

BX 8915 .W5 1815 v.3
Witherspoon, John, 1723-
1794.

The works of John
Witherspoon

v. 3

THE
WORKS
OF
JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D.

SOMETIME MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT PAISLEY, AND LATE
PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE, IN NEW JERSEY.

CONTAINING
ESSAYS, SERMONS, &c.

ON
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE AND ESTABLISH THE DOCTRINE OF
SALVATION BY GRACE, AND TO POINT OUT ITS
INFLUENCE ON HOLINESS OF LIFE.

TOGETHER WITH HIS
**LECTURES ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY,
ELOQUENCE AND DIVINITY;**
HIS SPEECHES IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS;
AND MANY OTHER VALUABLE PIECES, NEVER BEFORE
PUBLISHED IN THIS COUNTRY.

VOL. III.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR J. OGLE, PARLIAMENT-SQUARE; M. OGLE,
GLASGOW; OGLES, DUNCAN, & COCHRAN, LONDON;
AND T. JOHNSTON, DUBLIN.

1815.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following sermons are published just in the manner in which they were delivered at home; from which circumstance, if they suffer in some respects, they will have this advantage, that they will appear the plain and artless expression of a minister's concern for his people, and not in the least intended to increase the reputation of their author. Perhaps also, not having undergone any change, they will be little less either acceptable or useful to those for whose instruction they were first prepared, and at whose request they are now published. I have only further to say, that my present removal from this part of the world, has, in a great measure, delivered me from the nicety of publication, and made me willing to speak, while absent, and continue to instruct those whom it is so much my duty to love and serve.

J. W.

PAISLEY,
16th May 1768.

C O N T E N T S

SERMON I.

The security of those who trust in God.

PROV. xviii. 10. The NAME of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe. Page 9

SERMON II.

The object of a Christian's desire in religious worship.

EXODUS, xxxiii. 18. And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. 43

SERMON III.

The glory of Christ in his humiliation.

ISAIAH lxiii. 1. — This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? — 61

SERMON IV.

The deceitfulness of sin.

HEBREWS, iii. 13. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 88

SERMON V.

The believer going to God as his exceeding joy.

PSALM xliiii. 4. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy. 163

SERMON VI.

The Christian's disposition under a sense of mercies received.

PSALM cxvi. 7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. 169

SERMON VII.

A view of the glory of God humbling to the soul.

JOB xlii. 5, 6. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. 201

SERMON VIII.

Of the happiness of the saints in heaven.

REV. vii. 15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. — 232

SERMON IX.

Ministerial fidelity in declaring the whole counsel of God.

ACTS xx. 26, 27. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men: for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 258

SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD.

PROV. xviii. 10.

The NAME of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

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

struck out for themselves in travelling through life, our eyes are continually directed to the paths of righteousness, the sure and only way to rest and peace.

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

The wise man, in our text, points out what is the refuge and security of every child of God. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.* And he certainly intends to set this in opposition to every thing else in which worldly men might place their dependence; for he adds, as an example, in the verse following the text, “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.” The truth conveyed to us in this passage has an intimate connexion with practical and experimental religion; and on a firm belief and habitual application of it, in a great measure, depends the comfort and peace of the servants of God. In discoursing on it, I shall endeavour, in divine strength,

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

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

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

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

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

* The Church of England. EDIT.

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

By the NAME *of the* LORD, in our text, we are to understand the Lord God himself; his nature as it is discovered to us in all his glorious perfections, particularly in his power and goodness; to save and deliver them that put their trust in him. In this sense the name of God, or the name of the Lord, is used in many passages of scripture, as Psal. xx. 1, 5, 7, verses, "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend thee. We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners:—Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." As also in all those places where mention is made of calling on the name of the Lord, or praising the name of the Lord. Agreeably to this, we find, in our Saviour's directory for prayer, the following petition, *Hallowed be thy name.* That is, let God himself and his glorious perfections be acknowledged, and a suitable re-

gard paid to them, by all without exception. The same way of speaking is observed with respect to Christ, Acts iv. 12. "For there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." That is to say, there is no other Saviour, besides Christ, to whom we can flee for deliverance from guilt and misery. At the same time, it is easy to see the propriety of this expression *the name of the Lord*; it is used for God himself, because, amongst mankind, we are distinguished from one another by our names, so God is known or distinguished by the discoveries he hath made of himself, and the daily exercise of his perfections, in behalf of his people.

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

1. Let us consider the visible creation as the name of God. He hath engraven his name on all the works of his hands; he hath engraven it in an universal language, in which every intelligent creature may read it, and the most weak and ignorant may easily comprehend it. Psal. xix. 1. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-works." Rom. i. 20. "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen; being understood by the things that are made; even his eternal power and Godhead."

Are men ignorant of God? It is because they do not like to retain him in their knowledge; for the

whole creation is full of him, "He is not far from every one of us." We can no where turn our eyes, to the heavens above, or to the earth below, but we may see the most manifest proofs of his almighty power, his unsearchable wisdom, his unbounded goodness, and his universal presence. How feeling a sense of this does the Psalmist express, Psal cxxxix. 1—7. "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassedst my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"—It will fall more properly under the following head to shew how *the righteous run into the name of God as a strong tower*. We now consider only his works, as shewing forth his glory. See, to this purpose, the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, from the 12th verse and downwards. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord; or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?"

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

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

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

An experimental knowledge of the power and mercy of God, is, of all others, the most complete and effectual. To this we may well apply the words of Job, xlii. 5, 6. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It is also probable, that the Psalmist David often affixes this particular meaning to the knowledge of God's name, as in Pſal. ix. 10. "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." For the same reason he recommends a careful observance of providence, as an excellent means of being partakers of divine mercy. Pſal. cvii. 42, 43. "The righteous shall see it and rejoice, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Who is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

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

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

I am aware of an objection against this. Perhaps some persons will say, how can I make a particular application of providence? how can I certainly know the voice or meaning of every event that befalls my-

self or my family? is there not a great danger of running into visionary folly and enthusiasm? In the remaining part of this subject, I shall have occasion to say more as to the meaning of providence. In the mean time, let me only desire you to begin by a personal application of the unquestionable truths concerning providence, and this will lead you farther than you apprehend, without the least danger of mistake. Is it not certain, that “a sparrow fall-eth not to the ground without your heavenly Father, and that the very hairs of your head are all numbered by him?” Is it not of the Lord’s mercy, then, that you awaked this morning, and did not sleep the sleep of death? If you had done so, were you ready for it? Do you know how, when, or how soon it may be so? Were you engaged in any scene of intemperance, lewdness, debauchery? would that have been a proper scene for death? Have you been preserved from any imminent danger, recovered from any threatening disorder? Is not that a mercy? Has the desire of your eyes been taken away by a stroke? Have you heard the reproach of many on every side? Is not this the will of God? Whether does it call for patience or pride? Have you suffered in your substance? Whether does this teach you to love the world or to despise it? Is there any uncertainty here? Believe it, Christians, a personal application of the truths relating to divine providence, would reveal as it were a new world to you, and would make the paths of God towards you every day more intelligible, every day more profitable, and shall I not add, every day more comfortable.

II. WE proceed now to the second thing proposed, viz. what is implied in *the righteous running into the name of the Lord as a strong tower*. The word *tower*, especially when joined with the epithet *strong*, immediately conveys to the mind the idea of protection and defence. It evidently alludes to the state of many ancient nations and tribes, who were continually exposed to hostile inroads and invasions, and were obliged to have castles and towers as places of refuge and security; and this is far from being an improper image of the state of a child of God in this present world, whether we consider the common calamities to which he is liable as a man, or the peculiar trials with which he may be afflicted as a good man. To have a clear view of the import of the metaphor, we need only consider some parallel places, where we find the same expression, and others of the same meaning, Psal. xviii. 2, 3. "The Lord is my rock and my fortrefs, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler and the horn of my salvation; and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from mine enemies." Psal. xxvii. 1, 2. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me, to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." Psal. lxi. 2, 3, 4. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for

ever; I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah." When we hear a good man using such expressions as these, we may gather, with the greatest certainty and clearness, what is the general import of God's being a *strong tower*, namely, that he is a most powerful protector; that his almighty providence is the surest and strongest defence against all enemies of whatever kind, let their art, their activity, their malignity, be what they will.

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

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

You may observe I have said the *lively* exercise of faith; for, besides the habitual persuasion of the great truths of religion, as the foundation of our adherence to God as our portion, there must be an actual contemplation of them as the means of our

support in trial or deliverance from danger. Whatever be the nature or source of temptation, we must meet it, as it were, and resist it, by taking suitable views of the fulness and all-sufficiency of God. Does the believer stand in need of any thing spiritual or temporal? is he distressed with the want of it? does he see no human or probable way of his being supplied with it? He *runs to the name of God as his strong tower*, by considering, that “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof;” that his wisdom is infinite; and that, if it is really necessary, he can easily find a way of bestowing it. Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10. “O fear the Lord ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” He dwells upon the universal presence and the special providence of God, and endeavours to reason down his anxiety and fear. Perhaps he may do it in the words of our blessed Saviour, Matth. vi. 25. to the 33d verse, “Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on; is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet, I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grafs of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is caſt into the oven, ſhall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, ſaying, what ſhall we eat? or what ſhall we drink? or where-withal ſhall we be clothed? (For after all theſe things do the Gentiles ſeek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all theſe things.

Is the believer diſtreſſed with enemies, malicious, powerful, implacable? does he ſuffer, or is he afraid of ſuffering from them, in his name, in his perſon, in his life itſelf? he conſiders the power of God to ſhield him from their attacks, or more than compenſate all the injuries which he may receive from them, and ſtrengthen and animate him to a vigorous diſcharge of his duty in oppoſition to them, Pſal. iii. 5, 6, 7, 8, "I laid me down and ſlept, I awaked; for the Lord ſuſtained me: I will not be afraid of ten thouſands of people that have ſet themſelves againſt me round about. Arife, O Lord; ſave me, O my God; for thou haſt ſmitten all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone; thou haſt broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; thy bleſſing is upon thy people. Selah." He endeavours to deliver himſelf from the diſtreſſing fear of man, by the reaſonable and dutiful fear of offending God, Luke xii. 4, 6. "And I ſay unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you ſhall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to caſt into hell, yea, I ſay unto you, fear him." Dan. iii. 16, 17, 18. "Shadrach, Meſhech, and A-

bednego, answered, and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar! we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king! But, if not, be it known unto thee, O king! that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Is the believer afraid of the ordinary evils of life? is he of a timorous nature, trembling at the thoughts of the accidents that may befall him? he runs to the name of God as the supreme disposer of every event, and thinks of the invisible power that governs and directs all visible things, and that the very ministers of providence have received a charge concerning all his people: Psa. xci. 1,——12. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers; and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee: only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there

shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling: for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

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

Faith, in this respect, has an immediate relation to the promises of God. It is his name, as I observed on the former head, to which we are to flee, as revealed in his written word; and much of the life of practical religion consists in attending to the tenor, and in a daily application of the promises. God himself requires us to call upon him in a time of trouble, Psa. l. 15. "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me." Nay, he is graciously pleased to reckon our calling upon him an essential character of his own people, Zech. xiii. 9. "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, the Lord

is my God." He is pleased to esteem this, as giving him the glory of his truth and faithfulness, wisdom, power, and goodness, which we find represented in scripture as so many chambers of protection into which the righteous are called to enter for safety and preservation, Isa. xxvi. 20. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

I shall only further observe, that faith in both these respects, as applying the power and promise of God, receives very much strength from the examples of his mercy, either towards ourselves or others. His name is recorded in every page of the history of providence. And his people cannot, in a more proper or effectual manner, run into it as a *strong tower*, than by considering and weighing the examples of divine interposition, in behalf of his faithful servants. For this reason, is so great a part of the holy scriptures historical; because they serve, in a more effectual manner, to engrave the truths of religion both on the memory and heart. Many can remember what befel Abraham, David, Samuel, Daniel, and others, who would forget the precepts delivered them in a more abstract manner. And every one must be sensible, that the instructions which arise clearly and obviously from historical facts, come home upon the conscience with a degree of evidence, superior to any thing that flows merely from the deductions of reason. May not the Christian, with great advantage, say, "Do I not serve an everlasting and unchangeable God? Is he not the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Is his hand

at all shortened, that it cannot save; or his ear heavy that it cannot hear? Is not he who saved David, the stripling, from the strength of Goliath; who saved Danie: from the power of the lions; and in many other instances, assisted or delivered his own people, when employed in his service, able to save me from the power of the enemy, and to carry me through all the trials of this earthly state, whether they arise from temptation or suffering?" I hope I need not tell you to apply, in the same manner, all that you have learned of the wisdom or goodness of Providence, from reading or conversation. For this reason, the Psalmist declares his resolution of communicating the mercy of God to his soul, Psal. lxxvi. 16. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

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

But if our mutual experience may be serviceable to teach others, how much more must the past goodness of God towards themselves, encourage his chil-

dren to put their trust in him? How just and beautiful the Psalmist's reflection, Pſal. lxxiii. 7. "Because thou haſt been my help; therefore in the ſhadow of thy wings will I rejoice." In the ſame manner he recovers from his doubts and fears, Pſal. lxxvii. 5,—12. "I have conſidered the days of old, the years of ancient times; I call to remembrance my ſong in the night; I commune with mine own heart, and my ſpirit made diligent ſearch. Will the Lord caſt off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promiſe fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger ſhut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I ſaid, this is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Moſt High. I will remember the works of the Lord; ſurely I will remember thy wonders of old."

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

2. *The righteous runneth into the name of God as a*

strong tower by the exercise of fervent prayer. Prayer is the immediate and direct means of imploring the divine assistance and protection. Faith is the habitual principle, and prayer is the actual application of it. Many are the precepts in scripture enjoining the diligent exercise of this duty. Col. iv. 2. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." 1 Theff. v. 17. "Pray without ceasing." Many are the promises of a gracious answer to our prayers. Matt. vii. 7. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." ch. xxi. 22. "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." John xiv. 13. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son." There are also exhortations to importunity in prayer. Luke xviii. 1. "And he spake a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Many assurances of the success of prayer, Psal. xxxiv. 6. 17. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." Many examples of the power and efficacy of prayer, as in Jacob, David, Daniel.—It seems plainly an essential character of true piety, to be given to prayer. Psal. cix. 4. "For my love they are my adversaries, but I gave myself unto prayer." I forbear enlarging on these particularly, and shall only say, that it is quite necessary, in order to our *running into the name of God as a strong tower*. Though he knoweth all our wants perfectly, he requires that we implore

his assistance by prayer. Phil. iv. 6. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

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

3. In the last place, *The righteous runneth into the name of God as a strong tower*, by diligence in his duty. This also is necessary and inseparable from a child of God, and in order to take a distinct view of the Christian's diligence, in this particular light, as the foundation of trust, you may observe, that it implies these following things. 1. Diligence in all duties in general; in order to ascertain his character, and to be assured of the divine favour and protection, the promises of deliverance, of strength and preservation, are all made to those who serve God in sincerity. There is no such thing as a promise in any part of scripture to a bad man, as such. There are also the most positive and gracious assurances of powerful support in suffering, and all necessary help to those who truly fear God, Isa. xliii. 1, 2. "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob! and he that formed thee, O Israel! Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through

the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Nay, the most express declarations, that all things shall issue to their advantage, however discouraging an aspect they may wear for a season. Rom. viii. 28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." From this it plainly follows, that the very way to run into the name of God, is, by habitual diligence in doing his will. The more we can, by walking in his fear, keep clear our title to his special favour, the more unshaken trust and confidence we may place in his power and mercy, in every trial; for he hath not forsaken them that love him. So certain is this, that I believe every experienced Christian will bear testimony, that when he is unhinged by distress, when he is filled with anxiety, and fear of any kind, it arises as much, or more, from suspicion of himself, and doubt of his relation to God, as from any disbelief of the general truth, that God will support and strengthen his own people. Therefore the righteous may be said to *run into the name of God*, when they exercise themselves in keeping consciences void of offence, and walk so as they may humbly hope for his acceptance and approbation.

2. As a good man runs into his strong tower, by diligence in every part of his duty in general; so particularly by a watchful attention to his conduct, in every time of trial or danger. He will be on his guard, lest by any part of his behaviour he provoke God

to depart from him. He will then, in a peculiar manner, set the Lord before him, that he may, with the greater confidence, commit his cause and his interest to his care. The suffering disciples of Christ are often warned of the necessity of this. 1 Pet. iv. 19. "Therefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Whether therefore the danger arises from bodily distress, from worldly losses, from slander and reproach, or from whatever other quarter, the first and great care of the Christian should be, to keep his conscience undefiled; and the necessity of this is the greater, that suffering times are always times of trial. It is no easy matter to resist the temptations which arise from a suffering state, ordained expressly for the trial of our faith, which we are told, is "more precious than that of gold which perisheth." We may be tempted to impatience under calamity, to resentment of injuries, to taking wrong and sinful methods of redress. In opposition to all these, the servant of God will be particularly careful to avoid those sins which his situation invites him to, and to discharge those duties which the aspect of providence seems to ask of him; he will consider this as the great and only object of his attention, and freely commit the conduct of events, and the issue of things, to an all-gracious, and almighty God. Psal. xxxvii. 5, 6. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

3. A good man will diligently use every lawful

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

4. In the last place, The good man will renounce all dependence on created help, as such, and place his ultimate hope only on the power and sovereignty of divine providence. He will not neglect the use of outward means, in obedience to the command of God, but will look for the expected benefit from them only by the blessing of God. The *running into a strong tower*, implies a renunciation of our dependence on any thing else; we give up all other methods of defence, and trust in it alone for security. So it is here. There may be not only a dependence on means unlawful in themselves, but a sinful, because an excessive dependence upon such as are most lawful. We see this remark made on Aza. 2 Chron. xvi. 12. "And Aza, in the thirty and ninth year of his reign, was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Many are the evidences we have,

from daily experience, of the weakness and uncertainty of all outward means, that we may not be tempted to idolize them, or to trust in them: and we find, in many passages of scripture, an express opposition stated between trust in God, and trust in human or created help. Psal. cxviii. 8, 9. "It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." Psal. cxlvi. 3. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help."

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

We are told, *the righteous runneth into this tower and is safe.* In a perfect consistence with the use of the metaphor, the word might perhaps be better translated, *is exalted, or placed on high.* Now, their safety, I think, consists in the following particulars.

1. God, many times, by the course of his providence preserves them from dangers which they could not otherwise escape. Every good man, who has attend-

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

I need not attempt, because indeed it is impossible, to enumerate the various ways by which the great Disposer of all things works deliverance in danger. He sometimes changes the hearts of enemies, as he did of Esau towards Jacob—and of the Apostle Paul, when breathing out threatenings against the church—He sometimes carves out other work for persecutors, as Saul was once and again called off from the pursuit of David by the Philistines; and sometimes he makes the intended evil

prove a real blessing; as in the case of Joseph, in whose history we have one of the most beautiful draughts of Providence that is any where to be seen, and done with that union of majesty and simplicity, which so remarkably distinguishes the sacred writings. The whole hundred and twenty-fourth Psalm is a celebration of divine power, and a hymn of praise for divine protection. "If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

I shall only add, on this head, that a serious person, when thinking or speaking of deliverance from danger, will always consider sin as the greatest danger: he will reflect, with the highest pleasure, on the instances in which God has enabled him to discharge his duty with constancy. Let me beg of you to remember, with what courage and resolution the young persons, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego spoke to king Nebuchadnezzar, and resisted the threatenings of that powerful prince. It is worth while to observe, that they and Daniel seem, in that perilous time, to have given themselves much to the exercise of prayer. Thus, *running into the name of God as a strong tower*, they obtained security, while

other very eminent persons, by trusting in themselves, or boasting of their own strength, fell before temptations of a very trifling kind, as Abraham and Isaac in denying their wives, and the Apostle Peter in denying his master.

2. The security of the righteous consists in the promise of strength and support in the time of trial. Although God preserves his people from many dangers, yet he has no where promised them deliverance from all. On the contrary, we are told, "that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution; and that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God." Yet, even in these circumstances, they are safe, because God is with them in their afflictions; his rod and his staff powerfully supports them. Need I tell you, that here, in a particular manner, the text is exemplified: *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.* Under a smarting rod, what can a child of God do, but enter into his secret chambers, and supplicate the assistance and presence of his reconciled Father? and has he not promised to grant it? Isa. xliii. 1. "But now, thus saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob! and he that formed thee, O Israel! fear not; for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." And has he not many times, in fact, granted it? The three children walking at liberty in the midst of the fire with the Son of God as their companion, was but one instance of what has many times happened in every age. Who would not rather be in the place of Paul and Silas, singing praises to God in their chains, than be the master of the

world, with all the danger and anxieties of a throne? Let me here make an observation, which I think is warranted both by scripture and experience, that just as in point of duty, so also in point of suffering, the security and comfort of the people of God depends upon their running into, and, if I may so express it, keeping within the bounds of their strong tower. If they keep close to God, no suffering will disconcert them; no enemy will terrify them: but, if they neglect this, they may be unhinged by a very slight trial. I hinted before, self-dependence will make men fall before a very trifling temptation: but dependence on divine strength will make them superior to the greatest. In the very same manner, it hath been often seen, that persons who have lost their temper, or lost their courage, in sufferings of no extraordinary kind, when more severely tried have behaved infinitely better, and being constrained to flee to God for protection, have found such benefit from it, that they have slept in peace and comfort in a loathsome prison, have gone with an undaunted step to an ignominious scaffold, nay, and embraced, with joy and transport, a halter or a stake.

3. In the last place, The righteous is safe under the divine protection, as they are sure of deliverance in the end, and complete victory over all sufferings of every kind. Thus it is said, Pſal. xxxiv. 17. to the end, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the

Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones, not one of them is broken: Evil shall slay the wicked, and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." There is a great beauty in this last passage, which is lost or concealed in our translation; it lies in the opposition between the 19th and 21st verses. The 19th verse runs thus, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." In opposition to this, it is said, in the 21st verse, as it should be translated, "One evil shall slay the wicked; and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate." This probably points at the great distinguishing security of good men, that their salvation is safe in the keeping of God, and quite beyond the reach of their most implacable enemies. Whatever straitening circumstances they may be reduced to, they have treasures in heaven, "which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thief break through and steal." They may be driven from their habitations, or banished from their country; they may resemble those of whom we read, Heb. xi. 36, 37, 38. "And others had trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings; yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, (of whom the world was not worthy;) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and caves of the earth;" but they cannot be banish-

ed from the kingdom of heaven. No tyrant can shut the gates of paradise against them; for they have been opened by him, "who openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." I have often read with admiration, both in the inspired writings and ecclesiastical history, the patience and constancy of the martyrs. How edifying is it to observe, that by witnessing a good confession, together with the gracious influence of the Spirit of God, they have become superior to the fear of death, and have been enabled to despise or pity the weakness of persecuting rage? Sometimes we may clearly see, the unrighteous judges torn in pieces, with the fury of infernal passions, vainly endeavouring to wreck their malice, by newly invented tortures, and the happy prisoners, as it were, already beyond their reach, while by faith and hope they are firmly assured of an "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven above."

Having thus considered the nature of the good man's security, I am now to consider the absolute certainty of it.—On this I shall be very short, it rests upon the divine perfection, the divine promise, and the experience of the saints. 1. The divine perfection. Is there any thing too hard for the Almighty? Is he not the Lord of nature? And are not all things obedient to his will? The great enemy of souls, and all his instruments and agents, are under the government of God. He sets bounds to their rage, and will not suffer them to go so much as one hair's breadth beyond the limits he hath appointed for

them. How great then must be the security of those who put their trust in him? Again,

2. Consider his faithful promise; he hath said it, he hath repeated it, he hath sworn it, that his covenant shall stand fast for ever. Every page of the sacred oracles is full of the most gracious assurances; and these expressed in the most condescending terms. Psal. xci. 1,—4. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” Zech. ii. 8. “He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye.” Nay, the very ministers of his providence are your attendants. Psal. xci. 11. “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”

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

IV. I come now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And,
1. From what hath been said, you may see the sinfulness of distrust. Has God laid so noble a foundation for our dependence upon him; and are we still so backward to the duty? Is not distrust in some measure a denial of God himself? A denial of his presence, a denial of his perfections, and disbelief of his promises? Let us all be covered with shame, when we consider how much we have already dishonoured him, in this respect. And let us pray, that he may enable us henceforward not only to send up our cries to heaven, for relief in distress, but to cast our cares and burdens upon the Lord, in the faith “that he will sustain us, that he will never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

2. You may see the remedy of distrust, which is, to be more and more acquainted with the name of God. Contemplate his glory in the visible creation: he may be seen not only in his spreading out the heavens like a curtain, but in the formation of the meanest creature; in a pile of grass, or in a grain of sand. While you are daily tasting his gifts, forget not to acknowledge his bounty, in the rising sun, the growing corn, and the falling rain. Think of his faithful word, read his promises, lay them up in your memories, write them in your hearts; and especially, the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting gospel, which may be yours, which you are entreated to accept as yours, and if they be not yours, you shall render an account to himself at the last day, for receiving them in vain. Think also of his providence, all you have seen,

and all you have felt, of preserving goodness, and of redeeming grace; and continue to cleave to him as your portion, in the Psalmist's words, Psal. xlviii. 14. "This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death."

3. In the last place, learn from hence, what is the surest and shortest, and indeed, the only safe way of deliverance from suffering. Flee to God as your *strong tower*, by prayer and supplication: but with this, endeavour by the renewed exercise of faith in your redeemer's blood, to ascertain your title to the favour of God; endeavour by a steadfast adherence to your duty, to commit your ways to God; and so soon, and so far, as you have good ground to know that you are his children, you ought to resist and banish every doubt of your security. Rom. viii. 28. "And we know, that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose." Verse 32d of the same chapter. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things."

S E R M O N II.

THE OBJECT OF A CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

EXODUS, xxxiii. 18.

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

THESE are the words of an Old Testament saint; of that Moses, who, as a servant, was faithful over all the house of God. True piety is the same in substance in all ages, and points at one thing as its centre and its rest, the knowledge and enjoyment of God. In the preceding verses, Moses had been employed in earnest prayer and intercession for the people of Israel. He had met with success and acceptance in these requests; for it is said, in the 14th verse, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And in the 17th, "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name." The condescension of a gracious God, though it satisfies, does not extinguish the desires of his saints, but rather makes them more ardent and importunate; for he immediately adds, in the words of the text, *I beseech thee shew me thy glory.* It is high-

ly probable, from what follows, that this desire included more than was proper for the present state; yet such a discovery as was possible, or could be useful to him, is graciously promised, “ And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.”

My dear brethren, it is our distinguished privilege, that we have daily unmolested access to the house and ordinances of God. We ought to rejoice, that we have so many clear and express promises of the divine presence, in New Testament worship. But what cause have we to be ashamed, that we are so exceeding prone to stop short in the threshold, to content ourselves with the mere form, instead of earnestly breathing after real, inward, and sensible communion with God. I have therefore chosen this subject, in the view of that solemn ordinance, *The Lord's Supper*, where we have a sensible representation of Christ crucified, the great mean of our access to God, that we may serve him, on that occasion particularly, and the remaining part of our lives habitually, in spirit and in truth. And, Oh, that we may have daily more experience of the sweetness and benefit of his service on earth! and may daily long more for that time, when we shall serve him in a manner infinitely more perfect and joyful in his temple above!

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, in dependence on divine strength,

I. To explain what is the object of a saint's de-

fire, when he saith, in the words of Moses, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.*

II. To improve the subject—particularly by pointing out what is the most proper preparation for such a discovery.

I. Then, I am to explain what is the object of a saint's desire, when he saith, in the words of Moses, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.* It is very probable, from the passage following the text, which I have read, that Moses had some regard to the sensible appearance, which, in that dispensation, did often accompany or notify the immediate presence of the angel of the covenant. He desired, probably, to be strengthened for beholding stedfastly the Shechinah, or bright and luminous cloud which sometimes appeared over the tabernacle, and, by its glorious lustre, tended to affect the mind with a sense of the power and sovereignty of the Lord Jehovah. But this, surely, was not all; for this, in itself, was only a subsidiary mean, which served to carry their views to the real and spiritual glory of God. To the last, therefore, we shall confine our attention, as to what the gospel particularly opens to us, and what believers are enabled, by faith, to apprehend.

When Christians, then, desire to see the glory of God, it seems chiefly to imply the following things.

1. They desire to see the glory of an eternal independent God; they desire to see the only living and true God in his own inherent excellence and infinite perfection. God is the source and sum of all excellence; or, in the language of the Psalmist, "the perfection of beauty." Every thing noble or beautiful

in the creature, is only a faint ray from the fulness of the Creator's glory. Therefore he is the proper object of the highest esteem, and most profound veneration of every reasonable creature. The vision and fruition of God constitute the employment and happiness of heaven: and even here, while they are in preparation for the higher house, the saints desire such a discovery of the divine glory as their condition will admit of, and take pleasure in contemplating his nature, as revealed to them both in his word and in his works. They dwell, with adoring wonder, on all his attributes, which are boundless and unfathomable: the immensity of his being, who fills heaven and earth with his presence, who seeth in secret, and from whom the thickest darkness cannot cover us; his irresistible power, "who spake, and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast;— who called this great universe out of nothing into being, "who doth in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth whatever seems good unto him:" his infinite holiness and purity, with whom "evil cannot dwell, nor sinners stand in his presence; who looketh to the moon, and it shineth not, to the stars, and they are not pure in his sight:" his infinite wisdom, "who worketh all things according to his will, who bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought, and makes the devices of the people of none effect:" his boundless goodness, which fills the earth, and flows in plenteous streams to all the creatures of his power.

But, perhaps, some are saying, what is there extraordinary or peculiar in all this? is it not clearly revealed in the word of God? can any Christian be

ignorant of it? If Moses, in that early dispensation desired a discovery of the divine perfections, nothing of that kind is wanting to us, who, since the fulness of time, have so complete a revelation in the New Testament. But, my brethren, I must beg of you to observe these two things:

1. That there is in the fulness of the Godhead an infinite and endless variety even for the employment of our intellectual powers. Well might Zophar, in the book of Job, say, Job xi. 7, 8, 9. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

2. That the real and proper knowledge of the glory of God is by inward and spiritual illumination. The holy scriptures themselves, however clear a discovery they contain of the nature of God, are no better than a sealed book to many even of the greatest comprehension of mind. It is one thing to think, and speak, and reason on the perfections of God, as an object of science, and another to glorify him as God, or to have a deep and awful impression of him upon our hearts. Real believers will know this by experience. A discovery of the glory of God, is not to inform them of a truth which they never heard before, but to give lively penetrating views of the meaning and importance of those truths of which they had, perhaps, heard and spoken times without number. Sometimes one word spoken of the Eternal, the Almighty, the Holy One, will be carried home upon the conscience and heart with such irre-

sistible force, as to shew them more of God than ever they had seen before. O what a difference is there between the way in which we use the same words in prayer or praise, at one time, and at another! None but downright atheists will deny the omniscience and omnipresence of God; but how far is this general acknowledgment from that overwhelming sense of his presence which believers have sometimes in his worship in public or in secret: What a new sense of God's presence had Jacob at Bethel, when he said, Gen. xxviii. 16, 17. "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not: and he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" What a sense of God's presence had Hagar, Gen. xvi. 13. when "she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seekest me; for she said, have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" or Job, when he expresses himself thus, Job xlii. 5, 6. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

I shall only farther observe, that it plainly appears, that this discovery of the glory of God belongs only to his own people. Wicked men are said, in scripture, to be such as know not God. They are also described a little differently; as not having God in all their thoughts; not but that wicked men may have a general or customary belief, in the being and perfections of God, but because they have not that intimate sense of his presence, that discovery of the glory and amiableness of his perfections, which is

peculiar to his own children. Even the natural perfections of God, his power and wisdom, cannot be beheld with such veneration by any, as by those who are sensible of their obligations to serve him. But above all, the glory of his infinite holiness and justice can never be seen, but by those who desire to submit to it; nor the glory of his infinite mercy, but by those who see themselves indebted to it. This leads me to observe,

2. That the believer desires to see the glory of a gracious and reconciled God, not only infinitely glorious in himself, but infinitely merciful to him. This view ought never to be separated from the former. Take away the divine mercy, and the lustre of his other perfections is too strong for us to behold. The power, wisdom, holiness and justice of God, separated from his mercy, speak nothing but unmixed terror to the guilty. It is very probable, that there was something in the desire of Moses, in the text, according to his own view, ignorant and unadvised; but God granted his request only in such a way as could be useful to him. When he says, *I beseech thee shew me thy glory*, the answer is in the following terms, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." And again, it is said in the following chapter, 6, 7, verses, "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgres-

sion, and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty: visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the childrens children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."

