

U. P. Glas. 1813

Book

THE

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON

PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

VOL. I.

Edited by

George S. Woodhall
1813 V.

Woodhall
Editor

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech
you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled
to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

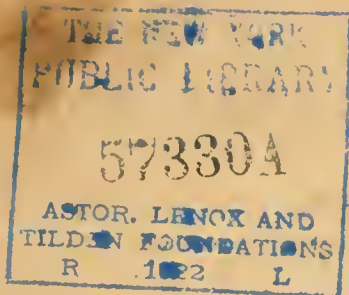
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1813

New Jersey

ZIX



District of New-Jersey, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirty-first day of March, in the thirty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“The New-Jersey Preacher, or Sermons on plain and practical subjects. By some of the ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey. Vol. I. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.— 2 Cor. v. 20.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical, and other prints.”

ROBERT BOGGS,

Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.

PREFACE.

THE present state of the world presents a prospect, highly interesting to the philosopher and statesman—and not less so to the real christian. The encouraging and gloomy scenes are so mingled together, as alternately to excite emotions of hope and fear. When the christian looks abroad on the earth, he discovers, comparatively few, who profess to believe and practice the precepts of the gospel.* The extensive continents of Asia and Africa are almost wholly immersed in the darkness of Pagan superstition and idolatry, or led away by the delusions of Mahomet. Europe has for many years been a *field of blood*; and our own beloved country has lately engaged in a sanguinary conflict with a powerful nation.

In the midst of this gloom and confusion, there is still something that gives to the christian an animating hope

* The following ingenious calculation will serve to shew of what small extent the christian religion is, when compared with those many and vast countries, that are overspread with Paganism or Mahometanism. Supposing the inhabited world to be divided into *thirty parts*, only *three* of those parts are possessed by christians of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communion—*two* by christians of the Greek church—*six* by Jews and Mahometans—and the remaining **NINETEEN** by Pagans.

It is to be observed that this calculation was made before the late discoveries of the north west part of America, the north east part of Asia, the vast tract of New-Holland, New-Guinea, and the numerous other islands in the Pacific ocean—How much greater then must the numerical difference appear at the present day between that part of mankind who enjoy the light of christianity, and that part who are now groping in Pagan darkness!

Miss Hannah Adams' view of religions, p. 496.

that the time is not far distant, when heavenly light and peace will be diffused through this dark and troubled world.

The increasing number of young men who are willing to devote themselves to the work of the gospel ministry—the numerous Missionary and Bible Societies that have been established in G. Britain and America within a few years past—the lively interest taken in our own country in the establishment of Theological seminaries—the spirit of liberality that has been manifested by all denominations of christians, in sending the Scriptures and a preached gospel among the Heathen—the avidity with which books on religious subjects are sought for and read, give us reason to hope that the dawning of a brighter day is near at hand.

Surrounded by such scenes, it surely becomes the duty of professing christians, and more especially of the ministers of the gospel, to be diligent and zealous in promoting the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. There is no object of greater magnitude—there is nothing on which the peace and happiness of mankind so much depend as the diffusion of the knowledge of a crucified Saviour. The universal practice of the truths and precepts of the gospel would put an effectual stop to fraud and injustice—to deadly feuds and animosities between nations, and individuals, and make this world a peaceful abode where the great Creator would delight to dwell with the workmanship of his own hands. It is the gospel of Christ that raises man to that dignity in the scale of beings for which his nature is designed—it is this that throws light on the darknes of the grave, and cheers us with the enlivening prospect of a glorious immortality,

To spread the knowledge of divine truth ; to concentrate the exertions of many in holding forth the *word of life* in a plain, forcible and engaging manner ; to give (if possible) some check to the progress of iniquity ; and to stir up professing christians to diligence and fidelity, are among the great objects that have induced the editors to engage in the publication of this volume.

We believed that a work of this kind, consisting of sermons, by ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey, on practical and important subjects—adapted to be read in families or in religious societies—preserved free from useless and unedifying controversy—and recommended by its novelty and variety to the laudable curiosity of individuals, could not fail to excite a lively interest through the churches in this state, and contribute largely to the edification and improvement of christians.

Our devout and humble prayer is, that the great Head of the church would give a blessing to this work, that it may serve to promote his glory, and the salvation of our fellow-men.

We cannot close these observations without returning our thanks to our Reverend fathers and brethren, who have so promptly complied with our request, in contributing materials for this volume.

If sufficient encouragement be given, to warrant the undertaking, we hope at no distant period to present to the public another volume of the “New-Jersey Preacher.”

GEORGE S. WOODHULL, }
ISAAC V. BROWN, } EDITORS.

NEW-JERSEY, July 24, 1813.

ERRATA.

- Page 49, line 8 from the bottom, for *creation* read *creature*
57, line 14 from the top, for *healing* read *feeling*
66, line 8 from the bottom, for *feint* read *faint*
do. line 3 do. for *pefect* read *perfect*
68, line 4 do. for *purse* read *pure*
96, line 7 do. for *intrusted* read *instructed*
164, line 4 from the top, for *promise is* read *promises are*
174, line 16 do. for *tenfold* read *twofold*
185, line 5 from the bottom, for *few* read *many*
298, line 15 from the top, for *victorioies* read *victories*
359, line 1 on the top, for *earl* read *early*
362, line 11 from the top, for *difficult* read *defective*
365, line 8 do. for *corrupt* read *correct*
348, line 2 from the bottom, for I. read II.

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SERMON I.

FAITH THE PRINCIPLE OF A HOLY LIFE.

1 Cor. xiii. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three—

And now abideth *faith*.

BY SAMUEL S. SMITH, D.D. L.L.D.

and spirit of his system, his instructions may appear dark, and we perceive no adequate motive to apply them for the regulation of our own conduct. We may have perfect confidence in the skill of some eminent artist who analyzes with judgment the principles of his art; we may admire the talents of a distinguished scholar who declaims with elegance on the beauties of any classic work, and points out with accuracy the grounds of the pleasure they afford us; but, for want of knowledge, or of taste, we may not distinctly comprehend his meaning, or perceive the beauties which he endeavours in vain to point out to us. In the cases which I have supposed, we may yield entire credit to the judgment, integrity, or skill of the teacher or the artist; we may have full *faith* in the wisdom and truth of the man, but, through defect of cultivated understanding, or of liberal taste, his principles, his doctrines, the beauty of his examples, cannot strictly be said to be the objects of our belief, because they are not justly apprehended, they are not seen in their proper light, nor perceived in their true nature.

To apply these remarks to our present subject.—A genuine and practical faith in the gospel, which is that alone after which we seek, consists not merely in acknowledging the scriptures to be the word of God, in confessing the divine authority and heavenly mission of the apostles, the prophets, or of Christ himself, all which may be nothing more than an hereditary opinion, a pious prejudice of education; but it implies, as still more essential to it, a clear perception of the *spiritual nature*, beauty and perfection of the *doctrines* which they teach, especially as they regard the glory of God, the system of our redemption, and the duties, and immortal hopes of man; and a profound persuasion, not only of their truth,

but of their infinite importance to our everlasting peace and happiness. These doctrines, therefore, as far as they are within the comprehension of the human mind, are not received with genuine faith, but in proportion as they are in their true nature understood; and truly understood they cannot be but in proportion as the heart perceives their spiritual excellence and perfection, and with a holy and divine taste, relishes their beauty. For the *excellence of virtue*, the loveliness of genuine piety—the *beauty of holiness* is part of its idea. Here, then, we begin to discern the practical and moral influence of a sincere faith. For, what the heart understands and loves, must govern the practice. Perceiving, by this gracious principle, the beauty of holiness, the divine excellence of the evangelic doctrine, the believer is led by the sweet and irresistible attraction of a renewed taste, to *delight in the law of God after the inward man*; and to derive his chief pleasures from the study of its heavenly truths, and conformity of heart to its holy precepts. Here we begin, also, to discern the dependence of faith on the good dispositions of the heart.

By the understanding we judge of speculative truth; yet, on all moral subjects, the convictions of the understanding are greatly influenced by the state of the affections. But it is the heart alone, profoundly touched by the spirit of grace, which creates those lively and affecting conceptions of the beauty of divine things, and the perfection of the system of the gospel, which form the essence of a practical faith, the active and operative principle of a holy life. Hence hath the apostle said, *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*. And Philip replied to the eunuch who desired to be baptized, —*if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest*.

Will it be demanded, if we do not, by this representation, require the regeneration of the heart, the cultivation of a divine and holy taste, as a prerequisite to faith, of which change, however, faith is acknowledged to be the only genuine cause? No; degenerate as human nature is, it still so far possesses ideas of moral excellence, so far approves, with the mind, the perfection of the divine law, and consents to it, that it is good, even when, by the law of sin which is in his flesh, he violates it, as, under the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, co-operating with his holy word, to be a sufficient foundation of this understanding, operative and sanctifying faith, of which we speak, in its first and incipient state. And when once this holy illumination, this divine taste exists in the weakest and most imperfect degree, it prepares the soul under the culture of the same word, and the continued influence of the same spirit, to receive every doctrine of the gospel with a fuller conviction, to perceive increasing beauties in the system of grace, and to feel with augmented force the obligation of the whole law of holiness.

But in treating of the moral and sanctifying influence of faith, we must add to that spiritual understanding of the doctrines of the gospel, and that divine taste of their beauty, which it implies, these powerful motives, also, to duty, to evangelic obedience, and universal holiness which it draws from celestial and eternal things. For, *it is, saith the apostle, the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* It penetrates the veil which covers them from mortal eyes, and presents them to the devout mind with a certain ineffable and spiritual sensation; especially the glory of God, the infinite love of the Redeemer, the final judgment of the

universe, the everlasting retributions of the righteous and the wicked. But, on these divine subjects, and the respective influence of each, both on devotion and on practice, your time does not now permit me to dilate. Your faith, believer, renders it unnecessary. The conceptions of faith in the heart of a humble and sincere disciple, far outgo all that the feeble powers of language could convey.

Let us, then, briefly review the principles which we have hitherto laid down. Faith, consists in the first place, and in its most general idea, in receiving the sacred scriptures as containing the gracious revelation of the will of God for our instruction in righteousness, and our eternal salvation. It consists, in the next place, not only in the belief of the divine authority and direction under which the scriptures have been communicated to the world, but in a clear and spiritual understanding of the nature and perception of the excellence and perfection of their holy doctrines. Thirdly, in a strong impression on the heart, of those high motives to practical piety and virtue, which religion has drawn from the glory of God, from the redemption of the cross, and the retributions of eternity. And, finally, in a profound persuasion of the personal, and everlasting concern which we have in these precious, these glorious, and these awful truths.

What moral system, then, or institute of religion, has ever laid such a foundation for purity of heart and sanctity of life, and for attaining ultimately the perfection of our nature, as the christian religion, resting, as it does, on the doctrine of a sincere faith in the Redeemer of the world. Here we behold the infinite purity and perfection of the divine nature, and are assimilated to it

by the powerful influence of a holy love ; we behold the excellence and beauty of the law of holiness, and are led to obedience by the delightful attractions of a divine taste, and the sweet constraints of a renewed nature ; we behold the love of the ever-blessed Redeemer extending salvation to a guilty world through his own sufferings, and the believing penitent from the depth of his affliction on the account of his sins, looking up to Heaven for mercy, is led to embrace the cross with an ecstasy of gratitude ; we behold the glorious rewards of life and immortality, purchased by the death, confirmed by the resurrection of the Saviour, and shining in every promise of the gospel, and the *spirit of holiness* becomes raised by the view, to its highest *tone*.

Assemble all these objects of faith in one view ; receive them as the infallible truths of God, not with a vague unmeaning assent, the fruit, merely, of custom and example, but with a profound conviction, arising from reflection, from examination, and from the holy influence of prayer, aided by the concurrent illumination of the Eternal Spirit, and what principles or what motives drawn from any other source, can be compared with those of the gospel, for their purity, their efficacy, and their persuasive power on the heart ? These considerations naturally lead to the second topic of this discourse ; the illustration of the excellence of this grace. Previously, however, to entering directly on this branch of the subject, permit me to take notice of some common definitions, or representations of faith, the coincidence of which with the views hitherto presented to you may not immediately appear.

Faith, in the holy scriptures is sometimes characterised by one of its principal acts ; *Abraham* is said to

have believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, because he trusted implicitly in the divine promise, in opposition to the most untoward events, and of appearances which might have discouraged the strongest hopes. Such confidence could have existed only in a heart prepared to receive with submissive duty and obedience every word of God.

Sometimes it is characterised by one of its principal objects; *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*, said the apostle to the jailor. And, in another place, descending to an idea still more particular, he says; *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* The doctrine of the resurrection of the Saviour is so intimately involved with the accomplishment of the atonement, and with the truth of all the promises and hopes of religion, that sincerely to receive it, in all its relations and consequences, is to embrace the whole gospel.

The pious and learned compilers of our catechism have chosen to describe it by one of its essential and inseparable fruits; *receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation.* Desirous of giving some single criterion of this grace which would be least liable to be mistaken by a believer himself in judging of his own spiritual state, they have fixed on this self renunciation, this absolute dependence of the penitent sinner on the grace and merits of the Saviour as one that is most certain, because one to which the pride and self-complacency of man most reluctantly submits: one to which he never does submit, till the sense of his own depravity and guilt; till the purity, the holiness and justice of the divine law; till the grace and all-sufficiency of the right-

eousness and power of the Redeemer; in a word, till the whole gospel has taken full possession of his soul.

II. But returning to the views already given of the grace of faith, permit me now to add a few reflections to illustrate its excellence as a principle of moral conduct, which will justify the high rank which the apostle has assigned to it, along with hope and charity in the christian system.

The enemies of the gospel who delight in disingenuous representations of its spirit, and its institutions, affect to consider the command *to believe* as an address to the credulity of mankind and as substituting faith in the room of good morals and a life of virtue. Oh! falsehood, embittered by malignity! Does not the gospel invite, does it not require the most rigorous investigation into its pretensions? And is it not the crime of unbelievers that they do not apply themselves, with seriousness and faithfulness, to this great and interesting enquiry? Instead of being designed, as they falsely and wickedly assert, as a substitute for morals, is it not true, on the other hand, that it is the purity, which they esteem the unnecessary rigor, of the morality of the gospel, that is the genuine source of all their hostility to it? Is it not the very ground on which the sacred writer extols this grace, not that it stands in the room of a virtuous and holy practice, but that it is the proper spring of all true virtue, and the most efficient principle of a holy life?

In entering on this subject, let me lay it down as an established maxim in morals, that right principles when truly understood and heartily believed, will ever be followed by rectitude of conduct. False principles, on the other hand, tend to vitiate the fountain of virtue and piety in the heart; and in the practice of life to lead

to many departures from the path of duty. What, then, is evangelic faith? Is it not the reception, on the authority of a divine and infallible teacher, and on the renewed taste of a mind enlightened by divine truth, of the purest principles of practical virtue, of the holiest law of universal duty, which have ever been prescribed to mankind? It is subjecting the soul to the influence of the sublimest and most powerful motives of holiness which even the wisdom of God has ever devised for the regeneration of the world. The laws of morals as they have been discovered merely by reason, or have been prescribed in the systems of the wisest of men who have not drawn them from the fountains of inspiration, are susceptible of so much disputation, are so doubtful in their limits, and liable in their application to so many exceptions and modifications in favour of each man's peculiar inclinations and passions, that they form a most uncertain and fallacious rule of duty. It is, besides, a rule as feeble in its authority, as it is defective in its prescriptions, being liable to be changed, or set aside by every caprice of self-love, or impulse of ungoverned passion. But every thing in the law of Christ is clear and luminous as the eternal law of truth from which it emanates. Here are no enfeebling doubts, no uncertain reasonings which may make the law too often speak the language of a corrupted heart. All is defined and enjoined by the awful and infallible authority of Almighty God. Where, then, let me again ask, can there be found, in all the systems of human wisdom, such a basis of morality as in that faith which is the practical principle of the gospel of Christ? Shame on those scoffers, then—shame on those pretended sages! who affect to represent the faith of the gospel as a weak and superstitious credulity, unconnected

with genuine piety or purity of morals. Is it not the whole purpose of the doctrine of the Saviour to bring sinners to repentance; to lead the penitent to unfeigned holiness of life, and thereby to conduct them, finally, to the immortal perfection of their nature in the heavenly state? And where shall we find means so wisely and admirably adapted to this end? Has any philosophy, the candid unbeliever himself being judge, taught so pure and excellent a system, derived it from so sublime a source, enjoined it by sanctions so weighty and important; or added to it the force of obligations, and the persuasion of motives so transcendent in their nature, and fitted to interest all the best powers of the soul?

Let us attend, then, to the effects of these principles and these motives on the life and character of the real christian: motives and principles which habitually govern him in private and in public, in all the transactions of his soul with God, and in all his intercourse with the world. What fervent and supreme love of God! what a deep sense of obligation for redeeming mercy! what dutiful submission to the divine will! what a holy fear of offending! what cautious circumspection in shunning the scenes or the incentives of temptation! what constant vigilance against the frailties of the heart, and the surprises of the passions! And in his commerce with mankind, what justice! what sincerity! what truth! what meekness and humility of mind! never arrogant to give offence, always ready to forgive! what warm and active benevolence; ever prompt to do good to others as a common family of brethren, and mingling, with an amiable sympathy, in all their joys and griefs! Such is the portrait of a child of faith. With the highest reason, therefore, does the apostle rank this grace in dignity and ex-

cellence, along with hope, and that divine charity which is the fulfilling of the law, far above miracles and prophecy, and the knowledge of mysteries and languages, (and all those external aids of religion which served in the beginning for its establishment and extension in the world, but were afterwards to pass away), not because it implicitly receives the gospel, as its enemies pretend, without examination, but because it most effectually promotes the end of all true religion, the virtue and moral perfection of man. The proper end of religion is to deliver mankind from the dominion of sin and death, and to make them heirs of life and immortality by restoring them to the primitive purity and holiness of their nature. And faith, which leads through hope to perfect love, is the precious instrument by which she accomplishes this great design.

The preceding illustrations of the nature and effects of a sincere and evangelic faith, considered as a principle of practical holiness, will vindicate the high place which it holds in the catalogue of christian graces, and the superlative value which is set upon it in the christian system. *It works by love, and purifies the heart.* Its genuine offspring is the supreme love of God through Christ, and the universal love of human kind. It is the commencement of that pure and heavenly spirit of charity, which, unfolded and ripened in the regions of immortal love, will be the consummation of that *grace wherein we now stand.*

If such are the fruits of a sincere faith in the gospel of the Redeemer, whence is it that we so often see in the manners of christians so little of the distinguishing spirit and character of the disciples of Christ? Alas! is it not because our faith is merely a habit of assent springing

from general custom and example, and not from a heart deeply penetrated with the truths which concern our everlasting salvation? Is it not because the ordinary faith of christians consists rather in not having called in question, through a useful prejudice of education, the divine authority of the sacred scriptures, than in having embraced them with an enlightened conviction of their excellence and glory, and a profound persuasion of our own eternal interest in the incarnation, the death and resurrection of the ever-blessed Redeemer, who is their principal subject. This is that *historical faith*, to use the language of casuists, which fills our churches with nominal christians, but never creates sincere disciples; which replenishes the garden of God with trees which only put forth leaves and blossoms, but, blasted with a fatal barrenness, never produce a holy fruit.

But, if the evidence of the gospel is so luminous as justly to command the assent of the world, and the excellence of faith is so transcendent as a principle of holiness, whence is it that there are so many doubtful christians, so many open and avowed unbelievers? The answer to these questions is, unhappily, too palpable; it is, saith our blessed Saviour, because *they hate the light, neither will they come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved*. The gospel, making war upon their passions, and their vices, and proscribing their dearest pleasures, awakens against itself every prejudice of pride and self-love; rouses into hostility the passions it would subdue, and makes every pleasure an enemy to the truth.

Finally, christians, let us in the conclusion briefly review the topics whence we may exalt, with the apostle, the superior excellence of this grace, and derive from them some grounds on which we may try the sincerity

of our own faith. The sole purpose at which it aims is to promote holiness of life, and through the road of holiness, to lead the humble believer to a state of heavenly perfection. And where shall we find such admirable means to enlighten, regenerate and sanctify the heart? Faith unfolds in its genuine spirit, the sacred volume of inspiration, that precious fountain of divine wisdom. Faith erects in the view of the believer, the cross stained with the blood of the atonement, loaded with the sacrifice of our sins. And, in this blessed symbol of our salvation, we behold all that can convince and bring to unfeigned contrition the sinner; all that can inspire hope in the bosom of the penitent; all that can win the believer to obedience and love; all that can elevate the soul above the corrupting influence of the world. Not only does faith erect the cross, all-powerful to conquer sin, in the view of the believer, but is able, likewise, in some measure, to draw aside the veil which covers from our feeble vision the glorious and the awful mysteries of eternity. It penetrates to the throne of God, and beholds in their fountain that infinite power, and wisdom, and love which pervade the universe. It contemplates the mansions of everlasting rest and peace, of light and of joy, and assists the soul to raise her hopes, and desires and pursuits to that celestial purity which reigns in the kingdom and the immediate presence of God. Often it casts its view downwards into *the lake that burns with fire*, into the everlasting prisons of divine justice, and thence derives new motives to diligence in duty; new power to urge the soul farther from the confines of sin; to break the force of the passions, and destroy the seductive charms of temptation.—Yes, in whatever view you consider this fundamental grace of the gospel, it will

be found to be the most efficacious, as it is undoubtedly the most pure and sublime principle of a holy life.

Try the sincerity of your faith, then, by this test. What humility, what repentance, what contrition for sin, what fervent devotion, what love, ardent and supreme to him who comprehends all perfection in his own existence, what profound gratitude to him who became incarnate, and died for our salvation; and in the intercourse of society what integrity and uprightness, what purity of life and manners, what simplicity of heart, what candour, what benevolence, what meekness of temper, what readiness to forgive offences against ourselves as we hope to be forgiven of God, will distinguish the genuine power of faith in the heart of a true believer; from all those false and defective principles of piety, that dishonour religion in the pretended disciples of Christ! Christians! if your faith bear these decisive tests of sincerity, adore the grace by which it hath been wrought in your hearts. Open your souls more and more to its divine illuminations, till it give place, at length, to immediate vision, and be lost in the blessed light of heaven, and till hope, the child of faith, *enter with you into that within the veil.* AMEN.

SERMON II.

ON EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

Psalm lxxvi. 16.

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done
for my soul.

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SERMON II.

Psalm lxvi. 16.—Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

IF any subject, proper to be made known, be deeply impressed upon the mind, and supremely and delightfully engage the thoughts and affections, the tongue will declare it; and it will be the chief and most delightful topic of conversation. Of the truth of this remark, there can be no doubt. It is proved by the declaration of our Saviour, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” Matt. xii. 34; and it is proved by daily observation and experience. If therefore we be christians, we shall delight to meet with our fellow christians, and engage with them in conversation on experimental piety. And true religion must either be very low, or be entirely wanting in the heart of that person who seldom speaks on the subject, or extends not his conversation beyond the doctrines and forms of religion, or speaks in an uninterested and heartless manner. The scripture saints, as appears from their history, engaged much in religious conversation: This was especially the case with the pious king of Israel, who penned the greater part of the Psalms; in the Psalm which contains our text, he was so filled with a sense of the divine goodness towards him, that he invited the people of God to come and hear what the Lord had done for him, that they might be encouraged and strengthened from his experience, and might

unite with him in praising God for his goodness—"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."—

By those who fear God we are to understand his true people. The whole of true religion is frequently expressed, especially in the Psalms, by the fear of God. And indeed it would have been almost, if not altogether in vain, for the Psalmist to have called on any but the people of God to listen to the relation of his experience. They would either not have understood him, or would not have entered into the spirit of his conversation, or would have wondered why he spake in such strains on a subject which appeared to them unintelligible or uninteresting. But the people of God would understand his language, and would hear with delight and improvement this favoured and experienced servant of the Most High relate what the Lord had done for his soul.

Experimental religion is a very fruitful subject; and if our hearts have experienced the rich grace of God, we cannot be at a loss for topics of conversation. The subject is inexhaustible, and will employ with renewed delight and rapture the tongues of the redeemed throughout eternity. We may tell our fellow christians, that the Lord hath chosen, redeemed, called, justified, adopted, sanctified and comforted our souls. In these particulars you have the division of the ensuing discourse.

1. The true christian may say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare he hath" *chosen* "my soul." Before the foundation of the world, he thought of me, and while he passed by others, placed his love on me, and determined to redeem and save my soul. And he did this when he foresaw I would, when brought into being, break his laws, trample on his authority, render

myself vile, and justly deserve his eternal abhorrence and wrath. He then laid the plan of my salvation—he then registered my worthless name in the lambs book of life—he then chose me in Christ. And it is in consequence of this everlasting, electing love, that I now love him. As saith the Apostle John, “herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us;” and, “we love him because he first loved us,” 1 John iv. 10, 19. Here, in the eternal, electing love of God, is the origin of all that astonishing love towards us which he has since manifested, and which he will continue to manifest for ever: let us unite with the Apostle Paul in saying, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace,” Eph. xi. 3, 4, 5, 6.

2. The Christian may say, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare “he hath” *redeemed* “my soul.” Descended from an apostate parent, from him I derived a corrupt nature, and in him I became exposed to the curse of the divine law—in him I died. As soon as I became capable of moral action, the seeds of sin in my nature began to grow, and discover themselves. I became guilty of actual breaches of the divine law, and thus to original sin added actual transgressions. The divine holiness, justice, and truth, and the honor of the divine law, required that the curse of the law, which was eternal death, should be executed. And unless the

holiness of God could be illustrated, his justice satisfied, his truth vindicated, and the honor of his law maintained, I could not be saved. And where was the person to be found in heaven or upon earth who was competent to, or who would undertake the work of removing these difficulties, and providing salvation? No created being on earth or in heaven was competent to the work.

But, O astonishing love! "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my" perishing, lost "soul." He redeemed my soul! and this too, Oh! in what a wonderful and mysterious way! and at what an infinite price! "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," 1 Pet. i. 18. He so loved me that he gave his only Son to be my Saviour, and redeem my soul from eternal woe: and truly, "herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John iv. 10. When no less a person could effect the great work of the redemption of lost sinners, God spared not his own Son.—When the Son of God "looked, and there was none to help," "then said he, lo I come, to do thy will, O God," Isa. lxiii. 5. Heb. x. 7. In the fulness of time, a body was prepared for him and he stooped to a union with our nature. Though "being in the form of God," he "thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" he "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men," Phil. ii. 6, 7. He was "made under the law," which man had broken, and he fulfilled it. He submitted to the most humiliating circumstances, and the most trying indignities for me. He emptied himself of his glory that

I might be crowned with everlasting glory—He became a servant, that I might become a Son of God. “Though he was rich yet, for” my “sake he became poor, that” I “through his poverty might be rich,” 2 Cor. viii. 9. and become heir of all things—“He” was “made sin for” me “who knew no sin ; that” I “might be made the righteousness of God in him,” 2 Cor. v. 21. “He bare” my “sins in his own body on the tree,” 1 Pet. ii. 24. He received on his own head the stroke of divine justice due to me, and which must have forever sunk me, beneath its awful weight—“He was wounded for” my “transgressions, he was bruised for” my “iniquities ; the chastisement of” my “peace was upon him ; and with his stripes” I am “healed,” Isa. liii. 5.—His soul “was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” Matt. xxvi. 3, 8, that my soul might be filled with everlasting joy—He was in an agony and sweat blood in Gethsemane—He endured the hidings of his Father’s face, that I might dwell in the light of his countenance—He became “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” Phil. ii. 8, and died, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring” me “to God,” 1 Pet. iii. 18.—He descended into the grave that he might conquer death and the grave for me.

But who can describe his love ! It was infinite. Mortal strains cannot reach it ; yea, saints in heaven fall infinitely short of doing justice to this subject. This love has “a breadth, and length, and depth and height, which passeth” finite “knowledge,” Eph. iii. 18, 19.

Let us speak of his person. He is “the brightness of his” Father’s “glory, and the express image of his person,” Heb. i. 3. “His name” is “wonderful, counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of

peace," Isa. ix. 6.—He is "full of grace and truth," John i. 14. "Unto" them "which believe, he is precious," 1 Pet. ii. 7.—He is "the chiefest among ten thousand—He is altogether lovely," Cant. v. 10, 16.

Let us speak of his redemption. It is complete. He is God, and therefore able to save. He is man, and therefore fitted to obey, suffer, and die. He is God and man in one person. And thus the proper works of each nature are ascribed to the whole person; and the obedience and sufferings of the human nature derive an infinite efficacy from its union with the divine nature. The Father has accepted the satisfaction: I therefore need not fear, and do not fear to put my trust in him as an all-sufficient Saviour, and to commit the dearest interests of my immortal soul to his care.

3. The christian may say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare he hath" called "my soul."—He saw me lying in the same mass of ruin with the rest of mankind. My mind was carnal, and it was enmity against him. I loved sin. I was walking with the multitude the broad way, which leadeth to destruction. God called after me. He gave me pious parents, who early dedicated me to him, and put upon me the seal of his gracious covenant; and who endeavoured by their prayers, their instruction, their example, and their affectionate reproofs and corrections, to bring me to a saving acquaintance with God, and divine things. But, although my conscience under these means frequently rendered me uneasy, still I continued a stranger to God; I wandered from him and loved to wander.—He cast my lot in a christian land. He brought me within the hearing of a preached gospel. By this he called after me, day after day and year after year, instructing, inviting,

warning, reasoning and expostulating with me, threatening me, and lamenting over me. But when he called, I refused! when he stretched out his hand I disregarded. He poured out his spirit—many of my companions became serious I paused and became thoughtful. But still I loved sin, and soon said to my convictions, “go your way for this time, when I have a more convenient season, I will send for you.”—He visited me with alarming providences; death snatched my friends from me, and disease threatened his approach to me. I trembled, I wished to die the death of the righteous; but I refused to give God my heart. I besought him to remove his hand from me, and promised amendment. He heard me, and granted my request; but I forgot his goodness and my promises, and returned to carelessness and sin. My heart became harder, my mind blinder, and my conscience less tender. O wonder of patience! that I was born with and not cut down in my sins!

The Lord would not give me up; but continued to call me, and sent his Spirit to accompany the call with his Almighty, and irresistible influences. Then, like the prodigal, I came to myself, and saw my wretchedness. I saw myself walking the broad way to destruction. I heard the law of God pronouncing its curses against me; and felt a load of guilt pressing down my soul into woe. Then my anxiety was excited in earnest; and I cried, “what shall I do to be saved.”—I then feared that the day of grace might possibly be past—I read, and heard, and prayed, and reformed; but could find no comfort. I heard the law rigorously demanding satisfaction for the past, and perfect obedience in future. I heard of the gospel plan of salvation; but my mind was blind, I could not understand it. My heart was proud,

and unwilling to submit—it was filled with unbelief, and I could not by faith lay hold of an offered Saviour. Ignorant of the deceitfulness of my own heart, I thought I was willing to give myself away to God; but that he was unwilling to assist me to make the surrender, or to accept the dedication. But he led me by a way that I knew not—he humbled my proud heart—he made me willing in the day of his power—he put his spirit within me—he took away my stony heart and gave me a heart of flesh—he enlightened my mind—he renewed my heart—he discovered to me the suitableness of the Saviour, and his ability and willingness to save. My heart approved of his character, and I was enabled to believe in him, and to receive and rest upon him for salvation as he is offered in the gospel.

Then was my soul comforted. “Old things passed away, and all things became new.” The character of God appeared to me glorious and worthy of my highest love—his law appeared holy, just and good, and I loved it, and heartily desired to render obedience to it.—Sin appeared to me odious and I detested it, and loathed myself on account of it, and wondered how I could live in sin with delight, as I had done. Jesus appeared precious to me, “the chiefest among ten thousand,” and “altogether lovely.” He appeared a suitable, an able, willing, and compassionate Saviour; and I felt as though I could and did venture my soul upon him, and commit my everlasting interests into his hands; and I heard him in his word speaking peace to my troubled conscience, and promising to me everlasting life. O fellow-christian! what a season was this! after the gall and wormwood which I had been compelled to drink! It was a day of espousals—a season of love. “Then was my mouth

filled with laughter and my tongue with singing," Psalm cxxvi. 2. O the riches of divine grace! that such a wretch was arrested in his career to destruction, while he was stopping his ears against the voice of mercy! and hath been brought to a saving knowledge of himself, and of Christ!

Fellow-christian, you have experienced this same grace, though there may be shades of difference in the manner and circumstances of your call, and the exercises through which you have passed. Like me, you were once blind, but you now see—you were once dead, but you are now alive—you were once lost, but you are now found. Let us unite in admiring, adoring and loving God. Why were we guests? Why were we made to enter while there was room, while so many have perished, and are perishing in their sins? We must ascribe it to the free grace of God. To grace we will give the glory—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory," Psalms cxv. 1. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to thine own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," 2 Tim. i. 9.

4. The christian may say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare he hath" *justified* "my soul."—By the law of God I was condemned.—I had broken the divine law, and that awful denunciation "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10, was directed against me. By the law I was cursed and condemned to die eternally. How unspeakably dreadful was my condition! for who can endure the

tremendous wrath of Almighty God ! who can bear the ceaseless agonies of the second death !

But the Lord has justified my guilty soul. He has pardoned all my sins. By the operations of his holy spirit, enlightening my mind, and renewing my will, he enabled me to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ; and believing on him, my “ faith was counted for righteousness,” Rom. iv. 5. By faith I apprehended the Saviour, and renouncing every other hope, I trusted to his merits alone for salvation. In consequence, agreeably to his promise—not for any good works of mine ; for so far from having any good works to recommend me, I deserved God’s eternal wrath—not for any merit in my faith ; for this was the gift of God ;—but of his free mercy, he imputed the righteousness of Christ unto me ; and for the sake of this righteousness, he pardoned all my sins—he annulled the sentence of the law against me which had doomed me to eternal death—he delivered me from the law as a covenant of life, and placed me under the covenant of grace. And truly I can say with David, “ blesed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered ; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,” Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

Further, for the sake of Christ, and through union to him by faith, the Lord has not only pardoned my sins ; but he has done more—he has accepted me as righteous, and received me into favour. He has not only delivered my soul from hell ; but has also given me a title to everlasting life. What riches of grace has he manifested in the justification of such a guilty, hell-deserving sinner ! Let us unite in, more fervently, adoring and loving him, and unreservedly devoting ourselves to him.

5. The christian may say again, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare he hath" *adopted* "my soul"—He hath not only pardoned my sins and accepted me as righteous; but he hath also received me into the number of his children. He condescends to call me his son, and permits me to call him, my Father—He loves me with a paternal love—yea, with a love infinitely greater and more tender than an earthly parent is capable of. And he has admitted me to the privileges of this high relation. With the tenderness and care of a father, he instructs me, provides for, corrects and protects me. "He hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into my heart, crying, Abba, Father," Gal. iv. 6 "I have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the spirit of adoption, whereby I cry Abba, Father. The spirit itself beareth witness with my spirit that I am a child of God: and if a child, then an heir; an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ," Rom. viii. 15, 16, 17. and "all things are mine; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come," 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. Fellow-christian! what amazing love is this? The Lord hath not only pardoned me; but he hath received me into his special favour—He hath admitted me into his family; and this, too, not as a servant, but as a son; and he hath made me an heir of heaven, and of all things.—Truly we who are the subjects of this love, have reason to exclaim with the Apostle John—"Behold! what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:—now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is," 1 John iii. 1, 2.

6. The christian, speaking of his experience, may further say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare, he hath" *sanctified* "my soul." By nature I was totally polluted, estranged from God, unfit for communion with him and the enjoyment of him, and wholly indisposed, and unable to do any thing really good and acceptable in his sight. In regeneration, the spirit of God gave me a new nature: he implanted a principle of spiritual life within me: this was the beginning of that work of sanctification, which he has ever since carried on. Although grace was implanted in my soul, the seeds of sin still remained, and tempted me to disobedience, backsliding and apostacy. But through the influences of the spirit, accompanying the means of grace, I have been kept from yielding the dominion of my soul unto my corrupt propensities; and, although, alas! with shame I have reason to speak it, I have too often yielded to the corruptions of my own wicked heart, and dishonored my God and Saviour; yet I humbly hope, sin has been mortified in my soul, and its influence gradually weakened, that I have a more pure and deep hatred of sin, and that I am filled with an increasing desire to be entirely delivered from it.

But this is not all that the Lord has done in the work of sanctification: he has by his spirit, not only mortified sin, but he has preserved and quickened grace, and caused me to "grow in grace," through the operations of his spirit. I humbly hope I have been enabled, not only more and more to die unto sin, but also to rise unto newness of life, and live unto righteousness, although I was regenerated, and then had a principle of spiritual life implanted in my soul; yet if God had left me then to myself, I should soon have relapsed, and yielded the

dominion of my soul to sin : without divine aid I could do nothing : I could not maintain what I had already received, much less advance in holiness. I needed continual communications from the fountain of divine influences ; and these communications, blessed be God, I have received. The Lord has preserved alive the seed of grace, which, by his spirit, he at first implanted in my heart ; and has caused me to grow in grace and the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, though alas ! with shame I have reason to confess it, I have not advanced according to the means which I have enjoyed. The Lord has also given me grace and increased and strengthened this grace, according to my necessities. When I have looked at my course of my duties, as marked out in the word of God, I have been ready to say, if this be the way to heaven, who then can be saved ? “ who is sufficient for these things ? ” But in the Lord I have found strength equal to my day. His strength has been made perfect in my weakness : and when I have been most weak—when I have most felt my own weakness, and distrusted myself and trusted in the Lord, I have been the strongest and have been enabled the most faithfully, and comfortably to perform my duty. Under trials at the approach of which I trembled, and which I knew not how to meet, his grace has been sufficient for me—He supported me by affording grace suited to suffering times. When I looked at my enemies—when I saw within me a numerous host of powerful corruptions—when I beheld without, the world presenting innumerable snares to draw me away from the path of duty—when I considered that Satan, endued with subtilty, and filled with malice, “ as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour,” 1 Pet. v. 8, and that I had to “ wrestle against

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," Eph. vi. 12. When I looked around and saw how many who once bid fair for heaven had been cast down by these enemies, and destroyed or wounded—when I considered how many who had appeared to begin in the Spirit, and for a time to run well, had ended in the flesh, I trembled, and was ready to say, how can a feeble, helpless worm ever advance and hold out to the end, amidst such numerous foes, before whom, many who appeared much more likely to stand and conquer, have fallen? Surely I shall one day fall by the hand of mine enemies. But fellow-christian! to the glory of God be it, spoken, he has strengthened my soul; and weak and helpless as I am in myself, he has enabled me to encounter these numerous foes, and obtain the victory; and here I may and will set up my "Ebenezer, saying hitherto hath the Lord helped me."

It is true, and with deep self-abasement would I confess it, I have too often been ensnared by the world, I have too often yielded to my corrupt propensities, I have too often listened to the suggestions of the wicked one, and I have suffered severely for it. But when I have been thus ensnared, and have thus wandered and stumbled, either forgetful of the directions of my heavenly Father, I had become less watchful, and less frequently visited the throne of grace, or was less earnest in my supplications there; or, unmindful of where my strength lay, and trusting too much to myself, I went forward in my own strength. But, forever praised be his name! when I have wandered he has humbled me, and then restored my soul; when I have fallen he has chastised me, and abased me in my own eyes, and

when I have cried to him, has raised me up again, and established my goings. He has forgiven the past and given me new strength. And from past experience of what he has done for me, I confidently hope he will enable me to hold out to the end, and will finally bring me off conqueror and more than conqueror over all my spiritual foes. Come polluted, weak, and trembling fellow-christian, and hear what the Lord has done for me, polluted, weak, and helpless too—He has mortified sin—He has preserved, increased, and strengthened grace :—in six troubles he has been with me, and in seven he has not forsaken me ; and from my experience, be encouraged to trust in the Lord—trust in the Lord and you need not fear.

7. Once more the christian may say, “ Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare, he hath” comforted “ my soul.” According to his word I have found that wisdom’s “ ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace,” Prov. iii. 17. He has given me “ joy and peace in believing,” Rom. xv. 13. He has declared himself to be reconciled unto me, and has made my own conscience to be at peace with me. He has given me a hope of glory, which has supported and rejoiced me in my darkest hours ; he has granted me seasons of communion with himself, when my soul has been filled with inexpressible comfort, and joy unspeakable, and full of glory. In every trying situation, his precious promises have been appropriate, and a never-failing source of comfort ; they have been “ my songs in the house of my pilgrimage ;” in seasons of darkness, desertion, and spiritual distress, he has comforted me with such precious promises as these :—“ Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,”

Psalm xlvii. 11. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted," Mat. v. 4. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," Ps. cxxxvi. 5. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer," Isaiah liv. 7, 8. Under afflictions he has comforted me with such promises and declarations as these:—"when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee—when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee," Is. xliii. 2. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not. He" chastened us "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Heb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 10, 11. When I have been distressed with a sense of the difficulty of christian duties, he has comforted me by saying, "my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Cor. xii. 9. Where my spiritual enemies have appeared formidable, and have terrified me, he has said to me, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," Mat. xi. 28. "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled,"

1 Pet. iii. 14. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. The Lord is my helper," Heb. xiii. 5, 6. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed, for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness," Is. xli. 10. When I have looked forward, and considering my own weakness, and the numerous snares laid for me, have trembled, lest I should one day fall, and at last come short of that rest after which my soul breathed, he has comforted me with promises of perseverance, saying, "my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand," John x. 27, 28. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. viii. 38, 39. Under all the trials of life the Lord has comforted me, with the declaration, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," Rom. viii. 28.

Thus we have attended to something of what the christian may say the Lord has done for his soul ; and looking forward, another wonderful theme for religious conversation is presented to the christian ; and he may speak of what he expects the Lord will yet do for his soul, viz. that he will glorify his soul. He may say, "there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at his appearing," 2 Tim. iv. 8. Soon I hope to enter into the rest which remaineth to the people of God, Heb. iv. 9,

and to be put in possession of “an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven,” 1 Pet. i. 4. Soon I hope to “inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world,” Matt. xxv. 34—to become a resident in “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” Heb. xi. 10—and to wear a crown of “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” 2 Cor. iv. 17. Soon I hope to “sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven,” Matt. viii. 11—and to join “the general assembly, and church of the first born, which are written in Heaven,” Heb. xii. 23. Soon I hope to be entirely freed from sin, and to serve my God with a perfect heart. Soon I hope to join the Redeemed in the song of Moses and the Lamb; and soon I hope to see my God and Saviour as he is. Fellow-christian! what a prospect is this! and what reason have we to join with all our hearts, in adoring and loving the Lord who has promised such blessings to us!

In the conclusion of this discourse, we may observe from what has been said, that christians need never be at a loss for conversation on experimental religion when they meet. The subject is inexhaustible. Even eternity will not exhaust it. And considering what great things the Lord hath done for his people, how can we belong to that number, if we seldom, or never when we meet, speak of these things to his praise and glory. Even the real people of God engage too seldom, and with too much indifference on this subject. Let them be humbled and excited by this subject more frequently to engage, when they meet, in conversation on experimental religion. Thus they will shew forth the praise and glory of God, and mutually edify and animate each other.

Another observation which is obviously suggested by this subject is, that salvation, in every step of it, is all of grace. The foundation stone was laid by grace, the superstructure is raised by grace, and the "head-stone will be brought forth with shoutings, crying grace, grace unto it," Zech. iv. 7. Let christians be deeply impressed with this truth; let it ever keep them humble, and cause them to say, "by the grace of God, I am what I am," 1 Cor. xv. 10; and to ascribe all the glory of their salvation to free and sovereign grace. Grace will undoubtedly be the theme of heaven. Merit in the creation, as the cause in the least degree, of their salvation, will never be mentioned there by the redeemed.—Even now let their song be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory," Ps. cxv. 1. And "unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever—AMEN." Rev. i. 5, 6.

SERMON III.

AN ORDINATION SERMON.

Rev. ii. 10.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

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SERMON III.

Revelation ii. 10.—Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

“**BE** thou faithful unto death.” This charge is from the **F**irst and the **L**ast—from him who was dead, and is alive. In the *gospel* of John we see the Lord Jesus a man, conversing with men; *there* we see him agonize in the garden, expire on Golgotha, and laid in the tomb. *Here*, in the *Revelation* of John, we see him raised from the dead and in glory; with a countenance shining as the sun in his strength, walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, or churches, and holding the stars, the ministers of the churches, in his right hand. *Here*, he speaks and acts as having conquered the grave, triumphed over death and hell, and, having angels, principalities, and powers in subjection, and exercising supreme and universal sway. This charge, then, is enforced by the highest authority. It is directed to the angel, or minister of the church of Smyrna, and through him comes down to these ends of the earth, and to every minister of the gospel;—*be thou faithful unto death*—with fidelity perform all the duties of thy solemn office, perseveringly through life, and to the parting with life itself, should thy trials reach so far; and I will give thee a crown—a *crown of life*.

We have in the text, a solemn charge, delivered to ministers of the gospel, by the *F*irst and the *L*ast, that is,

by THE ETERNAL—"be thou faithful unto death"—and, a gracious promise of an infinite reward to those who shall faithfully execute this charge—"I will give thee a crown of life."

In discoursing on this solemn subject, I propose, through divine assistance,

I. To consider some qualifications which are eminently needful in the faithful execution of this charge.

II. How it must be executed.

III. The danger of being unfaithful.

IV. The infinite reward of those who shall be found faithful.

First, I am to consider some qualifications which are eminently needful in the faithful executions of this charge.

And here, PIETY and PRUDENCE may be considered as holding the first rank. A good natural genius suitably improved by the knowledge of language, and of the sciences, is needful. The apostles, who were at first illiterate, were taught in the school of Christ, and miraculously endowed with knowledge from on high, before they were sent forth as heralds of the cross. Neither can we believe, that God ever so sanctified ignorance, as to make it a light to the world, or a safe guide to those who sit in darkness. But, *piety* or *real religion*, is eminently needful for a minister of the gospel. Without this he will be likely to pay but little regard to the solemn duties of his office. And if he discharge them at all, how can it be from a good conscience towards God, respect to his glory, or zeal for the salvation of souls? The great spring of his actions must be *self*—a principle very unsuitable to the pure nature and design of his office, and very remote from that excellent spirit which

ought to rule in his heart, and preside in all his actions. It is religion alone that disposes and qualifies us to aim at the glory of God in all, or in any thing, that we do. This attaches us to the gospel, to its doctrines, and laws, as the power of God, and wisdom of God unto salvation—this discovers its divine glories, and renders it precious—engages us to commend it with zeal, and makes us truly concerned for its success. A minister, who faithfully discharges his trust, will not only have the doctrines of the gospel proceeding from his lips, but also shining from his life : he will *live religion*. A lively and abiding sense of its important realities, will be of unspeakable consequence as to the success of his ministry—it will have the happiest effect upon every part of it, and give life and spirit to the whole—it will dispose him to take heed to his conduct and conversation—inspire him with holy watchfulness and caution—and, render him meek and gentle, kind and condescending to all. It will awaken the powers of the man, and put in motion all the springs of action ;—hence, he will pray with fervor, read with diligence, preach the word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. *Religion* is that inward savour in the character of ministers, which makes them the *salt* of the earth ; it is, that oil of grace whence they become *lights* in the world ; and, without which, they are in danger of being not only useless, but *noxious*.

The second qualification mentioned as being eminently needful, for the faithful execution of the ministerial office, is *prudence*.¹ Here, the wisdom of the serpent, and the harmlessness of the dove should be duly blended. Indiscretion in conduct and conversation will low-

er, and even sink the reputation of a minister, dishonor his office, and either lessen or destroy his usefulness.

The want of prudence, will cloud the brightest talents and eclipse the most shining abilities; no knowledge of language, no degree of science, not even religion itself, seems to be sufficient to compensate this loss. But, infidelity holds up its head, and religion mourns and languishes, while its advocates are daily exposing themselves by their follies. O! how highly necessary is it, that the ambassadors of Christ, who negotiate a momentous treaty of peace, between the offended majesty of heaven and earth and his rebellious subjects, should exercise the utmost circumspection, and carefully observe the different circumstances of time and place, of character and tempers, lest sinners should perish—the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom suffer—the honour of God be sullied, and the great design of their mission frustrated by their own indiscretion.

Secondly, We proceed to consider, how a minister must execute this solemn charge.

Here, we are not to suppose that the whole of our duty is confined to the pulpit, to the house of God, or to the congregation where we stately labour; but, that it extends, in a degree, to the presbytery, the synod, the general assembly to which we belong, and, even to the church of Christ, yet more extensively. Let no one, then, suppose that he faithfully performs his duty, while he neglects it in any of these departments.

At present we have time only to treat of the pulpit performances, which indeed contain the most important part of the minister's work.

1st. He must preach with *plainness and simplicity of style*. This may not be altogether calculated to please

the fancy, and to offer incense to our own vanity, yet, it is well suited to inform the judgment, and reach the heart. And indeed, it must be considered as a sad symptom on hearers, when they are disposed to have their fancies pleased in serious and solemn subjects; and a symptom not less sad on preachers, when they make it their business to gratify this disposition. As well may the physician undertake to cure a fever, and bind up a broken bone, with fine set music, as the minister to heal the disease of sin, and bind up the broken hearted, with flowers of language or strokes of wit. Dare he hope to receive a *crown* for his fidelity, who coldly entertains his hearers with *accomplished trifles*, while he ought in the most healing and animated manner, to proclaim to them those great truths of the gospel, which justly arrest the attention of angels and of men! There is a natural and commanding eloquence arising from a deep sense of the subject, from an ardent love for souls, and from zeal for the glory of God, wherein the speaker forgets himself, that of all others, is the most powerful rhetorick: and I believe these are the discourses which God usually owns, and condescends to bless.

2d. A minister must be awfully careful, that he may be able to say with the apostle, “I have not shunned to declare unto you, all the counsel of God;” that, at parting from his people, he may again make the apostle’s language his own, and say, “I am pure from the blood of all men.” To be charged with the blood of men is, awful, but, to be charged with the blood of their souls, and that by the eternal God, before whom we are soon to stand, carries something in it which language is too feeble to express.

To avoid this, we must endeavour to awaken those who securely sleep in sin; teach bold transgressors the error of their ways, and danger of their state; show them the wrath that hangs over their heads, and the destruction which lies beneath them: and, in the most persuasive and pathetic manner, beseech them to flee for refuge, before the storm of divine indignation overtake them, and they welter in flames which can never be quenched. We are also to bring to them the free offers and precious promises of the gospel; set before them the heavenly rest, and paradise of joy—the crown that can never fade, and the kingdom that can never be moved; but above all, we are, if possible, to constrain them by the love and sufferings of a Saviour. We are to set forth Jesus Christ crucified before them, pouring forth his blood in making atonement for sin, and pouring out his soul in making intercession for transgressors. Yes, like Philip in Samaria, we must preach CHRIST to our people. We must open up his boundless fulness and all-sufficiency, his rich grace and infinite compassion as a Saviour—show them their own insufficiency, and the defect of every other refuge, and the last necessity which they are under of depending only on him for life and salvation. We must make known the terms of their interest in him, and acceptance with God through him; in a word, we must, comparatively, neither know nor preach any thing among them, *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*. To him all the lines of our discourses should bend, and in him terminate. We must also lead weary and heavy laden sinners to this Saviour, support weak believers; defeat the dangerous errors of the times, and, in fine, do all that is in our power, which tends to turn

men from the ways of sin and death, lead them in the way of life, and bring them to glory.

3d. A minister must exercise the utmost *diligence* in the execution of this charge.

They greatly mistake their business, who enter into the gospel ministry, that they may lead a life of indolence and ease. For, as it is a work which requires the most diligent and laborious application, so it will be a most awful thing for the stewards of Christ's household, to receive that reprimand from the Judge, "thou slothful and wicked servant." We must therefore meditate on these things, carefully seek furniture for the great work, and give ourselves wholly unto it. For we are charged before God, to be instant in season and out of season; we are to think no pains too much, no care or application too great, which are within our reach, to promote the vast design of our ministry. We are even to travail in birth, to see Christ formed in the souls of our hearers. A great work is before us, in our study, in personal converse with our hearers, and in our public administrations, enough to engage the whole man; and, the infinite importance of the business, with the dread account which we are to give, are enough to challenge our most diligent activity, and absorb the whole soul.

4th. We must preach with *pathetic earnestness*, and *affectionate solemnity*.

We watch for souls—for souls of *infinite* value, whose salvation is yet depending, and now hangs in awful suspense. And can we with cold indifference look on and see the extreme hazard which those committed to our care are running; some by building their salvation on the bubbles of their own fancy; some, on the sandy

foundation of their own merits, while others, intoxicated with the allurements of the world and pleasures of sense, carelessly void of reflection, are treading on the breaking brink of eternity, liable, every step they take, to be lost—lost to this world, and to all worlds! “Passion would be reason, and transport temper here!” To lull hearers to sleep with languid essays in such a situation as this, and on matters of everlasting consequence, which might overwhelm their souls, or transform them into statues of attention, is a shocking inconsistency! It is inconsistent with the orator and christian, but most of all, inconsistent with the faithful ambassador of Christ, and the solemn charge given in our text. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, and the value of souls, we must persuade men. We must place before them their danger, and their remedy—bring to their view the *safety* of appearing in the righteousness of Christ, and the *danger* of depending on their own, which, like the yielding air, or breaking bubble, will vanish from them in the time of their greatest need. We must, with the utmost fervour of affection and expression, warn them by all the thunders of the law, and beseech them by all the grace of the gospel, to come away from every evil course, and every refuge of lies, and rest their whole salvation on Christ Jesus—be reconciled to God, accept of his mercy without delay, and not *wrest* from his almighty arm, that punishment which he is unwilling to inflict.

5th. To be *faithful*, ministers of the gospel must preach *experimentally*.

We should be able to say with the apostle, “that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus

Christ." This would render our labours pleasing to ourselves, profitable to our hearers, and approved of our God. And, although they may be ministers of Christ, their office acknowledged by him, (even *Judas* was an apostle), and, though they may be made instrumental of good to others, who have never felt the power of the divine life in their own souls; for, "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us;" yet, they who preach an unknown Christ, cannot be acquainted with the methods of grace, and variety of exercise, which souls meet in their way to heaven; and therefore, must be poor guides to others in a way which they know not themselves. And how inconceivable must be the disappointment and anguish of our souls, if, in the last great day, both our ministry and our people should rise in judgment against us, and we find, when too late, that while we had preached to others we ourselves were cast away.

6th. The charge, *be thou faithful unto death*, includes and enjoins *perseverance* through life.

Having put our hand to the plough, we are not to look back. After we have in the presence of God, and of the Lord Jesus, devoted ourselves to this great work, and have received the solemn charge, we are not to shrink from the undertaking, nor abandon the cause on account of the labours or dangers which may attend it; but, relying on divine aid, we are with diligence, with self-denial, and with fortitude to persevere—to endure labours however hard, and withstand opposition however formidable. And in doing this, a supreme love to Christ is of the first importance. Is *diligence* needful? Love will set in motion every spring, and awaken every faculty of the soul, and engage us to meditate, to read, to pray, and to fill up each portion of time with duty. Is *self-*

denial needful? Love stoops to any terms or to any condition; it was this that brought the Son of God from Heaven to earth—from a crown to a cross, and from a throne to a grave, that he might redeem us, and our fellow-men from death: and shall it not bring us to stoop down and take up the cross for him, and in his cause? And is the *fortitude* and *courage* of the lion sometimes needful? There is nothing like love, to inspire with this. This love, not only raised the ancient reformers and heralds of the cross above the fear of man, but hath enabled even delicate women and young children to smile at danger, despise death, and court the crown of martyrdom.

The gospel history, in the life and character of Paul, affords a pre-eminent example of faithfulness, of labours, of sufferings, and perseverance in the ministerial work. Having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, he possessed great knowledge and reputation, and had a fair prospect of rising to places of honour and profit. But, he gave up his earthly prospects, gave up his ease, parted from his friends, and entered upon a course of labours and perils, an affecting account of which is given by himself; yet, saith he, “*none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus.*” Paul, in the fullest sense of the word, was *faithful unto death*; he sealed his ministry with his blood. And when the time of his departure was at hand, and he ready to be offered, he could confidently say “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which

the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.”

Thirdly—We now proceed to consider the *danger* of being unfaithful.

1st. Unfaithfulness in our ministry, will be dangerous to the people committed to our care—dangerous to their souls—dangerous to their spiritual peace in this world—and to their everlasting peace and happiness in the world to come—and will leave them exposed to the wrath of God—to the dreadful penalty of his holy law—to the stroke of the sword of divine justice, and to final condemnation and eternal death.

It is a tragical and affecting spectacle, to see men die by human laws; but how much more so must it be, to see them led forth to that last execution, and hear the beginning of those cries and wailings which must never have an end! And oh! how must these cries pierce our souls, should it appear that they, and the agonies from which they arise, were all occasioned by our neglect or our unfaithfulness!

And this danger is brought *near* by the shortness and uncertainty of life. How short is the space, and how few are the steps, between our hearers and the eternal world! How frequently are we called to see them on a dying bed, or to attend their bodies to the grave, while the soul has already appeared before God, and received her doom! Their danger, therefore, is near, even at the door, and loudly and solemnly calls upon us to exercise towards them the utmost care and faithfulness. And, more especially, when it is further considered that our life is as great an uncertainty as theirs, and that death is reaching forth his cold hand, to stop their ears from hearing, and our mouths from speaking, and to hasten both them and us before our final Judge!

2d. Unfaithfulness in their office is awfully dangerous to Ministers themselves, as it brings the guilt of perjury before God, on their own souls. The vows of God are on them; they have been charged before him, and by the Son of God; and they have, in the presence of both, and before angels and men, solemnly engaged, faithfully to execute their sacred trust. It was a very aggravating circumstance of the falsehood told by Ananias, that it was spoken, not to *men*, but to *God*. And, the oath of fidelity in the ministry, is, with much formality and solemnity, made *before God, and to God*. Therefore, a violation of it will be an offence committed in the presence of, and against a being of infinite perfections and glory, and will infer a malignity, to which we do not venture to fix a bound, and must expose to a punishment equally boundless!

