” of burnt-offerings by which I stood, “and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.” The *live coal* denotes the means which God uses for our purification. We may therefore understand by it the operation of the Blessed Spirit in the soul, where it consumes sin, and kindles a holy love to God. The Spirit is often represented in scripture under this image of *fire*: “He who cometh after me,” said the Baptist, speaking of Jesus Christ, “shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” And it was under this emblem, that the miraculous gifts of grace were conferred on the apostles on the day of pentecost. The address of the seraphim, then, announced to the prophet two blessings which are inseparable; inward sanctifica-

tion and the pardon of sin: these can never be disjoined, since there is forgiveness with God only, that he may be feared.

VERSE 8.

The Jewish people deserved long since to be rejected; but God resolves to send one more message to them. “Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah, filled with zeal for that God who had testified his love for him, immediately offers himself for this service. He cries with equal ardour and humility, “Here am I, send me.” ‘I am ready, O my God, to expose myself to every danger for thy service; protected by thy power, I have nothing to fear; enlightened by thy Spirit, my weakness does not affright me. Speak, Lord, and I will fly to obey thy orders.’

Having thus explained to you at some length, the nature and circumstances of this vision, let us now,

II. Deduce from it some practical instructions.

1. The seraphim afford us a model for imitation. Jesus Christ has animated us in our Christian course, by promising that if we are faithful, we shall be made like to the angels in heaven; but if we would resemble them hereafter in glory, we must first resemble them here in temper. Let us, therefore, prepare in time to join the concert of these holy intelligences. *They burn with love to God.* Let us seek for the influences of that Spirit, who will consume all our unholy desires and criminal wishes; who will lift our affections above the perishable objects of time and sense, and fix them on the uncreated glories of the Great I AM.

They, notwithstanding their vast endowments, bend with reverence and humility before the throne of the Lord. Let us then cultivate this same hu-

mility. If seraphs are overwhelmed when contemplating the infinite distance between them and the Lord, what deep abasement should constantly fill the souls of us, poor worms of the dust!

They fly with rapidity to execute the commands of God. And you, unfruitful Christians, who talk much of your virtues and graces, but whose lives are not marked with any actions of piety and benevolence, remember, that you must imitate the holy alacrity and active labours of these spirits, before you can hope to enjoy their society in the future world. Holy love, deep humility, a diligent performance of the commands of God are, then, three things taught us by the consideration of the seraphim.

2. Besides these, we must feel what the seraphs cannot feel, because they are sinners, but what the prophet here experienced, and what every son of man must experience before his iniquities are pardoned; I mean, such *a view of the unsullied holiness of God* as will convince the once secure sinner of his guilt and just desert of punishment. Christians, you have had these humbling views; once you could reflect with self-complacency on your external morality; you could not believe yourselves those vile and guilty wretches, who deserved eternal death. You acknowledged yourselves to be transgressors, but then your offences appeared to be comparatively trifling, and to be counterbalanced by your amiable qualities. You could not believe yourselves to be thoroughly polluted, and opposed to the character and government of God. But, oh! when the Spirit has given you a view of the glorious holiness of the Lord, your proud thoughts have all vanished; you have seen the enormity of your guilt, you have ac-

known yourselves undeserving of mercy, and have cried out, almost in despondency, "Wo is me, for I am undone." Or with Job on a similar occasion, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Sinners, you also must feel these sentiments: happy will it be for you, if you feel them during the day of your visitation; but if you do not, you will experience them when you approach to the bar of God. When the glory that surrounds his throne shall flash upon you, you will then behold your deformity; you will no longer be able to conceal from yourselves your guilt, but, filled with terror and shame, will cry out in anguish, 'Wo is me, for I am undone.' Ah! no seraph shall then fly to announce forgiveness to you; the time of mercy will be past, and the thunders that issue from the throne shall sink you to the gulf of despair!

3. The conduct of the angel who removed the fears of Isaiah, teaches us how such *convinced souls must obtain consolation*. The seraphim do not recall to the prophet his upright life, or good qualities, his honourable station as a messenger of God, or the labours which he had undergone in his prophetic office: no! such representations would have little comforted the dejected Isaiah, who saw the guilt that attended his best works: the angel concludes him under sin, but applies to his lips a coal, taken from the altar of burnt-offerings, on which were consumed the victims typical of that Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

Mourners in Zion! seek not relief to your wounded spirits by endeavouring to palliate your offences and excuse your guilt; if you are truly abased and hum-

bled, as was Isaiah, you can obtain a well-founded tranquillity only by faith in the Lamb of God, and by being a partaker of that regenerating grace, which will burn up your vicious affections, and kindle a pure love to the Lord. Whoever otherwise obtains peace for a troubled spirit, has abundant cause to distrust the foundation of his confidence.