We may also see, that in the whole dispensation of divine grace to men, God is represented as coming under a peculiar relation to them; and they are called not only to serve him as God, but to trust in him as their God. Every hearer must be sensible how essential this is to a believer's desire, of seeing the glory of God. He cannot consider him as God over all, without at the same time, remembering, that he is one with whom he hath to do. There is also a necessity here peculiar to ourselves. The holy angels consider him as their maker and their happiness: but the children of Adam must consider, not only his goodness to the innocent, but his mercy to the guilty. This glory of God shines brightly, and shines only in the face of Jesus Christ. God, we are told, "dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto. No man hath seen God at any time; but the only begotten of the Father he hath declared him." In this wonderful dispensation, indeed, all the perfections of God are found united; but above all, "Grace and mercy shine and reign through righteousness, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here I must add, that the believer not only desires to see the glory of God's mercy, in general, as displayed in the gospel, in which he may have a share, but to take an appropriating view of it, as what he hath a clear right and title to call his own. Doubtless the mercy of God is published, offering salvation to the chief of sinners. It is their duty to accept of

it; it is their interest to cleave to it. But they are many times deterred by what they see in God, they are many times discouraged by what they feel in themselves, and are afraid to assert their title to so great a blessing. But when, by the Holy Spirit, they are enabled to see the infinite price paid for their redemption in the cross of Christ; when they see the riches of divine grace in the cross of Christ; when they hear the urgent invitations to them to believe in the cross of Christ; when they are enabled freely to renounce and quit hold of every other claim; when their hearts are sweetly constrained by the bonds of their Redeemer's love; they can then look upon God as their reconciled Father through him who hath made peace by the blood of his cross, and say unto him, *My Lord! and my God!* What an endearing view is this of the divine glory, and what ineffable satisfaction springs from it to the soul! What an unspeakable consolation to those who have been wounded in their spirits, and grieved in their minds, when they are enabled to apply the encouraging promises of the holy scriptures! Isa. i. 18. "Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isa. xliii. 25. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake; and will not remember thy sins." xliv. 22. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

3. The believer desires to see the glory of God as an all-sufficient God. This is a necessary view

of God, as the support and happiness of the creature, as well as the strength and consolation of the sinner.

My brethren, man was made for living upon God; forgetting this, he first went astray from him. Self-sufficiency, and a delusive sense of independence, is inseparable from a sinful state. Conviction levels a blow at the foundation of this mistake. Serious consideration shews us how insufficient we are for our own happiness. Daily experience discovers the inherent vanity of all created comforts in themselves, and as separated from God. When the penitent returns to God, he not only returns from the service of other masters to him as his rightful Lord; but forsakes all forbidden joys, and cleaves to God as his happiness, and rests in him as his portion. Does not this appear from the uniform language of scripture, with regard to both parts of the covenant? what belongs to God, and what belongs to man. See the tenor of an early promise to the father of the faithful, Gen. xv. 1. "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Multitudes of others are of the same import.

The power and providence of God, in behalf of his people, are largely and beautifully described, in the ninety-first Psalm. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall

be thy shield and buckler, &c." 2 Corinth. vi. 17. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." On the other hand, the invitation or exhortation to return, is ordinarily pressed from the profit of the change, Isa. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth! come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." And, to name no more passages, when God came to establish the faith of Abraham in his promise, he says, Gen. xvii. 1. "I am the almighty," or, as it ought to be translated, the all-sufficient God; "walk before me, and be thou perfect." Now, believers desire to see the glory of God, as all-sufficient; and all discoveries of this nature are attended with unspeakable complacence and satisfaction. They see the glory of an infinite God as theirs, and rejoice in the richness of their portion. Wearied with repeated disappointments, and deeply convinced of the vanity of the creature; they rest in him, as able to give them complete happiness; happiness that will never change! happiness that will never be exhausted! He that hath chosen God as his portion, hath, as our Saviour beautifully expresseth it, made "choice of that good part, which cannot be taken away from him."

My brethren, we are now come to the very substance of practical religion. The glory of an all-sufficient God, appears as more than a balance to all that pretends to rival him in our affections; to all

that we are called to give up for his sake. When the believer sees the fulness of God, then his anxiety, and distressing fears of every kind, are at an end. Does he want provision? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing." Does he want friends? God is able to make his enemies to be at peace with him. Does he want any outward comfort? God is able to procure it, or make him happy without it. Not to mention particulars; the triumph of faith, in this view, is to attain an absolute and unconditional resignation to the will of God, with a firm persuasion, that he is able to make all things work together for our good, and willing to bestow every thing that is for our real interest. It is to say with the prophet, Hab. iii. 17. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

I shall only add, that the divine all-sufficiency is to be considered, as regarding our sanctification as well as comfort. What distress does not the Christian often suffer from the treachery of his own heart, and from the power of surrounding temptations? Covered with shame for his past unsteadfastness, convinced by experience of his own weakness, he hath no other refuge but in God. And what courage does he derive from the fulness of divine perfection, the greatness of divine power, and the faithfulness of the

divine promise? "My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness." He then says, with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxi. 16. "I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."

II. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And, *1st*, Let us admire the divine condescension, in admitting his saints to a discovery of his glory. Solomon says, with very great propriety, in the language of astonishment: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" The same ought to be, nay, the same certainly are, the sentiments of every real believer. But let us remember what has been hinted at above, that our access to God, and our communion with him, is, and only can be, through the Mediator of the new covenant, in whom we have access, by faith, unto God.

2^{dly}, Let me beseech you to try yourselves, whether this ever hath been your attainment, and whether it is your sincere desire? Do you know, in any measure, what it is to see the glory of the true God? Hath he appeared before you in terrible majesty? Have your very souls been made to bow down before him, and to give him the glory that is justly due to his name? Have you seen the glory of a reconciled God? Have you chosen him in Christ as your portion? Have you devoted yourselves without reserve to his disposal? Again, have you seen the glory of an all-sufficient God? Surely I speak to many who have seen the vanity of the creature. Probably

you have tasted a little of the sufferings of a sinful state. Where did you seek your consolation? where do you find your support? Have you learned the holy and happy art of pouring out your souls to God? Have you felt the sweetness of it? And have you said, with the Psalmist, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul! for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee?" Is it your earnest desire to see the glory of God? Can you say with the Psalmist, P^{sa.} lxxiii. 1, 2. "O God! thou art my God, early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

3dly, I will now proceed to exhort you, in the most earnest manner, to diligence in seeking after real communion with God in his instituted worship. How highly are we favoured with light and liberty? how little are many sensible of their privileges? I have often, on such occasions, put you in mind of the fatal effects of a heartless, customary, formal worship: it is provoking to God, pernicious to others, hardening to the heart, and ruining to the soul. Were ~~but~~ a society of those Protestants abroad, who are lying under persecution, to enjoy the season which we now enjoy, what an edge would be upon their spirits? what a sense of gratitude in their hearts? what fire and zeal in their affections? Strange, indeed, that public prosperity should be so stupifying, and the approach of eternity to every individual should not be awakening, while the young and strong are hurried off the stage, while every day is bringing us nearer to our last, while every ordinance

is adding to our charge, that we should not desire to see the glory of God in his sanctuary here, that it may be the earnest of our future inheritance, and prepare us for his immediate presence hereafter.

Suffer me to speak a few words to those that are young. God is my witness, that their welfare is at my heart. Perhaps you will think, what hath been said hardly applicable to you. The desire of Moses, the man of God, intimate communion and fellowship with God, the attainment of ripe and experienced Christians, all this you will say, is unsuitable to me: nay, perhaps, by a bastard humility, you will say, to expect it would be presumption in me. But you are greatly deceived; there are none who have more gracious invitations to come to God than young sinners: there are none who have greater reason to expect nearness to God than young saints. Do you not read, that God revealed himself to Samuel the child, when he neglected Eli the old prophet? Besides I would recommend earnestness and affection to you; not only for your greater profit, but to prevent your apostasy. A little religion is very hard to hold; it is like a lamp which is hardly lighted, which the least breath of wind will extinguish, or a tree that is but newly planted, which a rude thrust will overturn. Unless you make God and his service, your hearty choice, you will not carry it long as your burden, but will be soon tempted to throw it down. Be concerned, therefore, I beseech you, to attend on his instituted worship, not in a careless and formal manner, but let the "desire of your souls be to his name, and the remembrance of him."

I shall now conclude the subject, by offering to

those, who would see the glory of God, a few directions, as to the best preparation for such a discovery.

1. If you would see the glory of God in his sanctuary, be serious in self-examination, and in the renunciation of all known sin. Holiness is an essential attribute of the divine nature ; and, therefore, he must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. Thus the Psalmist resolved with himself, Psal. xxvi. 6. " I will wash mine hands in innocence, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord !" It is true, none, who have any knowledge of the corruption of their own hearts, can reasonably hope to be perfectly free from sin in the present life : yet a real Christian will have it, as the object of his daily study, to " cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, that he may perfect holiness in the fear of God." It was sin that first rendered us unfit for communion with God ; and, therefore, our recovery of this happy privilege will be but in proportion to our sanctification. To bring sinful dispositions, indulged, and still suffered in the heart, to the worship of God, and to expect acceptance in such a state, is implied blasphemy, and the greatest dishonour we can possibly do to him.

2. In order to see the glory of God, you must be clothed with humility. No disposition is more essentially necessary to a Christian at all times, but more especially, when he makes an immediate approach to God in his worship : Isa. lxvi. 2. " For all those things hath mine hand made ; and all those things have been, saith the Lord : but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." And, indeed, how can we consider the nature of that God whom

we worship, and our own sinful and miserable estate, without being struck with a sense of the necessity of deep humility and self-abasement in our intercourse with him? It is particularly to be noticed, that self-abasement, and even self-abhorrence, is the immediate effect of a sense of the divine presence. See to this purpose, Isa. vi. 1,—5. “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple: above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory! And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Wo is me; for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” See also Job xlii. 5, 6. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Let us endeavour therefore, to be truly and inwardly humble. Let us remember the grace of redemption, what guilty criminals we were, before unmerited mercy and sovereign love found out a way for our recovery. Happy they, where humility arises from a real exercise of soul! How difficult, how rare a thing, is true humility! How easy is it to use modest and submissive expressions, compared to attaining a truly humble and mortified state of mind? May almighty God

by his power, make us humble; and do thou, O blessed Jesus! "cast down every high thought, and lofty imagination that exalteth itself against thee."

3. In the last place; if you desire to see the glory of God, be fervent in preparatory prayer: if there is any blessing that requires importunity and wrestling with God, surely this high and happy privilege of communion with him in his house must be of that kind. And, I think, we are warranted to say, that, in the divine government, there are some blessings that require more importunity than others. See a remarkable passage, Mark ix. 28, 29. "And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, why could not we cast him out? and he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." If some devils were so obstinate in their possession, that the same degree of faith and fervour, which prevailed over others, could not cast them out, must not the same thing hold, from analogy, with respect to other mercies? and how justly are indifferent, luke-warm worshippers denied that blessing which they so lightly esteem? Let me therefore earnestly beseech every serious person not to restrain prayer before God, but to repeat and urge the plea, that he would be graciously present with us; that he would pour down his Spirit from on high, and make us to know to our happy experience, "that a day in his courts is better than a thousand; and that it is better to be door-keepers in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

S E R M O N III.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN HIS HUMILIATION.

ISAIAH, lxiii. 1. second clause.

— *This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?* —

MY brethren, all the works of God are great and marvellous, worthy of the attention and admiration of his rational creatures. The contéplation of what is now revealed of him, is the noblest employment of which we are capable in this world: and the more clear and enlarged contéplation of him shall be our employment and happiness in the world above. But of all the works of God, there is none in which his perfections are so signally displayed, as in the redemption of an elect world through Jesus Christ. All other views of his glory are faint and fading in comparifon of this. However much we are called to adore the power and wisdom of Creation, or the goodness and bounty of Providence, our praises are extremely defective, if we omit that new song which he hath put into our mouths, even praise to our God for his unspeakable gift.

Redeeming love, my brethren, is the immediate object of our attention in the holy ordinance of the

Lord's supper. Here is a symbolical representation of it, that faith may be strengthened by the aid of sense. I hope, therefore, it will not be improper, by way of preparation for it, to take a view of the glory of our Redeemer's character, whose sufferings we are now to commemorate. As salvation is an agreeable found, so the name of a Saviour is a delightful name to every believer. I may therefore safely presume upon the attention of all such at least, while I endeavour to set him before you, as he is represented in the strong and forcible language of the text, *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?* Such a theme will be the most proper introduction to the work of this day; that, as we are to commemorate Christ's sufferings as an extraordinary event, he is here spoken of, and his appearance inquired into, in words of astonishment and admiration: *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah! this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength!* I shall not spend time in assigning the reasons why interpreters generally apply these words to Christ, but only observe, that, on this supposition, they contain a mixed representation of glory and suffering, of strength and abasement, which is the very substance and meaning of a Saviour on the cross.

Agreeably to this, the single point I have in view, in the present discourse, is, through divine assistance, to point out to you, in what respects the glory of our Redeemer was apparent even in his suf-

ferings, and shone through even the dark cloud that covered him in his humiliation, or in the language of the text, how he might be said, *to travel in the greatness of his strength*: and then I shall make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I. I am to point out to you, in what respects the glory of our Redeemer was apparent even in his sufferings, and shone through even the dark cloud that covered him in his humiliation. As the love of God to man, in providing redemption for him, was inconceivable, so the mean which he employed, in accomplishing this great work, was equally astonishing—that his eternal and well beloved Son should veil his divine glory, clothe himself with human flesh, subject himself to a life of pain and suffering, and at last make his soul an offering for sin upon a cross. This, as it was not after the manner of men, nor bore upon it any of the marks of human wisdom; as it was designed, and doth tend, to abase the pride of man, and exalt the grace of God; so it is with difficulty that man can be brought to an approbation of it. “The cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” It is therefore proper, that when we are to commemorate the incarnation and death of our Redeemer, we should attend to those evidences of his divine glory that still appeared even in his lowest abasement. By this means, while we grieve for the sufferings that sin brought upon him, we may still triumph in his power; for he is glorious even in his red apparel, and travels in the greatness of his strength.

I must here observe, that I do not mainly intend,

in discoursing on this subject, to establish the truth of our Saviour's divine mission, against those who deny it on the above or any other account: this would be too cold and abstracted an argument for our present purpose. What I propose, is chiefly, and directly, designed for heightening the devotion, for quickening the love, and increasing the faith and comfort of believers. However, at the same time, considering the humiliation of Christ, in the light of an objection against his divine commission, from the suggestions of human wisdom, what shall be said may also be considered as an answer to this objection, and serving to remove the offence of the cross.

1st, Upon this subject, therefore, observe, first, the glory of our Redeemer, in his sufferings, appears from his ready and cheerful undertaking of the work of our redemption. There can be little honour to any man in submitting to what he cannot avoid, or doing what he dare not refuse; but the humiliation of Christ was perfectly voluntary, as no constraint could be put upon him. Therefore his original dignity and greatness, is not only, if I may speak so, preserved unhurt, but improved and heightened by the grace of infinite condescension. This circumstance of Christ's readiness to undertake the work of our redemption, is often taken notice of in scripture, Psal. xl. 6, 7, 8. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo I come; in the volume of thy book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God!"—It is certain, that redemption could not

be the work of a creature ; and it is also probable, that no created being would have been willing to essay it. Nay, it is thought by many to be the import of the remarkable passage just now cited, which is applied by the apostle Paul to our Saviour, that in the counsels of heaven it was actually proposed to those glorious spirits that surround the throne of God, and their strength and inclination both were found insufficient. Neither is there any thing improbable in the supposition, that God might discover to them his purpose of mercy, upon a proper mediator interposing, and that none was found willing to subject himself to divine wrath, incurred by rebellious man. If so, then it is not only in one sense, but in all senses true, what Christ is represented as saying in the fifth verse of the chapter where my text lies, “ And I looked, and there was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to uphold ; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury it upheld me.” This interpretation may be confirmed by something similar to it, recorded, John vi. 5, 6. “ When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat ! And this he said to prove him : for he himself knew what he would do.” There is another passage which gives us nearly the same idea, viz. of Christ’s being only capable of taking the charge of the redeemed and their interests in providence, Rev. v. 2, 3, 4, 5. “ And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof ? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the

earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much because no man was found worthy to open, and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold the lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." How glorious then was the compassion of our Redeemer, who so willingly and cheerfully subjected himself to that abasement and suffering, to which none could constrain him? Thus he says of himself, John x. 17, 18. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." He is not represented as merely consenting, because none else could or would perform the work, and so having it as it were devolved upon him by necessity; not as yielding with reluctance, and overcome by great earnestness and importunity, but saying with readiness and cheerfulness, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book, it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea thy law is within my heart."

There is one circumstance which deserves particular notice, when we are considering the dignity of our Redeemer's undertaking; that he did well and thoroughly understand the difficulty of it, and the weight of that wrath which he submitted to endure. It is not such an evidence of greatness of mind, when a person involves himself in difficulties, and exposes himself to dangers, if he only runs an

uncertain risk of meeting with them, or has but a confused and indistinct apprehension of their nature; but it discovers a peculiar fortitude of spirit to have a clear view of sufferings, and yet composedly and steadily to submit to them for a good end. So true is this maxim, that it seems to be the only thing that renders human life supportable, that all future sufferings are uncertain even in the event, and, at any rate, in their nature but imperfectly known. Now, how does it serve to illustrate the glory of our Redeemer's undertaking, that he had a clear and perfect foreknowledge of every event that was to befall him? He knew the number and malice of the enemies he had to encounter; and the bitterness of that cup, the dregs of which he was to drink off: Yet steady in his purpose, and conscious of his own power, he went out to the combat as one assured of victory. As he began, so he carried on his work, with the same undaunted resolution; witness what he says, Luke xii. 50. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" All this, my brethren, is further confirmed, by some passages which are recorded toward the close of his life, when he drew near to the concluding scene of his sufferings. Matth. xvi. 21. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."—xx. 17, 18, 19. "And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes,

and they shall condemn him to death. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge, and to crucify him : and the third day he shall rise again." Luke ix. 51. " And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerufalem." To these I shall only add, John xviii. 11. " Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath : the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ?" Thus did there appear a glory even in his humiliation, a majesty even in his suffering; and thus did he come forth and travel in the greatness of his strength.

In the 2^d place, The glory of our Redeemer, in his humiliation, appears from the greatness of those sufferings which he endured. Though to the eye of sense, a state of suffering is apt to appear contemptible; to those who justly view the sufferings of Christ, there will be found far greater evidences of his power. A weak person is crushed by a small weight; but he who is able to endure uncommon sufferings, shows himself to be possessed of uncommon strength. Now, our blessed Lord and Saviour did, in his life, in this world, endure the greatest and most dreadful sufferings. His whole life was one continued track of the heaviest sufferings of which human nature is capable. Isa. liii. 3. " He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief : and we hid, as it were, our faces from him ; he was despised, and we esteemed him not !" This, my brethren, is a known subject, yet it is the subject which we ought, by faith to dwell upon this day ; and, indeed, the benefit and

comfort of believers does not depend on things new and engaging to the fancy, but on the Spirit of God setting home known truths with force and efficacy on the heart. Let me therefore beg your attention to two or three obvious remarks on the sufferings of Christ. 1. His afflictions began early, with his first entrance into the world. No sooner did the man Christ Jesus see the light of this world, but presently did affliction salute him. Immediately after his contemptible birth, did Herod, that bloody tyrant, seek to destroy him; so that we may allude to that expression, Rev. xii. 4. "And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born."

2. His afflictions were constant and perpetual, without interruption. It is recorded, not only by Christians, but even by heathens, who had heard of his life, that he was never observed to laugh, but frequently seen weeping; so that he well accomplished that prophecy, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It is probable, from several passages in the prophetic writings, that he was of a very tender and sensible frame: and therefore his afflictions had a great and powerful effect upon him. They so deeply touched him, that his body was wasted, and his strength melted and decayed, which is the usual effect of lasting and continued sorrow. Isa. lii. 14. "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Psal. xxii. 14, 15. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels: my strength is dried up

like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws: and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." So we may also apply to him what Job says of himself, Job xvi. 8. "And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me, beareth witness to my face."

3. His afflictions were of the severest kind. This I might shew you at large from the history, by particularising them all: I only mention four, poverty, reproach, temptation, and sympathy with others. He was so poor, as to depend upon the charity of others for his subsistence; and could say, Luke ix. 58. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—Reproach was thrown upon him without measure, and of the worst kind. He was called a glutton and a wine-bibber, a deceiver, a blasphemer, a Samaritan, and one that had a devil. Now, my brethren, all that know any thing of human nature, know that reproach and contempt are perhaps the hardest to bear of any sufferings to which we are exposed; and the authors of these calumnies were such whose circumstances rendered them most sharp and severe; for they were the Scribes and Pharisees, or the ministers of those times, who served in the temple, as the whole history shows, and his own natural relations, as appears from Mark iii. 21. John vii. 3, 4, 5.—Another remarkable affliction our Lord endured, was temptation, and that of the grossest kind, as is plain from Matth. iv. 3.—11. We are told, "he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." What was the precise nature and influence of such temptations on him, we

cannot know; only it deserves notice on this particular, that whereas some of the other afflictions he endured, were such as his perfect purity could not but render more tolerable than otherwise they would have been, this on the other hand, was such, that by how much the more pure and holy he was, so much the more distress would he feel on being assaulted with the vile temptations of the devil, and having his horrid and abominable suggestions presented to the fancy.——I only further mention his sufferings, from sympathy with others. The most excellent and worthy of the human kind are such as have the tenderest feeling of the sufferings of others. Now, since he was a perfect man, since tenderness seems to have been his ruling character, and his errand into the world a message of love flowing from infinite compassion as its cause, we must suppose him liable to the severest sufferings of this kind. I know the hard-hearted, selfish world, will find it difficult to conceive this as a source of severe suffering, especially such as have no regard to any thing beyond this world. But this is not the case with all; for I am certain there are some whose sharpest pangs have been occasioned by the sufferings of others, especially when of a spiritual kind. To form some conception of this, let us imagine, what must be the anguish of a pious and affectionate parent, on the death of a wicked child, who apparently trod in the path of the destroyer, and of whom he hath the greatest reason to fear, that he no sooner closed his eyes on the light of this world, than he lifted them up in the torments of hell. Now, as compassion was stronger in none than in the man Christ Jesus,

so none could have so clear a view of the misery of those who were the objects of it; and therefore, no doubt, this was a source of the deepest affliction to his soul.

4. In the last place, the afflictions of our Lord not only continued, but increased, through his life, till they, at last issued in an extraordinary conflict with the powers of darkness, and an immediate subjection to the wrath of a sin avenging God. Let it be observed, that though I here mention particularly his enduring the wrath of God, as the last and finishing part of his sufferings, I do not mean to confine his sufferings from the hand of God to this season. Without all question, every part of his humiliation was satisfactory to the divine justice, and contributed to appease the wrath of God. This cup was put to his mouth so soon as he assumed our nature; he continued to drink of it daily, and was therefore justly styled a man of sorrows; but, in the close of life, he came to drink off the very bitterest dregs of it. The waves of divine wrath went over him; and he waded still deeper and deeper in this troubled ocean, till he was well nigh overwhelmed. That Christ suffered under the wrath of God in an eminent degree, is manifest both from the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the relation given of the event in the New. Isa. liii. 5,—10: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not

his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." See the relation of his sufferings in the garden, Matth. xxvi. 38, 39. "Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Mark xiv. 33, 34, 35, 36. "And he taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death! tarry ye here, and watch: and he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed, that if it were possible the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee: take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt." Luke xxii. 43, 44. "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him; 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."

That the same deep distress of soul continued upon the cross, is plain from this lamentable exclamation, Matth. xxvii. 46. "And, about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani! that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In what manner, precisely, Christ suffered the wrath of God on this occasion, it would be too bold for us to determine; whether it was only God's withdrawing from his human soul the comforts of his sensible presence—his being assaulted and distressed with the infernal suggestions of the devil—his having a lively picture presented to his imagination of the miseries of mankind here and hereafter, on account of sin, and suffering with them by compassion and sympathy—or, finally, God's positively inflicting upon him, for a season, the same punishment in kind, at least, if not in degree, that should have befallen those for whom he suffered, and which the impenitent still shall for ever endure. This last is by some supposed impossible and contradictory, as much of their misery arises from an evil conscience, from which he was absolutely free; and from despair of mercy, which none will affirm that even God's desertion of him at that awful season did imply. It is probable, there was a mixture of all these particulars in his mingled cup. And, as to the last, I shall only say, that the pain and anguish, that follows any reflection of a rational soul, is only connected with it by the determination of God, the Creator of our spirits:

therefore it was certainly in the power of the Almighty to inflict a sense of pain in any kind, or in any degree, on the holy created soul of the man Christ Jesus. And I see no other contrariety to the divine perfections, in inflicting that very anguish on the holy and innocent Saviour, than in substituting him in our room at all, and bruising him for our iniquities. One thing is certain, that, in his life, and at his death, he suffered what was a full reparation of the dishonour done to God; a sufficient vindication of the purity of his nature, and the authority of his broken law, and what purchased pardon and peace, sanctification, and eternal glory to a whole world of elect sinners.—And now, my brethren, from this view, did not our Redeemer travel in the greatness of his strength? Was it a small strength that could go through all this track of suffering, without sinking in the way? Yet this did he with unshaken constancy; and as his giving up his life was the last part of it, so he expired not, before he could say, *IT IS FINISHED!* Well then might the answer be given to the question in my text, *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? in the words that follow, “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”*

We proceed to observe in the 3^d place, That the glory of our Redeemer in his sufferings, appears from the purity of his carriage, and the perfection of his patience under them. The former consideration shows his natural strength, (so to speak) and this his moral excellence. Affliction is the touch-

stone of virtue, tries its sincerity, and illustrates its beauty. Therefore we are told, Heb. ii. 10. "That it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Nothing could give a greater value to the sacrifice he offered up, than the meekness and patience with which he resigned that life which was not forfeited, but voluntarily surrendered. Isa. liii. 7. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." It is worth while to reflect on that continued and invincible patience with which he went through the several steps of his sufferings: that reproach and calumny, that contempt and abuse, which he met with from those in whose interest he was so deeply engaged, did not excite his indignation, but his compassion. Luke xix. 41. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." When his ignorant disciples would have defended him from the assaults of his enemies, he says, John xviii. 11.—"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" When he entered upon the last and heaviest part of his sufferings, and began to feel their anguish, he says, John xii. 27. "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! but for this cause came I unto this hour." And in that dreadful

season, when in the midst of his hardest conflict, this is the form of his prayer, Matth. xxvi. 39. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And a little after, verse 42. "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Was not this divine glory shining through the dark cloud that encompassed him? Was not this the patience of a God? And, in spite of the shame of the cross, on which he hung, did it not constrain the centurion that attended his crucifixion, to say, "Certainly this was a righteous man! Truly this man was the Son of God!"

In the last place, The glory of a suffering Saviour appears from the end he had in view in his sufferings, and which he so effectually obtained. This was none other than the glory of the great God, and the everlasting salvation of elect sinners. It was to do the will of his heavenly Father that he came into the world, and in doing this he delighted. Towards the close of his life he thus addresses his Father, John xvii. 4. "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He not only exhibited a fair and bright image of the divine glory in his personal character, while he dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, but in his work, as Mediator, illustrated all the perfections of God; and in particular, glorified his justice and magnified his mercy. If therefore a worthy end beautifies and ennobles any difficult undertaking, this excellent purpose must give dignity to a crucified Saviour.

But ought we not to add, the end so closely connected with this, the salvation of perishing sinners? Is not this a design, of the beauty of which we ought to be particularly sensible? Had not our compassionate Redeemer stepped in between us and the stroke of divine justice, we had for ever lain under the wrath of the Almighty. And, Oh, how unable had we been to bear that vengeance which was so heavy to him! How glorious does he appear to the convicted sinner in his red apparel! and what reason has he to say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!"

I shall now conclude this head, with observing, that I have all along considered Christ as God and man in one person, our Mediator. I am sensible, however, he could only suffer in his human nature, and indeed became man that he might be capable of suffering. But it was the inconceivable union of the human nature with the divine, from which he derived his glory, which gave him strength for suffering, and made his sufferings of value sufficient for the purchase of our redemption.

I come now in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And, *1st*, We are here called to admire and adore the unfathomable wisdom, and unspeakable love of God. There is a boundless depth in all the works and ways of God, and particularly here. Upon a slight view, we may be apt to take offence at the cross; to hide our faces from him; to be disgusted at an incarnate God, the Lord of glory, despised and trampled on by a proud Pharisee; the Creator of the

ends of the earth standing at the judgment-seat of a weak mortal; and the Author of life giving up the ghost. But, upon a nearer inspection, must we not admire the harmony of the divine attributes in our redemption upon this plan? that these perfections, which seem to limit each other in their exercise, should be, in conjunction, more illustriously displayed: that God's infinite holiness and abhorrence of sin, nay, his impartial justice, should be more displayed in the pardon than the condemnation of the sinner: that so signal a defeat should be given to the enemy of souls, even when he seemed exulting in the success of his designs: that our Lord, by death, should destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and by being lifted up from the earth, as unworthy of a place on it, he should draw all men unto him, joining thus the extremities of glory and baseness, power and humiliation, and travelling in the greatness of his strength. This, without doubt, shall afford subject for the adoring enquiry of glorified saints to eternal ages; and we ought to begin it here, saying with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxii. 17. "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed!"