The neglect of souls must be very eriminal in all, but eminently so in those who have deliberately and publicly taken upon themselves the charge of them. In this case, it would not only be perjury in us, but extreme cruelty to them, and base treachery to our Lord, who has bought them with his blood, and committed them to our care.

Unfaithfulness in our sacred trust, will not only incur the guilt of perjury, but, will also bring the blood of souls upon us. God has placed us as watchmen upon the walls of Zion, and hath declared, “If thou dost not speak, to warn the wicked of his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.” God hath manifested the high value which he sets on souls, by the vast expense which he hath been at for their redemption. The mighty effort of the wisdom of God in concerting the scheme of salvation—

his great love in giving his only begotten Son to execute it, taken in connection with all the Redeemer's labours, with his sufferings and death, loudly proclaim to all worlds, that, in the estimation of the eternal God, souls are of *infinite* value. How fearful a thing then, must it be, to have this same God charge the loss of them to us, and require their blood at our hands! Then, happy Paul who could say, "I am pure from the blood of all men," and happy are those, who can make his assertion their own.

Fourthly. Let us now consider the *reward* of those who shall be found faithful.

Be thou faithful unto *death*, and I will give thee a crown of life. These words plainly intimate that the complete fulfilment of the promise is not to be expected in the present world: for, the crown of *life*, is to be given after *death*. Yet, the Lord Jesus, who liveth and was dead, hath been graciously pleased, by his gospel, to draw aside the veil of darkness, which curtains round the eternal world, and thereby enables us, like Moses, to take a Pisgah view of that promised inheritance, which lies beyond the Jordan of death.

God doth not give either his ministers or people their inheritance in this world, where they continue but a few days, and where all, like travellers in a common inn, bad as well as good, are promiseuously entertained. But, he gives his children their portion in that better world, where he himself is, and where they are to have their settled abode, and everlasting rest—where the faithful and fervent Paul wears his crown, and where the holy apostles possess their thrones; there also those who are now faithful ministers of Christ, are to look for, and to receive their crown of life—CROWN OF LIFE!—These

great and highly figurative expressions are worthy of our most serious and careful consideration, that we may obtain some idea of the vast and comprehensive blessings contained in them. The usual language of mortals was never intended to express the majestic realities of eternity, it was designed for lower objects. Hence, the happiness and glory of heaven are illustrated by a crown, by a throne, and by a kingdom, or by such things on earth, as are most esteemed and valued among men. These similitudes are used, because we find nothing else that can afford us a more exalted idea of the supreme excellency and value of that glorious state. For, a crown is the highest wish of ambition, in which, the most aspiring mind proposes to rest.

But an earthly crown, however rich with gems and gold, and resplendent in the eyes of mortals, and admired by them as glorious and great, yet, must be but a dim and feint emblem of that dignity and dominion, of that glory and immortality, which are connected with, and give infinite value to the heavenly diadem, which not only exceeds what earthly monarchs possess, but goes vastly beyond the utmost reach of our imagination, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Hence, a crown being too feint an emblem fully to represent the heavenly glory, *life*, is added—a *crown of life*, which increases and completes the idea. And, is expressive of *an endless life, in the heights of perfection, of happiness, and of glory*, in the eternal world. This will suppose, or include perfect freedom from all sin—from all temptation to sin—and, from all the penal consequences of sin. Yes, when the faithful servant shall have finished his

course and put off his tabernacle of clay, he will also put off the body of sin, and enter into rest, into the joy of his Lord, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.—There, also, the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary find rest—there the roaring lion can never come, nor the tempting serpent ever enter—there no eye weeps, no tongue ever complains; for, God shall wipe away all tears from every eye, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things shall have passed away.

The comprehensive reward will also include the *perfection of our natures*. Here we are in the infancy of human nature; we see as through a glass darkly, and know only the surfaces of things—there we shall see face to face, and know as we are known, in a clear, intuitive, and comprehensive manner. O! how ravishing will the contemplation of the mysteries of divine providence, the riches of divine grace, and the works of Almighty power be to a glorified saint!—But, how much more ravishing will the clear view of God himself, with all his boundless and attractive perfections, be to us, when made strong by immortality, and able to bear the dazzling lustre of so resplendent an object. And above all, what transcendent felicity and perfection will arise from the transforming nature of this view! “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,” saith the word of God—and, “we all with open face beholding the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” These words express an increasing conformity, a rising from one degree of glory to another degree of glory, in the scale of perfection; and if we may suppose the increase to continue—to continue

through eternity, then what imagination, what thought can reach the glorious height of perfection, to which a saint will at some period arrive !

Another part of the blessedness contained in the reward promised to those who shall be faithful, may be considered as resulting from the *glory and beauty of the place* prepared for them. The Lord Jesus, when about to leave the world, and enter into glory, told his disciples, that *he was going to prepare a place for them*. This is mentioned, as an object of his special attention and care, one which lay near his heart. Then, if in the space of six days, *by his speaking the word*, this vast system of creation rose into existence, with all that order and beauty, which we behold with so much astonishment and delight—then, what must we suppose *that mansion* to be, where he hath bestowed his most curious workmanship, and with divine skill prepared for those whom he loves, and whom he delights to honour ? It is called *an house* not made with hands ; and is so glorious, that the temple built by Solomon, covered with gold and precious stones, and enriched with the wealth of nations, was but its type, or shadow. It is also called *a city* ; but then it is a city, of which the new Jerusalem, described by the beloved apostle John, was only a shadow—“ I John,” said he, “ saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband.” The length, and the breadth, and the height of it were equal, each being twelve thousand furlongs, or, fifteen hundred miles ; the walls of it were jasper, and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass ! If all this is no more than the *shadow* ! then, what must we think of the *substance*—of heaven itself, the court of the eternal King, the seat of

his glorious empire, the royal palace, and throne of our incarnate God! from which all evil is banished, and where light, and life, and joy, forever dwell. And *is this the place* where our blessed Saviour receives his faithful ministers and people? Hear his own gracious words; “and if,” saith he, “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Doth not every pious soul reply, *Lord it is enough?*

This happiness may be considered as further increased, by the *society and converse of the heavenly inhabitants.*

The pious and faithful of every age, and of every nation, will all meet in that blessed abode. Then, if we shall be so happy as to be found among them, we shall *there* sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob—we shall see the company of the Prophets—of the Holy Apostles—and the great company of the blessed Martyrs—*there*, we shall again see those who have been very dear to us, and have slept in Jesus, whether of our brethren in the ministry, of the people of our charge, or from our own families—we shall again enjoy their company, their conversation, and affections, and shall join our hearts and voices with theirs, in loving God without measure, and in praising him without end. But above all, *there* we shall see our Saviour and our God face to face, and shall satiate ourselves with the fulness of joy that is in his beatific presence, and in that ocean of pleasure, which is at his right hand for evermore.

Lastly, that which gives completeness to this happiness—to this great reward, is, its *duration.* The happiness is without intermission, and will be without end. It is an everlasting crown, the glory of which can never fade, it is an undefiled and incorruptible inheritance, re-

served in heaven, which can suffer no diminution by being possessed through eternity.—O, vast and boundless eternity, how dost thou at once astonish and delight us! thou addest new lustre to the crown of life, and givest new accents to the songs of the blessed, while they can in a triumph of holy security, say this happiness is endless, and this God is our God forever and ever.

The improvement follows :

1st. We cannot avoid reflecting upon the greatness and dread importance of the ministerial work—a work which hath for its object the salvation of souls, the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the glory of God—objects, which in their nature are infinite and reach to eternity! Who are sufficient for these things? Could we speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, we might tremble in approaching this sacred and awful work. What gifts and graces, what wisdom and prudence, what faithfulness and diligence, yea, what zeal for the glory of God, love to Christ, and compassion for souls are here needful! But our consolation is, that we serve a good master, who hath promised that as our days are, so shall our strength be. Had we no strength to depend on beyond our own, no encouragement but from human assistance, we might sit down in disconsolate despair, and utter the passionate language of Moses, “O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send,” for thy servant is insufficient for these things. But our sufficiency is of God, we have his divine promise for our security and consolation—“I am with you always.” With our Saviour by our side, we shall have nothing to fear. If he go with us into our study, into the pulpit, and among our people, we shall not only have easy, but joyful work. If he continue

with us always, we shall have light in darkness, strength in weakness, defence in dangers, victory over all our enemies, and finally, shall obtain the crown that can never fade, and the triumph that can never end.

2d. This subject leads us to look with trembling, to the last end of those who shall be found unfaithful in the sacred office. When conscience, and when God who is greater than conscience shall witness, that they had taken upon themselves the charge of souls, and had neglected them—that instead of awakening sinners from their slumbers, and warning them of their danger, they had lulled them to sleep by smooth and delusive words—that instead of preaching Christ Jesus, and him crucified, they had preached themselves, and offered incense to their own vanity—and, that instead of leading their people to the Redeemer's blood for cleansing, to his righteousness for clothing, and to his great salvation for life, they had left them exposed to wrath and eternal death: and, therefore, that their blood, the blood of their souls was found on them, and required from them. Surely, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for vain and vicious, or, for graceless and unfaithful ministers of the gospel.

Finally, let us admire and adore the grace and bounty of our Redeemer and our God, towards those ministers who shall be faithful unto death. He hath made them “stewards of the manifold grace of God,” and, “workers together with HIM.” And, to support their faith and hope, animate their zeal, and *insure* their fidelity and perseverance in the sacred work, he hath promised his presence—that he himself will be with them always, and that his *grace* shall be sufficient for them: and

then, to complete his bounty, he engages to crown his own gift—to crown that *grace* with glory.

O, how *short* are our labours, when compared to the *eternal* rest, and how *light* are our sufferings and services, when laid in the balance with the *eternal* weight of glory, and crown of life !

If the latter end of wicked and unfaithful ministers of the gospel shall be awful ; if they shall be followed with uncommon wrath, and be sunk down deep into misery, on the other hand, those who shall be found faithful and successful, will be raised high in heaven—brought near the throne, and wear a resplendent crown. “They that be *wise* (skilful teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the STARS, forever and ever.”—AMEN.

SERMON IV.

**THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH IN PRODUCING
HOLY OBEDIENCE.**

Hebrews xi. 17.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON IV.

Hebrews xi. 17.—“ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.”

WHEN we read, in the book of Genesis, the history of the transaction here referred to, our hearts feel a deep interest in all the circumstances of that transaction, and are affected by some of the most powerful and tender emotions that our nature knows.

We wonder at the strangeness of the command, and at the implicit obedience of the Patriarch. We admire his resolution and firmness to engage in such a transaction, and the perseverance and constancy which could hold out during a three days' travel, and, after every opportunity for reflection and for the working of parental tenderness and love, could yet endure and be prepared for the finishing of the heart-rending catastrophe. We love the filial meekness, obedience and submission of Isaac ; and perhaps we weep over his honest simplicity ; or venerate the character of a father, who could so command the confidence and respect of his son. We readily think we see a certain kind of piety reigning throughout the whole transaction, and our hearts are melted in grief and tenderness—in love and admiration.

Yet, in all this, there is no regard to that true character of piety which distinguishes the transaction : and, with all our sympathies and feelings, we discover nothing that would seem to have power to prepare us for

such a scene, or perhaps even to excuse altogether the conduct of the Patriarch, and satisfactorily to account to our minds for so strange an occurrence.

Reviewing the subject more at leisure, we may revolve in our minds curious questions of the means by which Abraham was assured that God required the sacrifice at his hand; and we may indulge ingenious speculations about the interfering of the mother, and the means by which the son was brought to yield to his father's purpose. But all these speculations would only lead us farther from that scriptural view of the transaction, in which we are called to regard it.

It is related to us in the scriptures with plainness and precision, in all the circumstances needful for us to know; and in the text the Holy Ghost teaches us to consider it, *a work of faith*, eminently illustrative of that pure principle of obedience, without which "it is impossible to please God."

It was that faith which was imputed to Abraham for righteousness, that prompted him to obey, and that supported him in so trying a duty.

We are therefore most deeply interested to consider and "see how faith wrought with his works."

The two great efficient principles of duty, by which men profess to be influenced, are Faith, and Reason. While some zealously contend for the sufficiency of reason alone, it is yet evident to all, how much the scriptures insist on faith as necessary to our acceptance with God in our services.

Reason may afford very strong convictions of duty, and may influence men to a very considerable extent in a seeming respect for God's authority, and obedience to

his will. But all this comes far short of what is, in the scriptures, called “the obedience of faith.”

Every one who acknowledges the Being of God, must have some convictions of duty towards him. The heathen have often had very deep convictions of this kind; and much more may it be expected in christian countries, where his name and authority are declared by his word, that reason shall teach men to fear him, and in certain things, to profess obedience to him.

We are therefore greatly concerned to examine and know the difference, between that obedience which arises from the convictions of reason alone, and that which flows from that principle of faith which is so often and so solemnly inculcated in the scriptures.

It is evident that reason, under the instructions of God’s word, and supported by the power of conscience, may lead men to most of the common duties of social life. These duties are, for the most part, plainly deducible by reason, from the circumstances of relation and connection in which we find ourselves; and therefore as far as the mind can be brought to consider them without passion or prejudice, the authority and power of conscience will interpose to require that they shall be respected.

But in a more enlarged and correct view of moral obligations, we will find the influence of reason, to produce holy obedience, is essentially deficient, especially in these three particulars:—

In its extent,

In its efficient power,

And in the manner of influencing the heart.

1st. In its extent, regarding both the grounds and the matter of duty.

The influence of reason, in the concerns of duty, can be founded only in those considerations and principles which can be distinctly perceived and comprehended by reason: and therefore can, at best, produce but a heathenish kind of obedience. There are many truths respecting God, and his providence, which our reason is not adequate to discover, nor even to comprehend when revealed. These truths are just and essential grounds of duty, but cannot become such with us, without faith to believe them.

Therefore, in the beginning of this discourse on the nature and influence of faith, it is stated that it is "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." While Philosophy and Reason wander, in the regions of conjecture, after their chaos, their monads, and their atoms, of which they may suppose the world was formed, Faith is satisfied that it was *created* by the word of God. There are also some of the essential doctrines of the gospel, which the limited reason of man never comprehends, and therefore can never adopt as grounds of duty. Such is the great doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God, and his vicarious sufferings and propitiatory sacrifice for sins. And it is evident how exceedingly deficient in the christian duty he must be, who has not this as a settled ground of duty with him. Such also, are the doctrines of God's universal, complete and holy sovereignty—of his eternal decrees, and of eternal rewards and punishments. Our reason is not naturally disposed to receive these doctrines, or capable to comprehend them. Yet every true christian knows, and feels, that if these should not be grounds of duty with him, there

would be a very great and essential deficiency in his duty toward God. And in this he is convinced, that “without faith it is impossible to please him.”

In regard of the *matter* of duty also, the influence of reason is far from being universal.

However decidedly and clearly it may lead to some duties, there are others which, if unassisted by faith, it never discovers. This is the case, not only where the grounds of duty lie beyond the apprehension of reason, but also where they are plain and obvious. Such is the *spiritual* worship we owe to God—christian self-denial, and christian love and kindness toward them that are Christ’s, as are also love toward our enemies, supreme and ardent love to God, and love toward our neighbour as ourselves. The influence of reason alone, seldom, and perhaps never, leads to these and other matters of duty essential and indispensable in true christian morality. So that it is evidently insufficient in point of extent, both as to the grounds, and the matter of duty.

2d. In its efficient power to produce holy obedience, the influence of reason is deficient, as a principle of duty.

This is evident in the multitudes of mankind who, although no strangers to the dictates of reason, yet deliberately and daily disregard them.

It is evident also, in the many instances in which passions and prejudices lead men on in violation of the clearest dictates of reason.

In every instance, where reason is relied on to direct and encourage in duty, it is evident how feeble are its influences, opposed to the feelings of interest, and to the fear and the love of the world.

Faith alone enables a man effectually to resist, and to triumph over these. Therefore, the scripture saith,

“this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

3d. In the manner of influencing the heart, the insufficiency of reason is great, and will cause a radical defection from holy obedience.

Its influence is primarily and chiefly on the understanding and judgment; and the affections of the heart are untouched and unmoved. Every one knows, that the judgment may be clearly and powerfully convinced, and yet the feelings and sentiments of the heart be entirely opposed and unyielding to such convictions. Reason exerts its influence by instruction and argument; but “faith worketh by love.” While, therefore, the former produces only a constrained and unwilling subjection to the laws of duty, the latter has effectual influence to produce a ready and cheerful obedience, in which the best affections of the heart are engaged. Such alone carries in it the marks and distinguishing characteristics of a pure and holy obedience to God.

He that is moved to duty only by the convictions of reason, even with the aid of the power and authority of conscience, engages in it with a very different spirit from what the man does whose best affections lead him; and whose strongest emotions prompt and support him in a cheerful obedience. This is “the obedience of faith;” and is conformable to that requirement in which God saith, “my son, give me thine heart.” “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

Let us now observe the illustration of these positions in the example referred to in the text.

The apostle had taught the doctrine of justification by faith; and that the necessity of faith, in order to justi-

fication, might fully appear, he devotes the whole of this eleventh chapter to the subject ; beginning with the declaration, that “ faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” and then by an induction of particuilar examples, shewing its operations and influence. With others he introduces also this, “ by faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac : and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten Son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called ; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure.”

In considering this example, we may observe, 1st. As to the grounds and the matter of duty—

Had the Patriarch relied chiefly on reason to determine his duty in this case, he would have found much to object, even against the immediate and plain command of God ; and would have argued, as faithless professors often do, that the fitness and propriety of obedience to a command directing him to sacrifice his beloved and only son, did not, on any principle which he could discover, appear to him ; and inasmuch as his Creator had not given him an understanding or penetration to discover any grounds of duty, that would justify him to his own reason and conscience in such a deed, it would be highly absurd in him to think of doing it. However fit and proper it might be in the sight of God, or of any intelligent beings superior to himself ; yet it never could be a duty for him, who could discover no propriety in it. And he would therefore conclude, either that there must be some mistake in supposing it to be the command of God, or else that he did not give it with a purpose of having it executed, or with any design or expectation

that he should obey it. He would also have argued, as deists and unbelievers continually do, that it was against every principle of his nature; and inasmuch as God had given him that nature, he could not suppose that he would seriously call on him to violate all its strongest principles, and act contrary to its most amiable dictates: and he would therefore have concluded, that however plain the command of God might be, yet he must not interpret it according to its plain and evident import, or else he must not suppose it was designed for him strictly to obey. As to the nature of the duty, he would have argued, how can God be honored, or how can any good possibly come of such a deed by my hand. If my Son had been guilty of any great crime, or meditated any serious injury against society, public justice might require of me the necessary means of prevention, or the merited punishment. But, when he has done nothing, and meditates nothing of this kind, it would be unnatural and wicked in me thus to sacrifice a beloved son, and it could be productive of no good to fellow-creatures, and of no honor, but on the contrary of dishonor, to God. His justice, his goodness, and above all his promise forbids it: for in this very son he has promised me a seed in whom all nations shall be blessed. What therefore would be the consequence of obeying this strange command? And how could I justify myself, even to God himself, in view of the promise he has made me, and of the covenant he has established with me?

In consideration of such arguments as these, reason would have rejected, without scruple, the plainest and most direct command, and would probably have made high pretensions to piety and religious feeling in doing so. After this manner, carnal and unbelieving men dai-

ly reason concerning commanded duties, of which they do not readily perceive the fitness, the propriety, and the end to be answered by them. And they think they argue correctly, and are led by the clearest reason to neglect such duties; and having the utmost confidence in their conclusions, they think they may rest in them with a good conscience toward both God and men. Perhaps the greater part of professed believers allow themselves to be guided mostly by the same principles, and to rest in the same conclusions.

But it was not thus that Abraham's faith wrought with his works, when it made them perfect before God.

His faith esteemed the word and authority of God paramount to every authority, and to all law; and instead of looking to nature and to reason, looked to nature's God, the fountain of all true reason, for direction in the way of duty.

All that such faith needs, is only to know the command and word of God, and it can trust all the consequences of obedience to his disposing. Abraham's confidence in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God enabled him to submit the event, and trust in God concerning the consequences, while he was satisfied that he obeyed *his* command. This enabled him "against hope, to believe in hope, that he might become the Father of many nations." It was by this faith, that "Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." His faith required nothing more than to know the command of God, and by this all the pleadings of nature and of reason were answered; and for the apparent contrariety between the promise and the

command, he confided in God to reconcile them, and make both good. And as at the first, he staggered not at the promise through weakness of faith, so now he still accounted him faithful who had promised, and trusted to him to reconcile the hopes which he had inspired with the command he had given.

The event eminently justified this confidence, and entitled him, who thus believed, to be accounted the Father of all them that believe. The maxims of human reason would have condemned such conduct, as rash and unnatural. A self-righteous spirit would call it impious. And the affected wisdom and philosophy of men would charge it to the account of superstition, and by the reproachful epithet of *fanatic* endeavor to shake off the obligations of duty. But in all the scriptures, there is, I believe, no one action of any man more frequently and more decidedly commended as partaking of the nature of true piety and obedience to God, than this of Abraham: and all these cavils and objections can only serve to shew the great influence of faith above reason to produce holy obedience, and to support men in the path of duty before God.

Superstition and fanaticism do not consist in implicit obedience to the command of God, where reason and nature seem, in the apprehensions of men, not to countenance or justify it. On this principle, there never would be any call or opportunity for the exercise of faith; and this first of christian graces, so much commended and insisted on in the scriptures, would be in fact, nothing more than philosophising professors and teachers represent it—the mere result of reasoning and reflection upon obvious truths, level with our own feeble understanding, and according with our own preju-

diced notions and opinions. This would be to invert the whole order of gospel doctrine, and to make the cross of Christ of none effect.

Fanaticism consists in men's substituting their own or others' fancies, conceits, or dogmas in the place of God's commands, and paying a blind regard and reverence to them as such : and superstition, in deranging the order of christian truth and duty ; serupulously adhering to some, and disregarding or despising others. There can be no superstition, or fanaticism, in the most serupulous and implicit adhering to the word of God, and obeying his commands. It is but our reasonable duty. And yet reason, connected with our depraved nature, and guided by our limited understanding, would never prompt us to this, in all cases, or support us in it. Therefore it is that the scripture saith, "without faith it is impossible to please him." This is the vital principle of all holy obedience : and without faith, works however correct in the view of reason and philosophy, and however painful or splendid to the senses of men, are *dead*. Destitute of that vital principle in which the true spirit and nature of holy obedience consists, they can be accounted, in a righteous judgment, only a "departing from the living God," and "coming short of his glory." "There is none righteous ; no, not one ; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one : there is no fear of God before their eyes."

2dly. In considering the example before us, we may observe also the inefficiency of the power of reason to strive against all the workings of natural passions and feelings, in promoting holy obedience.

Had Abraham been ever so thoroughly persuaded of his duty in this case—though no question had been left unanswered concerning his obligation to obey the command of God; yet reason alone could never have surmounted the difficulties that lay in the way of obedience. We all know that reason never stifles the natural affections and desires; and there is nothing in all the resources of reason and philosophy to hold that commanding station, which imposes stillness and submission on the heart, and animates duty in opposition to its tenderest emotions. The feelings of parental love would have plead powerfully, at least for delay; and instruction and argument could never have strengthened the mind, or supported the resolution, in a purpose of obedience. Nothing less than that faith which rejoices in God's holy sovereignty, and confides in his wisdom, power, and goodness, could overcome these difficulties, and put that restraint upon the natural feelings, which would leave the heart free to "rejoice that the Lord reigneth," "giving thanks at the remembrance of his holiness."

And, 3dly. If we could suppose Abraham's reason and judgment to have been wrought upon by fear, or by the force of authority, or by any other means, to yield obedience to the divine command; yet reason alone could never have engaged the feelings and affections of the heart on the side of duty. It could have been only by their being extinguished or overawed, that they would have ceased opposition; and there would have been no concurrence of the heart in performing the duty. So that, in the manner in which reason influences the heart, it is insufficient to promote holy obedience in men.

Faith alone could reconcile in Abraham's breast, the feelings of parental love and tenderness, with the spirit

of piety and obedience to God, and enable him, with all the feelings of a father, to fulfil the part of a dutiful son and servant of the living God. In the mingled feelings of tenderness and piety that wrought in Abraham's heart, parental love was not extinguished—it probably never wrought deeper; but it was brought to harmonize with the spirit of piety toward God, and was relieved and consoled by confidence in his power and goodness.

This is the genuine influence of true faith, when it is *tried*. It brings the believer sensibly near to God, and while it regards his will and his authority, above every other consideration, it also invigorates the mind to rest with confidence in his love, and to “wait for his salvation.”

In ordinary cases, the influence of faith will not be so conspicuous in the sight of others, and they who speculate on the subject, will discover nothing, that may not be attributed to the influence of reason and conscience. But every true believer knows there is an essential difference, between that conduct which proceeds from the convictions of reason alone, and that which is animated by love and duty to God, with a just confidence in his power and grace, and guided by a clear understanding and knowledge of his will.

If christians seldom feel themselves moved by that respect and duty toward God, which are the fruits of faith, it is because they yield themselves to the influence of inferior and unworthy principles. And if they seldom have confidence to venture much in the service of God, it is because their faith is weak.

Habits of pure obedience may make the genuine influence of faith less novel and surprising, and on this account less observable; but they can never make the be-

liever insensible of its refreshing and constraining power. The love of God and the love of Christ, are always arguments of duty, which have access to his heart: and to be found waiting on God, is infinitely better to him, than the utmost confidence of the approbation of reason and philosophy. The former always secures to him the latter; but the approbation of reason will not always satisfy him, that he is waiting on God in that respect and duty which he owes him.

Therefore it is, that a christian conscience is always better satisfied to take its directions immediately from the word of God, than from the most laboured systems of religion and duty, that human ingenuity can compile.

Brethren, is this influence of faith well known to us, and familiar in our daily experience? Are we partakers with Abraham in this, and followers of his faith?

It is the same faith that God requires in all ages of them that would approach, with acceptance, his altar. That principle which could so direct and support Abraham, and Moses, and Daniel, in former ages, is not, since the coming of Christ, debased to a mere uninteresting acknowledgment of the truth of the gospel; or chilled into an inert, mysterious, and uninfluential principle, that does not affect the life and manners; nor is it changed to a vain and presumptuous confidence, which regards chiefly a supposed security of God's mercy and approbation. Wherever christian faith exists now, it is the same as it was with Abraham; and it is as impossible to please God without it now, as it was in the days of Enoch. It was the same faith that Christ intended, when he said, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned."

SERMON V.

**ON ATTENDING THE PUBLIC WORSHIP
OF GOD.**

Ecces. v. 1.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools.

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SERMON V.

Eccles. v. 1.—Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools.

IT is our privilege, brethren, to live near the house of God, and often to meet within its sacred walls. We have no such lengths to go as had the ancient church of Israel. The tabernacles of God are in the midst of us, and their doors, from sabbath to sabbath, are opened for our reception. Here we are permitted to send up our prayers and thanksgivings to God, while his servants address us in his name.

With these advantages, should we not grow in grace, and daily ripen for that exalted service which is rendered by saints and angels in the higher courts? But how is the fact? Do not many of the Lord's people cry out, "O my leanness, and barrenness! How far am I from God, and from the happiness of those who come near to him!" Do not others from month to month and year to year, visit this sacred place, without sustaining any important change in their disposition or habits? I fear the salutary caution in the text is too often overlooked. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools."

That our future attendance upon God's house, may be more profitable than the past, I propose in the first

place to consider the import of this command, and secondly to urge a serious regard to it.

I. The command before us is, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools."

The first part of this precept is a solemn caution against those imperfections, which are wont to attend our public devotions. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God."—Do not step heedlessly; but consider well thy path. Remember, it is to the house of God that thou art going—to sacrifice to him, who is acquainted with all thy ways, and whose glory demands the entire, the unequivocal homage of thy heart. Apprised of the temptations which lie in wait for thee, exercise a watchful and jealous care over thy thoughts—over thy words and actions. Avoid whatever may be offensive to God or injurious to thyself, or to thy fellow-worshippers.

This, in few words, is what is meant by keeping our foot when we go to the house of God. But the duty deserves a more particular consideration. There are various things, concerning which the most jealous caution should be exercised, if we would enter into the spirit of this precept.

1. We should beware, in the first place, of entering upon the duties of the sanctuary, in a thoughtless manner, without preparation and without object.

Many hurry to the house of God when the appointed hour of public service arrives, without considering with themselves what object they have in view. They go because others go, or because they themselves have often been; they consider not, the duties to be performed

in the house of God, nor the deep and solemn interest which they have in those duties.

Others possessed of more principle, attend the service of the sanctuary from a conviction of duty—but still they attend without preparation. They stop not to reflect, whose altars they approach, what sacrifices are required—whether these sacrifices are offered with clean or with unclean hands. They rush into God's presence as the horse rusheth to the battle, without that awe upon their spirits which is indispensable to sincere and acceptable worshippers.

We should beware of such thoughtlessness and irreverence when we come into the house of God. We should contemplate beforehand the solemn duties to be performed, and earnestly implore the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit. We should say with the pious David, "O send out thy light and thy truth ; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacles, then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God, my exceeding joy."

2. But secondly, if we should beware of coming to the house of God in a careless manner, and without any specific object, we ought to be no less solicitous to avoid coming with improper motives.

We ought never to enter the house of God simply for the purpose of passing away an idle hour ; we ought never to enter it, merely with a view to entertainment, as men enter the theatre or the ball-room. Nor should we come hither with the empty design of seeing and being seen ; and still less with the design of making arrangements for business or pleasure for the remainder of the week. Far nobler objects should possess our hearts in such a place. We should come to worship the

King Eternal ; to pay him homage as our Creator and Lord. We should come to hear what God will say to us, by his messengers or by his Spirit ; to learn more of his character and our duty—to have our hearts inflamed with love to him and to one another. We should come to prepare for death and eternity :—to get our minds abstracted from the world—our thoughts, our desires, our hopes supremely placed on heaven.

3. To keep our foot, when we go to the house of God, we must not only attend to the motives which carry us there, but to the whole of our deportment while we are before the Lord.

Our external behaviour must be such as becomes the worshippers of Jehovah. Not light and frivolous, as though we had no reverence for God : not morose and gloomy, as though he delighted in austere and cruel rites ; but solemn and serene as those who worship a being of infinite perfection, and who ardently desire to secure his friendship. Our eye must not wander over the assembly of our fellow-worshippers, as if our chief business was to observe their dress and demeanour ; nor must we recline in the posture of indolence, as though we took no interest in the duties of God's appointment, and were only anxious for the tedious service to close. The whole of our external conduct should be marked with gravity and devotion ; for God is to be worshipped with our bodies as well as with our spirits.

A far more important article is, that our inward man should be duly regulated. The thoughts and feelings of our hearts should be such as an holy and omniscient God will approve.

It is the heart at which God chiefly looks in our devotions. Should we bow before him with the apparent reverence of adoring seraphim, it would be vain, unless our hearts were right. God cannot be deceived and he will not be mocked. All vain and unseasonable thoughts should be carefully avoided when we come into the sanctuary, and our minds exclusively fixed on the great duties before us.

This is often a work of difficulty. Our hearts are naturally unstable as water, continually changing the objects of their attention—wandering like the fool's eyes in the ends of the earth, instead of being swallowed up in the service of God. We had need to bring a solemn and prayerful spirit to the place of our devotions, if we would counteract the temptation which springs from this quarter. We must verily believe that there is a God—that this is the house of God—that these are his worshippers—and this his service, a service in which we are deeply and eternally interested, before we can say with the Psalmist, “my heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up my glory.”

II. It is not enough, however, that we keep our foot when we go to the house of God; the second part of the precept before us is “that we must be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools:” we must indulge a spirit of solemn and devout enquiry; we must feel a disposition to know and practise the will of God.

As this part of the exhortation relates to a specific and important duty, too often performed in a very unprofitable manner, I must beg you to give it a serious and attentive consideration.

“Be more ready to hear,” says the voice of inspiration, “than to give the sacrifice of fools ;” as though we were in danger of acting the part of fools in the house of God, instead of humbly and earnestly listening to his voice. There are occasions, brethren, when God’s visible worshippers do this ; when they are nothing the better for their attendance upon the services of the sanctuary ; but the worse, when instead of being brought near to God, in the prayers which are offered, or in the truths which are set before them, they go away with their thoughts dissipated and their hearts hardened. They have seen nothing of God ; nothing of themselves. No good purpose has been formed ; no grace awakened ; no virtue strengthened ; no sinful passion mortified. To avoid this unprofitable attendance upon the house of God, the wise man exhorts “to be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools.” But how ought we to hear to come up to the spirit of this precept ?

1. We ought to hear in the first place with attention in opposition to a careless or distracted frame of mind. It betrays a stupidity or levity unworthy of rational creatures not to be seriously attentive to what is uttered in God’s name ; besides of what consequence will it be, that we are addressed on subjects deeply interesting to our immortal being, if our minds are occupied with other things. Can we be intrusted or edified, if instead of attending to the several parts of the discourse, our imaginations are wandering over our farms—transacting the business of our families, or secretly taken up with the advantages or disadvantages of a bargain ?

In hearing the word of God attentively however, it is important to remark, that our attention should be direct-

ed more to the truth itself, than to the manner in which it is communicated.

It is the truth which instructs and edifies. "Sanctify them through thy truth," said our Lord in his prayer for his disciples, "thy word is truth." It is by manifestation of the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God, that the great end of hearing the gospel is attained. Believers therefore are considered not only as having purified their souls by obeying the truth; but as persons who are begotten by the word of truth, and born again, not of corruptible but of incorruptible seed, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

Whatever has not truth for its basis, however it may gratify our taste or delight our imaginations, is like a gilded cloud, which presently disappears and leaves no trace of its form or beauty behind. We want something to fix our principles and to operate as a constant and powerful spring to our actions. Nothing but the truths of God's word carried home to our hearts will do this. To these then should our attention be chiefly directed, when the servants of the Lord address us in his name.

2d. Again, if we would be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools, we must hear the word with *reverence*; we must hear it as the word of God, not as the word of man.

Instead of considering the preacher as coming to play a part before us for an hour, while we have nothing to do but to judge of the success with which that part is played, we must consider him as an ambassador of the Lord of Hosts, charged with a solemn message to our souls. We must consider him as coming in God's name and in effect speaking the words of God. As far as he

speaks according to the sacred oracles, this is the fact, and it is a fact which we should distinctly recognize.

Too often God is overlooked in the administration of the word. What is heard is not regarded as the authoritative voice of Jehovah, though it be uttered in language which he himself has dictated, but as the simple, unauthorised effort of human talents and skill. This is one reason that the word of the Lord takes so little effect—that it so seldom comes to men in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Confining their attention to the mere instrument, they lose sight of their relation to God, and of those tremendous sanctions of divine authority, which make the words of truth enter into the soul.

It is one thing to be interested or even fascinated with the powers of the speaker, and another to be edified. We may go from the house of God, admiring and praising the gifts of those who address us in his name, while the Lord hath sent leanness into our souls. Then only shall we profit by the labours of his servants, when his voice is heard in their voice, when we reverence their message as the message of the Lord of Hosts and honour them chiefly for their master's sake.

I speak the more freely on this subject, because it is evidently a fault among the hearers of the gospel of the present time, that the preaching of the word is considered rather as a matter of entertainment, than as a solemn institution of heaven designed for their salvation. I tremble to think how this must appear in the eyes of the great God who is jealous for the honour of his institutions, and who will not suffer them to be perverted or contemned with impunity.

5d. I hasten to observe, in the third place, that if we hear the word of God as we ought to do, we shall hear it with an humble and teachable disposition, in opposition to a proud and captious spirit.

This our Lord pressed upon his disciples, when he said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no case enter therein." And the apostle Peter urges the same thing upon believers, when he exhorts them "to receive with meekness the ingrafted word of truth, which is able to save their souls." It is the meek whom God hath promised to guide in judgment; the meek whom he will teach his way.

They who preach the gospel are required to do it with a spirit of meekness; and they who hear must have the same spirit. There cannot be a *readiness* to hear, where there is not a humble and child-like temper. There may be a disposition to enquire, or rather to speculate and build systems of our own; but there can be no disposition to receive the distinguishing and humbling truths of the gospel, till we are in some measure humbled ourselves. Our pride must be laid in the dust before we shall be willing to take our own character, or the character of God, as it is given in his word. Then only shall we be willing to hear and learn of the Father, when we are willing to place God on the throne, and ourselves at his foot-stool. Mary, at the feet of Jesus, listening with joy to the gracious words which fell from his lips, is an example of that humble and teachable spirit, which ought to inspire our bosoms when we attend upon the institutions of the sanctuary.

4th. To this we add, as an important article, that we should hear the word of God with close and pointed application to ourselves.

Many a judicious sermon has been lost, for want of being personally applied by the hearers. What does it avail that the character of individuals is drawn with strength and exactness; that their sins and dangers are pointed out with a bold and faithful hand, if they never bring the subject home to their own hearts; if after being told every thing, but "thou art the man," they are looking on the right hand or on the left to find the person to whom the observation or remark applies? Alas, brethren, what is more deceitful than the human heart; and where does its deceitfulness more manifestly appear, than in the artifices employed to hide from its own view the unsightly image of itself, frequently and faithfully presented in the glass of God's word. How ardently should we pray, "Search me, O God, and know me, try my reins and my heart. Let the light of divine truth penetrate my bosom. Let thy word, quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, pierce to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and become a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

We should make this prayer, brethren, because it is from God only that a serious, self-applying spirit can be obtained. It is his eternal power alone which can make his word sink down into our hearts and take effectual root there.

5th. We shall give the sacrifice of fools, unless we hear the word of God with a believing and obedient mind.

Founded on the veracity of God, it demands the full and unwavering assent of our hearts. Containing a glorious system of truth and duty, it ought to be affectionately received and obeyed. To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams: and it is

chiefly for the purpose of bringing our hearts to the obedience of the truth, that the truth is proclaimed in our ears. This is constantly held up as one great end of all the instructions, warnings and reproofs of the scriptures; and the very perfection of scripture itself, is represented by its being "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

We cannot be said to *hear* the word of God in the highest and best sense, unless we obey it: for in the language of scripture it is often one and the same thing.

Thus we read, "Hear, O my people and I will testify unto thee. O Israel, if thou wilt *hearken* unto me, there shall no strange god be within thee, neither shalt thou worship any strange god. But my people would not *hearken* to my voice and Israel would none of me;" i. e. they would not obey. "Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, saith the Lord of Hosts, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices. But this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice; but they *hearkened* not nor inclined their ear. They did not obey; but walked in their own counsels, and went backward and not forward."

These scriptures while they teach us, that to *hear* and *obey* are often one and the same thing, suggest to us also the immense importance of obedience. They teach us that all our sacrifices and oblations will be vain without this; that neither hearing nor praying will avail us any thing, unless they proceed from a spirit of sincere obedience to the divine will.

I close this discourse, brethren, by urging a serious attention to the subject now laid before you.

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools,” is the voice of Jehovah himself, directing his worshippers. Shall we regard it as such? Shall we set a double watch over our hearts and over our whole conduct when we come into the house of God? Yes; let us say, “God is to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him.” While we would not be hasty to utter any thing in his presence, let us not trifle with any thing uttered in his name. God is in heaven and we upon earth: let us hear him with submission; let us adore him with reverence; let all our services be begun, continued and ended in him.

We urge this not only because it is God’s command, but because it is in itself reasonable. Such a service is due to the great God, who gave us our being and all our powers. Any thing short of this, is a reproach to his character, and infinitely unworthy of the relations we bear to him. The worship of his people on earth should bear a resemblance to that which is paid him in heaven.

It should be a joyful anticipation of that exalted service, in which our enlarged and sanctified powers shall be employed through the ages of eternity. O! what preaching, what hearing, what praying, should we have, could our eyes be fixed on the temple above, and our devotions kindled from the fire of those altars which burn with increasing brightness before the throne of God forever!

But I ask, what will it profit us, to appear in the house of God, and attend upon its services, unless we do it in the manner which God has prescribed? Shall we enjoy the Lord in his ordinances? Shall we find his temple a Bethel? Shall we be made to say, with Jacob, “surely this is none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven?” No! all will be darkness and insensibility; the light of divine truth will not shine into our hearts. We shall not be humbled for our sins, nor consoled with the hopes of pardon—we shall not be animated to run in the way of God’s commandments, nor made meet for the service and bliss of the heavenly world. Unless we keep our foot when we go to the house of God, our services, instead of preparing us for the upper sanctuary, may set us farther and farther from God’s kingdom. Privileges abused, while they harden the heart and blind the mind, often provoke God to give men up as incorrigible and to leave them to remediless destruction. If we are not brought to wait upon God, in this world, in the spirit of true worshippers, we shall never be admitted into his presence in the world of glory. All the advantages we have enjoyed on earth will augment our guilt and aggravate our doom. The sermons we have heard, and the prayers and thanksgivings in which we have joined, will be remembered only to sting with keener anguish and to overwhelm with deeper despair. Every man who shall not learn to keep his foot when he goes to the house of God, will eventually curse the place of his birth—he will wish that he had been born among the savage tribes of the wilderness—where no temple of God is to be seen—no voice of mercy to be heard, rather than at the doors of the sanctuary, where, from his infancy, the public worship of God

has been celebrated and the oracles of divine truth explained.

May God pour his spirit upon us, and prepare us for his service in his earthly courts. In due time, may he call us to the general assembly and church of the first born, to worship in that glorious temple, where his face shall shine with unclouded beams forever.—AMEN.

SERMON VI.

THE SINNER BLINDED TO TRUTH, AND HARDENED AGAINST CONVICTION, BY HIS OWN SINS, AND THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD.

John xii. 39, 40.

Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, he hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

BY SAMUEL S. SMITH, D.D. L.L.D.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON VI.

John xii. 39, 40.—Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, he hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

THAT no being can exist but by the wisdom and power of God, and that no event takes place in the infinite order of divine providence, and the state of angels or of men, but in consequence of the physical or moral laws which he has established in the universe, are principles as certain as his own existence. On the other hand, that man is endued with entire liberty of moral action, whence arises his accountability to the Supreme Judge of Heaven and of earth, is among the first dictates of reason, and possesses the irresistible evidence of our own consciousness, than which no stronger exists for the first truths in science. In perfect consistency with these principles, we learn both from experience and the word of God, that, when men abuse their liberty, and pervert the faculties of their nature to the unrestrained indulgence of sinful desire, their perceptions of sin and duty, and in general, all their moral feelings become blunted, in proportion as they advance in this unhappy course; their hearts are hardened against the impressions of divine truth, and their unholy inclinations increase in strength, till at length, it becomes impossible to resist their force. In this state of the mind and affections, all

the principles and tendencies of human nature, and even all the circumstances in providence, with which men are surrounded, concur to weaken on the heart the motives of religion, and to augment the strength of its corruptions. Abundance or poverty, society or solitude, equally become snares to the soul; ignorance encourages sin; the light of divine truth irritates the passions or hardens the conscience, and even reason offers its aid, and employs its perverted powers to justify every vicious tendency of the heart. Such is the natural course of that order which God has established in the moral world, that men, by persisting in an evil course, arrive, at length, at an unhappy necessity of sinning. It is the consequence, indeed, of their own wilful abuse of the divine mercies; but being also the natural consequence of the laws which God has established for the operations of his providence, and the moral government of the universe, the effects proceeding from it are often said, in the holy scriptures, to be the work of God; because he has so laid the order of things, that sinful men, acting freely from their own impulses and unrestrained by his grace, shall bring upon themselves, as a just punishment of their folly, that blindness of mind and hardness of heart which are the surest presages, and deepest aggravations of the final perdition of sinners.

These preliminary observations may assist us in forming just views of that incorrigible state of depravity into which the Jewish nation were sunk in the age of the prophet, and which was again their reproach and their condemnation at the time of our blessed Saviour's appearance upon earth. They may serve also to rescue from misconstruction, and from the impious objections often raised against the language of the sacred scrip-

tures, as if they represented God, most holy, as infusing some positive degree of guilt, or obduracy into the heart of the sinner, or condemning him for an impotence to fulfil his duty, imposed upon him by the divine decree itself.*

This is a subject on which many speculative questions have been raised, which far transcend the powers of the human mind to resolve, and many uncharitable controversies excited to the great reproach of religion. The simplicity of the gospel has been marred, and the zeal of christians too often withdrawn from those plain and practical doctrines which sanctify the heart, to be wasted in speculations which have created divisions, and embittered contentions in the church, just in proportion as the subjects of them have not been understood, and indeed have been above the reach of the human understanding. This only we know from the explicit declarations of the word of God, confirmed by universal experience, that light, that privileges, that mercies, and even corrections sent, in the course of divine providence, for the instruction and reformation of mankind, if they do not soften and bring to repentance, if they do not produce the sanctification of the heart, commonly render it more callous to the impressions, more blind to the beauties of divine truth. And God has so formed, and so governs the universal system of things, both in the moral and natural world, that the wicked, following only the coun-

* This error is sometimes encouraged in ignorant minds by some inadvertencies in language which our venerable translators of the sacred scriptures have, in a few instances, permitted to escape them. One example of which occurs in our text. *They could not believe, it is said, because that Esaius said, he hath blinded their eyes, &c.* Whereas the expression contains only an allusion to the prophet's words, and ought to be rendered *according to what Esaius hath said.*

sels of their own hearts, shall inevitably deceive and destroy themselves ; some at an earlier, others at a later period, according to the natural tendencies of their minds, combined with the circumstances in which his sovereign and holy providence has placed them. And although it is true, as a general principle, that the present life is a state of trial, in which mankind are on their probation for a future, and immortal existence ; it is no less true that men may so hasten to fill up the measure of their iniquities as to be ripe for destruction before the natural course of life is run. And although the period of their mortal existence may be prolonged, and they may be spared in the midst of means and ordinances, they seem to be spared only in judgment. Ordinances and means become fruitless ; or, their only and terrible fruit is to aggravate the guilt of those who have so long misimproved and abused them. This is that awful condition of the bold, secure, and impenitent sinner, which has been denominated by practical writers, *judicial blindness and hardness of heart.*

As it is a doctrine which ought to affect, with deep and solemn concern, every hearer of the gospel who has long lived barren and unfruitful under the means of grace—as it ought to inspire with a holy fear over themselves those who have hitherto misimproved the precious means which God has given them to attain everlasting life, let me solicit your attention for a few moments, while I endeavour,

I. In the first place, briefly to explain the nature, and the evidences of this unhappy state of the soul ; together with the proofs that the scriptures afford us of the existence of such a state in the present life.

II. And, secondly, to point out some of those classes of sins which we have reason, from the express declarations of the holy scriptures, or the experience of the church, to consider and fear as principally conducing to this deplorable end.

1st. In the first place, I shall endeavour to explain the import of the proposition contained in the text; or to shew the nature of that blindness of mind, and hardness of heart which to some daring and habitual sinners have made their return to God by repentance, in a great measure, if not absolutely impossible, and is, at length in the righteous and holy purposes of heaven, judicially inflicted as a punishment, on nations or individuals who have rendered themselves ripe for destruction.

These figurative expressions, blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, have an obvious reference to those great and commanding powers of the soul, the understanding, and the affections, which, according as they are regulated, govern the operations of the will, and the actions of the life, either to good or evil. They imply, therefore, that spiritual ignorance of the nature and beauty of divine truth induced by the corrupted dispositions of the heart, and that perverseness and obstinacy in sinning, which is the consequence of long continued habit. Truth is the light of the mind. This precious light the corruptions of the heart tend to extinguish; or they render it incapable of discerning the proper beauty, glory and majesty of divine things. The instructions and invitations of the gospel, in consequence, lose all their convincing and persuasive power on a mind thus darkened by sin. *If our gospel is hid, saith the apostle, it is hid to those who are lost, in whom the God of this world, that is, the pleasures and vanities of this*

world which they worship as a God, *has blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* In conformity with this striking and obvious figure of language, bringing a sinner to a sense of his duty, and to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, is, in many passages of holy scripture, described by *opening his eyes, and bringing him from darkness to light.* In like manner, *hardness of heart* is expressive of that state of our moral affections, that is most directly opposed to true repentance, by which the humble and contrite soul is dissolved in profound sorrow under a sense of its great and manifold iniquities. Thus St. Paul uses the terms *hardness and impenitence* as implying precisely the same ideas. *Despisest thou, says he to the bold, audacious sinner, the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath.*

Such is the general interpretation of these scriptural phrases, *blindness of mind, and hardness of heart.* But, that they may be the better understood, and that I may enter more particularly into the practical nature, and the causes of those corrupt dispositions of the soul expressed by them, suffer me to trace them through the various degrees by which we find them marked out in the sacred scriptures.

1. The first grade, or rather the foundation of the whole, is that natural blindness and indisposition of the heart to divine truth, and to the duties of a holy life, which is common to all men, springing from the original

imperfection and corruption of our nature, which we inherit from the fallen parents of the race.

It is this which we see displaying itself in the early disinclination of all children to the duties of religion, to the practice of holiness, to whatever tends to the improvement of their nature. It is this which requires in their education, restraint, government, discipline, to be added to instruction. It is this that lays the necessary foundation for that most important and practical doctrine of our Saviour, the radical principle of the divine life; *except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

This native impurity and imperfection although laying a foundation for all the corruptions which may be added by time, by habit, and temptation, in the most depraved of mankind; yet, will easily be understood not to be, in itself, that blindness and hardness of heart, intended by the prophet, which places the obdurate sinner beyond the reach of repentance, and is truly a judicial infliction by God for his obstinacy in his crimes. The corruption of nature, however it is to be deplored, does not render repentance impossible. It is the purpose for which the Son of God hath come into the world, *to call all men every where to repent, and to draw all men to himself*, by the exciting movements, and the assisting grace of his Holy Spirit; and finally, to give them a law of life and salvation fitted to the frailty of a fallen nature. *He is the light of the world*, who came to dispel our natural darkness, and to open a practical way for the return of the sinner to God; and it is now his gracious purpose *to have all men come to the knowledge of the truth.*

2. But, in the next place, this natural, unholy state, and tendency of the soul, acquires a high, and most dangerous increase by our own actual sins. Habit confirms the corrupted principle from which all the positive transgressions of the laws of God proceed. Every indulgence of an impure passion, every repetition of a sinful act, strengthens its root, and strikes it deeper into the heart. Conscience which, in the beginning, might have been tender and easily impressed, with the fear of God, assumes, by degrees, a brow of brass, and sets at defiance the threatenings of the divine law. Each day renders repentance, and the return of the sinner to God, more uncertain and more difficult. This interesting and alarming truth is attested by universal experience; it is repeated in the instructions and reflections of all moral writers; and the sacred scriptures are full of admonitions and warnings on the subject: *to-day*, saith the holy psalmist, *if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* And the blessed apostle adds a farther and most solemn counsel; *wherefore exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

3. But there is another, and still higher degree of this dreadful depravity of heart which ought to be regarded as distinct from both the preceeding, although built upon them. It is the habit of sinning carried to the highest pitch of obstinaey and obduraey, when God, in righteous judgment for the abuse of past mercies, abandons the sinner to his own follies; to the unrestrained impulses of his own sinful passions, without any of those checks and admonitions which in the scriptures are so justly called the strivings of his Holy Spirit.

The means graciously appointed by God for the recovery of mankind from the death of sin become fruitless and ineffectual to him; they no longer make any impression on his heart. He not only does not love truth and holiness, God and divine things, he regards them with malignant aversion. All the tendencies of his soul are to sinful indulgences and enjoyments; given up in divine providence, to the power of those temptations which he loves and pursues with avidity, the determined course of nature renders his perdition sure and infallible. And, although man cannot enter into the heart of his fellow-man, or fathom the purposes of the Most High, so that we can know when any living man is beyond the reach of merey; yet we may be assured, from repeated declarations in the sacred scriptures, that there are sinners, in this unhappy case, whose state is already fixed in the secret decree of Heaven; sealed under a judicial hardness and blindness, the consequence of their own presumptuous folly and impiety. This is the condition of the sinner which is described in the text; and which seems to be implied, wherever God, in his holy word, is said to harden the hearts of perverse and obstinate offenders.

On this subject, however, permit me to remark, in order that we may guard against mistaken apprehensions of the divine government, that we ought to beware of imagining that the author of all purity and holiness ever, by any positive agency, or any agency independent of their own inclination and will, infuses any principle of evil into the heart of a sinner, which contributes either to blind him to the nature and beauty of holiness, or to harden him in his career to destruction. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God*

cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn to me and live. What then is the agency of God when he is said to harden the heart of the abandoned sinner? He refuses to him those lights, those assistances of his grace, those influences of his Holy Spirit, which have been so often resisted, abused, extinguished, without which the ordinances of the gospel are ineffectual for the conversion and salvation of the soul; and the sinful passions of a corrupted nature, constantly increase in strength, and meet with no resistance in their headlong course to ruin. Are not the assistances of the Holy Spirit necessary to every sinful child of Adam to give their full efficacy to the means of grace upon his heart? How much more necessary are they, then, to those who have added to the corruption of nature the perversity and strength that arises from long continued habits of sinning? And when God, in just judgment, for the manifold abuses of his mercies, not only refuses any extraordinary aids, but withdraws even the common influences of his Holy Spirit, what can be looked for but continually increasing darkness and blindness of heart, but augmented hardness and obstinacy in iniquity, the sure presage, and the awful seal of their approaching perdition? Thus said the Lord, by the prophet Hosea, of the apostate Ephraim, *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.* And of a degenerate church he pronounces; *my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts; and they walked in their own counsels.* When, therefore, the sinner has, like Ahab, sold himself to work iniquity; and God has determined concerning him, that his spirit shall no more strive with

him ; but that he will leave him to himself to *fill up the measure of his iniquity* till the day of final judgment and retribution. In Ephraim you have the picture of those wretched souls under the awful sentence of judicial blindness, and everlasting barrenness ; whose salvation is at length placed, by their own crimes, and the righteous and holy purpose of God, beyond the appointed limits of the divine mercies.

But in the execution of this judicial sentence upon the bold and hardened offender something more may be implied in the order of providence than this negative influence which consists in withholding the admonitions and restraints of the Holy Spirit ; for when a righteous punishment is to be inflicted on obstinate impiety, may not the train of events be so laid in the divine providence and government over the world, without foolishly charging God with the sins of men, that the sinner shall be thrown in the way of stronger temptations, that he shall be exposed to situations in which his sinful appetites, being more lavishly gratified, shall be greatly strengthened, the constant tumult of the passions excited by a continual succession of temptations, shall suspend reflection, and augment his fatal blindness and security, the company into which he shall be led shall seduce him more and more, and such views shall be continually presented to his perverted understanding, in the occurrences of the world, in the example and conversation of other sinners, as shall encourage and confirm those fallacious reasonings by which he delights to deceive himself. Such may be the positive as well as negative operations of divine providence in those fatal inflictions to which God, in his holy and righteous judgments is pleased to doom

some bold transgressors, whom he has left to themselves *to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.*

Do you ask what evidence we have that such spiritual judgments are ever inflicted in the present life, even on the most guilty? It is a melancholy truth which we can learn only from the word of God. We cannot penetrate into the states, or the destinies of our fellow-sinners. But in that holy and infallible word are contained many fearful denunciations to this purpose which should make every daring and habitual offender tremble, who has long and securely set at naught the instructions of the blessed gospel, and the admonitions of divine providence. Not to repeat again the declaration in our text, what can be plainer and stronger than the denunciation of the apostle in the second epistle to the Thessalonians; *for this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie, that they all may be damned who have pleasure in unrighteousness?* What can be more affecting than the declaration to the same purpose in the lamentation of our Saviour over Jerusalem; *Oh! that thou hadst known, even thou! at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thy eyes.* What can be more fearful than the complaint and the threatening of divine wisdom; *because when I called ye refused, I stretched out my hands and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also, will laugh at your calamities, I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early but they shall*

not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord.

Having shewn from such express and undeniable testimony out of the sacred scriptures that there are sinners who, according to the laws of the divine government, are given up and sentenced by God, even in the present life, to irremediable destruction; let me now, for our admonition and warning,

II. Point out some of those classes of sins, which we have reason, from the express declarations of the word of God, or the experience of the church, to fear, as principally conducing to this deplorable end.

Are there, then, any particular sins or any particular aggravations of guilt; which the great Governor and Judge of the church has determined uniformly to punish by the absolute dereliction of his spirit, and by utter abandonment to the unrestrained force of temptation, and of sinful passion? Not that are known to us. These are awful secrets in his own breast. And we must acquiesce in the decision of the apostle; *he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.* Sometimes, we see him leave the sinner to the natural course and effects of his own lusts, and his enmity to the truth; while, on other occasions, we see those who appear not less, or even more guilty, plucked as brands from the burning and raised up as trophies to the riches of divine grace. When we behold these mysterious operations of providence in the church, what can we say but unite in ascriptions of praise to God with our blessed Saviour; *we thank thee, O Father! Lord of heaven and earth! because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father! for so it seemed good in thy*

sight. Or add with the apostle ; 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.

But, although we cannot penetrate the depths of the divine counsels, yet have we such lights afforded as may furnish most important guards to us against these fearful and spiritual evils, and present most powerful incitements to holy fear and circumspection in working out our own salvation. It is not difficult to point out many sins which have a natural tendency to lead to the fatal issue described in the text. And in general, we may say that whatever sins have an operation to confirm men in a course of evil, to increase their natural aversion to the duties, and self-denials of religion, or to strengthen corrupt propensities and habits, ever expose the soul to imminent danger, and tend, more or less directly and immediately, to this awful judgment of God.