4. "By their fruits ye shall know them." This was the criterion of piety established by the Saviour. The propriety of it is illustrated by this vision. Isaiah, hearing the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" immediately answers, "Here am I; send me." No difficulties or dangers discouraged him; he was willing to undergo every thing in order to glorify a God, who had thus testified his love for him.

It is always thus, my brethren, when a person has obtained scriptural encouragement. Feeling his obligations to a God who has pardoned his sins, he cries out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?" He is anxious to use all his influence to benefit the church of Christ, to extend the triumphs of grace. "Here am I; send me:" this is his cry. 'Employ me to advance thy cause; command me as thou pleasest, and I will hasten to do thy will!'

5. Finally, Christians, behold your unspeakable privilege; you have as your friend, *the Lord of Hosts!* Those myriads of powerful intelligences minister to you on the part of God! If then you are in any affliction or distress, be not discouraged, but say, in imitation of your Saviour, 'My Father could send legions of angels to deliver me, if the purposes of his wisdom did not forbid it. Knowing his power, and confiding in his goodness, I will then be calm.'

And do you think of this truth, sinners? When you offend the Lord of hosts, you will in vain seek a shelter from his justice. The most powerful of creatures will become your enemies; instead of protecting you on earth, guarding your soul at death, and becoming your companions for eternity, they will become the executioners of divine vengeance upon you; they will tear your unwilling soul from your body, and hurl it to the regions of wo!

God grant that this may never be the case with any of us! God grant that, as he which hath called us is holy, so we "may be holy in all manner of conversation!"

SERMON CXI.



FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.



1 JOHN i. 3.

Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

IN what does true piety consist? What is that sincere godliness, which will secure for us the favour and protection of God during our lives; which will enlighten before us the gloomy vale of death; which will strip the judgment-bar of its terrors; and obtain for us a blissful eternity? Put this question to mankind, and a thousand different and contradictory answers will be given. That vain *formalist* will tell you, that true piety consists in a diligent attendance upon all the outward ordinances of religion; in maintaining the orthodox creed, and in expressing an abhorrence of infidel sentiments and libertine principles. Now though all this is commendable, yet all this may be done without the least degree of holy love to God; all this is very far from constituting vital Christianity. That proud *legalist* will tell you, that sincere godliness consists in honesty, temperance, benevolence to our fellow-men, and in a

strict attention to all the social duties. Now, though without such conduct we cannot be Christians; though such conduct makes us love and respect the persons who practise it; though these virtues tend to the benefit of society, and obtain as their reward the approbation of society; yet they cannot obtain the approbation of God; they cannot be regarded as acts of piety, unless their source be holy, unless they flow from a renewed nature and a sanctified heart. That self-deceiving *enthusiast* will tell you, that true piety consists in certain glows of affection, in certain raptures of soul, in certain ecstasies and elevations of mind. Now, though the soul of the Christian is warm and fervent; though God sometimes favours him with blissful and transporting seasons; though he sometimes in a single moment enjoys a felicity which more than counterpoises all the pleasures resulting from all earthly objects—yet still pure religion is something distinct from, is something greater, than glows of passion and ardours of soul, which may result from natural causes, when the heart is a stranger to regenerating grace, and which may be wanting to the real child of God.

But it would be endless to mention the several replies which men, ingenious to deceive themselves, and to stifle the reproaches of conscience, give to this question. Let us then turn from them, and consult the oracles of truth; in these we shall find it uniformly asserted, that true piety consists in fellowship with God, in communion with the Source of life, of joy, and of blessedness. Without this fellowship, all our fond hopes of heaven, however confident they may be, will be found delusive; will vanish, when God taketh away the soul, and leave us to bitter regret, to unavailing anguish; without this fellowship

we can, whilst on earth, enjoy no religious comforts except those which are the result of self-deception, and we are totally unprepared and indisposed to join in the employments of the world of purity. Favour me then with your attention, whilst I show you what is meant by that fellowship with God, which is enjoyed by every Christian, and which is enjoyed by none but the Christian.