2dly, Suffer me to improve the subject, by shewing the guilt and danger of all who are not reconciled to God, especially those, who, by continuing in unbelief and impenitence, shall die in that condition. There is nothing we can more justly infer from what hath been said, than the holiness of God, and his detestation of sin. Such is the hardness of heart of many sinners, and such their partiality to

themselves, that it is a matter of the utmost difficulty to convince them either of their guilt or danger. But, if you have any belief in the truths of the gospel, if you believe the certainty of that transaction which we are this day to commemorate, with what fear and trembling ought you to reflect upon the justice of God? If he punished sin so severely in the person of his own Son, how shall he punish it in the persons of the finally impenitent? If a temporary suffering of the wrath of God was so terrible to him, who travelled through it in the greatness of his strength, what shall it be to those who shall lie under it to eternity, without the least ray of hope or consolation? what shall it be to those who shall have nothing to support them in their unchangeable abode, but an accusing conscience, and despair of mercy?

I cannot help observing, hear it, O sinners, and tremble! that a despised gospel shall be an aggravation of the guilt, and an addition to the misery of all to whom it was offered, Heb. ii. 2. "For, if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"—Heb. x. 28, 29. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" The severity of the punishment of sinners rejecting the gospel shall bear a just

proportion to the love and mercy of God manifested in that dispensation. If these are justly called unspeakably great, the other must be inconceivably dreadful. Every drop of that blood, which was spilt in behalf of sinners, shall be as oil to the flames, that consume the impenitent, and make them burn with greater fierceness, to all the ages of eternity. Remember, I beseech you, that our Saviour shall continue in the character of administrator of the covenant of grace, till the final doom of sinners be ordained. The same person, whose soul was made an offering for sin, and who groaned on Calvary, shall one day come in his own and in his Father's glory, attended with his angels, as the ministers of his justice; then "every eye shall see him, and those also that pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Then how shall his enemies stand before him, when those who came to apprehend him fell to the ground at his word, even in his humiliation? Those who obstinately refuse to be the trophies of his grace shall then be the monuments of his vengeance. It is very remarkable, that as the nation of the Jews were a people uncommonly favoured of God, particularly by the enjoyment of the personal ministry of Christ, and hearing the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth; so when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities by rejecting him, the judgment that fell upon them was the most signal, and terrible, and lasting, that ever was inflicted on any people. In this they were an example of the fate of a whole world of sinners; and, indeed, the destruction of Jerusalem is described in such terms as do naturally suggest to us

the final judgment of the world, and teach us what to expect, “ when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Now the Saviour is in the posture of an humble supplicant, standing at the door of many hard hearts, and knocking and asking admission. Now does he earnestly beseech you, by his mercies, to be reconciled to God ; but then shall he put on the frowns and terrors of a judge ; and how shall they be able to lift up their eyes towards him, who now trample upon his love ? See a representation of this matter, Rev. vi. 14, 15, 16, 17. “ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together : and every mountain and island were moved out of their places : and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond man, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains ; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb ; for the great day of his wrath is come ; and who shall be able to stand ?” It is remarkable, that the wrath here spoken of, is called *the wrath of the Lamb*. Strange expression indeed ! but strongly signifying, that his present meekness, and patience, and suffering, shall inflame and exasperate his future vengeance. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, I would beseech every sinner in this assembly, to consider the things that belong to his peace, that the same strength

and power of our Redeemer, that was evident in his suffering in our stead, that is evident in working out the salvation of his own people, shall also be evident in the judgment of his enemies. Pſal. ii. 11, 12. “ Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiſs the Son, leſt he be angry, and ye periſh from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: Bleſſed are all they that put their truſt in him.”

In the 3^d place, I would improve this ſubject for the encouragement of ſinners to return to God through Chriſt. It was for this very end that God laid help upon One that is mighty, and raiſed up a choſen One out of the folk. Is there, then, among you, an awakened ſinner, who trembles at the proſpect of divine wrath, upon whoſe heart God, in his mercy, has carried home a conviction of his loſt ſtate, and who is crying out, *What ſhall I do to be ſaved?* Behold, here, the peace-ſpeaking blood of the Lamb of God! Behold, here, not only your ranſom paid, and juſtice fully ſatiſfied, but a powerful, an almighty Saviour, able to ſave to the uttermoſt, all that come unto God by him! He has gone through his work, in the greatneſs of his ſtrength: He hath foiled your ſpiritual enemies, and made a ſhew of them openly, triumphing over them in his croſs, My brethren, there is the greater need earneſtly to intreat your attention to this, that a ſlothful deſpondency, and diffidence of ſucceſs, is what keeps many ſinners from a hearty return to God. There is more of this in the hearts of many than they themſelves are aware of: I do not mean deſpair of mercy alone, but deſpair of reco-

very from a state of sin, of deliverance from the bondage of corruption, and attaining to the disposition and character of God's children. Are there not many of you, my brethren, who, though you, in some measure, see the excellence and happiness of a state of favour with God, and holy conformity to his will, yet finding how strongly you are wedded to the world, and its sinful enjoyments, and knowing, by experience, the unsuccessfulness of former resolutions taken on in your own strength, you have no hope of success, and so, in a fullen obstinacy, refuse to attempt what you think you cannot accomplish? Do you not see, from what hath been said, both your former error, and what is now the proper cure? You can do nothing of yourselves; but through Christ strengthening you, you may do all things. He is an almighty Saviour: He is stronger than the strong man who detains you in bondage: he is able to knock off the strongest fetters, and let the prisoners go free. Wherefore I beseech you, my dear friends, as you value your everlasting interest, that you do not sit still and perish, but arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with you.

In the *4th* place, The same instruction, with little difference, may be given to the people of God. As self-righteousness, and self-confidence, are the ruling characters of the unregenerate; so they are diseases never entirely cured in this world even in the best, and lamentably prevalent in many of God's own children. As their work is to obtain a victory over their corruptions, and grow in the exercise of every Christian grace, they often attempt both these too much in their own strength. As the natu-

ral and unavoidable consequence of this, they meet with frequent disappointments; these make them ready to sit down in slothful carelessness, and decline the struggle to which they find themselves unequal, nay, too often not without secret murmurings and complaints against God, as a hard master, requiring bricks, and giving no straw; instead of concluding, from their unsuccessfulness, that they must have taken their measures wrong, they conclude the attempt itself to be vain, and the work impracticable. But, my brethren, here is a truth, which not only the word of God every where teaches, but which almost every part of his providence towards us is intended to ratify, *that in us dwelleth no good thing*; that we can hardly have too low an opinion of our own worth, or our own strength; but at the same time, that God is able and willing to perfect strength in our weakness. He is able to uphold the weakest self-denied Christian in the midst of the most dangerous temptations, though he often suffers the self-sufficient to fall before his enemies. Wherefore, my dear friends, believe in the Almighty power of your Redeemer; and I hope you will know to your experience, that "he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength."

In the 5th place, Suffer me to improve this subject for the comfort and refreshment of every disconsolate and mourning soul. As weary and heavy laden sinners are the persons to whom the call of the gospel is addressed, so surely it also speaks peace to weary and heavy laden faints. This world was plainly designed as a place of trial and discipline, and not of

complete rest to the children of God. It often pleases him in his sovereign and holy providence, not only to afflict them with outward trials, but to hide his face from them, and visit them with distress of soul. May not all such see, from what has been said, that they are but conformed to their Redeemer; that they are but treading in the path which he hath sanctified? and is it not “enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and for the servant that he be as his Lord?” It would be a great point gained, if we could but be convinced, that afflictions are what we must look for, and so not hastily and rashly conclude, that he is “rebuking us in his wrath, and chastening us in his hot displeasure.” Is it not comfortable, and is it not true, that Christ hath taken away the sting of death, and of every suffering from his people, and left nothing but that correction which is healthful and necessary? Above all, ought you not to look to the power of your Redeemer, and his almighty strength, as sufficient to support you now, and at last work your complete deliverance? Banish every thought that tends to represent your case either as singular, to abate your sense of the divine goodness, or as desperate, to weaken your hands in seeking relief; and make your request to God, “with strong crying and tears, that he, as the God of hope, would fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

6th, I shall now conclude all with an earnest invitation to all intending communicants, to come to the table of the Lord, and by faith to feed upon the rich entertainment that is there provided for

them. See here the price of your redemption; the evidence and security of your pardon; the seal of God's love to you; and the certain pledge of every necessary blessing. "It pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell, and of his fulness you may all receive, and grace for grace." His body broken is the bread of life, that must nourish your souls to their everlasting state, his blood shed is a never failing cordial to a broken spirit, and a most excellent refreshment to the soul that pants in a parched wilderness. May the Lord himself meet with us and bless us, visit us with his gracious presence, and make us joyful in his house of prayer. Amen.

S E R M O N I V .

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

HEBREWS iii. 13.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

WE see many mysterious things in the frame of nature, and the course of providence. But nothing can be more mysterious and wonderful than what we may often see in the state of our own hearts. When there is no present solliciting temptation, and when we consider, in a cool and deliberate manner, the consequences of vice and wickedness, even barely from the dictates of natural conscience, it seems surprizing, that in any instance, we should yield to it; that we should be induced to break the peace of our own minds, and provoke the vengeance of an almighty Judge; nay, to do so for a trifling, momentary, and uncertain satisfaction. But if it be unreasonable to offend God at all, and to take but a few steps in the paths of sin, how much more above measure astonishing is it, that men should adhere to their former mistakes, and should not open their eyes

after repeated admonitions of their danger, and daily experience of their own folly!

I believe every body will be sensible, that many sinners, even setting aside the consideration of some of the most important religious truths, act in a manner so directly opposite to their own present interest as is not to be accounted for, without supposing them under an amazing degree of blindness and infatuation. This is to be resolved into *the deceitfulness of sin*, a circumstance on this great subject well worthy of our most serious attention.

In entering on the deceitfulness of sin, let us reflect a little on the meaning of the expression. Who is it that is deceived? It is the sinner himself. Does he need to be deceived? Is there not in us all a strong enough direct inclination to that which is evil, ready to burst asunder every restraining tie? There is so; and yet there is more in our danger than merely a propensity to sin. There is also a deceit and imposition which over-reaches us, and ensnares us into the commission of what, but for that mistake, we would have avoided or abhorred. There is very frequent mention made of this in scripture; many cautions against being deceived; and indeed all sin is represented as error and delusion, in which—a deceived heart hath turned us aside.

Again, If the sinner is deceived, who is it, or what is it that deceives him? Here we must observe, that when we speak of sin's being deceitful, it is not so much any thing without us, taking the advantage of our weakness, but it is the effect and evidence of the strength of corruption within us, which makes us see things in a wrong light, and draw unjust and

pernicious consequences from them. Let us always remember, that the whole frame of nature, although it be the scene of temptation, and even the fuel of concupiscence, is faultless in itself; nay, it presents us every where with lessons of piety and obedience to its Author. The mistake here arises wholly from ourselves. There is a remarkable difference between the deceitfulness of sin and deceit of any other kind; in worldly transactions, the person deceived is never supposed unfaithful to himself, but is imposed on by the superior art and cunning of the deceiver. But it is otherwise in spiritual matters, where the deceitfulness of sin is but another form of speech for the corruption and treachery of our own hearts. It is true, in some instances of delusion, there is an activity of outward agents, if I may speak so, the devil and wicked men, who use no little industry to seduce others, and lie in wait to deceive; but this, if I mistake not, does not belong properly to the deceitfulness of sin, which lies in the disposition of our own hearts, and is what lays us open to their snares.

I shall only further observe, by way of introduction, that this subject is equally applicable to good men and bad. Both ought to dread, and both ought to be warned of the deceitfulness of sin; it betrays good men into distress, as well as bad men into ruin. In further discoursing on this subject, I shall,

I. Endeavour to open a little the chief branches of *the deceitfulness of sin*.

II. Consider the duty founded upon it, of *exhorting one another daily*.

III. Make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. then, I shall endeavour to open a little the chief branches of the deceitfulness of sin: And I think the deceitfulness of sin may be divided into these three general branches. 1. Its disguising itself, and wholly concealing its nature. 2. Its forming excuses for itself, and thereby extenuating its guilt. 3. Its insinuating itself by degrees, and leading men on from the voluntary commission of some sins to the necessity of committing more.

1. then, The deceitfulness of sin appears from its disguising itself, and wholly concealing its nature. Though the great lines of the law of God are written upon the conscience in so strong and legible characters, that it is difficult wholly to efface them; yet it is plain that men have often brought this about to a surprising degree. The Psalmist David, sensible how often sin is concealed from our own view, exclaims, Psal. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." What ingenious reasonings do men often use with their own minds to prove the lawfulness of what inclination leads them to, either with respect to profit or pleasure! When the heart pleads the cause, the understanding is a very favourable judge. Every one may find a great number of examples of this in his own experience, and may daily see the unhappy effects of it in others.

For the better illustrating of this truth, that sin is often wholly concealed even from the man in whom it dwells, be pleased to attend to the following ob-

servations : (1.) Sometimes it shews itself in the prevalence of loose principles. I am sorry to say, that we live in an age in which infidelity, of the grossest kind, is spreading its poison among all ranks and degrees of men. But why is it so readily entertained? Because it either sets men at liberty from the ties of conscience, and a future reckoning altogether; or greatly narrows the extent, and weakens the obligations of the law of God. How sweet and palatable to the corrupt mind is every thing that removes restraints, and suffers the sinner to walk in the ways of his own heart, and the sight of his own eyes! It is not reason, but inclination, that makes profelytes to these destructive doctrines. The truth is, would you reason impartially, you would conclude, that the principles must be false, which tend to set men at ease in their crimes. When therefore the arguments in their favour are so easily admitted, we have just ground to affirm, that it is owing to the deceitfulness of sin.

2. If we proceed from principles to practice, and from generals to particulars, we shall find how sin disguises itself, and hides its deformity from our view. It never appears in its own proper and genuine dress, nor loves to be called by its proper name. Thus excess and intemperance is called, and unhappily thought by many, a social disposition, and good fellowship. Pride and unchristian resentment is called honour, spirit, and dignity of mind. Vain pomp, luxury, and extravagance, are styled taste, elegance, and refinement. Sordid avarice and love of money, calls itself prudence, frugality, and good management. Levity, folly, and even obscenity, is often called innocent liberty, chearfulness, and good hu-

mour. So great is the deceit, and so secure does the sin lie under its disguise, that a minister may preach with the utmost severity against these several vices, and the guilty persons hear with patience or approbation, and never once think of applying it to themselves.

This deceit discovers itself also by its counterpart. How common is it to stigmatize and disparage true piety and goodness by the most opprobrious titles. Tenderness of conscience, is by many reproached under the character of preciseness and narrowness of mind. Zeal against sin, and fidelity to the souls of others, is called sourness, moroseness and ill-nature. There was never yet a faithful reprovener from Lot, in Sodom to the present day, but he suffered under the reproach and slander of those who would not be reclaimed. I might easily run over many more instances in both these kinds; for, to say the truth, the whole strain of fashionable conversation is often nothing else but an illusion put upon the mind, that it may lose its horror of vice; and it is greatly to be lamented, that this is done with so much success. In many cases, young persons especially are inspired with a hatred and aversion at true and undefiled religion, and that under the most plausible pretences. Many, my brethren, there are who are far from thinking it themselves, and yet fall under the denunciation of the prophet Isaiah, v. 20,—24. “Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Wo unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Wo unto them that are

mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink : which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

3. But the highest degree of this branch of the deceitfulness of sin, is, when it not only puts on a decent and lawful appearance, but assumes the garb of eminent piety and worth. There is nothing impossible in this. As Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, so some of the greatest sins will take the name, and arrogate the honour of the most distinguished virtues. I do not here mean the case of gross hypocrisy; that is foreign from the present subject. Hypocrites know their own insincerity well enough, and only put on an appearance of piety to deceive others. But even when there is no known or deliberate hypocrisy, sin may insinuate itself under the appearance of the most important duties. Men may indulge the most hateful passions with the greater liberty, when they think they are doing what is acceptable to God.

The cross of our blessed Master is full fraught with instruction of every kind. It gives us particularly, a striking example of what I have now said. His enemies, who persecuted him with unrelenting malice through his life, and at last prevailed to have him hanged on a tree, did it, (some no doubt from a pretended, but) many of them, from a misguided

zeal for religion. He was crucified as a deceiver, and a blasphemer; and that in this they were misled, appears from the language of his prayer for them on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." What a conviction should this give us of the deceitfulness of sin, that the greatest sin that ever was committed on earth, was yet considered by the guilty as a duty!

Let us also consider our Saviour's remarkable prediction on the same subject, and how often it hath been fulfilled: John. xvi. 2. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service." My brethren, think a little on the many dreadful persecutions which good men have endured for conscience sake; the terrible tortures they have been exposed to, in which the utmost invention of the human mind has been employed to aggravate their distress. Think in particular, of the horrible tribunal of Inquisition, which is to this day in full authority in countries not very distant; and does it not inspire you with the highest detestation of the bloody tyrants? But there is another reflection not so frequently made, yet at least equally proper. How great is the deceitfulness of sin in the human heart, that can make men suppose that such atrocious crimes are acceptable to God? Yet they certainly do so. Neither would it be possible for them so entirely to divest themselves of every sentiment of humanity, if they were not inflamed by the rage of bigotry and false zeal. Let not any imagine, that these are dreadful crimes, but which they are not in the least danger of. We ought to maintain the greatest watch-

fulness and jealousy over our own spirits. It may very easily, and does very frequently happen, that an apparent zeal for religion is more than half composed of pride, malice, envy or revenge.

Nor is this all. In the above cases, by the treachery of the human heart, sins are changed into duties, and, in many others, every day, duties are changed into sins, by the perversion of the principle from which they ought to flow. Many a sober temperate person oweth his regularity more to a lust of gold, than to any sense of duty, and obedience to God. The desire of praise, or the fear of reproach, is many times a restraint more powerful than the apprehension of eternal judgment. Men may put one duty also in the place of another, and by that means convert it into sin. Nay, with regard to all our duties, we may be tempted to place that trust and dependence on them which is only due to our Redeemer's perfect righteousness; and, instead of acts of obedience, make them idols of jealousy before God.

How great then the deceitfulness of sin, which is capable of putting on so many and so artful disguises, and even to counterfeit true piety, which stands in the most immediate and direct opposition to it! There are more ways than I can possibly enumerate, by which men deceive themselves, and become obstinate and incorrigible in what is evil, by mistaking it for what is good. Justly does the Apostle in this passage warn Christians against being hardened; for if sin can hardly be restrained, even by the most constant vigilance, and the most steady resistance, what progress will it not make,

what strength must it not acquire, when it is approved and cherished, nay, when it is profecuted with all that care and attention which ought to have been employed for its utter destruction?

2. In the second place, The deceitfulness of sin appears from its forming excuses for itself, and thereby extenuating its guilt. That it is natural for sinners to form excuses for themselves, and endeavour to extenuate their guilt, daily experience is a sufficient proof. Nay, it is usual to observe, how able and ingenious persons, otherwise of no great capacity, are in this art; even children discover the greatest quickness and facility in it, and are no sooner challenged for any thing that is amiss, than they are ready to produce an apology. The disposition, indeed, seems to be hereditary, and to have been handed down to us from the first parents of the human race. On their being challenged for their disobedience, each of them confesses the fact, but immediately adds an excuse, Gen. iii. 11, 12, 13. "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldst not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." You will easily be sensible, that it is impossible for me to enumerate the several excuses, or distinct alleviating circumstances, that may be pleaded in favour of particular sins, because these are infinitely various. I intend, therefore, only to mention some of the chief considerations that are offered by pretended

reasoners, or have a secret influence upon the mind of the sinner; and which lessen the impression of the evil of sin in general.

(1.) One excuse, which, however weak, has no small influence in setting men's minds at ease in the commission of sin, is no other than the commonness of it; and that there are multitudes of others in the like condition. It is wonderful to think what boldness sinners often derive from this circumstance, and how hard it is to persuade them of the danger of what is common and generally practised. Even good men are often carried away with prevailing and epidemical sins. We may take the illustration of this from any particular sin. How ready are men to think, and even to speak, in the following manner: If this be a sin, I am sure I am not singular in it; there are many others guilty as well as I. They seem to look upon the practice of others, as a sort of support and justification of their own conduct.

But, my brethren, I beseech you to consider how delusive and dangerous these thoughts are to your immortal souls. If any credit is to be given to the scripture representation, the human race in general is under guilt; and, therefore, the commonness, nay, the universality of any practice, is not sufficient to give it a sanction, as lawful and safe. Will the law of an unchangeable God be altered or abated in favour of his apostate creatures, because of their number? Is there such a number of offenders, as to be able to make head against their almighty Creator? Sometimes, indeed, the transgressors of human laws are so numerous, as to be formidable to their very judges; but no such thing can take place here. Or

will it, in truth, be any consolation to the sufferers in hell, that they have society in their torment? Were a great number of malefactors to be executed together, would this alleviate the punishment to any one of them? I apprehend it would rather increase it, since they would, in a good measure, feel each others sufferings; as it certainly would add greater horror to the sight. Wherefore, my dear brethren, I beseech every one of you to consider the necessity of reconciliation and peace with God, and that it is not less important and necessary to you, for the multitudes you see around you so fast asleep in security and sloth.

(2.) Another excuse that men often make for their sins, is, that they are comparatively small. When they see, think, or hear of the monstrous and atrocious crimes of others, they are ready to bless themselves in their security, and to reckon upon their less degree of guilt, as a species of innocence. Believe it, my brethren, I have found with concern, persons in a dangerous sickness, or the prospect of death, taking comfort to themselves, and mentioning, with much satisfaction, that they were not so bad as some others; that they had never committed this or the other heinous crime; that they had never done as this or the other desperate profligate had done, with whom they were acquainted. To all such we may justly apply the words of the apostle, 2 Cor. x. 12, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves, are not wise."

There is a wonderful propensity in the proud spi-

rit of man, to gratify itself by comparison with others. Comparison, indeed, is the very fuel of pride; for of what are we proud, but of something in which it is supposed we excel. Is there any thing more common in conversation, when any instance of the sin or folly of others is narrated, than for the hearers, every one, to take the benefit of it to himself, and to say, I am sure I should never have done so and so, had I been in his case. Scarce any man finds fault with another for his conduct in his station, without blazoning and displaying his own real or imagined excellence. I do not say, that good men are wholly free from this fault; yet, as the principles of sin and grace are directly opposite, in general the same views that make a bad man proud, tend to make a good man humble. The gross sins of others, which incline careless persons to glory, that they are free from the charge, often tend to discover to the Christian the sinfulness of his nature, which is capable of such impiety. They fill him with humble adoration and thankfulness to that gracious God, who only maketh him to differ. He knows, that had he been left to himself, he might have exceeded the most abandoned profligate within the compass of his knowledge.

Let me therefore, my brethren, caution you and myself against all excuses drawn from comparison in any form. For, not to mention how ready we are to mistake and be partial to ourselves in making the comparison; not to mention that though we were ever so impartial, as the hearts of others are not open to us, nor the motives of their conduct, we cannot make it with certainty; I only insist, that all

comparifons, whether they be juft or unjuft, are unfpeakably pernicious. It is not your being better or worfe than others, that will juftify you before God, or be the matter of inquiry at the laft day. You will not then be asked, whether you were as profane a blafphemer as fuch a perfon; as great a liar as another; as great a drunkard as another; as great a whoremonger as another. No. You muft be weighed in the balance of the fanctuary, and all that are there found wanting, fhall be caft into the lake of fire. You may leave it to a wife and righteous God to proportion the feverity of his judgment to the atrociousnefs of the finner's guilt. But "except a man be born again, he cannot fee the kingdom of God." A man may be drowned in five fathom water, as well as in five thoufand; and therefore, let none foolifhly flatter themfelves with the hope of fecurity, even though they really fee many (to fpeak in the language of fcripture) "tenfold more the children of hell than themfelves."

(3.) Sinners are apt to look for another fource of excufes for their fins in themfelves. They are ftrongly inclined to make a merit of any actions they have done that are materially good, and think that fome indulgence is due to their faults and mifcarriages on that account. They fet their good works and their faults, as it were, in oppofite columns, as if they intended, in that manner, to ftrike the balance. There is very much of this difpofition in the natural unenlightened mind. We find many fentiments fimilar to this in the heathen world. "Every man, fays a certain author, has fome virtues, and fome faults; he that hath more virtues than faults, is a good man;

and he that hath more faults than virtues, is a bad man." I am sensible there might be some justice in such a comparison, after a person has really been brought to the service of God upon genuine principles. It might then serve to shew whether God or the world hath most of our prevailing love, and our habitual service. But this rule is highly pernicious, when an ignorant or vitious man endeavours to apply it: for first of all, these very actions which they suppose to be good, not flowing from a real principle of obedience to God, are falsely reckoned virtues in them. O that self-righteous persons would but faithfully examine the motives from which many of their boasted virtues flow! The more they knew of themselves, and their own real character, the less would they be inclined to glory in its excellence and perfection. It is certain, that even in the world, the more a man presumes to commend himself, the less others are disposed to esteem him; and is it not strange, that the self-justification, which is insufferable to our fellow-creatures, should be the foundation of our hope before a holy and heart-searching God?

But, besides, I beseech your attention to the following circumstance: even the false supposition just now mentioned, proceeds upon an absolute mistake of the nature of moral obligation. There is no proper merit in the obedience of a creature, neither hath it, in the least degree, any title or tendency to extinguish the guilt of crimes. If esteem, love, and obedience, all in the highest degree, be truly and properly due unto God, no reward can be pleaded for on account of the performance, much less can it

have the effect of procuring pardon where duty hath been neglected. Let me beg of you to reflect upon a matter of experience, which is but seldom attended to. Does the general goodness of a man's character incline even the world to indulge him in more bad actions than another? It does just the contrary. A man, who hath been eminent in piety during a long course of years, if he goes astray in any one instance, will be more deeply reproached, and his character will suffer more by it, I may even say, it will suffer an hundred-fold more for the same action, than the character of another whose conduct has been more imperfect and unequal.

I look upon it as the duty of a minister to bend his whole force against a disposition to self-righteousness. And, indeed, whether we take it from scripture or reason, we shall see that the hope of a sinner must arise not from extenuation, but confession; not from human merit, but from the divine mercy. This is so plain, that had men but any real and just convictions of their obligations and duty to God; such a plea would never come into their minds. Suppose any person were challenged for a debt which he was really owing, and he should answer in this manner, It is very true, I have not paid this; but I paid a debt to you at such a time, and another at such a time, and a third at such a time; would it not be natural for the other to reply, True indeed; but were not all these debts separately due? will your paying one discharge you from another? is not this as much due now as any of the rest were before? If therefore you will give the same justice to your Maker you expect from another, you must confess that a

whole life of perfect and spotless obedience would do just nothing at all to extinguish the guilt of the least sin. Be not therefore so foolish as to rest your hope on that self-righteousness, which, in truth, is no better than filthy rags, and however excellent and perfect it were, could have no effect in procuring the forgiveness of sin.

(4.) There are some to be found, who endeavour to excuse their actual transgressions, as being no more than the necessary effects of original sin. This we find frequently done by those who are no friends to religion in general, and, perhaps, believe as little of the reality of original as the guilt of actual sin. In such, therefore, it is no more than a pretence, that they may rid themselves of the apprehension of both. But there are also some who do not seem to be enemies in principle to the truths of the gospel, who yet are very ready to excuse themselves for particular sins by laying the blame upon their nature in general. It is my nature, they will say; I have so strong a disposition to it, that I cannot help it. Thus they seem to sit quite easy under the dominion of sin, and, by giving up all hope of overcoming it, are led to forbear all endeavours to resist it.

On this I cannot help observing, again, how opposite the principles of sin and holiness are. The sin of our nature, which, in true penitents, is matter of humiliation and sorrow, is often produced by others, as an extenuation of their crimes. See how the Psalmist David expresseth himself, Psal. li. 5. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." These words were not

spoken by way of alleviation, but confession and aggravation. In the same spirit does the apostle Paul speak in a great part of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, particularly verses 14—24. “For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would that do I not; but what I hate that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law, that it is good. Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me: for I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

That there is something mysterious in the first occasion and conveyance of original sin, on which captious persons may raise cavils, to perplex themselves and others, I readily allow. But after all they can say, it is certain, both from scripture and experience, that all actual sin is not only personal but voluntary. Is there any person, who will dare to maintain, in the face of his supreme Judge, that he is laid under compulsion, or an irresistible necessity, to think, speak,

or do what is wrong? Does any man commit sin, but from his own choice? Or is he hindered from the performance of any duty to which he is sincerely and heartily inclined? If this were indeed the case, it would not be true, what we are told in the sacred oracles, that God will be "just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth."

I must also observe, that upon the plan of the gospel, the force of this excuse is entirely taken away; because the renovation of our natures is there ascribed to the power and energy of divine grace. Though we are not able to reform our natures, God is able to renew them. Though we cannot resist corruption, God is able to subdue it. Our weak and helpless state by nature, is so far from being a proper excuse for sin, that a just and humbling sense of it is the very first step towards a recovery. "Of ourselves we are not able to do any good thing, but through Christ strengthening us we may do all things." We are exhorted to pray for the influences of the Spirit, in the sure hope of acceptance: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." So that, on the prevailing of sin, we have just reason to take the whole blame upon ourselves, and to say, "We are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels."

(5.) In the last place, Some are bold enough to excuse their sins, as being only the effects of the irresistible will of God, who hath decreed whatsoever comes to pass; some in a more artful and covered way, and some more openly and explicitly, make use of God's absolute predetermination of every event,

as taking away the guilt of their voluntary actions. This hath been a very old excuse. It was the spirit of that language you find, Ezek. xxxiii. 10. "Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" The same thing is mentioned by the apostle Paul, Rom. ix. 19. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" This infamous and blasphemous excuse is not only often made for particular sins, but is made a pillow of sloth in general, and sinners lay themselves asleep upon it in security, saying, if it be the will of God they should be saved, the event is infallible, let them take ever so desperate a course; and, if otherwise, it is impossible for them to oppose his irresistible decree.

In order to oppose this profane perversion of divine truth, let me put you in mind, what sin and folly it must be in us, to set the nature of God at variance with his revealed will, or one declaration of his in opposition to another. It is from the scriptures alone that you learn God's supreme dominion and appointment of every event. And is it not certain, that the same scriptures do lay the guilt or sinfulness of every action to the sinner's charge? Does not God absolutely refuse, nay, in infinite condescension, he solemnly protests against having it imputed to himself. Let the guilty hear and tremble, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "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?" And, again, James i. 13. "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." Perhaps, some will say, we cannot reconcile the certainty of events with the freedom of actions, or the imputation of guilt. But what is this, but saying, we are not able to fathom or comprehend the perfections of an infinite God? And is this any cause of wonder? It would not be the true God, if you could search him out; it would not be the Almighty, if you could find him to perfection. "It is higher than heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

Surely, my brethren, it is manifest, that the same God, to whom all his works are known from the beginning of the world, and who rules by his power for ever, hath established a necessary connection between the means and the end, between cause and effect. And, as it would be altogether madness in common life, to sit still and forbear activity and diligence, under pretence of its being impossible to hinder or alter the will of God; so it is equally mad and impious, to lay the blame of our sinful hearts and inclinations on the appointment of God. He can and doth control and over-rule, by his sovereign providence, all his creatures and all their actions, in a subserviency to his own glory; but, as to the sinfulness of every deed, the sinner alone is chargeable with it, and in the day of judgment, the sinner alone must answer for it.