But, not to rest in this general warning, permit me to descend to a few more particular examples of sins which appear to have the most dangerous tendency. And, in the first place, an open and habitual neglect and contempt of the means of grace, and the ordinances of divine appointment, threatens the most fatal consequences to the soul. If it is by the spirit and grace of God alone that the sinner can be brought to repentance, where can that blessing be reasonably expected, but where he has promised to bestow it ? *If faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*, what may we fear for those who voluntarily exclude themselves from the hearing of that word which is able to make them wise to salvation ? Shall they ever be able to enter into the holiest of all in the temple of God in the heavens, who refuse to ap-

proach even the outer courts of his house upon earth? Judge of the consequence from experience, and from the nature of things. Does not ignorance create a secure and unfaithful conscience? Does it not deliver the sinner, unadmonished, and unrestrained, to the impulse of his own lusts, to the power of temptation, and the infection of evil society? True it is, that in some instances, even strangers are brought in from the high ways; and a stroke of divine providence may be effectual for turning the hearts of those who had never been persuaded to attend to the voice of God speaking in the gospel. But is this an example on which you may prudently risk the salvation of the soul? It is like the unexpected and almost miraculous deliverance of a single individual in some of those terrible contingencies of providence, where thousands have perished. Let us contemplate with a holy fear the established connection between moral, as well as natural causes and their effects. It is possible with God, by the same almighty word with which he created the earth, to produce a crop where no grain has been sown, and where no plough has mellowed the soil: but is this in the course of nature? Is it not the established law of providence, that *he becometh poor who worketh with a slack hand*? In like manner may he not miraculously arrest a bold blaspheming sinner, like Saul in his way to Damascus? But is it not his usual course, that, *as they do not like to retain God in their knowledge, so he doth give them over to a reprobate mind*?

2d. If such is the dangerous consequence of neglecting, or despising the institutions which Christ hath appointed in his church, have we not reason to fear, in the next place, no less fatal effects arising from their abuse? It is a melancholy truth, that the abuse of the means of

grace, or habitually attending upon them without applying them to their proper end, or reaping from them their proper fruit, is perhaps as common as the utter neglect of them. How many are there, alas, who rest in the means alone, as if, by a grave and regular attendance on these ordinances, they had fulfilled all that God requires; who trust in *the form of godliness without the power*; who substitute rites and forms in the room of true holiness? Few things have a more powerful influence in producing coldness, and indifference to the great objects and interests of religion, if not absolute hardness of heart, than making a dull barren form of its ordinances, and customarily frequenting the house of God without having the sacrifices which we offer there, kindled by the fire of devout and holy affections. Habitual actions are less attended to, habitual forms become more and more lifeless, by repetition; but, on the other hand, every thing that is done with affection and desire, strengthens the warmth and force of those tendencies of the heart from which it springs, by every act. How much is this reflection verified in the experience of the crowd of our merely outward and formal worshippers! They come up to the courts of the Lord's house, with his people; but how often are they hardly sensible of aught that is said or done in the most holy acts of his worship? Whereas, the truly pious and devout, who love his habitation, the place where his honor dwelleth, only love his service the more by every approach which they make into his presence, and would feel the greater pain at being deprived of this precious privilege.

That the abuse which has been pointed out, of the ordinances of religion, naturally leads to habitual insensibility, and ultimately tends, if not corrected by the grace

of God, to the most deplorable of all conditions upon earth, judicial hardness, is evident from the general strain of the language of scripture. To the various passages already quoted to this purpose, suffer me to add one more, which should fill every customary and careless hearer of the gospel with a watchful and solicitous circumspection and fear: *For the earth, saith the Holy Ghost, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.*

3d. In the next place, resisting and stifling those convictions of truth, of duty, or of personal guilt which are often awakened in the house of God, or postponing an attention to them, like Felix, to some imagined more convenient season, is a most dangerous mean of hardening the conscience, and rendering it callous to all future impressions from the divine word. It is not uncommon under the influence of the preaching of the gospel, or, in consequence of some affecting dispensation of divine providence, to see the sinner awakened to a temporary concern for the things which belong to his eternal peace. But how frequently have we to lament that it is only temporary? He is impatient under the stings and reproaches of conscience; he is distressed with the serious reflections, with the melancholy views, which religion seems to present to a mind covered with the gloom, and oppressed with the fears of conscious guilt. He hastens, therefore, if by any means he can, to dissipate this melancholy, and to admit more flattering images, till he recovers his former security of conscience, and liberty of sinning. Seldom, however, is he contented to rest mere-

ly in the same degree of liberty and security as formerly ; but endeavours, if possible, to prevent the return of these gloomy thoughts. He closes his ears against the truths which would recall them ; he watches their first entrance, that he may turn away from them ; he plunges deeper into those follies, or crimes which will help him to stifle them. This is what, in the holy scriptures is called *grieving the Spirit*, and, in other passages, *resisting the Holy Ghost*. And may we not justly fear that it will provoke the Spirit of God to cease striving with the sinner who has so often quenched his influences ; who has so folded himself up in his guilty security ; and to pronounce on him, as on Ephraim, *he is joined to idols ; let him alone*.

4th. The last evil which I shall mention, as tending to that fatal blindness and hardness of heart against which our blessed Saviour pronounces the warning in the text, is the habitual indulgence of open, gross, and profligate crimes. Such sins are committed as much against the light of nature, as the revealed word of God. They lay waste the conscience, and drown its remonstrances. No evils commonly tend so effectually to indispose the sinner to listen to instruction, and to harden him in pride and obstinacy against reproof. For these sins the heathen, though violating only the light of nature, are said to have been given up by God, and abandoned to destruction ; and, surely, much more reason have they to dread his fearful dereliction, and his exterminating judgments, who have extinguished the light which came down from Heaven, and trampled so boldly on the authority of the divine law, and the riches of divine grace.

Having thus exposed to you the natural progression of those sins which most surely lay the sinner, under the gospel, open to the execution of the awful sentence, implied in the text, of being given up of God to hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, the necessary source of spiritual barrenness, and the sure prelude to eternal destruction, let me conclude this discourse with a few reflections which seem naturally to arise from the preceding illustrations.

In the first place, let me repeat here a caution, which I have already enjoined, against misinterpreting the language of the text, and other similar expressions in the sacred scriptures into a foolish and impious charge against God, as if he infused into the heart of the sinner any positive principle of evil, independent of the natural and necessary tendency of his own corruptions, while he obstinately shuts his eyes against the light of divine truth, and resists the means which God has appointed for his instruction and conversion. That blindness which at length becomes invincible, that hardness which time and sinful habit render impenetrable, is the fatal work of his own folly and obstinacy. God has undoubtedly so constituted the nature of man, and the order of things in the natural and moral world, that the bold commission and habitual indulgence of sin, shall lead the sinner to greater and greater insensibility both of his guilt and danger, and to a more determined resistance against the necessary means of his correction and reformation. And these native consequences resulting from the moral order of divine providence, may be regarded also as the holy and righteous judgments of God, who by these means, often prepares for a more exemplary perdition, those *vessels of wrath*, who have taken such fatal pains

to destroy themselves. The train of providence is so laid, in the unsearchable wisdom of God, as often to illustrate the riches of divine grace in the recovery even of the most guilty offenders from the error and madness of their sinful courses; and often to display the sovereignty of his dispensations, and the awfulness of his judgments, by so preparing their desperate and headlong way before them, that they shall by the abuse of his mercies only hasten their own irremediable ruin. *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!*

2d. Does not this order of divine providence, in the next place, and this tendency of human nature, afford the justest ground of fear to those who have been long barren and unfruitful under the means of grace? Believe it, it is not in vain that the gospel is preached, that the sacraments are administered, that the light shines around you, that the offers and the calls of divine mercy are so often addressed to you. If they do not penetrate your hearts, if they do not convince and persuade you, if they are not effectual to arrest you in your sinful course, and to bring you to an humble acquiescence in the terms of the gospel, they must have the contrary effect of hardening the conscience, and rendering it insensible and secure amidst the awful hazards of its situation. And have not you reason to apprehend the fearful judgments of God, on account of the long continued abuse of his manifold mercies? May he not withdraw the mercies which you have abused? May he not withhold the gracious influences of his Holy Spirit, which, often rejected or stifled, he may no more impart? and for the abuse of which, he may, in righteous judgment, resolve to deliver

you up to the unrestrained dominion of dangerous temptations, and of your own uncorrected lusts and passions? Reflect, then, how long you have been unfruitful in the garden of God; how many merciful calls you have rejected; how many movements of the Holy Spirit in your hearts you have resisted; how many blessings both of his grace, and of his common providence, intended for your salvation, you have perverted to your own injury, and to the dishonor of his holy name, and let a salutary fear awaken you to serious consideration. Tremble at the curse of being forsaken of God, of being given up by him to pursue your own destruction, without any further restraints or monitions from his Holy Spirit, as the most fearful state in which a sinner can be left on this side of the *blackness of darkness forever*.

3d. This subject, in the next place, addresses itself forcibly to the young, not without encouragement and hope, to persuade them to an early and diligent endeavour to return to God by repentance. Your hearts cannot as yet be hardened and confirmed in an evil course. Nay, do you not feel them, at some times, moved by the goodness of God, by the sentiments of your duty, by the thoughts of your eternal interests? Conscience has not yet been stifled by the boldness of gross iniquity, nor rendered callous by long continuance in its practice. The young mind is comparatively docile. It has fewer difficulties to overcome from the violence of passions and appetites long indulged, from pride and obstinacy of character, from the strength of confirmed habits in sin, than it will have after years have added all their dangerous force to the power of evil. But if you now thoughtlessly resist, or misimprove the precious season of instruction, if you study to efface the impressions

which the truths of religion often make upon your minds, remember that, at every step in your progress, you are losing more and more the dispositions most favourable to duty, and rendering the heart less susceptible of the influences of the Spirit of God. Every day is bringing you nearer to that deplorable state of hardness and blindness, when instructions and corrections, means and opportunities, shall have lost all their power; and God, justly offended at the obstinacy of the sinner, pronounces upon him the fearful sentence of his perpetual dereliction, and his final perdition. Awake, then, earnestly to improve the inestimable opportunities which you now enjoy; opportunities that, misimproved, will never return. Prevent the danger of being forsaken of Almighty God, by a speedy and diligent application to the great work of life, the salvation of your souls. If you seize the present opportunity to resist the beginnings of sin, if you study to devote your early life to your Creator, and Redeemer, you have every thing to hope from the aids of his grace; but if you now resist the earnest and repeated calls of divine mercy, you have every thing to fear from the hardening influence of time, as well as from the growing infirmities of nature, in advancing life, which disables men from contending against the strength, and deep-rooted power of their sinful habits. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. When your strength shall be turned into weakness, and even the grasshopper shall be a burden.*

5th. In the last place, this subject addresses itself in an awful tone to those who have long rejected the offers of mercy in the gospel, and, by the protracted custom of

sinning, have hardened themselves against its instructions and reproofs, against its compassionate invitations, and its most affecting warnings. Could we, indeed, distinguish those who have seared their consciences, and who are delivered over of God to work all uncleanness with greediness, sealed up by his sentence to eternal death, it would be in vain to address them: they have chosen their delusions: their hearts are as adamant; the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel's vision could as soon be awakened into life by the voice of man. But are there not some old and habitual offenders, who, though buried in deep insensibility and security, may not yet be beyond the reach of divine grace? But are you not every day approaching nearer to that fatal boundary which may forever separate you from the hope of salvation? Alas! how many means may yet be suffered in the forbearance of God to remain to you? How long may the light be yet permitted to shine around you? How near may the sun of righteousness be to his setting forever? To some of those who hear me, this may be the last ray of light which, by his grace, may ever be darted into your soul; this may be the last call which, in his righteous and holy providence, you shall ever enjoy. Oh! that that omnipotent voice which, in the beginning, said *let there be light, and there was light*, would graciously shed, along with our words, the powerful and creative light of divine truth into your hearts, to form them anew in Christ Jesus! Oh! that that voice which shall swell the trump of the arch-angel, that shall call the dead to judgment, would awake your consciences from the mortal sleep of sin, and bring them, before it be too late, to consideration and reflection! If I could hope, with regard to any such sinners who hear me, that

these solemn and interesting truths would so touch your hearts as to arouse you from your security, and make you sensible of your danger, with pleasure would I point you to an all-sufficient Saviour who is able, even in this extremity of your case, to deliver you from going down into the pit; who can pierce the most secure and dead conscience, and soften the most obdurate heart, who can change and sanctify the most unclean spirit, and pluck the most atrocious offender, as a *brand from the burning*. Possibly, the repetition of these offers of pardon and salvation, which have been so often rejected and contemned, may only tempt you still more lightly to esteem them; yet, although you should again trample them under your feet, I call God, and your own souls to witness this day, that salvation has been once more with-
in your offer.

SERMON VII.

**THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, THE LIGHT
OF THE WORLD.**

Matt. v. 14.

Ye are the light of the world : A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON VII.

Matthew v. 14.—Ye are the light of the world : A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

TO man in paradise, all things were full of light. His eye was single, his understanding clear, and the divine image was bright upon his soul. This was sufficient for his direction in his passage through the world, and if this were not sufficient, the light of the descending divinity was daily displayed before him. Happy for him if with such helps he had continued his journey to the heavenly land. But when he sinned his situation was greatly changed. He stumbled and fell upon the very brink of everlasting darkness. But as God had ordained, not entirely to cast away a sinful race, it was necessary that our first parent should be supplied with a little light. What was given him was large enough to keep him from despair ; and yet so small as to be expressive of the divine displeasure. He no more enjoyed the perfect assurance of the love of God which he once possessed ; nor did he see the heavens continually open to him as before : but was left to follow the twinkling ray of an obscure promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Instead of the quickening splendor of the present divinity, the mission of angels and their ministry made up the light of unhappy man. In this manner the father of lights communicated himself in the days of the patriarchs. In the midst

of night only a star appeared and that but rarely. As the designs of mercy were opened up, the Lord gave a clearer light coming down himself on mount Sinai ; but not in such a manner as he appeared in the happy garden. There in the mildest and most condescending manner he unveiled his glory. But on Sinai he shrouded his awful light in darkness, making the cloud his chariot and the thick cloud his pavilion. In process of time a clearer light shone forth, and the Baptist preached repentance for the remission of sins. Afterwards, the sun of righteousness arose with healing in his wings, and happy they who walked in his light. Yet it was but a short period that the sun of righteousness continued to shine on earth. He made a few revolutions and then removed to shine in brighter worlds, and display his beams amidst the glory of everlasting day. Before his removal he had enlightened a portion of our race, and restored the lost image of God to their souls. Having done this he departed, leaving them by their light to lighten the world, till time shall be no more. Ye, said he, are the light of the world ; let your light shine before men. The collective body of christians is by Christ's appointment designed to illuminate mankind. Their lives are ordained as the medium through which, in general, men will see religion and judge of it as true or false ; the way-marks by which they will learn the road to heaven, or for want of which they will err from the way of righteousness and perish in their error. In a situation attended with so much importance and accountability, it becomes the followers of Christ to present the brightest points of their christian character before the world, and at the best advantage, lest their light be found as darkness.—Our subject naturally leads us to consider,

I. Wherein consists the light of the christian's life.

II. The ways in which he can best present his light before men.

I. Wherein consists the light of the christian's life.

In shewing this, it would be an easy matter to fill up several discourses. The christian graces might be all enumerated, each of which contributes something to adorn the man of God. But some of the more eminent parts of the christian character, and which at once enlighten the beholder and attract him toward heaven, are, gentleness and love, innocence and separation from the world—superiority to the vicissitudes of life and heavenliness of mind—humility and repentance.

1. The christian's light consists in gentleness and love. If it were not so these characteristics would not be so often mentioned nor so much insisted on in the holy scripture. They are there described in such a manner that a beam of light seems to accompany the very recommendation and description. "The wisdom that is from above," saith the apostle James, "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace," James iii. 17, 18. The sun of righteousness sends his beams in benignant influence upon the heart, rendering it soft and pliable and affectionate. Does the apostle ever appear to more advantage than when he writes to the Colossians? "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children, so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted not the gospel of God only; but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us," 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. While he thus expresses himself, we are satisfied, that Christ had imparted to him his own temper

and dispositions.—I do not mean to say that an angry christian is an impossible character ; nor that it is unlawful for the best of men to be angry on just occasions. But I mean to say, that passion though it may be sometimes necessary and often lawful, is like the angry cloud which darkens rather than enlightens the traveller. It is difficult to persuade mankind that the lamp of holiness burns amidst hardness, unkindness and severity. However badly they may judge in other things, they will readily decide with the apostle ; that “ where envying and strife is there is confusion and every evil work,” James ii. 13. The world judges rightly in this, it being utterly impossible for the grace of God, in any considerable degree to dwell amidst the conflictings of the angry passions. The spirit of truth speedily departs from the realms of noise and strife and seeks some more tranquil habitation. In secret silence of the mind ; our God and there our heaven we find.—This gentleness of disposition derives great lustre from being connected with that love which is sollicitous for the happiness of others. The man who is easy, and amiable and gentle in his manners, soothes and interests the beholder. But love takes hold upon his heart. It is love in the Saviour’s character that constrains us, and so endears his precious name to our hearts. To the power of this he resorted, when every other influence failed him, in his desire to convince and save the inhabitants of Jerusalem. His flowing tears bespoke the pity of his heart, and had they not been given up to a blind and obdurate mind would have convinced them, that as God is love, so the fulness of the Godhead did dwell bodily in him ; he was so filled with love and compassion for their souls.

And when christians possess this temper and to such a degree as to persuade the world, that they have a real compassion for the perishing state of men, they have gone far to make sinners believe in the necessity of being born again. Love and pity will do more to enlighten and persuade, than a thousand cold and unfeeling arguments. Perhaps, a great reason why ministers have so little success in persuading men, is the want of a fervent charity for their souls. Indifference to the interests of others, whether temporal or spiritual, too much resembles the temper of the world, which has never been enlightened by the Spirit of truth.

2d. In innocence and separation from the world. The innocence of Adam made him a fit object for the love and regard of angels. It arrayed him with a robe of light and crowned him with a crown of glory. And being lost by his apostacy from God, his fine gold became dim, and the excellency of his character departed. Sin is called in the scripture by the name of darkness, and the father of lies is represented as the prince of darkness. God, because of his perfect holiness is called that *light in which there is no darkness at all*. Whosoever becomes a follower of God as a dear child, is assimilated to him who dwelleth in the light, and is exhorted to cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. We cannot help admiring the lives of those who pass through a polluting world, without materially injuring their christian character, by any great departure from the perfect rule of righteousness. There is something in the heart of man, notwithstanding his fall, which makes him remember primeval purity, fix it as the standard of all that is excellent, bow before it wherever it is in any good degree discernible, and mark it as

the leading star which conducts to heaven. The world is in reality but little influenced by those disciples, whose lives are not unblemished, however splendid their talents, however great their attainments, however brilliant their accomplishments. If they admire them, it is for their strength of mind, and elegance of taste, but not as proper guides to heaven. Their lives only, have influence on the hearts and consciences of men, who bear a proper resemblance to their Lord and master, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."—Connected with innocence of life, is *separation from the world*. Not an austere withdrawing from the endearments of society, nor slothful negligence of appointed duties. But that temper and conduct which in the midst of all the rational enjoyments of society, and the diligence of a faithful steward, still exhibits the character of a pilgrim and sojourner. There is something exceedingly impressive about the man, who can persuade the beholder that he believes and feels himself made for a better world. "Be not conformed to this world," is a direction of the greatest moment. It is to little purpose to persuade men to take their affections from the earth, unless we can at the same time persuade them, that we have not selected the companions, the fashions, and the interests of the present life as our best portion. The father of the faithful is conspicuous among the cloud of witnesses, who "when called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and went out not knowing whither he went, and sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose

builder and maker is God; confessing that he was a pilgrim and stranger in the earth," Heb. xi.

3d. The christian light consists; in being superior to the troubles of the world, and in heavenliness of mind. The children of this life who have no better hope and look for no better portion, act consistently with themselves when they keenly feel all the vicissitudes of life. They have here their gods and no wonder if they are troubled, when these are lost or endangered. They know no other happiness. But God and man expect something more from those who have received a kingdom that cannot be moved, and are made heirs of an inheritance, that fadeth not away. Not that the good man loses the sensibilities of his nature, or puts off the feelings of humanity. The infusion of divine grace does the more soften the heart. The pious parent does not love his children less for being made partaker of the grace of God, but the more, viewing them as immortal beings. Nor does the pious youth less esteem and reverence his earthly parents, because he hath a father in heaven. He loves them more abundantly because the love of God hath strengthened and refined his heart. The christian may therefore feel under his various afflictions. But while he feels and mourns, he feels and mourns as those who have a better hope. "Therefore," saith the Psalmist, "will we not fear, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High," Ps. xlv. 2, 4. The character which interests mankind and makes them wish they were possessed of it, is that of the man who weeps and is afflicted when the tender ties of nature are unloosed. But who smiles through

his tears, looks upward, cries Abba Father, and is assured that his beloved interests are still safe. On viewing such a life, it is easy to discover that the end of that man must be peace; and scarcely any one can forbear devoutly wishing himself possessed of such a frame of mind. The disciple that is cast down but not destroyed, perplexed but not in despair, who looks away from the things that are seen and temporal, thinks of the things which are unseen and eternal, and casts his anchor within the veil, makes every beholder wish himself a christian.—Especially, when combined with this temper, there exists a heavenliness of mind. Men must see some resemblance of heaven, before they can be persuaded to seek it, and they can no where so well discern it as in the lives of those who are journeying thither. While the patriarch in the cool of the evening walks in his fields, contemplating his eternal rest: while the psalmist remembers God on his bed, converses with him, and rejoices in the shadow of his wings: while the apostle has his conversation in heaven, from whence he looks for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, to change his vile body; they carry a divine illumination, not upon their souls only, but almost on their very countenances. I once heard of a little child, who being asked by a pious mother, whether he would not wish to be like a certain one of his relatives; answered, no. Being asked in like manner concerning another; he answered, no. These were both professing christians; but they had not in operation, the unction from the Holy One, nor were they like persons who waited for the coming of the bridegroom. But when he was asked what he thought of a friend who was eminent for a useful life, and for com-

munion with God : he answered, oh ! mother, I wish I may live and die like him.

4th. The last part of the christian's light is humility and repentance. " And be ye clothed with humility," saith the apostle Peter. In his estimation, the christian's most beautiful apparel, was humility, and his most useful ornament, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. On the humble heart, God himself looks with approbation ; and in his sight humility is of great price. Purple and fine linen, parade and equipage have their effect upon the human mind ; but they have no tendency to convince the beholder, that the possessor is bound for heaven. Vanity and self-estimation excite men to great, sometimes to noble actions. But after all, they manifest but little of the spirit of heaven. Indeed few things excite greater disgust, than a mixture of high religious profession, and empty parade or swelling pride. When the apostle wished to make a deep impression on the Ephesians, and establish a conviction on their hearts, that he had the marks of a true apostle, he appealed to his humility. " Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and many tears," Acts xx. 19. Pride looks too much like the prince of darkness to lighten men to heaven. Even the lawful equipage of wealth sometimes lessens the christian's light. Let those therefore who would wish to hold forth the light to others, learn of Jesus who was *meek and lowly of heart*. Moreover, because in this world of weakness and temptation, offences must come, and the christian's light be for a season dimmed ; therefore a light is requisite which can shine through and even dissipate his darkness. And such a light repent-

ance is found to be. The waters of contrition have a mighty efficacy to cleanse the heart. They cannot justify in the sight of God. This the blood of Christ alone can do. But they may purify him. "For behold this self-same thing, saith the apostle, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what vehement desire," 2 Cor. vii. 11. While the heart is healed toward God, the wounded character is recovered in the sight of men. Few descriptions in the holy scripture, strike us more forcibly, than that of the prodigal especially after he comes to himself. "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him; Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," Luke xv. 18, 19. It is almost the best evidence that can be given of real piety, when men after lapsing into sin, are truly humbled, and with sincere repentance recovered to God. It requires a greater effort of the soul to endeavour a recovery of what it has lost by temptation, than to make the first exertion toward a religious life. Offering to God the sacrifice of a contrite heart, is an act at which the world looks with wonder. For although it may for a while stand in doubt whether this profession of repentance is sincere; yet when it is once convinced of this, it is convicted, and desires to partake of the principle which has actuated the real penitent. Repentance is the grace which excites interest and joy, among the angels of God.—We proceed,

II. To consider the ways in which the christian light may best be made to shine before men.

Christ having committed the illumination of the world to his disciples, proceeded to inform them that it was

not proper to veil this light ; that they ought to act not like those who light a candle and put it under a bushel. In a word that they ought to let their light shine before men.—This may be done ; by the disciples standing foremost in every thing that is excellent and useful : by the uniformity of his conduct : and by making it appear, that his happiness consists in following Christ.

1. By standing foremost in every thing that is excellent or useful ;—the conspicuous place is always in the fore-front. There the soldier acquires his glory, and by doing good and being ready to communicate, the good man obtains the respect of others. “ What do ye more than others,” said Christ, as he taught his disciples, where was their proper place in point of duty. While christians do not exceed others, in patience and forbearance, in activity and zeal, in love to God and charity to men, their light is not discernible. They are lost amidst the multitude, and cannot be distinguished. They should come out and be separate, therefore ; not with the vain-glorious forwardness of the man who seeks his own things more than the things of Christ, but with the sincerity of those who feel it a duty to be meekly conspicuous in every grace. Without wishing to attract the notice of the world, they should be desirous to make a good impression in favour of true piety. The pharisee was condemned, who to obtain the praise of men, fasted twice in the week, paid tythes of all he possessed, and for a pretence made long prayers. But the conduct of Nicodemus was more praise-worthy who was a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews. It was a noble commendation of the Corinthians, that their charity abounded greatly. The forwardness of their minds was the pleasing theme of the apostle’s

boast. For he bore them record, that according to their power, yea and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves, so that their zeal had provoked many. Religion must live and act to be visible to the world: and it must live and act with greater vigor than the spirit of the world, to have its proper influence. True piety forgets the things that are behind, and reaches to the things which are before. Every duty does not belong to every christian, God having marked out different lines for different characters. But in their proper sphere, every disciple ought to feel a holy ambition to be among the foremost, in whatsoever is lovely and of good report. They may be, and often are too tardy in their course of duty. But this very tardiness obscures the lustre of their character, and leaves a degree of doubt whether they are influenced by the spirit of Christ or not.

2. The christian's light is seen in the uniformity of his life. There may be light and life where there is great unevenness of conversation. But they are greatly obscured by such unevenness. While there are many ebbs and flowings in the current of the professor's life, he is often seen by the world as dark as its own children. Our Saviour has informed us that the water which he gives, shall become in him that drinks it, a well of water springing up unto everlasting life, John iv. 14. It therefore becomes a fixed belief with men in general, that there is no true religion, where the course of christian duty does not proceed as evenly as the stream from the living fountain. For want of this the greatest acts of duty and even piety, are only like the blazing of a meteor, which flashes and is extinguished, and seems afterward only to increase the darkness. Light it is, but no one can be benefited by it; it is so sudden and tran-

sitory. The jealousy of man concerning the piety of others, will not suffer him to follow them unless they have some resemblance of Jesus Christ: "who is the same, to-day, yesterday and forever." They will suspect that it is melancholy, or enthusiasm, or hypocrisy, if it only appears on a sudden and disappears as soon. But where by the grace of God, the sense of duty, and the feelings of divine love operate with a steady influence and produce a uniform obedience to the will of God, there the best impressions are ever made in favor of piety. Such light is like that of the sun constant and uniform, to the praise and glory of God.

3. The christian's light appears, by letting others see that his happiness is increased by religion.

The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever. The heart pants after happiness, and wheresoever it can be found with the greatest certainty, men will most naturally go. It is certain that religion does soothe the afflictions, and griefs of our nature, and enlarge its joys. It is the duty therefore of every christian to grow in grace, that he may give religion its proper force upon his heart, in order to diminish the pressure of his afflictions, and render his life as tranquil and happy as possible. He may thus convince mankind, that it is a high privilege as well as duty to have received the Spirit of the gospel. Peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit of adoption which embraces the promise of the heavenly inheritance, cannot fail of imparting an excellent savour to the name of those who have largely received them. When the afflicted heart is strengthened by confidence in God, so as to say like David, "when my father and my mother forsake me,

then the Lord will take me up :” when the happiness of prosperity is increased by the love of God : when gratitude for the kindness of our heavenly Father, enlarges the satisfactions of life : then it is made evident, that blessed is the man whose God is the Lord. How earnestly ought christians to strive for the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, and peace. They would themselves live and enjoy at a different rate. Love, the most active and delightful of all feelings, would promote a life of charity and equal justice ; and their joy would bear up their spirits, while they were expecting the blessed hope, the bright appearance of their Lord. Religion promises an increase of happiness to those who embrace it. It proposes to lighten the yoke and burden of human sorrows, and points to a way of pleasantness and to a path of peace. What it promises, it is able to perform. But before the world will fully believe this, it must have the evidenee from the lives of professors, that they are really made more happy. The men of grace ought to find glory begun below. How can the world believe, unless the peevishness of the human heart is abated, the raging passions cooled, distressing cares destroyed, and the fear of death diminished visibly in the man of God ? God hath not designed, that our present condition should be a state of perfect happiness. But he meant that his children here should partake of some consolations which should teach the world as well as convince themselves, that they have chosen the better part.

We come now to improve this subject by one or two observations—

1. We may notice the goodness and wisdom of the divine providence, in appointing true christians to be the

light of the world.—All the other methods by which it had pleased God to make the light to shine in the dark places, had passed away, and become inexpedient. Sin effaced the image of God from the heart of man, and the light within was obscured. God who is light withdrew his spiritual beams from his offending creatures, and hid himself behind the thick cloud of iniquities. The ministration of angels ceased, after that the Angel of the covenant had come, the minister of better promises. The mixed and terrible scenes of Sinai wherein the law was given, were too dreadful ever to be repeated. The feeble light of types and shadows, fled away after the coming of the very substance.—The lamp of the ancient prophets was extinguished, and their succession broken. The beams of the morning star were absorbed in the overwhelming brightness of the sun of righteousness; and Christ, the true light, had withdrawn from the sight of men, to repossess his glory, and finish our salvation in the heavens—there remained therefore only the light of the Spirit in the souls of men, which Christ at his ascension promised to send down and that it should abide forever. This is the best and most convincing of lights. The image of God, clearly discernible in the lives of good men, is the most satisfying evidence of the certainty of religion. The nicest reasonings or the most solid demonstrations have but little effect, unless he that utters them is confessedly a man of God. It is only like the operation of a pleasing dream, the remembrance whereof glides insensibly away. But when the spirit of Christ's religion is displayed in the life of his disciples, it becomes substantial, it lives and produces its impression. Herod never felt the denunciations of the prophets; but the presence of the Baptist filled him with awe

and terror. This is a light too, the nature and force whereof is easily understood. It may be difficult for most men to enquire into the certainty of those various lights which God hath furnished to the world. But it is no difficult task to notice the workings of the Holy Ghost wherever they exist; and they are understood with almost equal ease by the rich and the poor, by the ignorant and the wise. One may not be able to read his bible, nor to understand the plainest book, and yet be fully competent to understand the language of a holy life—such a life continually addresses the observer; “we are journeying to the place, of which the Lord said, I will give it unto you, come thou with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning us,” Num. x. 29.

2. How earnest ought every christian to be in his endeavours to make his light shine.—The motives to this duty are many and powerful; but especially those connected with our text. Others will be greatly benefitted, and the great and precious name of our God and Saviour glorified. The christian is surrounded with a cloud of witnesses, most of whom are in some way influenced by his example. It hath pleased God to create man with a strong propensity to follow the example of others whether good or evil. The wicked believe that there is a heaven, and a happy flock who are collecting there; and a hell where the neglecters of religion must feel the stings of a guilty conscience and the wrath of God. Perhaps at the same time they often doubt, wish that there was no heaven, that all things were uncertain in futurity, and that their prospects might be as good as others. In this mixture of certainty and doubt, they will often look upon the conduct of the disciple, to judge

whether his soul is really filled with the life of God, and whether the lamp kindled by the sun of righteousness is truly burning on his heart. How very much as to means does the salvation of the world depend on christians. They are set for the falling or rising of many. Groping in the darkness of sin, the world is left by God to the light of the Holy Ghost shining in his people, for their conviction and external guidance.—In this way will God be glorified also. When the disciples increased in faith and holiness, the name of Jesus was exalted. When they forsook their duty, it gave occasion to the enemy to triumph. When David sinned, the Lord said unto him by his prophet; “by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme:” and the apostle testifies the same to heedless christians: “for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.” Too little do we think, how much the glory of God among men, and the honour of the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour rest on us his professed people. Men cannot follow Christ into heaven to see him there: but they can examine the character and conduct of those who profess to have received his Spirit and to be changed into his likeness. They will judge of the master by his household, of the parent by his children, and of our heavenly Father by his adopted children. And what a powerful incentive should this be to live a life of exemplary piety, and to shine as lights in the world, that thereby the name of God is exalted! What so glorious as the name of God! What so precious as the name of Christ! What end of man so high and excellent as the glory of his Creator: and what duty so urgent as that of living

habitually in such a manner as to make others glorify him!

Now to him that is light—to the bright and morning star—and to the Spirit of illumination be immortal praises—AMEN.

SERMON VIII.
THE SMITTEN ROCK.

Exodus xvii. 6.

Behold I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb: and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink.

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SERMON VIII.

Exodus xvii. 6.—Behold I will stand before thee there, upon the rock in Horeb :
and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the
people may drink.

THE journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, was a standing miracle, and evidently intended to represent the wonderful changes, and providential interpositions, incident to a life of faith and holiness. They were liberated from the most abject servitude that ever oppressed an unhappy people, and their joy seemed to preclude every apprehension of any future disaster. But behold their disappointment! They come to the waters of Marah, and borne down with extreme fatigue, and thirst, were delighted with the prospect of cooling draughts ; but alas! the water was bitter ! however their expectation shall not be defeated ; a species of wood is provided, which thrown into it corrects its taste, and renders it palatable. The traveller to the heavenly Canaan does not proceed far, when he meets with the bitter waters of affliction, both internal and external, which nothing but the wood of our Saviour's cross can sweeten. Their next grievance, and which produced seditious murmurings, was want of food. The clouds drop manna, and the eastern breezes waft multitudes of quails into their camp. The christian sojourner in this strange land, becomes subject to hunger, which nothing can allay but the bread that cometh down from heaven, justly and emphatically denominated the hidden

manna. The next afflictive occurrence, is again want of water to extinguish their thirst, at Rephidim. They chode with Moses ;—“ Wherefore,” said they, “ is this, that thou hast brought us up out of the land of Egypt to kill us and our cattle with thirst.” Upon his crying unto the Lord, he was commanded to take with him the elders of Israel, and his rod, and repair to a certain rock in Horeb, and the Lord promises as in the text, “ Behold I will stand before thee there, and thou shalt smite the rock ; and there shalt come water out of it, that the people may drink.” The weary traveller in his journey to the celestial world meets with his Rephidims, a dry and thirsty land where no water is, and where he pants for the refreshing streams of quickening grace, as the hunted hart for the water brooks. But behold his rock in Horeb is smitten ; waters flow out of it, that the people may drink. That I may treat the subject with some order, I shall show,

I. That the Saviour Jesus Christ was typified by this rock in Horeb.

II. In what manner he was smitten, and,

III. For what purpose,

I. Jesus, the Redeemer of Israel, the Mediator of the new covenant is typified and prefigured by this rock in Horeb ; as a proof I may quote inspired authority ; see 1 Cor. x. 4, “ for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.” To select a rock as emblematical of the Saviour, is an evidence of divine wisdom, as nothing can be more expressive of his mediatorial qualities. As a rock he is the strength and support of his people. In this point of view he applies the figure to himself ; see Matt. xvi. 18, “ Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell

shall not prevail against it." In strains of pious ejaulation the sweet singer of Israel tunes his harp in Psalm xviii. 2, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I will trust;" and in Psalm lxi. 2, he prays, "lead me to the rock that is higher than I." As a rock, he is to his people a refuge, and an asylum, in times of imminent danger; to him they fly with nimble wing when pursued by their embittered foes.—"He is an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," see Isaiah lxii. 2. This rock was in Horeb the mount of God. The rock Jesus holds his seat in his church, God's holy mountain; he is in the midst of her a Sinai in holiness; he is the foundation stone, which the builders rejected, and is become the head of the corner.

He is there as King, bearing universal sway over his extensive dominions, for he was anointed over his holy hill; on this mount he feeds his flock; here he is to all his chosen a refuge in distress and a very present help in time of trouble.

II. The rock in Horeb was smitten. Jesus our rock could have produced nothing advantageous to his people, had he not been smitten.—He was smitten with the rod of Moses; the rod of God's fiery law inflicted on him all its awful penalties; he had declared himself man's substitute, placed himself in man's law-stead, and made himself obnoxious to all the punishment sin had merited. The sins of the elect become his by imputation, his perfect innocence and spotless holiness become theirs; hence a pious christian once addressed the Saviour, "Lord, my sins are thine, thy righteousness is mine; I am thy hell

but thou art my heaven." From this rod he received many sore stripes. They were laid long and heavy. It heaped on him all its dreadful maledictions, see Gal. iii. 13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He was smitten by the rod of divine justice. Having undertaken to bring in an everlasting righteousness, by making complete satisfaction to vindictive justice, the uttermost farthing of the sinner's enormous debt was demanded from the surety; the most rigid infliction of all the punishment due to sin: not a groan, not a tear, not a single arrow of divine vengeance, nor one bitter ingredient in the cup of God's wrath, could be deducted: justice seized him by the throat, and said, pay me what thou owest as surety for thy people.

He was smitten by the rod of devils. At his entrance into the world, satan raised a storm against him in the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem. On his entrance on his public ministration, he made another formidable attack on the seed of the woman. He led him into the wilderness, and there harrassed him with the most direful temptations, for the space of forty days; and again when his mediatorial sufferings were brought to a crisis, and about to receive their completion, all the powers of hell rushed upon him with infernal rage, determined to crush his scheme for the subversion of the kingdom of darkness in its last efforts. The devils probably accosted him with such language as this; "Feeble man, what a tremendous work hast thou undertaken! namely, to suffer the punishment due to sin: all the host of angels are inadequate, and wilt thou, O! despicable son of Mary, venture upon it? Abandon a work so far

above thy created powers ; thou wilt surely sink under the pressure of such a presumptuous attempt."

He was smitten by Romans : Pilate commanded him to be scourged, hoping thereby to excite the compassion of the Jews. Behold the innocent Son of the Most High, with his body all over lacerated and torn to pieces.

He was smitten by the Jews : smitten with mocking tongues, crying, " Hail king of the Jews ! Who is it that smiteth thee ? If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross ; others he saved, himself he cannot save." Smitten with thorns on his head, with nails in his hands and feet, with a javelin in his side, and in his soul with sorrows and the wrath of an incensed Jehovah. •

He was smitten by the rod of his people's sins, " for he was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our transgressions ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." All the sins of every individual, and of all collectively, who have existed from the beginning of time, and of all who shall exist to the end of the world's duration, were leaded on him. Enormous mass ! How was our rock smitten ! He was smitten during the whole time of his sojourning on earth ; it was by no means limited to his crucifixion, nor to the most excruciating passion of his last moments. From his manger to his grave was one continued scene of smiting ; born of a contemptible virgin, and in a stable ; debarred from the comforts and often from the necessaries of life ; travelling through the Jewish country on foot, accompanied by twelve companions in mean attire, one of them carrying the bag ; possessing not a mite to pay his tribute, until he had extracted it from the bowels of a fish—How affecting his complaint, and yet how magnanimous ! " Foxes have holes, and the fowls of the

air nests ; but the Son of man hath not whereon to lay his head." He was smitten with hunger, thirst and fatigue ! He was smitten with the rod of divine indignation ; the Father who now proceeded against the darling of his bosom, in the character of an angry judge, suspended that parental affection which his Son from eternity had enjoyed in his bosom, and rushed on him with all the vengeance of offended majesty. How awfully doth he excite his indignation against him," Zech. xiii. 7, "Awake, O sword ! against my shepherd ; and against the man, that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts : smite the shepherd." He held the bitter cup at his lips, and there continued it until he had drank the last drop of his wrath. Like the rock in Horeb, he was smitten merely for others, "He, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God ;" see 1 Pet. iii. 18. Astonishing condescension and grace : this is love ; love that surpasseth all understanding : angels have been desirous to look into this tremendous plan of divine love, but have not been able. It is too high for finite conception ; an ocean without bottom or shore, infinite like deity. That the Son of God should willingly submit to all these smitings, merely for the sake of promoting the happiness of apostates, rebels, and enemies, is a fact that exceeds all the powers of created reflection. We can only say, the Lord hath done it, and it is wonderful in our eyes. It will furnish the most pleasing theme for beatified contemplation to saints in glory. The heavenly arches will ring forever with loud Hosannas to the rock of our salvation, that was smitten, not on Mount Horeb, but on Mount Calvary ; and a reflection that their sins have smitten him, will greatly swell the celestial anthems. O ! to consider, that by suffering all this smiting, he has

brought them to glory, will link their hearts to Immanuel, in the indissoluble bond of unfeigned, eternal love!

III. The rock in Horeb was smitten, that water might come out of it, and the people drink: for the same purpose, was the rock Jesus smitten? We shall enquire, 1. What hath resulted from all the smittings our Saviour underwent, that can fitly be represented by the water that flowed from the smitten rock at Horeb. 2. How his people are said to drink.

The blessed effects of our Lord's active and passive obedience are, in many places of scripture, compared to water, especially those spiritual gifts and influences, which he hath purchased; see Isaiah xlv. 3, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring;" see also John iv. 14, "But whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; for the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing unto everlasting life." A body of water possesses astonishing force; running in strong and rapid currents, it often overturns cities, inundates extensive tracts of country, and overwhelms every thing that comes in its way. So the Spirit of Christ in its powerful and saving operations on the human mind; it breaks in with amazing energy, and carries all before it; the carnal bias, erroneous principles, strong prejudices, self-sufficiency, and pride, are all necessitated to yield to the omnipotence of the Holy Ghost. Water possesses a power to wash away filth or remove a stain; by the purifying efficacy of the divine Spirit the sinner's innate pollution and uncleanness is washed away; see 1 Cor. vi. 11. "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified,

but ye are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God." Water possesses a nourishing virtue, so do the gifts and endowments of the Holy Ghost.

The rock was smitten that the people might drink. This smiting, with all the water that gushed out of the rock, would have afforded no refreshment had the people abstained from drinking. The blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ possess power to quicken and revive our souls, to make them vivid and fruitful, but not unless we drink of these waters of life.—Christ's people drink of this rock by faith; out of his exhaustless stores they receive abundant supplies of grace; see John vii. 37, 38, "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The phrase is expressive of that exquisite gladness, which the Holy Spirit produces in the hearts of God's people, yea, joy unspeakable and full of glory; "for the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink, but peace, joy and gladness through the Holy Ghost." The waters that flowed from the smitten rock were emblematical of that abundance which believers receive through Jesus Christ; namely, rivers of living water; enough for all the people to drink; therefore eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

"They are satisfied with the fatness of his house, and he makes them drink out of the rivers of his pleasure." Not only are all their wants supplied, and all their holy desires satisfied, but all share in this abundance, from the most eminent personage to the meanest babe in

Christ. These streams are not limited within the narrow confines of this lower world, they water even the celestial paradise. The myriads of glorified spirits drink of this rock. It is there "a river of pure water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb," see Rev. xxii. 1. Here they are, comparatively speaking, barely the droppings of the sanctuary; there they flow in copious rivers, and make glad the city of God, the New Jerusalem; there they fill the hearts of the blessed, with fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore at God's right hand. Eternity will never obliterate from their minds the recollection that their glorified state has originated from the smiting of the rock of ages, Jesus Christ; hence, in strains of beatific rapture, they sing, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins, in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father—to him be glory and dominion forever and ever—AMEN."

IMPROVEMENT.

I. From what has been advanced on the subject, we may infer,

1. That salvation, through the sufferings of a divine Saviour, justly excites admiration. The whole intelligent system is struck with amazement. Doubtless the Israelites were astonished when they saw the smitten rock in Horeb emit rivers sufficient for six hundred thousand and upwards, with their numberless herds; and who is not amazed at the tremendous effects of the Redeemer's obedience, whereby a perishing world has been saved? Who does not wonder at the benevolent design? What goodness! what love! what condescension! what mercy did the Israelites observe in this miracle!

but infinitely more is to be seen in the smiting of our rock ;—O that the Almighty should send his darling Son, to suffer all these smitings for us ! had it been for fallen angels, but O ! for such vile nothings as we are ; incomprehensible condescension !

2. It has equally a tendency to excite joy. What ecstasies of joy must have expanded the heart of every Israelite, when they beheld the waters gushing from the rock. Ready to perish, despairing of relief, and conceiving it impossible, according to the nature of things, that water could be extracted from a flinty substance. How may christians rejoice, when they behold Jesus Christ, God's eternal and beloved Son, thus smitten, that their souls, ready to perish, might yet be saved !

3. Such reflections should excite sincere thankfulness. What gratitude did doubtless fill the hearts of these Israelites when they saw rivers spouting from the rock ; scorched with thirst, harrassed with desponding fears and torturing apprehensions that they were led into the wilderness, with their wives, their children, and their cattle, to perish. They must have experienced the most grateful emotions when they saw that a beneficent preserver would command the rocks to supply them, where no springs could be found. How much more should the most sincere and unaffected gratitude influence our minds, when we consider that God caused the beloved of his bosom to be smitten, that sinners might drink of the waters of life and live for ever !

II. But at no time, and on no occasion, does any spiritual entertainment so fully answer to the smiting of the rock in Horeb, as when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered ; here Christ crucified is set clearly before our eyes : here we view him as the smit-

ten rock. But, alas ! multitudes reject and despise him, by neglecting and slighting this ordinance. What would you have thought if persons among these perishing Israelites had refused to come to the rock, and had said, “ We believe not that a drop of water will come out of it, though it be smitten a thousand times, and had rather perish than come ? ” Your obstinaey and folly, who neglect the Lord’s Supper, are still more unjustifiable. You disobey his positive command. “ Do this in remembrance of me,” was the dying injunction of our Lord. And what is your reply ? We will not eat this bread, and drink this cup in remembrance of thee. We are not desirous of remembering thee, and care not how soon we forget thee. Ye deprive yourselves of the most solemn and the most beneficial of all gospel ordinances, and thus you act a foolish part : like the prodigal, you run away from your father’s sumptuous table, and are content to feed upon husks. But says some one, “ a morsel of bread and a sip of wine appear so trifling and insignificant, that I cannot see what good effect they can produce.” Who art thou, O man, that thou wouldst boast of wisdom superior to that of Jehovah, who has been pleased to institute these simple elements, seals of his covenant ? A serap of paper, and small bit of sealing-wax, confirms your title to all your earthly possessions ; and yet these are in themselves trifling things : and will you reject the offer of an inheritance among the saints in light, because your heavenly Father has thought proper to seal your title to it, by broken bread and a cup of blessing ? Besides, as the ritual of the Mosaiek worship was extremely expensive, which rendered it a burden too heavy to be borne ; that under the new dispensation was intended to restore equal liberty, and

therefore must necessarily be simple.—Says another, “I cannot view the Supper as essential to salvation, and therefore it may be dispensed with.” Friend! thy promise is just, but thy conclusion is false. It is not essential to salvation. A man may go to heaven who has never partaken of the Lord’s Supper. But it may not be dispensed with; and whoever lives in an habitual neglect of this ordinance, certainly is not, nor was he ever in the way to heaven.

Says another, “I am afraid of eating and drinking my damnation.” Against partaking unworthily we should use all possible precaution; but that precaution does not consist in abstinence, for thereby we most certainly expose ourselves to condemnation. Another objects—“I am too great a sinner, it would certainly be presumption in the extreme should such a wretch approach the sacred board.”—This ordinance is by no means instituted for sinners, whose sins may be comparatively few, but for sinners without distinction. Not for a few polite moralists, but for the most abandoned profligate, provided he repents and believes; for Saul of Tarsis, who persecuted the lambs of Christ; for Mary Magdalen, whose body had become a den of devils; for the thief on the cross; yea, for many who had assisted in killing the Lord of glory.—Says another, “I do not find that I possess the requisite frames and exercises of mind, and therefore I cannot come; not that humble mindedness, not that brokenness of heart, nor that contrition of spirit, which I think we should experience when we go to the Lord’s table. Your uneasiness is an evidencē that you are not wholly destitute of them, but that you do not possess them to the degree you would wish—but know ye not that these are among the bless-

ings that result to the people of God, from the use of this ordinance? Ah! says another, "I would come to the table, but I feel not that hunger and thirst which, according to our Lord's sermon on the mount, would render me a proper subject of the promised blessing." And yet you appear not to be devoid of that very hunger and thirst. Pray what else is the desire you intimate, but the identical frame, whose want you complain of?

III. The solemnity of the ordinance demands that I should particularly address you who have made up your minds, and have determined, in the power of divine grace, to approach.

Come with a broken heart; such an oblation is acceptable to God; on such he will look who are of a broken heart and of a contrite spirit, and that tremble at his word. Was Jesus broken for you, and should not you be broken for him? Come, leaning on Jesus as one that leaneth on her beloved: come, weeping: He will lead you with joy. O did he weep blood for you, and will you not weep tears for him?

When at the table, meditate on his sufferings; their nature, their variety, their design, and their effects. Consider his command when he instituted this ordinance. "Do this in remembrance of me." Does not your heart reply—remember thee? O! should I ever forget thee? Forget one who has shed his own blood for my soul? No! let my right hand forget its cunning, if I forget my Redeemer. O, my soul, keep my Jesus in everlasting remembrance.—AMEN.

SERMON IX.

**ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S
SUPPER.**

1 Cor. xi. 28.

But let a man examine himself, and let him eat of that bread and drink of
that cup.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON IX.

1 Cor. xi. 28.—“ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.”

THE all-wise governor of the universe knowing what is in man, and condescending to his infirmities, has not accommodated his holy ordinances to the intellectual improvements of a few only of the human race, but adapted them to the great mass of mortals, immersed in sensual things, prone to acquiesce in mere animal life, and with difficulty perceiving and admitting the pure and exalted truths of religion. The rites which he has instituted are accompanied with sensible images, with objects visible, and tangible in order to conduct the carnal mind by gentle gradations, and in the easiest manner, to the sublimity of a spiritual and celestial state. For this purpose he has appointed two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in which the elements of water, bread, and wine, are constituted under the operation of his Spirit, both signs and means of sanctification and pardon. In these symbolical institutions something is done as well as spoken, some palpable signs are introduced, and the language of actions and signs is adopted, a language more impressive and universal than any mode of articulate utterances whatever.

The word *sacrament*, which distinguishes these Holy Rites, is certainly not a scriptural term, neither is it classical, for it does not appear to be derived from *sa-*

cramentum, the military oath of the Romans ; but from the same word, as used by the early translators of the bible, in the edition called the vulgate, whenever they had occasion to render into latin the Greek term *mystery*. The very name *sacrament* implies mystery. In the language of theologians, who, more intent on things than words, did not always study the purest diction of classical accuracy, *sacramentum* is adopted as the appropriate name for the holy mysteries of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and accordingly our church, in the communion service, announces, " that our Master and only Saviour hath instituted and ordained holy mysteries, as pledges of his love, and for a continual remembrance of his love, to our great and endless comfort." Wherefore, as sanctification and the remission of sins are, without doubt, the greatest favours that a human being can receive, and as these are offered in the eucharist to the worthy receiver, by the founder of our religion, and of its rites ; it follows, that, with the lowest prostration of body and mind, man, wretched as he is by nature, ought to approach this holy mystery, and accept the blessings of grace which it tenders ; that *he ought to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup after having examined himself*, with respect to the ideas which he entertains of the nature, end and advantages of this rite, after having examined the force of the objections and pretences which generally speaking induce christians to neglect it ; after having examined the religious habits and dispositions of his soul required to receive it. In order to lend some assistance to those who are willing to enter upon this important examination, I shall endeavour, by God's help, briefly to lay before you at this time, the nature and end of this holy ordinance,

together with some reasons which oblige christians to comply with it, and the answers which may be made to their objections and excuses. And first, with respect to the nature of this ordinance, it is evident from every passage of scripture in which it is mentioned, that the Lord's Supper is a spiritual feast, appointed for a solemn remembrance of Christ's death, and is moreover a seal of that covenant which God has made with us in him. Its two-fold meaning is therefore manifest. It is meant, on the one hand, to be a solemn remembrance of the person and passion of our blessed Lord, exciting us thankfully to call to mind all that he has done and suffered for us, and in our stead; and quickening our affections with love to his person, and our wills with resolution to obey his commandments; and on the other hand, it is a seal of the new covenant of grace, which God has made with us in Christ: in which covenant he has assured us of pardon of sin, and eternal life, upon the conditions of faith and repentance. This, in few words, is the genuine nature of the Lord's Supper. It is a commemorative sacrifice, and typical representation by way of memorial of the grand sacrifice that had been offered up on the cross by Jesus Christ. Now with respect to the ends of this religious institution, or the special reasons and purposes, for which it was ordained by our Saviour, they were briefly these—it was intended, in the first place, as a renewal of that solemn covenant which we entered into at baptism, when by the piety of our parents, or sponsors, we were dedicated to the Lord, and solemnly promised to continue *his faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives end*: and because our infirmities are many, and our violations of this covenant too frequent, this opportunity was mercifully af-

forded us to rise again into newness of life. Another end of it is to quicken our remembrance of our dying Redeemer, and of the love which he manifested for us in his painful and costly sacrifice. "This do in remembrance of me." It was meant as a seal to God's act of forgiveness, as an assurance of his free gift of eternal life. "This is my blood of the New Testament," says he, "which is shed for many for the remission of sins." A third end of this ordinance is to fortify the soul against temptations of every kind, and through the strength of this bread of life to render those who duly partake of it, more than conquerors over all their spiritual enemies.— Lastly, it was intended to create an intimate moral union between Christ and the human soul, it being indeed an holy communion between man and his Redeemer, and to establish between all the professors of his religion the strictest bonds of harmony and love. "We being many are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread," 1 Cor. x. 17. That is, as many grains of wheat united together in one lump, constitute one loaf of bread; so christians, though many by the death of our common Saviour, and the participation of his holy supper, are spiritually incorporated into one mystical body, and should labour assiduously to be of one heart, and one mind.