In order to have precise views of this subject, we must begin by inquiring, what is meant by the word *fellowship*? This inquiry is so much the more necessary, because there are many Christians who suppose that fellowship with God is *an act*, rather than a *settled state* and *confirmed habit* of the soul; who suppose that fellowship with God consists in high joys and raptures, which in truth are often the fruit of it, but which nevertheless are not absolutely essential to it, and may be separated from it. What then is meant by *fellowship*, in its most extensive senses?

1. To have fellowship with others originally signifies, to possess something in common with others; to have something in state, relation, and enjoyments, of which we and others mutually partake: thus we have a fellowship of nature with all the human species; we have fellowship with the angels in our intellectual powers, and with the beasts in our bodily faculties. Thus the apostle says in the words immediately preceding the text, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us;" that is, that ye may be admitted to a community of blessings, privileges, and promises. Thus Paul exhorts us, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness;" that is, let there be nothing in common to these

works and your conduct. This is the first sense in which fellowship is used; but,

2. This word is often taken in a much wider sense, to denote the intercourse and communication which we have with one another, by giving and receiving favours, by business, by conversation, or in similar manners. Thus the word is used, (Acts ii. 42.) "They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship;" that is, in Christian intercourse with them. And so in a variety of other places.

Now from these observations we immediately perceive what is the nature of that fellowship with God which is essential to the Christian character. It evidently must include these two things:

I. The possession of certain things in common with God; and,

II. An intimate intercourse with him.

I. Fellowship with God implies, that there are certain things common between God and the believer. In vain do we flatter ourselves that our "fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," unless, according to our measure and degree, we have *attributes, aims, wills, affections, and interests*, similar to those of God.

1. Believers have fellowship with God, by having all the divine *attributes* enstamped upon their souls; by being moulded into a resemblance of the divine nature; by having the divine image, which was lost by the apostacy of Adam, re-impressed upon them by the Spirit of God. This is real fellowship: this is that fellowship which the angels and glorified spirits enjoy in heaven; where, seeing God as he is, they become like unto him; where, receiving the influxes of his glory, they are assimilated to him. And

this is that communion which in their measure saints enjoy upon earth : a resemblance of Deity is drawn upon their hearts ; a resemblance which, though infinitely far from being full and perfect, is yet true and real : lineament answers to lineament, feature corresponds to feature ; and they can see God, not only in the works of his hands, not only in the word that he has inspired, but also in their own souls, where his likeness is portrayed : according to the expression of the apostle, “ Christ, the express image of the Father’s person, is formed in them ;” an infant Christ who has all the features, though not the size and perfection of the original. With respect to the communicable attributes of God, there is a real likeness of participation ; the soul of the believer is a mirror which receives the impression, and reflects the form of the divine righteousness, purity, truth, wisdom, mercy ; and, in general, of all those perfections of which creatures may in some measure partake. With respect to the incommunicable attributes of God, those which are peculiar and appropriate to him, there cannot be this likeness of participation, but there is a likeness of correspondency ; such a likeness as is formed by the seal upon the wax, where there is a resemblance, although the parts which in the one are elevated, in the other are depressed. Thus, though believers do not *partake* of the attribute of all-sufficiency, yet they nevertheless have communion with this attribute by having that frame which is the proper impression of it ; by an unreserved dependence, an entire going out of themselves and living upon God ; by a wish and an endeavour to diminish, to shrivel, to decrease, that “ God may be all in all ;” to vanish, that his glory might shine the brighter.

Thus also, though believers do not *partake* of the attributes of sovereignty and supremacy, yet they nevertheless have communion with these attributes by having that frame which is the proper impression of them; by an entire subjection and a total self-dedication; by being enabled to consecrate themselves to God, and to exclaim from the very centre of their souls, "Lord, I yield myself to thee! thou art my owner! possess thine own right! I give myself up entirely to thee!" The case is the same with the other incommunicable attributes of God. Believers, then, hold communion with God by having a real participation of his communicable, and a real impression of his incommunicable attributes.