Before I proceed to the third branch of the de-

ceitfulness of sin, I must beg your attention to a few observations on what hath been already said. And,

1st, You may observe how various and involved, and how deep-laid, the excuses for sin are. The ways of the world, the general prevalence of sin, and many of those very circumstances which ought to make us dread its influence, and fill us with abhorrence of it, are frequently made use of to extenuate its guilt. The corrupt inclination of our hearts, which is the source of all sin, and may be said to be the essence of sin, is often made use of to excuse or palliate its effects, as the badness of the tree for the sourness of the grapes. How ill qualified are we to judge fairly on such a subject? We are partial in our own cause, and give an unjust decision from our relation to the pannel. Down then with the reasonings of the carnal mind. Suspect them, dread them, shut your ears against them. What reason is there to sit down in silence, and humbly acquiesce in the account given us of our character and state by a God of infinite holiness? There is no error to blind his judgment, no interest to bias his inclination, and there is no equal who may contend or enter into judgment with him.

2^{dly}, You may see that the excuses for sin, are not only insufficient, but deeply criminal. In the form they assume, they may appear plausible; but, when they are stripped of their disguise, they will appear to be horrible. The immediate pretence may appear to have nothing very atrocious in it; but when they are traced to their source, they will be found to take their rise from the most malignant infidelity or atheism in the heart. You see, from what

has been said, that many excuses for sin, at last land in laying the blame upon God himself. All the encouragement we take in sin from the divine patience, all our abuse or perversion of the gifts of nature, or the course of providence, lands ultimately here. Let us therefore pray, that it may please God to open our eyes on the wonders of his law, on the riches of his grace, and the greatness of his power. Let us confess, that “to us belongeth shame and confusion of face; but to our God belongeth mercy.” Let us adopt the words of the Psalmist, Psalm xix. 12. “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

3. I proceed now to the third and last branch of the deceitfulness of sin, viz. Its insinuating nature, by which it leads men on in an insensible manner, from one degree of wickedness to a higher, and after the voluntary commission of some sins, lays them under a sort of necessity of committing more. I think it is probable that the Apostle had this particularly in his view in the text, where he says, *Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* And certain it is, my brethren, that wicked men do not see the whole course they are to run at one view, but are drawn in by little and little. Take the most abandoned sinner in this guilty world, and there was a time of his life when he would have trembled to think of the crimes which he afterwards committed. Thus Hazael, king of Syria, when he was told by the prophet Elisha, of the unnatural barbarity and cruelty he would be guilty of among the children of Israel, he could not believe so ill of himself, but

answered with a kind of abhorrence, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" But such is the nature of sin, that it carries men away, if they yield to it, infinitely farther than they themselves intended. We find this taken notice of by moral writers in every age and country. Many of the ancients used to represent it by a very expressive similitude, viz. that the way of vice lies down hill; so that if you take but a few steps, the motion is soon accelerated, and becomes so violent and impetuous, that it is impossible for you to resist it.

This is certainly a circumstance, with respect to the nature of sin, which lies at the foundation of practical religion, and to which I would particularly intreat the attention of the younger part of my audience. Neither is it unsuitable to persons of any character, as it will contribute to enforce upon their minds, a sense of the necessity of constant vigilance and of constant prayer. In order to represent the matter to you in the stronger light, I shall endeavour to lay before you some of the chief steps and gradations by which a sinner is brought into a hardened state; and show how naturally, and in a manner necessarily, they lead him forward from one to another.

(1.) Men enter and initiate themselves in a vicious practice by smaller sins. Though every sin hath that malignity in it that it deserves God's wrath and curse both in this life and that which is to come; yet there are some sins, which, in themselves, as well as from several circumstances which attend them, are far more heinous in the sight of God than others. These are too alarming to the conscience of a young

finner; and, therefore, he only ventures upon such as are smaller at first. I hope you will not think it too minute or trifling, if I mention that every particular kind of vice creeps in this gradual manner. Many have begun to steal, with taking away things without their parents knowledge, from their own house, thinking there could be little fault in this; and then picked up small things, perhaps from people of better rank, saying to themselves, they will never be the worse of it, they can easily spare it; but time has perfected them in their trade, till they ended their days upon a scaffold. Some have begun with little arts of equivocation, and concealing the truth, who, in time came to boldness and obstinacy in gross falsehood. And many have begun with levity of carriage, and vanity of dress, who have ended in lust, whoredom, and open prostitution. My brethren, though we are all born in sin, and powerfully inclined to that which is evil, from our first entrance into the world; yet we have also a witness for God in our own consciences. There seems to be some reluctance in the first commission of sin, some sorrow and regret for departing innocence. It is a saying of one of the heathens, "No man becomes all of a sudden very wicked;" or, if I may use the expression, is made perfect in sin. It usually takes some time, and is carried on by progress and improvement, though some, alas! make wonderful proficiency in it, and advance at a very great pace. These lesser sins, then, are the introduction and preparation for what afterwards shall follow; they begin the attack upon conscience, which, at last, ends in a total overthrow and defeat.

(2.) Let us now follow the sinner to the next stage of his unhappy course. Having once begun in the ways of sin, he ventures upon something greater and more daring; his courage grows with his experience; and he gives himself more liberty to walk in the ways of his own heart, and the sight of his own eyes. Now sins of a deeper dye do not look so frightful as before. The reason of this is plain, or rather there are many reasons which concur in producing this effect. Custom makes every thing familiar, even to despising the authority of God, and counteracting the strongest obligations. Sinners, after some apprenticeship to this infamous trade, commit such sins as lay waste the conscience, and offer the greatest violence to their own minds; these still lead forward to others, and to every new transgression, if I may speak so, they are driven by a stronger inclination, and withheld by a weaker resistance. No sin comes by itself alone, but stands in close connection with many others. Some sins teach us how to commit others, as well as afford an opportunity to do it. I have heard of a servant who went into an apartment with no other intention than to gratify appetite, by making free with some sweetmeats, but happening to see something very valuable lying open, which might be easily concealed, could not resist the temptation, but commenced thief, and came at last to a miserable end. Many sins also bring others after them, as excuses to cover them. So that no person who once breaks over the limits of clear and unquestionable duty, knows how far he may be carried before he returns back, or rather whether he may not be so

deeply involved, as never to return at all. This leads me to observe,

(3.) That open sins soon throw a man into the hands of ungodly companions. This effect is necessary, because they determine his character; and according to the old observation, those of like disposition, by a natural and powerful instinct, are led to associate together. No sooner do men begin to take liberties in their conduct, than they begin to shun the society of good men; the presence of such is a restraint upon them; their example is a reproof to them, and awakens any principle of conscience, which yet remains un subdued, to reproach and sting them; whereas, in society like themselves, they are greatly emboldened, by seeing vice practised, and by hearing it justified. Behold the sinner, then, with corrupt communication as well as corrupt inclination! The danger of this we are warned of by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 33. "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners." As united fires burn the fiercer and the stronger; so a sinful society improves and grows in impiety, and every member joins his brother's pollution to his own. It is not easy to say, how much profane companions are instrumental in reciprocally undoing one another. But surely if those, otherwise virtuous, are often in danger of being led away with the error of the wicked, much more must they who are themselves so disposed, and are every whit as ready to follow a bad advice or example, as others are to give it.

I cannot forbear adding upon this subject, that seriously disposed persons are as much afraid of the

society of loose persons, as they are impatient of theirs. This makes the separation still more complete. And even when they are occasionally joined, the fear of casting their pearls before swine, who may trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent them, often shuts their mouths. It prevents them from giving that salutary instruction, and useful admonition, which their heart might dictate, or the necessity of the case might require. I confess, my brethren, when I consider the unspeakable advantages for true piety, which arise from the relation, the company, or the friendship of eminent Christians, it fills me with the deepest concern for those unhappy persons, who, by their conduct, and circumstances, are necessarily deprived of every thing of this kind, nay, are daily exposed to all the contrary snares. I dare say, not a few in this assembly will bear witness, as I desire to do with inward gratitude to God, what infinite benefit arises from the society of the excellent ones of the earth; to have been instructed and trained up by pious parents in the fear of God; to have had your lot cast in a family which was a house of prayer; to have the faithful admonitions of a truly conscientious friend; and to have the daily edifying, restraining, comforting, animating example of an eminent Christian, as well as a share in his fervent prayers. Nay, I will say more, the very precious remembrance of such, after they have entered into rest, whether parents, children, friends, or neighbours, has the noblest and happiest effect in reproofing our sloth, and stirring us up to be "followers of them, who, through faith and patience, do now inherit the promises." How

miserable those who are wholly ignorant of every such privilege! How deceitful is sin, which daily administers the most deadly poison, and, at the very same time, closes up the way on every side, and debars the infected victim from every mean that might contribute to his cure!

(4.) In the next stage, the sinner begins to feel the force of habit and inveterate custom. The frequent repetition of acts of sin constitutes a habit. How powerful this is, and hard to be overcome, experience is a daily standing proof. We are warned of the danger of habitual wickedness in many passages of scripture, particularly Jer. xii. 5. "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if, in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Chap. xiii. 23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Nature itself, in this, as in many other instances, is full of spiritual instruction. Habits of any indifferent kind, when once established, can hardly be overcome even by the greatest effort of resolution: even any motion of the body, or any particular word or phrase in discourse, if once they have taken place by custom, are hardly ever laid down. But, it must be observed, that habits of sin are not only infinitely more hurtful than habits of a common kind, but they are also much more obstinate. They fall in with the bent and disposition of corrupt nature; and, therefore, are like a double cord, not easily broken.

Behold then the sinner rooted and settled in an evil way! Before, it might have been expected, that an awful dispensation of providence, or the convincing demonstration of the word of God, might have had an effect upon him; but now, though it is still possible, it becomes less and less probable. A tree, when it is newly planted, may be easily removed, or may be overturned by a blast of wind; but when once it has spread its roots in the ground and long kept its possession, the most violent tempest may bend its top a little, but cannot shake its firm foundations. So the sinner, that has long been habituated to wickedness, and confirmed by a long course of time, will stand even the storms of affliction, and if they do bend his haughty spirit, yet they will not break his stubborn heart. I do not mean to set bounds to the almighty power and sovereign grace of God. He no doubt may, and in some instances, has plucked the most advanced sinners as brands out of the fire. But these instances are few and uncommon, for some of the great ends of his government. It is not the ordinary way of his dealing with us: and he hath sufficiently warned us against trusting to it. He hath threatened to make the sinner feel the natural consequence of obstinacy, by ceasing to strive with him, and giving him up to the lusts of his own heart.

It is an awful, but an useful lesson which young persons may learn, from what they see in the world about them. Those who have been long habituated to idleness, what a hopeless thing is it to attempt to bring them to apply? Those who have been long habituated to drunkenness and intempe-

rance, or sensuality of any kind, we ought not to say they are inclined to it, but they are compelled to it by the irresistible calls of these appetites, which they are no longer able to control. All who observe them are so sensible of it, that they consider it as in vain to speak to them, and think they may just as well speak to the wind or the storm: nay, we may often perceive the poor unhappy wretches themselves sensible, in some measure, of their captivity, though unable to break the chains that bind them. Some drunkards have been known to be filled with the deepest vexation, and ready to tear their own flesh, on reflection of their beastly condition, and yet drawn, by an irresistible force, to the next temptation. Nothing can set in a clearer light the deceitfulness of sin, than comparing the strength of habits with the slow and silent manner in which they steal on. One single act of sin seems nothing; but one after another imperceptibly strengthens the disposition, and enslaves the unhappy criminal beyond hope of recovery.

(5.) The next stage in a sinner's course, is, to lose the sense of shame, and sin openly and boldly. Sin is, in itself, a dishonourable thing, which hath in many instances, the testimony of mankind against it, though their practice be on its side. Hence comes the veil and covering of hypocrisy. Most part of sins are the works of darkness, because they shun the light. But, when once a sinner has come to a certain degree, he throws off every mask or covering, and sins in the face of the sun. He no more seeks darkness for his evil deeds, but walks as "destruction that wasteth at noon-day." The observing

eyes, and censuring tongues of men, are now no bar in his way; since the strength of inclination and habit is such that he must indulge himself, he takes courage, and refuses to be restrained.

The prophet Jeremiah mentions it as an evidence of a high degree of degeneracy in the children of Israel, that many of them had lost all sense of shame; Jer. vi. 15. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord."

And, without all question, it is an evidence of an uncommon height of impiety, when even natural shame is gone; and whoever are in that condition, have lost a very powerful fence to virtue. So long as shame remains, it is a great draw-back upon them in their licentious practices; but, when it is no more, they are without curb or restraint, they *draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-ropes*. And that men are naturally carried to this bold and shameless impiety, is evident from the very nature of the thing. Repeated acts of sin, which must be known, offend natural modesty so frequently, and accustom a man so much to shame, that he loses the sense of it in time altogether. Of this we have but too many examples.

(6.) Another stage in the sinner's progress, is, to harden himself so far, as to sin without remorse of conscience. The conscience of a sinner, for a long time, bears its testimony against him, and every outward indulgence costs him some inward uneasiness; but, after he hath given himself over to abandoned

wickedness, it frequently ceases its reproof. This victory he may obtain two different ways: 1. The easiest and speediest way is by hearkening to loose principles. These, at once, set the mind at ease, and blunt the reproofs of conscience. But of this I have spoken on a former head. 2. The other way is practical. The frequent repetition of atrocious crimes stupifies the conscience. They, as it were, weary it out, and drive it to despair. It is much the same with the monitor in our own breast, and any friend who has a concern for another; if he finds that instruction, admonition, reproach, are all in vain, he, at last, looses the reins, and suffers him to take his course. Now, what must be the condition of a man who has out-finned even his conscience itself? he must surely be kept within no bounds, but triumph in his miserable conquest. The apostle Paul tells us, 1 Tim. iv. 2. of some who are guilty of "speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron." And thus describes the condition of some sinners, Eph. iv. 19. "Who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Perhaps it may be thought some degree of comfort to a sinner to have overcome his conscience, so that he is no more harrassed with its reproofs. But consider, I pray you, that all that he hereby gains, is only to be a little farther out of the way of recovery, a little nearer to destruction. What avails it, that he has rendered himself insensible of his danger? This will neither screen him from it, nor make it lighter when it falls. There is something, on the contrary, extremely terrible in the condition of that man who is insensible

of the judgment awaiting him, and still going on till he lift up his eyes in torments that shall never have an end. But, before this, he has frequently some further steps to go. Having finished his character, he proceeds to finish his work; and therefore, in the

(7.) Place, Improved finners often come to boast and glory of their wickedness. It is something to be above shame; but it is more still to glory in wickedness, and esteem it honourable. Hear what the apostle Paul says of such, Phil. iii. 18, 19. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." How many are there who have studied to excel each other in the glorious arts of debauchery and riot, and then proclaim their own praises upon the subject! How dreadful and how pernicious a character! for it is never separated from its counterpart, despising and reproaching true religion and a steadfast adherence to its laws. It gives me great concern to say, that there is so much pains taken amongst us, to give countenance to profanity; so that it requires no small measure of courage and resolution not to be ashamed of our Master's cross. To what height of wickedness are those arrived, who have thus inverted the natural order of things, have mastered their own judgment, and turned their reason upside down. Glorious ambition indeed! to have made such a progress downward toward the brute creation, both as to their bodily appetites and the sentiments of their minds. There remaineth but one step more for them to take, viz.

(3.) Not to be content with being wicked themselves, but to use all their art and influence to make others so too. This is to be zealous in sinning, and industriously to promote the interest of the infernal cause. How often do we find those who have no fear of God before their own eyes, use their utmost endeavours to extinguish it in others, to laugh down the qualms of their consciences, and break any reluctance they may seem to have at running to the same excess of riot with themselves! Some are so eminent this way that they resemble the Pharisees who “compassed sea and land to make one proselyte,” and when they had made him, they made him “twofold more the child of hell than themselves.” So will zealots in vice compass sea and land to make a proselyte to the devil. It is hard to tell to what we should attribute this extraordinary conduct. Is it that they are really persuaded they have made a wise choice, and out of their great generosity and affection to their brethren are willing to make them partners of their joy? This I am afraid will hardly be believed by any reasonable man. It is more probable, that as they resemble in many other respects their father the devil, so they resemble him also in malice, “going about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour.” They already begin to feel their misery by sin, and desire to bring as many as possible into the same condition, as a wretched (and indeed mistaken) source of consolation in their future wo.

And now to close the scene, those who have thus far hardened themselves shall be given up of God to judicial blindness of mind, and hardness of

heart. When this sentence takes place, they are incapable of mercy, and marked out as vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. That God sometimes, in his righteous judgment, lays the sinner under this awful sentence, is evident from the following passages of scripture, Isa. vi. 10. "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." 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, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Rom. i. 28. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." 2 Theff. ii. 11, 12. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." This is always a consequence of their former obstinacy. As they despise and trample upon his mercy, he gives them over to themselves and the masters they have chosen; he finishes the day of his patience and long suffering, and devotes them to the judgment they deserve.

And now, my brethren, view (and view it with terror!) the dreadful consequence of the deceitfulness of sin, and by what fatal steps it leads on to that hardness of heart which is a sure prelude of eternal misery. Who that ventures upon the prac-

tice of sin, ever intends to go so far? They mean only to take a short trial of the pleasures of vice; but it gains upon them insensibly, and fixes its hold still faster and faster, till they are its absolute slaves. I shall conclude this illustration of the deceitfulness of sin with observing, that there is an exact correspondence between the progress of a saint in holiness and meetness for heaven, and the progress of a wicked man in sin, and his growing fitness and preparation for hell. A new convert finds it hard at first to separate himself from his sins, and confine himself within the bounds of duty: he has some relenting thought towards his lusts, as old companions from which he is to part for ever. Just so a young and unexperienced sinner finds some reluctance at sin, some uneasiness from the challenges of conscience, and painful forebodings of his unknown future fate.—A good man after walking some time in the paths of virtue finds the way become smoother and easier, and serves God with greater constancy, and with greater pleasure. Just so the sinner finds it more easy through time, to violate his conscience, does it more frequently, and with less remorse.—A good man soon associates himself with the excellent ones of the earth, he is instructed by their conversation, emboldened by their example, and assisted by their prayers. Just so the sinner soon finds, or is found out by those who are like him in inclination; they join in confederacy, adopt each others principles, and follow each others practice.—A good man in time is thoroughly confirmed, becomes possessed of a prevailing love to God and holiness; so that it is his very na-

ture, his delight as well as duty. Just so the sinner, in process of time, is governed by his lusts; they acquire that authority over him that they do not solicit but demand indulgence.—A good man is fortified in his choice, and despises the smiles and frowns of a corrupt world. Just so the sinner lays aside shame, and says, nay but I will do that which hath proceeded out of my mouth.—A good man is filled with concern for the interest of religion. Just so the sinner espouses the cause of profanity, will plead it in his conversation, and strengthen it with his substance.—In fine a good man is at last raised above the world, his heart is in heaven, and he longs to be carried there. Just so the sinner fills up the measure of his iniquity; the infernal passions take possession of the whole man, he wearies of the earth for the few good men that are in it, and is fully prepared for the language of blasphemy and despair.

II. I proceed now to the second general head, which was to consider the duty which is founded by the apostle on the deceitfulness of sin, viz. Mutual exhortation, *Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day*: This I shall do by some reflections on the three following particulars, 1st, The persons who are obliged to exhort others. 2dly, The season in which this duty is to be performed. And, 3dly, The manner in which it is to be performed, if we hope to do it with success.

1st. As to the persons who are obliged to exhort others. It seems in this passage to be laid upon Christians in general, without any exception, *Exhort one*

another; and there is little doubt that it may and ought to be understood in the greatest latitude. This is perfectly consonant to the spirit of true religion, to our relation one to another, and to the constant language both of the Old and New Testament. The two great branches of practical religion, the heads of the two tables of the moral law, are love to God and love to man; and as our love to man ought to take its rise from our love to God, so there can be no expression of it more natural, or more necessary, than an endeavour to warn them of the deceitful nature and dangerous consequences of sin. This is a duty which is founded with the highest propriety on the deceitfulness of sin. For as it deludes the sinner himself often in an insensible manner, others may be supposed to observe his condition, and to see the imposition more clearly, and are therefore obliged, by the dictates both of humanity and piety, to awaken him as it were from his lethargy, and admonish him of his danger. Oh, my brethren! consider how clear and unquestionable this duty appears in common matters. Suppose any man were to observe an apartment on fire, and know of several persons sleeping over it, or near it, in security, when a few moments delay would wrap them in the flames, what a monster of injustice and barbarity would he be reckoned, if he did not give them immediate notice, that they might flee from the danger. Is the danger of sin less real? Is it less terrible? Just the contrary. The loss of substance, or the loss of life by fire in our dwellings, is not once to be compared with having soul and body for ever tormented in the fire of hell.

Agreeably to this, we find frequent mention of this duty both in the Old and New Testament. It is a precept in the Levitical law, Lev. xix 17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Prov. ix. 8. "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." Phil. ii. 4. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Heb. x. 24. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works."

There is no doubt, at the same time, that this duty, however general, lies with peculiar and heavier obligations on some than on others, and varies a little according to the different relations we stand in to one another. You will easily be sensible how much it is the duty of those who have the ministry of reconciliation committed to them, who are entrusted with the charge of precious souls, to be urgent and earnest in their exhortations to all without exception; to be at all proper pains to fit themselves for awakening the attention, enlightening the understanding, and convincing the consciences of their hearers. It is their duty to do what in them lies, to trace the subtle workings and windings of the human heart, and to know the depths of Satan, as the scripture expresses it, to declare the whole counsel of God, and keep back nothing that is profitable for their hearers. It is not to be denied that you ought to hear them with patience and attention; that they have a right to speak with freedom and boldness to persons of every rank and character; and that there ought to be a particular fire and edge

in their exhortations, since they watch for your souls as those who must give an account unto God.

There is also a particular obligation upon superiors of all sorts, whether in office, as magistrates; in station, as persons of wealth and opulence; in years, as those whom time and experience should have enriched with solid wisdom; in relation, as parents and masters of families, to be frequent in exhorting others, and warning them of the deceitfulness of sin. It is laid upon them, and expected of them, that they should not live to themselves, that they should not satisfy themselves with exacting and looking for the respect and deference which is their due; but that they ought to exert themselves in giving useful instruction or salutary admonition to all who are within their sphere. Is sin so deceitful? Are the unwary and ignorant so easily misled, and so hardly recovered? Then surely those who ought to excel others in knowledge, should be careful to impart it for the benefit of the weak. Undoubtedly, my brethren, it is not only a Christian, but a noble and amiable character, for those who are exalted above others, to be full of compassion to their inferiors, and in their whole conversation breathing a desire after their spiritual good.

But it is also plainly a part of Christian friendship, even for equals to exhort one another, and kindly to communicate their mutual experience in the spiritual life. "The lips of the righteous (we are told by Solomon) feed many." O how rare and difficult a duty! But wherefore should it be either difficult or rare? The love of God leads to it. The state of your brethren requires it. And surely it is neither

unpleasant nor hurtful to him that performs it. I am sensible where the difficulty lies. We suppose there are few who will hear it with patience, or receive it with profit. Alas! my brethren, it is too true, we hear on all hands complaints that people will not take advice; that they are but offended, instead of being reformed. Perhaps, indeed, this is as much owing to the manner of giving, as to the backwardness of receiving counsel. However, we shall allow the objection; and since the duty is mutual, I hope it will not be reckoned wandering from the subject, if I beseech you to submit to one another's exhortation. We all stand in need of it; we may all be the better for it. What though it be administered imprudently or harshly for the manner; nay, though it may flow from envy, pride or malice, as the principle you will lose nothing by hearkening to the counsel. I do not remember any thing recorded more truly glorious for a monarch, than what we are told of Philip of Macedon, that he heard reproofs not only with patience, but with pleasure: and I am sure there is nothing more like a Christian, than to profit, not only by the admonitions of friends, but by the reproaches of enemies. If they are just, reform what is amiss; if they are probable, abstain from the appearance of evil: if they are neither the one nor the other, submit to them with patience, as a part of the will of God.

2. I come now to consider the season in which the duty of mutual exhortation is to be performed, *Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day*. By which we are to understand, that it is to be done frequently, and without delay. This, my brethren,

will perfectly accommodate the subject of this discourse to our present situation, when entering on another year. We have many admonitions of the quick passage of time; and all these serve to enforce the exhortation of the wise man, Eccl. ix. 10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." If any hearer has received a conviction of the deceitfulness of sin, or the duty of mutual exhortation, he ought seriously to consider, that the present time only is his; that he knoweth not what a day or a night may bring forth; and that delaying or postponing what he may do at present, is at the possible or probable hazard of its being left undone for ever. I beseech you, my brethren, to make this use of the commencement of another year. There is no difference, in one sense, between one day and another, as much of life is spent, and as much of our dying frame is wasted in one day as in another; but our computation and reckoning of revolving years, by the principal seasons, only helps us to mark the constant, though silent passage of time, which, like a flowing river, is bearing us all down into the ocean of eternity. Has any of us then a relation, friend, or child, to whose eternal interest he desires, or sees it to be his duty to contribute? let him be speedy and diligent, whether by instruction, admonition, example, or even prayer: you know not how short a time the opportunity may last. By and by all these relations shall be dissolved. How many who were with us last year are now sleeping in the dust; their state irrevocably fixed for eternity, either entered into

rest, and happy in their Redeemer's presence, or reserved in chains of darkness, and looking forward, with despair and terror, to the general judgment. No warning of the deceitfulness of sin there; they know it, and feel it in inward reproach, and everlasting self-condemnation. No preaching of the gospel there; no hope of recovery, or place for repentance there: so that we may justly address every hearer of the gospel, in the words of the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

I shall only add, that the deceitfulness of sin, and the precariousness of time, are considerations which serve greatly to strengthen one another. As time wastes, the sinner hardens; not only is the season passing away, but the work is becoming still more difficult, and, at last, as I have shewn before, in the course of nature, and by the appointment of God, totally impossible. It is the danger of a hardened state, that the Apostle urges, particularly in this passage, as the argument to diligence, *But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* And, indeed, elsewhere we are cautioned against delay for the same reason. Thus, in Psal. xcv. 7, 8. which is cited a few verses after the text, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness."

3. Let us consider the manner in which this exhortation must be given, if we hope to do it with success. And, here, I must acknowledge, there is so great a variety of cases, that it would be extremely difficult, or almost impossible, distinctly, to enumerate them all, and give the different directions that are suited to each; there must be a great difference in the manner, according to the end proposed. Superiors of all sorts, magistrates, ministers, and heads of families, may, and ought to reprove, both with authority and severity, because the end is not singly the reformation of an individual, but the preservation of others, and the general good: nay, even private Christians may often be called to reprove, in much the same manner, as a public testimony of their abhorrence of sin; they may have it chiefly in view, to save or edify the by-standers, by refuting the calumnies of an enemy, bearing down triumphant wickedness, or disgracing an open factor for the devil.

But as I reckon the passage of scripture, which is the subject of my discourse, has an eye chiefly to brotherly admonition, for the benefit of the person concerned, I shall just mention some of the most important directions for doing it with success. These shall be both negative and positive.

1st, You ought not to reprove at an uncertainty, upon bare rumour and suspicion. This is what many people have done, and thereby have, in a great measure, lost all the pains they have bestowed. Where men are reprov'd in the wrong place, or for what they either are not guilty of, or are much less guilty than is supposed, it often puts them upon self-

justification, and hardens them against all reproof for the time to come.

2dly, It ought not to be done when the offending person is in an ill temper to receive it. Though no time ought to be lost in doing what good we can to our neighbour, especially to the precious soul; yet it is worse than losing time to attempt it, when he is in a disposition to reject it: for example, it is usually improper presently after the sin is committed, because then the heat is not over, nor the uproar of the passions and affections appeased. Many a domestic reproof is thrown away in this manner. Perhaps, a husband comes home disordered in liquor, and his wife meets him with a surly countenance, and reproachful language; the offence is too recently taken by her to speak with meekness, and the provocation too recently given by him to hear with patience: hence dissensions and quarrels arise; and, perhaps, he is hardened in his sin, by thinking he hath greater cause to be displeased with his wife for the frowardness of her temper, than she has to be displeased with him for his intemperance. On the other hand, it is not improbable, that, by waiting till the return of calmness and reflection, the sin may be set in such a light, as to carry conviction to the conscience, and, by the blessing of God, prove the means of reformation. Many are the admirable remarks of Solomon on this and the like subjects; particularly, Prov. xv. 23. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

3dly, We are not to reprove those whom we have reason to believe to be such desperate wretches, that they would be but the more exasperated, and

sin in the more daring manner, on account of the reproof. To these it would be no act of love and charity, as it would provoke them to dishonour God still more highly, and so heap still heavier loads of wrath and vengeance on their own heads. It is a saying of Augustine, one of the fathers: "If we, therefore abstain from admonishing wicked men, because the season does not suffer it, or, we fear, they may become worse by it, that seems to be the counsel of charity." And, alas! how many are there, who, when they are reprov'd for their sins, though very justly, are presently kindled into a rage, fall a blaspheming and railing at piety, and all that profess it, and seem more confirmed than ever in their hatred and opposition to it. Therefore we are expressly warn'd of the danger of this by Solomon, Prov. ix. 7. "He that reproveth a scorner, getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth himself a blot." And, to the same purpose, our blessed Saviour, Matth. vii. 6. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." On the other hand, positively, when reproof or exhortation are administered,

Ist, It should be made appear, as much as possible, to flow from love and affection as its principle. It is plain that this ought to be its principle, in order to its being a duty acceptable to God; and there will be little hope of its success with men, unless this appear to their conviction. It would, indeed, be greater perfection to profit by the malicious invectives of enemies; but every body will allow, that

is not ordinarily to be expected; for this reason, all ostentation and vain glory is carefully to be avoided, and every thing that may look like only affecting superiority; for the same reason, it should, in all ordinary cases, be done in as secret a manner as circumstances will permit it. The case of public offences, to be sure, must be excepted; concerning which we are told, "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear." But, in other cases, not only of private injury, but of private sins, the rule of our Saviour is to be observed, Matth. xviii. 15. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." I cannot say all that might be said on this subject; but nothing can be of greater importance, than, if possible, to shew that it flows from love; for, where the offender is truly convinced of this, even though he should not be reformed, it is very seldom that he is displeased. Therefore,

2dly, As it ought to flow from love as the principle, so it ought to be conducted with meekness in the manner; no railing or reviling expressions, which will look like the wounds of an enemy to destroy, and not the balm of a physician to cure. Therefore the Apostle gives us advice in the following terms, Gal. vi. 1. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." This last expression gives an inimitable beauty to the apostolic counsel. Our own sins should fill us with compassion as much as resentment against sinners, and should make us take

the same gentle methods with others that we would wish to be taken with ourselves, if we were in their condition. We are of the same nature, liable to the same temptations, and, if left of God, may easily fall into the same miscarriages. Besides, as it is most suitable to our state and character, so it is most likely to have a proper effect. Meek and gentle admonitions will penetrate the heart, when rough and clamorous reproofs will be rejected and despised. Thus Solomon says, Prov. xxv. 15. "By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone." And, Chap. xv. 1. "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger."