Our next consideration regards the obligations incumbent upon christians to observe this ordinance, and these obligations are founded in motives of duty and of interest—of duty, because a compliance with this institution is a positive command issuing from sovereign authority, enacted by a dying Saviour: it is a command of love and grace, "eat, and live." It is a pleasant, easy, and honourable command, admitting frail man to the table

of the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is a command admirably calculated to facilitate our obedience to every other precept ; a command which must remain in force till countermanded by the same supreme authority by which it was enacted.—A compliance with it is grounded moreover in motives of *self-interest*, for it is surely a rich magazine of spiritual treasures—it strengthens our faith, it enlivens our hopes, it kindles the flames of divine love, it enlarges our views and desires of Christ, increases our sorrow for sin, and our esteem of holiness ; it multiplies all our spiritual comforts in this world, and greatly enlivens our expectations respecting those of the next. While holding out such inestimable advantages, is it not a matter of much astonishment, that the greater part of christians should resist the kind and pressing invitations of the gospel, and its ministers, and turn their backs upon this holy ordinance ? Many reasons, no doubt, are alledged by thoughtful persons, to reconcile their consciences to an omission of this kind. We will consider the principal and most common of these excuses in the remaining part of this discourse ; and should what is about to be said produce no conviction among my hearers, let them attribute this less to the validity of their objections, than to the want of skill and ability in the present attempt to refute them. Among the first excuses made by some, is the extraordinary dread, and solemnity of the ordinance itself. These persons would put their Saviour off with a compliment by telling him, that the privilege is too great, the dignity too high, the institution too sacred for them to approach it—this, indeed, is a good reason for not partaking of this ordinance without preparation and care, but it is no reason for omitting it altogether. Let

us not mistake the reverence required of us in this act of religion. It is the reverence of obedience, not of mere speculation ; and that man only has his mind impressed with a proper sense of the solemnity of this sacrament, who is careful to receive it with all the humility and self-abasement which becomes sinful dust and ashes, without encouraging those superstitious apprehensions, which deter him from his duty.—*Another plea*, is that of *unworthiness*. We are *unworthy*, and therefore *afraid* to come, for *he that eateth unworthily, eateth his own damnation* ; it is safer, therefore, to *abstain altogether*.—Now, besides the improper stress laid upon the word *damnation* in this passage, which, in the original means only the temporal judgments of God, as the context clearly evinces, we must always remember that there is a tenfold worthiness with respect to this sacrament : a worthiness of *merit*, and a worthiness of *meetness, fitness or propriety*.—If by being *worthy*, you mean the former, a worthiness implying *merit*, or a *deserving* to be entertained at the Lord's table ; in that sense, not only the holiest saint upon earth, but the highest archangel in heaven is unworthy of this privilege. But there is besides this a worthiness of *fitness or propriety*, which consists in such a preparation of soul, as the gospel requires, and Christ will accept. A beggar is frequently not worthy of your alms, yet you would not account it humility, but rather pride in him to refuse them (especially if solicited to do so) upon the pretence of his unworthiness. The truth is, an humble sense of our unworthiness is among the best preparations for receiving this sacrament—as to the plea of safety, which is urged for keeping away from it altogether, I conceive it to be a very palpable mistake, because the guilt and dan-

ger of *unworthy refusing* is certainly as great or greater, than the danger of *unworthy receiving*; for a total omission must generally be considered as a bold affront to the authority of Christ, and a cold indifference to his love. It is an open renunciation of those important gospel privileges and graces, which the best and wisest professors of christianity have always believed and contended, are conferred in this ordinance. They who slighted the invitation to the marriage-supper fared no better than he did, who came without a wedding-garment. The former were as severely punished for their disobedience, as the latter for his disrespect. The third plea, is *a want of due preparation*. My conscience tells me, some one will say, that *I am unfit to come to this ordinance, and therefore, I had better stay away*.—But to whose charge, let it be asked, is this unfitness to be laid? It must either be God's fault, or your own.—Will you be rash enough to say, that God is not willing to assist, and to accept your endeavours? What is it then that renders you unprepared? Is it not some darling sin, which you are unwilling to renounce? Does not conscience tell you that you lead an unchristian life, or that you have never thought seriously on the nature of this ordinance, and your obligations respecting it? Besides, let them, who plead their unfitness in this respect, ask themselves whether they be fit to die: such persons pretend that they must wait all the days of their lives till they are prepared for the Lord's Supper; but will death wait for *them*, till they are prepared for that event? When this terrific messenger calls, whether prepared or not, you must obey his summons. Now, in what does a preparation for death consist but in the exercises of faith, repentance and a holy life? These also will fit you for the sa-

erament ; and to expect admittance into heaven without them, is the height of senseless and guilty presumption. Let these persons, moreover, candidly acknowledge, whether they ever undertook in good earnest to prepare themselves for this ordinance ? Whether they ever spent a day, or half a day, or a few hours in their closets, in reviewing their consciences, in discovering, confessing and bewailing their sins, in soliciting God's grace to mortify and subdue them ? Did they ever take time to examine the grounds, the reasons of this christian rite, as well as the presumptive evidences in favour of its strict obligation on christians, arising from the opinions and practice of every christian church, and of their most exemplary and learned members and divines ? If they have never done this, does it not look very like hypocrisy to plead unfitness, which they have never taken any pains to remove ? Such persons should be careful, lest their unfitness for the Lord's table be extended to every other duty of religion. The same omission of preparatory exercises disqualifies for both, and God was never known to work a miracle to countenance inattention and sloth. If you say, that you can do nothing without God ; I reply, that, in this instance, God will do nothing without you. His grace is ever ready to assist your sincere endeavours and his goodness to accept them ; but do not deceive yourselves by excusing one fault with another. Some will say, as another excuse for omitting this duty, " Alas ! we are ignorant and unlearned, and altogether destitute of the knowledge which is required in a worthy communicant." To these I reply, that, if they be ignorant of the fundamental doctrines and duties of religion, their ignorance, indeed, is dangerous and fatal, such as must debar them from

heaven as well as from this ordinance. But why do such persons sit down contented in their ignorance? Why do they not repair to their churches for *public*, or to their pastors for *private* instruction, who would thank them for such opportunities of serving them? The fact, however, probably is, that such persons are not so ignorant as they imagine; perhaps they are mistaken in the measures and degrees of knowledge required in a worthy communicant. For if they have a competent knowledge of the *Author*, the *use* and *end* of this ordinance, this will be sufficient, however they may be unable to dispute about its controverted points. If they understand the author of this ordinance to be the Lord Jesus; the end or purpose of it to be a representation, and commemoration of his death—that the breaking of the bread represents “the breaking of his body upon the cross,” and the “pouring out of the wine, the shedding of his blood for their redemption;” if they understand the use of this ordinance to be the renewing of their covenant with God, which they entered into at baptism, a remembrance of their dying Lord, a seal to pardon for sin, a pledge of Christ’s love, and a solemn sanction to a strict union among Christians in charity and love: if, I say, they know all this, and endeavour to act conformably to this knowledge, I may venture to assure them, that they are sufficiently instructed respecting this ordinance; and that their views of the same will be enlarged and perfected in proportion to their punctuality in partaking of its blessings. There are others who complain of a certain hardness of heart, a certain insensibility to the pleasures of religion, or the guilt of sin, and without some inward feelings of this kind, they deem it most advisable to abstain from the Lord’s Supper. Such per-

sons should reflect, that if their sorrow for sin induce them to loathe and abandon it, although their souls, at the same time, be as *land without water*, they may hope humbly that their repentance is sincere. Lively and vehement impressions are not *certain* signs of the solidity of religious principles, much less are they always the forerunners of a holy life. The remembrance, of enormous crimes often fills the soul with horrors and alarm which are not felt by those whom God's grace has preserved from such crying iniquities, and who have only to deplore the usual frailties and sinfulness of their nature; of these the repentance is not less sincere for being calm and composed, and if sincere, the devout communicant wants no other evidence of its reality. The danger of relapsing into former irregularities is another excuse which many alledge for omitting this ordinance; "we fear," say they, that if we fall again into sin after being at the sacrament, we shall sin, as it were, against the Holy Ghost, and never be forgiven; we judge it, therefore, safer not to receive it at all." My brethren, it must, indeed, be acknowledged, that to sin wilfully and deliberately, after being admitted to this intimate communion with the Lord Jesus, is a considerable aggravation of our offences, but still not such as to render them unpardonable, or sincere repentance ineffectual, because still "we have an advocate with the Father, ever making intercession for us," as long as we remain in this state of trial. He expects indeed of the devout communicant an *holy*, but not an *angelical* life; a life of sincerity, though not of absolute perfection; and it was chiefly to secure us against the surprizes of our vicious propensities, and to enable us to repair them by godlike sorrow and genuine

repentance, that this sacrament was instituted; for what can so effectually preserve us in a course of innocence, from relapsing into sin, as the solemn act of our religion, which commemorates *his death*, who suffered to expiate it? Another *plea* is this—I dare not, says one, partake of this ordinance, because I labour under fears and doubts of my own sincerity.—Had I an assurance of my state of grace, I might venture; but I have heard that no man ought to come to this ordinance who wants *assurance*. In reply to this excuse, we may observe, that there are two sorts of doubtings: some proceed from a want of faith, and some from weakness of faith. With respect to the former, some men there are, whose consciences tell them that they are either open sinners, or concealed hypocrites: these persons have great reason to doubt of their condition, or rather there is scarcely room for any doubt at all. It is, certainly, very bad and very dangerous, and should be immediately abandoned. But, on the other hand, there are doubtings which arise from weakness of faith—our Lord alludes to these, when he says, Matt. xiv. 31, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Now the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is the proper remedy for the relief and cure of doubts of this nature, and the consequence is, the longer we neglect it, the more distressing will be our perplexity and apprehensions. As to the idea that none should approach this sacrament without an assurance of grace, it is certainly a great mistake; for the sacrament being a sealing ordinance of the covenant of grace, cannot pre-suppose what it is the principal means of procuring.—If a man possess the full assurance of salvation, there can be no need of repairing

to any ordinance to obtain it. Besides, this assurance, which is not of *sense*, but of *faith*, must rest entirely upon the promises of the gospel ; and these, we know, will only be realized to those who comply with its positive injunctions ; of which a participation of the Lord's Supper seems certainly to be one. But, says another, by way of further excuse, I see not much advantage arising from this ordinance. Many who frequent the Lord's table lead as " unchristian lives, as they who entirely absent themselves ; and such persons, instead of being benefited, only incur the additional guilt of profaning a holy rite." Allowing this assertion to be true in its utmost extent, we must still reject the conclusion drawn from it. Shall we say, because some persons by a blameable inattention to their bodily food are choaked in the act of eating, that therefore we should resolve to abstain from all nourishment ? Because some persons eat and drink unworthily, and so dishonour the memory of their Redeemer, is this a sufficient reason why we should disobey him. My brethren, we must be influenced by principle ; we must walk by rule, and not by example. We must attend to Christ's command, not to our neighbour's excuses for eluding it. Besides, do we know that the person who has fallen, after receiving the sacrament, has not risen again by repentance ? This, at any rate, we may presume, that a remembrance of this ordinance is calculated to produce a delicacy of conscience, and to back its upbraidings with many affecting suggestions, which they who neglect it are not so likely to experience. It is with this, as with every other act of religion ; the frequency of its being performed unworthily can never serve as a plea for its omission. How many attend weekly at the house of God without being re-

formed! Shall we therefore say, that such attendance is unnecessary? By many who see and acknowledge the propriety of attending to this ordinance, a very common excuse is alledged, "that they are not in charity with a neighbour, that they have received such injurious treatment, as has excited feelings incompatible with the dispositions required for the sacrament." On this head calmly reflect, whether you should wrong your own souls, because a neighbour has wronged you. The injury done to you is *his sin*; but the malice with which you resent it is *your own*, and you must answer for it. At any rate, it is your duty to enquire, whether your anger against your neighbour be just or otherwise. If he has clearly injured you, and persists in his injustice, your resentment is well founded; but even in this case it must be kept within due bounds, and not suffered to instigate you to sentiments of revenge. A sensibility to injuries, when chastened in this manner, does not indispose you to this holy rite. But if, upon examination, you discover your aversion to be unfounded in this case, go *first and be reconciled to your brother* before you present yourself at this feast of love; and there, if any sparks of the irascible passions be still lurking in your hearts, you will surely be induced and enabled to extinguish them when solemnly engaged in commemorating the most illustrious and affecting instance of loving *our enemies*, and pardoning injuries, that was ever exhibited to the world. This emptying of the heart of all rancour and animosity is an indispensable preparation for coming to this ordinance; but reflect also, that even to pronounce the Lord's prayer without it, is a manifest profanation, and that at the final judgment of the universe, the definitive sentence will turn chiefly upon this point. Another

reason for neglecting this ordinance, and which they who are actuated by it, will hardly allow themselves to acknowledge, is a certain apprehension, lest so public and so solemn a profession of religion should lay them under restraints incompatible with some beloved levities, frivolities, and vanities of a worldly life. Such persons unfortunately confound the gloom of superstition with religious seriousness, and are thus deterred from their duty in this particular by the insidious tempter persuading them that the christian temper is inconsistent with the innocent enjoyments of human life. This, indeed, is a fatal and common error; but if it be suffered to influence their conduct with respect to this ordinance, it may also annul the obligations which are already upon them. Let such persons look back upon their baptismal vows. Did they not then “renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so as not to be led by them?” Did not as many as have been baptized into Christ, promise to put “on his Spirit and walk in his commandments all the days of their lives?” Now what obligations arising from a participation of the Lord’s Supper are more binding than these? This ordinance, therefore, lays no restraints upon the conscience, which our baptismal engagements have not already established; nor are they who neglect it exempted from any christian duties and strictness of living which the devout communicant is obliged to practise. At the Lord’s table we confirm our baptismal covenant, and proclaim it to the church; but we bind ourselves by no new ties to the service of our Maker; so that whether we partake or not of this holy ordinance, the obligation is still the same “of living soberly, righteously and godly in the present world.” The last

excuse which I shall mention, is that which is often alleged on the score of a multiplicity of wordly concerns. "We are so incumbered, it is said, so bewildered with a press of daily business, that we have really no leisure to prepare ourselves for so holy a solemnity."—But can, indeed, men find no *time* to serve and glorify that God, of whose gift is every moment of their existence? Can time be found for every thing, but the concerns of the soul? Your business is either necessary or it is superfluous, if the latter, why not renounce it; for such business is commonly, to say the least of it, *laborious idleness!* If it be necessary, and proper, the business of your station and calling ought not to preclude a preparation for the sacrament; for such business, performed with a right spirit, is God's service. You are serving God, when walking industriously and uprightly in the ways of your vocation. Besides, let us reflect, that the more worldly business we have upon our hands, the more pressing is our obligation to attend on this ordinance. Men of extensive business, more than all others, are exposed to that wordly-mindedness so hostile to a spirit of religion, and which nothing can effectually counteract but occasional abstractions of the mind from earthly concerns, to refresh it with the influences of another world. The constant encroachments of the mammon of unrighteousness upon the affections must be combatted by the most powerful aids of religion, or this idol will finally succeed in usurping that place in the heart which should be always reserved for its Creator and its God. In a word, he who pleads *business* for neglecting the Lord's Supper virtually declares that he cannot wait upon the Sovereign Lord and Master of the

universe, till permitted to do so by another master who has a higher claim to his services.

And now, having taken a very cursory view of the examination which every person should make of the nature, end and obligations of this ordinance, and of the excuses which are commonly alledged for neglecting it, we should, in the next place, naturally proceed to that personal examination which each one ought to make of the state of his conscience, before he *eats of that bread and drinks of that cup*. But as there is no leisure, at this time, for entering on this subject, which is very clearly elucidated in our book of common prayer, and other treatises on the Lord's Supper, which devout communicants will not fail to read as part of their preparation, all that remains to be said at present is, to entreat those who hear me to make themselves acquainted with this holy ordinance, and the dispositions necessary for partaking of its blessings. The example of those who deliberately reject this institution, or who, without deliberation, never comply with it, can on no account be deemed an excuse for any who will not think upon the subject. In a matter of such importance, it is the duty of all persons to examine for themselves, with uprightness of heart, and humble supplication for light to understand the scriptures, which mention this institution: they should examine moreover the presumptive evidence in favor of the importance, sanctions and benefits of this rite, arising from its primitive, uninterrupted, and universal adoption in the christian church; and from the conscientious practice of the most learned, most religious members of that branch of it to which we profess to belong. As members of this church anxious to preserve her ancient respectability, to support her claim to apos-

tolic orthodoxy, and promote effectually her concurrence with other churches in spreading on every side the light and purity of the gospel, let us from this time pay more becoming attention to this holy ordinance—Let us consider an increasing attendance at the Lord's table as one of the most certain proofs of an increase of piety among us. Besides the excuses commonly alledged for the neglecting this holy ordinance, there are some causes to the same effect of a local nature, which apply to particular congregations, and from which ours is probably not entirely exempt. Our lot is cast in a part of the country, where a certain christian society is most numerous, which has abandoned all the outward ordinances of religion: and it has been often remarked, when this is the case, that the opinions of the many, merely from the weight of numbers, are apt to preponderate, or at least to damp the zeal of less numerous communities for their peculiar doctrines; any indifference arising from such plausible pretexts towards what we profess to be the positive injunctions of the gospel, must be ranked among those obstacles to our duty which we are called upon to overcome; nay, the very respectable society which deems it a material part of their religious system to omit these ordinances, must censure those who imitate their practice, while condemning their principles. What in fact would be our own reflections, if at the close of a sermon against Baptism and the Lord's Supper, we should see these sacraments administered in a meeting-house of Friends? And are not their unfavourable impressions equally well founded; when they behold so few of those who admit these ordinances to be divine, regarding them with indifference, and omitting them altogether? Let us then wipe away the foul reproach of

inconsistency so frequently, and alas, so justly objected to us by the professed adversaries of this rite, who tells us exultingly, that we teach our children to believe the *Lord's Supper to be one of the sacraments generally necessary to salvation*, and yet that many of us, nay by far the greater part of us, pass our whole lives without ever receiving it. In a word, let us always remember, that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is one of the appointed and most effectual means of grace; that the preparation for it, and all that concerns the receiving of it, is highly favourable to virtue, and true godliness, and that whatever favours these, must promote happiness, both *private and social*, both *temporal and eternal*. And now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be everlasting praise.—AMEN.

SERMON X.

THE DANGER AND FOLLY OF INDULGING A COVETOUS TEMPER.

Luke xii. 20.

⁂ But God said, unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee ⁂
then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON X.

Luke xii. 20.—“ But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?

NEVER was the folly of a worldly spirit, pourtrayed in stronger colours than in the parable before us. One had said to our Lord while he was discoursing upon the danger of denying him, “ Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritanee with me.” To which unseasonable request Jesus returns this answer, “ Man, who made me a judge or divider over you ?” I am not come to settle men’s disputes about their worldly estates ; I have an infinitely more important errand ; I came to save their souls, which from a covetous spirit they are in danger of losing forever. “ Take heed therefore, and beware of covetousness, for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundanee of the things which he possesseth.”

To give the more effect to this reply, he relates the short and striking parable from which my text is taken. “ The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully : and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do ? because I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, This will I do : I will pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then

whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he, who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

There is none who can describe the heart of man like him who made that heart. There is none whose instructions so much merit our regard, as his who came into the world to teach us and to shed his blood for our redemption.

He has a perfect knowledge of our ease, and the most disinterested regard to our welfare. Let us a moment attend to his representation of the rich man in the parable, whose character and destiny are both comprehended in these words, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

I ask the more earnest attention to this subject, because no doubt there are many, who are acting the foolish part of this man, while others, are treading so closely in his steps, as greatly to endanger their salvation. It is a day, brethren, of deep and awful declension; when the love of the world has become predominant; and the cry of many hearts is, "give, give, and say not, it is enough."

But let us hear our Lord's representation of the rich man.

1. In the midst of prosperity, he was *unthankful*. God had endued him with wealth, and thus raised him above that state of dependance, to which many are subjected. A blessing descended upon the labour of his hand, and his ground brought forth plentifully, so that he had not room where to bestow all his fruits. Here was a call for the warmest gratitude. He ought to have lifted up his heart to God, in sentiments of humble and pious acknowledgment. But God does not appear to have

been in all his thoughts. His concern was how to augment and secure his abundance, regardless of the hand whence it came and of the obligations it conferred.

Who does not see, that this is a common case, among those on whom God has bestowed the riches of this world? The more they are indebted to their great benefactor, the more do they forget him. The more he causes their cup to run over, the more presumptuous, hardened, and ungrateful do they appear. This is so plainly the fact, that if a man were to ask, where shall I find the best friends of my God? Where shall I find the heart that glows with the warmest sensibility for the common blessings of divine providence? We must for the most part direct him to the humble dwellings of the poor, and often to those who subsist upon the slender charity of their fellow men. Read what the pious Asaph has said of the rich in the seventy-third Psalm. "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart can wish.—They set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue walketh through the earth. They say, how doth God know? And, is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world: they increase in riches." We know that this is not true of all: we know that there are many who, like Abraham, abound in the good things of this life—and at the same time are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Still it cannot be denied that men who increase in wealth, often increase in pride and self-sufficiency, and forget their dependence on God. But we proceed with our Saviour's account of the rich man in the parable.

2. His grounds brought forth plentifully. God pours abundance into his hands. Does he not begin to consider,

what is the proper use of this bounty? What deeds of charity and beneficence he ought to perform? Perhaps he intends to be the father of the poor, and to make the widow's heart sing for joy? Perhaps he meditates deeds of benevolence which shall immortalize his name on earth and lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come? Far otherwise; his heart is occupied only with selfish and earthly schemes. He cares not for the cries and sufferings of the poor. If others chuse to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, be it so: he neither covets their work nor their reward. His soul is bent on another object. All his thoughts turn upon the grovelling purpose of increasing his wealth, and providing the means of voluptuous enjoyment. He does not seem to know that he has an eternity to provide for. He talks of his soul indeed, but not of its future and immortal destiny. All his attention is confined to this world, and to those short-lived pleasures, which with the fashion of this world pass away. On these his imagination eagerly dwells. But mark,

3. They are to him pleasures yet future. Much as he loves the world, and much as he possesses of it, all his enjoyment is in prospect. He has not yet reached the period in which he can say, "Soul, take thine ease;" nor does he know any satisfaction in a moderate participation of his abundance; an insatiable desire to hoard up, and to rise to a state of independence, is paramount to every other object. Thus his foolish heart postpones the certain enjoyment of the present, for the precarious and excessive indulgence of the future. He deceives himself by imagining that time and the increase of his wealth will make him more liberal.

How many are there who follow his example ; who cannot enjoy to-day because they are laying up for to-morrow ; and when to-morrow comes, their enjoyment is still postponed for the same reason. All is prospect with them, and were they to live to the age of Methuselah, the scene would not change. To swell their estates, with the deceitful dream of one day enjoying them, constitutes the sum of their desires and exertions.

4. We call your attention to another view of the rich man. He is increasing in wealth, while it fills him with care, puts him upon resolutions to guard against loss, and provide for future enjoyment. But attend to the self-confident and presumptuous language he employs. "I am resolved what to do. I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." You hear not, "If the Lord will, I shall live, and do this or that." He forgets his dependence on God, for the accomplishment of his purposes, and what is commonly connected with it, he forgets the precarious tenure of that life, on which all his schemes and enjoyments are suspended. He looks forward to the future, as if the events of it were under his control ; and calculates as confidently upon success, as if his own exertions were sufficient to command it.

Neither death nor disappointment make any part of his plan. In all the height of self-flattery, he fixes on a period when he shall be able to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." Then nothing is to be wanting of all that he desires. Secured from the chances of misfortune, and freed from his present cares and labours, he is to pass the remainder of his days in a course of unrestrained indulgence, and of unmingled delight.

This is the prospect which his own imagination presented. But what was the sequel? In the midst of this dream, God said to him, "thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Awful reverse! In a moment his sky is overcast; the gilded prospect of the morning disappears; all his expectations are cut off, and his hopes are forever turned to despair. He dies,—and that soul, whose immortal destiny he had forgotten, is summoned to the bar of judgment. It comes before God, whose mercy it had abused, and whose power and justice it had defied. Where now is that wealth which he had accumulated in this world, or which he was so anxious to accumulate? Will it fill him with confidence in the presence of his Judge? Will it soothe the anguish of throbbing guilt? Will it purchase for him a moment's reprieve from the wide opening pit of hell? Alas! riches profit not in the day of wrath: the remembrance of them to the lost soul, will sting it with keen and eternal remorse. Who can look at this picture without saying, miserable end of a self-deluded mortal! Fool, indeed, to make this world his portion, while all that is honourable in a virtuous course, all that is valuable in the immortal soul, all that is pure and exalted in heaven is sacrificed. But pause a moment, brethren.—On whom does this censure fall?

We are astonished at the man who is wholly intent on the pursuit of gain, while he neglects the salvation of his soul, "a good all price beyond." But are none of us treading in his steps? The heart is deceitful above all things, and a covetous heart, perhaps, the most deceitful of all. On no subject do men more frequently mistake their own character. We often see those over whom this vice reigns with the most unlimited sway, apparent-

ly as unconscious of the fact, as if their souls were baptised with the purest charity. They may even become a proverb for their covetousness without suspecting that this disposition has ever found its way into their hearts. But how is it with us? Are we so far absorbed in the world as to have neither time nor inclination to attend to the great duties of religion? Do we plead the multiplicity of our worldly cares as an excuse for neglecting the great and solemn concerns of our souls?

Then are we covetous. We indulge an inordinate desire for the good things of this world, and we are not willing to cast our care on divine providence in the humble discharge of our duty. We are not willing to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness first of all, leaving it to the Lord to supply us with whatever is needful, according to his good promise. We tread in the steps of the rich worldling, whose heart was supremely set upon the acquisition and enjoyment of the present life.

But suppose we do not neglect the duties of religion altogether—yet if we attend to them only as our worldly interest and convenience will admit—if we subordinate them to the pursuits and acquisitions of the world, we are among the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. I will go farther. Suppose we are scrupulously attentive to all the external duties of religion, yet if our souls are not in them, what will it avail? If our hearts are not in heaven but on earth, are we not earthly? The Pharisees abounded in the rites and forms of religion, while they devoured widows' houses and gave other signs of the most deep rooted covetousness. Whoever toils chiefly for the body, not for the soul, is like the man in the parable, who laid up treasure for himself, but was not rich towards God. What shall be said of those,

who, though possessed of abundance, have seldom or never any thing to spare for the poor; whose well known covetousness chills the heart of every applicant? What shall be said of the litigious man, who has always some right in dispute, and who has a thousand times more concern for his earthly inheritance, than to secure a title to the promised rest? What shall be said of the devouring usurer, who in defiance of the laws of God and society, grinds the face of the poor to satisfy his greedy thirst of gain? Are not these men under the reigning power of covetousness? Are they not in danger of being arrested by God himself, in the awful language of our text, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

But admit that we could acquit ourselves of covetousness as a reigning sin, and that, none of the characters now mentioned, belong to us; still, has not this temper too manifest a hold of our hearts? Do we not think more about the world, and care more for the world than we ought to do? Do we not give less frequently, less bountifully, and less cheerfully, than if a spirit of covetousness was wholly eradicated from our hearts? Alas! brethren, covetousness is the sin of our times. It is a sin in the church, and a sin out of the church; a sin which, under the deceitful names of prudence and œconomy, chills the spirit of piety in many a bosom, and which daily loads with reproach that heaven-born religion, whose principle and end is charity.

What shall we do to counteract its baneful and wide spreading influence? Let us deeply fix in our hearts, the immense folly of seeking to become rich in this world, when it is to be done at the expense of any moral duty,

and at the hazard of our immortal souls. Let us remember, that wealth is but a painted bubble, which though it has a thousand charms for its votaries, can never make us happy. It cannot satisfy the covetous soul itself. It cannot bring peace to the troubled conscience ; it cannot draw the sting of death.

Let us bear in mind, that we brought nothing into the world with us, and that it is certain we can carry nothing out ; that death will soon strip us of all our worldly acquisitions, should our days be protracted to the longest period, and that for aught we can tell, it may be nigh, even at the door. Who ever felt more secure than the rich man in the parable, when he was occupied with the thoughts “of pulling down his barns and building greater?” And yet God said to him, “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.”

We know not what a day may bring forth. Every moment we are liable to be torn from our possessions, and pass into eternity.

What madness is that, which causes our hearts to cleave to this world? Why are we so anxious to lay up treasures on earth, rather than in heaven? I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God : I beseech you by the hopes of an eternal heaven, and by the fears of an endless hell, that you withdraw your affections from this world ; that instead of heaping up silver as the dust, and preparing raiment as the clay, you strive to become rich towards God. Fear not to give alms of such things as ye have ; but remember, that to do good, and to communicate, is a sacrifice with which God is well pleased. By and by you will be put out of your stewardship ; O, how desirable to find one who will receive you into everlasting habitations !

I press you the more upon this subject, because it cannot be doubted, if we held the world with a looser hand, we should enjoy more real happiness while in the world, and should not find the same impediments to our entrance into the kingdom of God, when the business of this world is over. On the wings of faith let us rise to that rich and undefiled inheritance, whither Jesus the Saviour is gone, and to which he will bring all his true disciples at last:—there are treasures incorruptible and immortal; treasures of increasing value, which can never be lost by misfortune, or torn away by violence; treasures which will continue to enrich and to bless their possessors through eternity.

Some, however, may be ready to felicitate themselves, that they are in no way concerned in this subject. Whatever vices or follies they possess, they are not covetous. They have no desire to hoard up wealth with a view to any future enjoyment. They spend liberally and cheerfully as they go. The parable of the rich worldling, they conceive is in no degree applicable to them.

To such let me say, are not your hearts fastened upon the world? It matters not, whether it be honour or pleasure, or gain which attract you. If you love the world, you will perish with the world. The rich man dreamed of one thing: you may dream of another: but your dreams will be alike delusive, alike ruinous. He who said to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee," may suddenly and unexpectedly pronounce the same awful language in your ears. Delay not then in detaching your affections from the world. Think often, and think solemnly of that dread eternity, which will soon swallow up all your interests and con-

cerns. Prepare to meet thy God, whose favour is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and thou perish from the way, while his wrath is kindled but a little.—AMEN.

SERMON XI.
ON THE BENEFITS OF AFFLICTION.

Romans viii. 28.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.”

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XI.

Rom. viii. 28.—“ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.”

SO numerous and so various are the afflictions of the christian, that he is, sometimes, ready to say, with the good old patriarch Jacob, “ All these things are *against me.*” When the hand of poverty presses heavily upon him,—when those, whom he once called friends, prove treacherous,—when his *real* friends are torn away, by death, from his arms ;—and when he himself is languishing with disease ; is it surprising that he should, occasionally, yield to dejection ?

But he is never left to *remain* without hope and consolation. In the midst of all his darkness, light will arise. Amidst all his sorrows, sources of comfort are still left open to him. Whilst he is assured, that *all things work together for his good*, he has no reason to repine. Nay, he finds daily cause to bless the sovereign hand, that chastises in mercy.

The sentiment contained in the text has been the support and consolation of many believers, when dangers threatened, and afflictions pressed. In order to afford relief to a distressed heart, you must place hope before it. It is of the utmost importance that this hope be well founded, and the *reason* of it be perceived. Although the Apostle speaks with the greatest confidence—“ we know that all things work together for good to them

that love God,"—and although we might safely rest this matter wholly on his authority; yet, as we may not, immediately, perceive the *foundation* of this blessed assurance, I shall endeavour, in the

FIRST place, to illustrate, in a few propositions, the *truth of this consoling sentiment*: so that we may, at length, arrive at the same degree of assurance, “that all things work together for good to them that love God.”—For this purpose, let it be observed,

1. That the Almighty is the *governor of the world*, and the *disposer of human events*.

No truth is more obvious than that there is a divine providence, which governs the world. Even among the ancient Heathen, this doctrine was universally admitted; except by the disciples of Epicurus, who abandoned themselves to sensuality and libertinism. Some of the heathen writers compare the Almighty to a pilot, sitting at the helm, and steering the ship: others, to a general, who marshals his hosts, and directs all their movements. Some speak of him as one who guides a chariot whithersoever he pleases; and others represent him as a mighty monarch, sitting on his throne, and giving laws to his subjects:—*all* evidently intimating, that he has the direction and management of human affairs. The altars, which they erected, and the worship, which they performed, clearly prove, that they believed, not only in the *being* of God, but also that he *interfered with the concerns of mortals*.—I mention this, to shew, that even the *light of nature* gives strong intimations of a *Divine Providence*.

In the *sacred volume*, also, we find this doctrine frequently inculcated, and better explained. Therein, we are taught to believe, that He, who created the world,

governs it by his providence : so that nothing happens by chance to him. He, whose mind conceived, and whose power executed, the vast plan of the universe, directs all its movements, either by his immediate and invisible energy, or through the intervention of secondary causes. His providence extends to the state and condition of all his creatures. "He covereth the heaven with clouds. He prepareth rain for the earth, and maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry," Psalm cxlvii. 8, 9. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth," Dan. iv. 35. And not even a sparrow falleth on the ground without his knowledge: but the very hairs of our head are all numbered. See Mat. x. 29, 30.

Since the providence of God is thus conversant about the minutest affairs, it follows, of course, in the second place, that he is intimately acquainted with the *particular* state of every good man.

Although the divine providence extends to all creatures, and all worlds, yet, in the holy scriptures, we are taught, that it has a peculiar reference to the condition, and actions, of intelligent beings. Man, the favoured child of heaven, is an object of the Almighty's particular attention.

To us, whose powers are so limited, it may be difficult to conceive, how the particular state of all human beings, scattered over the face of the whole earth, may be distinctly known at once. But let us remember, that it is an attribute of Deity, whose knowledge is boundless, and whose wisdom is infinite. Whatever conceptions we could form of the Supreme Being, *without this power*, would represent him as liable to ignorance,

uncertainty and error ; and, therefore, would be wholly unworthy of God, the Creator, Governor and Judge of the world.

Since he is, then, a Being of perfect knowledge, he must be intimately acquainted with all our concerns. “ In him we live, and move, and have our being : and he determines the bounds of our habitation.” Nothing can, therefore, happen to us without his knowledge. He is a witness to all our calamities. He beholds those tears which are shed in secret. He hears those groans which mortal ears never hear. He beholds the anguish of the struggling heart. He sees the captive, in his dungeon, from whom the light of heaven is excluded. He beholds the ship-wrecked mariner struggling for life. He is present with the child of affliction languishing on a sick bed,—so that, whatever evils befall the christian, in this world of sorrow, the God, whom he serves, is perfectly acquainted with them all.—

I proceed to observe, in the third place, that the God, who knows and orders all things, *loves* the christian.

Whilst sinners remain in their natural state,—far from God,—under the control of sin, and the influence of depraved hearts ; a Being of infinite purity and holiness must regard them with abhorrence. As *creatures*, they are viewed with complacency, but, as *sinners*, with detestation ; for it is expressly said, that “ God is angry with the wicked every day.”—But when the heart is changed, by the power of divine grace, the sinner’s guilt is removed ; for “ there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” He passes from death unto life. He is made a new creature, and a partaker of the divine

nature. He is admitted into the family of Zion, and his heavenly Father views him as a beloved child.

Now, in taking a view of these particulars, collectively, the truth of the Apostle's declaration in the text, will evidently appear.—“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” All the afflictions of life, which the christian endures, are the *dispensations of providence*. They are, wisely, ordered, by that gracious Being, who has all power in his hands,—who *delights in the happiness of the godly*; and, therefore, they must, either in their present, or future, consequences, *produce real good*.

The truth of the sentiment contained in the text, might be further illustrated, and confirmed, by considering that the *promises*, and *attributes*, of God are all engaged to promote the welfare of good men: and, also, by considering that this life is a state of *trial*, and *preparation* for the next; and, therefore, that all things must, ultimately, be productive of good to the christian.

But, forbearing to dwell on these particulars, I shall now proceed to consider, in the

SECOND place, in what *manner* affliction is productive of good.

And, here, I must premise, that the whole force and emphasis of the text seem to turn on a circumstance mentioned in the latter clause of it, namely, that afflictions and troubles are productive of good to those *only* who LOVE God. They, whose hearts glow with love unfeigned towards the blessed God, are the only persons, whose minds are disposed to make a wise improvement of these dispensations of providence. The incorrigible sinner, although “often reprov'd, yet hardeneth his neck, until he is suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy.”

Affliction, instead of melting his heart into contrition, serves only to harden him in sin, and render him more inexcusable at last.—But the real christian, whose heart and life are devoted to God, derives substantial and permanent benefits even from the chastisements of his heavenly Father. For, in the

1st Place, affliction brings him to *abhor and forsake sin*. “Before I was afflicted,” says the Psalmist, “I went astray; but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” When the christian labours under any affliction of body, or mind, he considers *sin* as the cause of every woe. He knows, that *natural* evil was introduced into the world, in consequence of *moral* evil. And, from the weight of affliction which presses upon him, he feels that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God. Hence, he is brought to abhor evil, and cleave to that which is good.—He is not only persuaded that sin, in general, is the cause of misery; but he is led to examine, whether he is not guilty of some *particular* commission of evil, or some omission of duty, which calls for the rod of affliction. He finds, perhaps, upon examination, that his ways are not right with God. Some inordinate passion prevails. Some darling sin is too much cherished, or some christian duty too much neglected. Hence, he is brought to consider his ways. He humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, and abhors himself in dust and ashes.

Affliction serves, not only to correct what is wrong in us, at *present*, but, also, to remind us of the iniquities which are past,—to keep us humble under a sense of our demerit; and to make us more watchful against temptations in *future*. We have a striking instance of this in

king David. The unnatural rebellion of his son Absalom,—the misfortune of his daughter Tamar,—the conduct of Shimei, in cursing him before his face,—and all the troubles which befel him, in his kingdom, were considered and improved, by that truly penitent man, as solemn mementos of his awful wickedness, in the case of Uriah the Hittite. “Against thee,” says he, “thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me.”

2. Affliction is productive of good to the christian, as it serves to *wean his affections from this world, and direct his views to a happier region.*

If we enjoyed nothing but pure, unmixed happiness, beneath the sun, we would, naturally, wish, that this world were our permanent abode. Our affection would be wholly set on things on the earth: and the bare idea of resigning all these joys would chill our very soul. Even as it is,—with all the troubles and afflictions, which fall to our lot,—we are prone to become inordinately attached to earthly vanities. When we enjoy health and affluence,—a good flow of spirits,—and agreeable friends; we are too apt to form false estimates of human happiness. We imagine, that our mountain standeth strong, and that we shall never be moved. When our paths are strewn with flowers, we sport and play with every trifle. We are, almost, tempted to wish, that this world were our home. We forget, that these pleasures are fleeting,—that we ourselves are mortal,—and that, in a few years, these bodies shall intermix with the clods of the valley, and our immortal spirits ascend to God who gave them.

It is, therefore, wisely ordered, by Providence, that we should, sometimes, experience affliction, and sorrow, in order to correct these false notions. When we struggle with the pains and ills of life, our affections are gradually, weaned from the world. Sudden shocks of misfortune teach us to repose confidence in God only. When our best earthly hopes are destroyed, we see the folly of building for happiness beneath the skies. When we lie on the bed of affliction, we naturally reflect, that we must soon, lie down in the bed of dust; and we think of that happy world, wherein none of the inhabitants will say, "I am sick." When our dearest friends are torn away, by death, from our embrace, we reflect on the vanity of expecting pure and permanent happiness from any earthly connection: and we look, with fond anxiety, towards that delightful region, where we hope to meet our departed friends.—When we are persecuted, for righteousness' sake, we think, with the liveliest sensations of joy, of that blessed abode, where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

3. Affliction is productive of good to the christian, inasmuch as it is one mean of *improving his graces*.

It is not enough, my brethren, that our heart and affection be withdrawn from the vanities of life. If we would be happy and useful christians, we must, also, *grow in grace*. And afflicted christians, generally speaking, have their graces in the most lively exercise. In this respect, "sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better."

Affliction serves to confirm the christian's *faith*. Far from viewing trouble as a mark of his heavenly Father's *displeasure*, he considers it as a token of love and affection: "For, whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth,

and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not ?"—And, from divine assistance afforded in *past* tribulation, the believer draws a fresh argument, that he shall, at length, through riches of grace, triumph over every difficulty.

Affliction serves, also, to enlarge and confirm his *patience*. "We glory," says the apostle Paul, "in tribulations ; knowing that tribulation worketh *patience*." "My brethren," saith another apostle, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations ; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh *patience*." Whilst others murmur and repine under affliction, the christian can say, "It is the Lord, let him do whatsoever seemeth him good." Although it may appear, at first view, that tribulation is calculated to produce impatience and disquietude, yet it is evident, from frequent observation, that affliction begets, under the influence of divine grace, a calm, silent, humble resignation, which is strengthened and confirmed by daily exercise.

Again : affliction serves to animate the christian's *zeal*. When the world smiles, he is too apt to slumber and sleep. But when God, in his providence, visits him with the rod of correction, he is roused from his lethargy. His whole soul is in action, and his chief concern is to promote the glory of his God.

4. Present afflictions must be productive of good to the christian, inasmuch as they will serve to *sweeten the joys of heaven*.

With what pleasure does the weary mariner behold the desired haven, after a tempestuous and dangerous voyage ! In like manner, the christian, who is now struggling with misfortunes, will be filled with joy

unspeakable, when he shall bid adieu to every evil. O, how sweetly will he *rest* from all his toils ! The transition, from *pain*, to pure *pleasure*,—from *poverty*, to the enjoyment of the heavenly *inheritance*,—from the valley of the shadow of death, to the light of everlasting day—will be so great as to fill his soul with such exquisite sensibilities as exceed all thought and description. Behold the afflicted christian; see him struggling with poverty and wretchedness. See his body wasted by affliction, and his spirits almost broken by adversity. Behold him stretched on the bed of death, and his whole frame convulsed with agony.—Perhaps, you are ready to ask, How is it possible that all these things work together for his good? Pursue his soul, in her flight to the everlasting habitations, and you will be satisfactorily answered. Behold him carried, by angels, into Abraham's bosom. *Before*, he was afflicted; “but, *now*, he is comforted.” He is comforted, in viewing the striking *contrast* between his *former misery*, and *present happiness*. *Before*, he was, perhaps, despised: but, *now*, he is introduced with acclamations of joy, to an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. *Before*, he was poor and destitute: but, *now*, he is put in possession of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. *Before*, he was assailed by temptations: but, *now*, he is out of the reach of every adversary. *Before*, he was afflicted with pain: but, *now*, he has bidden an everlasting adieu to pain, and toil, and misery. He is come out of the great tribulation. He shall hunger no more; neither thirst any more: for the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, shall feed him, and lead him unto living fountains of

waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes.

Thus have I endeavored to shew, that affliction, although it may now seem grievous, is productive of real good to the true christian, either in its *present* and *immediate effects*, or in its *future* and *everlasting consequences*.

Let us now briefly consider, in the

THIRD, and last place, what *influence* this doctrine ought to produce on our views and conduct.

Its leading tendency is to produce *contentment*. If all things, and, especially, *affliction*, work together for good, then ought we to suppress all murmur and repining. Remember, O afflicted believer, that it is *God* who allots thee thy portion. Who art thou, then, that replest against thy Maker, and why dost thou yet find fault ? Has he not a sovereign *right* to do what he will with his own ? Son of affliction, lift up thy brow. It is thy heavenly *Father* that chastises, and chastises in *mercy*. His thoughts towards thee are thoughts of peace. Although *man* regards not thy anguish, *God* sees thee, and his gracious ear is ever attentive to thy cries. “ We have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence ; and they verily chastened us after their *own pleasure*, but” God “ for our *profit*, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” Let the voice of murmur be, then, forever silenced. Our heavenly Father knows what is best for us, and it is our part, to bear with patience. Believing that every afflictive dispensation is designed, by Him, for our good, let us, cheerfully, resign ourselves to his will. We are in the hands of a gracious God, who is merciful even in chastising. If affliction slay our sin, and quicken our christian graces ;

if it wean our hearts from this transitory world, and direct our thoughts to a better state, as well as prepare us for it; we have reason to be, not only *contented*, but *thankful*.

In this life, we cannot, in many instances, discern the kind intention of heaven, in afflicting us. The purposes of God are often inscrutable. His thoughts are not as our thoughts, neither are his ways as our ways. But, as far as we are able to trace his designs, we see, that every thing is ordered in wisdom and mercy.—Let us, then, cheerfully leave with God, what we are unable to explain. When we arrive in yonder bright region, we shall see, and understand, what we are now unable to unfold. We shall then see, that the way in which we were led, though it may now appear circuitous, was the *right* way. We shall see, and confess, with gratitude, that every affliction, however painful, was blessed, to promote our welfare.

“Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.”

SERMON XII.

ON RESIGNATION.

Psalm xxxix. 9.

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because thou didst it.

BY JOHN M'DOWELL, A. M.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XII.

Psalm xxxix. 9.—I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it:

EVER since sin was introduced into our world, by the apostacy of our first parents, trouble has fallen to the lot of mortals. Some it is true have less than others; but none are exempted. Life is truly a chequered scene—many sorrows are interwoven with our joys. Now are we perplexed with cares and anxieties; again, we are disappointed and crossed in our pursuits; at one time we are called to undergo pain, and linger with disease, at another we are compelled to part with near and dear friends. Numerous and various woes beset our path through life. If we look abroad through the world we may see innumerable proofs of the declarations which Job made in anguish of soul, “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,” Job v. 7. “Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble,” Job xiv. 1.

But the afflictions which befall man in this life, do not happen by chance. “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground,” Job v. 6. Every trial which man experiences is sent by the overruling providence of God. However second causes may be employed in producing our trials, yet God is the great first cause, without whom, not even a sparrow falleth on the ground, and by whom the very

hairs of our head are all numbered, Matt. x. 29, 30. Second causes are but the instruments in his hands. But, alas! men are too apt to neglect this important truth, and to look no further, in the disasters which befall them, than second causes, or the instruments, by which they are inflicted. While the providence of God is thus neglected, our trials must be misimproved. But while the world at large, atheistically, look no further than second causes, and discern not the uplifted hand, and the operations of the Lord, the true child of God, in the exercise of grace, looks beyond all instruments, and acknowledges the hand of the Lord. Thus David did. When he penned the Psalm which contains our text, he was suffering some severe trial from wicked men. But notwithstanding they voluntarily and wickedly afflicted him, he viewed them as the instruments, and looking beyond them, eyed the hand of God in his trial. And while he beheld the hand of God afflicting him, he was filled with submission. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it."

In this conduct of David under his trials, we have marked out our duty in similar circumstances. It is our duty to see and acknowledge the providence of God, and to be submissive to his will, because he hath done it.

In speaking from the text I shall endeavour,

- I. To illustrate the duty of resignation under trials.
- II. To enforce the duty, from the consideration that our trials are sent by the Lord.

I. Let us attend to an illustration of the duty of resignation to the will of God under trials.

Resignation is something very different from a stoical insensibility under suffering. It by no means forbids us to *feel* afflictions; on the contrary, sensibility to

suffering is necessary to true resignation. Where there is no *feeling sense of trial*, there can be no resignation. When God lays his hand upon us, he intends we shall *feel*, that we may be led to make a useful improvement of afflictions. And afflictions will entirely fail of having the intended effect upon one who is insensible of them. This is that despising the chastening of the Lord, which the scriptures expressly condemn, Heb. xii. 5. This insensibility under sufferings is also condemned by the examples of the scripture saints—They keenly *felt* while they were examples of resignation. Job's heart was filled with sorrow, while he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord," Job i. 21. For "he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground," verse 20 ; and uttered this sentence, breathing a spirit of resignation. Again, he was sitting among the ashes, keenly sensible of his grievous sufferings, when he submissively said, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Job ii. 10. David was most sensibly alive to his sufferings, when he uttered the very submissive expression in our text, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth;" for we hear him saying in the same Psalm, "my sorrow was stirred," ver. 2 ; "I am consumed by the blow of thine hand," ver. 10 ; "O Lord, hold not thy peace at my tears," ver. 11. But we have a still brighter and safer example, in Christ, who is proposed to us as our example, that we should follow in his steps. He most sensibly *felt* his trials in the garden of Gethsemane ; for we hear him saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," Matt. xxvi. 38. And he prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," Matt. xxvi. 39 ; "and being in an

agony, he prayed more earnestly : and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," Luke xxii. 44 ; never was more *sensibility* to suffering manifested ; but at the same time never was more resignation displayed. " O my Father," is his language, " if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done," Matt. xxvi. 42. Hence we learn, that the highest resignation is consistent with the *most feeling sense of suffering*.

Again, I would remark, that resignation is perfectly consistent, with an earnest desire to avoid afflictions, or to have them removed. We cannot love afflictions, or be reconciled to them, considered in themselves, apart from the good effects which may result from them, or the glory of God which may be promoted by them. Human nature recoils at afflictions, and God never intended that we should contradict those principles of our nature which are not the effects of sin : and this repugnancy to afflictions is not the effect of sin. The example of David in the Psalm which contains our text, is a proof that a desire to avoid afflictions, or have them removed, is consistent with true resignation.—For, immediately after he had said, " I was dumb, I opened not my mouth," he prayed, " remove thy stroke away from me—hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry : hold not thy peace, at my tears. O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more," ver. 10, 12, 13. The example also of our Saviour in the garden proves the same—while he was saying, " thy will be done," still he prayed, " if it be possible let this cup pass from me."

Thus it appears that it is consistent with true resignation to *feel* afflictions, to shew that we *feel* them, and to

desire and pray that we may avoid them, or be delivered out of them.

But while we *feel* and while we desire and pray that the Lord would remove his chastising hand from us, true resignation forbids us to reproach or censure God's dealings with us, or to speak or think dishonorably of God, however heavily he may lay his hand upon us. It forbids all impatience, fretfulness, and murmuring against God, and calling in question, even in thought, his justice, his wisdom, his goodness, or his faithfulness in his dispensations.

True resignation requires that our wills be bowed to the divine will. As has been observed, it is contrary to human nature for any man to chuse suffering for its own sake ; yet we may chuse that the will of God should be done rather than ours, even if it be his will that we should suffer. True resignation requires this. And when we have such a confidence in the wisdom, justice, goodness and faithfulness of God, that we can in sincerity of heart say with our divine Redcemer, Father not my will but thine be done : let thy will be done in preference to mine, whether it accords with mine or not ; and even though it be, that I should drink a bitter cup, at which my nature shrinks back and trembles ;—this is true christian resignation.

This is doubtless a very difficult duty, but it has often been performed. And that same grace, which has enabled others, possessed of the same nature with ourselves, to perform this duty, is also sufficient for us and can enable us to do the same. Our text presents a powerful motive to influence those under trials, to feel and exercise resignation.—“Thou didst it.”—This introduces the

Ind. Branch of our subject, viz. to enforce the duty of resignation, from the consideration that our trials are sent by the Lord—"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because thou didst it."

The scriptures clearly teach, that the providence of God is concerned in every event, which taketh place in our world, insomuch that it may be said of every event, "Thou didst it."—They teach us, "his kingdom ruleth over all," Psalm ciii. 19. "I form the light, and create darkness ; I make peace and create evil : I the Lord do all these things," Isaiah xlv. 7. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Amos iii. 6. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered," Matt. x. 29, 30. "The lot is cast into the lap : but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord," Prov. xvi. 33. These texts clearly teach us, that God exercises a providence over our world—that this providence extends to individuals as well as to nations—that it extends to the smallest as well as the greatest events : and even to those events which may appear to us to be casual or accidental.—Seeing then that all our trials are sent upon us by the Lord, what arguments may we draw from this consideration to promote resignation ?

1. God is a being of perfect justice. He reigns in righteousness. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. xviii. 25. We are his creatures, and he is our sovereign, and has a right to govern us, and dispose of us according to his sovereign pleasure. This consideration assures us that God will do us no wrong ; and that he hath done us no wrong in the heaviest trials,

which he has laid upon us. Yea, there is merey, in the heaviest trial which any of us has ever experienced. God would be just, he would do right if he were to strip us of every earthly comfort—if he were to take away all our property, deprive us of every mean of obtaining a support, and turn us beggars upon the world—if he were to suffer the tongue of calumny forever to blast our character—if he were to take away our health and leave us to drag out a wretched life under painful disease—and if he were to take away not merely one, but every relative and friend we have in the world. For we have forfeited every comfort, we deserve hell, and God would do right to send us all there. He would have done right if he had sent us all there many years since. Every trial which God sends upon us, in this world, is therefore not only right, but a merey, even if it produces no good effect upon our souls, as it is short of what we deserve. This consideration, certainly ought to silence every murmur ; to produce submission to the divine will ; and even make us thankful to God in the midst of our afflictions ; for the heaviest trials which he lays upon his sinful creatures in this world are less than they deserve. Besides, most generally, in the heaviest trials, he grants us many precious blessings. We are too apt to feel as though we had lost all our comforts, when God lays his hand upon but one that is dear to us ; when if we were duly to consider, we should find that while he has deprived us of one or a few, or impaired them, he has continued a great many. Hence, in our heaviest afflictions, God not only does right, but his judgments are mingled with multitudes of tender mereies, which ought to silence every murmur, and make us submissive and thankful.

2. God is a being of infinite love, "God is love," 1 John iv. 8. Hence it is certain that he cannot delight in misery for its own sake. Agreeably to this, we are told, "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," Lam. iii. 33. If therefore he doth afflict, it must be for some good end. He designs and promotes his own glory and the general good by the afflictions which he sends. This should be a motive to resignation to the renewed soul, who aims supremely at the glory of God, and in connection with this, desires the general good. We know not what a great revenue of glory may accrue to God, nor how much good our fellow men may receive from our afflictions. By these trials we may be fitted to be far more useful in the world than we otherwise would have been—and perhaps our trials themselves may be the means of the conversion of some precious souls. Has God visited us with sore and unexpected judgments? Has he suddenly snatched away a dear friend? Others may hear and fear, and be excited to prepare for death. These considerations, certainly, afford to the renewed soul a powerful motive to resignation.

Further, God oftentimes afflicts even a careless soul, not only for the general, but for his individual good; to bring him to repentance, when other means have failed to produce this effect:—And afflictions have often produced this effect. They had this blessed effect upon the prodigal; and many a soul will have reason to bless God through eternity, for the afflictions with which they were visited while in a careless state. This should excite submission even in the unrenewed, and lead them, instead of repining, to endeavour so to improve their afflictions that they may have reason forever to praise God for them.

But this consideration, that God is a being of infinite love, ought to be a source of unspeakable consolation to the real child of God, under the heaviest trials with which he may be visited. The Being who afflicts him is his reconciled God and Father, and loves him with a most tender love. It belongs to the character of a good Father, who loves his child, to seek his happiness, and if he ever correct him, it must be intended for his good. Most assuredly, therefore, God, who loves his children far more than ever an earthly parent loved his child, will seek their best interest, and if he afflict them, will do it with a view to promote their best good. The character of God secures this to all his people. Are you then the people of God? His love presents a powerful argument to enforce resignation.

3. God is a being of infinite wisdom. He sees the end from the beginning; he perfectly knows the consequences of every event; and he knows what is best for his people. As his love to his people will ever lead him to desire and seek their best good; so his wisdom will ever lead him to devise and pursue the best plans to promote their best good. An earthly parent, though he may tenderly love his child, and earnestly desire and seek his best good; yet he may mistake as to the best means to obtain the desired end; but the Lord cannot err on this subject. This also presents to the true child of God, a powerful argument for resignation to the divine will. We are short-sighted mortals; we know not what is best for ourselves, but are oftentimes ready to say with Jacob, "all these things are against me," Gen. xlii. 36; when at the same time they are all working together for our good, and the good of others. It is well for us that the Lord reigns, and that he appoints our lot in life. The

reasons of his dispensations, we very often know not now ; but we shall know hereafter ; and we shall then see that he led us by the right way, and shall adore and praise him even for those heavy trials which here wrung our hearts. Let us implicitly trust him for a future and satisfactory explanation of those mysterious providences which we cannot now understand ; and let an implicit confidence in his wisdom, lead us to acquiesce with resignation in the afflictive dispensations of his providence.

4. God is a being of infinite power. This is a further security to the real believer that his trials will issue in his best good ; for God has almighty power to execute the plans which infinite wisdom devises for the good of his people. An earthly parent may devise the best plans to promote the happiness of his child ; but he may want power to render his plans effectual. But the designs of infinite wisdom cannot fail on this account. No power in the universe can frustrate the plans of God. Hence, again, the believer has reason to be resigned to his will.

5. Once more, God is a being of infinite faithfulness—what he has promised his people he will perform. “Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but his words shall not pass away.” He has made many precious promises to his people under afflictions. Let us attend to some of them. “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord : neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth,” Prov. iii. 11, 12. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt ;

neither shall the flame kindle upon thee," Isaiah xliii. 2. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. He chastened us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Heb. xii. 7, 10, 11. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," Rom. viii. 28. Such are the precious promises of God to his afflicted children; and he is a faithful God—his promises cannot fail—he will fulfil them.

The heaviest trials of his children are therefore blessings in disguise. Though grievous to the flesh, they are salutary medicines to the soul, having a purifying effect upon it. They promote the work of sanctification, and ripen the soul apace for eternal blessedness. The faithfulness of God in connection with his promises, certainly ought to give the believer much consolation under his trials, and lead him to bear them with resignation.

In the conclusion of this discourse, let us be exhorted to examine ourselves, whether we be the people of God, and have an interest in those precious considerations which have been presented, for the support of the believer under trials.

Brethren, we have all need to be interested in these supports; for we live in a world of trial. We have no security for the continuance of any earthly comfort which we may now enjoy, however dear it may be to us, and however necessary we may esteem it to our happiness. We may suddenly and unex-

pectedly be deprived of our dearest earthly comforts. Of this we have frequent proofs. We often see heavy trials suddenly and unexpectedly fall upon others. What, my hearers, would you do under such trials as you have sometimes seen others experience, without the supports and consolations of the gospel? If you have any feeling you must be wretched indeed. To similar trials you are constantly exposed. Therefore be exhorted to be reconciled unto God, that when tried you may be supported and comforted, and your afflictions be made blessings.

Further, you are not only exposed to have your dearest earthly comforts snatched from you in a moment; but you are liable every moment, without any previous warning, to be hurried away from life yourselves, and hurried to the bar of God. Are you prepared? If not, how awfully perilous is your situation! The eternal interests of your immortal souls may be suspended on a single week—a single day—a single hour; yea, on a single moment. And can you delay any longer to seek in earnest after preparation for death? Awake, flee to Christ, be reconciled to God; and then, let death come when and where and how it may, for you to die will be gain.

Christians, who may be now suffering trials, remember, it is the Lord's hand—the Lord hath done it.—He is righteous—he is your Father, and loves you with a most tender love—he knows what is best, and will do what is best for you—his wisdom is infinite, his power is almighty, and his faithfulness endureth forever.—Let these considerations resign you to his will, and support and comfort you under your trials.

SERMON XIII.

JUSTIFICATION, WITH SOME OF ITS PRE- CIOUS FRUITS.

Rom. v. 1, 2.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

BY PETER STUDDIFORD, A. M.

Pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church of North-Branch.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XIII.

Rom. v. 1, 2. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ : By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

THE probability of deliverance, from moral evil, from the guilt and dominion of sin, must be encouraging to labouring and heavy-laden sinners ; but this encouragement must certainly be much greater, when the manner of this deliverance, its suitableness to their condition, and harmony with the divine perfections are considered, for they are now begotten into a lively hope, that God is willing to be gracious. The Apostle proves in the preceding part of this Epistle, the extreme depravity, as also moral impotency of human nature, that the appropriate nature of the remedy might be apparent to all who seriously attended to the subject. If all mankind are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, justification by faith in the Redeemer is a doctrine as rational, as it is consolatory. It is worthy of God, and exactly suited to the guilty, depraved and helpless condition of the human kind. To be convinced of the correctness of this reasoning, let us take a view of justification, and the benefits particularized in this passage, as flowing from it.

There has been much unnecessary disputation about the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek terms, employed by the sacred writers for justification. Some contend that they are expressive of holiness, communicated by

the justifying act; others, that this act is nothing more than a judicial sentence, or declaration. If the corresponding language of scripture is consulted, the last opinion is undoubtedly correct, for it represents justification as a *forgiving, removing, blotting out, and passing by of transgression*. Look into the word of God, and you behold the *judge* and his *tribunal*, the *criminal* and his *advocate*. The *accusation* and the *plea*, the *sentence* of acquittal, and the *reason* of it, are all before you. The forensic use, or signification of the terms admitted, justification may be defined, *that gracious act of God, as Judge, which absolves from guilt, and confers a right to eternal life, solely on account of the righteousness of Christ received by faith*. The attention is therefore naturally fixed in contemplating this subject, on the benefit granted, the condition of the grant, and on the graces which renders it a reality.

First, on *the benefit granted*. This is justification, which implies absolution from guilt, and a right to eternal life.

1. *Absolution from guilt*. Man though originally good and upright, is in consequence of the fall of our first parents, in a state of sin, and therefore of condemnation. Death is the wages of sin. Justification is the only remedy. By means of it transgression is pardoned, and the curse due to it effectually taken away. But are all sins past, present and to come, absolutely forgiven? All sins to the moment of justification, but no further, for it is certainly an absurdity to assert, that a judge pardons crimes before they exist, and crimes too of a very different nature from those which the amnesty, (the act that consigns them to oblivion,) can with propriety be considered as embracing. Sins afterwards committed, are the sins of

persons standing in a new relation. They were once guilty condemned malefactors, but they are now children of God, over whom the law has no longer the right or power of condemnation. *They are not now under the law but under grace.* Though the sins which they daily commit require to be pardoned, and what is required is granted, you must certainly admit, that the pardon now granted is not that of an offended judge, but that of a gracious and reconciled parent. Besides, what consistency is there in praying daily for the pardon of sins that are already pardoned? Conformity to the law is no doubt still obligatory, and the neglect or violation of it, subjects those who are justified to *chastisement*, or if you please, *punishment*; but this does not arise from the authority of the law as a rule of life, but as a rule of obedience inseparable from human nature. It arises also from their connection with the family of God, whose good pleasure it is, that his children should through tribulations enter into glory. Sufferings are now as necessary for the promotion of their spiritual, as prudence and industry are for that of their earthly, prosperity.