2. Believers hold communion with God by having a common *aim* with him, and thereby becoming, in the apostolic phrase, "*fellow-workers* with him." What are the aims, the ends which God proposes to himself? His own glory, and the happiness of his creatures. What are the aims, the ends which believers propose to themselves? The glory of God, and the happiness of man. Once they could act solely from selfish ends and motives; but enlightened from above, so as to perceive the infinite interval between the self-sufficient Jehovah and worms of the dust, between the fountain of excellence and this corrupted mortal; penetrated with admiration of his matchless perfections, and attracted by gratitude for his boundless love, they have now no wish more fervent, no aim more constant, than that God may be glorified and worthily exalted by all the works of his hands. And in consistence with this ultimate aim at the glory of God, they desire, they labour to do good to the family of God, to advance the felicity of their fellow-men, to save them from

those miseries which sin hath brought into the world; to save them from eternal despair!

3. Believers hold communion with God by having a common *will* with him. By nature we are disinclined to the directing and disposing will of God; we desire to be our own rulers and to regulate our own affairs; our hearts rise against the unlimited authority and sovereignty of the Lord. But the grace which has renewed believers, has given them different views; and though the remains of corruption sometimes make them murmur or struggle, yet in the general bent of their minds and course of their lives, they acquiesce in the will of God; and they are never so happy as when they can rest in the divine will with full complacency, with perfect approbation: the habitual language of their souls is, ‘Worthy art thou, O Lord, to rule! command me what thou wilt; dispose of me as thou wilt: thy will be done!’

4. Believers hold communion with God because they have common *affections* with him. God has the chief place in their hearts, and it is therefore impossible that their affections should run in a different channel: the same holy objects which God loves, are loved by Christians; the same sinful courses which God hates, are hated by Christians: not conformed to the world, they are united to God by the powerful ties of love, which causes their affections to mingle together, and cements the communion between them.

5. Finally: believers hold communion with God because they have common *interests* with him. The interests of God are considered by Christians, as those of a Father, a Benefactor, a tender Friend, and are, therefore, most dear to their souls. Does the cause of God flourish, and do his interests advance

among men? Christians are exulting, even though this reformation may have no effect upon their personal aggrandizement and pleasure. Does the cause of God decline, and are his interests neglected? Christians are unhappy; and as they have no separate interests from the Lord, they cannot be satisfied, even though their own "corn and wine increaseth."

This then is the first way in which believers hold communion with God; they have certain things in common with God.

We have said that communion with God implies,

II. *An intimate intercourse with him.* To give a proper illustration of this intercourse in all its various branches, would require more time than the limits prescribed to these exercises will allow. I can only give you a few brief hints which it would be delightful to develop. This intercourse is carried on by *giving and receiving favours*: God showers down the blessings of nature and of grace on the believer: the believer carefully observes them, and pours forth his grateful acknowledgments.

This intercourse is carried on in *the works of creation*. God enstamps his perfections on the visible frame of nature: the believer views the traces of these perfections, and is moulded into a temper correspondent to them.

This intercourse is carried on in *the works of Providence*. Whatever are the dealings of God, the believer diligently regards them, strives to acquire that frame and perform those duties which these dealings call for: in afflictive providences, he is submissive; in humbling providences, he is abased; in joyful providences, he is elevated; in gracious providences, he is grateful: in short, he labours to preserve an in-

tercourse with God by exercising those graces which the several divine dispensations may respectively require.

This intercourse is carried on with God in *his word*. The believer does not read it with haste, irreverence, and languor; but by exercising those acts and graces which its several parts require, he really and intimately converses with God. At a threatening, he exercises holy fear and reverence; at a promise, he exercises gratitude and trust; at a command, he exercises submission and forms pious resolutions to obey it: and so in other cases.

Finally: this intercourse is carried on with God in *his ordinances*. The believer is not satisfied with a mere outward attendance, unless he can meet with God and converse with him: he says therefore to the Lord, ‘Show me thy glory;’ the Lord reveals to him his excellency: he says, ‘Lord, strengthen my graces;’ the Lord fortifies and increases them: he says, ‘Lord, nourish me by the bread of life; poison my corruptions by the blood of the Lamb;’ the Lord listens to his petition, and complies with his request. Thus an intercourse is preserved on their part by the formation of holy desires, and on the part of God by the fulfilment of them.

This is the second way in which believers have communion with God by an holy intercourse with him: “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.”