3dly, Reproof should be given with some degree of zeal as well as meekness; we should avoid the extreme of remissness as well as severity. A slight careless reproof is often worse than none; for it is ready to make the offender think lightly of his own offence. There must, therefore, be such evident weight and concern of spirit, as may serve to evidence as well his danger as your own love. For this reason, I beg leave to observe, that speaking in a way of jest and merriment, on sins of an atrocious nature is deeply criminal, and highly pernicious. Solomon tells us, "Fools make a mock at sin." Tho' a turn to raillery and pleasantness of temper is reckoned a very harmless, as well as agreeable disposition; yet great care ought to be taken of the subjects on which it is exercised. It is only smaller weaknesses that ought to be treated in this manner. Sins against God should be treated with a gravity and seriousness from the importance of their nature

and effects. I shall give an instance of this. Swearing, and taking the name of God in vain, is sometimes ridiculed, instead of being reprov'd. This seldom has a good effect. The crime is of so atrocious a nature, and so direct an assault upon the majesty of God, that it ought not to be treated lightly, as only a small indecorum, or breach of good manners. It ought, indeed, to be despis'd for its folly; but, at the same time, it ought to be deeply abhorred for its guilt.

4thly, In admonishing one another for particular sins, we should still keep in view the source of all sin, a polluted nature; and the great danger of the sinner, as in a sinful state. Though particular miscarriages may give the occasion, it is of small moment to convince them of the folly of such or such a practice, unless you point out to them the necessity of repentance, in general, upon evangelical principles. I have rarely seen that any arguments were sufficient to reform a sinner of any particular fault he was once addicted to, but those drawn from eternity, and the awful effects of the displeasure of a holy God. Present inconveniencies, however great, soon lose their effect, and are quite unequal to combat a vitious inclination, or wrestle with the power of habit. But, though it were otherwise, what a small matter is it to cure a man of being a drunkard, or a swearer, or a whoremonger, if still you leave him a slave to sin, upon the whole, a servant of the devil, and an heir of hell? It is plainly with a view to the final consequences of sin, that the Apostle recommends mutual exhortation in this passage, *Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-*

day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Would you, therefore, admonish any person to his real profit? make use of particulars, to convince him of the evil of all sin, as such, and its power and influence over him by nature. When you reprove him for any fault he has committed, shew him the deceitfulness of sin, and where, if he do not speedily stop, he will be landed at last. Let his eternal state be the motive that urges you to the duty, and let the same great consideration be made use of to carry home the instruction with power and efficacy upon his heart.

5thly, In the last place. Let those who would acquit themselves of this duty in a proper manner, be particularly watchful and circumspect in their own conduct. It is evident, that nothing can be more unfuitable, than for those who take upon them to admonish others, to be grossly and visibly blameable themselves. It is, indeed, so intolerable, that nobody can bear their instructions with patience. You know, from daily experience, that recrimination is the first thing to which those who are reprehended betake themselves. The moment they are challenged, the reply is ready, Why, you yourself do so and so, or, perhaps, worse. So prone are they to this, that many times they will upbraid men with innocent or lawful things, as if they were faults, to cover their own guilty practice. Now, if this is the case, how much more hurtful must it be for those who reprove others, to be really liable to just accusation themselves, and, perhaps, upon the same subject? Therefore our Saviour says, with the greatest strength and propriety, Luke vi. 41, 42. "And

why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either, how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye?" Perhaps, my brethren, some of you are saying within yourselves: Alas! you have now destroyed the whole effect of what has been urged, at so great length, on the duty of mutual exhortation; for where is the man that is without sin to reprove his neighbour? My brethren, no doubt we have all such failings as ought to make us do it with meekness and self-denial; yet, surely, we both may and ought to walk so circumspectly, as not to be justly liable to heavy accusations. Though there is no holding of intemperate tongues, yet, surely, there is such a thing as a conversation becoming the gospel, which will entitle the servant of Christ to appear with some measure of courage in his master's cause; nay, and such an habitual love of mankind, as may sometimes open their ears to his salutary counsel. And, believe it, those who begin to make conscience of their duty to their neighbour, either in a family, or a wider sphere, will find its powerful and happy influence as a restraint upon their own conduct. They will be naturally led to double their diligence, lest their example should, unhappily, frustrate the effect of their reproofs.—One particular more I must add, that the next thing to being always in the right, is to be humble, and ready

to confess when you have been in the wrong. This also is a scripture precept, James v. 16. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." I am persuaded that few things would add greater weight to any person's admonitions, than his being willing to confess, and ready to amend any thing that was pointed out to him as blameable in his own conduct.

I come now, in the last place, to make some practical application of what has been said. And,

1. From what has been said, you may see the great corruption and depravity of our nature. I look upon it as of great moment to have a deep and growing conviction of this truth. It is the language of scripture, it is the language of experience, and it is the parent of humility. I observed in the beginning of my discourse on this subject, and it appears from every thing that has been said upon it, that the deceitfulness of sin is but another expression for the treachery of the human heart. In vain would the objects of sin appear before us; in vain would Satan and his emissaries present their solicitations, if our own inclination did not plead powerfully in their favour. To be deeply convinced of this, will lead to the exercise of penitence, and to self-denial, which is the best mean of our support and preservation. If the deceitfulness of sin lies chiefly in ourselves, that man will guard against it in the most effectual manner, who has learned to fear himself as his own greatest enemy.

2. From what has been said, let us be led to strictness and frequency in self-examination. If sin is

of deceitful, it may easily lurk unobserved. Self-knowledge is a study of as great difficulty as importance. You have heard what artful disguises sin puts on, and how dreadfully some have been led astray. The very best duties may be polluted by sinful motives, and the very worst things may be done by an erring conscience, of which we may justly say, with our Saviour, Matth. vi. 23. "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The old heathen precept, "Know thyself," was reckoned so excellent a saying, that they supposed it to be a revelation from Heaven. And, in the holy scriptures, we have many exhortations to self-examination. I shall only mention that of the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Examine yourselves, 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?" Nay, after all our pains to examine ourselves, there ought to remain such a suspicion of our own treachery, as should make us intreat, humbly and earnestly, the more impartial trial of a heart searching God, Psal. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24. "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."

3. From what hath been said, let me beseech all, but especially young persons, to beware of the beginnings of sin. It may be said of sin in general, as Solomon says of strife, "the beginning of it is like the letting out of water." Beware of all that dis-

course which tends to give you slight thoughts of any sin. Sometimes men consider sins as small sins, and therefore tolerable. Many parents have thought it wrong to check their children for the follies and levities of youth, and have found, to their melancholy experience, that when follies had been suffered to ripen into crimes, they had taken too deep hold to be rooted up. Many make light of sin by comparifon. How common is the pretence of the drunkards: We are harming nobody; we are not fpeaking ill of our neighbours; we are not oppreffing the poor. In the mean time, they are foon led to curfing and blasphemy; and, perhaps, by their riotous living, they are unable to pay their juft debts, rob the induftrious poor of their right, and, for the indulgence of a beaftly appetite, bring their own offspring to beggary and ruin. Such is the behaviour of many of your harmlefs people; men of focial friendly difpofitions, that, if you believe them, would not wrong their neighbour of a farthing to their knowledge; and yet it would be happy for any man to fall into the hands of high-way robbers rather than into their fociety. How fhort-fighted men are! they not only forget to look forward to the other world, but look not even to any diftance in this. From time to time we are made fools by fin, which never asks more of us than the prefent compliance; yet if this is granted, never leaves us till our ftate is irrecoverable. What reafon have all to be afraid of that deplorable hardnefs of heart which is the confequence of the continued indulgence of fin. Let us never confider any fin by itfelf, but together with that ugly train which it draws behind it; and then, though our falfe hearts

might plead for the indulgence of a single lust, they may not be so willing to submit to that deluge of vice which follows fast at its heels.

4. In the last place, I shall close the subject, by addressing an exhortation to those of my hearers, who have been long and hardened sinners; who have many habits of vice cleaving to them; who have hitherto despised the gospel, and even sat in the seat of the scornful. No doubt, you have heard, in vain, and perhaps with contempt, many exhortations of this kind before; and therefore there is, humanly speaking, but little hope, that any thing I can say will have the effect. However, as our blessed and gracious Master has commanded his gospel to be preached to every creature, this Prince of the kings of the earth is able, by his Spirit accompanying the word, to lay the proudest and the boldest of his enemies prostrate at his feet; let me beseech you, in his name, to hear, that your souls may live. Why will you longer continue at enmity with him, while he is offering you mercy? nay, he is treating you with mercy in every instance of his kind providence, in the renewed messages of his blessed word, and in his dying agonies on the accursed tree? Have you been long wedded to sin? he is able to set you free; he came to destroy the works of the devil, and is able to knock off the strongest fetters, and restore liberty to the most sorrowful captive. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Remember, on the other hand, I beseech you, the dreadful vengeance that awaits the despisers of the gospel. If you still refuse the

gracious offer; if you will not suffer his mercy to be glorified in your recovery, his holiness, power, and justice, shall be illustrated in your perdition. Time is hastening away; judgment is hastening on; no refusing to appear at that bar; no deceiving or biasing that judge; no room to escape; no source of consolation under that sentence. How unsupportable the reflection on opportunity irrecoverably lost! And how terrible the sanction which follows upon the offer of mercy! You may read it, Prov. i. 24,—31. “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: for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices.”

I only add, if any impression is made on your minds of the importance of eternity, suffer it to abide there. Let it have an immediate effect. Of all the deceits of sin or Satan, none more fatal than that of putting off convictions to a more convenient season. I conclude, therefore, with the words of Solomon, Eccles. ix. 10. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” Amen.

S E R M O N V.

THE BELIEVER GOING TO GOD AS HIS EXCEEDING JOY.

PSALM xliii. 4.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.

IT is of great moment to attend to the proper mixture of reverence and love which ought to possess our hearts in the worship of the living God. If they arise from proper principles, they will not destroy or weaken, but strengthen one another. A believer can never lie too low in the dust before the most holy God; he can never be too sensible either of his distance as a creature, or his guilt and unworthiness as a sinner: but, at the same time, he can never be too deeply penetrated with a sense of divine love, or have too strong and ardent desires after communion and fellowship with God. The truth is, the lower we are in our own sight, it doth but the more illustrate and magnify all the grace that is shewn to us in the gospel: and the more joyfully we contemplate the fulness of our portion in an infinite God, it will but the more bring back this reflection, and constrain us to confess that we are less than the least of all his mercies.

In several passages of the Psalms of David, we have very warm and fervent expressions of the delight which the man after God's own heart had in the worship of his sanctuary. There are few of these more beautiful and forcible than the passage of which my text is a part, "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.*" That which seems to have brought the Psalmist to this striking and beautiful thought, was, his being under the pressure of heavy affliction; and, particularly, in a state of distance and banishment from the temple service. This led him to flee for refuge to God, his almighty friend and unchangeable portion. Did the Psalmist then go to God as his consolation in distress? What reason is there for every Christian to go to him as his Father and his God, not only for support under the various trials of this mortal state, but for happiness and peace after he hath seen and felt the inherent vanity of every created enjoyment?

All I shall further add upon the words is, that what David is here praying for, is to be brought to the temple of God, to have access to his courts, and communion with him there. This he plainly looks upon as a source of exceeding joy; and surely to those who are duly disposed for it, there is not, there cannot be, in this world, a more delightful employment than the joint celebration of our Creator and Redeemer's praise; than the united voice of his servants in his temple. It is the nearest approach we can make to the employment of heaven, and the most

sensible foretaste we can have of its happiness in this foreign land.

But, my brethren, I must limit the subject to what is the particular and distinguishing employment of this day,—the holy ordinance of the Lord's supper, commemorating our Redeemer's dying love. This was called by the ancients the *Eucharist*, or *Sacrifice of Praise*. And, indeed, no disposition is more proper or necessary, in attending upon it, than a joyful and thankful frame of spirit. This will be like a precious perfume, which will fill the house with its fragrance, and will greatly strengthen every other gracious disposition; and therefore, my intention is, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To shew you what matter of joy and satisfaction there is to every sincere Christian, in what is represented to our view in the sacrament of the Lord's supper; or, for what reasons we ought, in this solemn service in a particular manner, *to go to God as our exceeding joy*.

Having done so, I shall make some practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction.

I. IN the first place, then, I am to shew you what matter of joy and satisfaction there is to every sincere Christian, in what is represented to our view in the sacrament of the Lord's supper; or for what reasons we ought, in this solemn service, in a particular manner, *to go to God as our exceeding joy*. I am deeply sensible, my brethren, that I have entered on a task to which I am very unequal, to raise your

minds to that sublime temper of joy in God, and to disclose that fountain of joy there is to every believer; in what his Redeemer has done and is still doing for him. It is so great a subject, that we ourselves may see how unfit a mortal tongue is to speak of it: and therefore, I shall in the entry, pray "that God may shed abroad his love in our hearts; that he may send forth his light and his truth, that they may be guides to us;" and accompany the word spoken with the powerful energy of the Spirit of consolation. But a little of that real communion with God which is the work of his Spirit, and which he sometimes vouchsafes to his people, will give them such a lively sense of his love and joy in him, as they themselves know may be felt, but cannot be expressed: and I cannot forbear already observing to you, that the meanest real Christian shall, one day in the higher house, have such a fulness of joy, and such conceptions of God and his Redeemer's love, that he shall look down, with wonder, at the weak and imperfect stretches of our imagination after it now. But so long as we are here, let us patiently content ourselves with what is given us as necessary to support our weary steps in this desolate wilderness; with what this ordinance, instituted for enlivening our faith supplies us for our comfort and joy.

For this purpose, let me beg your attention to the following considerations.

1. You ought to go to God, in this ordinance, *as your exceeding joy*, because in it you have the fullest assurance, and the clearest evidence of the forgiveness of your sins, and peace with your offended Maker. This is the preliminary mercy which, with

respect to fallen creatures, must open the way to every other blessing. Nothing so much damps our joy in God, and lessens our satisfaction in addressing him, as consciousness of guilt. This it is that makes religion so unpleasant to the carnal worldling; even the secure sinner, who seems to walk without fear, is yet deterred by natural conscience from drawing near to God. He does all in his power to rid his mind of the thoughts of God's ordinary and constant presence with him in every place. A horror of his Maker possesses his mind at all times; he cannot love him as a gracious Father, because he hates him as an enemy, and fears him as a righteous judge. Nay, the same thing it is that makes us all feel so frequently an aversion at the duties of religion. The cold hand of a spirit of bondage freezes up the affections. Trembling and fear taketh hold upon us. An inward dread and jealousy of our own state throws a gloom and darkness, as it were, through the temple of God. And, with whatever strength or beauty the promises or privileges of the saints may be set forth, there is a secret restraint upon us, and as a voice discharging us from touching them, as forbidden fruit. Were we but as pure, and free from guilt,^d we should, with as much joy and satisfaction, draw nigh to God, as the angels do in heaven.

I have been the more full in opening this to you, that you may see the foundation there is in nature, and in fact, for the leading doctrine of the gospel, "Christ Jesus set forth as a propitiation for sins, through faith in his blood."

His blessed body was broken, and his precious

blood was shed, for the remission of sins. Are you to commemorate this? are you to receive the visible signs and the appointed seals of it? does not this assure you, that your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake? Are your sins very great? are they many in number, and heinous in their aggravations? Consider the infinite value of this sacred blood. It was no less than that of the eternal Son of God, who cheerfully undertook our cause: "and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isa. liii. 5. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." O unsearchable mystery! O the infinite holiness of God! O the tremendous justice of God! How well may the exhortation be pressed, Isa. i. 18. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Well may we say with the apostle Paul, 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Are you afraid of the condemning sentence of the law, Gal. iii. 13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Are you ashamed to appear before God in your own undeserving character, hear, and comply with your Saviour's own counsel, Rev. iii. 18. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint.

thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." In the spotless robes of your Redeemer's righteousness, you shall be adorned for the courts of your God, and dwell in his presence. Are you afraid to apply all this to yourselves? This is the express purpose of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, to confirm and close the covenant of peace with every partaker. Do you doubt the sincerity of the offer upon God's part? See him dispensing the healing medicine, "This is my body which was broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Hear him saying, Matth. xi. 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Hear him further saying, John vi. 37. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Isa. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money, and without price." Rev. xxii. 17. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." All who have truly groaned under a sense of guilt may here see their pardon sealed, and may and ought to rejoice in it as theirs; and, unless they doubt the faithfulness of God's word, or the efficacy of their Saviour's merit, may triumph in both, and set at defiance the thunders of the law, the reproaches of conscience, and the accusations of the devil. They may say, with the apostle Paul, Rom. viii. 33, 34. "Who

shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

2. You ought to go to God, in this ordinance, *as your exceeding joy*, as it affords the strongest and most illustrious proof of divine love. This, my brethren, is the immediate subject of our contemplation in the Lord's supper; and I chuse to consider it as an argument by itself, separately from its fruits, because nothing serves more to heighten our affection to, and delight in God, than a firm persuasion of his love to us. Is it a comfortable thing to have the pardon of our sins? It is also unspeakably refreshing, and even ravishing, to view, in faith, the wonderful means by which it is accomplished. We may consider, shortly here, the riches of redeeming grace, as extending to the sinners of Adam's race in general; and, then, what it is for every believer to consider himself as the determinate object of divine regard in the councils of peace. The whole perfections of an infinite God shine with united lustre in the work of redemption. His power, wisdom, holiness, and justice, are severally and jointly illustrated in it. His unfearchable wisdom is mentioned, Rom. xi. 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unfearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" His mighty power, Eph. i. 19. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." The righteousness of his government,

Rom. iii. 26. "To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." But love is most conspicuous of all; and is therefore most frequently insisted on: John iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Rom. v. 8. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." And, indeed, my brethren, it passeth the power of man to open fully the greatness of the love of God to sinners in Christ Jesus. It is a subject which we are so far from being able now to exhaust, that it shall afford matter for adoring inquiry to all eternity, whilst the everlasting God lives and reigns with his saints, and unfolds to them, age after age, more ample views of his goodness and greatness. By what shall we measure the love of a friend, but by the greatness of his gifts? What sentiment then shall we entertain of the love of God for his (justly styled) unspeakable gift? He has given us his only begotten Son, "who was from eternity in the bosom of the Father; the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" the best and greatest of created beings, nay, the whole creation itself had been nothing compared to it.

The truth is, I am ready to think that there

seems to be something like divine contrivance, and infinite design, in this particular circumstance. All created things are in themselves equal, and alike easy to the power of God, being but the effects of his simple will. For this reason there could be no comparative greatness in any such gifts. There was therefore but this one way left to express an uncommon degree of love, that he who was one and equal with the Father, should himself be employed in the message, and "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." Nothing else could have made man an expensive purchase. Nothing else that God could bestow, would have had any appearance of doing violence to himself; or could give meaning and beauty to that expression, Rom. viii. 32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Lord of the vineyard, in the parable, is represented as in suspense, how to fall upon a method to break the stubbornness of the husbandmen. Luke xx. 13. "Then said the Lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved Son, it may be they will reverence him when they see him." Let us paraphrase and apply it. God, who bears the person of the master of the vineyard, may be supposed to say, What shall reclaim these obstinate children of mercy, become rebels? Nothing but the invincible force of superior love. But wherein shall the love of the eternal God appear to advantage? in nothing but an eternal gift: they shall not be cheaply purchased, they shall be bought with blood, with that sacred blood, which shall be the surprize of angels, and the wonder of heaven. These reflections

I would make with reverence, on this elevated and delightful, but awful and tremendous theme. One thing appears clearly from them, that it is not only obscuring the lustre, not only weakening the force, but destroying the very being of redeeming love, to deny the proper and eternal Godhead of Christ, the Mediator. But, Oh! my brethren, what an improvement is it, to the contemplation of the love of God, for each of us to consider himself as having been from eternity the object of it. While I taste the streams of his bounty, may I thus trace it back to its source! Did he love me from the foundation of the world! Did he pity me, when in unprovoked rebellion against him! Did he make so gracious provision for my recovery and salvation! Did he make atonement for my guilt, by the blood of his own Son! and conquer my heart by the power of his sovereign grace! What returns of praise and gratitude are his due! With what joy ought I to remember my Redeemer's death at his table, in the hope of sharing with him his crown and his throne, in a higher state!

3. You ought to *go to God*, in this ordinance, *as your exceeding joy*; as you have in it the clearest and fullest assurance of receiving from him all that is necessary for your comfort and happiness, while you continue here. There are, in a strict sense, but two ends of going to God in his worship and ordinances, to express our sense of, and thankfulness for favours received, and as beggars for more. Now, my brethren, in this ordinance you are not only called to celebrate the love of a gracious and reconciled God, but to trust in the fulness of an all-sufficient God,

That we may view this the more distinctly, there are these two kinds of blessings we stand in need of, those that relate to our spiritual life, and those that relate to our temporal comfort.

1st, Those that relate to the spiritual life. What is the great desire of every real servant of God in this house? Is it not to have your hearts more inflamed with the love of God, and more devoted to his fear? Is not sin your greatest burthen, and its remaining influence your greatest grief? Now, where can you have a more reasonable hope of getting your gracious dispositions strengthened, or your sins mortified, than at a communion table. Is it not expressly designed for your spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace? And as the institution of these sensible signs is a remarkable proof of divine condescension, so I can hardly conceive any thing more wisely and happily calculated for this excellent end. What can more strengthen your faith in a dying Saviour, than being allowed to look upon the signs of his broken body, and his blood poured out? What can speak greater peace to the conscience, than your being allowed and invited to receive him explicitly? "This is my body broken for you." What can more happily serve to kindle and inflame your love to God, than the immediate contemplation of his infinite love for you? Where can you take such a hateful view of sin, as a detested object, as at the Lord's table, where you see it in your Saviour's sufferings? Where and how can you lay such a bond upon the conscience, as by receiving the seals of this sacred engagement? How can you give such a deadly wound to your strongest lusts, as by nailing and affixing

them to your Redeemer's cross? What motive of future obedience equal to bearing about in your bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus? See what the Apostle says, 2 Cor. v. 14. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all then were all dead." 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, who loved me, and gave himself for me." What remedy can you find for your own weakness, like the all-sufficiency of Christ? Col. ii. 9. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." 1 Cor. i. 30. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." I will not so widely handle the subject as to cite to you all the passages which shew that the spirit of sanctification is a part of the purchase of your Redeemer, and one of his gifts to those who humbly implore it. Is it not well known, and do not believers at his table, sensible of their own weakness, and confident of their Saviour's power, get their feet upon the necks of their enemies, and say, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."

2d, They have here all things necessary for their temporal comfort. They have a complete remedy for their cares, as well as their sins. As at the Lord's table you lay hold of the covenant of peace, so there, if any where, you may see, that it is ordered in all things and sure; your food and raiment and all necessary provision, is contained in it; and Christ's body is the pledge. How gracious the pro-

mise! your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things, Psal. xxxiv. 8, 9, 10. "O taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." Isa. xxxii 16. "He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure." Deliverance from suffering is contained in it, Psal. xxxiv. 19. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Strength and grace to suffer with patience is contained in it, Isa. xliii. 2. "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." The sanctified use and improvement of suffering is contained in it. Rom. viii. 28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." 2 Cor. iv. 16. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Consider especially, that at the Lord's table you have an immediate view of the great foundation of reliance on divine providence, Rom. viii. 32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." That God, who was so lavish of his love, as not to spare even his own Son, but gave him

up to be despised, buffeted, and crucified for you, will not be so inconsistently hard, as to refuse the small gift in comparison of a little earthly good. He whose soul was redeemed by the blood of Christ shall not lose his body for a little bread.

I cannot help observing here, of what universal use and benefit the doctrine of Christ crucified is, and how high a place it ought to hold in our esteem. It is not only useful for assuring us of the pardon of sin, but makes us superior to all those sufferings of every kind which took their rise from sin. The path of a Christian is sometimes thorny and difficult; and many of the weaker order of saints have even a greater sensibility of the inconveniencies of life than some thoughtless sinners. These last maintain a sort of bustle and contest for worldly pleasure, and, with a sturdy self-sufficiency, can, if I may speak so, return the blows and buffets of adverse fortune, while the feeble of Christ's flock become sunk and heartless under a frowning providence. But is not the Lord's table a place of refuge? and is it not matter of experience, that they have found consolation there? Whatever their complaints have been, whether of sickness, or poverty, or loss of relations, or the slanders of their enemies, they have adored the sovereign will of God in them all; they have been brought to a placid submission to his providence in them all; nay, they have happily seen and confessed his wise and merciful purpose in them all. It was not without a view to his trials, that the Psalmist, in the text, desires *to go unto the altar of God, unto God his exceeding joy*. And you may see how he expresses himself in the following verse,

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

4th, I come now, in the last place, to observe, that this ordinance is a source of joy, as it is a pledge and earnest of heaven; a fore-taste of that eternal happiness which God hath prepared for his faithful servants in the world to come. This, my brethren, ought never to be out of our view while we sojourn in this valley of tears.

This eternal joy is what our Redeemer has given us the fullest assurance of. It is he who hath drawn aside the curtain, and opened to us a joyful prospect into the holy of holies, into the blessed mansions of perfection, purity, and happiness within the veil. In one of his last discourses to his disciples when he was about to leave them, he tells them it was to be but a short separation; for that he would come again, and carry them with him; and that they should never more be divided, John xiv. 2. “ In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you;” and not only hath he left the promise of his return, but hath instituted this ordinance, on the one hand, to keep up the memory of his former appearance; and, on the other, to keep up our hopes of his second coming, and what he will then bestow, 1 Cor. xi. 23. “ As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” It is intended to support the languishing faith of his people, and make them tread with constancy, in his strength,

the same paths of virtue and self-denial that he did, in hopes of shortly sharing his crown and reward, Heb. xii. 1, 2. "And let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." And how highly proper is this institution for pointing us to the glorious issue of our Christian conflict? In it we have at once a proof of the certainty—of the excellence—and even some perception of the nature of the heavenly glory.

How certain and infallible is that happiness to the saints, which our exalted Redeemer, *the Amen and faithful Witness*, hath passed his word for, and gone before in our name to take possession of? Heb. vi. 19, 20. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered."—1 Cor. xv. 23. "But every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." However high an hope it may seem for such as we are, to aspire to a station so near the throne of God, to his presence and fellowship; yet it is not too much, after what is already bestowed upon us; after what Christ hath done, it can beget no surprize, that this should be the conclusion of it; after he hath borne our sins in his own body, and with his own blood washed away our guilt: after he hath sanctified and cleansed us by his Holy Spirit, made us the children, and imprinted the image of his Father upon our hearts;

after he hath kindled in our souls a flame of divine love, and made us content with nothing but himself, and with no place where he is not; surely he will not leave us comfortless; he can have no other design than to carry us to live with him, and reign with him for ever and ever.

Does not this representation also serve to shew the excellency of the heavenly glory? It is called in scripture, "the purchased possession." And, oh! my dear brethren, how great, beyond expression, must that inheritance be, which was so dearly bought, for which every price but the blood of the eternal Son of God was rejected! See his body broken and his blood shed; and there see what heaven has cost; and this it cost to him who had dwelt there from eternity, and could not be deceived in its worth. It was no unnecessary expence, idly thrown away, but what alone was equal to the glorious purchase. Had we nothing else by which to guess at that which eye hath not seen, this of itself ought to be sufficient to raise our hopes to the highest pitch, and give us the most exalted conceptions of its infinite glory.

And may I not add upon this head, my brethren, that this ordinance is to many, an earnest and foretaste, as well as an assurance, of the happiness of heaven. Is it not the sensible communion with God, which some of his saints even here enjoy, a resemblance, though faint, of that full and perfect communion which they shall enjoy with their Creator and Redeemer in the world above? John xiv. 23. "If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto

him, and make our abode with him." What is heaven but to be free from sin, to contemplate the glory of an infinite God, to be filled with a sense of his love, and to be beyond the reach of temptation to offend him any more! Now when the believer sees his pardon sealed with his Redeemer's blood; when he is filled with a hatred of all sin, and a humble confidence of being delivered from its power; when his very complaints are put to silence, and the frailties of a dying body are left behind, or swallowed up by the hope of a blessed resurrection; what is this but the very dawn of heaven in the soul! what is this but the shout of victory! and an earnest of that day of complete triumph, when all his enemies shall be brought under his feet!

I am sensible that the frame of many communicants will be but a bad emblem of heaven; and, if they measure it by that standard, it will give them but low and sorry notions of it. This however is not the case with all; and there are few real Christians, but, in some parts of their lives, have felt such inward joy in God, that they have been ready to say with the disciples in the mount of transfiguration, *It is good for us to be here.* Neither is there any place where it may be more reasonably expected than at a communion table: every pious soul should breathe out this prayer of the Psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 1, 2, 3, 4. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is: to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary; because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus

will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name."

And now, my brethren, what reason is there for every sincere communicant to go to God in this ordinance, *as their exceeding joy*. It points us forward to that blessed time when we shall indeed be satisfied with that fulness of joy, and those rivers of pleasures that are at his right hand. We are glad now, indeed, to help our flagging conceptions with symbols and figures: but then shall our eyes see the glorious Saviour standing at the right hand of God, surrounded by ten thousand of his saints, who have been redeemed by his blood. This life is but a scene of misery and sorrow, where wretchedness is often to be seen, and lamentations heard, even in the dwellings of the righteous: but then all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes, and these songs of praise begin which shall never end. Now we are borne down with prevailing corruption, which as a dead weight depresses our spirits: But then shall we be perfectly freed from all impurity, and serve our God and Redeemer with the same spirit and joy as the angels do in heaven. Now we are but as young unfledged birds, which in learning to fly can but flutter a little, and immediately take refuge in the earth: But we shall soon soar above it, rising with unwearied wings and never failing strength.

Let us forget for a little the weakness of mortality, and carry our thoughts to the general assembly of the church of the first born, where no suspicion of our false heart being admitted shall remain, when all the wide congregation shall join in celebrating the praises of almighty God, and of the Lamb; and

there shall not be one jarring or one discordant note in the universal harmony. Thus I have laid before you what a source of joy there is to the believer, in the holy ordinance which you have now access to partake of, and proceed, in the

Last place, to make some practical improvement of the subject. And,

1. May I not, in a few words, observe how great is the goodness of God, in providing so rich an entertainment for us in our present state. This life has been expressly designed in providence, as a scene of difficulties and trials. We are here in exile from our Father's house; yet doth he not leave us altogether desolate, but has given us this as a token and pledge of his love, before the full manifestation of it. Here is food to give us vigour for our journey in this valley of tears; strength to embolden us against our enemies, that we may hold on our course steadily without wearying. Will it be matter of eternal surprize, that the only begotten Son of God should do honour to our world, by taking up his abode in it, and dignify human nature, by wearing it himself, and uniting it to his own? Is it not a continued proof of the same condescension, as well as an evidence of divine wisdom, that he should leave to every age this standing memorial of himself, his appearance and work, that sense itself might be partner with faith, in rejoicing over his goodness? If his hearers were blessed with his heavenly voice, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth during his personal ministry, let us with admiration and joy, look upon the symbols of his sufferings and death:

let us survey the picture of his agony drawn by himself, and let us remember what it promises, and what he is now gone to prepare for his faithful followers.

2. Let us, by way of improvement, consider a little for whom this joy is provided; does not this need explication? And are not many of you saying within yourselves, surely obstinacy itself cannot deny, that here is great cause of joy to some: but who are they? is it not a joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, that pertains only to a privileged few? This inquiry is highly needful, as the great spring of joyless communions is the want of a personal application of the blessings of our Redeemer's purchase. That I may neither unwarrantably discourage any, nor prostitute this precious privilege to the unworthy, I shall observe, that this joy is truly applicable to all to whom it is desirable; to all whom it may be useful, but in different lights, according to their different characters.