2. *A right to eternal life.* Without this, absolution could be of little advantage, for mere exemption from sufferings, or punishment, gives no claim to favour. Indeed the right to any blessing is a very different thing from the possession of the blessing itself; but justification as a judicial act gives nothing more than a right or title to the favour of God. It does not communicate a single grace or moral excellence. It produces a change of state, of external condition, but not of nature. Guilt removed, the very persons, who just before were condemned criminals, are now reconciled to God by the death of his Son, and entitled to all the benefits of his mediation.

Secondly, *the condition of the grant.* The right is conferred solely on account of the righteousness of Christ, for though justification is a free and gracious act, the merit of the surety is the foundation of it, that God may be just in the justification of the ungodly. If the Mediator had not fulfilled all righteousness for them, how could they as transgressors be declared not guilty? If he is not, as represented by the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord our righteousness, what can be the hopes of our guilty and helpless race? The objection that a performance in which we have had no agency cannot be our own, is of no validity, for every one knows that in law and equity a debt paid by the surety is the very same thing as if it had been paid by the debtor himself. Did the advocates of this doctrine pretend to any agency in the obedience and sufferings of Christ, they would claim it by virtue of their own merit, for human nature is as proud as it is depraved; but conscious that Christ is all, they plead his righteousness and his only, as the ground of acceptance with their offended Sovereign.

Lastly, *the grace, which renders this benefit a reality.* *Justified by faith, we have peace with God.* Faith is of greater importance than is generally imagined. It has already been shown that justification produces no change of nature; but without a change, the benefit cannot be enjoyed. The justified therefore are renewed in the spirit of their mind, are blessed with an internal change, as a consequence of the justifying act, and thus fitted for the new relation in which they are placed. However, if with this change they did not regard the righteousness of the surety as the cause of their acceptance with God, neither his merit, nor the sentence of the judge ground-

ed on it, would be of much account; they are therefore blessed with the precious gift of *faith*. This is as necessary to a complete reconciliation with God as the justifying act itself. And it is probably on account of this necessity that it holds so high a rank in the word of God. “For by grace ye are saved through *faith*, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Though not the cause of justification, there can be no justification without *faith*. He that hath the Son hath life. Without this appropriating grace he hath no life—he is dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore an enemy to God.

The *benefits* particularized in this passage as flowing from justification are now to be considered. These are *peace with God—access to favour, and the joyful expectation of future glory*.

1. *Peace with God*. Prior to justification mankind are not only in a state of condemnation, but of enmity, the most deadly enmity to God and holiness. No sooner, however, is sin pardoned and a right to eternal life granted, than a change of heart takes place, so that love to God and holiness now swells those bosoms in which enmity so lately reigned. Sin spoiled of its sovereignty, and holiness becoming the predominant disposition, reconciliation is now a reality. Pardoned sinners love as they are beloved with sincerity and ardour. Intellectual blindness and heart-alienation are superceded by the enlightened views, generous and elevated sentiments peculiar to the children of God. From being enemies they are become friends of God, devoted friends to that very Sovereign against whom they were so lately in open rebellion. Blessed exchange! invaluable friendship! for to this connection envy, jealousy and distrust

are entire strangers. Endless as eternity shall be its duration. Rolling, but never ending periods encrease the purity of its flame, augment its ardour, and preserve its accessions. *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

2. *Access to favour.* This is evidently the meaning of the phrase *access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.* Free admission to its smiles must greatly enhance the value of friendship. Incessantly exposed to vicissitudes of the most distressing nature, surrounded by numerous and powerful temptations, and often much perplexed by indwelling corruption, the persuasion that the compassions of our heavenly Father are upon us, that his inexhaustible bounty is open to our relief, and his almighty arm stretched out for our protection, is to enjoy a happiness which this world can neither give nor take away. Indeed this privilege of drawing near at all times to the throne of grace is in the believer's estimation of more value than ten thousand worlds. In every condition in which we are placed, and under every occurrence that may arise for *penitence*, to confess the occasional deviations from rectitude inseparable from our present state of existence; for *affliction* to pour out its complaints—*gratitude* to return thanks for the reception of innumerable unmerited blessings, and *love* to pant after still greater conformity to infinite excellence, is to be happy even whilst sojourning in this vale of tears. Could sinners form an idea of the blessedness of communion with God, they would on bended knees day and night supplicate him for mercy and for grace, for pardon and holiness. To taste his love, as manifested in the gospel, is to commence the life of heaven, for to

know God and Christ Jesus whom he hath sent, is life eternal.

3. *The joyful expectation of future glory.* Intercourse with God naturally enlarges the mind, and elevates the sentiments of the human heart. When the conceptions and aspirations, the views and the affections of the soul are holy and heavenly, they are earnest of future felicity. Grace nurtured by habitual communion with God, is the forerunner of unceasing glory. Indeed, in the present state of human nature, however advanced it may be in sanctity, the very best of men must content themselves that they are privileged to rejoice with trembling. The variations of religious experience in the same individual, the necessity of having different graces occasionally called into action, and the changing, yet wise and gracious dispensations of providence, do not admit of unceasing joy, of uninterrupted felicity. This world is the school in which the christian is educated for heaven. His interest, as well as the honour of his Sovereign, demands that he should submit to self-denial, mortification, and the assumption of the cross. He is, however, promised strength proportioned to his day. *He that soweth in tears, shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing. Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he will sustain thee.* Various are the trials to which the people of God must submit; but their encouragements are numerous and powerful. If heaven did not occasionally open to their view, their courage would languish; their exertions become enfeebled, if not effectually paralyzed. Conscious that after a few more struggles, sin and sorrow shall cease, and sanctity and joy characterize their existence, they go on with firmness in the way of the divine com-

mandments. In commiseration of their condition, piercing winds are tempered, and storms that would otherwise overwhelm them robbed of their greatest fury. Hope steadily attends them, joy sometimes expands their bosom, when by faith they are enabled to claim as their own, that inheritance, which is incorruptible, unfading, and full of glory.

These are some of the precious fruits of justification. And should they not make us anxious to know the state of our souls, whether our iniquities are forgiven, and whether we are in possession of a title to life everlasting? Without the knowledge, or at least a well grounded hope of our justification, we must remain strangers to the consolations and pleasures of religion, for we cannot look to the future world without fearful, distressing apprehensions. We are therefore called upon by duty and interest to ascertain our true spiritual condition. The test of examination is plain, decisive, and within the reach of every individual. The tree is known from its fruits. If you are enemies to holiness and aliens from God—and your hearts are never gladdened by the smiles of redeeming love, you are still in your sins, in a state of condemnation, and therefore in danger of perishing forever. But even by you, who are in this awful situation, this doctrine must be regarded as consolatory, for it directs you to the only, the effectual and the never-failing remedy. Though in consequence of your transgression, despondence thickens around you, the consolations of justification pierce through the gloom, and call forth your reliance on that compassionate Redeemer, who never suffers any to seek him in vain. Indeed he invites—importunes you to look unto him and live. But remember that proffered friendship, obstinately rejected, may be-

come indignant at such treatment ; for God, the merciful God has declared that his Spirit shall not always strive with man ; and should he once consign you to the blindness of your minds and to the hardness of your hearts, you are wretched without the remotest prospect of relief. Dream not then of slighting, rejecting and yet experiencing mercy. Come without delay to this once crucified but now exalted Redeemer, as to the only medium of reconciliation with your offended God, and as to the only source of holiness and happiness. *He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* Therefore intreat, earnestly entreat God for his righteousness sake, to have mercy on you, to pardon your iniquities, and bless you with hearts devoted to his service, that you may rejoice in the hope of glory.

But if to the guilty this passage is encouraging, it certainly must be more eminently so to those who are in actual friendship with God. Your aspirations, believers, your faith, your hopes and your joys, are testimonials in your favour that God will not withhold from you a single blessing which your happiness demands. He will open for you rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of vallies, he will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. *He will give you wine and milk without money and without price. A new spirit will he put within you, and cause you to walk in his statutes.* Proceed therefore in cultivating the sentiments and duties of your highly privileged relation. Proceed in honoring your God, in doing good to your fellow creatures, and in the advancement of your own

sanctity, happiness, and dignity. Proceed with confidence in this your course of duty, for yet a little while, and you shall receive a *crown of glory, that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens.*—AMEN.

SERMON XIV.

THE TRUE AND FALSE GROUNDS OF RELIGION.

(IN TWO SERMONS.)

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, &c. &c.

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SERMON XIV.

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.—But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness, which is of God by faith.

IF the christian religion be true, it follows, from the very nature of it, that it is the only religion given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved. In the whole strain of it, it excludes man from all hope of salvation, from any other source, and expressly declares that “No other foundation can any man lay than is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” This declaration should be well weighed : for, on the supposition of its truth, men who reject the gospel, reject their only remedy, and ensure their final and eternal ruin.

The passage that has been now read in your hearing, was penned by one who was, in the highest degree, qualified to be a witness of the truth of what he preached ; and of its infinite importance, as the *only way of salvation*. He was miraculously converted to the faith, and called to preach the gospel. God evidently working with him, during the whole of his ministry, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God. The miracles, that he and his fellow apostles wrought, were wrought in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ, and

in no other name, and by no other power. They were such as transeend every thing that mere human power or diabolical agency could possibly effect. This persuasion wrought so powerfully on multitudes who were eye and ear witnesses of these miraeles, that they were constrained to aeknowledge the finger of God in them, to give up their opposition to the gospel, and to embrace the faith which, before, had been the object of their seorn and malignity. Heaven, in this way, gave indisputable evidenee of the truth of the gospel, that it was no cunningly devised fable, conjured up by art and man's device ; but a revelation from God himself. Paul, in particular, declares that, " he received it not of man, neither was he taught it by man ; but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." And being taught in a supernatural way, confirmed in the faith by numerous attestations evidently and immediately from God himself: and seeing in the gospel, committed to him, the clear aecomplishment of the types and propheecies of the Old Testament, he could no more doubt of the truth of the gospel, than he could doubt of his own existence.

Nor could Paul and the other apostles doubt of their own call and appointment of God to " go forth into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature ;" and to declare in the name, and by the authority of God— " He that believeth shall be saved ; and he that believeth not shall be damned !" The certainty of these things was put so completely past all doubt with them, that they could say, " necessity is laid upon us ; yea, woe unto us if we preach not the gospel."

To the evidenee above stated, they had also that of their own experience. They had felt the divine power and efficacy of the gospel on their own souls. They

knew in whom they had believed, and from their own experience, were thoroughly persuaded that, he was able to keep that which they had committed to him. Nothing makes us so acquainted with, and so fully confirms us in the belief of any thing, as *experience*. Experimental acquaintance with the nature, truth, and excellence of the gospel, will make us both esteem, and speak highly of it.

This was the case with Paul ; he had been once a persecutor of Christians, an enemy of the gospel, a proud Pharisee, trusting in his own righteousness, and highly valuing his distinctions and privileges as a Jew and a scholar of Gamaliel. “But, when it pleased God to reveal his Son in him,” and lead him to the knowledge of salvation by Christ, then, how do his views alter ! The gospel he had before despised, hated and laboured to destroy, now becomes more dear and precious to him than life itself. All his former attainments and legal righteousness appeared to him as *loss*, in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord. Nay, when set in competition with Christ, “he esteemed *all things but loss*, and did count them but *dung* that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having on his own righteousness, which is of the law ; but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

It cannot be denied that this is the language of one that well understood the gospel, and had indisputable evidence of its truth. It will, therefore, demand the more serious attention from us.

In the passage before us, two things are expressed by the apostle.

I. That every thing short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, for the attainment of our salvation, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

II. The distinctive characters of gospel religion.

In discussing these two points, I shall pay a particular regard to the method and language, in which the apostle has seen proper to treat them. And

I. That every thing, short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, for the attainment of our salvation, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

Words can scarcely express this sentiment more strongly than the apostle has done. He had been warning the Philippians against the ensnaring doctrines of the Judaizing teachers, who taught the young converts to christianity that, "unless they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved." This the apostle calls, "Turning them aside to another gospel;" or, placing their hope of salvation on a different ground from that on which the gospel had placed it.

The aim of these teachers appears to have been either to draw the young converts off from their hope in Christ altogether, or to confound law and gospel, grace and works; to mingle the free salvation of the Saviour, with the merit of human obedience, and substitute the observance of ceremonial rites in the place of evangelical holiness.

These teachers, not understanding, or not embracing the gospel, were fain to glory in something beside Christ. Lured by the pomp of external ceremony, they were for making a fair shew in the flesh; and not persuaded that their typical system was now abolished; they, therefore, enjoined on their hearers the observance of external

rites, as necessary to salvation, that they might glory in their flesh, escape the offence of the cross and do away the soul-humbling doctrine of "trusting in Christ Jesus, putting no confidence in the flesh." Such corruptions and perversions of the gospel the apostle abhorred. He saw they aimed, immediately, to the overturning of the doctrines of the cross; and, with the honest zeal of a faithful ambassador, he nobly declares—"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The cross of Christ was, in the apostle's view, *the only tree of life* for perishing sinners. And, persuaded that nothing short of true faith in Christ could avail men to salvation, he conceived the doctrine of these teachers to be in the highest degree, mischievous and dangerous to the souls of men: and, therefore, in our context, he so warmly exhorts the Philippians on this subject. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision,"—these sticklers for carnal ordinances and a boasted self-righteousness, who to establish their own systems, would subvert your souls, and overturn the gospel of Christ: for, adds he, we the apostles and ministers of Jesus Christ, that declare unto you the gospel, as we received it of the Lord, "we are the true circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

His reasoning evidently goes to this, and is as if he had said—"As to confidence in the flesh, or a dependence on any thing of our own, as the ground of our acceptance with God, I might say as much as any man. Shew me a man among them all, that can urge stronger pleas from his carnal privileges, Jewish prerogatives, or external performances; or that can raise a louder boast

of his self-righteousness than myself. *If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day—of the stock of Israel—of the tribe of Benjamin—an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless! Few, among all these teachers, can say as much as this for themselves; and none can say more. But what can all this avail a guilty sinner, for his justification before God? True, I once thought as highly of these things as they now do, and as confidently expected to gain heaven by my own righteousness. But, blessed be God, he hath stripped me of my false hopes, and shaken me from my false foundation; and taught me to rest my eternal all, on that only foundation which he hath laid in Zion. Here I see no room for boasting and glorying, and trusting in the flesh. The salvation of sinners is placed by God on quite another ground. So that *what things were gain to me; or what I once esteemed gain to me, these I now count loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.*"*

What a proficient was Paul, in natural, ceremonial and moral righteousness! Behold the man! How fair his claims! How well founded, as some might suppose, his hopes of acceptance with God! He had been no hypocrite; however ignorantly he might have acted, he was sincere. But when his eyes were opened; when he was brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; see him casting away all his former grounds of

confidence; renouncing them all *as loss*, and counting them but *dung*, that he might win Christ. He saw, there was nothing short of true faith in Christ, and an interest in him, that could avail him to salvation. And, therefore the best his heart or hands could do, when viewed as the ground of his acceptance with God, he utterly disclaimed, and rejected with abhorrence, as mere garbage, to be relished by those only who had no just views or esteem of the gospel.

And, my brethren, if every thing, short of the religion of Christ, was of no avail to salvation, in the view of the apostle, who had the fairest advantages to judge in this matter; what warrant can we have to put our trust any where else? If he, from clear views of the truth, utterly renounced all confidence in the flesh, or in any thing that flesh can do, can these things be a proper ground of confidence to us? Surely reason and conscience must constrain us to say, *No, they cannot.*

But it is proper, on this subject, that I should be more particular; and detail and examine the false grounds of confidence, which the apostle enumerates, and to which misguided multitudes, in one way or another, are so attached. And,

1. The apostle refused to glory, or put any confidence in his being descended from a particular nation, tribe or family.

In this, it seems, the Jews were fain to boast. They were Abraham's seed; of the stock of Israel, that favoured nation, which the Lord chose out from all the nations of the earth, and distinguished by many peculiar privileges. On these accounts, the Jews were ready to conclude themselves the peculiar favourites of heaven;

that is, entitled above others, to the distinguishing favor of God.

But had not the apostle equal ground of boasting on this score, with any of them? He was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; a tribe honored with the first of Israel's kings, and that kept close to God, when other tribes fell away to Jereboam's idolatry. He was an *Hebrew of the Hebrews*, *i. e.* born a Jew, both by the father's and mother's side, which some Jews were not. So that, in this respect, he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Jews. And though he was far from despising, or lightly esteeming national advantages; yet when these things were boasted of, as entitling to the divine favor, he rejected such confidence, as groundless, and would know nothing, in this view, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

As Gentiles, we indeed, cannot plead this boasted Jewish distinction, nor abuse it, as a ground of false confidence. Yet how many are there who, in the same mistaken way with the Jews, plead their having been born and educated in a christian land; their acquaintance with christian doctrines and duties; their belonging to a distinguished church, famed for its orthodoxy and purity; or their having sprung from, and been trained up by pious parents! How delusive must all such confidence be! Such should remember that, as among the Jews, "they were not all Israel that were of Israel; so neither, among christians, can external privileges give any title to the divine favour, if we be not ourselves found in Christ.

2. The apostle renounced all confidence in his obedience and conformity to the ceremonial law.

The rites of this law were all typical of Christ and the blessings of the gospel ; but could never make the comers thereunto perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. The Jews appear to have had very mistaken views of this law ; to have considered even an external conformity to its precepts, as atoning for moral defects, and rendering them acceptable in the sight of God.

It was this mistake that made the judaizing teachers so much insist on the observance of this law, as necessary to salvation. The apostle was fully convinced of their error, and considered it as leading men from the *substance* to the *shadow* ; from the true sacrifice for sin, to that which can never take away sin, and therefore building them on a false foundation.

This foundation he wholly renounced. He had himself, according to the strict prescription of the law, been circumcised the eighth day, and scrupulously exact in the observance of all its rites. But he now saw, these were all but *types* ; that the *substance was Christ* ; that the design of their observance, from the beginning, was *to lead to Christ* ; and not to be rested in as, of themselves, meritorious and efficacious to salvation. In this view, he considered and rejected all his ceremonial righteousness as loss and dung.

And, my brethren, does it not betray a like misplaced confidence, when we build our hopes of salvation on our external compliance with the ordinances and institutions of the gospel ? These things, indeed it is our bounden duty to observe. They are established by the authority of our divine master, and for wise and good ends. But when we plead, as the ground of our acceptance with God, that we have been baptised into Christ ; that we have put on the profession of the christian religion ; united

ourselves to the church in its most solemn ordinances, and are strict and punctual observers of all the duties of its worship; and think that, by a scrupulous observance of these external duties, we shall recommend ourselves to the favor of God, are we not guilty of the same error that the Jews were? This, surely, is to let go the Head, *even Christ*; and, instead of using these gospel institutions as means to increase our faith in, and conformity to Christ, it is substituting them in Christ's stead; and, contrary to their express design, making them the foundation of our hope. Alas, brethren, if we have no better foundation than this, our hope, at the last, must prove as the giving up of the ghost!

3. The apostle had been a Pharisee, one of the strictest and most devout sect among the Jews, and the most inviolably attached to the rites of the Mosaic law.

His zeal in the Jews' religion had outrun many of his equals in his own nation. He was, touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, transported even to persecuting the church. But now he rejected all hope from these things. Not all his strictness, as a Pharisee, nor all his zeal, as a disciple of Moses, could give him the least confidence towards God. However highly he might once have thought of himself, as a zealous Pharisee, he now saw that he was the *chief of sinners*, and acknowledged his only hope of deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Happy were it for multitudes, did they see and renounce their mistakes, in this way, as the apostle did. The blind attachment of some to sects and names, to peculiar opinions and forms—the spirit of intolerance which proclaims “Stand by thyself, come not near, for I am ho-

lier than thou," seems too plainly to betray a belief that, to be of *their* party, is to possess a sufficient title to the divine favour. There is a kind of zeal too, the result of ignorance and spiritual pride, and, in the forms it assumes, disreputable to religion, which will affect the name of exalted piety, and advance its boasted claims to acceptance with God.

My brethren, we may belong, as we suppose, to the purest and most orthodox denomination that ever existed; we may be ever so strictly attached to their doctrines and modes of worship, and have a zeal to promote these that would lead us to compass sea and land to make proselytes; and yet be only so much the farther from the kingdom of heaven, the more we rely on such party attachment and zeal, as constituting the ground of our hope of acceptance with God: for such reliance is, virtually, a renouneing of Christ, and setting up something of our own in his stead.

4. The apostle rejected all confidence in his moral attainments.

He had been a strict observer of the law, both moral and ceremonial. "I was," says he, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." That is, he was so in his own view, and in the view of others who knew him. He was esteemed an honest, upright, moral man; and one that paid a scrupulous regard to all the institutions of religion. None could impeach him with a want of integrity; he lived up to his knowledge, and his practice corresponded with his profession. And if this could have afforded him a safe ground of confidence, he might have rested there, and trusted and gloried in his own righteousness as well as others.

But alas ! he saw that all this would not do. His eyes had been opened ; God, in his inflexible justice and spotless holiness, had been manifested to the view of his soul ; the covering had been taken from the great deep of his inbred corruptions ; the divine law, in its extent and purity, had been set home, by the Spirit of God, on his soul ; this had awakened him to such a view of his moral depravity and guilt as he, before, had never experienced ; had slain all his vain hopes and refuges of lies, and taught him that, “By the deeds of the law, can no flesh living be justified in the sight of God.” As a condemned man he had been shut up to the faith ; as a sinner ready to perish, he had been led to see that salvation for sinners was to be found no where else but in Christ. He therefore gave up every other ground of hope ; rejected all trust in his own righteousness ; esteemed it but as filthy rags ; and aspired after the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ.

And, truly, my brethren, if there be any thing, short of Christ, that can afford a ground of hope to sinners, it must be *moral virtue*. This is inseparable from the nature of all religion ; this possesses intrinsic excellence in itself, and has, deservedly, commanded the veneration of all ages and nations.

But that the best obedience to the moral law, that guilty depraved man ever did, or does, or can perform, can never be plead as the ground of his justification and acceptance with God, will appear from the following considerations. 1. This law, from its very nature, and from the character of the lawgiver, requires perfect obedience. This, no man, in his fallen state, ever performs. The law reaches to the *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart, as well as to the *outward conduct*. Every

man, therefore, is *daily* a transgressor, in *thought, word and deed*. His best obedience is extremely imperfect ; so corrupt in the principle, from which it flows, and so defective in practice that, the man of the best morals may well cry, “ If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand ! 2. This law has its penalty. Every transgressor, therefore, and for every transgression, falls under the malediction, or penalty of the law. And what can he do to make amends for his transgression ? His best obedience, even should he do all those things that are required of him, is doing no more than is his duty to do. Instead, therefore, of making amends for past transgressions, the sinner is daily running deeper and deeper in debt. 3. The law, in whatever form and degree made known to man, must, in the day of final account, be the rule by which he shall be judged. If he then, when tried by the law, be found guilty of innumerable and awfully aggravated transgressions both in heart and life ; if it shall appear that, through all his life, his heart has been a sink of iniquity, and that all he has ever *thought, said, or done* ; that all his appetites, passions, affections, aims and views have been, more or less polluted from this corrupt sink of sin ; how will the sinner stand ? What *will* he, what *can* he plead in arrest of judgment ? Will he plead his imperfect obedience ? This will not answer the requisition of the law ; and this the righteous judge cannot, and will not accept. What can hinder, then, but that, as a totally depraved, guilty creature, and wholly unmeet for heaven, sentence should go against him ? All hope of acceptance with God, for our own righteousness, must, therefore, be forever in vain ! For, as the apostle reasons, Gal. iii. 21, 22, *If there had been a law-giver, which could have given*

life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe.

This doctrine the apostle well understood ; and fully persuaded that there was salvation for guilty man in no other way than through Christ ; and that, in this way, God could be just, and yet justify them that believe in Jesus, he esteemed all his own righteousness, all his gifts, all his learning, all his attainments ; yea, he esteemed *all things* but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, and did count them but dung that he might win Christ !

Thus have I endeavoured to prove, as was proposed, that, every thing, short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

I pass, for the present, the consideration of the nature of this religion, that I may make some improvement of what hath been said.

1. This subject teaches us that, men are in great danger of running into fatal mistakes in matters of religion. It is manifest that this danger existed in the apostle's day. The superstitions, self-righteous spirit, and misguided zeal of the Jews, on the one hand ; the captivating charms of the infidel philosophy of the Gentiles, on the other ; the arts and assiduity of false teachers ; the general laxness in morals which then prevailed, and the ever working depravity of the human heart, were sources of danger, against which all the solicitude, the zeal, and the diligence of the apostle were employed to guard the young converts to christianity. But why all this zeal of the apostle ? Why did he use such unweari-

ed diligence to instruct and warn the churches, and guard them from error, if he had not the fullest reason to believe that, they were in great danger of erring from the true faith of the gospel; and that such errors were of a fatal tendency? And should not a like pious concern engage all who love the truth, to guard against the encroachments of error? Surely, the danger of erring from the truth is not less now than it was in the apostle's days. The heart of man remains, as ever, *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*

All unrenewed men labour under a deplorable spiritual blindness of mind. They are ignorant of the divine perfections; of the purity and extent of the divine law, and of the great evil of sin. They possess, naturally, a proud conceit of the sufficiency of their own power; the merit of their own righteousness, and, of course, see but little either of the beauty or the necessity of the way of salvation through Christ. And from their natural repugnance to the self-denying and soul-humbling truths of the gospel, they will ever be in danger of leaning to systems that flatter human pride and depravity, and of being *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* "Evil men and seducers," we are told, "will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." We are therefore to expect that, they will be unwearied in their endeavours *to beguile unstable souls,* and turn them aside from the truth, as it is in Jesus. The danger, then, of erring from the true faith of God's holy word is great, and the consequence fatal.

This consideration should awaken parents to a more serious diligence in instructing their families in the first

principles of the oracles of God; and excite our young people to offer themselves more readily to catechetical instruction, lest, when entering a world full of seductions, and assailed by the enemies of truth, they, through ignorance, fall an easy prey to error. The danger of erring should also excite all, who wish to know and keep the truth, to study the word of God with a humble and prayerful attention, that they may be rooted and grounded in the truth, and not easily moved away from the hope of the gospel. And it would be well if all ministers of the gospel, like the apostle Paul, took due pains, in their public ministrations, clearly to instruct their people in the knowledge of gospel truth; to guard them against the seductions of error, and to establish and build them up in their most holy faith.

2. Let all examine carefully, on what foundation they are building their hope of salvation.

God alone is judge, on what foundation we may rest our hopes with safety. No schemes of human device can ever succeed in opposition to the plan of infinite wisdom and mercy. And the day that is coming will be, to all, a day of decision on this important point. *The fire will try every man's work, of what sort it is.* God will then thoroughly purge his floor, and gather none but the true wheat into his garner. What confusion will then overwhelm deceived souls, when the great judge shall pronounce; "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting!" When the rains shall descend, the winds blow and the floods beat, ah, what sweeping will there be among the sandy foundations of men's invention!

Sons of men, fly for refuge to the only shepherd and bishop of your souls.—Seek your remedy where alone

God has provided it.—Build for eternity on that foundation which God hath laid in Zion : for, be assured, “ No other foundation can any man lay, than that is laid ; which is Jesus Christ.”

3. This subject may admonish true believers to adore a sovereign, gracious God, who hath brought them out of darkness into his marvellous light, and made them wise unto salvation.

Ye children of God, let your devout reflections often dwell upon that distinguishing grace which hath made you to differ. How highly favoured is your lot ! Had not a sovereign God arrested you in your course of carnal security ; had he not, by his Spirit, discovered to you your lost state by nature, convinced you of sin, and brought you, from all your errings and wanderings, to the shepherd and bishop of your souls ; you would now be lying in a state of spiritual darkness and unbelief. Let God have all the glory that, *Whereas you were once blind, you now see.* Bless his holy name for what he hath done for your soul. Give thanks to him for whatever blessed experience you now have, or heretofore have had, of his mercy and love in Christ, and for that hope which is set before you in the gospel. See that ye stand fast in the faith, rooted and grounded in the truth, and not be easily moved away from the hope of the gospel. Let the lives you now live in the flesh, be lives of faith on the Son of God. *Ye are complete in him. Your life is hid with Christ in God.* Look to him, by faith, that of his fulness ye may receive, and grace for grace. Labour to adorn, in all things, the doctrine of God your Saviour. Thus living, ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And now, to him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.—AMEN.

SERMON XV.

**THE TRUE AND FALSE GROUNDS OF
RELIGION.**

(IN TWO SERMONS.)

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, &c. &c.

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SERMON XV.

Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.—But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

IN a world where truth and falsehood both assume the name of religion; and where, from the depravity of the human heart, error will often present itself as the most pleasing and acceptable to men, we are in great danger of erring from the truth. And the more we suffer our enquiries, on this head, to be directed by the pride and corrupt passions of the heart, the greater will be the danger of building our hopes on a foundation that must finally be swept away, as a refuge of lies.

These are considerations that should excite every honest mind, to take heed what he receives for truth, in matters of religion, and on what he founds his hopes of acceptance with God. It is from these considerations also that ministers of the gospel have a double work to perform. They are to detect the fallacy and shew the insufficiency of *false* religion, while they explain and enforce the *true*. These are the two great objects of the apostle, in our text; from which, when this passage was before under consideration, it was proposed,

I. To shew that every thing short of the religion of Christ, can be of no avail to us, for the attainment of our salvation, and should be entirely rejected as a ground of confidence.

II. To consider the nature of that religion which the gospel reveals.

For the illustration of both these points, it was proposed to take up and consider the view which the apostle gives of *both*, in the passage under review. And, therefore, in shewing, under the first head, the insufficiency of every thing short of the religion of Christ, as the ground of our acceptance with God; the *false* grounds of confidence, which the apostle enumerates in the context, were considered, both as plead by the Jews; and as, with some circumstantial difference, they are plead by mere nominal christians. A recapitulation of the false grounds of confidence, enumerated in the former discourse, will not now be necessary. I, therefore, proceed,

II. To consider the nature of that religion which the gospel reveals, as the ground of our acceptance with God.

This the apostle has distinctly marked, and forcibly expressed in opposition to all these grounds of false confidence he had been combatting. Having entirely renounced all such confidences for himself, he declares that, the religion he aspired after—that in which *alone* his soul could rest—and in comparison with which he esteemed all things else but loss, was “*That he might win Christ, and be found in him. not having on his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*” This is the apostle’s description of gospel-

religion. The better to understand which, let us attend to its several parts.

1. The *winning of Christ*. “That I may win Christ.” It is manifest the apostle here uses figurative language; and has reference either to the prizes, set up for the victors in the olympic games; or, more probably, he alludes to the cities of refuge among the Jews, to which if the man-slayer reached, before the avenger of blood overtook him, he was said to *win the city*, and thereby saved his life. The aptness of this latter figure is abundantly manifest; and the language used leaves little room to doubt that the apostle had reference to it, when he speaks of winning Christ. Taking this, therefore, as the figure the apostle had in view, and the following things are evidently implied in the soul’s winning Christ.

1. A deep conviction of his own sin and danger.

As the man-slayer, in fleeing to the city of refuge, was under an awful dread of the avenger of blood, until he reached the city; so the soul seeking to win Christ, has an alarming conviction of his own sin and guilt.

Whatever slight views some may entertain of convictions of sin and guilt, as essential to gospel religion; the word of God as well as sound christian experience, teaches us that, none ever truly flee to Christ for refuge, until they are convinced of the deep pollution of their nature by sin, their exposedness to the just displeasure of God on account of sin, their utter inability to save themselves, and their entire unworthiness of the divine mercy. These convictions may differ, in the degree felt, in different persons, and in the manner of their manifestation; but whoever truly flies to Christ for refuge will, in a greater or less degree, feel that, until renewed by divine grace, he is “*as an unclean thing; dead in tres-*

passes and sins, and by nature a child of wrath. The man-slayer dreaded the resentment of the avenger of blood, and fled, in haste, to his city of refuge; the convinced sinner trembles under the denunciations of God's violated law, dreads the displeasure of the just and holy sovereign of heaven and earth, against whom he hath sinned, and, in this deplorable situation, flees to Christ. The man-slayer mourned for the deed he had done; the convinced sinner flees to Christ, weeping and mourning for his transgressions, and loathing himself for all the abominations of his heart and life. The man-slayer used every exertion to reach his city of refuge; the convinced sinner is in serious earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come. He asks, he seeks, he knocks, he strives to enter in at the straight gate, to lay hold on the hope set before him. In short, it is necessity, a felt, pressing necessity, that first excites the soul to flee to Christ. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." And while, as sin-sick souls, looking and fleeing to Christ, under this felt necessity, they cannot be indifferent about their success; their cry is "*Lord, save me, or I perish!*"

2. *Winning Christ* implies that, the whole trust of the soul, for salvation, is in Christ only.

The man-slayer, pursued by fear, and feeling his life in danger, used his utmost exertions to reach the appointed city of refuge. And to none other would he direct his course: for no where else had he any warrant for his security; no where else could he be safe from the avenger of blood. So it is with the soul that seeks to win Christ. He is assured, from the authority of God himself, that, *There is salvation in none other; that, there is none other name under heaven, given amongst*

men, whereby we must be saved; that, he is exalted of God to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sin; that, we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; that he is the propitiation whom God hath set forth, through whom he can be righteous and yet remit sin. Therefore, the soul seeks no other refuge; but finds his whole hope and trust, for salvation, in Christ Jesus, as the only foundation which God hath laid in Zion. To seek any other refuge, he is constrained to view as a most dangerous presumption. And therefore, all his former false hopes and refuges of lies he gives up and wholly renounces. What things were before gain to him, he now esteems loss for Christ, and counts them but dung that he may win Christ.

And to this sole trust in Christ Jesus he is led, not only because Christ is the only appointed way of salvation to sinners; but because he sees in Christ an infinite suitability and all-sufficiency for accomplishing this salvation. Instructed by the word and Spirit of God, he is led to view this Saviour as, *the eternal Son of God; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; as having assumed our nature into union with his own divine nature; as having submitted to be made under the law; to be made a curse for us, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law; to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; to suffer and die, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. In this view of the Saviour, his infinite power, and the all-sufficient merit of his atonement and righteousness are abundantly manifest. So that, the soul in fleeing to Christ for refuge, puts his whole trust in him, as one able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. This*

view of the suitableness, the infinite power and merit of Christ, as a Saviour, must have a powerful influence in exciting the soul to flee to him, as the only refuge.

Add to this, the influence which a view of the loveliness and love of Christ has upon the soul. When Christ is revealed to the soul, in all the glory of his person, his character, and his offices, there will be a *shining in the heart of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. Christ will appear to the soul as, *the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely*. And the love of Christ manifested in the whole of the great work of redemption, will have an irresistible influence in constraining the soul to flee to Christ. How astonishing the mercy and love of God in Christ! How overwhelming the love of Christ to sinners! Ah! this is love that melts down the soul, that, while we were *dead in sin; dead in law; lying in all our pollution and wretchedness, and deserving nothing but the everlasting displeasure of God, Christ should so love us as to give himself an offering to God for us! Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he first loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins! While we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly!* Well might the apostle say "*The love of Christ constraineth us.*" And, constrained by this love, the sinner will seek to win no refuge but Christ.

3. To win Christ is, to attain to a satisfactory evidence of the soul's saving interest in Christ.

The man-slayer could not dismiss his fears, and feel himself in entire safety until he actually reached his city of refuge. So neither can the soul enjoy a settled peace in believing until it has some satisfactory evidence of its interest in Christ. There is a period, in christian ex-

perience, called the believer's *day of espousals*, when the soul, despairing of help elsewhere, and renouncing every other refuge, does freely give itself up to be Christ's, and cordially receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel. This is reaching to the true city of refuge; this is, in the language of the apostle, *to win Christ*. The soul, having been tossed as with a tempest, and not comforted, now reposes in Christ as, *a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and as rivers of waters in a dry place*. A sweet peace ensues; the burden of his sins rolls off; his guilty fears are allayed; and, assured of the pardon of his sins, and feeling the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart, in a holy transport, he cries, *my beloved is mine and I am his!* Like believing Thomas, while his finger was in the print of the nails, he no longer hesitates to adopt the appropriating language, *My LORD, and my GOD!* Or with Paul he can say, *I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him*. The seeking soul has now found rest in Christ, and knows by happy experience, what it is to *win Christ*.

The persuasion, thus attained, of a saving interest in Christ is usually called the *faith of assurance*. Concerning this assurance, it is here proper to observe that, though it be the privilege of every child of God, yet, from some unhappy constitutional gloominess of mind, or from having their affections too much divided between Christ and the world, some are long left to mourn the want of this assurance. In fleeing to Christ for refuge, how often does it happen that, awakened, convinced souls are for a time, left to struggle with distressing doubts

and fears, and sometimes to conflict with the anguish of despair. When they seem to be just entering on the threshold of hope, they are driven back to their former doubts. When they are about to say, *I have found him whom my soul loveth*, they are left to complain, *my beloved hath withdrawn himself and is gone*; and the fear arises, *he will be favourable no more*. Such complaints are often heard from sincere, humble souls, at almost every stage of their christian progress.

However difficult it may be, in such a case, for the soul to decide on its real state, yet if, on a careful examination, it is found that, the soul does repose its entire trust in Christ; is striving to follow him in all his ways; and is willing to give up all for him; the hope of our having obtained a saving interest in Christ, although accompanied with many doubts and fears, should not be rejected but cherished. Nor should the soul, in such case, content itself to live in a state of uncertainty, nor be deterred from labouring after the *full assurance of faith*.

Thus much on the soul's *winning Christ*.

II. The next thing in the apostle's definition is, *to be found in Christ*. "That I may win Christ, and be found in him."

Those who are strangers to gospel religion, may have very low thoughts of this part of it. But Paul, who was a fit judge in this matter, viewed it as of essential importance. In describing to the Ephesians their state, before they embraced the gospel, he tells them, Eph. ii. 12, That at that time, ye were *without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. To be *without Christ*, or

out of Christ, then, is to be in a most deplorable situation. It is to be, in no covenant relation to Christ; in no spiritual union with Christ; and therefore, no sharers in the blessings of his purchase.

The phrase, *to be found in Christ*, expresses more fully, the state of those who *win Christ*. *To win*, the soul goes out to, and under a deep sense of sin and guilt, cordially accepts of Christ. *To be found in him*, expresses the soul's being born in the image of Christ, its covenant relation to him, its spiritual union with him, and its safety from condemnation.

1. *To be found in Christ*, is to be renewed and born in his image.

While out of Christ, we bear no spiritual likeness to him. The old nature characterises us; we are in sin, and under its dominion. From this state we must be delivered, and *created anew in Christ Jesus*. This doctrine the Saviour has inculcated in the most explicit and forcible manner. “*Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” It is requisite, therefore that, *we put on the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. The same mind must be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Moreover, whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.* From the above scriptures, it appears that, regeneration is an essential doctrine of the gospel, and that none can *be found in Christ* until they are born in his image. No professed respect for religion; no compliance merely with its external duties; no fervors of mere animal feeling; no zeal however loud and active,

are of themselves sufficient to constitute us the spiritual members of Christ's family. No, there must be a change of heart ; an implanting in Christ ; a passing from the state of nature, to a state of grace. This is the state so highly accounted of by the apostle, and which he considered as essential to being *in Christ*. As he speaks, *2 Cor. v. 17*, If any man be *in Christ*, he is a *new creature* ; old things are are passed away ; behold all things are become new.

2. *To be found in Christ*, expresses the soul's covenant relation to him.

The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him, with all true believers in Christ. As Adam was the first, so Christ is the second covenant head ; and while he delivers from the miseries incurred under the first, he confirms to believers all the grants and privileges promised in the new covenant. *Gal. iii. 17*, The covenant that was confirmed before of God, in Christ. *2 Cor. i. 20*, For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God, by us. This covenant, of which Christ is the head, the apostle styles, *Heb. viii. 6*, a better covenant, established upon better promises. While out of Christ, therefore, we remain in the condition of the apostate children of Adam, and subject to all the ruin which the breach of that first covenant brought on us. But on believing in Christ, we pass from death to life ; from the condemnation and curse of the first covenant, to be heirs of the blessings promised in the new. That is, we are placed in a new covenant relation ; we are now *in Christ*, in a covenant relation to him. *Eph. ii. 19*, We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of God. *Gal. iii. 26*, For ye

are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Eph. iii. 6, We become fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the gospel. Blessed state! glorious change! From being children of wrath and heirs of hell; to being the children of God, and heirs, yea, joint-heirs with Christ Jesus!

3. To *be found in Christ* implies the believer's union with Christ.

All those who have fled to, and accepted of Christ by faith, become spiritually united to him. *He abides in them by his Spirit which he has given them. He that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* His spirit is diffused through them all, and is both the common bond which unites them to Christ, the *Head*, and into one body, the church; and is also the common source of life which supports the whole body, and each individual member. This union is beautifully described by the Saviour in the 15th chapter of John: I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. Paul thus speaks of it, 1 Cor xii. 13, For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit. Christ tells his disciples, John xiv. 20, Ye shall know that, I am in my Father and *you in me*, and I in you. The love of Christ to his people drew from him that most comforting petition. in the 17th chapter of John. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me—that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. It is from this union that, the spiritual life, or life of

grace, is maintained in believers. Gal. ii. 20, I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God. To what high dignity is our poor nature raised, through Christ! If David thought it an honor too great for a subject, to be united to his king, by a marriage alliance; what must be the honor of the real believer! He is united to the King of kings, and Lord of lords; to the head of all divine influence. His life is hid with Christ in God. It is from his being thus *in Christ*, that he derives all his spiritual life from Christ's fulness; and has, moreover, the assurance that this life shall be maintained in his soul and consummated in glory. John xiv. 19, Because I live, ye shall live also. I briefly add,

4. *To be found in Christ*, is to be in a state of safety.

As the city of refuge afforded safety to the man-slayer who had reached it; or as the ark afforded safety to Noah and his family, from the overwhelming flood, then all those who are *found in Christ*, possess a security that cannot fail: for it is a security of heaven's own providing. *In Christ*, they are set on high from the fear of evil. Neither the condemning sentence of the law, nor the avenging justice of God can reach and smite them there. Sprinkled by the blood of atonement, no curse can light upon them. Once they were the children of wrath; but *in Christ*, they have escaped from the wrath to come, and are warranted to adopt the following exulting language, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.—There is therefore, now, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.—Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ*

that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Such is the import of being *found in Christ*. It is to be born in his image ; to be brought into a relation to him, as our new-covenant-head ; to be spiritually united to him, and to be in a state of safety from all condemnation. Each of these articles, it is evident from the scriptures adduced, are essential features of gospel-religion, and of such high import that, the apostle might well make so great account of being *found in Christ*, and be willing to suffer the loss of all things that he might attain to this.

III. The third and last part of the apostle's description is in these words. "Not having on 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."

Here it is taken for granted that, man stands in absolute need of righteousness. That where there is not such a righteousness as the law requires and God can accept, man can have no hope. The reason is, man is a creature made under law to God, and in the day of final account, must be judged by the law under which he is placed. To be acquitted of the charge of guilt and pronounced righteous, or as the scriptures express it, *to be justified*, man must have either in himself, or in his surety, a righteousness equal to the demands of the law ; that is, a perfect righteousness : for the law knows nothing of mercy and forgiveness ; it is a pure law, not an act of grace. And God, the righteous law-giver and judge, cannot depart from his just claims of perfect obedience : for such a departure would be equal to the acknowledg-

ment either, that his law was, in itself, unreasonable, or that he had ceased to be just. A perfect righteousness, then, is necessary for the sinner's justification before God.

Let it be observed further that, to the salvation of man, it is also requisite, he possess a meetness for the enjoyment of God. Nothing unclean can enter heaven. This meetness is usually styled *holiness or sanctification*. It commences in regeneration, and is imperfect, even in the best of men in this life : for as the apostle observes, “ *We are here sanctified but in part.*” But it is a work of grace, in believers, which increases and grows until they are finally *presented unto God without spot or wrinkle or any such thing*. Every believer, therefore, so far as he is holy, that is, conformed to God, in the spirit and temper of his mind, and in the conduct of his life, is righteous ; he has the righteousness denominated sanctification. In our text, the apostle must have respect to righteousness, in both the senses above explained.* And so fully was he convinced of the insufficiency of his own doings, and of his entire dependence on free grace for every thing essential to his salvation that, *his own righteousness which is of the law* was rejected by him, as of no avail, and *the righteousness which is of God by faith*, was embraced as his sole ground of confidence. The former of these, therefore, he would not have on ; but with the latter, that which is of God by faith, he desired to be clad. I shall speak to both of these.

1. His own righteousness which is of the law.

* Imputed righteousness is doubtless the principal thing in the view of the apostle in the text ; but as sanctification is a benefit inseparable from justification, it may be considered as included in the apostle's description.

This will need little explanation. As obedience, or conformity to the law, is termed righteousness, he must mean, his own personal obedience to the law ; that is, to any law which God hath enjoined, whether moral, or ceremonial, or even to the institutions and precepts of the gospel. Such obedience or righteousness, was indeed his own, because performed by himself personally, and not by another for him. The explanation may be carried further, so that, by *his own righteousness*, he may intend, any obedience of his to the law, performed in *his own strength*, by the efforts of mere unrenewed nature, and without the aids of divine grace. Thus performed, the righteousness may be called *his own*. But it was such a righteousness as he would not have on. That is, he would not look for any shelter or security from it ; he would not place any reliance on it ; nay, he wished to have no esteem for it, as constituting any part of gospel religion. It was not the *wedding garment* in which he could ever hope or dare to appear before God. It was not that *breast-plate of righteousness*, provided in the panoply of God, which every christian is enjoined to put on.

There are two strong reasons why the apostle did, and why all should renounce any dependence on their own righteousness. First, because all such dependence is vain. It is a righteousness, certainly not perfect, but, ah, how miserably defective ! so mixed with sin, even in the very best of men, that it cannot possibly be accepted, by a holy God, for our justification. And if it be performed in no better strength than our own, without the aids of God's holy spirit ; if its spring and motives be no higher than the *carnal mind, which is enmity against God* ; if it be the production, merely of our un-

renewed, unsanctified natures, then there can be no holiness in it, it is not that righteousness which is denominated sanctification. Secondly : another reason for renouncing all dependence on our own righteousness is, that all such dependence is an opposition to the gospel plan of salvation. Salvation, on the gospel plan, is through free grace, without money or price on our part. The gospel finds us, *wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*, in forlorn and helpless circumstances, and offers us salvation freely, and *wholly through Christ*. Whereas salvation by our own righteousness, is a plan founded on totally distinct principles ; a plan, in which Christ and his merits, and the necessity of divine influence, either make no part at all ; or, at best, they are taken in as sharers with the efficacy of our own works. To rely on such a plan is, to place our hope of eternal life on a covenant of works, and not on the covenant of grace through Christ. It is, as the apostle says of the unbelieving Jews, a being ignorant of God's righteousness, and a going about to establish our own righteousness, refusing to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God. And yet how many, even among professing christians, discover a strong attachment to the old covenant of works. If they profess some dependence on Christ ; their main reliance appears to be on their own power, and the efficacy of their own works of obedience. Such was not the faith and spirit of Paul. This eminent apostle had not so learned Christ. In this view of gospel religion, Christ is the *only name*, the *all and in all*. He would know none other, on none other foundation would he build. Therefore, he would not have on his own righteousness, which is of the law ; but,

2. That which the apostle did aspire to, and on which he could freely and confidently trust his eternal all, was *that righteousness which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

This is the righteousness, and this only, that can justify and save a sinner. Possessing this, he knew that, he should never be made ashamed. Two things are here to be noticed. 1. The righteousness itself. 2. How it is received by the sinner or becomes his.

1. The righteousness itself.

It is called God's righteousness, or the righteousness which is of God. We have the same language, Rom. i. 17 ; and in sundry other places in the gospel *is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.*

The scriptures, as was before observed, use the term righteousness, as it relates both to our justification and our sanctification. So I shall now consider it. The righteousness, by which we are justified, is the *imputed righteousness of Christ.* This righteousness is, Christ's perfect obedience to the precepts and penalty of the divine law. Such an obedience Christ has performed. Being made under the law, substituted in the guilty sinner's place, and without sin in himself, he fulfilled all righteousness ; his obedience was without spot ; and his propitiatory sufferings rendered it a righteous thing with God to forgive sin. For Christ came into the world, not to obey and suffer on his own account. Of this he had no need, nor was he under any obligation, seeing he was without sin, and is, moreover, the Lord and lawgiver of all creatures. But he submitted to this wholly on account of, and for the salvation of his believing people. He obeyed, *he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.* Rom. iii. 24, We are justified

freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. To *redeem* is to recover from captivity, bondage and wretchedness, by paying down a price. Sinners, by nature, are in bondage to the law, sold under sin; but *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*. It is said, Rom. x. 4, Christ is the end of the law, *for righteousness*, to every one that believeth. Now the end of every law is, that it be obeyed; and if transgressed, that its penalty be suffered. This Christ hath accomplished. That is, he hath fulfilled the great end of the law by his obedience and suffering. And in doing this, he hath satisfied the law, paid down the ransom, and thereby brought in an *everlasting righteousness* for all them that believe in him. This is the righteousness which, according to Rom. iv. 6, God imputeth without works. Hence says the prophet, Jer. xxiii. 6, This is the name by which he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. And it is said, 1 Cor. i. 30, Christ Jesus is made, of God, unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

By this righteousness of Christ, imputed unto us, we are justified. And this righteousness *is of God*; because it is of God's appointment; because it was wrought out for us by *the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ*; because God hath declared himself well pleased and satisfied with this righteousness, and because he imputes it to the believing sinner, and will accept it for his justification. On whomsoever, therefore, this righteousness is found, the condemning sentence of the law cannot light. In the Saviour's righteousness he stands complete. He has the robe, the wedding garment, that

will admit him to the guest-chamber, in the courts above!

The righteousness of God, by faith, is also *imparted* righteousness, or sanctification. It is the spirit of grace, implanted in believers, with the fruits of this spirit brought forth in their tempers and lives.

In this sense the word righteousness is so often used in the scriptures that it is needless to cite passages in proof. Of this *righteousness* every real christian partakes. The stamp they bear is, *Holiness to the Lord*. And it is not merely an external, but a real holiness; not a holiness, the mere result of our own natural strength; or of a good education, but the fruit of the implanted spirit of grace, which *is in all goodness and righteousness and truth*. To render his people *holy* is one great object of Christ in the plan of our salvation, Titus ii. 14, Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Our whole sanctification, or inherent righteousness, is the purchase of Christ's blood and the work of his Spirit. It is communicated, or *shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour*. This righteousness cannot, indeed, answer the demands of the law for our justification before God; but it is that righteousness or *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*.

The apostle, therefore, could not rest in any thing short of the *imputed and imparted righteousness of God*. He was neither a legalist, nor an antinomian. He looked to be *justified freely, by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; to be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and*

by the Spirit of our God. Humbled and stripped of all self-dependence, he trusted in Christ Jesus his Lord ; and looking for the aids of divine grace, through him, he applied himself with diligence and earnestness to the *putting off the old man, with his deeds, which are corrupt, and to the putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.* In this way, his life was one unceasing endeavour, to *increase in the fruits of righteousness which are, by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.*

Such, then, is the righteousness the apostle desired to have on, while he resolved to renounce wholly his own. Happy resolve ! Noble exchange ! To give up dross and dung, for the pearl of great price ! To renounce the vilest poverty for gold tried in the fire ! To cast away his filthy rags, for robes, pure and white ! To reject all dependence on poor unrenewed nature's strength ; and live in constant dependence on the merits of the Saviour, and on the aids of divine grace. I am,

2. To enquire, how this righteousness is received by the sinner, or becomes his.

And this is, in one word, by faith, *through the faith of Christ*, that is, by a gospel faith. He that is a stranger to the faith of Christ, possesses not the righteousness which is of God. This faith is the full and free assent and consent of the soul to God's revealed truth ; or, in other words, it is the receiving of the record which God hath given of his Son. In the religion of the gospel, this faith has a high rank. It is there revealed as of divine origin ; it is *the gift of God ; of the operation of God* ; it unites to Christ ; by it we become the children of God ; it puts in motion all the gracious affections : for *it worketh by love and purifieth the heart* ; it supports

under the severest trials ; renders the soul superior to discouragement, in seasons of the greatest difficulty, and is its grand stimulus to all holy obedience. So essential is it to our acceptance with God, that we are told, in Heb. 11. 6, Without faith it is impossible to please him. And in Mark xvi. 16, He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.

In the article of justification, *faith* stands opposed to *works* ; that is to our own works of obedience to the law. Rom. iii. 20, 28, By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight—therefore, we conclude, that a man is justified *by faith*, without the deeds of the law. Those who are looking for salvation, in some other way than through the faith of Christ, are opposed to this order of things. And by rejecting the doctrine of the totally depraved, guilty, undone state of man, as a fallen creature ; by persisting to plead for man's sufficiency in himself, for the purposes of his salvation ; and relying on the merit and efficacy of their own works of obedience, they see but little beauty in, or need of Christ, why they should desire him ; nay, they are opposed to the gospel plan of salvation, and reject the only remedy which God hath offered to sinners. How manifest is it that, in this way, the guilty creature sets himself up against the sovereign mercy of God ? He will be his own physician ; he is offended with the doctrine of entire dependence on the mere mercy of God in Christ. Notwithstanding his apostasy, with its effects on his state, he claims the credit of possessing in himself sufficient power and skill to procure his own deliverance, and work out for himself a sufficient meetness for heaven. Such a temper of mind can be no otherwise considered, than as in direct hostility to the re-

ligion of the gospel. Instead of desiring, seeking, and humbly receiving the righteousness which is of God by faith, it refuses to submit to this righteousness.

The above remarks are made, with a view, to shew more clearly, how the believing sinner does receive this righteousness. And I know not how, better, to shew this, than in the following manner. Brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, he bows to the testimony of God in his word, without conditions, or exceptions. He submits to become *reconciled to God by the death of his Son*. He gives up all trust in, or dependence on himself; acknowledging his perishing necessity, and intire unworthiness. With his whole soul, he reviews and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel; and looking for acceptance with God, and help from God, wholly through Christ, the language of his heart is, "Lord, to whom shall I go, thou hast the words of eternal life!" This is faith. It is a submitting to, and cordially acquiescing in, God's own terms; it is humbly and thankfully receiving what God hath provided, and freely offers to perishing sinners. And he, that thus believeth, shall be saved; shall be justified from all things, from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses, nor by any other law. This is the divine plan. And on this plan, it appears that faith no more merits salvation than works do. But God hath so constituted the method of our salvation, that Christ and the benefits of his redemption, when received by faith, should become ours. Ours, *without money and without price*. John i. 12, As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Rom. iv. 4, 5, Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace,

but of debt ; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. And in Rom. x. 10, With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. That is, a believing in Christ, with all the heart, secures to the sinner a perfect, saving righteousness. It unites him to Christ, and thereupon, Christ's righteousness becomes his. And, in this view, is the doctrine so much insisted on in the scriptures that, we are *justified by faith, and not by the deeds of the law*. No, not of any law : for, as the apostle reasons, Gal. iii. 21, 22, If there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, *by faith of Jesus Christ* might be given to them that believe. This is saying that, the sinner can look to no law for life ; that the righteousness, by which alone he can be justified, is through the faith of Christ ; a righteousness which, according to the gracious plan, or promise of God, is given to them that believe.

It is through the faith of Christ, also, that the sinner is made partaker of inherent righteousness, or sanctification. In regeneration, *the faith of the operation of God* is implanted in the soul. This faith, from a clear view and deep conviction of the truth, operates in the soul as a principle of sanctification. Our Lord prays, John xvii. 17, Sanctify them, through thy truth, thy word is truth. This prayer teaches us that, the truths of God, received by faith, have a purifying effect on the soul ; that the soul, being thus brought to view the glory of the divine perfections, the excellence of the divine law, the great evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, and the rich displays of God's mercy in the gospel, is led to hate

and strive against sin; to love and labour after holiness; and thereby to grow in grace and increase in the fruits of righteousness. In this way, then, *faith worketh by love and purifieth the heart.*

Believing sinners, also, derive holiness or sanctification in the way of direct application, by faith, to Christ the living head. *They are complete in him. Their life is hid with Christ in God.* Though of themselves they can do nothing; yet, though Christ strengthening them they can do all things. The supplies of the Spirit of grace are derived from Christ, by faith, to the souls of believers. Christ is the object of their habitual trust for sanctification. As the apostle speaks, *The lives they now live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God.* In this way, *they receive of the Saviour's fulness and grace for grace.* And thus grow up into him in all things, and finally attain to a perfect meetness for God's heavenly kingdom. It is to this end that the throne of grace is made accessible; that, repairing thither, in the confidence of faith in the great high priest over the house of God, they may obtain mercy and find grace to help them in time of need. Thus, *by faith* is the sinner made partaker of God's righteousness. Having, thus far, considered the nature of gospel-religion, according to the view which the apostle hath given of it in our text, I shall now close the subject, by making some inferences from the whole.

1. From the view that has been taken of this subject, we are naturally led to infer that, gospel religion alters men's views of God, and reconciles them to his true character.