Such is true fellowship and communion with God. It consists not in a round of heartless duties; in crying, “Lord, Lord;” in talking much of divine truths; in naming the name of Christ; or in warmly advocating the orthodox creed. All this may be done while the soul is unsanctified, and without true

communion with God. It consists not in high joys and raptures; these may be unfelt, and yet the communion be real and most intimate: and we shall run into dangerous errors, if we do not carefully distinguish between the sense and perception of fellowship and fellowship itself. But it consists in a kindred mind to God, in a temper conformed to his; it is a communion of attributes, aims, wills, affections, and interests; a communion in his works, word, and ordinances: this fellowship you must have, I do not say perfectly and fully, but sincerely and really, before you have any right to the name, or any title to the promises of the Christian. It is the character of believers that they are "partakers of the divine nature;" or, as the original word may more literally be translated, "holders of communion with the divine nature."

My brethren, this communion which has been described to you, forms the highest excellence of the creature; is the source of the most abundant and unfailing joys; and is absolutely necessary if we hope for future happiness.

It forms the *highest excellence* of the creature: for what more noble or more dignified than to be formed on the pattern of Jehovah; to partake of his perfections, and maintain a tender and endearing intercourse with him! This is a life worthy of man; this is the life which angels lead, and by which arch-angels are blest. Let then the men of the world scoff at the character of the Christian; let them deride it as mean and low-spirited; they will at last find that it was no light sin to call that mean which bore the impress of divinity; to scoff at him as low-spirited who was animated by the Spirit of God. "*Not many noble are called*;" and when they are call-

ed, they are made infinitely more noble than they were by birth or descent, by places of preferment and command.

And as communion with God is the highest excellence, so it is the *chief happiness* of man. We can never be happy till we enjoy it. God is the centre of the soul, and it must continue restless and agitated till it is fixed on him. In vain will we rove from one earthly object to another: nothing below can give us rest and quiet, because nothing below is as extensive as the powers of our nature; nothing below is itself at rest: there will still be a raging thirst in the soul, until wearied with earthly vanities, struck with the excellences of Jehovah, and constrained by his power, we fall at his throne and exclaim, ‘Lo, I come to thee, the Eternal Being, the Spring of life, the Centre of rest, the Stay of the creation, the Fullness of all things! I join myself to thee; I will lead my life and spend my days with thee, with whom I hope to dwell for ever!’ Then the soul must be tranquil and at rest, for it then has found an object sufficiently great to fill all its capacities; an object which answers the intent of its creation, the end of its being.

And as communion with God thus brings down heaven into the soul, while we remain on earth, so it ensures to us a perfect felicity in heaven when we depart from earth. The sum of the future blessedness is a perfect communion with God; and if this communion has been begun on earth, it must be consummated in the kingdom of glory. The Christian already has the seeds of heaven; or, to speak more properly, as far as he has communion with God, so far he has heaven and God in his soul; and therefore, when he leaves behind him the body of flesh, he must necessarily be in heaven, unless God should

either infuse sinful habits into him, (which it would be blasphemy to imagine,) or unless he should annihilate his soul, which would derogate from every one of his perfections.

Since our dearest interests are thus involved in this subject, let us try ourselves carefully on this point; for it would be dreadful to be deceived here; it would be dreadful to discover on the bed of death, or at the bar of judgment, that, notwithstanding all our outward performances, our professions, and our fancied joys, we were still strangers to a heart-fellowship with God; it would be dreadful to discover that our religion had consisted in notions laid up in our head, and in raptures produced only by natural passions or fancy; instead of a new principle implanted by God, laid in the very constitution of the soul, refining all its faculties, making us to be like God, as far as a creature can be like its Creator!

And let us, who hope that we have this communion in some degree, strive continually to carry it to as high a point as is possible in this world of sin and temptation. Let us eagerly desire and ardently pursue a more intimate conjunction, a more close communion with God. Thus shall we have more of the heavenly temper, and become more prepared to mingle with the throng of adoring seraphs.

And you, sinners, we importunately beseech you to form more noble and exalted notions of happiness than you now have. Do not limit your ambition to the vanities of earth, but aim at a happiness worthy of your souls; tread the toys of earth beneath your feet; pant to be filled with the fulness of God; to have God dwelling in you; to enjoy a happiness in common with God! This, and this only, is an aim worthy of an immortal being.

SERMON CXII.



PROSPEROUS JOURNEY.



ROMANS i. 10.

A prosperous journey, by the will of God.