1st, All those who have not only laid hold on Christ for salvation, but have some degree of humble confidence in the divine mercy, on whom the Lord has lifted up the light of his reconciled countenance. If there are any such among us, as God forbid but there were, they ought; but why do I say they ought? for, no doubt, they certainly will *go to God as their exceeding joy*. To you, my brethren, it belongs, with wonder and gratitude, to survey these blessings to which you know your title, and to join in that heavenly anthem, Rev. i. 5, 6. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests

unto God, and his father, to him be glory, and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Rev. vii. 12. "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Let your faith follow your risen Redeemer to his Father's throne, and look forward to what he is doing and preparing for you, as well as backward to what he hath already done. If Satan be under your feet; if sin be crucified on your Saviour's cross; and cares and sorrows kept at a distance, I hope it will help you to some conception of the felicity of that state, "where there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God, and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him."

2dly, In this ordinance there is matter of joy and consolation to the fearful and doubting Christian, who, not without desires after God, and the remembrance of his name, yet is full of solicitude and anxiety, and dare not positively affirm his own interest in the Saviour. What is set before us in this ordinance, particularly what I have this day opened up on the subject, will shew how well it is fitted for strengthening the weak, and confirming the feeble-minded. But, to explain this propriety a little, let me ask you, is your doubt of God's willingness to receive returning sinners? This doubt the Lord's supper is a full resolution of; this table spread by his appointment, is an express stipulation on his part, of pardon and peace, to all who are willing to accept of them on the terms of the gospel. Well, but what are the terms of the gospel? Infinitely free and gracious on the one hand, and exceeding strict

and severe on the other; full forgiveness to the chief of sinners, without any merit or qualification on their part; complete deliverance from the power of corruption; and sanctification by the Holy Spirit of grace. What then are the severe terms? Truly to accept of them just as fully and freely as they are offered; to receive forgiveness as mere mercy, which we have not deserved, and desire deliverance from every sin without exception? and to expect to obtain it, not from ourselves, but by the strength that is in Christ: the true self-denial of the gospel is the hardest sacrifice to human pride. Men may cry up morality, and boast of it, and trust in it, and never practise it; but heartily to approve of the whole law of God, and breathe after conformity to it, as the purchase of Christ's death, and the effect of our union with him, and giving the honour of it only to him, this, if I mistake not, is the obedience of faith. Now, do you doubt whether you have accepted Christ on these terms. This is not doubting, but refusing: and I have no consolation for you. But if you are willing that Christ should be all, and you should be nothing, and sincerely grieve for the sin and impurity that still cleaves to you, and even for your unbelief, and the hardness of your hearts, come to this table, and "my God shall supply all your wants from his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

3dly, That I may, if possible, yet farther illustrate and commend the divine grace, here is matter of joy to all without exception: "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself!" You have cause to be thankful, that, for your former contempt of mer-

cy, you have not been cut off from the land of the living, and condemned for ever to the flames. O that you were sensible what grace and patience is exercised towards you in your daily preservation! that your past refusals have not been accepted as your final choice, and your state determined beyond redemption! I do now, upon this solemn occasion, when the body and blood of Christ, as broken and shed for sinners, is to be set before you, by his warrant and authority, beseech you by the mercies of God, and pray you to be reconciled unto him. Shall I be obliged, on this season of joy, amidst so bright a display of divine love, to unsheath the sword of almighty vengeance, and denounce the terrors of the Lord. No, my brethren, I rather chuse now to beseech than to command, to invite than to threaten you; to shew you the wrath of God falling upon your Saviour than upon yourselves; and shall not his love constrain you, shall not his mercy persuade you not to reject the counsel of God against yourselves? Will you prefer the pleasures of sin, carnal mirth, and sensual riot, to all the blessed fruits of divine love? You will say, I suspect that you have but a cold notion of all this profusion of language about joy in God; it is because you know it not. Do but taste and see, that the Lord is good! I am sensible, however, it is in vain to speak to any but those who are weary of their sins; and therefore I shall only, in our Saviour's words, call all those "who are weary and heavy laden to come unto him, that they may have rest." As this ordinance is proper for ratifying former engagements, so it is also proper for entering into covenant with God, and solemnly giving your

felves to be his. And oh that this may be a day and place, marked in the registers of heaven, when and where many joined themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten or recalled!

3. The last use to be made of this subject, is to shew you what is your proper employment at the Lord's table. It ought to be a joyful, thankful application of the blessings of Christ's purchase to your souls. Be strong in faith, giving glory to God; not only celebrate his love, but improve it, by asking in faith, every thing necessary to your sanctification and peace.—I shall shut up all, by desiring you to use the Psalmist's preface, in going unto God, who says, in the 3d verse, "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me, let them bring me into thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles." In order to raise and elevate your minds, to fix and engage your unsettled hearts, apply to God who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, that he would dispose you for his service; that he would shed abroad his love in your hearts, and make you joyful in his house of prayer. And my earnest prayer to God for you, is, that he would, at this time, convert some, or (why should we limit him?) every profane sinner in this assembly; pull off the mask of hypocrites, and shew them their own likenesses; that he would make it a joyful communion to many of you, and a profitable communion to all. Amen.

SERMON VI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DISPOSITION UNDER A SENSE OF MERCIES RECEIVED.

PSALM CXVI. 7.

*Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath
dealt bountifully with thee.*

IT is the language of nature, as well as of grace, to cry to God in distress. When great extremity shews the weakness of all other help, there remains so much of God written on the consciences even of the most profligate, as excites them to this duty. The truth of this observation appears from many scripture examples, as well as every day's experience. But though bad men may cry to God for deliverance from suffering, they know little, if any thing at all, of returning to God in duty and gratitude for the mercy received, Psa. lxxviii. 34,—37. “When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him; neither were they stedfast in his covenant.” See also the account of the ten lepers, Luke xvii. 12,—17. “And as he entered into a certain vil-

lage, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off, and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And, when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests; and it came to pass, that as they went *thy were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan: and Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" They all cried alike for the cure; but the greatest part soon forgot their obligation to their merciful favour.

It is no way difficult to account for this behaviour in bad men; but, alas! it is melancholy to think how much of this unhappy disposition is to be found even in the best. When the pressure of any trial is felt, they flee to God as their refuge and security; with fervent supplication, and earnest wrestling they intreat his help. But, though we must not charge any sincere servant of God with an entire forgetfulness of his goodness, or open desertion of his service; yet, I am afraid, that many are very defective in this particular; and that few, very few, preserve the same sollicitude to improve their mercies as to obtain them.

My intention is to apply this to us, who have lately been at the Lord's table: and, I hope, before going there, not a few were earnest in their prayers for the divine presence. Urged by the sufferings of this mortal body, the loss of outward comforts, the power of inward temptations, or a desire of the re-

turn of an absent God, or the quickening of a slothful spirit, they sought consolation in this holy ordinance; they went to seek the Lord, going and weeping. I hope also, and believe, that many went not in vain, but “found him whom their soul loved, found him, and would not let him go.” All such ought to imitate the Psalmist in the spirit that breathes through the whole of this Psalm: and particularly in the words of my text: *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

I need only say, in a very few words, that the whole psalm is an expression of his gratitude for deliverance from great sufferings, from enemies cruel and treacherous. They were also of an inward, as well as an outward kind, as all his trials did ordinarily bring sin to remembrance, and fill him with a humbling sense of the awful judgments of a holy and righteous God. He seems also to have been particularly exercised in prayer to God, his all-sufficient help: ver. 3, 4. “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.” He thereupon celebrates the mercy of God, and wearing the bonds of love, desires to express his obligations in the strongest terms, and to satisfy them by the most cheerful obedience: ver. 12. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?”

In discoursing further at this time, I shall just observe, that the words of the text contain the Psalmist’s resolution: *Return unto thy rest, O my soul—*

and the reason on which it is founded;—*for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.* These two, as applicable to the servants of God in general, and ourselves in particular, I shall distinctly consider, not in the order of the words, but in the order of nature.

I. I shall describe the state of those with whom God *hath dealt bountifully.*

II. Explain the import of the Psalmist's resolution, which ought to be theirs: *Return unto thy rest, O my soul.*

And then shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. Then, I shall describe the state of those with whom God *hath dealt bountifully*; and I am just to describe this, in its great lines, from experience, beseeching every one present to hear it with application; and to add such circumstances to the several particulars, as will make them completely suitable to his own state—Observe, then,

1. That the Lord hath dealt bountifully with those from whom he hath removed any affliction under which they groaned, and for deliverance from which they prayed.—If we would count our mercies, they are very many: and we often lose both the relish of them, and the benefit of them, by not observing them. Those who are delivered from sickness, or the fear of it, in themselves or their relations, ought to be sensible of the goodness of God, who maketh them to lie down and rise up in safety.—If any had reason

to fear confinement from ordinances, or from usefulness, they should say with the Psalmist, Psalm cxviii. 16,—19. “The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord doth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; the Lord hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord.”—If any were oppressed with calumny and reproach, and God hath hidden them from the strife of tongues, hath pleaded their cause, or brought forth their “judgment as the light, and their righteousness as the noon-day.” The Psalmist says, Psal. cxviii. 10,—14. “All nations compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns; for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me; the Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.”—If any are delivered from the fear of want, and a reasonable prospect given them of competent and suitable provision for themselves and families; if they can remember the time, whether lately or at a greater distance, when they seemed to be threatened with poverty and dependance, and all the shame, distress, and temptation that attends that ensnaring state; if, I say, they can remember this, and see how God, by a gracious providence, has led them by the hand; has given them food to eat and raiment to put on, and even honour-

ed them with the ability and the heart to stretch out their hands to the poor and needy, the fatherless and the widow; surely he hath dealt bountifully with them. They ought to say with the Psalmist, Pſal. xxiii. 5. "Thou prepareſt a table before me in the preſence of mine enemies: thou anointeſt my head with oil, my cup runneth over."—If any have been burdened with a ſenſe of guilt, the arrows of the Lord within them, and the poiſon thereof drinking up their ſouls, and God hath revealed himſelf to them, as pardoning iniquity, tranſgreſſion and ſin; if they have been enabled to lay hold, with clearneſs and confidence, of the great atonement, they have ſurely taſted of his love: Or, if a ſpirit of bondage and ſlavish fear has given a forbidding aſpect to the paths of piety, or hath brought a gloom and darkneſs upon the paths of providence, and it hath pleaſed God to ſpeak peace to their ſouls by the Spirit of conſolation, they will ſay with the Psalmiſt, Pſal. ciii. 1. "Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and all that is within me, bleſs his holy name."—Or, finally, if any hath complained of a dead, ſlothful, ſecure frame, reſting too eaſily in the form, and minding little of the power of godlineſs, and it hath pleaſed God to touch their hearts and lips with a live-coal from off his altar; to command their attention by his word; to excite their affections in his worſhip, and to give a new ſtrain of watchfulneſs and tenderneſs to the whole of their converſation; they have ſurely the greateſt reaſon to ſay, *Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

2. The Lord hath dealt bountifully with you, if

you can observe a particular mark and signature of his providence in your mercies. It is one thing to receive the bounty of providence, and another to discern and confess the hand that bestows it. Even with regard to the blessings that are in a great measure common to every thing that lives, it is a matter of the highest moment, and of great influence in religion, to have a deep and serious conviction from whom they flow, to be sensible of the absolute and constant dependance of every creature upon God: It places us immediately in our Maker's presence; for, as the apostle Paul says, Acts xvii. 27. "He is not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being."

But though this is not to be neglected, I have something farther in view, viz. When we can observe the particular steps of providence, as well as the gracious intention of it, as the fruit of special and distinguishing love. The footsteps of providence are to be seen often in the means,—in the season,—and in the nature of the mercy. *I/z*, When the means by which any mercy is brought about are extraordinary, and far beyond the reach of human wisdom, it serves to shew that God himself hath been their help. Sometimes the children of God are left to prove the weakness of all created help, and to be urged in a manner to the brink of despair, that their deliverance may be the more signal, and may the more evidently point out the very finger of God. What a mercy is it, when the enemies of good men wait for their halting, and hope to overcome them, and yet they are remarkably delivered, and out of weakness are made strong? See how the Psalmist

prays, Pſal. lxxxvi. 16, 17. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me. Give thy ſtrength unto thy ſervant, and ſave the ſon of thine handmaid. Shew me a token for good, that they which hate me may ſee it, and be aſhamed; becauſe thou, Lord, haſt holpen me, and comforted me."

2dly, Sometimes the providence of God is ſeen in the ſeaſon of the mercy. It is beſtowed when it is moſt needed, or when it may be of greateſt uſe. When the faith of his people is beginning to fail, it frequently meets with unexpected and eminent ſupport. Pſal. lxxiii. 2. "But as for me, my feet were almoſt gone: my ſteps had well nigh ſlipt." v. 10. "Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." Pſal. xciv. 16, 17, 18, 19. "Who will riſe up for me againſt the evil doers? or who will ſtand up for me againſt the workers of iniquity? Unleſs the Lord had been my help, my ſoul had almoſt dwelt in ſilence. When I ſaid, my foot ſlippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my ſoul." When they have duties of importance before them, they have ſometimes ſuch ſupplies of grace and ſtrength given them, as to carry them through with comfort and with credit. Sometimes to prepare them for trials which may be before them, they have uncommon meaſures of conſolation from above; and ſometimes under or after trials, for their ſupport and comfort, they meet with all in the Creator, and much more than they loſt in the creature. And I hope, my brethren, many have cauſe to adore the wiſdom, as well as the grace of God in public ordinances, that

directs his ministers, as well as his Spirit, to such instructions as may be most suitable, both to the wants and the desires of his saints. How excellent is found instruction at any rate! But what a new beauty and excellency does it acquire in the eyes of that person, to whose inward complaints it is directly suited? We may say of it as Solomon says, Prov. xv. 23. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it?"—xxv. 11. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Isa. l. 4. "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

3dly, Once more: The signature of providence is sometimes seen in the nature of the mercy, when it is exactly suited to the state and character of the person concerned. Our temper, station, duties, have in them a very great diversity; and there is frequently an opportunity to observe how God dispenses his gifts with wisdom and propriety. If he gives to the rich, humility, thankfulness, or liberality; to the poor, patience, trust, and resignation: If he keeps the weak from temptation and trial; and fills with fortitude those who are to meet with resistance, and, in general, accommodates his mercies to their apparent necessity, can it be denied, that he deals bountifully with them. We are taught this truth in a very tender passage, Psa. ciii. 13, 14. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." In many instances, indeed, this kindness and condescension is to be ob-

served both in the nature of mercies, and in the measure of afflictions, Isa. xxvii. 8. "In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind, in the day of the east wind."

This leads me to observe,

3. That the Lord deals bountifully with his people, when he gives them a clear and satisfying view of the salutary end, and enables them to make a sanctified use both of their trials and mercies. I need not tell you, that calamities of various kinds are inseparable from this state of mortality and of sin; neither need I tell you, that the children of God never were, nor ever shall be exempted from their share. But, as their mercies have a quite different nature and influence, from those which are bestowed upon a careless secure world; so their trials have a peculiar direction, and are capable of a spiritual improvement: nay, they are represented in scripture, as the fruit and evidence of love, Heb. xii. 5. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Psal. lxxxix. 30, 31, 32, 33. "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

Now, my brethren, sometimes the children of God may struggle for a season under afflictions, and find much difficulty to adhere stedfastly to their duty:

may, what do I say? truly they may sin not a little by impatience in their hearts, and speaking unadvisedly with their lips, as well as by sinking under the stroke, and manifesting unbelief and distrust in the Rock of their salvation. They may be also greatly at a loss to interpret the language of providence, and discover the cause of God's controversy with them. They may say with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxvii. 6,—9. "I call to remembrance my song in the night; I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah." Or, with Job, Job x. 1,—3. "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, do not condemn me: shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee, that thou shouldest oppress? that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?"

But what a mercy is it, when it pleaseth God to reconcile our minds to the will of his providence; to set home upon the conscience his right of sovereignty; his title to dispose of our persons, our reputation, our substance, our relations, without exception and without condition, even as he will. O how happy! to be able so say with our suffering Saviour, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And again, "If this cup may not pass away,

from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Is this unreasonable? Nothing less. Should he not do what he will with his own? Is it impossible? Blessed be God, it is far from it. How happy, my brethren, to have our corruptions mortified by suffering! to have the spirit broken by contrition and penitence, when the body is broken by sickness or distress; to weaken our attachment to the world, when it is shewing its instability and uncertainty as our possession; to hate the sin for which, and not the God by whom the stroke is inflicted, let it be of what nature soever it will? O how happy to have divine consolation under suffering! an angel from heaven strengthening us! the soul following hard after God! when the believer is enabled to delight himself in God, even in the absence of all outward comfort! and to say with Hab. iii. 17, 18. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!" O how happy is it, when we experience the sanctifying effects of suffering, to be able to look back upon it, and find the bitterness and severity over, or mitigated by time, but the fruits of it remaining, and daily gathering strength! One affliction, truly sanctified, prepares the mind for others to follow, and makes them both more tolerable, and more useful. He who has sought and found consolation in God under one affliction, is refreshed, braced, and armed for another combat; he is not so much afraid of new and unknown enemies, because

he knows where to find sure and effectual support. There is something very noble and animated in that part of the apostle Paul's discourse to the elders of Ephesus, which relates to his sufferings for the gospel, Acts xx. 22, 23, 24. "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerufalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." I cannot go through either every kind of suffering, or every kind of benefit we may receive from it; but we have the pleasure of seeing the scripture saints, both in the Old and New Testament, bearing witness to the salutary consequence of affliction. Thus David says, Psal. cxix. 67. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word:" and, ver. 71. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." And the apostle Paul, Rom. v. 3. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." And so certain is this truth, that I am persuaded, there is no serious exercised person among us, but is willing to strengthen the evidence by his own testimony.

I may add, that the Lord deals very bountifully with those to whom he gives the sanctified use of their mercies; when in general mercies have not led to security or pride, but to thankfulness, and even to a holy concern to improve them to the glory of

God; when great abundance of outward possessions has not led to sensuality, or profanity, or hardness of heart; but, on the contrary, to humility, usefulness, liberality; when a numerous or growing family, children springing up as olive plants round about the table, only fill the parents with a tender concern to train them up in the fear of God, and season their young hearts with early impressions of religion; when, instead of a foolish jealousy or ambition to have your children more sumptuously dressed than others, your great care is to have them kept from the society of the vicious, and to have them no way behind the very best accomplished in every branch of useful knowledge; when you are favoured with the esteem and affection of others, and God enables you to improve your influence by zeal and diligence in doing good.

These are all sanctified mercies: and, as the Lord deals bountifully with those on whom they are bestowed from time to time; so, in acts of solemn worship, it is an unspeakable happiness, when such views are taken of our state and situation, and of the aspect of providence towards us, as serve to confirm and strengthen every holy disposition, and lead us in the paths of truth and righteousness. In the

4. And last place. *The Lord hath dealt bountifully* with those whom he hath admitted to the most intimate and spiritual communion with himself; those whom he hath carried above the sphere of temptation, filled them with sensible joy in the Holy Ghost here, and earnest desires after the complete and perpetual enjoyment of his presence in heaven. My brethren, it is no contemptible communion with

God, when the soul is poured out in penitential sorrow, filled with hatred of sin, with a love of God's laws, or submission to his providence; when the Spirit shines with clearness either on commands or promises, and makes the heart approve and rest in them; but there are also special happy seasons, when the believer may be said to leave his mercies, trials, sins, and duties, altogether at a distance, and to rejoice in the contemplation of an infinite God. He is the proper object of the highest esteem, and most ardent love of every reasonable creature; he is the immediate object of delight and wonder to the celestial hosts; and sometimes he vouchsafes some degree of the like exalted joy even to the saints on earth. It seems to have been the desire of Moses, when he says, *Exod. xxxiii. 18.* "I beseech thee shew me thy glory." And the same seems to have been the happy attainment of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration; of which see the account, *Matth. xvii. 1,—4.* "And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light; and behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." The lustre of their Master's appearance, and what they heard of his intercourse with the two inhabitants of heaven, seems to have made them quite forget that they had any thing to do on earth; or, at

least, made them very unwilling to return to their former state.

How shall I explain this, or bring it down to the conception of worldly men? Perhaps it is wrong to attempt it; but, lest any should go away, speaking with contempt or indignation of communion with God, as extravagance, enthusiasm, and folly, I shall take leave to support it by the following illustration. Suppose any of you were, as perhaps you have been, admitted to the sight of some exceeding strange and wonderful appearance in nature or art, will not this sometimes fill you with inexpressible surprise and delight? will it not, for a time, quite suspend your attention to any thing else? Your business, cares, fears, and other pleasures, will be all forgotten for a season. Now, if this is the case, I desire to know, why the glory of the true God, discovered in his word, and illustrated by his Spirit, may not, or ought not to be the subject of the greatest wonder, and most exalted pleasure to those who truly love him? The truth is, there is so much to be seen, that is surprising and astonishing, both in the nature and works of God, in creation, providence, and redemption, that the only thing that hinders us from dwelling with delight on this great subject; is the sinfulness of our nature, which too strongly prompts us to flee from him. When therefore the believer is freed from the apprehensions of guilt, and goes to God, as his God, in gratitude and duty, it is no wonder that he tastes a little of that unspeakable joy that is at his right hand. I doubt not, but many will say this is true. O let but the light of his reconciled countenance shine upon me, let me be but free from the doubt,

suspicion, and fear, suggested by my sins, and heaven would immediately begin to dawn upon my soul!

As intimate communion with God may be said to bring down something of heaven to earth, so it always carries the desires of the soul from earth to heaven. It is not only made up of faith and contemplation in the present state, but of hope, which breathes after farther discoveries in a state of greater perfection. It not only increases desire, but helps our conceptions. The soul, if I may speak so, climbs up to the summit of present enjoyments, that it may see the farther into what still remains. It says, as it were, if such the glory and lustre of the outer court, what must be the unvailed splendour of the holy of holies. You see the apostle Paul makes this use of comparative reflections, 1 Cor. xiii. 9,——12. “For we know in part; and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but, when I became a man, I put away childish things: for now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.” 1 John iii. 2. “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.”

Alas! my brethren, that intimate communion with God should be so rare, and that so few of us should attain to the disposition of the apostle of the Gentiles, who desired “to depart and to be with

Christ, which is far better." Let us be ashamed of it. Surely many of us have tasted a good deal, and seen a good deal more of the vanity of the world, which ought to wean our affections from it. Happy, happy they! who can use the language of the apostle to the Philippians, Phil. iii. 20, 21. "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." And, Titus ii. 14. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." That there are some who have been formerly, and of late so happily visited with the divine presence, I have little doubt; and to as many as have been so, surely I am warranted to say, *the Lord hath dealt bountifully with you.*

II. I come now to the second thing proposed, viz. to explain the import of the Psalmist's resolution, or his exhortation to his own soul, which all in the same situation ought to imitate, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul.* It may, perhaps be supposed only to imply, that he resolves to forget his anxiety and care, and solace himself in that state of quiet and security to which he was happily brought by the kindness of Providence; but though, no doubt, this may be considered as in part the meaning of the words, I cannot think it is the whole. It would be doing great injury to the holy Psalmist, to suppose that he was not carried upward in his views to the Author

of his rest, or to God himself, as the rest of his soul. The whole psalm, indeed breathes his piety and gratitude to God; and his desire of testifying it by every proper and acceptable expression. Taking the words therefore in this light, we may suppose them to imply the following particulars:

1. Return and give the praise where it is due; and humbly acknowledge God as the author of thy mercies. He had, as we see by the preceding verses, earnestly implored help from God in his distress; and now desires to confess that it came from no other quarter. We are exceeding ready to fail in this particular: sometimes we look upon the outward means and visible instruments of our deliverance, and forget the supreme Disposer of all events, who employs them, directs them, and blesses them. Sometimes we embrace the mercy itself with so much complacency, that we forget both our former necessity, and the author of our deliverance. In opposition to both these, it is our indispensable duty to ascribe every mercy we receive, and every deliverance with which we are favoured, to God as its proper author, and to offer him the tribute of praise, and to bless his name for ever. James i. 17. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." I admire the manner of speaking frequently found in scripture, where the kindness of men towards us is immediately and expressly attributed to the agency of God, Gen. xxxix. 21. "But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." Acts vii. 6, 10. "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph

into Egypt; but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt, and all his house." Dan. i. 9. "Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs."

How great a duty, and how important a part of religion, praise and thanksgiving to God are, may be seen in every page of the holy scripture, both in the way of precept and example, Deut. viii. 10. "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God, for the good land which he hath given thee." Psal. cxxxvi. 1, 2, 3. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods; for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords; for his mercy endureth for ever." Psal. ciii. 1, 2, 3. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." Psal. cxlv. 1, 2. "I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever." And that this duty ought particularly to be discharged by those who have been highly favoured of God in any respect is very plain. Though the glory of God is the subject of habitual adoration, and the constant course of his bounty the subject of habitual gratitude, yet new and special mercies, give as it were a new spring, and

add strength and vigour to the soul in this exercise. Our praises ought to be particular, as well as general; and those who observe and record the special instances of divine mercy toward them, will find a fulness of heart in this duty, to which they are perfect strangers, who satisfy themselves with a general and indiscriminate acknowledgment of the divine bounty. Many of the psalms of David are monuments of his gratitude for particular interpositions of providence in his behalf, and bear particular marks of reference to the time and circumstances of his distress.

I only add upon this subject, that the Psalmist might well say in this sense, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul*; for a tender and affectionate acknowledgment of the mercies of God, not only makes us find our rest in him, but makes his mercies rest with us; it increases the sweetness of every comfort;—it purifies its nature,—it prolongs its duration.—It increases the sweetness of it: for this I appeal to the experience of every child of God. Do you ever taste so much real delight in any mercy, as when you pour out your heart to God in gratitude for bestowing it; even in gifts from men we are sometimes sensible of a higher value in them, on account of the person who gave them, than any worth they have in themselves. This holds, in the strongest manner, with regard to God; the more we return our mercies in praise to the giver, the more we possess them, and the greater richness we discover in them.—It also purifies their nature. Many instances of divine goodness regard our state and circumstances in the present life; they are the objects of sensible gratifi-

cation, as well as religious gratitude. Now, when we observe and celebrate the kindness of him that bestows them, they not only strengthen the body, but sanctify the soul. Is it not something more than barely outward provision, when we say with the Psalmist, Psal. xxiii. 5. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil? my cup runneth over?"——Again, it prolongs the duration of our mercies. One of the consequences of the weakness and imperfection of the present state, is, that we are ready soon to forget our mercies, and to lose the relish of them. In how many instances do we find that what gave us great and sensible pleasure at first, becomes in time habitual, and at last indifferent to us? Now praising and confessing the goodness of God in them, serves to write them upon our hearts, to continue the sweetness of common mercies; and keep up the memory of signal mercies, or those of an extraordinary kind. Health, strength, provision, and comfort, when they are not interrupted, are apt to be quite overlooked; but the daily acknowledgment of divine goodness, gives us not only the possession but the use of them. Signal mercies, in time, slip out of the memory, but the more we have acknowledged them, they will be the more easily recalled to remembrance. I have known instances of pious persons, appointing fixed days of thanksgiving for extraordinary deliverances, which served to renew their sense of them, and gave them some degree, at least, of the same joy and gratitude which they felt when the event happened. Some also, by keeping a record in writing of the paths of

divine providence toward them, are able to read them over at proper times in their order, to compare them together, and thus as it were, to have a rich feast upon a whole life of mercies, the remembrance of many of which would otherwise have been effaced by time.

2. This expression may imply returning to God, and delighting in him as our reconciled God, and supreme portion and happiness. This is indeed the rest of the gracious soul, which gives him more joy than all outward possessions taken together. His outward possessions have no value, but as they flow from it, and lead back to it. He says with the Psalmist, Ps. iv. 6, 7, 8, "There be many that say, who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety." Psal. lxxiii. 23,—25. "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Now, my brethren, this rest is frequently disturbed, and meets with interruption in the present life. Sin is the chief cause of interruption; it raises an interposing cloud, and separates between God and us. But it is also sometimes interrupted by affliction, and distresses of various kinds. These two causes have a mutual relation, and a mutual influence one upon another. Afflictions bring sin to remembrance, and sin squeez-

cs the bitterest ingredients into the cup of affliction; so that it sometimes becomes a cup of trembling. The believer is often ready to mistake the rod of fatherly correction for the exterminating stroke of avenging justice: hence the bitter and heart-melting complaints of many of the children of God. Job vi. 4. "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit, the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." Psal. xlii. 6, 7. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Lam. iii. 1,—4. "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned, he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old, he hath broken my bones."

While this continues, the believer is excluded from his rest; and indeed the more peace he can take in any thing, while at a distance from God, so much the worse sign it is of his character; so much the more fearful symptom of his state. But when the Lord hath loosened his bonds, lifted up his countenance upon him, and given him peace, is it not proper and natural for him to say, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.* When he hath seen the marks of distinguishing love in his mercies; when he hath tasted consolation under suffering, or communion with God, in

public or in secret, will not this dispose him to rest in God, to improve the happy season, and desire its continuance? All things else are vain, and have proved their vanity, but complete satisfaction is here.

I have no doubt, my brethren, that this is, if not the only, yet one of the chief senses, in which we ought to understand these words. Rest, you know, supposes labour, and even weariness before. Rest also seems to imply that which is the end of labour, or the desire of the weary. It also signifies that which is to continue, or that we wish to continue without further change. In this sense it is used, Psal. cxxxii. 8. and 14. "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it" which refers to the ark of the testimony taking a fixed abode, and being no more carried about from place to place. The same sense is conveyed to us by Heb. iv. 9. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." When, therefore, the Psalmist says, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul*, it means that God and his favour, was his supreme and ultimate desire, the very centre of his hope. Is it not so with every real servant of God? All true religion points to, and ends in this. All religion, without this, is an empty form. And when we return to this, after any interruption, is it not like the distressed mariner, after having been driven about in a tempestuous ocean, and threatened every moment with destruction by the rising billows, at last obtaining sight, and entering with heart-felt joy into a haven of security and peace?

3. In the last place, this expression implies a con-

fidence and reliance on God for protection and security against future dangers. This seems necessary to the completeness and perfection of any deliverance. The danger may be warded off for a season; if there is ground to fear its immediate or speedy return, the state is very precarious, and the comfort very imperfect; but those who are delivered from fear of evil, and think they can depend upon their defence and guard, have received a deliverance indeed.

Now, this is the view which a believer is particularly led to take of God, as his sure and all-sufficient help. He considers the greatness of his power, the operation of his providence, and the faithfulness of his promise. How often does the Psalmist express, in the most triumphant manner, his dependance upon God? Psal. xviii. 1, 2, 3. "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies." Psal. lxii. 5, 6, 7. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God." Psal. cxlvi. 5, 6. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, which keepeth truth for ever."