This religion commences by God's *shining into the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the*

face of Jesus Christ. The shining of this light into the soul bows it to God, and it is led to adore and love God in that very character which he hath given of himself in his word. The wicked know not God. Unregenerate men are displeased with, nay, they cannot endure the view which the scriptures give of God's perfections and government. And this is the fruitful source of those numerous corrupt systems of religion which have appeared in the world. Men are opposed to revealed religion because it gives such a view of God as their proud corrupt hearts revolt at. They pretend not to deny the existence of a God; but, then, they are fain to form such a view of his character as, at least in some degree, resembles their own, and suits their wishes. He must not be so much displeased with sin, as the scriptures represent him. He must be all *mercy*; possess no vindictive justice. He must good-naturedly put up with their trampling on his laws, and their slighting and despising the offers of his grace. A little external morality, or, at most, a few formal professions of repentance, must be accepted with him, as a sufficient passport for them to eternal felicity. But gospel religion totally alters the views of the soul in this respect. They who possess this religion, are taught spiritually and savingly to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. God, as revealed in his word, appears altogether glorious; And they, ~~condemning themselves,~~ and confounded at their former enmity against God, now most heartily give up all their opposition, and become reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

2. From this subject, the inference fairly follows that, the religion of the gospel is a soul-humbling religion.

It prostrates the sinner in the dust, not only from the view of his past sins, with their dreadful demerit; but from the conviction that he feels of the awful moral depravity of his nature. Whatever may have been the ease before, he can now no longer entertain slight views of the evil of sin. His pride is brought down; his high looks and lofty imaginations are laid low. He is stripped of all dependence on his own power, or on the merit of his own works. He feels that, he is wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked. This religion, by teaching him the absolute necessity of dependence on Christ for justification and sanctification, takes from him all ground of boasting. He dares not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but, from every view of his situation, is constrained to cry, *God, be merciful to me a sinner!* Ah, how much of that which with many in our world, passes for religion, would be viewed with shame and rejected with abhorrence, did men truly see their own guilt, vileness, weakness and unworthiness, and the glory of the plan of salvation through Christ. On this plan, the sinner is laid low indeed, and the Lord alone is exalted. To every self-righteous professor, this religion speaks, as in 1 Cor. iv. 7, Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? And in Rom. iii. 27, Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith.

3. From this subject we are led to infer that, to those who possess gospel religion, Christ is precious.

They have not those low thoughts of Christ which are entertained by many in the world, who notwithstanding, call themselves, christians. Ah no: to think

and to speak as some do of Christ, they cannot but view as treason against the King of kings! Christ is *the Lord, their righteousness and strength*. He is, to them, *the chief among ten thousands, and the one altogether lovely!* He is *their trust, their hope, their life, their all!* To you who believe, says the apostle, *he is precious*. God forbid that *I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, expresses the very feelings of their hearts. They adore and love him for what he is in himself, and for what he hath done and is doing for the salvation of a lost world. To Christ Jesus they trust their dearest interests; to him they commit their departing spirits; and through him and from him they look for their eternal all. To such, therefore, the name of Jesus is, *as ointment poured forth*. His honor, the interest of his kingdom, and the prevalence of his truths, are objects near to their hearts. They are grieved when Christ is dishonored, when his truths are opposed, or when the interests of his religion appear to be neglected. With this religion in lively exercise, they can join with the apostle in the text and say, *We esteem all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord*.

4. From this subject, it follows that, gospel religion, above all others, furnishes the best security for a holy life.

The character given of it is that, it is *a doctrine according to godliness*. An objection is often brought forward against the doctrine of justification by faith, that it tends to licentiousness. Now this objection must be made either from a misunderstanding of the doctrine, or from a wish to discredit it because of a preconceived fondness for an opposite system. Let any one serious

consider the sentiments it inspires ; the views that it gives of God, of his law, of the evil of sin, and of the beauty of holiness ; let him consider the feelings that, from its very nature, it excites in the soul, the necessity that it teaches of man's sanctification, and of his hearty co-operation therein ; let him consider the help so freely and abundantly offered, the powerful motives urged, and the constraining influence which the mercy and love of God, manifested in the gospel, has to lead men to holiness ; and then let him say, whether the doctrines now contended for, do not manifestly tend to constrain men, *to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world* ; to call and quicken their attention to all the duties they owe to God, to their fellow men and to themselves. Should the appeal be made to fact and experience, the truth of the inference advanced will be abundantly confirmed. The most distinguished for piety and godliness have ever been found among those, who have most strictly adhered to the doctrines that have now been advocated.

I shall now close this discourse by a very brief exhortation. 1. To those who have hitherto but too little considered, on what they are building their hopes of acceptance with God. Let me say to such that, no foundation will abide the day of trial but that which God hath laid in Zion. All others will be swept away as refuges of lies. But let every man take heed how he builds on this foundation. We are here in danger of fatal mistakes. Whatever professions of faith in Christ we may make ; if our faith be not of the operation of God ; if it be not a faith that receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel ; if it do not work by love and purify the heart, our pro-

fessions will stand us in no stead ; but, numbered with the enemies of the gospel, we must fall under the awful denunciation, “ Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels !” *Examine yourselves, therefore, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves : know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.*

2. Let true believers bless the Lord for the glorious foundation he hath laid for your faith and hope in the gospel of his Son ; that he hath called you by his grace, and made you partakers of a living faith in the Lord Jesus. How changed is your state from what it once was ! Now are ye the sons of God ; adopted into his family ; made heirs of God, yea, joint heirs with Christ Jesus. All things are yours : for ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. While you adore him for his distinguishing love to you, and for all your consolations that abound by Christ ; see that ye walk worthy of the vocation, wherewith ye are called ; labour to adorn, in all things, the doctrine of God your Saviour. Testify, both to yourselves and others, the saving nature of your faith, by your works. Let not a vain world deceive and mislead you. Live not after the flesh ; but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever, **AMEN.**

SERMON XVI.

ON A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

Matt. xxv. 10.

And, while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready,
went in with him to the marriage ; and the door was shut.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XVI.

Matt. xxv. 10.—And, while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage ; and the door was shut.

UNDER the simple and familiar images of this parable, are conveyed truths the most interesting to mankind, the most awful to sinners. Sincere repentance and the habits of a holy life, are, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, the only preparation which can justly be relied on for a peaceful death, and a happy immortality. But sinners, mistaking the nature of repentance, as if it consisted merely in the tears extorted by the terrors of their last hour ; or in the bitter reproaches which they make to themselves for the folly and madness of their worldly pursuits, when the world itself is seen to be perishing from their embrace ; mistaking the nature of heaven, as if it consisted in a happiness independent on the regeneration of the heart, resolve to enjoy the world, while they have powers to taste its pleasures, or to pursue its interests, and to postpone their preparation for eternity, till, at length, they leave it to the dreadful hazard of a death-bed. To destroy this most dangerous and fatal error, and to preserve men always awake to their everlasting interests, so that neither death nor judgment shall find them unprepared, is the great object of our blessed Lord in this parable. For this end he pictures to us the surprize and consternation of foolish virgins who were employed at a marriage to be in waiting for the bride-

groom ; but who, having neglected their duty, were not in readiness to receive him at his coming, and were in consequence, excluded from the honors and joys of the nuptial festival.

The structure of the fable is founded on an eastern custom of celebrating marriages at a late hour in the evening. The bridegroom and his attendants were received at the house of the bride by a train of virgins bearing lamps or flambeaus in their hands. In the ease here imagined, a part being wise and attentive to their duty held themselves in readiness to fulfil their office whenever their Lord should appear ; the rest being thoughtless and improvident, left their lamps unfurnished with oil, trusting that they should have time to replenish them after the first signal had announced the approach of the bridegroom. But, while they were buried in profound forgetfulness, a sudden cry was made from every side ;—*behold the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him !* Then appeared the folly of those who, in the season of preparation, had neglected their proper duty. While they were seeking in vain to repair their error, and, in the hurry and confusion of their spirits, were continually committing only new mistakes, the bridegroom had already come and entered into his apartments ; those who were ready entered along with him, and *the door was shut*. After which, there was no more admission either for attendant, or for guest.

With what force and truth does this beautiful fable represent to us the infinite danger of delaying our repentance, and preparation for eternity till the moment when God is calling us by the voice of death to appear in his presence. The bridegroom hastens to his joys, and does not wait to give time for the foolish virgins to

repair their neglect. He commands the door to be closed and no more listens to the entreaties by which they solicit to be admitted to his presence. Such is the terrible state of an impenitent sinner on his death-bed—The *season of repentance* and the *season of the divine mercy*, both, are past.

Attend, my brethren, to these interesting ideas.

1. The sinner, on his death-bed, will want *time* for that great change which must pass upon his heart in repentance.—Do we not perceive that all important improvements either in our intellectual powers, or our moral habits, are the effect of long and assiduous culture? Leaving out of our view, what in the regular and common course of divine providence, ought not to be expected, every extraordinary operation of the divine power upon a sinner's heart, can we believe that a change so great as that which is produced by repentance in the entire systems of our views, of our affections, of our pursuits and habits, and in one word in our whole nature, should be the sudden and unprepared effect of the surprise and terror of our last moments? To what purpose would be that long season of discipline, those multiplied and daily repeated means of grace, afforded by God to cultivate the heart for heaven, if after they have been abused and mispent, their end can be attained in one critical instant at the close of life? No, this does not accord with the moral constitution of man, nor with the established order of the moral world. God in the ordinary course of things, seconds by the gentle influences of his Holy Spirit, the convictions and persuasions which his word and providence are calculated to produce upon the heart. But, shall we forever look for miracles in favour of those only who have wasted opportunities, and

means, and time, and *wantonly resisted* the merciful operations of the spirit of God in their *proper season*? Let it be remembered also, that peculiar difficulties oppose themselves to this change. It is not merely the renovation of a heart which, though not enlightened, is not an enemy to the truth; which, though not holy, is still innocent, and offers no obstacles to divine grace. It is the regeneration of a heart *corrupted* as well as *blind*; which *hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest its deeds should be reproved*: it is the conquest of passions which oppose their whole force to the law of divine truth: it is the eradication of perverse and sinful habits which have struck their *roots deep* into the whole mass of our nature. Are these works which can be effected in a few moments? Victories which are easily obtained? Ask the experience of all the truly penitent. What struggles, what conflicts, have they been obliged to maintain with a blind and hard heart before it could discern the beauties of holiness, or be penetrated with the love of the Redeemer! What a long and distressing warfare with a stubborn and rebellious will, before it would submit to the grace of the gospel! with a sensual imagination continually assembling before the soul the ensnaring images of vice; with irregular passions continually hurrying them into sin! How often have they been obliged to return foiled from the contest; and, after they seemed to have made some progress towards an entire victory over their lusts, have they been again overcome in the moment of temptation, and had all their labours to begin anew! Yes, it is only after many long and arduous conflicts that the pious have been able to conquer the dominion of sin in the soul; and to attain at last to the kingdom of heaven.—Can you then, O sinner!

presume on accomplishing this great work in the rapid instant which you may still enjoy on a death-bed; in the short and tumultuous interval between the attack of diseases and their fatal period? Were the mind in the most favourable state for exerting her full powers, how little could be done in that brief time for eternity! But urged by extreme disease upon her destiny, and overwhelmed by her fears, she is still less able to accomplish so great a change. Her distracted thoughts incessantly hurry her from her work to her danger, and again from her danger to her work. All her efforts are feeble and confused. She besieges heaven in all the importunity of prayer. It is her only, and now almost vanishing hope. But, ah! she expires without being able to attain the consolation of hope.

To such hazard is the delay of repentance till the close of life exposed, even if you could enjoy the utmost you can promise yourselves, the warning of a death-bed. But *this warning*, fruitless as it commonly is, you *may not* enjoy. Death often lies in ambush for his prey, and in the moment of the deepest security, suddenly seizes upon it. Will you then risk your everlasting salvation on the delusive, the hopeless promise of a death-bed repentance? Will you reply to all the invitations, the admonitions, the remonstrances of religion, *I resolve to repent before I die?* Death may arrest you while you are forming the resolution. Your next step may be to the tribunal of your judge. The same moment may sound the alarm of the coming of your Lord, and forever close the door against you.—This is the first danger of postponing re-

repentance till the approach of death ; the sinner will want *time* to accomplish so great a work.

2. As he will want *time*, he will also want the *powers necessary to attend to it* as becomes the important and arduous nature of this duty.

The work of eternity is to be done ; and what can be expected in the few days, or perhaps the few moments in which the last fatal disease commonly finishes its dreadful course, from a *weak and fainting mind* ; from a *confused and faltering reason* ; from a *heart in which the sources of life are almost extinguished* ? Perhaps acute pain takes from the wretched sufferer all power of thinking except upon his miseries. Perhaps, sunk in a profound lethargy, he rather *dozes* than *lives* ; and his slight thoughts resemble the wanderings of a dream. If the fever seizes on his brain what wild and incoherent fancies fill and distract his mind ? How can we reason with him on his duties, and his eternal interests, who receives false impressions from every object around him ? How can he know his Saviour who knows not the friends who are weeping by his bed-side ? All then is chaos and confusion in the soul ; and the powers of reformation and repentance are lost with the powers of reason and reflection.

To some who hear me I may, perhaps, confirm this argument from their own experience. Have you, at any time, been brought, by the hand of God, near to the gates of death ? Urged upon your destiny, as you thought, and trembling before the justice of heaven, what composure of mind did you then possess for the great work which was before you ? What clear discoveries could you attain of divine things ? What tumults agitated your breast ! What fruitless struggles did you maintain with an impeni-

tent heart without being able to make it relent! What efforts did you make to break through the profound darkness which covered your soul without being able to see any light! What confessions did you make of the past sinfulness of your life, but without being able to appease conscience! With what earnestness did you assail the throne of grace, but without being able to calm your terrors. What resolutions did you make of amendment, if God should spare you to recover from that bed! Ah! this is *commonly all the fruit of a death-bed repentance*: it consists only in resolutions for *the time to come*, which the dying sinner does not live to execute; which if he did live, he would probably forget with returning health. Did you not then do as much for your salvation as, in the same circumstances, you are likely ever to do again? What was its fruit? Ah! what would have been the fearful destiny of the soul, if she had then been called to her judgment? And, will you again hazard your everlasting interests on that desperate hope—the hope of repentance on a death-bed, from the wreck of which you have but just escaped? Your Lord will then come to call you to *judgment*, not to extend to you *new mercies*; to receive your *account*, not to *repair the errors of a mispent life*.

To all these representations, will the sinner oppose the power of God which is able to change the heart in a moment and is not limited to any order of means or of time; and the mercy of God which is ever ready to hear the cries of the miserable, and the perishing? The almighty power, the infinite goodness of God we cannot deny. They are truths precious to every sincere christian. But in drawing such expectations from them, you would

make them the grounds of the most unwarranted and dangerous conclusions. For,

3. The impenitent sinner, in the last moments of a mispent life, will have no *reasonable foundation of hope in the divine power and mercy.*

The moral order of things, not less than the natural, has its fixed and certain laws. Moral changes are usually the slow effect of culture, and of time—of the gradual developement of truth, and the application of proper motives to the heart. And is it reasonable to expect that God will depart from this order only in favour of a sinner at the close of a life spent in despising or abusing the means of grace which he has afforded him? But is not repentance, you ask, the gift of God? May it not, therefore, be imparted at any moment? This question, I will answer by another. Is not every blessing of divine providence equally the gift of God? But, are those blessings *ever* bestowed independent of the natural means with which he has been pleased to unite them? Is it not God who bestows on you the abundance of harvest? But, will you ever *reap* if you have not *sown*?

Whatever degree of influence may be ascribed to the grace and power of God in the regeneration of the heart, can we believe that he will extend that grace, or exert that power in favour of some sinners only to encourage so many others to contemn the established means of their salvation, and to hazard their eternal interests on the desperate contingencies of their last hour? The power of God, indeed, *can do every thing.* But has he not imposed *limits* to the exercise of his own power—the *limits of wisdom—the limits prescribed by the order of the universe?*

If the divine power affords no reasonable ground of hope to the impenitent sinner at this awful crisis, as little, perhaps, is he entitled to draw it even from the *divine mercy*; that attribute so much abused by men to the encouragement of their crimes—that attribute from which they have formed almost unlimited expectations in their last moments; that attribute which is supposed to be able to refuse nothing to the tears and miseries of an unhappy soul.

Men deceive themselves by the sentiments of compassion in their own breasts, by the strong sympathies which they often feel for their fellow sinners, and their fellow sufferers. Private compassion and public justice move on different principles. In the administration of human laws, how often do we see the sympathies of the *man* obliged to yield to the duties of the *magistrate*? The plans of the *Divine Mind*, and the operations of divine providence are formed on views infinitely beyond the reach of human understanding. They embrace the whole universe. And the destiny of each individual is linked, by more immediate or remote relations, to innumerable millions of other beings. All must be governed by the same immutable laws, and no personal considerations, however interesting they may appear to us, can alter their invariable course. Do we not see the wheels of providence move on with constant and undeviating regularity and never arrested by any of those calamities which most deeply touch our sympathy? Is all the anguish of a frantic mother who sends her shrieks to heaven over her infant expiring in agony, and who alternately implores its mercy, and accuses its justice, sufficient to suspend the inexorable stroke of death? If heaven were governed by those principles of pity which can refuse

nothing to the cries of despair, and from which the self-love of sinners expects such miracles on a dying bed, would fire and tempest, would pestilence and death every where spread such cruel ravages among the human race? Would Abraham have interceded in vain for the guilty cities of the plain? Nay, would not hell itself be unpeopled, and its unquenchable fires be extinguished? But those dreadful fires never cease to burn; and its miserable prisoners are held, and will be forever held, the hopeless victims of eternal justice.

Even the divine benignity and compassion, therefore, afford no reasonable ground of hope, at this late hour, to an impenitent sinner who has despised the means, and wasted the season, of salvation. Will God, by the facility of his compassions enter into your plans, O sinner! and, after you have indulged only your own pleasures, crown with eternal life the miserable remnants of a soul and body which have been exhausted among sinful joys? Will he save you at the last moment only to encourage so many others to destroy themselves? With what confidence will you be able to turn your dying eyes to his eternal throne to solicit for that mercy which you have always rejected, or abused while it was offered to you? Remember, that when mercy has exercised itself to its appointed limits, justice assumes the throne and measures with the line and the plummet* the sinners whom its thunders are about to destroy.

I might argue from the *habits* of confirmed holiness which are necessary to enable the redeemed to relish the pleasures, and fulfil the duties of that pure and immortal state of holiness and love where they shall dwell for-

* Isaiah xxvii. 17. 2 Kings xxi. 13.

ever. I might argue from the labours, the sacrifices, the self-denials by which the pious at last attain to the kingdom of heaven; whereas you affect to live in pleasure and then hope to be transferred almost from the midst of your crimes to the regions of purity and glory. I might argue from the good works which follow the dead who die in the Lord, and on which, the Saviour Judge shall pronounce his sentence of benediction, and eternal life, Mat. xxv. 35. But what are the works which follow the sinner, who has been impenitent till his last moments, but the *works of his passions*; but his *follies and his sins*?

Your time will not permit me to pursue these illustrations; and, after remarking that the case of the thief upon the cross, (which has been so often appealed to on this subject,) affords no reasonable ground of hope to those who have all their lives enjoyed and abused the grace of the Saviour;—and that the parable of the labourers has no reference to a death-bed repentance, but to the late reception of the Gentiles into the church of God, I shall conclude the series of these melancholy proofs, with the awful and unqualified denunciations of the spirit of God.—*Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.*

Do you say that this doctrine represents the divine nature, all merciful and gracious, in the most austere

and gloomy light?—It represents it in that light only in which it is exhibited in the whole word of God, and in the whole course of providence.—Our most wise and merciful Creator has furnished to men the means of improvement and the means of happiness; and if they neglect the one, or abuse the other, is his goodness obliged to repair their errors and to save them from the natural consequences which, by an inevitable law, he has made to follow their crimes? No, he justly leaves the fool to reap the fruits of his folly.

Has he not in his mercy provided a Saviour? Is not that Saviour and his salvation *freely* offered to men? Has he not instituted means of grace abundantly sufficient for our salvation, if they are faithfully improved? The enjoyment of these mercies, at once acquits the goodness of God, and leaves the sinner without excuse; the misimprovement of them leaves him, with aggravated guilt, to suffer the just punishment of his iniquities.

It is a false and dangerous idea in religion, that after God has richly furnished to us the means of salvation, he is to save the sinner at last, independently of the use of those means, and notwithstanding their most criminal abuse. No, the course and the laws of nature progress with uniformity in the *moral*, not less than in the *natural* world. If men have despised the rules of temperance and sobriety, will all their regrets and self-reproaches restore their health, or relieve the pains and the anguish which their vices have planted in a broken constitution? If you have neglected the means of improvement in youth, will any inspiration impart to you the virtues or the knowledge which will qualify you to hold a respectable station in future life? If so much time, and so much pains, if so many labours, and so many self-

denials, as we see, are necessary to enable us to act a part with dignity and propriety on the brief theatre of the present world; are none, nay, are not infinitely *more* required to prepare us for a glorious and immortal existence? This world is our *school*, our *discipline* for eternity. And as youth impresses its character on our maturer years, so the character which we bear with us hence, shall form the basis of that endless progression which shall commence when we enter on a future state of being.

These reflections, while they vindicate this doctrine of religion from unreasonable severity and gloom, and demonstrate its analogy with the course of providence, urge us to the most faithful and earnest improvement of *our precious time*. This invaluable season, and this *only season of our salvation*, is hastening to pass away. It is consuming while we speak. And when once the summons of death, or the trumpet of the archangel, shall proclaim that time shall be no longer, that the Judge is approaching, if you have *no oil in your lamps*, while you *go to buy*, or, in all the agony of prayer intreat of heaven, Lord! Lord! open to us—then, the door shall be shut.

Do you ask if this is not robbing the last moments of men of their only remaining consolation? No, it is inviting them never to expose it to such a desperate hazard; it is inviting them to place it, in *proper season*, on an immovable foundation; on *the rock of ages*; it is destroying an idea fatal to true religion, and the happiness of mankind. For if sinners can flatter themselves with enjoying their pleasures in the full career of health, and, when they can enjoy them no longer, of obtaining salvation from the indulgence of heaven in the last *crit*

ical moment of a mispent life, will not their hearts forever repel all the persuasions, or the terrors which the gospel can address to them to bring them to repentance? Do you ask then, what are all those appearances of a lively and sincere repentance exhibited by dying sinners in their last moments; their tears, their prayers, their agonies of mind, their self-reproaches for the past, their resolutions for the future? Are they of no avail with a merciful God? I have already shewn that the divine government and the sympathies of mortals move on different principles. If that which touches our compassion could move the purposes of God most just and holy, or change the laws of the moral world, who would not be saved? Few can preserve their insensibility to the last moment of life. However they may have lived, all tremble, all pray, all resolve, and repent, when they see before them the opening grave, and the tribunal of judgment. Then we have heard those who never prayed before, pour out their souls with a frightful earnestness at the throne of grace: but they uttered rather the cries of despair than the prayers of penitence and faith. Those who in the days of their prosperity only scoffed at the ordinances of religion, now call for them with importunity, solicit the prayers of its ministers, and of all good men, and seem disposed to rest too much upon them, because they find nothing in themselves on which to rest. Nature is dissolving; and, having no anchor of hope in the dreadful storm, they endeavour to cast their souls, in this moment of anguish and despair, on their counsels and prayers. They seize them as a perishing warrior, one miserable and almost hopeless plank in

the universal wreck of soul and body. Good God! how awful is the situation!—struggling in the agonies of *death*—distracted with the terrors of *remorse* and *guilt*—overwhelmed with fearful apprehensions of a *judgment* to come—to be forsaken of thee!!—But thou hast numbered and finished thy mercies!

SERMON XVII.

WARNING AGAINST SELF-DECEPTION.

(IN TWO SERMONS.)

Matt. vii. 24, 25, 26, 27.

“Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock,” &c.

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IT is a serious and melancholy truth, that many, both Jews and Christians, have been justly chargeable with hypocrisy, dissembling with God; and also, with self-deception, indulging fallacious hopes of salvation.

Did not God thus complain of his people Israel?—“They draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me,” Isa. xxix. 13. And, saith the prophet Ezekiel, “They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. For, with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness. And, lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not,” Ezek. xxx. 31, 32.

The hypocrisy of these people, especially in the time of the prophet Isaiah, seems to have been very general. “For every one,” says he, “is an hypocrite and an evil-

That the solemn, interesting, and affectionate caution, or warning, contained in these words, may, if possible, be duly regarded by us, I shall,

I. Consider, what is meant by “hearing the sayings of our Lord, and doing them.”

II. I shall attend to the wisdom and happiness of such, as shall “hear these sayings, and do them.”

III. I shall notice what is meant, by “hearing the sayings of Christ, and not doing them.” And,

IV. I shall shew the folly and unhappiness of such conduct.

I. I am to consider what is meant by “hearing the sayings of our Lord, and doing them.”

And here, let it be asked, can any thing less be meant, by “hearing the sayings of Christ and doing them,” than truly to receive and embrace him, as the promised Messiah; “that prophet which should come into the world?” or a due reception of the gospel of Christ; a firm belief of all his doctrines; a sincere and universal observance of all his precepts and ordinances; a confident reliance on his promises; an holy fear of his threatenings; a due regard to his exhortations, warnings, and admonitions?

The man who believes not the doctrines of Christ, cannot, in the sense of the text, be said to “hear them.” Nor can it justly be said that he “does the sayings of our Lord,” who lives in the violation of his commands, and is regardless of his ordinances; who relies not on his promises; who fears not his threatenings; who regards not his exhortations, warnings, and admonitions.

For instance, Christ declares, that “he who believes not in him, shall be damned,” Mark xvi. 16—that he who regards not his commands, cannot be his disciple.

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,” says Christ, “he it is that loveth me,” John xiv. 21—is my disciple indeed. And, says Christ also, he that regardeth not my exhortation to repentance, or “repenteth not, shall perish,” Luke xiii. 3. And if we rely not on the promises of Christ, how can we be saved by him?

So much, then, is implied in “hearing the sayings of our Lord and doing them.” And would we obtain salvation by Christ, we must, through the aid of the divine Spirit, thus hear and do, and perseveringly, even “unto the end” of life; for “he who putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God,” Luke ix. 62. “He who is faithful unto death, shall receive the crown of life,” Rev. ii. 10. And, in the sense of the text, he who “heareth the sayings of Christ and doeth them,” so receives him by faith, that Christ gives him “power to become a son of God;” and he is “born, not of blood; nor of the will of the flesh; nor of the will of man, but of God,” John i. 12.

Such a person is then “born again,” not only of water, “but of the Spirit.” He is so in Christ, that he is a new creature; “he has put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, and has put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness,” Eph. iv. 22. And, such a person, having the spirit of Christ, by it he is led and governed; and, being “born of God, he sinneth not, but keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not,” 1 John v. 18.

In these things the religion of the gospel consists: and the wisdom and happiness of our being christians, indeed, of “hearing the sayings of our Lord and doing them,”
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In these things the religion of the gospel consists: and the wisdom and happiness of our being christians, indeed, of “hearing the sayings of our Lord and doing them,” I shall now,

II. Proceed to notice.

I shall not, however, attempt to describe all the blessedness that will attend those of real religion, in life and at death; in time and through eternity; all the evils they will be delivered from, and all the good they will enjoy; but pay attention only to the happiness that will attend the sincere christian, as mentioned in the text. And even such a character may expect trials and afflictions. On him "the rain may descend; against him the floods may come and the winds may blow."

1. He may, by the providence of God, be called to drink, and deeply to drink, of the cup of affliction.

He may particularly be grievously afflicted by disease; by poverty; by calumny; by oppression; by personal insult and violence; by bonds and imprisonment; by persecutions; by banishment; by various tortures and sufferings, and by the death of relatives and friends.

"Many are the troubles of the righteous," says the Psalmist, Psal. xxxiv. 17. But in all these troubles, the real christian, though he feels, he does not murmur, nor despair. His hopes of support, under these trials, and deliverance from them, in due time, is in "the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength;" and he will deliver him out of all his troubles.

"The sorrows of hell," says David, "compassed me about. In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried unto my God. He heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even to his ears. He sent from above; he took me; he drew me out of many waters. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me," Psal. xviii. 5, 6, 19.

But the righteous will not only be delivered from their trials, but their afflictions shall be sanctified to them—shall be a blessing to them—"shall work together for

their good." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us," says St. Paul, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17. And so far were the primitive christians from sinking into despair, when afflicted, that they exulted in their sufferings; gloried in them, knowing they would terminate to their advantage. "We rejoice," says St. Paul, "in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given us," Rom. v. 3, 4, 5.

And does not history inform us of many christians, in ancient and modern times, who remained unmoved; who were comforted and supported under all their trials and sufferings. When in dungeons and chains for the religion of Christ, have not many "sung praises to God?" And have not others exulted even in the flames;—in holy triumph, sealed their faith with their blood? Then it was, indeed, that the Lord heard them! that the God of Israel did not forsake them," Isa. xli. 17. Then it was, that they experienced the truth of this divine promise—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," Isa. xliii. 23.

2. The sincere christian may, also, be tried by the withdrawings of the divine presence; by the hiding of God's countenance. The pious man, then, may appear to be forsaken of his heavenly Father; with the Psalm-

ist he may say, "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long," Psalm xxxviii. 6.—And, with Job he may exclaim—"Oh! that I knew where I might find him!" "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when, by his light I walked through darkness," Job xxix. 1, 2.

But, in such a state of distress, the man of true religion does not despond; for the divine promises comfort and sustain him; he believes that "God will lift upon him the light of his countenance;" he is confident that though "a woman may forget her sucking child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb," yet that God will not forget him, Isa. xlix. 15. He knows "that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; that he delighteth in his way; that though he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down, because the Lord will uphold him with his hand," Psal. xxxvii. 23, 24. He is assured, that "though weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come in the morning," Psal. xxx. 5. And how is he consoled by the following language of Isaiah:—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light?—let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God," Isa. l. 10.

3. The real christian may, likewise, be assaulted by the powers of darkness; "lest he should be exalted above measure," there may be given unto him as was given unto St. Paul, "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of satan to buffet him;" but the faith of the man of piety "fails not," though thus tried; he is assured, that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations;" that "God is faithful, and will not suffer

him to be tempted above what he shall be able to bear ; but, with the temptation, will make a way of escape, that he shall be able to bear it," 1 Cor. x. 13. And the man of piety, is assured, also, that, on beseeching the Lord, that "this thing may depart from him," he will, happily, experience that the "grace of God is sufficient for him;" that the strength of God will be perfected, (eminently displayed) in giving deliverance to him in his state of "weakness," 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8, 9.

4. As "it is appointed unto men once to die," the sincere christian cannot escape the tempest of death, and though convinced that by its power he shall fall, yet, he meets the king of terrors with calmness and serenity, without terror and dismay; for he "knows in whom he believes;" he knows that his hope of eternal happiness is founded on the rock, Christ Jesus, and, therefore, his heart faints not; he knows, that "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, he will have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," 2 Cor. v. 1. He knows, too, that "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; that they rest from their labours, and that their works follow them," Rev. xiv. 13. In that solemn hour, when "he shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he will fear no evil; because God will be with him; because the rod and staff of God shall comfort him," Psal. xxiii. 4. In death, then, will not the man of piety experience the truth of the apostolic declaration—that God will give him "victory over sin, the sting of death, through our Lord Jesus Christ?" 1 Cor. xv. 57.

5. Nor will the real christian escape the awful hurricane, if I may so speak, of judgment ! Then, on him, indeed, as well as on the whole assembled world of men, will “ the rain descend, and against them will the floods beat and the winds blow ! ” August, solemn, and trying, indeed, will be this mighty tempest ! Then “ shall every man’s work be made manifest ; for that day shall declare it,” 1 Cor. iii. 13. Then, shall it be known, “ what manner of spirit we are of ! ” Then will hypocrisy drop its mask, and every one appear in his genuine character ! Then will it be known to all, on what foundation we have erected the superstructure of our hopes of salvation ; whether on the sand, or on a rock !

But, the real christian, having received Christ Jesus by faith, as his God and Saviour, resting with firmness on this foundation, he will not only remain unmoved, when “ the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” Pet. iii. 10—but, with holy transport, will cry aloud, “ Come, Lord Jesus ! come quickly ! ” “ Come, take me to thyself ! Come, put me in possession of that kingdom, which was prepared for thy redeemed, from the foundation of the world ! ” Matt. xxv. 34.

Such is the wisdom, and such is the happiness, of being christians indeed ! of “ hearing the sayings of Christ and doing them ; ” of indulging only scriptural hopes of salvation ; of building our expectation of eternal blessedness on the rock Christ Jesus, and not on the sandy foundation of ignorance, delusion, or error ! But, are there not many who thus build ? and may it not be useful to present the characters of such to view ? This I shall do, when,

III. I shall notice what is meant by "hearing the sayings of Christ, and not doing them." But for want of time, I must here draw a line, and defer the sequel of this subject to the after part of the day.

May what hath now been delivered, be treasured up in our minds, and on us have salutary effects!

SERMON XVIII.
WARNING AGAINST SELF-DECEPTION.

(IN TWO SERMONS.)

Matt. vii. 24, 25, 26, 27.

“Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock,” &c.

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IN discoursing on these words in the fore part of the day, after some introductory remarks, I mentioned, that I should,

I. Consider what is meant by “hearing the sayings of our Lord and doing them.” That,

II. I should attend to the wisdom and happiness of such as shall “hear these sayings and do them.”

III. That I should shew what is meant by “hearing the sayings of Christ and not doing them.” And,

IV. That I should shew the folly and unhappiness of such conduct.

Time permitted me to attend to only the two first of these particulars. I now resume the subject, and, therefore, proceed,

III. To notice what is meant by “hearing the sayings of Christ, and not doing them.”

Those who act thus, are, unquestionably, unsound professors of christianity ; they are such as build not their hopes of heaven upon the rock Jesus Christ ; but, upon a sandy foundation ; upon delusion, ignorance, or error. And, how many are there of this character !

1. The gospel of Christ was designed for the benefit of mankind in general; for "Christ was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of God's people Israel," Luke ii. 32. In the Saviour promised to Abraham, "all the families of the earth were to be blessed," Gen. xii. 3. "All the ends of the earth are invited to look unto Christ, that they may be saved," Isa. xlv. 22. And therefore it was, that "the poor were to have the gospel preached to them;" "the poor," the unlearned, as well as the learned. It was necessary, then, that the fundamental principles of the gospel should not require profound learning, deep investigation to understand them, but lie level to the meanest capacity; especially, that the conditions of salvation should be plain, and easy to be understood by the most illiterate of men. And is not this, indeed, the case? May not "he that runs," read the way to eternal life?

But, yet, how grossly has the gospel been misunderstood by many? What gross errors were entertained by numerous christians, even in the first age of christianity, respecting God and Christ; his doctrines, precepts, and the conditions of salvation?

Did not Irenæus, of the second century, write even five volumes to confute the errors and heresies which had then been broached in the churches;* and, with regard to the terms of salvation of the gospel, have not great numbers extremely erred, even from the days of the apostles, to the present period? And, therefore, have they not been rearing their hopes of heaven upon a fallacious, sandy foundation?

* Du Pin's Eccles. Hist. Cent. II.

In the apostolic age, one error of this kind, seems to have been but too prevalent. "He that believeth and is baptized," said Christ, "shall be saved;" meaning, undoubtedly, "he that believes me to be the promised Messiah, and, in all respects, submits to my dispensation of grace; believes my doctrines; obeys my precepts, and regards my exhortations and requisitions, "shall be saved." But, regardless of the genius, end, and design of the gospel, did not many erroneously conclude, that faith only in Christ, was all that was required to cause them to be heirs of salvation? And thus, while they expected salvation by Christ, they were regardless of his precepts and authority; of that repentance for sin, and purity of heart and life, which the gospel demands.

Thus they lived in sin, while they flattered themselves they were the children of God! and, in this manner, they "turned the grace of God into lasciviousness!" Jude, 4. But how was such conduct opposed by St. Paul? "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Rom. vi. 1, 2. And was not this gross error, of salvation by faith, without works, or while men indulged themselves in sin, most forcibly opposed, also, by St. James? "What doth it profit, my brethren," says he, "though a man say he hath faith and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works. Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew

thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble. But, wilt thou know, O man! that faith without works is dead?"

The apostle then shews how influential faith was on the practice of Abraham and Rahab, and concludes his arguments on this subject, by the following striking similitude. "For, as the body without the spirit, is dead; so faith without works is dead also," James ii. 14, &c.

But, unhappily, this erroneous doctrine, of salvation by a fruitless faith, did not become extinct in the apostolic age. It hath existed in the church, even to the present day; and those who now embrace the error, are styled Antinomians. This sect teach, that, in believers God seeth no sin, however sinful may be their conduct. That celebrated Antinomian, Dr. Crisp, an English divine of the last century, thus expresses himself:—"Though believers do act rebellion, yet the loathsomeness, and abominableness, and hatefulness of their rebellion, is laid on Christ: he bears the sin as well as the blame and shame of it. The only reason why God can dwell with those believers who act thus, is, because all the filthiness of their sin is transferred to Christ."* "The freeman of Christ hath this freedom, that Christ doth all his work for him, as well as in him. Christ doth all for him that God requires to be done."† "To take delight in the holy service of God, is to go a whoring from God. A man may not be exhorted to any duty, because he hath no power to do it. If Christ will let me sin, let him look to it! Upon his honor be it!"‡

* Dr. Daniel Williams's Discourses, Vol. III. page 186.

† Ib. p. 288.

‡ Ib. p. 254.

So far, indeed, does the Dr. disclaim all obedience, that he will not admit even faith to be a condition of salvation, and asserts, that there is not any condition in the gospel covenant. "There is not," says he, "any condition in this covenant. Observe, I pray you, and you will perceive, that man hath no tie upon him to perform any thing whatever, in the covenant, as a condition that must be observed on his part; and there is not one bond or obligation upon man, to the fulfilling of the covenant, or to the partaking of its benefits."

He then considers a person stating to him the following objection:—"Though works be not the condition of the covenant, yet, we hope you will allow that faith is the condition of it!" He replies—"I must needs tell you directly, that faith is not the condition of the covenant."* "Faith," he adds, "justifies the unbeliever; that is, that faith which is in Christ, justifies me who have no faith of my own."†

2. But while the Antinomians, by disclaiming good works, and even faith, as requisite to salvation, and therefore, are raising their hopes of heaven upon a sandy foundation; are there not some who, as fatally deceive themselves, by relying wholly, or in part, on their works of righteousness, for eternal life?

Does not the Socinian, for instance, deny the deity of Christ; his atonement for human guilt; a change of heart, through the energy of the divine spirit, and depend wholly upon morality for salvation? Though it is declared, that "Christ Jesus of God, is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification," if we shall obtain "redemption;" and that "by the deeds of

* Dr. Daniel Williams's Discourses, Vol. III. p. 66.

† *Ib.* p. 251.

the law, no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God," Rom. iii. 20.

3. Are there not those, also, who deceive themselves, by expecting that they can commend themselves to God, and enjoy his favor, by their pilgrimages, processions, penance, and sufferings which they inflict on themselves? And, in the church of Rome, are there not multitudes of this character?

4. The ordinances and devotional parts of religion, were instituted as means of grace, and can, justly, be no further valued, than as they contribute to the end proposed by them. But, through ignorance, are there not some who place religion in the observance of these things, and thus, fatally impose on themselves; though it is declared, that "the kingdom of God is not (*i. e.* true religion consists not in) meat and drink; but (in) righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?" Rom. xiv. 17.

5. The hypocrite, by endeavoring, through a series of years, to deceive others, may, at length, deceive himself; imagine that he is, indeed, what he appears to be, and, therefore, indulge a hope of salvation. But, as the eye of God penetrates the disguise of the hypocrite, will not his false hope "perish, be cut off, and his trust be as a spider's web?" "He shall lean upon his house," says Job, "but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure," Job viii. 14, &c.

6. Through a false zeal, may not men unjustly conclude they are the heirs of salvation? While St. Paul, for example, was persecuting the church of Christ, he verily thought he was doing God service, and deemed his conduct highly meritorious. And will not even the Martyr's hope of salvation be vain, if he sacrifices his

life through obstinacy, pride, false zeal, without necessity, or for the support of error?

7. A state of lukewarmness is, perhaps, generally a state of deception. Because men conclude they are orthodox in their profession of faith, and cannot be charged with outward sins, though they are devoid of active goodness, how apt are they to persuade themselves they are real christians? Did not the whole lukewarm church of Laodicea indulge fallacious hopes of salvation? Did they not flatter themselves that "they were rich, and so increased with goods, that they needed nothing?" But, in fact, were they not "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Rev. iv. 17—wholly destitute of the graces and virtues of the gospel; in a state of sin and condemnation?

8. God is merciful: "he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather he would turn from his way and live," Ezek. xxxiii. 11. And are there not those who have no other hope of salvation but the mercy of God; who expect, that though they live and die in sin, he will not cast them off forever, and sentence them to eternal misery; though God has explicitly declared that "he will not at all acquit the wicked;" that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die?" Ezek. xviii. 4. Though God has declared also, that he is a God of justice, as well as mercy? Psal. lxxxix. 14. And, of God, did not a celebrated poet justly say, that "a God all mercy, is a God unjust?"*

9. When men are called to preach the gospel and administer its ordinances; to minister in holy things, and, of necessity, to live a life of apparent holiness, are they not inclined, though strangers to the power of godliness,

* Dr. Young.

to believe, that they are entitled to salvation? But, does not our Lord warn men against such self-deception, in the following words, which also declare, that many will be thus deceived? “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied (preached) in thy name, and have cast out devils in thy name, and, in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them—I never knew you! Depart from me ye that work iniquity?” Matt. vii. 22, 23. But while multitudes, in these several ways, deceive themselves, and raise the superstructure of their hopes of heaven upon an unstable foundation, are there not some who live from year to year without any hope of salvation, though they “name the name of Christ,” and though they are not of the number of those who despair of the mercy of God, through the number and magnitude of their sins; but who bestow not a thought on their salvation; who, like Gallio, “care not for the things of religion;” and, who “eat, drink, and are merry,” without reflecting, that “to-morrow they may die,” and eternally perish? But, are not such persons a disgrace to christianity—a reproach to human nature? And, will they not fall the unpitied victims of the wrath of God? Would it not have been better for them, that they had never heard of the name of Christ? But for them, would it not, indeed, have been much “better, had they never have been born?”

It remains for me,

IV. To shew the folly and unhappiness of “hearing the sayings of Christ, and not doing them.”

Christ came from heaven to earth, clothed with divine authority, and, at his entrance on his mediatorial office, “the heavens were opened; the Holy Ghost de-

scended in a bodily shape, like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'Thou art my beloved Son! In thee I am well pleased!' Luke iii. 21, 22.

And as Christ came with a message of grace to sinful men; as he did not come to "condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved," John iii. 17—one would be tempted to imagine, that all men, both Jews and Gentiles, with open ears, would have "heard his sayings;" and, with joyful and grateful hearts, would have embraced his salvation!

But, unhappily, at first, a crucified Saviour was "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness," 1 Cor. i. 23—and, therefore, was Christ rejected by many of them. But, my brethren, we are not numbered with unbelievers; we are of those who "say unto Christ, Lord! Lord!" We "hear his sayings," and have laid ourselves under the most free and solemn obligations to "do them."

And what can be urged in our favor, if our practice shall contradict these our sacred obligations? For such conduct shall we not be justly chargeable with folly, and in the extreme? Can any possible good ensue from it?

But, for such dissimulation, such solemn mockery of God, shall we not incur great guilt; suffer great loss, and endure great misery? For, will God be mocked with impunity? Is it not "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God?" Heb. x. 31.

Are not the blessings of grace here, and the happiness of glory hereafter, of unspeakable value? and are not the miseries of wickedness, in this world, and the

everlasting punishment of it in the world to come, most justly to be feared and dreaded?

The folly of trifling with religion, and of bartering away the soul for any earthly considerations, was put in a most striking point of view by our Saviour, when he said, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark viii. 36, 37. But, how distressing will it be in the hour of death, to those whose eyes shall then be opened to discern the awful truth, that they have been erecting the superstructure of their hopes of salvation upon an unscriptural foundation? And, may not all their efforts to retrieve their error be fruitless? Then may not the "Spirit of God cease to strive" with them? Then may not the gate of mercy be closed against them? Then may not God "swear in his wrath, that they shall not enter into his rest?"

How awful, indeed, is the language of God to such sinners, as shall procrastinate repentance until the day of death! "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you! Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer! they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me!" Prov. i. 24, &c.

But, how great will be the consternation, horror, and wretchedness of those, in the day of judgment, who shall have indulged false hopes of salvation, and have died in

their sins? Beholding with heart-felt anguish their fatal error, will it not be too late to correct it? Then, will they not feel the full force of the declaration of our Lord in the text? Then, will they not be convinced, that the deceitful hopes they indulged of heaven, will terminate in their eternal ruin?—that great, inconceivably great, will be their destruction?—that they shall have no other opportunity to build for eternity? “Great,” then, indeed, will be the fall of their false hopes of salvation! Happy for them would it be, could their existence then vanish with these hopes! But, no! In vain will they “say to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!” Rev. vi. 16.

Hauled they will be, before the judgment seat of Christ, to “give an account of their deeds done in the body;” and as they have dissembled with him; rejected his grace; “filled up the measure of their iniquities,” and deceived their own souls, will they not be banished the presence of Christ, and condemned to “everlasting fire, with the devil and his angels?”

Such is the folly, and such is the unhappiness of “hearing the sayings of Christ, and not doing them!” Such are the dread effects of vice and irreligion—of living “without God and Christ in the world!”—of having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof!” 2 Tim. iii. 5.

I shall now conclude this subject, with some reflections.

1. How great is the privilege we enjoy of “hearing the sayings of Christ!” Before his incarnation, were there not “many prophets and righteous men,” who, in vain, “desired to see the things which we see,

and to hear those things which we hear?" Matt. xiii. 17. And, at present, are not these things unseen, and unheard, by much the greater part of the human race?*

2. How grateful should we be to Christ, that, of his great goodness, he has become the rock of our salvation; indeed, that he "gave himself for us;" that he died himself, that we might not perish forever!

3. If salvation shall not be ours, shall not we alone be culpable? For, through the grace of God, may we not all "do the sayings" of Christ?—rest our hopes of salvation upon him? "How then shall we escape," if we shall dissemble with Christ; deceive ourselves, and "neglect his great," rich and free "salvation?"

4. But, wherefore should we neglect this salvation? or, wherefore suffer ourselves to entertain delusive hopes respecting it? Who is there of us, that would, of choice, erect a house upon a sandy foundation, and especially, when, in consequence of such conduct, he might be buried in its ruins? A house, however, thus destroyed, might be rebuilt, and on a permanent basis. But, if the fabric of our hopes of heaven that we shall erect, shall be demolished, can it be rebuilt? Must we not inevitably perish in its ruins? Will not "the fall of it be great," indeed? How careful then, should we be, that in this particular we do not deceive ourselves? Should not each one of us adopt the language of David, and say? "Search me, O God, and know my heart! try me, and know my thoughts! and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Psal. cxxxix. 23. And should we not duly regard the following admonition of

* It is supposed by some there are about 400 millions of the human race in a state of heathenism.

St. Paul? "Be not deceived! God is not mocked! for 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!" Gal. vi. 7, 8.

5. Will it not, then, be wise, my brethren, faithfully, and without delay, to enquire into the state of our souls—into our conduct, temper and dispositions?—Whether "we are bowing to the flesh or the Spirit?"—Whether we are "doing the sayings of Christ?"—Whether the gospel has on us its intended effects?—Whether, by it, we are reconciled to God, through faith in Christ?—Whether we are regenerated, sanctified, by the divine spirit?—Whether we are obedient to the divine commands?—Whether, in all things, our will is submissive to the divine will?—Whether "our affections are placed on things above?"—Whether "our conversation is in heaven?"—And, whether we are qualified for celestial enjoyments?

Happy are those of us who can answer these interrogatories in the affirmative! Such will rejoice and "give glory to God" for their blessed state! Firmly they will still adhere to, and rest on Jesus Christ, the Rock of their salvation! No tempest, either of temptation or affliction, shall cause their feet to slide! They will be "stedfast, unmoveable, and always abound in the work of the Lord," and especially, as they perceive, that "their labor will not be in vain in the Lord!" 1 Cor. xv. 56. And, resting on the Rock, Christ Jesus, with what security, firmness, and even holy joy, will they meet all the storms, trials and tribulations of life; knowing that they will remain secure, and that these storms, trials and tribulations, will redound to

their honor and benefit; will unite them more closely to Christ, and shew them, more sensibly, their dependence upon him? For, is it not declared, that “blessed will be the man who shall endure temptations, and that when he shall be tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him!”

But, are there any present of a different character; who are building not on “the only sure foundation, Jesus Christ;” but “on wood, hay and stubble,” which shall not endure, but “shall be burned?” Let such rejoice, that yet they may be wise builders!—that the superstructure of folly and delusion which they have erected hath not been demolished, and to their utter destruction! But let such no longer be thus exposed to ruin! Without delay, let them begin to build for eternity! Let them remember, that “other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ!” 1 Cor. iii. 11. Let them remember, that when overtaken by death, they may not have time nor ability to build on this sure foundation! And let them remember, also, that, in time only, can they raise this spiritual edifice;—as it is declared, “that the night cometh, wherein no man can work!” and that “now is the accepted time! that now, only, is the day of salvation!”

May God bless what hath been said, agreeably to his word, for Christ’s sake!—AMEN!

SERMON XIX.
ON THE DISSOLUTION OF THE WORLD.

2 Pet. iii. 11.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons
ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness !”

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SERMON XIX.

2 Pet. iii. 11.—“ Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness !”

WHAT a sublime and grand spectacle was presented to all intelligent witnesses, when the Almighty laid the foundations of the earth ! By the word of his power, this fair and vast fabric was reared :—at first, indeed, “ without form, and void ; and darkness covered the face of the deep.” At the divine command, it began, however, to assume, by degrees, a more pleasing aspect, and a more definite form. The land was separated from the waters, and each stocked with innumerable tribes of animals. A mighty sun, was kindled in the firmament, to govern the day ; and the moon and stars to rule the night. So grand and illustrious was the scene, when, from chaos, a new world emerged,—arranged, adorned and beautified in all its parts—“ that the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy !”

Equally grand and sublime, but infinitely more awful, will be the *dissolution* of the world ; when “ the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ;” when “ the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.” Of that great event, which will afford an illustrious display of the divine power, the apostle is expressly treating, in the paragraph, from which the text is taken : and on this solemn and awful subject, I propose to address, to

you, a few considerations, in the present discourse. With this view, let us proceed to consider,

I. The *proofs* which we have of the final dissolution of the world ;

II. The immediate *cause*, which will produce this mighty effect ;

III. The *order* of this event, in the general course of things, which will, then, take place: and,

IV. The *practical effects*, which the contemplation of this subject ought to produce on our present views and conduct.—“ Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, *what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness !*”

We proceed to collect,

1. The *proofs* and *evidences* of the final dissolution of this world.

And, here, it may be proper to remark, in entering on this subject, that the light of nature can afford us but little aid, in our enquiries on this point. Our natural reason is, however, sufficient to satisfy us, that such an event, as we here contemplate is not *impossible*: for, surely, the power of an infinite and almighty Being, who formed the universe and still supports the frame of nature, is fully equal to the accomplishment of this work. If He was able to *create* the world, there can be no doubt but that He is also able to *destroy* it. Nay, without having recourse to *miraculous* power, reason must allow the *possibility* of such an event on *natural principles*, and from *natural causes*, as we shall presently see.

Perhaps we may advance a step further, and say, that the light of nature renders the dissolution of the world a *probable* event. Whithersoever we turn our eyes, we

see that all things are subject to decay. The verdure, which, in the summer-months, clothes the fields, fades, from year to year, at the approach of winter. The foliage on the trees, in like manner, withers and decays. Plants and animals, of all kinds, are subject to death. Even the sun itself, according to the opinion of some philosophers, is continually exhausted, and requires a constant supply of fuel to repair its waste.—And can it be thought probable, amidst this general change and decay throughout nature, that the world, in its present form, will be *eternal*? Do not the death of all living creatures, and the decomposition of vegetable substances; strongly intimate, on the contrary, that the period is certainly advancing, when “the great globe itself shall dissolve; and like the baseless fabrick of a vision, leave not a wreck behind?”

Whether it was from some obscure hints of this kind, drawn from natural reason, or, as is more probable, from *tradition* originally derived from the *sacred books*, certain it is, however, that many of the ancient *Heathens* entertained an expectation of the dissolution of the world; and that this great catastrophe would be produced by a *general conflagration*. The doctrine of the *Stoicks* naturally led to this belief. *Pliny* thought there was a tendency in nature to such an event, and wondered that it had not, long ago, happened. The words of *Seneca*, on this subject, are very remarkable, and not unworthy of being here repeated. “The time will come,” says he, “when the world will be consumed; when the powers of nature will be turned against herself; when stars will rush on stars, and the whole material world, which now appears resplendent with beauty and harmony, will be destroyed in one general conflagration. In

this grand catastrophe of nature, all animated beings shall perish together."

The light, which natural reason throws on this subject, is, indeed, but faint and feeble. We cannot, therefore, be surprized, that the Heathens should be perpetually led into the grossest absurdities, which need not be now mentioned.

There is, however, *another*, and a far better, source of evidence from which we draw the *proofs* of the final dissolution of the world, even the testimony of the *sacred scriptures*. Let us, then, in further prosecuting this inquiry, attend "to the *law* and to the *testimony*." And "what saith the scripture," on this awful subject? It assures us in many places and in direct terms, that the earth, in its present form, will not be perpetual, but shall be dissolved. "Of old," says the Psalmist, "hast thou laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. *They shall perish, but thou shalt endure ; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment ; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.* To the same purport are the following words of Isaiah : "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath ; for the *heavens shall vanish away* like smoke, and the *earth shall wax old like a garment*, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner." "Till heaven and earth pass," says our Saviour, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

The holy scriptures not only inform us, in general terms, that the heavens and the earth will *pass away*, but also that this awful event will be produced by means of a *general conflagration*. This is, perhaps, where more clearly and distinctly stated, than in t

paragraph, from which the text is taken. "But the heavens and the earth which are," now, saith the apostle, "are kept in store, being reserved unto *fire* against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall *melt with fervent heat*; the earth also, and the works which are therein, shall be *burnt up*. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God, wherein, the heavens being *on fire*, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall *melt with fervent heat*!" This paragraph is introduced, by the apostle, for the purpose of fortifying christian converts against the attacks of those who scoffed at religion. With this view, he represents to them the absolute certainty, and the awful manner, of the dissolution of the world. No shadow of doubt can remain, that this was the *real design* of the apostle, when we attend to the *connection* of these words—to the *opposition* which is kept up in the beginning of the passage, between the *first* destruction of the world, by the *deluge*, and the *second* by a *conflagration*, and, especially, when we attend to the *plain import* of the expressions used. "The *day of the Lord*," and "the *day of judgment* of ungodly men," are phrases of such *precise* and *determinate meaning*, that they cannot fail to *mark* the great and tremendous event, to which the apostle plainly refers. Here is, then, one direct, positive and unequivocal *proof*, that all these things, which we now behold in this world, shall be dissolved; that "the earth, and the works which are therein, shall be burnt up."

There are many other passages, both in the *Old Testament* and in the *New*, which, either *immediately* relate to the time of this event, or, at least, plainly *allude* to it. I shall select only a few of them. Speaking of the final judgment, the Psalmist says, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a *fire* shall *devour* before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.” “Behold,” says the prophet Malachi, “the day cometh that shall *burn as an oven*; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be *stubble*: and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” To the same purport is the language of St. Paul, who observes, that “the Lord Jesus shall, then, 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.”

On *these proofs*, which have been adduced, I now rest the matter; being fully satisfied, whatever weight should be allowed to the evidence arising from *natural reason*, and the *consent of the heathen*, that the *word of God*, at least bears plain and explicit testimony of that great day, in which this world shall be burnt up, and exhibit a huge heap of smoking desolation.

The holy scriptures do not, indeed, expressly declare in what *manner* this mighty conflagration shall be kindled. We may, therefore, rest assured, that the knowledge of the *fact* is, infinitely, more important to us, than of the *manner*, in which it shall be accomplished. Inasmuch, however, as several conjectures have been formed on this point, I shall.

I. Inquire, very briefly, into the immediate *cause*, which will, probably, produce the final conflagration.

Various have been the sentiments of learned, speculative and pious men, on this subject. Many have supposed that this grand catastrophe of our world will be produced by *natural* causes ; and, with regard to these again, there has been a diversity of opinion. Some have imagined, that the cause of the final dissolution of our world is laid deep in the bowels of the earth ; that the *central fire*, which they suppose lodged therein, will burst forth, with a tremendous explosion, and lay the globe in flames and ruin. Others have imagined, that the executioner of the divine wrath on our world will be some one of the *comets* ; which, in its *descent*, may draw the earth into the sun, or in its *ascent* from the sun, being *intensely heated*, may pass so near the earth as to exhale the vapors, inflame the air, dry the seas, and consume this terraqueous ball. Without having recourse, however, to these, or any other *natural* causes, which have been assigned, we may find, in the mighty *power of God*, with whom all things are possible, a sufficient cause for the production of this effect. And upon the whole, seeing the scriptures are entirely silent, on this point, it becomes us not to indulge a licentious imagination, and unbecoming curiosity ; but humbly refer the whole matter to *God*, to be accomplished, in the *manner* and by the *means*, which infinite wisdom, and almighty power, may see fit to adopt.