MANY of those who have been accustomed to worship with us in this place, have left us for a season; many of you will shortly follow them. It will not be useless, before your departure, to show you what should be your aim, what your sentiments, and conduct, in order that your journey may tend to your spiritual good and everlasting welfare.

For this purpose I have read to you the words which the apostle Paul addressed to the Romans, when he expressed his desire to visit them.

My sole design in addressing you from them is to inquire,

What is necessary to render a journey, or a voyage, prosperous in the estimation of a real Christian?

Is he satisfied if by it his temporal interests are advanced, if he enjoys worldly amusement and pleasure, if he meets with kind friends and affectionate relatives, if he be preserved from calamity, and return home with invigorated health? These are blessings which require his grateful acknowledg-

ments to God. Feeling his unworthiness of them, he ought for their conferment to pour forth the tribute of thankfulness and praise to the Most Merciful. With these he ought to be contented, if this world were his home, or if he were preserved in life solely for the purpose of enjoying the blessings of earth. But when he remembers that heaven is his true country; that every hour as it passes shortens his journey through life; that religion is his great business, and that he is continued upon earth to glorify God, to save his own soul, and to benefit others: when he considers these things, he must feel that much more is necessary to render a journey or a voyage prosperous; and that it deserves not this title, unless it tend,

I. To give us more affecting and admiring views of the attributes of the great Creator, as displayed in his works which we behold.

II. Unless it give us a more deep and grateful sense of the goodness and care of that Providence on which we depend, and a more comprehensive survey of the general dispensations of Providence.

III. Unless it deepen our conviction of the uniformity and value of real religion.

IV. Unless during it we embrace opportunities of acquiring or of doing good.

V. Unless during it we remember that our whole life is a journey, which is hastening to its close, and that we are only pilgrims and strangers upon the earth.

Where these circumstances unite, we make a "prosperous journey," or voyage, "by the will of God."

I. We should seek more affecting and admiring

views of the attributes of the great Creator, as displayed in his works.

In the scenes of nature, God has spread before us a brilliant and expressive picture of many of his perfections: he has endowed us with sublime faculties capable of reflecting on his works, of admiring their order and beauty, their harmony and proportion, and thus rising "from nature up to nature's God." Yet how few are thus affected by creation! How few love to trace in it those perfections of the All-Wise, the Almighty, the All-Merciful, that are so strikingly impressed, that they may be visible to every eye, and obvious to every understanding. When our minds are employed upon the works of nature, it is generally only to make them subservient to our worldly interest, or to administer to our earthly gratification; and not to warm our hearts by the contemplation of that infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, which appear in the formation of them. If such conduct at all times is inexcusable and ungrateful, it is doubly so in our journeys and our voyages, in which the works of God are presented to us in such rapid succession; in which, occurring in such variety and number, they crowd in upon our sight, and solicit our observation. Christians! avoid this insensibility; every where behold around you the marks and tokens of your God. When on the ocean, the bounds of which you in vain attempt to discover, think of the greatness of him who "ruleth the raging of the sea, and when the waves thereof arise, stilleth them;" who "brake up for it his decreed place, and set bars, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." When you view its numberless

inhabitants, and observe how the several species are distinguished from each other, and what diversity in the whole; how admirably their natures are contrived and adjusted to the elements in which they are placed, and what never-failing provision is made for their subsistence and preservation, cry, with the holy Psalmist, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches, so is this great and wide sea.” When you raise your eyes to the heavens, and behold those vast and magnificent orbs which shine above us with so much lustre, and roll over our heads with so much order and regularity; let it not be with stupid insensibility; let it not be merely with a desire philosophically to mark their orbits, to measure their distances, and to know their proportion, but with the feelings of David when he exclaimed, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work.” In travelling upon the land, let every thing, in like manner, lead you to the great Creator. While admiring the varied landscape, forget not its Author: behold him both in the vast and in the minute; see the footsteps of your God, not only in the towering mountain and the roaring cataract, but also in each spire of grass, and every lily of the field. Acknowledge him painting the leaf of the minutest flower, and giving lustre to the smallest insect’s wing. Happy he, who thus every where discerns his God! he can call the objects of earth, “the varied scenery, all his own.”