My brethren, this trust and dependance on God is a very considerable part of the rest and comfort of

the believer's soul. He is, on all hands, surrounded with enemies, liable to suffering, exposed to temptations. The more he knoweth of himself, the more he feels his own inherent weakness and insufficiency. But, in God, he sees full and adequate provision for all his wants, Psal. xxxiv. 22. "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

This trust is also in a particular manner generated by remembering the past goodness, or by a sense of the recent mercy of God. We have daily experience of our own weakness and unsteadiness in this respect. When our hopes are in any measure disappointed, when calamities threaten, when afflictions visit us, we are ready to yield to the dark suggestions of fear and despondence; but when we contemplate the great goodness of God on former occasions, or when we have met with any singular manifestation of his grace and favour, it serves to strengthen our confidence, and often, indeed, to cover us with shame for our unbelief and distrust. On the whole, then, a believer who imitates the Psalmist in this expression, *Return into thy rest, O my soul*, may be supposed to say, "Thou hast tasted, O my soul, of the loving kindness of God! he hath brought thee out of deep waters; he hath calmed thy fears; he hath set thy feet upon a rock; he hath established thy goings: Blush, blush! when thou considerest how easily thy confidence was shaken; how prone thou wast to sink under affliction; and, upon every new trial, to doubt his power, and distrust his promise. But, now, return unto thy rest; lay aside thy fears, which have so unhappy an influence both

on thy progress and comfort. Commit thy ways to him, and he will bring thy desires to pass."

I come now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said: And,

1st, From what hath been said, you may observe one great branch of the sinfulness of the world in general; forgetfulness of God, and unthankfulness for his mercies. How little sense of the divine goodness is in the hearts of men? how formal, cold, and frozen their language in praise? how languid their endeavours to serve him, from whose indulgent hand every blessing they enjoy flows? One would think that here might be some hold even of worldly men, who have not wholly extinguished the light of natural conscience. The greatest part of this discourse has been directed to those of another character. Suffer me, now, to speak a little immediately to them. You are not insensible to worldly comforts; on the contrary, you love them too ardently; you seek them too eagerly; you indulge them too liberally. Consider, I beseech you, who it is that bestowed them; who it is, that, when he pleaseth, can blast them to you, or withdraw them from you. O the blindness and infatuation of mortal men! How passing and transitory are all created comforts! how certain and speedy the approach of death and judgment! Think what return you have made for all the goodness of God toward you from the womb even till now. And let me beg every hearer to recollect how far he stands indebted to God for continued health, for plentiful provision, for remarkable deliverances, for early instruction, for providential warn-

ings. And if God, by his Spirit, has raised convictions in your minds, or earnestly pleaded with you in his gospel, in what a terrifying light will all this despised goodness appear, when you come to the brink of that gulf which separates you from an eternal world, but, above all, when you appear before God in an unembodied state? It is my duty to set this before you with plainness and fidelity; it is your present privilege, that you hear the things that belong to your everlasting peace. May God himself write them upon your hearts, and constrain you to flee, by faith, to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.

2dly, Let me also beseech every serious person, who now hears me, to consider how far he hath sinned against God and his own comfort, by forgetting the goodness of God, both in common and special mercies. It is surprising to think how little we make conscience of this duty, and even when it is remembered in some measure, in what a lifeless, heartless manner it is performed. How little proportion is there between the prayers of distress, and the songs of deliverance? how little sense upon our minds of the many gracious interpositions of divine providence in our favour? If he hath invited us to communion with himself; if he hath brought us into the secret chambers, and made his banner over us to be love, how soon is it forgotten? how little desire of its continuance? what faint endeavours to recover it? how little concern to improve it? Strange, indeed, that some, after tasting of the heavenly manna, should feel so unseemly a longing after the flesh-pots of Egypt,

But do you not sin as much against interest and comfort as your duty? To forget a mercy, is to lose it; to give thanks for it, is to preserve and to increase it. It is a very common mistake for serious persons to sit brooding over their sorrows, and, by that means, at once to increase their sufferings, and to prevent their deliverance. I do not know a more useful direction to melancholy or dejected Christians, than by a deliberate effort of mind, from a sense of duty, to recollect and give praise to God for the many mercies which he hath bestowed on them. This may be a happy mean of silencing their complaints, of turning the tide of their affections, and giving them "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Is not thankfulness the improvement of mercies? and hath not God said, to him that "hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have?"

3dly, I shall conclude, with offering the three following directions to those who are truly sensible of the goodness of God.

1. Be circumspect and watchful; though a thankful frame of spirit is of great advantage, both for your sanctification and peace, yet it is not out of the reach of temptation; let it not produce pride, security, or self-sufficiency. It is an excellent direction given by the Psalmist to men in high station and prosperity, Psal. ii. 11. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Take heed also, lest it degenerate into carnal and sensual joy, making you rest with complacency in the creature, instead

of being led by it to place your delight and happiness in the unchangeable Creator.

2. Be public-spirited and useful; if the Lord hath dealt bountifully with you, commend his service, and speak to his praise. This was often the resolution and practice of the Psalmist David, Psalm lxvi. 16. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." Psal. cxlv. 5, 6, 7. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works; and men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts; and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness." Let me recommend this particularly to Christians of age and experience. It gives religion a very discouraging aspect to younger persons, when such have nothing to utter but complaints. On the contrary, where can we behold a more edifying sight, than an aged person ready to bear testimony to the peace and comfort of true religion, dying by necessity to the pleasures and gaieties of time, but living above them on the earnest of his future inheritance; and instead of a fretful spirit arising from the frailties of a tottering frame, preserving a cheerfulness and serenity of mind, in the hope of a blessed resurrection.—I imagine I hear some say, nothing is more true; but, alas! I am not the person: I see nothing in me but causes of complaint, or grounds of fear. I believe it is so with all; but you have mistaken or perverted the meaning of the exhortation. I did not advise you to boast of yourself, but to speak to the praise of God. I believe it is good, in most cases, to resist despond-

ing fears, as so many temptations, and send them away as hinderers of your duty, without a reply. Or, may I not justly say, admitting the truth of all that you can advance against yourselves, is it not but so much the more reasonable, that you should say, with Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, that thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

3. Be frequent and diligent in secret prayer. This is the way to preserve your watchfulness, and to increase your usefulness. The more you converse with God in secret, you will speak with the more judgment and profit to men in public. This is the way to dispose of your complaints. What signifies repeating them to men, who may despise you, and at best, can only pity you, when you may carry them to God who can effectually help you? Speak as much ill of yourselves to him as you please; but be so just as to speak honourably of him and his service, to others who converse with you.—Now, may the Lord supply all your wants, from his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. May he give you the sanctified use of every step of his providence, whether of mercy or of trial. "May the God of peace, (Heb. xiii. 20, 21.) that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

S E R M O N VII.

A VIEW OF THE GLORY OF GOD HUM- BLING TO THE SOUL.

JOB xliiii. 5, 6.

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

MY brethren, we can have no experimental knowledge, and indeed we have not much distinct knowledge at all of the nature of religion as it takes place among angels, and other intelligent beings who have kept their first estate, and never were polluted by sin. From some things however recorded in scripture, we have reason to believe, that they appear before God with the greatest lowliness and self-abasement, that they are at all times deeply penetrated with a sense of the infinite disproportion between themselves as derived, dependent, limited, imperfect beings, and the eternal, immutable, omnipotent Jehovah. Thus, in the vision of Isaiah, in the sixth chapter of that book, ver. 1, 2, 3. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims;

each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." But, if this is the case with these exalted and happy spirits, how much more must a deep humiliation of mind be necessary to us, who, by sin, have rendered ourselves the just objects of divine wrath, and whose hope of salvation is founded only on the riches of divine grace? We ought never to forget, that every instance of the favour of God to man, is not to be considered as the exercise of goodness to the worthy, nay, not merely as bounty to the needy, or help to the miserable, but mercy to the guilty.

For this reason, as repentance is necessary to every sinner, in order to his reconciliation with God; so those Christians preserve the justest views of their present state and character, as well as the foundation of their hope, who frequently renew this salutary exercise. I cannot help saying further, that those make the wisest provision for the preservation of their inward peace, who frequently water that tender plant with the tears of penitential sorrow. To assist you in this exercise, and to point out the proper grounds of it, I have chosen to insist a little on these words, in which you see the effect which a discovery of the glory and majesty of God had upon his servant Job: *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

It is not necessary to my present purpose, to enter into the dispute between Job and his friends, al-

though, no doubt, the words of the text have an evident relation to it. The controversy seems plainly to have turned upon this point. His friends finding him in deep distress, under the most complicated affliction, would needs have it, that no good man could be so frowned upon by a righteous God; and therefore that his former profession must have been hypocritical and false. This is evident from the manner in which Eliphaz opens the charge against him. chap. iv. 6, 7, 8, 9. "Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed." In opposition to this, Job asserts and maintains his integrity in general, and, withal, affirms their opinion to be false; for that God, in his just and sovereign providence, brings affliction both on the righteous and the wicked. That this is the proposition which he all along endeavours to support, is plain, as from many other passages, so particularly from chap. ix. 22. "This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the perfect, and the wicked."

Thus stood the matter in dispute, between Job and his friends, in which, though that good man had supported the truth on the subject of divine providence; yet in the heat of the debate, and the anguish of his own sufferings, he had let fall some expressions, not only of impatience, but of disrespect to the conduct of the Lord his Maker. For these

he was first reprov'd by Elihu, and afterwards, with unspeakable force and majesty, by God himself, who asserts the dignity of his power, and the righteousness of his providence. On this discovery of the glory of divine perfection, the sufferer was deeply humbled, and expresses a sense of his own vileness and folly, in the 4th and 5th verses of the fortieth chapter: "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further." And again, in the beginning of the forty-second chapter, concluding with the words of the text.

It is not improbable, from the beginning of the thirty-eighth chapter, that it pleased God to give Job some visible representation of his glory and omnipotence. This was not unusual in ancient times, before the canon of the scripture was closed. But, no doubt, the discovery which chiefly affected him was inward and spiritual, carrying home with irresistible force, the great truths which we still find recorded in a manner inimitably noble and sublime. *I have heard of thee, says he, by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.* This implies, that, as seeing gives a more distinct, full, and satisfying knowledge of any thing, than hearing of it only by the report of others, the impressions which he then had of the majesty and glory of God, were far stronger than any he had ever felt before.—*Therefore, says he, I abhor myself.* It filled him with self-loathing and abhorrence.—*And I repent in dust and ashes.* This is either, in general, a strong expression of deep penitence and sorrow, of which dust and ashes were

anciently the signs ; or, perhaps, it has a particular reference to his present miserable and afflicted state, described in chap. ii. 8. “ And he took him a pot-herd to scrape himself withal ; and he sat down among the ashes.” As if he had said, Lord, I am deeply sensible of the evil of every rash word, of every rebellious thought. I confess, that thou hast afflicted me in truth and faithfulness ; and that, in this low and desolate condition, it becomes me to lay my hand upon my mouth, and to repent of that guilt which would have fully justified thy providence in a still heavier stroke.

The words thus explained, present to us this general and most important truth, That a discovery of the perfection, glory, and majesty of God, has a powerful influence in leading us to repentance ; and that the clearer this discovery is, the more sincere will be our repentance, and the deeper our humiliation. In discoursing farther on this subject at present, I propose only, through divine assistance,

I. To make some observations, at once to illustrate and confirm the proposition above laid down, as to the effect of a discovery of the glory of God. And, in the

II. And last place, to make some practical improvement of what shall be said.

I. Then, I am to make some observations, at once to explain and confirm the proposition just now laid down, as to the effect of a discovery of the glory of God. But, before we enter on what is principally

intended, I must intreat your attention to the following preliminary remarks :

1. That this truth will hold equally certain in whatever way the discovery is made. It may please God to manifest himself to his people in very different ways. Sometimes it may be in a way wholly, or in part, miraculous, as in the case of Job, Isaiah, and some others mentioned in scripture ; sometimes by affecting dispensations of providence ; sometimes by his ordinances, or instituted worship, accompanied with the operation of his Spirit ; and sometimes by this last alone, without the help or accession of any outward mean.

2. I hope it will not be thought improper, that, in reasoning on the influence of a discovery of the glory of God, I sometimes bring in view the additional manifestations given us in the gospel of the divine glory. This, to be sure, could not be supposed to make a part of what was discovered to Job, to whom that mystery, hid from ages and generations, and only opened in the fulness of time, was very obscurely, if at all known. But the example afforded us in the text, leads us to a general truth ; in the illustration and application of which, we may make use of all that is known to us of the nature and government of God. The

3. And principal remark is, that, when I speak of the influence of a discovery of the glory of God, I mean an internal and spiritual discovery, and not such a knowledge as is merely speculative, and rests in the understanding, without descending into the heart. There is a common distinction to be met with in almost every practical writer, between know-

ledge merely speculative, that swims in the head, and practical or saving knowledge, that dwells in and governs the heart. That there is such a distinction in fact, experience obliges every man to confess: but it is extremely difficult to speak in a clear and precise manner upon it; to tell wherein it consists; or to shew how these two sorts of knowledge differ otherwise, than by their effects. Yet even to point out their radical difference, seems necessary to me, who propose to shew the happy influence and powerful efficacy of this knowledge, when it is of the right kind.

For this purpose, my brethren, be pleased to observe, that a barren speculative knowledge of God, is that which fixes chiefly on his natural perfections; or if it be supposed to take in such as are moral, it is only to reason upon them as an object of science; but the true knowledge of God, is an inward and spiritual discovery of the amiableness and excellence of his moral perfections; or, to speak more in the scripture style, to perceive that he is indeed "glorious in his holiness. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." This is the language of celestial adoration, of those who "see him as he is, and know even as they are known." The same, in some measure, is the view given to every real child of God on earth, and alone serves to distinguish his children of every rank, and every degree of capacity, from others of an opposite character. Let me suppose a poor Christian weak in understanding, and unassisted by education, who is witness to any extraordinary act of divine power: for example, a thunder storm, seeming to rend the heavens asunder, and

either laying some ancient and venerable pile in ashes, or perhaps, striking some persons to death, in a manner swifter than thought; he is immediately affected with a sense of the sovereignty of the Lord of nature, the holiness of every part of his will, the duty of absolute subjection in the creature, and the sinfulness of every rebellious thought. But, above all, he is struck with a sense of the malignity of sin, which has introduced so many natural evils, and, as it were, armed the elements in their Maker's cause. Such a person, though he can express his thoughts but very poorly, nay, though he can hardly speak to others with coherence or consistency, sees much more of God, than he who can reason on the planetary system; who can trace the beauty, variety, and extent of the Creator's works, and thence infer the necessity of a self-existent, almighty, and intelligent first cause. The one may expatiate on the wonderful works, or the wise purposes of the Author of nature; the other feels and confesses him to be God. Alas! my brethren, we see too often, that knowledge and holiness in us, do not bear proportion one to another. We see every day examples of the greatest intellectual abilities, the noblest natural talents, being abused to the worst of purposes; for such I must always reckon, their serving no higher end than to adorn and set off the possessor, or burn incense to human vanity.—By a discovery, then, of the perfections, majesty, and glory of God, I understand the glory of his infinite holiness; that holiness which is inseparable from his nature, which shines in all his works, and in all his ways.

These observations being premised, let us now

consider what influence a discovery of the glory of God hath in producing repentance, and increasing humility. And, in the

1st Place, It hath this effect, as it tends to convince us of sin, and, particularly to bring to light these innumerable evils, which a deceitful heart often, in a great measure, hides from its own view. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God, which discovers and exposes the works of darkness. That a view of the divine Majesty has a strong tendency to give us a deep sense of our own sinfulness, is plain from many scripture examples. That of Job, in our text, is one directly in point. Another you have in Isaiah, chap. vi. 5. where the reflection of the prophet, on a view of the divine glory, is, "Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Another instance you may see in the apostle John, who, upon a view of the Redeemer in his glory, was, in a manner, deprived of life, through excessive fear. Rev. i. 17. "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." The only other instance I mention is of the apostle Peter, who, on the unexpected appearance, or rather from a view of the power of Christ, manifested in a miracle, was immediately struck with a sense of guilt, Luke v. 8. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

It is not difficult to explain how a view of the divine holiness tends to discover and to affect us with

a sense of our sinfulness. Nothing makes any quality appear so sensibly as a comparison with its opposite. The application of a straight rule marks the obliquity of a crooked line; nay, it marks even the least degree of variation, which by a less accurate trial would not have been discovered. Any piece of deformity appears more hideous and shocking when compared with perfect beauty. For the same reason, a clear view of the holiness of God, and a sense of his intimate presence with us, tends to bring sin to remembrance, as well as to confusion for those sins, which before we were able to justify, palliate, or conceal. We are expressly assured that our first parents immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, were sensible of their guilt, and I cannot think they were wholly insensible of the omniscience and omnipresence of God. Yet we find that their fear greatly increased (doubtless from a sense of sin) when they heard God's voice in the garden, Gen. iii. 8. "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

You may take a very plain and simple illustration of this from daily experience. Are there not some persons of loose principles and irregular practice, who, when by themselves, or in society like themselves, justify many of their sins, and to all appearance, commit them without remorse, as innocent, if not laudable? but let the same persons be carried into sober company, especially into the presence of any person eminent for piety and gravity,

and they will be restrained and ashamed, and not able to open their mouths in defence of their licentious carriage. The mere presence of such a person carries instant irresistible conviction with it, by forcing a comparison between piety and profanity; that is to say, good and evil, light and darkness. So certain a truth is this, that one of the ancient heathen authors gives it as a rule for moral conduct, “that men should always imagine themselves in the presence of such a man as Cato, renowned for gravity and virtue.” But if the fancied presence of a mortal, in whom some faint rays, if I may speak so, of the divine image appear by reflection, has so much influence, how much greater would be the effect of a firm persuasion of the real presence of a holy God, “who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity!” What is it else than this that makes wicked men flee the society of the good as painful, and shun the thoughts of God as intolerable; so that it is the scripture character of such, that they say unto their Maker practically, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”

2. A discovery of the glory of God serves to point out the evil of sin, the aggravations of particular sins, and to take away the excuses of the sinner. Let us remember what I observed in a preceding part of this discourse, that it must be a discovery of the glory of the divine holiness: not only a knowledge of the true God, and understanding what he is, but a view of his infinite glory and beauty in being such. It must necessarily set the evil of sin in the clearest light, that all sin, as such, strikes immediately at the very being and perfections of God. When the

law of God shews us our sins, we may be ready to complain of its strictness and severity, and wish to slip our necks from under the yoke. But when we see that the law could not be otherwise than it is, without being faulty; when we see that it is nothing else but a fair transcript of the moral perfections of God; and when we look up to the great and bright original, it must convince us that all sin is a direct opposition to the nature, as well as a rebellion against the will of God. If he is infinitely perfect and glorious, sin must be infinitely hateful and abominable. No man can plead for sin, in any instance or in any degree, but he must blaspheme the nature and perfections of God, to which it stands in opposition.

All men, indeed, by nature, are enemies to God himself in their minds by wicked works; and they hate his law, because it is spiritual and pure. There are also too many in this age, who have very relaxed principles as to the extent and obligation of the law, and of consequence, very slight thoughts of the evil of sin. But a view of the glory of God rectifies at once these fatal errors, and carries home such conviction of the rights of the Creator, the obligation and subjection of the creature, and the beauty and excellence of that image which was stained by sin, as forces us to adopt the language of the Holy Ghost: "How evil and how bitter a thing is it to depart from the living God!" God grant that there may be many in this assembly, who understand and feel the force of this truth! There is need, my brethren, to attend to it; for all convictions of sin, which do not proceed from this source,

or do not necessarily include this view, whatever pain or terror they may occasion, will prove empty and fruitless at last. Though there may be a slavish fear of the power of God, unless there be a view of the infinite evil of sin, there cannot be any lasting and saving change.

The same view also points out the aggravation of particular sins. The more clearly we understand the nature of God, our relation to, and dependance upon him, the more will we perceive the aggravation of every sin which bursts asunder these bonds. A view of the glory of God must either be general, or particular; or perhaps, for the most part, there is a mixture of both. My meaning is, that when there is a discovery of the glory of God in general, there is often at the same time, a peculiar and striking display of some one attribute, of power, wisdom, justice, or mercy. Now, how strongly does this impress upon the mind, a sense of the evil of those sins which strike directly against that perfection which happens to be set in the strongest point of view! When any display is given of the omniscience of God, how does it make us sensible of the impiety and folly of secret sins! Dan. ii. 47. "The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret." When the power of God is made manifest, how does it aggravate the guilt of presumption and confidence! Isa. xlv. 9. "Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker: let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth.

Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? or thy work, he hath no hands?

When the wisdom of God is displayed, doth not then all distrust appear highly criminal? Ought we not to say with the Psalmist, Psal. xxvii. 1. "The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" When we have a view of our absolute dependance upon, and unspeakable obligations to the divine bounty, what a sense does this give us of the sin of unthankfulness, and forgetfulness of God! Of how many unhappy sensualists may this complaint be made! Isa. i. 2, 3. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Without any further enumeration, it will appear undeniable, that the clearer the discovery of the glory of God, the more must not only the evil of sin in general appear, but every particular crime must be loaded with new aggravations. I cannot help mentioning here, in a few words, that this is the immediate effect of a discovery of the glory of God, as it shines in Jesus Christ. The unmerited, unparalleled love, manifested to sinners in the gospel, greatly aggravates their ingratitude and rebellion. And the more that believers reflect upon their own conduct, and compare it with the grace and condescension of their Redeemer, the more they must *abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes.*

I only add on this head, that a discovery of the

glory of God takes away the excuses of the sinner. How prone men are to excuse and palliate their sins, we all know by experience. It is a light sense of the evil of sin, that leads us to commit it; and there is no reason to be surpris'd, if this, joined with self-interest, makes us ingenious in forming an apology for it after the commission. Hence often arise hard thoughts of the threatenings of God against sin as severe. Hence also unbelieving thoughts, which will not admit that ever he will fulfil his word, or execute the threatened judgment. But a discovery of the glory of God, particularly of his infinite holiness, by shewing the evil of sin in its proper colours, stops every mouth, drags the sinner into the presence of his Judge, and strips the guilty criminal of every vain plea. We see plainly, in the case of Job, that he had such a view of the power, dominion, and absolute sovereignty of God, as put him entirely to silence, and convinced him, that there was no room for contending; no place for comparison between so unequal (must I call them) parties, God and man, Job xl. 4. "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth."

This right of sovereignty in God, and the duty of absolute, immediate, unconditional subjection in the creature, I find plainly and frequently established in scripture. It is indeed entirely in this style, which may well be called the style of the King of kings, that God speaks to Job in the four chapters preceding that where my text lies. Though he is brought in speaking to resolve a difficulty in providence; yet, you may observe, he does not say one word as

to the justice of his proceeding ; but, under many of the strongest images, sets forth his irresistible power; chap. xxxviii. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. “ Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge ? Gird up now thy loins like a man ; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth ? Declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest ? or who hath stretched the line upon it ? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened ? or who laid the corner stone thereof ? ” And, again, chap. xl. 8, 9, 10, 11. “ Wilt thou also disannul my judgment ? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous ? Hast thou an arm like God ? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him ? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency, and array thyself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath : and behold every one that is proud, and abase him.”

The sovereignty of God, is what of all things else, sinners, while they continue in that character, are least capable of understanding, and least willing to submit to. This is not to be wondered at, because the very nature of sin consists in casting off our allegiance, and as far as in us lies, rejecting the authority of God. But, my brethren, a real discovery of his glory, at once raises him to the throne, and humbles us at his footstool, and is as if we heard a voice from heaven, addressed to us in the following striking words, Isa. ii. 10, 11. “ Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness

of men shall be bowed down ; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." One who hath so known God, will perceive, that there can be no more proper reply to objections on the part of man, to the divine procedure, than that of the apostle Paul, Rom. ix 20. "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

3. A discovery of the glory of God serves to point out the danger of sin. It is the hope of impunity that emboldens the sinner to transgress, and to persist in his transgressions. For this reason, we find the scriptures in general attributing the impenitence of sinners to these two great sources, ignorance and unbelief, Psal. xiv. 1. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." And, in ver. 4. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" that is to say, such bold rebellion in their conduct plainly discovers the atheism of their hearts. To the same purpose, Psal. x. 11, 13. "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it.—Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require it." But a discovery of the divine glory, at once destroys the foundation of this stupid security and impious presumption. It realizes the very being of God more than before, as is plainly implied in the words of Job: *I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.* It makes his presence sensible, and teaches us, that "all things are naked before him." So that there is no hope of lying concealed. It sets before us his holiness and justice; that he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. So that, while his nature con-

tinues the same, the guilty and impenitent cannot possibly obtain pardon. Above all, it sets before us the terror of his power, which is infinite and boundless; so that nothing can be more vain, than for the sinner to hope either to escape or resist.

Agreeably to all this we find, that in the holy scriptures, in which God hath been pleased to make himself known to us by external revelation, it is by asserting, and as it were displaying and producing to view, the glory of his infinite perfection, that he endeavours to deter us from sin, and animate or encourage us to duty. When God gave the law to the children of Israel, he gave them, at the same time, a display of his greatness and majesty in a very awful manner. To express his sovereign authority, and the absolute propriety he had in them, he introduces it with these words: "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." You may also remember, how often, in appointing the several Mosaic constitutions, these significative words are repeated, *I am the Lord*. In the same manner, to impress his people with a sense of the evil of sin, as committed against such a God, he declares his own absolute dominion, Mal. i. 14. "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

When he would give his people a deep conviction of the folly and danger of secret sins, he sets forth his omniscience and omnipresence, Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar

off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." When he would express the danger of obstinacy and disobedience, he gives a very lively idea of his infinite power, Jer. v. 22. "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" The very same thing he doth to encourage the trust of his own people, Isa. xlv. 6. "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God." When he would make us sensible, that if we continue in sin, it is impossible for us to escape punishment, what a terrible representation does he give of his dreadful and irresistible vengeance! Prophecies of Nah. i. 5, 6. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

Thus we see, that God in scripture reveals the glory of his own nature, as the effectual means of restraining us in the commission of sin, or turning us from it; and plainly supposes, that nothing but ignorance of him can encourage sinners in their rebellion. Neither can it be denied, that when there is an inward and powerful discovery of these truths

to the mind, it must lead us to repentance, and lay us prostrate before his throne, in obedience and submission. Who, that knoweth the Almighty, will run upon the thick bosses of his buckler? or will not rather use this dutiful language of Job, chap. ix. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. "I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? which removeth the mountains, and they know not; which overturneth them in his anger; which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble."

4. In the last place, a view of the divine glory tends to lead us to repentance, as it sets forth his infinite mercy, and affords encouragement to, as well as points out the profit of repentance. Just and proper conceptions of God cannot be given us, without including his great mercy. This bright perfection shone, even on Mount Sinai, through all the terrors of that legal dispensation, Exod. xxxiii. 18; 19. "And he said, I beseech thee shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, 7. "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness

and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Without the knowledge of this amiable attribute, all the other perfections of God would signify little to bring us to true repentance. Without this, they carry nothing in them but unmixed terror to the guilty. Without this, therefore, the consideration of his infinite holiness and purity, his inflexible justice, and almighty power, would only serve to drive us farther from him, by throwing us into absolute despair. But when, to all the other perfections of God, we join his infinite mercy, the true knowledge of him serves not only to destroy criminal presumption, but to animate to dutiful submission. Thus the Psalmist expresses himself, Psal. cxxx. 3, 4. "If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Here you may observe, that when he says, "there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared," he not only means, that there is encouragement to serve God, but that his mercy itself leads to that filial reverence which is so essential a part of true penitence. The greatness and mercy of God happily conspire in melting the heart of the sinner. There is an expression of singular beauty, Hof. iii. 5. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King: and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter days."

This leads me to observe, that it is in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that we have the brightest and clearest display of divine mercy. It is in Christ, that we have the true and saving dis-

covery of the glory and perfections of God. And it is particularly in him, that we have an united illustration, and joint display of greatness and goodness, of majesty and mercy. In the undertaking of our blessed Redeemer, we have a very clear and affecting view of those perfections, that shew the evil of sin, and the danger of the sinner. Never did the holiness of God shine brighter, or his hatred and indignation against sin, appear with greater terror, than when the sword of his justice was drawn out against *the man who is his fellow*. When God swept away a polluted world by an universal deluge; when he overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven; when the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; these were terrible proofs of his hatred of sin, of the justice and holiness of his nature. Yet were they, after all, but faint evidences, in comparison of what were given, when “he who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God,—was found in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

But, at the same time, in this great event, hath he not magnified his love? Rom. v. 8. “But God hath commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” How shall we think or speak on this unfathomable subject! Christ Jesus is the fruit of the Father’s everlasting love to sinners of mankind. How great the giver! how unspeakable the gift! how mean and worthless the objects of his love! God is love. Power, wisdom, holiness, and justice, shine, indeed, in the

doctrine of the cross. But, above all, grace and mercy prevail “and reign through righteousness unto eternal life.” What a melting view to every convinced sinner! Zech. xii. 10. “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one that mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.” Must they not, with Job, *abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes*? This is a circumstance frequently taken notice of with regard to the gospel converts, Jer. xxxi. 9. “They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them.” Jer. l. 4, 5. “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten.” I shall close this head, by addressing to you the words of God to the children of Israel, Joel ii. 12, 13. “Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

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

I. You may learn, from this subject, the force

and meaning of those passages of scripture, in which the whole of religion is impressed by the knowledge of God. Thus, Prov. ix. 10. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." The same thing is affirmed by our blessed Saviour, John xvii. 3. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." On the other hand, wicked men are often described by this short and expressive character, that they know not God, as in 2 Theff. i. 8. "In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God." The truth is, God is either wholly unknown, or greatly mistaken by wicked men. None but his servants do truly see his glory; and the more they see of him, the more they are assimilated to him. Thus the apostle Paul describes conversion in the following terms, 2 Cor. iv. 6. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And, in the same epistle, chap. iii. 18. he thus describes the progress of the Christian life, "But we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

2. From what hath been said on this subject, you may learn the great danger of a state of ignorance. If repentance, which is the beginning of true religion, takes its rise from a knowledge of the nature and perfections of God, does it not follow, that those who are grossly ignorant, are not only in a

contemptible, but in a deplorable state? that they must be strangers to the power and practice of religion, and dying in that condition, must perish eternally? It is much to be lamented, that even amongst us, who have the means of instruction in so great plenty, there are still many who continue grossly ignorant. How inexcusable are those parents, who do not make conscience of diligently training up their children in the knowledge of the things that belong to their eternal peace? I must also intreat all heads of families, whom God hath enabled to hire the labour of others, seriously to think of the obligation that lies upon them, to instruct their servants in the principles of religion, and not suffer any under their roof to perish for lack of knowledge. Do not think you have done enough, when you have given them food and wages, if you wholly neglect their precious souls. I do not expect to prevail upon you, faithfully to discharge this duty, by any arguments but those drawn from the glory of God, and your own everlasting interest; but I cannot help, at the same time, putting you in mind, that it is very much for your temporal interest. Depend upon it, the more conscientiously you discharge your duty to them, the more honestly, diligently, and cheerfully will they serve you. It is very common to hear complaints of the slothfulness, unfaithfulness, and insolence of servants; but, if we consider seriously what belongs to the duty of a master, there will be found, perhaps, as many, and as great faults on this side as on the other. It is surprising that some seem to expect in a poor uneducated creature, all manner of decency of behaviour, sweetness of temper, inte-

grity and diligence, and are ready to storm upon the least defect, while, at the same time, they shew no example in their own conduct, but of a visible neglect of duty both to God and man. O! my brethren, have pity on the ignorant, especially the younger sort, who would learn, if they had teachers. Ignorance is always a secure insensible state. They know nothing, and therefore they fear nothing. Public instruction is, in a great measure, useless to those who are not prepared for it by more familiar teaching at home. Let ministers speak never so plainly from the pulpit, it is still to many of them a strange language, which they do not comprehend.