Let us, now, endeavor,

III. To determine the *order* of this event, in the general course of things, which will, then, take place.

It is evident, that our knowledge, on *this* point also, must be very imperfect, since the *order* assigned for the conflagration, by which the world shall be dissolved, is, perhaps, not clearly and absolutely determined in scrip-

ture.—We know, in general, that it will be closely connected with the *appearance of the Great Judge*, the *resurrection of the dead*, and the *final judgment*; although it may be difficult to ascertain the precise order, in which these momentous events shall succeed one another. It appears probable, however, that the general conflagration will not take place, until Christ shall have made his appearance in the clouds of heaven, and the dead shall have been raised incorruptible. We are expressly told, by the apostle Paul, that some believers will be found *alive* on the earth, at the coming of our Lord; which plainly intimates, that the dissolution of the world will not *then* have taken place. “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are *alive* and *remain unto the coming of the Lord*, shall not prevent them who are asleep,” that is, shall not be glorified *before* them. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we who are *alive* and *remain*, shall be caught up, together with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” Elsewhere, he observes, “Behold, I shew you a mystery: we shall not *all sleep*, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; (for the trumpet shall sound.) and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” From an attentive perusal of these passages, compared with some others, it appears, that the *coming of Christ*,—the *shout of the archangel*,—the *resurrection of the dead*, at least, of dead saints,—the glorious and happy change of *living saints* into the image of their Lord, and, probably their *meeting with him in the regions of the air*, will precede the gen-

eral conflagration. Whether the grand scene of the final *Judgment* will be opened *before* the dissolution of the world, or *afterwards*, is not expressly stated. In the paragraph, from which the text is taken, the apostle represents these two great events as *very nearly connected*; for he observes, that “the earth is reserved unto *fire*, against the *day of judgment*.” From the apostle’s adding, that this fire is also for “the *perdition of ungodly men*,” as well as from Paul’s representation of it as “a fiery indignation which shall *devour the adversaries*,” it is highly probable, that the wicked, who shall be found alive, on the earth, at that awful period, shall, by the righteous judgment of God, perish in the flames, and, thereby, receive some foretaste of “the vengeance of eternal fire.”

Let us now hasten to consider,

IV. The *practical effects*, which the contemplation of this subject ought to produce on our present views and conduct.

1. “Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved,” how ridiculous is it, that we should set our hearts on earthly vanities! What are all our present possessions? They even “perish with the using.” At best, they are but “uncertain riches.” In a thousand different ways, they may “make themselves wings, and fly away, as an eagle, towards heaven.” Soon, at the furthest, we must bid a final adieu to all that we now call our own; “for as we brought nothing into this world, so it is certain that we can carry nothing out of it.”

But, brethren, extend your views a little further. Let the awful scene of the last day pass before your eyes. See the earth in flames, and all the works which are therein burnt up. Ah! where are now your possessions?

They are lost, in an undistinguished mass, enveloped with smoke and darkness. Your houses and lands are fuel for the devouring element; and your silver and gold “melt with fervent heat.” Let the prospect and frequent contemplation of this scene moderate your attachment to earthly vanities.

2. This subject inspires us with exalted ideas of the *mighty power of God*. If, at the creation of the world, when the Almighty said, “let there be light,” his infinite power was manifested, no less illustrious will be the display of it, in the *dissolution* of the world. Whether this great event shall be accomplished by means of *natural* causes, or by an *immediate* and *miraculous* act of God, the evidence of his mighty power will be the same. Who would not fear; who does not tremble before a Being, “at whose presence the hills shall melt like wax,” and who will “set on fire the course of nature?” “Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger;” when “his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him?”

3. This subject leads us to adore the *patience* of God. Has he the power, in his hand, not only to take away the breath, that is in our nostrils, but to crush the world, and to demolish the whole fabric of nature? and does he still bear with a rebellious race, one generation after another: and not only *bear* with them, but continually *do them good*; causing his sun to rise, from day to day, and nature to carry on her various operations for their benefit? Surely, his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. From this amazing patience of God, perhaps, indeed, there are, in *our* days, as well as in the days of *St. Peter*, some scoffers, who take occasion, when we speak of the second advent of Christ, to

say, where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." But, beloved, let them scoff, and deride; we know, that "he, who cometh, will come, and will not tarry." 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." Wherefore, "account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation:" it does not proceed from the want of power, or forgetfulness of his promise; but from a desire to promote the salvation of his people, and to afford unto all an opportunity of securing their final deliverance.

4. The subject on which we have been meditating, leads us to reflect on the *exceeding sinfulness of sin*. This is the cause of all the evils, which we feel, and fear. And, because this earth has been the scene of great iniquity, the Almighty and holy God has determined to purify it by fire. In order to vindicate the purity and equity of his own character, and to exhibit his displeasure against sin, as well as to accomplish, perhaps, some other great purposes, he will, finally, overthrow this world, and the wicked, who shall be found alive in it, with a sudden and awful calamity. How heinous must be the guilt of sin, that shall lead the Almighty to blot out such a fair portion of his work! Let us, then, my brethren, be truly and deeply humbled, for the iniquity that is past, and dread to indulge ourselves, for the future, in the habitual commission of any evil.

5. This subject teaches us the importance, and necessity, of *preparing for the great events*, which will then take place. Let us ever remember, that the *dissolution of the world* will be attended, and very nearly connected, with

the *resurrection* of the dead, and the final *judgment*. The hour is coming, in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." "For 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." "What manner of persons ought ye, therefore, to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!" "Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."

How inexpressibly terrible will that great day of the Lord be to the wicked! In vain will they call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for "there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Oh! be persuaded, then, my fellow-sinners, in *this your day*, to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on the hope, that is set before you, in the gospel.

And let professing christians, in the view of this great day, frequently examine, whether their hopes be built on a sure foundation; even on *Christ*, the rock of ages, and the only foundation, which God hath laid in Zion. Let us, always, remember, dear brethren, that "every man's work shall be made manifest, and tried by fire." Let the contemplation of the great events, which will then take place, dwell in our thoughts, and influence our daily conduct. And when the solemn period shall arrive, in which the world shall be dissolv-

ed, and nature herself be convulsed and expire, may we, then, find our safety, and our happiness in God ! Preserved by his power, and infolded within the arms of his love, may we ascend to the heavenly Paradise, “unhurt amidst the war of elements, the wrecks of matter, and the crush of worlds !”—AMEN !

SERMON XX.

**THE EXCELLENCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE
OF CHRIST.**

Phil. iii. 8.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XX.

Phil. iii. 8.—Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

OF all the earl ministers of the gospel, none appear to denounce in such bold and eloquent strains, all personal merit in the sight of God, and to exalt on the throne sovereign grace, as the great apostle of the Gentiles.

For the honor of a crucified Saviour he was a powerful champion. He seems to have delighted in losing sight of himself, that Christ might appear to be all and in all.

And from no other could this sentiment have come with more fitness, and by no other, could it have been delivered with a more convincing and persuasive eloquence. The words of our text carry with them irresistible conviction, that his whole soul was absorbed in the divine mysteries of the cross, and in the most forcible manner recommend to all, the precious *knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord*.

This sentiment advanced by any one, who was inspired by the Holy Ghost, would have been equally the truth of God, and as such, infinitely worthy of our attention; but, flowing from the lips of this great apostle, it strikes the mind with peculiar force.

For Peter, and Andrew, for James, and John, poor, and illiterate fisherman, and despised Gallileans,—for Matthew the Publican, whose very office was esteemed

disreputable, for Simeon the Canaanite—for these, I say, to have declared that *they* counted all things but loss, for the knowledge of Christ, would, at that age particularly, have been saying comparatively *little*—for in the eyes of the world, what had they to boast of?

But for a Paul, whose natural parts were supereminent, and whose acquired knowledge equaled any of his day. For a Paul, who was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a celebrated doctor in Israel, and thoroughly versed in the Jewish religion. For, a Paul who could say of himself, “If any one hath whereof to boast, I *more*; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church—touching the righteousness which is in the law, *blameless.*” For such an one, uniting in himself the gifts of nature lavishly bestowed, with the most profound erudition of his times—in a word, every thing that could secure the respect and admiration of his contemporaries, in the literary world, and raise him to eminence.—For such an one to exclaim—“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea doubtless and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”—must have carried with it, to those who knew his character, an irresistible force, and may well claim from us a fixed attention. What is this knowledge of Christ, then, which the holy apostle thus exalts above every thing else?

And wherein consists its distinguished excellency?

These two considerations, will compose the substance of the ensuing discourse.

And whilst we are thus engaged, O thou divine Spirit! who inspiredst this holy apostle with an unconquerable

love to Jesus, and his cross—condescend to warm our souls with the same heavenly fire; that we like him may count every thing but loss, for the knowledge of his name.

I. I shall endeavour to show, *in what this knowledge consists, of which the apostle speaks.*—And it all may be expressed in these few words—*an understanding, and reception of the whole scheme, and science of salvation.*

But to be a little more particular. It embraces, in the first place, *an acquaintance with the character, and offices of Christ.* A knowledge of the character of Christ lies at the very foundation of true religion, which is all expressed by *believing* in him, and *obeying* his precepts.

But in order to faith, some knowledge of the object of faith is absolutely necessary—For, Rom. x. 14, “how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard.” Without this knowledge, faith would be nothing more than a blind, and irrational act. The knowledge of which the apostle is speaking in the text, contemplates the Lord Jesus Christ, *in the first place*, in the character of a divine person, joined in the most strict and indissoluble union with the nature of man. This the apostle exhibits, as you will see in his epistle to Timothy, as the first part of the august mystery of salvation, 1 Tim. iii. 16, “without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness—God was manifested in the flesh.”

He delighted to acknowledge and exalt his divinity, whilst he never lost sight of his humanity. Though when he looked back a few years, he *contemplated in his Master* the infant of days, wrapt in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger; yet he also looked, back still further, even into the fathomless abyss of eternity, and contemplated him, as the original possessor of the throne

of the universe ; as the Alpha, and Omega, the beginning, and the end, Heb. i. chap. And this knowledge of his divinity, composed an essential part of that, for which the apostle counted every thing but loss.

Vain, then, is the pretended spiritual knowledge of those, however they may pride themselves in it, who acknowledge not his divinity, 1 John ii. 23. Another essential part of this knowledge, consists in an acquaintance *with the offices, which Christ sustains and executes as Mediator* : without this our knowledge of him will be extremely imperfect, nay, essentially difficult. The apostle knew the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great *prophet*, of his church, from whom his people derive all instruction, and light. He knew him as the great *high priest* of his people—the atoning sacrifice for sin—whose blood had typically been shed from the foundation of the world.

He knew him, as the great *intercessor* of his church in the heavenly temple, whom every Jewish high priest prefigured, when in the earthly temple, standing before the mercy seat, he presented with incense the supplications of the people, Heb. ii. chap. He knew him also as the *king of Zion*, all powerful, to rule, defend, and succour. This view of Christ in his *character, and offices*, composed a part, and a necessary part, of that knowledge of him, which the apostle so highly valued.

But to this must be added also, a correct knowledge of the *doctrines of the cross*. I mean the great, and leading *doctrines of the gospel*, which are the *total depravity of man—the absolute sovereignty of God, in the dispensations of his grace—the eternity of future enjoyment to the righteous—and of future misery to the wicked.—Faith without works, the only terms of acceptance before God.*

The final perseverance of every one, whom God effectually calls, by his Spirit, to the knowledge and obedience of the truth. By the total depravity of man, I mean, that state of spiritual death, in which, the scripture uniformly testifies, that all mankind by nature lie. Men are by nature totally opposed to all that is spiritually good, and prone to all that is evil; at enmity with God; not subject to his law; children of wrath, in a state of condemnation; without hope, and without God in the world. And they can be brought nigh to God, only through the blood of the cross, Rom. iii—Ephes. ii.

By *the sovereignty of God*, in the dispensation of his grace, I mean that distinguishing grace of God, by which, according to his eternal purpose—Ephes. i—which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began: he in the fulness of time effectually calls, by his Spirit, through his word, to the knowledge and obedience of the truth, those whom he had before chosen in Christ Jesus, imparting to them, as his gracious act, repentance unto life, faith in his Son, and a living principle of new and holy obedience; thus making them partakers of a divine nature, and conforming them to the image of their Lord and Saviour, to which they were predestinated in the counsels of eternity. By *the eternity of future enjoyment to the righteous, and of future suffering to the wicked*, I mean that immutable and everlasting state of retribution which succeeds this state of trial and probation, in which, he that believes in Christ Jesus, shall enter into, and enjoy life eternal; whilst he that believes not, shall, according to the letter of the divine words, go away into eternal punishment, Matt. xxv. 46.

By *faith without works, the only terms of acceptance with God*, I mean, a humble and hearty trust in Christ

for salvation, without the least respect to personal goodness, merit, or worthiness, but an utter renunciation of them all before God, Rom. x. 3, 4—Gal. ii. 16. And finally, by *the perseverance of the saints*, I mean the absolute certainty, of every one who is truly born from above, of the word, and Spirit of God, being kept, by the mighty power of God, through faith unto salvation; and in the fulness of time being introduced into the beatific vision and full fruition of God in eternity, Rom. viii. 29—39, John x. 27—29. These are the great and leading doctrines of the cross, which compose another part of that precious knowledge, of which the apostle speaks, and a part too in which he gloried. These divine doctrines were all precious to his soul, and these he enforced upon others, with an eloquence and zeal, worthy of an apostle of Jesus Christ, and a martyr to the truth.

Religion, my brethren, I mean the christian religion, is a rational thing, and without knowledge in vain do we pretend to it. *Enthusiasm* may be founded in *ignorance*, but true religion *cannot*. The understanding must be enlightened. And whence shall we derive this necessary light, but from the scriptures, and the fundamental doctrines of the cross? Isaiah viii. 20—“To the law and the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Forever be discarded, and banished from the christian church, as pernicious to man and dishonorable to God, the deistical doctrine, that it is little or no matter what a man believes, provided his practice be good. This was not the creed of the great apostle of the Gentiles, else, why did he, with a zeal truly divine, so earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, and that too in the face of a contending world, and even in the face of death

itself. No, my brethren, he deemed it important to be firmly grounded in the *doctrines* of the faith, as the necessary preparative for being rooted and grounded in the *faith* itself. Is any one prepared to say, that it is of no importance from what sentiments and feelings our actions proceed? This would by no means be admitted in *temporal* things; how can it be in *spiritual*?

How is it possible to obtain those corrupt sentiments of God, and the Saviour, and correspondent affections toward him, whilst at the same time we are believing that, with respect to him, which is false? I repeat it, then, that in order to know Christ Jesus the Lord, we must have some acquaintance with his *character*, with his *offices*, and the *great and leading doctrines of the cross*.

Parents and guardians of youth, can you fail of perceiving here, how much is incumbent upon you, and how much you are able to perform, toward those committed to your care, and who look up to you for instruction? May you not, and are you not, bound by every sacred consideration, to impart to their understandings this knowledge of the *character, offices and doctrines* of Christ, of which I have been speaking, and which forms, as you have seen, the very basis of an enlightened and saving faith? And in how many instances this early instruction has proved to be the true seed of everlasting life, God only knows. We have reason to believe that in many instances the Eternal Spirit has built upon it the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

But again, the knowledge of which the apostle speaks, in the text, has another and very important part, without which, all beside will be in vain. It is the knowledge of Christ Jesus as *his Lord*; that is, as his SAVIOUR.

We may, in the sense I have hitherto been speaking, know him as the *Lord*; we may have an enlightened understanding of his character, and offices, and doctrines; we may even be able, from this knowledge, to vindicate his name, his cause, his doctrines against the revilers of the truth, and yet know nothing of him as our Lord and SAVIOUR. The great apostle knew him as his *Lord* and *Saviour*. Hear his language—"I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." And what was it that he had committed to his faithful hands? It was his *soul*—his immortal interest—his everlasting all. He knew the glories of his person, revealed to him by the Holy Ghost. He had tasted the sweetness of his love and grace. He was experimentally acquainted with the precious doctrines of his Lord, and they were the comfort and support of his soul. And this experimental knowledge is what we must add to all the light of the understanding, would we possess what the apostle so highly valued. The former is an understanding of the science of salvation, but this latter is a reception of it. It is this which effects, melts, purifies, and sanctifies the heart. It is this which makes a Saviour precious to the soul, and confers a divine glory upon all the doctrines of his grace. It is this which humbles and abases the sinner, and exalts the Saviour. In a word, it is this, which transforms the soul, and all its affections and desires; and after the example of the holy apostle, while beholding the spiritual glory of the Lord, leads it to lose sight of itself, that God and Christ may be all, and in all.

Thus have I, my brethren, showed you, in what that knowledge consists, for which the apostle was willing to barter every thing beside. Do you know by experience

what it is? If you do, you will be able to anticipate me, in some measure, whilst I am pursuing the *second* head of this discourse, the object of which is, to show *the transcendent excellency of this knowledge*: and if you are yet unacquainted with it, may the Lord grant that a view of its excellency may lead you most earnestly to desire and seek after it. Its transcendent excellency will appear in the illustration of the three following particulars:—*the object of this knowledge; the nature and effects of it; and its ultimate end.* Its excellency appears in the transcendent excellency of its *object*. It is the knowledge of *Christ Jesus the Lord*, and through him, the knowledge of the holy and ever-blessed *Trinity*. It looks primarily to him; but in him is exhibited the eternal *godhead*, in all its adorable perfections; for in *him* dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead, bodily. What object can be found, throughout creation, so excellent as this? Even in the creature, whether inanimate, irrational, or intelligent, we find depths which the human intellect cannot fathom. But what are these, compared to the immensity of the godhead. Ah! “who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? It is higher than heaven; what can we do?—Deeper than hell; what can we know? It is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” This knowledge, whose excellency we are illustrating, has the glorious God, infinite in all his perfections, for its object. It respects him as the Creator, the Governor, but especially, as the Redeemer and Judge of men. It is this divine knowledge which employs the researches of angels. In the stupendous work of redemption, new subjects of investigation are opened to these holy intelligences, into which they are continually prying with an

holy curiosity. Whilst wisdom, power, and love, infinite and incomprehensible, open still deeper and deeper, their exhaustless treasures; whilst depths profoundly, infinitely deep, still lie unexplored, and thus shall lie forever, 1 Pet. i. 12—Ephes. iii. 10.

Say, then, my brethren, must not this knowledge be transcendently excellent, since it hath an object no less excellent than God, exhibiting his adorable perfections with insufferable brightness in the face of the glorious Immanuel, God with us, and the stupendous mystery of redeeming love?

But, *secondly*, this divine knowledge is transcendently excellent in its *nature* and *effects*, which are holy and heavenly; and in this respect it is infinitely superior to every other. Its nature is to purify the heart, and sanctify the soul, in all its powers; whilst its effects are exhibited in a holy and heavenly life. All other wisdom, compared to this, is weakness and folly; for all other knowledge, however great its degree, leaves its subject still in spiritual darkness, bondage and corruption. “For the world by wisdom knows not God;” but this divine knowledge enlightens the soul, gives it a view of its spiritual bondage; and not only so, it also rescues from it. And in addition to all this, it sheds abroad through the whole soul a heavenly peace.

To perceive, in this particular, my brethren, the supreme excellency of this divine knowledge, we only need to have a correct view, and a lively sense of our fallen state. By nature, however, we may boast of freedom; we are slaves to sin and Satan, and by them held in cruel bondage. And although our chains may for a while sit light upon us, yet the time will come when we shall feel their weight. Sinner, hast thou not sometimes felt

them?—hast thou not often found in thy own breast the sad proofs of thy captivity, when hurried on in the wild career of sin and folly, by unhallowed desires, corrupt affections, or furious passions? When conscience has raised her voice, and thy own judgment decided in her favor, hast thou not found a something within, which resisted thy obedience to the calls of reason, of duty and conscience, bidding thee to give to God thy affections and thy service? All this is nothing more nor less than the reigning power of sin in the soul. But whilst sin and Satan thus maintain their empire in the soul, it is far from God, and far from hope. Is not that, then, supremely excellent, which delivers from so grievous a bondage, and overthrows the kingdom of so base a tyrant? In this the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, displays a part of its excellency. No other knowledge can give to the soul this spiritual victory—this holy freedom. True it is, that there is a rational pleasure in improving the mind in human knowledge; and to seek this improvement according to the opportunity which providence affords us, is a duty enjoined upon us, both by nature and the God of nature. But in vain shall we seek in that, a deliverance from our spiritual bondage. Though by it the intellectual powers may be enlarged, and the views of the mind extended, yet it hath no power to slay the tyrant sin, or overthrow his empire in the breast. This divine conquest can be obtained only through the precious knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. The whole circle of human science cannot effect it. Were we masters of all the wisdom that the world could ever boast of, from the beginning of time to the present;—nay more, could we travel through the works of nature; could we penetrate their essences; could we solve all

their phenomena, yet, unless this was sanctified, through the precious knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, it would still leave us slaves and captives—slaves to sin, and captives of satan. Philosophy might indeed teach us lessons of morality; but by these, the strong man armed is not to be dispossessed; nor by means like these, can his kingdom be shaken, John i. 12, 13. We have seen this truth confirmed by the most vigorous exertions of Pagan erudites and Heathen philosophers. What was ever effected toward the reformation of the heart, by all the far-famed learning of Egypt, Greece, and Rome? So far from reforming those parts of the world in which they resided, or into which they travelled; so far from begetting in the multitude a love of virtue and holiness, and a hatred of sin, their respective and most eminent philosophers were unable to reform even their own hearts, or regulate their lives, but almost without exception were the slaves of vile affections, and in spite of all their boasted wisdom, held in captivity by sin and satan. Thus weak and vain, even in the most important article, is the wisdom of the world. Here, then, is displayed the supreme excellency of the wisdom of God—the precious knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. This hath a power and efficacy peculiar to itself. It penetrates and renews the heart, and sanctifies the soul; nor can sin or satan hold their dominion in the heart that possesses it. It was by this that a few poor and illiterate fishermen reformed, and conquered the world, wherever they went, disseminating this precious knowledge, attended by the Spirit of grace. The chains of satan fell from his captive subjects; the shades of spiritual death and corruption were dispersed, and the unhappy slaves of sin were made the joyful servants of

righteousness, and the Lord's freemen. And, my brethren, this divine knowledge is at this moment as efficacious as ever. Its power is not in the least impaired. It is each day repeating its heavenly conquests. Each revolving sun witnesses its extending influences and life-giving power : and it is through its all-powerful efficacy that the empire of sin and satan shall eventually be entirely overthrown on the earth, and the kingdom of holiness universally established. And happy, thrice happy and blessed are all they, who with a love and zeal worthy of so important and benevolent an object, engage with all the soul, to send into every land, among every kindred, and tongue, and people, this heavenly knowledge : and divinely blessed are all those, who for themselves seek, above all things, and obtain this inestimable treasure. Say, my brethren, do you not begin to perceive, nay, to feel its transcendent excellency, and to pant for its obtainment.

Another property which discovers the excellency of this knowledge, is, that it *restores peace to the troubled conscience*. God is the God of peace ; Christ Jesus is the Prince of peace, and the Holy Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son, is the Spirit of peace. To possess, then, the true knowledge of God, is to possess divine and everlasting peace ; and this is its only, its native source. The peace which the knowledge of Christ Jesus imparts to the soul, consists in a deliverance from the burden and guilt of sin, and in a sense of the divine favor ; and without both of these, no true peace can be enjoyed in the soul. A sense of sin must necessarily carry with it a sense of guilt ; and a sense of guilt before God, the holy and righteous Law-giver and Judge of the world, must of necessity disturb the peace

of the sinner, and afflict him with the most fearful apprehensions. An offended, an angry God, and an accusing conscience, are enemies from which the sinner cannot fly, and against whose assaults, the united wisdom and power of the world cannot defend him. The philosopher, the stoic, the epicurean, employ their powers in vain to heal a wounded spirit, pierced with conscious guilt, and the anticipation of future wo. The most ingenious arts here fail. The most costly sacrifices are of no avail. Stoic indifference and apathy, with all their boasted powers, cannot render the soul insensible of the gnawing of that worm which never dies; nor can the softest strains of human eloquence soothe its anguish. Nothing but the precious knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, can pluck out the barbed arrow, and heal the wound. And here, my brethren, we discover at once its divine excellency, and the comparative worthlessness of every thing beside; for what can that be worth, which leaves the possessor, after all, the wretched victim of self-reproach and endless anguish?

And thus will all the wisdom, the wealth, and honors of the world leave him. It is no created power which inflicts the wound, and no created power can heal it.— God alone, infinitely holy, just and good, is the object of the sinner's fear and terror, and in him alone can he find true and solid peace and consolation, and this only through the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord: and without this, neither men nor angels can save the soul from present forebodings of wrath, and from endless wretchedness. Well might the holy apostle, then, count every thing but loss for the excellency of this knowledge; for without it, what would he have been, in all his attainments in which he once gloried? Of what avail would it have been to

him, to have called Abraham his father—to have been of the stock of Israel—of the tribe of Benjamin—an Hebrew of the Hebrews, and after the strictest sect a Pharisee, and to have been able to boast of a zeal for his religion which led him to persecute, even into strange cities, those whom he conceived hostile to it? Of what avail would it have been to him, to have had the applause of an adoring world, and to have been raised to the summit of worldly honor and fame?—I say, of what avail would all this have been to him, had he at the same time been destitute of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord? But possessed of this, he was indeed possessed of all things in the sublimest sense. It was a reflection like this, which led him to exclaim with an holy triumph—“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count every thing but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” And can it fail to convince us of its transcendent excellency? But finally, in the ultimate end of this knowledge, we are led to behold more fully, if possible, its consummate excellency. Its end, like its author, is truly divine. It conducteth to heaven. Its ultimate end is immortal felicity and glory. It secures to him who possesses it a kingdom, a throne, and a crown of glory—an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens. All this it shall in due time put into the full and everlasting possession of its possessor. Say, then, my brethren, what can be compared, in point of excellency, with this precious knowledge? Here is an object suited to the nature and boundless ambition of the soul. To discover more clearly its superlative value, let us now for a moment contrast it with all that the world calls great and

noble, and we shall find it distinguished by these two striking characteristics, viz. soul-satisfying and eternal. Choose whatever you will besides, and you choose as a portion, an unsatisfying good. To say nothing of the hazard of disappointment—of the risk of failing in the attainment of whatever the world holds up to its votaries, which those best know who have been most eager in the pursuit, these objects of pursuit, when obtained, are in their very nature unsatisfying. The whole world cannot fill the grasp of an immortal soul. It pants for a good infinitely greater, and of a nature similar to its own, which is spiritual, and this it can find no where but in God, the eternal Father of spirits. Contemplate the man of pleasure ; you imagine, perhaps, you see in him the happy man, contented, and satisfied with his portion. You behold the man of wealth and affluence, pleasantly gliding along, with all his canvass spread, filled with the gale of prosperity, and for the moment you are ready to congratulate him, as the subject of an enviable happiness. You behold another soaring aloft on the wing of fame, and rapidly approaching its summit, whilst another suddenly raised to the pinnacle of honor, grasps a crown, ascends a throne, receives a kingdom ; and you are, perhaps, tempted for the moment to exclaim, what more can they desire ? These, my brethren, are the things which the world calls great and noble ; but ah ! what are they in reality but gilded bawbles ; how little they can do toward satisfying the soul, those can best tell who have possessed them. Hear the testimony of one of the wisest of men on this subject, who in his own person proved them all ;—*vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.* Could we but penetrate this outside show, this specious garb, and look into the chambers of the soul, how

should we be amazed to find, beneath this fair semblance of happiness, restless and unsatisfied desires, fretful impatience, insatiable ambition, tormenting envy, perplexing cares, corroding anxiety, and distressing fears. These are the inseparable though secret attendants of all that the world has to bestow. But not so is this heavenly knowledge : it satisfies and fills the soul : it imparts to it a portion of the felicity of God himself : it makes the possessor, though in the eyes of the world an object of pity and compassion, supremely happy. You may behold him indeed poor in this world's goods, and pity his hard lot, whilst at the same time he feels that he possesses a treasure greater in value than ten thousand worlds, and this too not the fruit of a disordered imagination, as the lunatic on the dunghill may fancy himself on a throne, but a divine reality which he knows, which he feels to be a substantial treasure. You may contemplate him without earthly friends or connections, and descending from ignoble blood, whom a proud and disdainful world passes by with scorn ; but though he may have neither friend, nor brother, nor sister, nor father on the earth, yet hath he, indeed, a father in the heavens, and a friend and brother on the throne of the universe, who disdains not to acknowledge this relation, Heb. ii. 11—and by whom he shall soon be advanced to a throne and a kingdom, compared with which the thrones and kingdoms of earthly monarchs are more insignificant than the molehill. Though in the eyes of men his birth be mean and his blood ignoble, yet, notwithstanding, the blood-royal of heaven flows in his veins ; for he is indeed “ born of God :” he is an “ heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ Jesus ; to an heavenly inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth

not away,"—an inheritance of felicity and glory, and the earnest of which he sometimes here enjoys, when his God and Saviour condescends, in the fulfilment of his gracious promise, to pay to his soul the visits of his grace, John xiv. 23.

Thus you see, my brethren, that the excellency of this knowledge surpasses every thing else, inasmuch as it satisfies the soul: and now to give it at once an infinite value, an incomprehensible excellency, we add, that it is *eternal*, and in this respect, the contrast is infinite between it and all that the world can boast of; all its treasures, all its goods, every thing that is allied to earth is of finite duration, but this endureth forever. And here, my brethren, I should exhort you in vain to strive to comprehend its unrivalled excellency; for who can comprehend *eternity*? The time will come when all the boasted wisdom of the world will be lost, nay, when the world itself shall be no more. But this heavenly wisdom shall continue, shall increase, so long as God, its object and its author, lives. The crown which it shall place on the head of its happy possessor, shall grow brighter and fairer, and shine with increasing splendor, when the crowns of earthly potentates shall have crumbled into dust, or have been lost amidst the ruins of a dissolving world. The sun may cease to shine, the moon and stars may lose their brilliant lustre, and fade away, but the possessor of this heavenly knowledge shall forever shine in fairer skies, Dan. xii. 3—and with brighter lustre, whilst the eternal Light of lights, Isaiah lx. 19, 20. Rev. xxi. 22, 23—the uncreated Sun of suns forever sheds his most refulgent beams upon his head. Christian, dost thou hear it? dost thou indeed *believe* it? To what art thou born! To what glory art thou ordained!

Look around thee, now, and see whether earth hath ought for thee to covet, or contend for, who art destined to possess a kingdom of GLORY. This is your certain heritage, confirmed by charter, sealed with the blood of the Highest, O ye sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Sinner, this is the soul-satisfying inheritance, which to-day is offered to thee, by the King of heaven. Whilst thy soul is saying, who will shew me any good? he is replying to thee, "Behold in the precious knowledge of my name, a sovereign good, a treasure so immensely great, as to leave in the soul no unsatisfied desire.

Come, thou Spirit of light and truth, teach us all its excellency; excite us to seek it before silver, and to search for it as for hid treasure; that so, according to thy word, we may "understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." And then shall we also say, with the holy apostle, both now and forever, that we count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.—AMEN.

SERMON XXI.

**THE BENEFITS RESULTING FROM BEING
FOUND IN CHRIST.**

Phil. iii. 9.

That I may 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.

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SERMON XXI.

Phil. iii. 9.—That I may 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.

THE methods which men take to make their conscience easy are very various. The law of God being interwoven with our nature, *judgment* and *eternity* are sometimes realities to the most inconsiderate. Something therefore must be done, and men in every age and nation have sought a ground on which to build their hope of happiness. The Heathen rely upon their superstitions. The ancient Jew rested on the name of Moses. The despised tribes of Israel still believe that they have Abraham to their father, and are strong in the hope of heaven. The men of this world depend on their charity, their equity, and their being free from gross violations of the law of God. But the true christian, renouncing all things else, depends upon *the merits of the Saviour*. He denies himself, and after his best obedience, counts all things but dross and dung in comparison with Christ. Of this we have a striking and instructive instance in the words before us. The apostle boldly affirms that he had claims as strong as any other man to legal righteousness; and that if any man had whereof to boast, he had more. Early brought into relation with God, in the covenant of circumcision; descended from that stock, whose were the promises; rig-

orous even as a Pharisee in fastings and prayers; and possessed of a zeal warm and glowing, he might have made some pretensions to that righteousness which is of the law. Instead of this, he renounced his righteousness, (and well he might,) as filthy rags. He cast it all away, as one would cast the useless dross, or the offensive dung. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ his Lord engrossed all his thoughts, and his desires were absorbed all in one, “that he might be found in him.”

Our text contains,

I. A renunciation of human righteousness as a means of life, and the reason of that renunciation.

II. A desire to be in Christ, and the benefits of being found in him.

I. A renunciation of human righteousness, and the reason of that renunciation.

The inspired writer describes it as a garment, uncomfortable in itself, and not pleasing in the sight of God. He distrusted it and sought a better; because *it was of the law*. He had been alive without the law once, but the commandment came, sin revived, and he died to all self-confidence. He died because the law had ceased to be a way of life—because even a perfect obedience to its precept could not cleanse his heart nor atone for sin—and because its demands were beyond his power.

1. *The law has ceased to be a way of life, and therefore obedience to it can never avail to eternal happiness.*

There was a time and state wherein obedience had the offer, and human merit the assurance of eternal bliss. Then were all the rich promises of God tendered to mankind through the covenant of works. “Do this and live,” was the counterpart of that fearful threatening; “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Perfect righteousness was the gate which opened into the upper paradise. But the law being broken, through disobedience, the covenant was dissolved on the part of God, and all the promises of peace, joy, hope, and everlasting life that were annexed to it, were withdrawn. It remains only the *law of sin and death*, discovering to man the greatness of his guilt, and threatening him with misery and endless pains. It still contains its curses and all its terrors; but not a single promise for him that is out of Christ. The dreadful mount of God where the moral law was repeated, as a rule of life, was a lively representation of the covenant of works in its broken state. The thunders and lightnings, the clouds, the thick darkness, and the sound of the trumpet which waxed louder and louder, were not mixed with any voice, or circumstance of comfort. So terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." The instructive scene was designed to teach us, that he who flees to Sinai for a refuge, comes to a mount that burns with fire, and which if he only touch, his deceitful hopes shall be thrust through with a dart. In our weak and miserable condition, we need a gentle light to lead us, and words of peace and promise to support our fainting hearts. But in all the law and its righteousness, there is no word nor voice of consolation; nothing that declares to man, this is the way, walk therein and thou shalt live forever.

2. *The law cannot renew the heart, nor make atonement for sins.* We do not now stand upon the same ground that Adam did before the fall, in seeking for salvation. Nothing was demanded of him, but to persevere in the course of rectitude in which he was created. The restoration of the lost image of God is now requir-

ed, and satisfaction in order to the remission of sins that are past. The law cannot cease to command the sinner to make to himself a new heart, nor be satisfied with an obedience short of that which man could have paid in his first estate. But how shall a sinner restore his nature? The whole head is sick. The whole heart is faint. The whole man is polluted and destroyed, nor is there any virtue in legal righteousness, to cure the sickness or repair the ruin. The disease is of such a nature that no earthly balm can heal it, and the stain so deep, that neither flood nor sea can wash it out. We have destroyed ourselves, and there is no help from earthly power. Every awakened sinner is sensible of this. He finds a law in his members that wars against the law of his mind, and brings him into bondage. His earnest strivings only make him feel the more, how guilty and how vile he is, and how dead in trespasses and in sins. Nor does the wrath of God cease to terrify him, till by the renewing of his heart through grace, he receives the spirit of adoption.

Neither does the righteousness of the law propose any method of satisfaction for sins that are past. God not only now requires a perfect conformity to his will ; but he did so from the beginning of our lives. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*, is, and ever was, the tenor of the law. If, therefore, in our striving for salvation, we could attain to perfection, still possessing the iniquities of our youth, we should be strangers to true peace. Justice would not cease to say, "Pay me what thou owest." Man is laid in prison, whence he cannot come till he has paid the whole debt. The divine law and justice are inexorable, not as being angry or implacable ; but as being eternal and immutable in their

nature. The punishment that is due to every sin, was proportioned by perfect wisdom. It can therefore be no more remitted without a propitiation, than the unchanging God can alter.

3. *The law demands more than fallen man can give.* It insists on universal and perfect obedience, while in many things we all offend and come short of the glory of God. We are debtors to do the whole law, and yet transgress in thought, in word, and deed. If we owe ten thousand talents they must all be paid. If the law pronounce curses on every offence, it will see that they are executed: and every sin "shall receive its just recompense of reward." Well, therefore, may the awakened sinner cry, Whither can I go? What shall I do? Well may the terrors of the Lord affright him, till he obtains a sight of the righteousness which is of God through faith. The dread of God's offended majesty, the fear of death, and the solemnity of the world to come, urge him to such a trial of his strength as to convince him that he must perish under a law that requires perfection.—Amazed at the discovery of his sinfulness, he cries with the apostle, "wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." To give ease to the guilty bosom, satan has put it into the hearts of some to believe and teach; that through the coming of Christ the law is new modified, and softened in its demands, requiring not as before, a perfect obedience, but an evangelical or sincere obedience, that is, such an obedience as the sinner can pay. This is one of the devices of the enemy of souls, to keep men from Christ. For though it is true that the world is placed under a new law; yet it is far from being a new modeling of human righteousness. It is the law of the Spirit of life which makes

us free from the law of sin and death. It was then with the greatest reason, that the apostle renounced his own righteousness, desired to be unclothed, and clothed upon with the Saviour's merits.

II. A desire to be in Christ, and the benefits of being found in him. Happy is the man who shall find himself in Christ at death. Happy he who in the day of judgment shall appear in him. There are some who suppose that the words in which the apostle expresses his desire are only a figure, Christ being compared to the ark in which Noah and his family were saved, Gen. vii. 23; or to the city of refuge whither the man-slayer fled and remained in safety, Deut. xix. 3, 4. Nor can it be doubted that the scripture, in representing the security of the believing sinner, sometimes compares the Saviour to the ark in which Noah was preserved, and to the city of refuge where he was kept secure that fled from the avenger of blood, 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21—Heb. vi. 18. But though there is great beauty in these figurative representations of the Saviour's power to protect, and of the soul's security when interested in him, yet this is far from all that is meant by the apostle in his desire "to be found in Christ." He repeats the sentiment in his epistles so frequently, with such variety of expression, and utters it with such pleasing vehemence, that we are constrained to believe that he trusted in Christ as a covenant head, and that he had placed his hope in him as his righteousness and strength. He delights, therefore, to speak of being *baptized into the death of Christ*, and of having *put on Christ*, of being *crucified and dying with him*, of being *buried with him* and in him *rising to newness of life*, and the well founded hope of heaven. The Son of man having been wounded for sin, and taken up-

on him the chastisement of the sinner's peace, having been smitten of God, and endured the sanction of the broken law, was made by the appointment of God a covenant head, to cover by his righteousness, and save by his blood, every one that believes in him. This great point will come up more fully to our view, while we are considering the benefits of being found in Christ. The benefit is double.

1. Thereby believing sinners are made partakers of "the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ."

2. "Of the righteousness which is of God through faith."

If he may partake of these, his fears are gone, and his soul is safe.

1. *Thereby believing sinners are made partakers of the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ.* Afraid to trust any longer to himself, he turned his eyes on every side for some better hope, nor was any seen, till Christ appeared "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Great is the excellency of faith. To it are attributed all the powers of the new birth, of justification, and of growth in grace. Inasmuch that without faith it is impossible to please God. Nor is it that God hath fixed on this method of dispensing mercy, by an arbitrary constitution. The way was chosen because there is no other, by which men can be saved. Saints of ancient years and late days have been saved on no other terms. In *faith* Abraham saw the Saviour's day and was glad. In *faith* Job viewed the Son of God, and in him the resurrection of the dead. David beheld through *faith* the body which was prepared for our surety, in which he was to endure the wrath that was due to sin. The prophets spake of *faith* in a Medi-

ator's death, and were filled with hope and joy while they apprehended him as bearing their iniquities in his own body on the tree. Jesus preached that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. *Faith* is therefore a great and vital principle which runs through the scheme of man's redemption, the want of which leaves the soul in darkness and in death. Nor is the faith of the scripture a charm, a watch-word of party, or an enthusiastic feeling, producing its effect by mechanical operation on the human mind. It is more : it is unspeakably more. For though faith simply sympathizing with a suffering Saviour, may melt the heart to tenderness and love ; or exploring the terrors and glories of the world to come, may excite in the soul of man a feeling of amazement or vehement desire ; yet in all this there is nothing of that quickening and purifying power which is attached to it in the word of God. The faith of which we speak is nothing less than that by which, and in the exercise of which, man receives the Spirit of Christ to make him alive from his spiritual death, and unite him to Christ. "God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby ye cry abba Father," Gal. iv. 6. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the *faith* of the Son of God," Gal. ii. 20. That Spirit of Christ, that seed incorruptible is placed in the heart, in the moment, when the sinner urged by the law, fleeing in vain from its sentence, and sinking in despair, cries to the Saviour, "Lord, help me, I perish ;" that is, in the moment when with his heart he *believes in the Son of God for salvation*. Christ, by his obedience to

the precept, and through suffering the full penalty of the law, hath thereby abolished the covenant of works.—Henceforth the soul that was dead in sin is made alive to God by “the law of the Spirit of life,” and is made righteous by union to Christ, in such a great and sovereign constitution as that by which the posterity of Adam would have stood in him and obtained security through his righteousness; or by such a constitution as that wherein they “sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.” “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,” Rom. v. 19. The apostle, therefore, having no righteousness of his own, rejoiced greatly in the discovery of the Saviour’s merits, and wished with intense desire to be found in him at death, and to appear in him in the day of judgment.

The second benefit of being found in Christ, is, that thereby we partake of the righteousness which is of God. The righteousness which is by faith was planned in the wisdom of the eternal councils, wrought by the labours of the Son of God, and is fully equal to the demands of the law of God.

1. *The scheme was laid in heaven and formed in infinite wisdom.* “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption,” 1 Cor. i. 30. None but God had power to dissolve the covenant of works and bring in the better righteousness revealed in the gospel. It was his own law, which he alone could alter. None had wisdom to propose a new way, and it was his sovereign right to accept or to refuse a substitute, even if it had been proposed. But which of the morning stars that sang together when the world was formed could have

conceived the plan? Even now that it has been displayed in the sight of both worlds, the angels desire to *look into*, rather than fully understand, that wondrous scheme where truth and mercy meet together. Christ in himself precious to the sinner, is still more precious, because he is the *elect of God*.

2. *It was wrought by the only begotten Son of God, who was the brightness of the Father's glory.* Faith triumphs, the sinner knows whom he has believed, and he rests in hope, while he beholds the Lord of angels, employed in the work of his redemption, and crushed in the wine-press of divine wrath, and filling up the vast outline sketched by redeeming love. How certain is our salvation, since we obtain the forgiveness of our sins, through the blood of one "who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature; by whom were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers, and who is before all things, and by whom all things consist, Col. i. 14—17. We admire, we adore, we believe and are confident; we rejoice sometimes with joy unspeakable and full of glory, when we see him who was in the form of God, assuming the form of a servant, and made under our law, that he might redeem us that were under the law. "It is God that justifieth," even Jesus who is the Lord our righteousness, God over all, and blessed forever.

3. *It is fully equal to the demands of the law of God.* The sacred writers delight to tell us, that whatsoever justice required at the sinner's hand, the Saviour paid, and whatsoever the law demanded, Christ fulfilled. "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that

we might be made *the righteousness of God in him,*" 2 Cor. v. 21. The Holy Ghost assures us, "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life hath made us free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that *the righteousness of the law* might be fulfilled in us," Rom. viii. 1—4. Not only is something done, but all things are prepared, and the invitation freely given, may be confidently accepted. If justice demands the sinner's blood, the Saviour shews his own. If God requires a spotless obedience, the Saviour answers, "Lo I come to do thy will; thy love is in my heart," Psal. xl. Well, then, might our sacred poet sweetly sing the feelings of the believing sinner.

But speak, my Lord, and calm my fear;
Am I not safe beneath thy shade?
Thy vengeance will not strike me here,
Nor satan dares my soul invade.

Yes, I'm secure beneath thy blood,
And all my foes shall lose their aim;
Hosannah, to my dying God,
And my best honors to his name.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. *Let us build our hope of heaven on a crucified Saviour.* Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid in the gospel; and woe to that man who in the day of trial is not found in Christ. The vain hopes of men will be blown away like chaff, and their refuges of lies shall disappear when God shall come in judgment.

Neither hay, nor wood, nor stubble, nor gold, nor precious stones, can endure the fire that shall try all things. No mention will then be made of sincere but imperfect obedience; nor of doing as well as we can and committing the rest to the mercy of God. If such things as these could have availed, Christ had never wept before the gates of Jerusalem, nor in the garden been exceeding sorrowful, nor on the cross endured the pains of the second death. Could any human righteousness, however sincere, have reached to the forgiveness of sins, angels had never seen their Lord expiring, nor the sun hid his face, while Jesus was forsaken of his Father. Seeing, then, that Christ is slain as our passover, let us labour to be sprinkled with his blood, lest the destroying angel find us. Men cannot be saved simply because Christ has died. They must *receive him, and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel*. To profess a reliance on his merits, and yet neglect to apply to him for righteousness and atonement, what is it, but to mock God and deceive ourselves. The very death of Christ may and must increase the condemnation of thousands “who going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.” For this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men have loved and chosen darkness rather than light; nor will they come to Christ that they may have life.”

2. *Let us examine ourselves whether our faith be true, and such as God requires.* The faith of the gospel is not a fancy. The faith of Christ is not a cold speculation, neither is the apprehension of the Saviour a dead and lifeless act. Faith in Christ may seem a fancy, to those who have never seen the holiness of God, which like a

devouring fire will consume the unbelieving and impenitent. It may appear a visionary system to those who were never convinced of sin. It may be dead in those who have only learned Christ as a name or head of party. But to those who have seen and felt that they were sinners, exposed to the wrath and curse of God ; to whom God has appeared a judge, and his name vengeance ; to such, faith in a Saviour " bearing our sins in his own body on the tree," becomes a reality—a *reality, O! how precious!* To them it is " the substance of things hoped for," the pardon of their sins, " and the evidence of things not seen," the opening door to heaven. There is, indeed, a wide difference in men's constitutions, education, and modes of thinking. But can there be a constitution so cold, an education so defective, or a mode of thinking so unhappy, as to hinder the faith which is produced by the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire, from melting the heart with love, kindling up the honorable zeal of a renewed mind, and raising the heart to God? Or can that which unites to Christ, and is accompanied with the spirit of adoption remain a dead, inactive principle? Impossible. As well might the sun remain and yet cease to warm, as the soul be made partaker of true faith, and yet know nothing of what the apostle felt when he wrote, " Whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. i. 8. It will overcome the world in some measure, and give the victory over sin.

Lastly, *Let all take encouragement to seek that salvation which is of grace through faith.* It is a broad land of wealth unknown, where millions may obtain mercy, peace, and eternal reconciliation. None so old, so

stubborn, so sick or discouraged with sin as not to find here a remedy suited to their case. There is help laid on one that is mighty and able to save unto the uttermost; and it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely. It was dearly purchased with blood; but it is offered without money and without price to all who need it. The door, though straight, stands open night and day to every one that wishes to enter. O! could I dispel the fear of the weak and trembling, and help them to believe it would give them peace. Could I bring to Christ the laboring and heavy laden, he would give them rest. O! could I reach a true conviction to the careless heart, and lay it pierced at the cross, I might then open the Saviour's bleeding wounds, and pour upon the mourning sinner the streams of life and joy. Let the ends of the earth look to him and be saved. Let sinners come as a cloud; there is room; and when *they* have come *there still is room*. We testify in the name of Christ that the crimson sin shall be purged away, and the scarlet dye shall be washed out, in the fountain that was opened for sin and uncleanness. The Saviour stood on earth, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." From heaven he declares the same saying, *that he has no pleasure in the sinner's death*.

Hark! wandering sinner, he calls to you. Hark! wretched child of man, he calls to you. Wherefore go, and *fear not to go*. Christ died for sin. He died to melt the sinner's heart. He died to be a refuge and a righteousness. His wounds are open whither you may flee. Flee with believing speed. The robe of his righte-

ousness is prepared to cover you, and place you spotless before your God. May each of us be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.—AMEN.

for ever — — —

Eternity.

SERMON XXII.

DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED.

Prov. xiv. 32.

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL FISHER,

Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation at Morris-Town.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XXII.

Prov. xiv. 32.—The wicked is driven away in his wickedness,

THIS world is peopled with a multitude of inhabitants, of various descriptions, and possessing various characters. If we look abroad through the earth, and take a survey of mankind, we shall perceive almost as many shades, in the characters of men, as there are different individuals in the human race. But notwithstanding this variety, the scriptures inform us, that, in the sight of God, who “seeth not as man seeth,” there are two classes, which comprehend every individual.

These classes are denominated the *righteous* and the *wicked*. However various their characters may appear in the eye of man, in the sight of God a clear line of distinction is drawn between them. In his view, it is impossible that these classes should be blended together; they are always distinct and separate. That change which is wrought in the heart, by the Holy Spirit, and which in scripture is called the new birth, forms the discriminating line. Those who have been born again, in whose hearts a principle of holiness has been implanted by the Spirit of God, are termed the *righteous*; and those who still remain in their natural state, are termed the *wicked*. This is a distinction of no trifling import.—When viewed in connexion with its consequences, it will appear of unspeakable importance to every individual of the human race. The *righteous* are the friends of God,

but the wicked are his enemies. The righteous are destined to eternal life, but the wicked to eternal death.— Hence, it is important that, in this life, we be able clearly to ascertain to which of these classes of persons we belong, that we may know the destiny which awaits us in the life to come.

To aid in this enquiry, and to stimulate all carefully to engage in it, I design, in the sequel of this discourse,

I. To point out some things, which characterize the wicked. And,

II. To show what is implied in their being “driven away in their wickedness.”

In the first place, I am to point out some things which characterize the wicked; or which distinguish them from the righteous.

“The scripture hath concluded all under sin.” No truth is more clearly demonstrable, from the word of God, than that every son and daughter of Adam is, by nature, totally alienated from God, “by wicked works.” And even these, who are the subjects of renewing grace, have still the remains of sin and corruption dwelling in them; for, saith the word of God, “There is not a *just man* upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.” There is, therefore, a sense, in which all are wicked. But the term *wicked*, in the text, is put in opposition to the term *righteous*, and signifies all those, who still remain in their natural state. Hence, by the *wicked* we are to understand those who have never been renewed by the Spirit of God, and consequently are not united to Christ by a true and living faith. Such persons possess an unsubmitive temper—a carnal mind, which is “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” They have no love for the true character of God, but are supreme-

ly devoted to self. Being “after the flesh, they mind the things of the flesh.”

Unrenewed persons manifest that they are justly denominated the wicked.

1. By their feelings and conduct towards God.

They may, indeed, imagine that they love God ; but this arises either from self-deception, or from ignorance of his true character ; for the declaration of God’s word is undoubtedly true, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” Carnal men do “not like to retain God in their knowledge.” They may imagine God to be altogether such an one as themselves, and thus feel pleased with his character. But let them view the character of God, as manifested in his works, and as described in his holy word ; as the righteous Sovereign of the universe, as holding the destinies not only of nations, but likewise of individuals, in his own hands ; as ruling in the hearts of men, and making one vessel to honor and another to dishonor, as wisdom dictates, and they will soon discover that, so far from loving God, their hearts are full of enmity towards him.

The various dispensations of divine Providence are well calculated to make sinners acquainted with themselves, and to discover the enmity of their hearts towards God. When the course of events corresponds with the desires and pursuits of their selfish hearts, they, no doubt, can acquiesce with cheerfulness. There is no reason why they should not ; for they pursue, without interruption, the desires of their hearts. So long as God suffers sinners to be joined to their idols, they will have no difficulty in persuading themselves that they love him. But when, in his righteous sovereignty, he is pleased to touch their idols ; when he deems it best to

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thwart their plans, and to frustrate their undertakings, the enmity of their hearts soon makes its appearance. They murmur against their heavenly parent, and refuse submission to his righteous dealings. The language of their hearts, if not of their lips, is, that he is an hard master.

There are various ways in which the wicked manifest the opposition of their hearts to God. Sometimes they do it by violating his holy laws ; thereby casting contempt upon his character, as a sin-hating God. Instead of remembering "the Sabbath day to keep it holy," they do not hesitate to profane it, in the pursuit of pleasure or worldly gain. They profane God's name, and treat his religion and its ordinances with contempt. Thus, though in words carnal men may acknowledge God, in works they deny him.

2. The wicked manifest their true characters, by the treatment which the blessed Saviour, and the glorious plan of salvation by him, receive at their hands. Wonderful was that love of God which prompted him to give the only begotten Son of his bosom to ransom a ruined world. Infinite was that condescension, in the Son of God, that led him to become "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," that he might open a door for the pardon of sinners, and their reception to the favour of God. But notwithstanding this love and condescension ; notwithstanding this Son of God is the only Saviour ; yea, the only Mediator between God and man, by whom we can have access unto the Father, as our reconciled God and Judge ; and notwithstanding this compassionate Saviour is every day pleading with sinners to come unto him and live, they turn a deaf ear to his calls, they refuse to listen to his invitations, and say, by their

conduct, "We will not have this man to reign over us." His love, his condescension, his sufferings, have no influence upon them. They even "mock the pangs in which he died." Though, in the view of all holy beings, Christ is the "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely," yet, in the eyes of the wicked, "he hath no form nor comeliness" that they should desire him. O sinners, do I appear in your eyes as "one that mocketh," when I utter such things? But where is the evidence of a different temper and conduct? Jesus, the Saviour, has long been extending the arms of mercy towards you: have you run to his embrace? Long has he been pleading with you, in tender accents, to give him your hearts: have you devoted yourselves to him? Far otherwise! You treat with neglect, if not with contempt, his dying injunction, and thereby manifest most clearly, that you are not of the number of his obedient followers. "If ye love me," says he, "keep my commandments."

3. The wicked manifest their true characters, by their feelings and conduct towards their fellow-men. Though pride and a regard to personal reputation often operate as powerful restraints to prevent the outbursts of vice, yet, as the wicked are actuated entirely by selfish motives, they often overleap those barriers, which Providence places in their way. Hence dishonesty, fraud, violence, and a desire to deceive and overreach their neighbours, are striking traits in the character of the wicked. They are utter strangers to that heavenly maxim, which ought ever to regulate our intercourse with our fellow-men. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The breasts of the wicked are the harbor of all those angry passions, which so often disturb the peace of society.

denly. God bears long with sinners many times, that they may have a space for repentance. But when they abuse his patience, and persist in their sinful courses, he is often induced to drive them away in a *sudden* and awful manner, without a moment's warning. When they are saying to themselves "*peace and safety*, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." And we read in the word of God, "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

But what aggravates the banishment of the wicked most of all, is that they will be driven away *in their wickedness*. This is an awful consideration; for their sins will render it utterly impossible for them ever to be admitted into heaven. If they could but be delivered from sin, in death, they might hope for a happy immortality. But being driven away *in their wickedness*, they must inevitably sink down to hell, where all the workers of iniquity will be forever banished. How important, then, O wicked man, to forsake thy sins immediately, before death overtakes thee! The same character which you sustain, when driven away, you will forever possess.

This leads me,

3. To speak more particularly of the circumstances, connected with the banishment of the wicked.

And here let it be seriously considered, that the wicked, at death, will be driven from all hope of happiness, either in this life, or in the life to come. As all the treasures which they have laid up for themselves are confined to this world, it will, undoubtedly, be hard parting. But part they must. The wicked youth whose heart has beat high with expectation, who has neglected his God, and pursued the phantom of happiness through

all the giddy round of youthful dissipation, though a thirst for worldly pleasures may entwine itself around every fibre of his soul, must nevertheless, be torn from them all, and be dragged like a convicted felon to the judgment seat, and from thence to the place of execution. The tears of weeping parents will, then, be utterly unavailing; for nothing can ward off the deadly blow.

The epicure, whose only happiness consists in pampering his bodily appetite, and in pleasing his palate, will be driven from his rich repast, and the choice viands which adorned his table will then only serve to aggravate his wo.

The beastly drunkard will be driven from the cup of intoxication. The inebriating draught will no longer serve to drown the sorrows of his soul; but, on the contrary, will add fuel to the flames of despair. The miser will be driven from his hoarded treasures. The debauchee will be driven from the scenes of his impurity. The gambler will be driven from his midnight revelry. The profane swearer will be driven away with his very curses upon his tongue. The aged sinner, even now bending over the grave, will be driven from the poor remnant of life to which he still elings, and though an hundred years old, will die accursed. Sinners of every description must soon be driven from all that is dear to them in life. But if this was all, they would be comparatively happy. But, ah! no. A dreadful curse awaits them in the world to come. When they leave this world they must appear before the bar of an angry God, to receive their final doom. And where, then, must they be driven? They must be driven from the presence of God, "in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore." They will be

driven from the favor of God, and from the throne of mercy. Never, never more will the enchanting sound of mercy's voice salute their ears. This heavenly messenger will bid them an eternal adieu. In this world they are permitted to associate with God's people, and to enjoy much good society; but they will be driven from all this. Never more will they listen to the accents of friendship. And all those tender sympathies which unite together kindred souls will be forever past and gone. Even the compassionate Saviour, whose soul is tenderness itself, and who, now, with melting accents pleads, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," then, armed with the sword of justice, will pronounce the dreadful doom—"Depart ye cursed!" But O! where, where must they depart? Into happiness? Into the society of the blessed? Ah, no! Into hell! into everlasting fire! amongst devils and damned spirits, for whom this fire was prepared! "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." Being driven away, *in their wickedness*, they will be completely fitted for hell. They will be driven from the land of hope, into the regions of everlasting despair. Supported by hope, men will encounter great difficulties, and undergo severe pain and distress with fortitude. The blessed martyrs, who laid down their lives for the religion of Christ, supported by the hope of soon being present with the Lord, went *boldly* to the stake, and endured the flames of martyrdom even with exultation. But those who are driven away in their wickedness, will not have one ray of *hope* to cheer the gloom of their infernal prison. "Tortured with keen despair they lie, yet wait for fiercer pain."

These are some of the circumstances under which those must depart who are driven away in their wickedness.

In view of this solemn subject, who will still venture to persist in sin? O, wicked man! O, wicked woman! awake from your sinful slumbers! you stand upon a precipice—an awful precipice. The fatal gulph yawns wide to receive you. Seize the kind hand of mercy which the Saviour extends, or you will soon sink into eternal despair; “for the wicked is driven away in his wickedness.”

O merciful Saviour, spare the rebels, and make them the trophies of thy victorious grace!—AMEN.

SERMON XXIII.

TRIUMPH OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Prov. xiv. 32.

But the righteous hath hope in his death.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL FISHER,

Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation at Morris-Town.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XXIII.

Prov. xiv. 32.—But the righteous hath hope in his death.