“ His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy
With a propriety that none can feel :
But who, with filial confidence inspired,

Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
And smiling say, ' My Father made them all !'
Are they not his by a peculiar right,
And by an emphasis of interest his,
Whose eye they fill with tears of holy joy,
Whose heart with praise, and whose exalted mind
With worthy thoughts of that unwearied love,
That plann'd, and built, and still upholds a world,
So clothed with beauty for rebellious man ?"

But if in " a prosperous journey," a Christian has his heart warmed by the contemplation of the works of his God, so also,

II. Does he acquire a more deep and grateful sense of the goodness and care of that Providence, on which we depend.

Though in God " we live, and move, and have our being," though we could not enjoy the smallest degree of felicity, or exist for a single moment without his constant support, yet the majority of mankind think but little of this guardian providence. Attending only to those second causes which have been appointed by our heavenly Father for the promotion of our happiness or the preservation of our lives, they scarcely ever raise their thoughts to the great First Cause of all. And even Christians, when nothing occurs to interrupt the regular and uniform course of their lives, are too apt to forget, or to feel too feebly this, their dependence ; but surely in our journeys and our voyages, unless we are utterly destitute of piety, we must, from the consideration of the seen and unseen dangers to which we are exposed, feel that we need each moment to be encompassed by the guardian care, and shielded by the power of God.

Think then, when you shall be upon the ocean, how absolutely you depend upon him whom the winds and the waves obey. Recall with gratitude his watchfulness over you in times past, and his deliverances in seasons of peril. Think, as you cast your eyes upon the waves, how many of your fellow-creatures are entombed in their bosom; how many have shrieked, but shrieked in vain, as they sunk in their watery grave! And then ask yourself, ‘To whom is it owing, that while these have perished, I have been preserved? To whom but that God who must still uphold me, or in an hour, in a moment, I also must perish? And to whom should my life be devoted, but to Him who has thus made it his care?’

When journeying upon the land, remember how many have expired far from their homes, and found that separation from their friends which they supposed would have endured but for a few months, to have been a final one upon earth. Remember that you are continually exposed to the operation of some of those thousand circumstances which have cut short the days of others. Each evening then, that you are spared, erect your Ebenezer, and cry, “Hitherto the Lord hath helped me.” Each morning that you rise, implore his protection through the day. Engrave on your heart his interpositions. “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your steps.”

Attend not only to your preservation, but to all the providential dealings of God to you: see him continually guiding and blessing you; here bestowing an unexpected mercy; there, for your good, disappointing your plans: constantly so arranging, combining, and disposing events as to invite you to new degrees of holiness. Extend your observation to those with whom you associate; to the places which you visit.

Every where you will see proofs of a Providence universally extended, constantly operative, constantly kind.

Such views of divine providence deeply impressed, and permanently retained, will render your journey prosperous ; but if you are destitute of them, through your ingratitude and insensibility, you offend your God.

III. A Christian may esteem a journey prosperous, in which his conviction of the value and uniformity of the religion of Jesus is increased.

The various objects that will be presented to him will be calculated to produce this conviction ; and if he be not wanting to himself, he must return home disposed more ardently to bless God for the revelation of his gospel, and the communication of his grace. Does he in his journeyings enter the house of poverty ? He can still find happiness there, if there be true piety in the bosom of its inhabitants. Does he visit the bed of death ? He sees the expiring mortal, if the friend of his Jesus, supported by the recollection of the agonies of his crucified Redeemer, and filled with transport from the assurance of the love of his Redeemer, now reigning in glory. Does he in his travels behold every variety of human wretchedness ? He sees no wound for which there is not a balm in the gospel, no agonized heart that is beyond the power of its consolations. Does he contemplate the deep degradation of human nature ? It is among those wretched persons who have treated with neglect the blessed Redeemer. Is he at any time in danger of sudden death ? He is not dismayed if he have the assurance of God's love, and if he feel the gracious presence of his Saviour. Does he think of the friends and relatives that he has left ? How cheering, while

separated, to be able to meet them in spirit at the throne of grace ; and to know that they and he are encompassed in the protecting arms of the same gracious Father, and are under the guardianship of the same merciful Redeemer. Yes, he feels more deeply the value of that heartfelt piety which can not only cheer his home, but can attend him in his voyages, and accompany him in his journeys ; can shed consolation in every hour of trial, and give new charms to every season of joy.