THE benevolence and compassion of our heavenly Parent are most illustriously displayed in his holy word.—The precious truths which are there revealed, if cordially received by our fallen race, are eminently calculated to promote their temporal and eternal welfare.—Has the pencil of inspiration drawn a striking portrait of the natural man? It is to teach us the horrors of that state into which we have plunged ourselves by sin. Is the wonderful plan of salvation, by Jesus Christ, unfolded in the scriptures? It is to induce men to seek an interest in his atoning sacrifice, that they may become partakers of that blessedness which he has purchased for all those who are his disciples indeed. Do the scriptures warn us of the fatal consequence of persisting in sin? It is to excite us to break off from sin, by repentance; and transgression, by turning to the Lord. Do they speak, in raptures, of that glory which shall be revealed in those who die in the Lord? It is to animate us, by the cheering prospect, to fight manfully the good fight of faith, that, in the end, we may lay hold on eternal life. To promote this benevolent object, was, undoubtedly, the design of the wise man, in the text. In a concise, though forcible manner, he brings up to our view, in this verse, both the righteous and the wicked, with regard to the prospect before them. To the char-

acter and destination of the wicked, I have attended in the preceding discourse. Pursuing the plan of the wise man, I propose, now, to speak of the character and prospect of the righteous, that, if possible, some may be excited to walk in the *ways of wisdom*, whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace.

In pursuing the subject, therefore, I propose,

I. To speak of the character of the righteous.

II. Point out the nature and objects of their hope.

And,

III. Shew the foundation on which their hope rests.

“But the righteous hath hope in his death.”

First, then, I am to speak of the character of the righteous.

Whoever examines with care the sacred scriptures, with a view to become acquainted with the truths which are there revealed, will undoubtedly perceive a line of discrimination, distinctly drawn, which divides the whole human race into two distinct classes. On the one side are those who remain in their natural state; while, on the other, are those who have been born of the Spirit of God. The latter are termed the righteous; the former, the wicked. By the righteous, therefore, in the text, we are to understand those who have been renewed in the temper of their minds. We are not to suppose, however, that this renovation of heart, by the Holy Ghost, takes place on account of any superior goodness perceivable in them before their regeneration; for we read in the word of God, that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” By nature the righteous are no better than others. In this respect, “they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that

doeth good, no not one." But being united to Christ by faith, "as the branch is united to the vine," they are in this sense identified with him, and are justified on the ground of his righteousness, which is imputed to them. It is on this ground that they are termed the *righteous*, in distinction from those who continue in impenitence. This distinction is not merely speculative. The holy principle which is implanted in the renewed soul will have a practical influence upon the life. Hence the Saviour says, concerning his professed disciples, "By their fruits shall ye know them."

1. The righteous will discover their true characters by their feelings and conduct towards their heavenly Parent.

Having had the image of God reinstamped upon their souls, they will take delight in his holy character. They will be pleased with every thing revealed of God, either in his works, or in his word. It will afford them the most exalted satisfaction, to reflect that he is on the throne of the universe; and that in righteous sovereignty, he does his pleasure, "in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." Knowing the perfections of his nature, they will rejoice to be in his hands and altogether at his disposal. Though, in consequence of remaining sin, they will find that their resignation is not perfect; yet so far from justifying themselves on this account, it will be their constant grief that they are not entirely resigned to the will of God. They will sincerely endeavor to yield obedience to all God's commandments, and to honor him by a careful observance of those ordinances and institutions which he has enjoined. They will have no desire that the plan of divine government should be altered, or the requirements of the

law abated. However imperfect their obedience may be, they can, in heart, unite with the apostle and say, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." They can clearly perceive that, were all the creatures of God to yield a perfect obedience to his laws, unmingled felicity would reign throughout the universe.

2. The righteous will manifest their true character by their treatment of the Saviour.

Having been brought to realize their ruined condition by nature, they will look to Christ, and to him alone, for help. They will esteem him to be excellent, the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely. They will be disposed to receive him, in all his offices, as a Saviour in every respect suited to their case. Renouncing self-dependance, they will look to Christ for righteousness and strength, and on him alone they will depend for acceptance with God. The plan of salvation made known in the gospel, will meet with their cordial approbation.

3. That faith which unites the believer to Christ, will work "by love, it will purify the heart, and overcome the world." There is a manifest distinction between the righteous and wicked, both in principle and conduct. If we are truly of the number of the righteous, even the men of the world will be able to take knowledge of us that we have "been with Jesus." Christ says of his disciples, that they are not of the world, because he has chosen them out of the world. Accordingly, they are exhorted, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." And again, "Be not conformed to this world." It is absurd for persons to pretend to be of the number of the righteous, while they live in a daily conformity to the world. God has drawn a line of distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and this distinction will

be manifest in the life. Hence the apostle John saith, "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The holy principle by which christians are actuated, will lead them to "do good unto all men," as they have opportunity, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Their benevolence and compassion will extend even to their bitterest foes. In their daily walk they will endeavor to imitate him, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." Thus living they will have hope in death. Which leads me, as proposed,

II. To point out the nature and objects of their hope.

Hope, in the common acceptation of the word, is defined to be, "the expectation of future good." It includes the prospect of deliverance from evil, as well as the future possession of positive happiness. Hope has, undoubtedly, a most powerful influence upon the whole human race, whether its foundation be substantial, or not. It is hope that enables mankind in general, to encounter, with so much alacrity, those various difficulties, which beset them in their journey through life. In hope of gain, men are induced to traverse sea and land, and cheerfully to endure almost every hardship. In hope of pleasure the sensualist deems no sacrifice too great. In hope of obtaining that honor, which cometh from man, the aspiring and ambitious will cringe and bow to the meanest of their fellow worms; and think it no hardship to be obliged to compass sea and land, if they can but make one proselyte to their interest.

Influenced by the same principles, the warrior endures labour and fatigue, and rushes upon the embattled foe fearless of death and unmindful of that solemn tribunal before which his temerity may suddenly hasten him.

The people of God, likewise, are greatly influenced by hope, in this their state of trial. Supported by hope, they are enabled to endure with patience the trials and afflictions which await them here. But the hope of the christian is infinitely superior to that of the wicked. It rests upon a more solid foundation, and aspires to a more pure and substantial felicity. The hope of the wicked often ends in confusion and disgrace even in this world; but if it does not, it will perish at death. But the good man's hope, is a "hope that maketh not ashamed." It implies 1. The expectation of a full and complete deliverance from the afflictions of life, and from sin itself, the parent of them all. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, yea, saith the Spirit, that they may *rest from their labors.*" Pain and sorrow will forever cease and all tears will be wiped from their eyes. The hopes of the wicked will be blasted in death. Their sins still cleaving to them, their pains and sorrows will not cease to torment them. But the hopes of the righteous grow stronger in death. In this life, they are engaged in a constant struggle between sin and holiness, and they have no promise that the warfare shall cease till death. But when that momentous period shall arrive, the struggle will end, their sanctification will be complete, and sorrow and sighing will forever flee away. "Sin, their worst enemy before, shall vex their eyes and ears no more." The very nature of that *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord the righteous judge will give them, at that day, implies perfect freedom from sin.

2. The hope of the righteous, even in death, includes the full expectation, that their body shall be ransomed from the power of the grave. In the resurrection of Christ, believers have the fullest assurance that they

shall not always sleep. Though their bodies, when the soul ceases to animate them, must moulder into their original dust, and continue for a season in a state of separation; yet not one particle, which is essential to their identity, will ever be lost, or misplaced. He, who is their Omniscient and Almighty Friend, faithful to his promise, will continue to "watch over their dust till he shall bid it rise." The wicked will, indeed, be raised up, at the last day, as well as the righteous; but their resurrection, so far from being an object of hope, will truly be an object of terror. Saith the prophet, "They shall come forth to shame, and everlasting contempt." Yea, the Saviour himself has declared that they shall come forth "to the resurrection of damnation." But as the resurrection of the just is to life and glory, it is an event of lively hope and earnest expectation. In view of death, the believer can say: "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Therefore,

3. The hope of the righteous, in death, includes the full expectation of eternal blessedness in the world of glory. The prospect of the wicked, on the borders of the grave, is awfully gloomy and portentous. "All is dark and comfortless." The objects, on which their hopes have been placed, they behold vanishing away. Yea, their hopes themselves are about to expire, and be succeeded by the blackness of despair. But it is far otherwise with the righteous. Their soul's anchor being fastened to that, which is within the veil, a beam of celestial glory darts across the dark valley of the shadow of death and illuminates their path. When they enter

the gate of death, hope forsakes them not, but proves a constant and *cheering companion*, till she is swallowed up and lost in the full fruition of heaven. Such, my brethren, is the nature and such are the objects of the *christian's* hope. How important, then, that they be built upon a stable foundation. Let us then,

III. Enquire into the ground of these hopes.

And here let it be observed, in general, that *Christ* is the foundation on which the righteous build their hopes. There is no other foundation on which they can build with safety. Saith the word of God: "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." This is a sure foundation on which believers may safely build their hopes of a blessed immortality. Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, speaking of the privileges of the gospel, which God had revealed to the saints, says: "To whom God would make known, what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is *Christ* in you, the *hope* of glory." The folly of the wicked is manifested, in their building their hopes upon a foundation, which will certainly fail. The very objects, on which their hopes are built, are short-lived and must soon perish; and consequently their hopes must perish with them. Therefore, saith the word of God, "The expectation of the wicked shall perish." "Their hope shall be as the giving up of the Ghost." But the hopes of the righteous, being built upon Christ, the rock of ages, will never fail. They have a sure prospect, that their hopes shall be realized. 1. Because they are built upon the *merit* of Christ.

The best saints upon earth are, in themselves, wholly unworthy of the least favor. On the ground of their

own' merit, they could have no hope of ever possessing those infinite favors, to which they aspire. But their hope is in Christ. United to him by faith, they have an interest in his atoning sacrifice. The merit of his death being infinite, the foundation of their hope is sure. By his sufferings and death he has wrought out a perfect righteousness, which is amply sufficient for all those, who put their trust in him.

But admitting that Christ is worthy, that the merit of his death is infinite; that the atonement, which he has made is all-sufficient;—yet perhaps it may be asked: what reason have believers to expect, that they shall have an interest in that sacrifice? Which leads me to observe,

2. The hope of the righteous, that through the merit of Christ, they shall inherit eternal life, is grounded on the *promise* of Christ. Many and precious are the promises which he has made to this effect. I will direct your attention, my brethren, to a few of them. Says the compassionate Saviour: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Yea, continues he: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Therefore, saith the Saviour, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me, shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Speaking of the righteous under the denomination of his sheep, Christ says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never

perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." And saith the word of God to believers: "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours; and ye are *Christ's*, and Christ is God's. These cheering declarations serve to confirm the hopes of believers, and to beget in them a full persuasion that they shall ere long inherit the promised blessings. But their assurance is made "doubly sure",

3. From a consideration of the faithfulness of him, who promises them life. The faithfulness of Christ is a firm pillar of the christian's hope. He is styled in scripture the "faithful and true witness;" and such his church has ever proved him to be. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Paul encourages his Hebrew brethren to persevere in their profession, from the consideration that "he is *faithful* that promised." And says the same apostle to Timothy: "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." In the dealings of Divine Providence, these precious declarations are abundantly confirmed. Though he often visits his children with the rod, and punishes their transgressions with stripes; yet his loving-kindness he will not take from them; nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. Thus we see how firm is the foundation of the good man's hope. It rests on the *merit*, the *promise*, and *faithfulness* of Christ. With what propriety then might the apostle Peter exhort his suffering brethren to "commit the keeping of their souls *to him*, in well doing, as unto a *faithful Creator*." Their lives are his constant care; and even their death is precious in his sight. There-

fore, though the "wicked are driven away in their wickedness; yet the righteous hath hope in his death."

From the view which we have now taken of the present and future prospects both of the righteous and wicked, must not every reflecting mind perceive, and will not every candid person acknowledge, that the condition of the righteous is far preferable in every point of view, and particularly with regard to the *nature* and *ground* of their hopes. The hopes of the wicked, as we have seen, are placed upon objects, which in themselves are perishing and must soon fade away. But admitting that all these worldly hopes could be realized, to what would they amount? The mind would still be unsatisfied. What is the condition of that world to which the wicked look for enjoyment, even in the estimation of the wicked themselves? I will quote a description of it, from the pen of an infidel, whose splendid talents made him an object of envy to many infidels of inferior note. "Who can without horror," says Voltaire, "consider the whole earth as the empire of destruction? It abounds in wonders: it abounds in victims; it is a vast field of carnage and contagion! every species is, without pity, pursued and torn to pieces through the earth, and air, and water! In man there is more wretchedness than in all other animals put together. He smarts continually under two scourges, which other animals never feel; anxiety, and listlessness in appetence, which make him weary of himself. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoys some transient good, for which he is thankful to heaven, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is *his* fatal prerogative: other animals have it not. He feels it every moment rankling and corroding in his breast.

Yet he spends the transient moment of his existence, in diffusing the misery which he suffers; in cutting the throats of his fellow-creatures for pay; in cheating, and being cheated; in robbing and being robbed; in serving, that he may command; and in repenting of all that he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches, equally criminal and unfortunate; and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble, upon a review of this dreadful picture, to find that it implies a complaint against Providence; and *I wish that I had never been born.*"*

If such are the feelings and such the prospect of worldly men; who, in view of it, would not exclaim with Balaam: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Very different is the situation of the righteous. They have the promise of the life that *now is*, as well as of that *which is to come*. But they do, by no means, expect perfect happiness here. They view this world, as it was designed, a world of trial; and as such they improve it. The scriptures assure them that, however varied or distressing the circumstances which attend their journey through life, to those who love God, all things shall work together for good. Buoyed up by this precious hope, they are comforted, under the most trying and distressing scenes. With their eye fixed upon the glory of God, in which they know that all the events of time will terminate, their breasts are unappalled by those shafts of adversity, which they are called to encounter. So far from being terrified at the thought of dying, they frequently, even long for the time, when this mortal shall put on immortality, and death be swallowed up in victory. Why should a christian fear to

* Simpson's plea, page 201. Wiatt's Edition.

die? Moses died—but his death was an immediate passport to glory. Of this we are assured; for, upon the mount of transfiguration, Moses appeared in glory. In view of that glory, who would not wish to be like Moses? But, my brethren, the same glory is the object of every believer's hope. It is indeed a precious hope! It is a faithful companion to all the children of God; for while "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness, the righteous hath hope in his death."—AMEN.

SERMON XXIV.

**WISDOM RESULTING FROM NUMBERING
OUR DAYS.**

Psalms xc. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

BY THE REV. AMZI ARMSTRONG, A. M.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XXIV.

Psalm xc. 12.—So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

NONE of us expect to continue here forever. By unquestionable evidences we have been convinced, even from our early childhood, that the time will come when we must leave these earthly scenes, and, the number of our days being run out, we must lie down in death. Nor do any of us ever indulge the expectation that the period of our earthly cares and enjoyments will be lengthened out to an *hundred years* to come. Yet how little influence does this sure conviction usually have upon our thoughts and purposes.

It is an observation of an ancient sage, daily verified, that “though all men expect to die, and are looking for a state of existence beyond the grave; yet they are busy in providing for this life as though it were never to have an end, and for the life to come as though it were never to have its beginning.”

We all feel a deep and lively interest in that existence, and in those intellectual endowments, which God has given us: and if truly wise, we would make it our especial care so to order and improve this beginning of our existence in the present life, as not to be increasing a load of miseries upon it; and so that we might seem, to ourselves at least, to exist for some worthy purpose, and for some desirable object and end. It was for this, that Moses addressed unto God his prayer in the words of

our text. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The psalm is entitled, "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God," and is supposed to have been composed by him on that awful occasion, when the oath of God cut off the expectations of the faithless Israelites in the wilderness, and condemned them never to enter the promised land. The life of man had been gradually shortening since the days of Noah, and on this occasion seems to have been reduced at once to the standard of three score years and ten, where it has ever since continued. In addition to this, that whole generation of the children of Israel, except Joshua and Caleb, were put under the curse of God, sanctioned by his oath, to end their days in the wilderness within the space of forty years. Some would die sooner, most of them before that time should expire, but not one of them should live beyond it. This led Moses devoutly to pray to God, that as the only remedy left them in their case, he would teach them so to consider the number of their days, and to be warned by the bounds God had set to their years, that they should feel the importance of a diligent improvement of them in the ways of *wisdom*, and not be left to waste them in unprofitable employments, or in unavailing complaints.

We, too, have our bounds set us. The appointment of God has limited the period of our continuance here; and though none of us know how soon we may die, yet we all know that every passing year takes one from the little circle of three score and ten, beyond which none of us can hope for much enjoyment in our worldly pursuits or pleasures.

In numbering our days, we must therefore count the few years that lie between us and seventy, as the full

complement of all we may expect. And probably the greater part of those of us who have not yet attained it, will never reach that extent of life. But we must expect, that from year to year, and from month to month, our numbers will be lessened, and we must go down successively to the grave.

Shall not these considerations lead us to apply our hearts unto *wisdom*? I do not, indeed, expect that any considerations or any means will ever wholly remove from any of us all our folly or madness on this side the grave. But surely it might be expected of us as rational creatures, so solemnly circumstanced as we are in regard to death and eternity, that we should have some purpose worthy of life, and some object that would make the continuance of our existence desirable. Nor can we well answer to our own understanding and judgment, and much less to our consciences, if we are wearing out life in any inferior purpose, or wasting day after day of our existence, without an object or an end.

Let us devote the present hour to a candid self-recollection and examination of ourselves on this interesting concern. Let us severally recollect the purposes by which our lives are guided, and the ends for which we live; and consider whether they are such as are worthy of rational and immortal beings, such as we ourselves can be satisfied with.

They who live only for *mischief*, whose chief purpose is to *distress and trouble their fellow-creatures*, and who glory in *polluting the world with their crimes*, cannot endure reflection. And they whose chief object is the enjoyment of *sensual pleasures*, often render themselves almost as incapable of reflection as the beasts of the field, with whom they hold an inglorious competition. I do

not now address my discourse to such, but only to sober-minded people, who mean to live honestly, and wish to live creditably amongst their fellow-men. Of these there is at all times a very considerable portion, especially of those who approach to, or have passed the méridian of life, who from disappointments, from the straitness of their circumstances, or from want of a native energy of mind and disposition, readily give over all ambitious prospects, and aim at nothing more than by their daily cares and labours, with perhaps the assistance of a little patrimony received by inheritance from those who have gone before them, to provide for their daily wants, and, if they have a family dependent on them, to rear and to support their family in an honest and creditable way. As members of society these are useful people ; and as they are honest and industrious, they are worthy of respect. But as intelligent beings, can they be contented to live for *no other purposes than these* ? It is a dull and tedious round of cares, and labours, and anxieties, and at length they must lie down in death. Is life worth possessing ? Is their existence endeared to them for only *such purposes* as these ? Would it not make even life itself a *burden*, if they knew they were bound to continue it in such a form and manner forever ? There is in the human mind a native power of generous, expanding thought, and of noble expectation, that must make it sick of life, and feel existence itself a burden, if such must be its only end and object. It is not however my wish to make such people sick and tired of life ; but to call their attention to an object and purpose that will afford scope and employment for their noblest powers of thought and expectation, and that may call into life that pulse of immortality, which lies stifled and languid in

their breasts. I know the rich and the powerful often look down with a kind of pity and contempt on such people, and wonder what can make life desirable to them. Yet they have as deep and true an interest in that precious treasure of existence, which God has given them, as those who affect to despise them; and to pervert or waste it, is as great a loss, and must be followed by as deep misery. Would they apply their hearts to learn *wisdom*—to *know* and to *fear* the Lord; and were their daily cares and labours relieved by frequent intercourse with heaven; did they daily commune with God by prayer and praises, and by devout meditations in his word; and could they feel themselves to be the heirs and expectants of the kingdom of their Father above, and to be training up those entrusted to their care in the same hope and expectation, they would *then* feel that life is worth possessing—that existence is indeed that precious blessing which our great and good Creator designed it to be.

There *are* those of this class of people, and I hope not a few, whose chief purpose is, amidst all their cares and labours, to serve and honor their Lord; whose end and object is to learn, and to obey his will: and while he inspires them with the blessed hope of heaven, through the sacrifice of the cross, they feel that they possess a treasure in that existence which God has given them, for which kingdoms and worlds would be a poor and despicable exchange. Every year, as it rolls round, brings them nearer to their rest from their labours, and to the full commencement of their eternal joys. They number their days, and applying their hearts to wisdom, they cheerfully bid them roll on, and bring the wished for hour. There is *another class* of people who perhaps think

they can enjoy life without these comforts, and prize existence without these hopes. With enough in their possession to give vigor to their activity, and afford an opportunity for their usefulness among men, they are *active and diligent in business*, and endeavor to satisfy themselves with the idea that they are *doing well for themselves and theirs*, and filling up their places usefully and honorably in society, in whatever relates to the *present life*.

It is true, these are just grounds of self-approbation ; and every reasonable man will enjoy a satisfaction in the consciousness that he acts his part well in life. But is this enough to satisfy an immortal mind? When they consider that they are endowed with powers and affections to love supremely the ever good and glorious God, their Maker and Redeemer, and to be active and useful in his service ; and that they are capable of being forever happy in a participation of his love and favor, and of his life-giving presence ; and in the consciousness of this, begin to number their days, and consider how little time remains for them to shew their love and obedience to God, before their everlasting destinies shall be fixed by the righteous Judge, can they feel that they are living to any good purpose, and be contented in the idea that they are doing well for *this life only*? This would be to reduce themselves to the level of beasts of burden, many of whom fill up their places well, and are of real use and service in the world. But the immortal mind disdains such degradation ; and whenever it gets relief from the fatigues and hurry of business, it aspires to something more noble, and more congenial to its native powers, and to its original destination. And if it be destitute of the feelings of true piety, and a stranger to the hope of a blessed immortality, it must feel life to be a burden, and existence itself not worth possessing, for the

mere purpose of *worldly business*, which death will soon interrupt, and for the enjoyment of a few social pleasures and endearments, which are liable at any moment to be finally broken up, and must inevitably soon end forever.

Could these people enjoy a consciousness that they serve their day and generation according to the will of God; and did they thus affectionately discharge these social and relative duties with a pious respect to the divine command, as well as of good will to men, their course of business and of cares would wear a different aspect, and seem worthy of their time and talents. And did they know what it is to commune with God and with Christ, and to feed upon the divine promises, and have the soul enriched with the knowledge of God's revealed will and purposes, their seasons of retirement and their hours of leisure would be sweet and precious. And were their hopes fixed on the heavenly inheritance, they would then have before them an object and end on which their minds might rest with a delightful complacency; and while every day should be filled up with its duties and its comforts, they might sincerely rejoice in the progress of time, and welcome the approach of death.

Lord, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

I need not dwell upon the character and circumstances of those whose chief purpose it is to acquire *honors and distinctions among men*; or to amass to themselves *riches*, and accumulate *property* for their posterity: for although a suitable attention to these concerns is not to be condemned; yet when the mind is chiefly confined to such purposes, and men allow themselves to regard no other object or end, but *gain or fame*, it creates a sordidness in the soul, that chills every generous thought, and frowns upon every noble aspiration, and reduces it to

that mean and cowardly state, that either a continual grudging, or a trembling apprehension and fear, takes away all power of enjoyment.

The *gay*, the *vain*, the *luxurious*, and the *idle*, who seem to have no higher object than to remove themselves as far as possible from rationality, and to prevent anxieties by banishing thought and reflection, are with difficulty persuaded to give any attention to the calls of wisdom. But if ever the time come, that they begin seriously to think and ponder on their state, they will find it to be wretched beyond description.

If there be *another class* of people deserving a particular notice in the review of this interesting subject, it consists perhaps of those, who are chiefly engaged in the *pursuit of knowledge*, and make it the great object and end of their lives to explore the paths of human science and to store their minds with those treasures of knowledge, which genius and persevering industry can acquire. There is something truly gratifying to the rational mind, in searching out the causes and effects of things, and investigating the efficacious laws of nature. Nor is it unworthy of such a mind to thirst after a knowledge of what has been in times past, and what is now transacting on the great theatre of the world. But what purpose is all this learning and knowledge to serve? Intellectual enjoyments, it is true, are more congenial to the nature of the rational mind than any others. But if it is only a present and temporary enjoyment, that is procured by all this labor and study, how are the immortal powers of the mind to be benefited by all this? Can the soul of man, with all its consciousness of being destined to an everlasting existence, be satisfied with such attainments which are all soon to be blasted, and to perish in death? They may boast, as some have done, that by

these acquirements the mind is fortified against the power of *pain*, and the influence of *fear*. And yet the severity of acute disease will often put all their boasted philosophy to flight; and the agonies of death, when only beheld in their effects upon another, have made the wisest of them stand aghast and tremble. Whatever satisfaction and support the mind may derive from philosophical knowledge, in the present state of things; yet in the comparison of the present and the future, God has put such an immense difference between them, that all the best attainments of mere philosophy are but as the small dust of the balance against the weighty and all-important concerns of that which is to come. Would they bend the energies of their minds to knowledge with a view of applying it to the great concerns of that change, which must take place at death, and make it serve the purpose of preparing themselves, and helping to prepare others, for these vast and eternal concerns, their study and labor would then be turned to some good account. And if they were daily growing in the *knowledge of God and of Christ*, this would make life worth possessing. Let them once begin to number their days, and consider seriously the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the certainty and the solemnity of that great change that will take place at death, and they will soon perceive the vanity and unprofitableness of all that knowledge, that helps not to prepare for these great events, and the necessity of applying their hearts to a truer wisdom, and more enduring knowledge.

And now, after this review and examination of the most favourable circumstances in human life, where we might expect, if any where, to find sources of solid and durable satisfaction, and just grounds of self-gratulation; and after finding them all barren and joyless, whenever

we begin to number our days, and to think seriously of death and of eternity; may we not fairly conclude, that *without religion, without sentiments of true piety toward God, and the hope of a lasting interest in his favor*, no situation in life can afford enjoyments worthy the immortal mind, or reconcile the judgment and conscience to a calm and patient enduring of a life, which has not *religion* for its chief purpose and the comforts, the duties, and the hopes of religion its great object and end. This is the *true wisdom* of men. As the scripture has said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments."

This conclusion is so clear and obvious, that I am persuaded it must, at every fair opportunity, commend itself to every man's conscience and judgment. And I know not how people, that allow themselves any opportunity for reflection, can get clear of it as they usually do: unless it be by that deceitful and insincere proposal of putting it off, only to some future day, when they will give it, they think, all the serious consideration it demands. But how unreasonable is this! For besides the awful uncertainty there is whether that day will ever come, and whether, if it should, they would then find themselves any more disposed to attend to the voice of wisdom; is it not most unreasonable and absurd for them contentedly to abide and wilfully to persist, even a single day, in that situation and conduct, which they themselves deliberately and unequivocally must *condemn* as both *dangerous* and *unwise*? It is all evasion and insincerity, by which they contrive to put off the conviction which *numbering their days* cannot fail to bring with it, and endeavor to excuse themselves from applying their hearts unto wisdom.

Is it not enough, my friends, that any of you have already wasted away the *third*, the *half*, or perhaps *more* of the full extent of the life of man, and have never yet pursued any purpose, or set before you any object or end, that your own judgment or conscience can approve as worth living for? Make an estimate of the days or years, that you may yet expect to live. You cannot reasonably calculate on much beyond the appointed *three score years and ten*. It is probable that the most of us will never live to see that period. Some of us may die soon; every year will thin our ranks; and no one knows but his turn may come next. So solemnly circumstanced, even can any of you be contented to spend another *year*, or even another *day*, in that which can yield no lasting profit, or solid consolation? If any can—**THEN BE WARNED—**

The holy scriptures condemn us all of apostasy and rebellion against God, and our consciences are witnesses that the condemnation is just; and the same scriptures require us to return to our allegiance, and by repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, to begin, and continue a life of religion in obedience and piety before him whom angels fear and archangels worship. Every day therefore that you neglect this, you spend in violation of your duty to God; you hold yourselves his enemies, and you reject his sacred authority. Nay more, the scripture has also warned us, and the oath of God and the blood of Christ make it sure to us, that after the short period of probation allowed us in the present life—if, when death comes, we be still found among the enemies of God, and the despisers of the cross of Christ, we must then appear before the dread tribunal of the eternal Judge, to receive the awful sentence from his lips, and depart under the curse of his wrath, into *everlasting fire prepared for the devil*.

and his angels. This is the appointed wages of sin, and this the fearful destination of them that forget God. Oh, apply your hearts *without delay* unto wisdom: all her ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Seek ye the LORD, while he may be found. Call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the LORD, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Let me now address an exhortation to such, as *have obeyed the voice of wisdom*, and have given themselves to seek and to serve the LORD. If you have done this in truth and sincerity, it is thus far well. But remember, you too have your appointed time, and God hath set bounds also to your days. If it behoves you to shew your love to God in the world, and to labor for the prosperity of religion, and for the salvation of your fellow men; if you would be well prepared for death, and fitted to enter on the joys on high; you have *no time to lose—no days or hours to waste in trifling or unimportant purposes.* The day is *spending*, and with some of you is already *far spent.* The *night* approaches. And your Saviour himself said, concerning *his* work on earth, “I must work the work of him that sent me while *it is day*; the night cometh, wherein no man can work.” If you have any thing yet to accomplish, set about it without delay; and do that which thy hand findeth to do, with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”—AMEN.

SERMON XXV.

**JOY IN HEAVEN OVER A REPENTING
SINNER.**

Luke xv. 7.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

BY THE REV. ENOCH BURT, A. M.

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NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XXV.

Luke xv. 7.—I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

IT is well known that the Publicans, and the openly profane and profligate, were regarded by the self-righteous Pharisees with scorn and supercilious contempt.—These proud and haughty teachers of the law, were so far from mingling with them, and making them the subjects of their instructions, that they considered him as polluted, and as having forfeited the benefits of the covenant, who so much as touched them. Unhappy Pharisee! and contemptuous Scribe! why did you never consider that while you were thus pursuing these miserable men with your contempt and scorn, your anathemas and thunders, and thus driving them either to despair or to still greater lengths of impiety, that the spiritual pride which your conduct betrayed was far more odious and detestable in the sight of God, and will receive from him a more fearful punishment, than those very practices and crimes for which you despised and detested those unhappy men? The conduct of the compassionate Saviour was very different from theirs. He invited Publicans and sinners into his presence, and tendered to them his heavenly instructions, that he might thereby turn their feet from the path of destruction into the way of life and peace—that he might make them the eternal subjects of those infinite blessings which he came to pur-

chase for the chief of sinners. It was at one of these seasons at which he was teaching this despised class of men, that some of the scribes and Pharisees, who lost no opportunity of reproaching and calumniating him, mingled with the multitude and began to exclaim, "Behold this man, who notwithstanding all his pretended sanctity, associates with these infamous characters as his favorite companions. Behold him a glutton, a wine-bibber, a friend of Publicans and sinners." The blessed Saviour, who lost no favorable opportunity of enlightening the darkened mind, by conveying divine instruction, took occasion, from their murmurings, to deliver to them the parable of the lost sheep, of which the text is the conclusion—saying, "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it: and when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing: and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which was lost. I say unto you likewise, joy shall be in heaven, over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." This consideration of itself amply justified his conduct in visiting, and in paying special attention to the sinful, polluted, and miserable, whilst it invited them still nearer to him, and clothed his malicious enemies with shame. The same divine truth is now addressed to us, miserable sinners, inviting us to turn from our sins. Jesus is even now saying to us, to persuade our rebellious hearts, *There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.*

First, I shall endeavour to illustrate and establish this precious truth; and,

Secondly, consider the effect it should have upon our hearts and lives.

I. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. God the *ever-blessed Trinity* rejoice; the *holy angels* rejoice; and the *spirits of the just* made perfect, rejoice. God the *Father* rejoiceth in the repentance of a sinner. He views him returning from his wanderings, with a divine complacency. To be convinced of this, listen to his own most gracious declarations, which stand as so many precious invitations to the returning penitent. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O house of Israel," Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end, Deut. xxxii. 29. Is the sincerity of God questioned in these precious declarations which he hath made, as so many tokens of his joy in the repentance of a sinner? Behold then all his acts of love and mercy, speaking the same language, and unequivocally attesting his sincerity. Hath he not abundantly witnessed it in the unspeakable gift of his only begotten and well beloved Son?

Say, O sinner, had the Father willed thy death—had he taken pleasure in thine impenitence, would he have delivered up the darling of his bosom, as a sacrifice for sin? Had he not delighted in thy repentance, would he have devoted his chief delight, and the delight of all the heavenly hosts, to such unutterable woes as thy Saviour endured? Oh, no! This conduct of God speaks a language impossible to be misunderstood and testifies in the most affecting manner, his joy over the repenting sinner.

Again: had he not delighted in thy repentance, why hath he so long lengthened out thy course, and afforded thee so many precious aids and opportunities to repent? Instead of permitting the thread of life to run so long, why hath he not cut thee down in the midst of thine impenitence and folly, and plunged thee into woe? Art thou not a living witness for him, that he delighteth in mercy, and is ready to view with an holy complacency thy repentance? Did he not rejoice in the repentance of a sinner, would he have interposed for thee, when there was but a step between thee and the grave, whilst thou wast unprepared to die; thus saving thee from sinking suddenly into hell? Why hath he afforded thee those kind admonitions—those friendly warnings of thy danger? Why hath he sometimes, through his providence, by his Spirit, brought thy conscience to a stand, leading thee to reflect on thy state and on thy future prospects, and making thee feel for the moment that it was high time for thee to make thy peace with God? Why hath he sent warning after warning, and call after call, unless he had rejoiced in the repentance of a sinner? Yes, sinner, these are so many indubitable proofs that God delighteth in mercy, and rejoiceth over the returning penitent. They are so many pledges that he indeed stands with open arms, to receive the returning prodigal; nay, that upon his return he will even hasten to meet him.

What a powerful motive is this, to excite to repentance? God is not only exhibiting to us, his readiness to receive the penitent offender, but is also pleased to manifest a peculiar joy at his return.

God the Son, rejoiceth in the repentance of a sinner.

If not, why so many expostulations, and entreaties, and why those lamentations which he uttered over those that were about to be destroyed? Who can hear his lamentation over Jerusalem, when he saw the hour of her awful visitation near at hand, and doubt for a moment, whether he rejoiceth over the returning penitent? “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not,” Luke xv. 34. Who can behold him at the descent of Mount Olivet, amid the acclamations of the multitude, weeping over this self-ruined and devoted city—and hear him venting the compassions of his heart, in abrupt sentences, broken as it were by the rising of holy grief—“*If thou hadst known, even thou—at least in this thy day—the things which belong to thy peace!—But now—they are hid from thine eyes,*” Luke xix. 42: I say, who can witness in the Son of God, these tears and words of compassion and grief over the perishing, and doubt at the same time whether or not he would rejoice over the returning sinner?

Unless it be to him matter of joy, what mean all his gracious invitations? “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Matt. xi. 28. He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out, John vi. 37. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat, yea come buy wine, and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not; hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fat-

ness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live," Isa. lv. 1—3. The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth, say come, and let him that is athirst, come, and whosoever *will* let him come, and take the water of life freely, Thes. xxii. 17. What more, O sinner, could the Saviour say to convince thee that he would indeed rejoice in thy repentance. But he not only testifies to this, by all those gracious words which proceed from his lips, but also by all his conduct, which with the most convincing and persuasive eloquence has been from the beginning, and is still proclaiming the same truth. Was it not to invite sinners to repentance, that he left the mansions of glory, the heaven of heavens, the bosom of the Father? Behold him on this gracious errand, leaving the eternal throne, laying aside his radiant crown, and royal robes, and descending in haste, through all the shining ranks, of cherubim and seraphim, and angelic orders, to make his appearance on earth, in a stable at Bethlehem! Again behold *him*, who by his wisdom and power, had formed the worlds, Heb. i. 2, and arched the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth in the empty air, Isa. xlv. 24, Zech. xii 1; learning the carpenter's art of one of his creatures, and toiling at the laborious occupation, Mark vi. 3; and then say, whether the Son of God, who thus humbled himself, to prepare the way for thy repentance, will not rejoice in thy penitential tears. Behold him, in whom heaven delighted, whom angels adored, and who moved amidst their shining ranks, condescending to mingle with the poor, the afflicted, the polluted children of men, that he might instruct, and bring them to repentance; and say, will he not rejoice, when the sinner, convinced of his folly and ingratitude, yields to his entrea-

ties, and with penitential sorrow supplicates his mercy? See this Lord of glory, this King of angels, submitting to the reproach, the contumely, the persecution of worms of the dust, when he could in an instant have stopped their impious breath, and ascended glorious in justice to his native heaven, and eternal throne; and all this, that the sinner might be entitled to repentance, with the assurance of receiving pardon, and eternal life; and will he not now look down with a peculiar complacency on the returning sinner, and rejoice over his repentance? And finally, can it be possible that after the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, and the agonies of the cross, we can doubt whether the Saviour will rejoice in the repentance of a sinner? It was this to which he looked forward when he endured those dreadful sufferings, and will he not rejoice in their fruit? Was it not that the sinner, who deserved to die eternally, might be saved from wrath through him, and God glorified in his justification, that he poured out his soul unto death, and will he not rejoice when he sees the waters of repentance flowing—when he perceives the heart *humble, broken, and contrite*, and ready to receive his rich grace? Yes, my brethren, the Saviour indeed rejoices in the repentance of a sinner; for in it, he sees a part of the fruit of the travail of his soul; in it he beholds the increase and prosperity of that church, and kingdom, which he purchased with, and founded in, his blood; whose interest ever lies near his heart. Every returning penitent is a new trophy of his grace, and star in his crown of victory; and in this new accession to his empire, and his spiritual glory, he cannot fail to rejoice. He sees in it the eternal promise of the Father fulfilling, the complete measure of which in prospect encouraged him in all his labors, his toils,

and conflicts, in his agonies in the garden and his tortures on the cross. This was no inconsiderable part of the hope, and the glory, which was set before him, in view of which he endured the cross, despising the shame, and he is now waiting on his throne for its full accomplishment, Heb. xii. 2. Can he fail to rejoice, then, in that, which is thus fulfilling, the important design of his advent, his toils, his sufferings? Impossible! Sinner, whoever thou art, be assured that thy repentance will create joy in the presence of the Divine Redeemer. And dost thou find in this no motive to repentance? Hast thou not sufficiently afflicted, wounded, and pierced him, by thy sins, to be willing now to cause him to rejoice over thy repentance? Did he once weep and sink in floods of sorrow, that thou mightest eternally rejoice, and will thou not now create joy in his presence, by weeping and mourning for thy sins, which thus overwhelmed him with affliction? Say, shall such a motive be addressed to thee in vain?

But again, there is not only joy in the presence of God the Father, and of God the Son, over the repenting sinner; but *the Holy Ghost also, rejoiceth in his return.*

This is manifest from the important and benevolent part which he performs in the mystery of redemption, and from the lively interest which he takes therein. Is it not his gracious office to enlighten the darkened mind, and impart conviction to the thoughtless sinner? Is it not by him, that the hard and obdurate heart is made to relent, and from this flinty rock the waters of godly sorrow, made to flow? And will he not then rejoice in his own work? Will he not take pleasure in the lasting effects of his gracious influences?

Did he not rejoice in the repentance of the sinner, why doth he so long wait upon him with his heavenly influences? Why doth he follow him, though continually resisted, and provoked, week after week, month after month, and year after year? Why doth he so often present his kind sollicitations, and his faithful warnings? Why doth he not in just anger give up the sinner speedily, to his own chosen way, to sleep securely in his wickedness until awakened by the flames of wo? Is it not because he rejoiceth not in his death, but in his repentance and salvation.

Have not some of us, my brethren, been the subjects of these reiterated admonitions? Have we not been followed by him, through all the mazes of our folly, and forgetfulness, and in spite of all our ungrateful resistance? Hath he not at times, almost persuaded us to break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by turning to the Lord? Hath he not at times, almost melted our frozen hearts, by turning our thoughts to a Saviour's dying love, and the manifold mercies of our God? Or made them quake and tremble at the voice of the infinite justice, and holy indignation of a sin avenging God? And when these kind monitions, and faithful warnings have been stifled, and resisted by us, has he not in compassion repeated them again, and again, and perhaps even at this moment, is whispering to our consciences? Why then all this persevering labor of the Holy Ghost, unless he rejoiceth in the return of the sinner, and views with an holy complacency, his repentance. Where not this the case, would not his patience long since have been exhausted, and we left in awful stupidity, no more to think of the joys of heaven, or the

miserics of hell, until we had lost eternally the former, and plunged into the latter?

Can we require further evidence of the truth that the Holy Ghost rejoiceth over one sinner that repenteth? And shall that be a matter of no concern to us, which thus giveth joy in the presence of the holy and ever-blessed Trinity! To what adamant hardness must sin have reduced that heart, which can resist a motive to repentance, such as this. But there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, not only in the presence of the eternal Godhead, but also, *in the presence of his holy angels*. All the angelic legions are filled with joy, when the sinner by sincere repentance escapes the toils of Satan, bursts the chains of the prince of darkness, and becomes the willing subject of the King of Zion, their adorable sovereign.

With what holy pleasure did they fly from heaven to earth, to announce the glad tidings of the Saviour's birth! With what extacy did they raise their immortal voices in the heavenly anthem, glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will toward men!

If such was their exceeding joy in view of that which was to open the way of salvation, and invite the sinner to repentance, and forgiveness; what must be their joy when they behold him leaving his sins; shaking off the yoke of satan, and flying to the blood and merits of his Redeemer, for cleansing, and forgiveness! Yes! they exclaim, with love and joy, another captive soul has escaped as a bird from the hand of the fowler, satan hath lost another subject, in spite of all his malicious devices! Behold him, already encircled in the arms of the everlasting covenant, and beginning to taste its saving blessings! Behold him, safe from the power of all his

spiritual foes, and from the dominion of his own corruptions! Behold him, embraced by the hand of omnipotent grace, from which neither earth nor hell, shall be able to pluck him! Behold him, a few moments since, a child of wrath, a captive of satan, lost to hope, lost to heaven, and lost to God; now a child of God, a joint heir with Christ, to an heavenly inheritance, who will soon walk the golden streets of the new Jerusalem. Yes, with an holy excess of joy, these exalted spirits contemplate the poor prodigal, coming to himself, and saying, "I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Sent forth by the Lord of glory, to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation, Heb. i. 14, they feel the most lively interest in the success of those precious means and ordinances, established in the church below, for the training up of subjects for the church triumphant; and whilst they drop the tear of pity over the poor, infatuated creature, who manifests no more concern for the life of his soul, than for the reptile which he treads under his feet, their countenances brighten with joy, when they behold the beginnings of an unfeigned sorrow for sin, and an anxious concern to be delivered from it. With an holy anxiety they wait to see the issue of those faint emotions, which the sinner discovers, whilst the blessings of the everlasting gospel, and the Saviour, with all his infinite fulness, is tendered to him. They watch to see what effect a Saviour's love seems to have upon the hitherto impenitent, and unfeeling heart; or with what sentiments it seems to hear the terrors of the law proclaimed. Interesting thought! Perhaps at this very moment some of those holy spirits are hovering

around us, whilst a gracious God is inviting us, by his word, to turn to him from our transgressions. Nay, more than a *perhaps*, undoubtedly many of them, assemble with us in the house of God, to be spectators of our worship and our conduct, as far as created spirits are able, discovering the manner and degree in which our minds are affected, 1 Cor. xi. 10. Yes, sinner, they are now waiting that they may have the unspeakable joy of bearing to their holy society above, the blessed news of thy repentance. O! could they but see thee now, manifesting a heart humbled at the foot of the cross, relenting for thy sins, and sighing after thy Saviour, whilst at the same time informed by him, from whom they come forth to minister, that thy repentance was sincere, of which, on the event, they would soon receive infallible intelligence.* How would they with triumphant joy stretch their wings, and mount the skies, that the ten thousand times ten thousand, might share in their joy over thy repentance! How long, O sinner, shall they thus wait, before they be permitted to fly with the joyful tidings! Think not that this is merely ideal. Have we never read the vision of Jacob's ladder, which extended from earth to heaven, and on which the angels of God were continually both ascending and descending, Gen. xxviii. 12. Had this vision then, no meaning? or was it, indeed, designed to instruct us, as well as the Patriarch of old? Unquestionably it was; and this no doubt is its true language, *That through Christ Jesus, communion, and in-*

* It is not supposable that any created spirit can of itself discern intuitively the arts of another, but since angels are sent forth by Christ to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation, Heb. i. 14, and since they rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, Luke xv. 10, may we not believe that this subject-matter of their joy is *immediately communicated to them*.

tercourse, is opened between heaven and earth, and that the angelic hosts, who wait the orders of their king, and minister to his church on earth, are continually, in the execution of this delightful office, passing, and repassing, from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven, John i. 51—and saith the Saviour himself, 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, Luke xv. 10.

Yes. They rejoice indeed in the repentance of a sinner. For they now view him as a future member of their immortal society, already partaking in a measure of their spirit, soon to be admitted to their endless felicity.

They rejoice in the repentance of a sinner. For they see therein the advancement of that glorious kingdom, for the increase and prosperity of which, they minister with an holy pleasure, and unwearied assiduity.—And they look forward, to its increasing splendor, until it shall reach the exalted summit of its glory. They rejoice in the repentance of a sinner, for in it they behold new victories won by their adorable sovereign, whom they once attended, and strengthened, in the garden, and around whose cross they hovered with astonishment, and wonder, when he paid the infinite ransom, for the penitent sinner, and laid in his blood the broad foundation of his kingdom and glory. They rejoice in the repentance of a sinner; for in it they behold, not only the mystery of grace, more and more unfolded but also, the glory of God the ever-blessed Trinity advanced, and his infinite grace exalted.

And say, O sinner! whilst angels lament over thine impenitence; whilst they stand ready to rejoice over thy repentance; canst thou thyself remain indifferent, and

stupid? Once more, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, in the presenee of *the spirits of the just made perfect, amidst the church triumphant*. Once, themselves, the vassals of satan, held by him in cruel bondage, but long since rescued from his power, by the all-conquering grace of their Saviour, with what holy pleasure must the joyful tidings be received by them, of another heir of glory born; of a brother or a sister in the human family, from a child of satan, being recently made a child of God. Whilst on earth, their souls delighted to witness new conquests of their Saviour's grace, to see the boundaries of his church extending, and her spiritual glory continually increasing. With what sublimer joy then will their hearts exult, in the heavenly glory, at hearing of these fresh conquests of divine grace, over sin and satan! If when on earth, when they could know only in part, the awful state of the sinner, out of Christ, or the inconceivable felicity, and glory of the sons of God, they were filled with joy at the thought of one soul escaping from spiritual death, and the thick shades of death eternal, into the embraces of the Lord of life, and the light and glory of his kingdom; with what an extacy of joy will they now, knowing by sweet and constant experience, how to estimate the inheritance of the saints in light, hear the glad tidings of a new heir, just born of the Spirit of God, to possess it with them; and whose happy arrival at the gates of the new Jerusalem, they already anticipate. If the hopeful conversion of friends, dear to them as their own soul, of children bound to their heart by ten thousand ties, filled their soul when on earth with a joy the tongue could scarcely utter; with what transport, must a glorified immortal hear of, and perhaps witness,

that friend, whom at his departure from the flesh he left behind, impenitent, and under condemnation, turning to God, by sincere repentance, and about to receive the tokens of his love.

Perhaps, the hour of his dissolution, though bringing with it, to his own soul, the lively hope of glory, was nevertheless, imbittered by the thought, that this friend whom he was about to leave, he should never see again, but at an awful distance, at the left hand of his judge ; perhaps, the last look, was a look of *painful, of final adieu.*

Who then but a glorified immortal can conceive, with what joy he will be filled, at the tidings, or sight, of such an one, returning to God, through sincere repentance, and secured in the arms of everlasting love ?

With what divine rapture will he anticipate the hour approaching, when they shall meet on Mount Zion above, eternally to recount together, with ceaseless joy, the wonders of redeeming love.

How many parents, now in glory, closed their eyes on this state of probation, in painful anxiety for those children whom they left behind, thoughtless and impenitent, exposed to all the temptations of a seducing world, and in imminent danger of being thereby eternally lost ! Whilst with them in the flesh, how earnestly did they seek to God, for his grace to soften their hearts, and save their souls ; but still, in the hour of death, were constrained to leave them in the hands of a merciful God, without having received, from him, one comforting evidence that their supplications for them were heard, and fearing, lest they should never behold them in the society of the redeemed. O ! who can conceive, then, with what emotions, they shall hear of, and, for

aught they know, witness the answer of all their prayers, in the sincere repentance, and conversion of their children, and with what unknown pleasure they look forward to the happy moment, when they shall again receive them, not to a temporary, but an eternal embrace, in a world, which sin and death can never enter.

Surviving friends, yet in the gall of bitterness and under the bonds of iniquity, whose departed companions have gone to the mansions of bliss, and are now rejoicing in the paradise of God, with what tenderness and force does this reflection address you? Think not that because death hath removed them from your sight, and their Saviour received them to his glory, that they must necessarily, on that account, live wholly unmindful of you. True, they are no longer the subjects of pain and sorrow, but holy compassion still dwells in their breasts; and if this would draw tears from the blessed, they would drop them over you, while they hear not of your repentance, and return to God. Perhaps they are sometimes permitted by God to be spectators of your conduct, when employed by him, as ministering spirits; and that glorified immortals are sometimes thus employed, as well as angelic natures, the scriptures seem to intimate,* Rev. xix. 10, and xxii. 9.

Can you think of it but with tenderness, and concern? How often did they exhort you! how often did they pray

* I see no good reason for concluding that this messenger must necessarily have been of an angelic nature; he calls himself, not only a *fellow servant*, which an angelic nature might in truth do, but he adds, "I am of *thy brethren*, the prophets," by which he seems to claim a kindred nature to the apostle, as well as a relation to him in office. If it be objected, that it is contrary to the laws of the spiritual world, that departed saints should revisit the earth, is not this fully refuted, by the *real appearance of Moses and Elias* on the Mount? Matt. xvii. 3, and that of *Samuel*, to Saul, 1 Sam. xxviii. 12—20.

for you, while together on the earth, that you might, with them, be led to walk in the fear and love of God below, that so you might, with them, walk the streets of the new Jerusalem ! And now, they are there ! waiting to hear of your having entered the path, which leadeth thither. They are ready to rejoice over you, whilst advancing towards them, and with exultation to anticipate the joyful moment of meeting in the paradise of God. And can you remain unaffected, at a consideration like this ? But the spirits of the just made perfect, not only thus rejoice over the repentance of a sinner, once united to them by tender and endearing ties, but also, over every returning child of Adam.

It is the spirit of the gospel to embrace, in the arms of universal benevolence and charity, all mankind. In heaven, this spirit is perfected, in every member of the church triumphant. Oh ! how different in this respect is that holy society, from the corrupted society of earth. In that blessed world the joy of one, is the joy of all ; and all, with one voice, exult at the tidings, that another soul is born to God, whether in the East, or the West, in the North, or the South.

From every quarter under heaven is the church triumphant collected, and though on earth its members be distinguished by country, by language, by name, by climate, by colour ; in heaven they are all one, and with one heart, and voice, they rejoice in the view of every new accession to their holy community. Impenitent sinner, whoever thou art, wilt thou not permit this blessed society to rejoice over thee, by sincerely repenting of thy sins, and turning unto God, and thus becoming an heir of their glory, and a future member of their immortal society ?

Once more, there is joy in the assembly of the just made perfect in the heavens, over one sinner that repenteth, inasmuch as they rejoice above all things, in the increasing glory and exaltation of their adorable Redeemer. And in every returning sinner they behold his glory advanced, the riches of his grace magnified, and his most worthy name, as King of Zion, celebrated by all the heavenly hosts, in higher strains. Whilst on earth, they regarded him indeed as the chief among ten thousands and altogether lovely and deserving; but oh! it was only the shadow of his beauty and glory which they there beheld. Now, standing in his presence, and his lovely face unveiled to their immortal eyes; admitted now to know, even as they are known, and to see, even as they are also seen, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, their ravished souls rejoice to see him crowned with all possible glory; and new tongues, loosed on earth, to speak his praise in the church militant, and preparing to celebrate it, in more exalted strains in the church triumphant. Thus is there abundant joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; joy in the presence of God, of his holy angels, and of all the spirits of the just made perfect. Though it be an event which the world deems scarcely worthy of its notice, it is one which fills *all heaven with joy*, and strikes anew all the golden harps of paradise.

What effect should this truth have on our hearts and lives? Sinner, what effect should it have upon thee? what, but to arouse thee from thy fatal lethargy, and excite thee, without delay, to break off all thy sins by repentance. Think for a moment where thou standest, an object of concern to God, angels, and devils, who all view thee, with a deep interest; and canst thou still remain unconcerned thyself? Art thou not amazed at

thy own stupidity? Didst thou ever imagine that thou, a worm of the dust, wast of so much consequence, as to be viewed with such interest, by *two vast worlds, Heaven, and Hell*. Ah! it is because thou art *immortal*. It is because *thou hast a soul, which can never cease to live*, and is of more value than ten thousand worlds. God, and angels, behold thee with compassion, and stretch toward thee the hand of mercy, whilst thou art ready to sink down to flames. Devils are striving to sieze thee, as their lawful prey, and bear thee to the blackness of darkness, and are as yet for a moment resisted only by the out-stretched arm of grace! O sinner, thou art indeed condemned already, but mercy even yet extends to thee her golden sceptre, and all heaven is ready to rejoice over thee, at thy rising and embracing it. Seize then the precious moment, on which perhaps thine everlasting all depends: cast thy soul at the feet of the long neglected, but compassionate Saviour, imploring from him the grace of repentance, and his pardoning mercy: lest having called and intreated in vain he suddenly rouse his wrath to flame, and permit hell to triumph in thy destruction!

Fearful, trembling, desponding soul, Is there joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth? Astonishing, delightful thought! let it calm your fears, let it raise your hope, and encourage your approach to the Saviour. He is exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance, and remission of sins. He rejoiceth to bestow these immortal blessings on the meanest, and most unworthy child of Adam, who falls at his feet, lamenting his sins: for this purpose he entered our world, suffered and died, and rose again, and ascended on high. Go to him, then, however great your sins or peculiar

their aggravations. Pour out your heart before him, and be assured you shall obtain your suit. I am warranted to assure you, on the best of authorities, even that of himself, that so far from rejecting you, he will *even rejoice over you*; nay, that your return to him, as the great shepherd; and bishop of souls, will be *hailed with joy by all the heavenly hosts*. However mean, and despicable you may appear to yourself, though feeling unworthy the notice of any of his creatures, yet this very brokenness of heart, and contrition of spirit, wrought in your soul by the agency of his spirit, and the love of Christ, he will view with an holy complacency; nay, he doth already thus regard it, and all heaven rejoices over it. Come then to Jesus; dismiss your desponding fears, and rejoice also in God your Saviour. Is there joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth? *Christians, what effect should the thought have upon you?* Must it not stir you to an holy diligence, and activity in works of piety? Must it not inspire you with an holy circumspection, and watchfulness over your hearts and lives? Must it not constrain you continually, to whatever has a tendency to impress the thoughtless mind, and to lead the convinced sinner to true repentance? Must it not sacredly guard you against whatever would lead others to security in sin, or tend to harden the impenitent? Remember, christians, you are by divine grace, and your holy profession, placed on an eminence, for this very purpose, that an unholy world may behold you and by the light which you reflect, be led to repentance, and to glorify your Father in heaven; and in promoting this, will you not take a lively interest? Do you possess the spirit of Christ? Do the temper, and affections of heaven, dwell in your breasts? Must you not rejoice, then, in forwarding that, which raises

still higher the unspeakable joys of all the holy inhabitants of heaven? Whilst God is proclaiming his love, in the unspeakable gift of his Son; whilst Jesus the Son, is showing all his bowels of compassion; whilst the eternal Spirit is wooing by his sacred influences; whilst angels are ministering; whilst all heaven, with one voice, is calling on the sinner to repent—will you not also become co-workers, and by your every act, call upon the sinner, to come, and taste that the Lord is gracious? that your soul may rejoice, and heaven resound again with alleluia to the dying, risen, and glorified Redeemer, for another conquest of his grace. O christians! where is there a work, in which your heart and hands can engage equal in dignity, importance and value to this?

There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. *What a reflection is this, for us, who are ministers of Christ!* Let it ever dwell within us, through all our labors; amidst the trials, the difficulties, and discouragements which attend them, let the remembrance of this, refresh our spirits, and renew our activity, and zeal.

If all heaven rejoices over *one* sinner that repenteth, can our ministry be accounted lost, and our labour vain, should the whole fruit of it be the saving conversion of a *single soul*? No! since for that soul Jesus died, and over it he rejoices, with all his holy angels.

Shall we remit our labours, because iniquity abounds, and the world reproaches? Shall we be led to suit our instructions to the corrupt taste of the world? Shall we confine them to places, and persons, which the world account honorable? Shall we be prevented from visiting, with the messages of grace, the obscure cottage, the poor African, and the chief of sinners, whom a self-approving world despise, because proud pharisees

account it disgrace, and reproach us for it, as the companions of the low, the degraded, the polluted? No! for to such Jesus himself went, notwithstanding these reproaches; he spake to them words of mercy, because they were sinners.—Let us go, and do likewise—answering every reproach, in the words with which he silenced his revilers, saying, *there is joy in heaven, over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* Yes! since for sinners Jesus died—since he seeks them still—since over their repentance *He*, with his *Father*, and the *Eternal Spirit*, with all the *holy angels*, and the *church triumphant*, rejoice, *we will rejoice also*; and follow his example, with unremitted zeal, and self-humiliation, seeking to find them out, and by the preaching of the cross, and love of Christ, to bring them back to God, through sincere repentance.

Blessed Jesus! fill us with thy Spirit—make us faithful unto death, and successful in our labors—that, having through thy grace turned many unto righteousness, we may through grace, shine forth as the firmament, and as the stars, forever in the kingdom of our Father.

AMEN.