And as he thus feels the value, so he sees the uniformity of the religion of Jesus. Far from his home, and from those with whom he was accustomed to “go to the house of God in company,” he meets with the disciples of the Redeemer. They have been brought to a knowledge of the truth by different instruments, and, it may be, in different methods from himself, and from one another ; they may belong to different denominations of Christians, and have met from different quarters of the world ; yet, though meeting for the first time, when they speak of their common Saviour ; of the change that has been wrought in their souls ; of the new views, sentiments, and emotions, that are given by regenerating grace, he finds such a similarity, and, in all essential points, such a sameness in the operation on their hearts and his own, as to give him the most unshaken conviction, that it is the same Spirit of God who in all places works in the children of Jesus. He only has made “a prosperous journey,” who returns from it thus, feeling more sensibly the value and the uniformity of the religion of Jesus.

IV. That journey cannot be esteemed prosperous by a Christian, in which he does not embrace opportunities of acquiring and doing good.

Sometimes even believers, during their voyages and journeys, instead of advancing in holiness, have receded ; have found their graces withering, because they neglected those means of spiritual improvement to which they habitually attended at home. Carefully guard against this danger. Let the word of God not be disregarded : daily read a portion of it ; and let it be your song and rejoicing during your pilgrimage. Reject all pleas from hurry and occupation that would lead you to intermit the offices of devotion and the exercise of prayer ; forget not to keep holy the Sabbath of the Lord ; always, if possible, attend in the sanctuary when God is wont to meet with his people, and bless them ; and when you cannot enjoy public ordinances, be careful to preserve the life of religion in your soul by private prayer, reading, meditation, and spiritual conversation. Think, wherever you may be, of the flock to which you belong, and bear them and their pastor in the arms of faith and prayer to the mercy-seat. Avoid as much as possible any intimacy with the enemies of God, and cultivate the friendship of those warm-hearted believers with whom you meet, and whose zeal may animate you. Think what will be the peculiar temptations to which, in your journey, you will be exposed ; and beforehand fortify yourself against them. Reflect on the several means you possess of being useful, and seriously inquire what you may do for the glory of God and the honour of the Redeemer. Be not afraid nor ashamed, on all occasions, to avow your attachment to the blessed Saviour : an open, consistent conduct, will be far less likely to excite the sneers and scoffs of the profane, than a timid, temporizing behaviour. Embrace with joy any opportunity of instructing the ignorant,

of comforting the unhappy, and of warning the thoughtless. A word spoken in season may be the means of saving a soul.

Thus act, and "your journey will be prosperous," and remembered by you with pleasure at death, and at the judgment-bar. Forget not that for the occupation of every moment of it you are to render an account. Suppose not that it forms an interstice between your regular duties and habitual employments, that you may spend as you please. God demands your *whole* life, and he deserves it all.

5. Finally: that journey is prosperous in which we constantly feel that our whole life is a journey towards eternity; that we are here pilgrims and strangers; and in which we act in a manner conformed to this persuasion.

Frequently then think, when far from home, that you are only sojourners upon earth: that this world is not your home: that heaven is your country, from which you were new-born; where your best and dearest friends live; where is your inheritance; and where you shall dwell for ever. When during your journey your thoughts turn to your earthly home, say, "Ought I not more frequently to think of that heavenly country where are my chief concerns, my everlasting interests? Ought I not to keep up a constant correspondence with it by prayer and by praise, by the exercise of faith, of love, and of desire?"

Do you meet with little inconveniences and troubles, which you bear without repining, because they must so soon cease? Say to yourselves, 'And are not all the afflictions of life also transient? Will they not soon cease for ever to harass me? Let me then endure them without murmuring.' Thus let

every object tend to lead your thoughts to your true country ; to inspire you with heavenly-mindedness ; and your journey will be prosperous.

Ye children of God, who are about to leave us, may such be your experience ! May you be protected by the Almighty ! and return more zealous, more grateful, more devoted to the Redeemer !

And ye, my brethren, who are about to leave us, but whose consciences attest that ye are yet unrenewed, and strangers to the covenant of promise, will ye not at last pause, and before your departure solemnly think of your danger ? Have you made a covenant with death ? Are you assured that you ever will return ? May you not almost touch that period when God shall demand your soul ? Oh ! secure an interest in the Redeemer, that, living or dying, you may be happy.

And let us who remain recollect, that our course may be terminated before our friends return ; let us then so live, that our journey through life and through the dark valley of death may be prosperous.