3. From what hath been said on this subject, you may see the necessity of regeneration, or an inward change of heart, in order to real religion. You have heard above, that it is not a speculative knowledge of the nature and perfections of God, or understanding what he is, that leads to repentance, but a view of his excellence and amiableness, as glorious in his holiness. This none can have, but those who are in some measure transformed into the same image. Hence it is, that wicked men do not cherish, but avoid the thoughts of God. Hence it is, that extraordinary tokens of the divine power and presence, signal judgments, and unexpected strokes on themselves or their relations, distress and terrify them, and bring them under a slavish bondage for a little, but produce no love; no desire of union; no cordial submission. Hence also appears the foolishness of that sinful, but general propensity in men, to ask after a sign, and to desire that other and different evidence should be given them of the truth of reli-

gion than God hath seen meet. We have an example of this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded Luke xvi. towards the close. There the rich man is represented, as intreating that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren for their warning. When Abraham refers them to the revealed will of God, Moses and the prophets, he urges his request thus, ver. 30. "And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent;" to which the answer is given immediately, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

There have been others, at different times, who have desired such extraordinary proofs; but they would, of themselves, be attended with no real benefit. Though you had been on Mount Sinai with Moses, it would have produced terror, but no other effect, without a spiritual discovery of the real glory of God. See Exod. xix. 16. "And it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders, and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." And the same book, chap. xx. 18, 19. "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off: and they said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Another evidence of the same thing may be taken from the case of devils and damned spirits. They

have, no doubt, a sensible demonstration of the being, and probably a very clear intellectual knowledge of the nature of God; yet hath it not any effect in changing their dispositions: on the contrary, the more they know of him, who is so opposite to their temper, they hate him the more; it inflames their natural enmity, and makes it rage with double violence. This, I think, appears very plainly, both from the reason of the thing, and from the following passages of scripture, Matth. viii. 29. it is said of two demoniacs: "And behold they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Mark v. 6, 7. "But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." And again, Mark ix. 20. "And they brought him unto him; and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him, and he fell on the ground, and wallowed, foaming." From which passages, we may perceive, agreeable to what has been observed, that the presence of Christ increased at once the rage and misery of the unclean spirits. Let this excite us to pray that it would please God to reveal himself to us by his Spirit, and give us the saving knowledge of him, as he is "in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to himself."

4. Suffer me on this occasion, shortly to address myself to those who are strangers to true religion. Let me beseech them while they are yet in the way, and whilst the Spirit of God is striving with them

in his word and ordinances, to lay down the weapons of their rebellion against him, and to lay hold, by faith, on the atoning blood of Christ for their reconciliation and peace. Are there not some in this assembly, who have yet no knowledge of God, but that which makes his service a burden, his Sabbaths a weariness, and his people contemptible or odious? Are there not some tender spirits, who are passionate lovers of this present world, but unable to bear the view of mortality and misery in their fellow-creatures; who tremble at the gloom of a church-yard, or burying vault, and turn pale as ashes at the sight of a death's head, or an open grave? I beseech you, my beloved hearers to join with the terror of divine power, the riches of divine grace; and let both constrain you to "acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace, that thereby good may come unto you." I know no way by which you may avoid meeting with the king of terrors, but you may set him at defiance under the protection of the King of kings. There is no profit in forgetting, but there is both honour and profit in conquering death. Some are unhappily successful, for a season, in banishing every dismal idea from their minds. The false and flattering pleasures of life ingross their attention, and intoxicate their minds. But, in a little time, Behold the supreme Judge "cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." He is now beseeching you with tenderness, and waiting on you with patience. Embrace, therefore, the happy season. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye pe-

rish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

5. In the last place, you may see the reason why every truly good man, the more he groweth in religion, the more he groweth in humility. Growth in religion implies, or carries in it, a growing discovery of the glory of God, as it shines in his works, his word, his ordinances, his providence. This necessarily leads to self-abasement. O how contrary to religion is pride! But, above all others, how absurd, criminal, intolerable, is spiritual pride? What a proof of self-ignorance, as well as forgetfulness of God! The first views of a penitent are fixed on the enormities of his life; but when these are in some measure subdued, additional discoveries of the glory of God bring forth the latent corruptions of his heart. What affecting complaints does that eminent, zealous, faithful minister of Christ, the apostle Paul, make in the following well known passage, Rom. vii. 8. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not." And ver. 23, 24. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Nay, the clearest views which a believer can take of the riches of divine mercy through a Redeemer, though they afford unspeakable consolation in God, tend also deeply to humble him under a sense of his own unworthiness. The

doctrine of the cross is not more refreshing to the broken in heart, than it is abasing to the proud; for it was chosen of God for this very purpose “that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

On the whole, my brethren, as you cannot live under the direction of a better habitual principle, so you cannot prepare for any act of solemn worship more properly, than by deep humility. To improve this disposition, let me entreat you to make a serious and impartial search into the sins you have been guilty of, in heart and conversation, by omission or commission; by neglecting your duty to God, or the ill performance of his worship in public, in family, or in secret; by neglecting your duty to your neighbour, to yourselves, to your relations; or doing that which is wrong, by indulging in any measure, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life.” To conclude all, you will never have a more satisfying evidence, that your acts of worship, ordinary or more solemn, have been acceptable to God, than if they serve to clothe you with humility, and make you adopt and relish the words of Job in the text: *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

S E R M O N V I I I .

THE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

REV. vii. 15.

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

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

And, surely, this is a subject highly proper for our meditation on the evening of a communion Sabbath. In this ordinance, you have had the price paid for this glorious inheritance set before you, by symbolical representation, that your faith

in, and hope of the possession of it, might be the more confirmed. In the institution itself, as recorded by the apostle Paul, you find he connects the commemoration of the sufferings and death of Christ, with his second appearance in glory, 1 Cor. xi. 26. "For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Nay, our Lord himself seems to have had his heart and his thoughts in heaven, when he left this memorial of his presence on earth, as appears from Matth. xxvi. 29. "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And, indeed, we have his own example in this first communion, wherein he himself was the administrator, for following or concluding it with a meditation on the heavenly happiness; for, before he rose from it, he begins his excellent consolatory discourse in this manner, John xiv. 1, 2. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you."

It is true, indeed, my brethren, our knowledge of the future glory of the saints, is, at present, extremely imperfect, and must be so, for wise reasons, while we continue in the body. There are, however, several different views of it given in the word of God, highly worthy of our attention. Amongst others, this in our text, that they are *before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple*. That these words are to be understood

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

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

I. In the *first* place, then, I am to illustrate a little to you the happiness of the saints in perpetual communion with God in his temple above. And here, observe, that though I have said perpetual

communion with God, and did mean it of his immediate worship and service, I did not intend to assert, that they are at no time employed in a different manner, or in work which may be called by a different name. What variety of exercise may be provided for their noble and vigorous faculties, in the nature or works of God, we cannot pretend to know. As the angels are called “ministring spirits, sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation;” so we know not how far he may bless and dignify his saints, by employing them in the administration of some part of his extensive dominion. But it is surely just, to call their communion with God in his worship perpetual, both because of their frequent actual application to it, and because of that constant adoration of soul which we must suppose will accompany either an investigation of the nature and works, or an execution of the will of God. It is also well warranted by the expression in the text, *and serve him day and night in his temple*. Now, in order to illustrate the worship of the saints in heaven, we may consider it in two different lights: First, as it is *internal and spiritual*. Secondly, As it is *external and sensible*.

First, Let us consider the happiness of the saints, in that part of their celestial worship, which is internal and spiritual; and, in general, we must frequently recal to our minds the imperfection of our present discoveries, and remember, that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what the Lord hath laid up for them that love him.” There may, for any thing we know, be discoveries, and

by consequence, acts of worship, and dispositions of mind corresponding to them, totally different in kind from any thing we are now capable of, as well as higher in degree. Of these we must be absolutely silent: therefore, all that shall follow upon this subject, is founded upon the following remark, 'That whatever acts of worship we have now any experience of, and by which we are initiated, so to speak, into, and trained up for the employment of heaven, shall then be performed to far greater perfection, and with infinitely greater joy.

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

In the first place, Acts of adoration. By these, as distinguished from the others mentioned, I understand the immediate contemplation of the glorious excellence of the divine nature, and the exercise of these affections of soul which correspond to it. The nature of God is discovered, and his glory exhibited to view, in all his works, and in all his ways. And he is the proper object of the highest esteem and deepest admiration, and most ardent love of every reasonable creature, for what he is in himself, independent of any interest they may have, or hope to have in his favour. Therefore it is the first duty and chief end of man, to give unto the Lord the glory that is due unto his name. I know this is what worldly men, who live in sin cannot understand, and therefore are apt to deride; which is indeed the case with respect to all

the truths of God considered in their full extent, and as resting upon their proper foundation; the natural man cannot receive them. But as it is the first commandment of the law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;" so it is the leading and the capital truth taught and repeated in the sacred oracles, that all things were made for, that all things shall finally tend to, and therefore all intelligent creatures ought, supremely, to aim at the glory of God. This may be easily supported by unprejudiced reason; for what can be more just than to have the highest esteem of the highest excellence, the deepest admiration of boundless and spotless perfection, and a supreme love for what is infinitely amiable. It is wholly owing to the corruption of our nature, that we are so little sensible of the sin of neglecting this. And, indeed, a short and just description of our corruption may be given thus; it consists in dethroning God, and setting up self to be honoured, loved, and served in his room.

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

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

And is there not some lover of Christ saying, here, within himself, Why do you not mention the mystery of redemption, "God manifested in the flesh?" in this the glory of God eminently shines, his unequalled, his unrivalled glory. That this, as the work of God, (though we can hardly keep our own concerns out of view) shall be the particular theme of celestial praise is not to be doubted, and is evi-

dent from hence, that Christ, as the object of worship, is represented as appearing there like a Lamb that had been slain.

Once more, as the church of God at present, is the mean of illustrating his wisdom to principalities and powers, or to the angelic hosts, which we learn from Eph. iii. 10. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers, in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God;" so the order and government of these superior intelligences shall be opened to the view of the saints in glory. In the prospect of all this they shall say, Rev. xv. 3. "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." With what exultation of soul, then, with what fervour of adoring wonder, and admiring love, shall they celebrate the divine glory! As they shall be wholly freed from every degree of sinful and selfish bias, they shall feel the clearest conviction of the obligation of their duty, and discharge it by a free, unconstrained impulse of soul: for the same reason, the pleasure arising from it will be so much the more pure and unmixed, that it is not aimed at on its own account, nor purchased by any compliance that might but seem to have a mercenary view.

In the second place, Let us consider the celestial worship, as consisting in acts of gratitude and praise. And, here, observe, that though I have considered the disinterested love of God, and the humble adoration of his own matchless inherent excellence as first both in order and dignity, which it ought to be, this does not take away, or supersede acts of thanks-

giving, but rather lays the justest and noblest foundation for their exercise ; because it subjects the creature to the Creator ; keeps its dependance and obedience continually in view, and greatly enhances the favours bestowed by such a hand, and upon such objects. Gratitude for the goodness of God, is what surely we may have some conception of, even in this state, in which he loads us with his benefits, and in which every moment of our continuance is a proof and evidence of his patience and forbearance. The saints especially, who have learned not only to discern and confess the hand that sustains them, but to acknowledge God as the God of their salvation, must understand what it is to praise him for his mercies.

But how much louder must the voice of praise be in heaven than in earth ! The mercies for which they give praise are incomparably greater ; so is also the uniformity and security of their possession. What is the richest and most gorgeous attire, the most sumptuous and delicate fare, which this world can afford, compared with those rivers of pleasures which are at God's right hand ? How imperfect are all the enjoyments of this state by reason of the sufferings and sorrows that are mingled with them ? We are apt to envy one another through ignorance ; but the man liveth not on earth, who hath not some sorrows to allay his prosperity, except perhaps, for a few moments, when the mind is ingrossed, and as it were intoxicated with some late acquisition. Our present character is such as doth not admit of perfect happiness. Here must be the fire of affliction to purge away the dross of sin. But in the world to come,

the happiness of the saints is perfect and unmixed, for the people shall be all righteous. So it is said in the words immediately following the text: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." And, Rev. xxi. 3, 4. "And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." The precariousness of our present enjoyments greatly diminishes their value; they are very uncertain in their own nature, and our continuance with them is equally so. But, in heaven there shall be no more death, the inhabitants shall go no more out; and their enjoyments shall be such as can neither waste nor change. How animated, then, must be the praises of the higher house, especially when the reflection upon the wretchedness and precariousness of their past state must so greatly improve their sense of the riches and security of the present! Let me suppose a case, which indeed happens every day, though the effect of it is not fully discernible by us; suppose a poor Christian, perhaps poor in this world, but certainly poor in spirit, who hath long struggled with the evils of life, who hath patiently endured the insulting language, and disdainful eye, of the proud and prosperous, nay, which is far worse, hath been distressed with many anxious fears concerning his own future state; such an one, taken from the world,

how amazing, how blessed the change! from an earthly cottage, to a throne of glory; from a despising world, to an approving God; from a frail, diseased dying body, to everlasting strength, and undecaying beauty! how must his mouth be filled with praises, when the days of his mourning are for ever ended!

But that which especially serves to enliven the praises of the saints in heaven is, their sense of their own unworthiness as sinners: this it is which makes all the gifts of God of sevenfold value, they are all of free unmerited grace and mercy. Redemption! Redemption is the theme of the praises of heaven, Rev. i. 5. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Rev. v. 9. "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Redemption is at present carelessly sought after, and coldly acknowledged; but then shall they know the guilt they have contracted, the hell they have escaped, the glory which they possess, and the price at which it was bought. Oh, my brethren! how light a sense of the evil of sin has the most humbled penitent now, compared to what he shall have in heaven! how light a sense of the misery of the impenitent, compared to what he shall have after he has heard their sentence pronounced by the Judge, and seen them go away into everlasting punishment! how small a value does he put upon the gift of God, eternal life, till he taste of it! and how weak is his love to God in Christ, whilst it is only kindled by faith, compared to what

it shall be, when he sees the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world !

In the third place, Let us consider the celestial worship, as consisting in acts of desire. There is much of this in the disposition of the people of God on earth ; they say with the prophet Isaiah, ch. xxvi. 8. " The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." And as every agreeable object is the more desired, the more it is known ; so the clear discovery that is made in heaven, of the glory and excellence of God, and the delightful communications of his love, must still increase our desire of further and further degrees of it ; and there is a fulness, both in the divine nature and benignity, that can never be exhausted. Earthly things, indeed, to which we often, through ignorance, affix an erroneous and excessive value, the more they are known, are often the less esteemed ; but this can never take place where the object cannot be esteemed in proportion to its worth, because its worth can never be completely discovered. Perhaps it may be thought improper to include desire among the acts of celestial worship, as there the happy souls shall be so fully gratified in every holy inclination, as to leave no room for any further demand. But we must consider that there shall be room for an everlasting progressive improvement to every finite creature ; and the gradual enlargement of their capacity shall make way for these further communications of divine love.

There shall, indeed, be no such desire, as implies any anxious or impatient craving. This is ordinarily produced by doubt, or difficulty of supply, which

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

But, secondly, It appears highly probable, that the love of change, so observable in human nature, is more owing to the vanity of created enjoyments, than any thing essential to us, as rational spirits; and, therefore, when we enjoy the substance instead of the shadow, the Creator instead of or in the creature, the cause being gone, the effect will cease of course. And, to confirm this, we may observe, that novelty is not an essential qualification of what pleases us; for habit often creates as strong or stronger attachment to what we have long known, than the charms of novelty to what is untried: enjoyment therefore may, in some cases, excite desire. And if this is the case sometimes on earth, there is all reason to think it will be always so in heaven. May I not just add, that we find from our present imperfect experience, that a life of hope and activity, when there is suitable encouragement and success,

from time to time, is the most agreeable of any that can be conceived? How delightful then must be both the habitual and actual desires of the saints in glory, pointed at the worthiest objects, and not only assured of, but rewarded with complete satisfaction!

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

Thus clear discoveries of God's nature, and extensive views of his works and ways, must establish them in a cheerful dependance on his unchangeable truth. And, O, with what a readiness, or rather with what pleasure and alacrity, will they resign

themselves to his will, and consecrate themselves to his service ! There will then be no remains of the carnal mind to refuse obedience, or of an impatient murmuring spirit, to complain under the yoke ; but they will be as the angels, his ministers to do his pleasure, ready at his call, and earnestly coveting employment. Obedience will be their prevailing inclination, and the formal expression, and tender of it, to their God and Redeemer, will be a part of their actual service.

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

Let us, now, in the second place, consider the worship of the saints in heaven, as it is external and sensible. That there is something even external and sensible in it, necessarily follows from the resurrection of the body, which is so important a part of the Christian doctrine : for though the bodies with which the saints shall be clothed at the resurrection, shall exceedingly differ from their gross bodies, in

splendour and beauty, and particularly shall so far excel them in purity, as to be termed by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. xv. 44.) "Spiritual bodies;" yet, if they be body or matter at all, they must be limited to some place, and have an external and sensible form. The same thing appears from that beautiful passage in the book of Job, ch. xix. 25. "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

Further, though we are no doubt taught in scripture, to consider heaven more as a nature than a place, yet there is evident foundation from several expressions, to suppose that there is some portion of the works of God set apart for that purpose, and adorned with such a visible glory, as is proper to affect the imaginations of created beings. Thus there is mention made of the third heaven, the highest heaven, the heaven of heavens. See also Rev. xxi. i. 2. "And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea; and I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." And, from the 19th verse of that chapter to the end, it is described in such terms, as naturally suggest to us the greatest glory and magnificence.

This is the temple of God in which his servants shall serve him, in which we may suppose the general assembly of the church of the first born meet together, for the joint celebration of their Creator and Redeemer's praise. But as to a more particular account, either of the place or manner of the worship there performed, it were more easy to form

amusing and curious speculations, than to fix upon any thing solid and certain. In this, as indeed in every other part of the heavenly state and employment, comparative reflections are most to be depended on. And surely, if in this lower world, and that part of the creation, which is at present subjected to our view, there is so much order and beauty, so much splendour and magnificence, though it be the abode of guilty creatures, under manifest tokens of divine displeasure, what must be the unclouded lustre and perfect beauty of that place, where the glory of Almighty God is peculiarly displayed, and which was prepared for the reception of the objects of his special love, before the foundation of the world? If the several senses, with which we are now endued are capable of affording us so exquisite a pleasure in their present gratification, notwithstanding their apparent disorder, how high and ravishing a delight may they communicate when they are refined and purified, furnished with their proper objects, and freed from that insatiableness, and tendency to excess, which is the fruit of sin, the evidence of a corrupted frame, and, as a mixture of gall, poisons every worldly joy? It is worth observation, upon this subject, that the happiness of the saints is many times described in scripture, by their external circumstances and position, so to speak, and by sensible gratifications; as by sitting upon thrones at the right hand of God; by a city highly adorned; by a river of water of life, a tree of life bearing twelve manner of fruits. And his service is described by the melody of songs of praise, and even by instrumental music, Rev. xv. 2. where mention

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

But the external circumstance, which, in my apprehension, will contribute most to the delight and happiness of the saints, in their heavenly worship, will be their union and society in it. Man is evidently framed for deriving his chief happiness in this state from society. It never was, and never will be good for man to live alone. Social worship is peculiarly acceptable to God, as might be shewn from many passages of scripture, Math. xviii. 19, 20. "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Psal. lxxxvii. 2. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." And doth not the experience of every one of those who love the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelleth, testify what an

elevation of soul, and enlargement of heart, they obtain by mingling their voices in his praise? As united fires brighten each other's blaze, as many concordant sounds make the finer harmony, so the union of many hearts in divine worship makes the higher spiritual melody, not only more grateful to God, but more delightful to themselves. The pleasure of this is, indeed, greatly allayed on earth by a mixture of discordant notes (to continue the former allusion) of enemies with friends. But allow me to make a supposition, that all within these walls, this evening, were perfectly upright with God, and that our mutual sincerity were perfectly known to each other, what inexpressible fervency, and rapture of spirit would it give to every one, in singing the praises of God and of the Lamb, to consider himself as joined with such a number of pure, holy, blessed, redeemed souls? But how much beyond conception will this be increased, when we meet with the innumerable company of the redeemed above, and all our pious fathers, who, many ages before this, served our common master; many, we hope, who kept holy days in this very place, and whose bodies now sleep in the dust under our feet, and around us; nay, when all from the east and from the west, shall be completely gathered in, when every heart shall agree with every tongue, and salvation to the Lamb shall be the universal, delightful, repeated acclamation? There are two passages of scripture which speak of the multitude, and employment of this glorious company, which ought never to be read with-

out a holy and delightful reverence. Rev. v. 9. 15.

“ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and the four beasts said Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down, and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.”

Rev. vii. 9, 12. “ After this, I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; saying, Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever and ever, Amen.”

I proceed now to conclude the subject by some practical improvement of what has been said. And can we refuse to begin, by praising God for his unspeakable love, and matchless condescension? The whole work of our redemption is wonderful; but, in a particular manner, the conclusion of it: that we should not only have our clothes washed in the blood of the Lamb, but should be *before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.* At the dedication of the temple of Solomon, that wise and pious prince breaks out into an expression of holy admiration and astonishment, and says, 2 Chron. vi. 18. “ But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth! Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much

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

In the second place, from what has been said, you may see the importance and benefit of the worship and service of God on earth. If this state is a state of trial and preparation for that which is to follow it, and the worship of God is so great a part of the employment, and so great a source of the happiness of the saints above, it is plain, that his worship on earth must be of the highest usefulness. It is not only an unquestionable duty, but it is manifestly necessary to fit us for, and habituate us to the heavenly exercise. It is plain from the whole analogy of providence, that a preparation of nature is necessary for the possession and enjoyment of any state. We see, even in natural things, that sowing, and a long time of gradual nourishment, is necessary to the strength and consistency of any plant or tree; and that, according to the seed, so is the production. This the

Apostle very strongly applies, Gal. vi. 7. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Those that expect to serve God in his temple above, must be habituated to serve him in his church on earth. This is the seed-time; then is the harvest. The house of God is the place both of the birth and nourishment of his people, Psal. lxxxvii. 5. "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her; and the highest himself shall establish her."

Therefore suffer me, my brethren, to reprove the sin, and shew the danger of those, who altogether neglect and despise the worship of God. If chance, imitation, curiosity, or a worse motive, has brought to this audience, any who are habitual despisers of the worship of God, I hereby assure them, in his name, that, unless they change their heart and practice, in heaven they shall never dwell, because its employment they do not love. It is both the evidence and cause of the degeneracy of many in this age, that they have fallen into a neglect and contempt of the public worship of God; that in their notions of religion, when they form any at all, they in a great measure, leave out their duty to their Maker, and confine it only to a few of the ordinary offices due from one man to another. Experience, indeed, plainly shews the weakness and feebleness of those virtues that are not enlivened and animated by piety towards God; and that it is as possible to uphold the superstructure, by taking away the foundation, to preserve the vigour and verdure of the branches of a tree, by separating them from the

root, as to preserve and secure any regularity of conduct, without a principle of divine life, of vital, spiritual union with God through Christ; but what, in a particular manner, shews the folly of all such, is their relation to eternity. Supposing their practice were every way fit and proper for this world, how does it agree with the employment of heaven? Doth not conscience tell you, that you have neither right nor relish, nor even capacity for it, and, by necessary consequence, are under a sentence of condemnation, "children of wrath, and heirs of hell?" for there is no middle state. I beseech you therefore, nay, obtest you, in the most solemn manner, that you henceforth honour God in his house and ordinances, if you expect that ever he should honour you: and, remember, that his warning, which you have received by the wise disposal of his providence, will be an aggravation of your guilt, if you neglect and despise it.

I cannot help, also, upon this occasion, putting you in mind of the neglected duty of worshipping God in your families. These smaller societies, in which the members are connected by the strongest ties, and stand in the nearest and most endearing relations to one another, how proper are they for the joint worship of God! and how great is the sin of neglecting it! How can you expect any thing else, but either an angry providence, or hardening and stupifying prosperity, which is infinitely worse, unless you call on the name of God? whereas by mingling your voices in his praises on earth, you prepare yourselves for his service in heaven. I can-

not go through all the excuses offered for this neglect; but wo shall be to that man, who is too busy, too proud, or too modest, to worship in his family, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who made him by his power, and upholds him by his providence.

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

whose indisposition often to this work, by sloth or worldliness of mind, is their greatest grief. Such, my brethren, have good reason to look forward to that happy time, when they shall serve him with unwearied vigour and alacrity; and shall behold the smile of his countenance without one mortifying frown.

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

This leads me, in the last place, To direct you to improve this subject for animating your present devotion. Nothing is more proper for this purpose than the lively hope, or rather anticipation of the heavenly employment. Let us overcome our present sloth, by entering, in faith and hope, within the veil,

and considering how we shall then praise him : then there shall be no wandering thought, no cold heart, no faltering tongue, no flagging spirits. And, as without all question, some are here present, not a few, I would charitably hope, who shall enter into that temple of the living God ; so we know not how soon any of us may be sent for, to leave this worldly sanctuary to be above the use of present ordinances, and to join the innumerable company about the throne. In the prospect of this, Psal. cxlix. 1, 2. “ Let us sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him ; let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.” Amen.

S E R M O N IX.

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY IN DECLARING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD.

ACTS XX. 26, 27.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men: for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

MY BRETHREN,

THESE words are a part of the apostle Paul's discourse to the elders of Ephesus, when taking leave of them, under a firm persuasion, or rather a certain knowledge, that he would never again see them in the body. My present situation, of which none of you is ignorant, has determined me to the choice of this passage, as a very proper subject from which I may conclude the exercise of my ministry among you. I had once occasion, on leaving another charge, to have taken a formal farewell of a very affectionate people, but had not courage to attempt it. The circumstances attending the removal, which, if Providence prevent not, seems now to be at hand, are such as do not lessen, but greatly increase the difficulty of speaking from such a subject. And yet,

in another view, they seemed to urge it so strongly, and to present such an opportunity of being useful, as I durst not wholly decline. Every Christian ought to be an observer of providence. Nothing will more effectually promote his holiness and comfort. And both a minister and his people ought to improve the aspect of providence, when it hath any thing peculiar in it, to their mutual benefit.

Let me therefore intreat you to attend to the following discourse, with patience and composure. This request I the rather hope you will comply with, as there is nothing intended that is personal, further than must necessarily arise from the subject itself, or be unavoidably suggested by your own thoughts. I bless God that I have no complaint to make of want of duty or affection upon your side; neither is it any part of my purpose to justify my own conduct, during the time that I have had the honour and happiness of being entrusted with the ministry of the gospel in this place. I shall therefore only say, that whether I have been able to deliver my own soul by fidelity in duty, and by purity of principle, I am certain, that very much has been laid to the charge of many of yours. Least of all do I intend to endeavour to satisfy you of the motives which have induced me to accept of a call to a distant part of the world, and, in some degree, a different employment in the church of Christ. For this, I know that an account must be given, in due time, to a much greater Judge, with whose approbation either the applause or censure of men are not worthy to be laid in the balance. The single purpose, therefore, of the following discourse, shall be to give you such

a comprehensive view of the truths of the everlasting gospel,—of the importance and difficulty of a minister's work; as may direct you in the choice of another pastor,—increase your esteem of such as are faithful,—and excite you to guard against every thing that may either discourage them in their work, or prevent their success.

The apostle Paul had planted the church of Ephesus, and he had spent a part of his time there, very considerable, if we consider the extent of his commission, and his many apostolic journies to different parts of the world. In the whole of his discourse to the elders of that church, whom he had sent for in his passage to Rome, we see the greatest tenderness and affection, and an earnest concern to engrave upon their hearts the truths which he had taught them while residing there. And, in the words of the text, you see the foundation on which he takes them to record that he was *free from the blood of all men*; for, says he, *I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*. I omit every thing that might be occasionally introduced from the text or context, such as ministers being chargeable with the blood of those who perish by their neglect, and the doctrine of the gospel being the counsel of God, that I may fix your attention, where certainly the emphasis of this declaration lies, viz. That he had declared to them *all the counsel of God*, and that he had not *shunned* to do so; or that he had not been deterred by any difficulties from the faithful discharge of his trust. Therefore, in discoursing further on this subject, I will endeavour, through divine assistance,

I. To consider the fidelity of a minister, as consisting in *a full and complete* declaration of the counsel of God.

II. To consider the difficulties which may lie in his way, or tempt him to *shun* any part of his work.

III. To make a particular improvement of the subject, by giving you my parting advices in the spirit of this passage, and in a way to the best of my judgment suited to your situation.

I. Then, Let us consider the fidelity of a minister, as consisting in *a full and complete* declaration of the counsel of God. This is a circumstance which the apostle seems to have laid particular stress upon in his discourse to the elders of Ephesus, as he not only rests his solemn appeal to themselves in this passage upon it, but had mentioned it before, verses 20, 21. “And how I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is, indeed, a circumstance of the utmost moment, as ministers may be supposed much more ready to fall short in this respect than in any other. It is probable that many more are chargeable with concealing truth, than affirming falsehood; with neglecting duty, than committing crimes; with not building the house, than wilfully pulling it down. Agreeably to this, we find the charge of the prophet against unfaithful shepherds is chiefly, or only, for neglect of duty, Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 3, 4. “Son of man prophesy against the

shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds, Wo be to the shepherds of Israel, that do feed themselves: should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock: the diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost, but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." But that you may have as comprehensive a view as possible, of the character of a faithful minister, given in the text, observe, that integrity in declaring all the counsel of God, implies the following particulars.

1. Declaring all the truths of God without any exceptions. The revealed will of God is of great extent and compass. It takes in all that we are to believe concerning God, and all the duty which God requires of man. It gives us an account of the original, and of the fallen state of man; of the early purpose of divine mercy, and the steps that were taken, from age to age, in carrying it into execution; of the person, undertaking, and sufferings of the Saviour; of his laws as a teacher, and his dominion as a king. Together with all this, we have a history of providence, and many special examples, instructions, and warnings of the most particular kind. Now, my brethren, he who would declare *all the counsel of God*, must pay a due regard to every part, and, as far as time and health is given him, endeavour to make his people ac-

acquainted with the whole. This, to be sure, cannot be done all at once and at the same time. Doubtless there are some truths of more importance than others. As the foundation must be laid before the structure can be raised, and the foundation and corner stones are of more moment than the finishings of the surface; yet there is a mutual subserviency of every one in its place to another, and not the least can be wholly omitted without a real injury to those that are retained.

There is a preciousness in every truth that hath the stamp of divine authority upon it; and, therefore, to neglect any of them, and count them trifling, or of little moment, argues a want of reverence for the word of God. The holy scriptures, as they are full and complete, containing every thing that is necessary; so they are perfect and faultless, containing nothing that is unnecessary. Serious persons have often borne testimony to the great utility of such parts of the sacred oracles, as are commonly treated with most indifference. Nay, I cannot help thinking, that the veneration due to God, who doth nothing in vain, obliges us to believe the utility even of those passages whose purpose we ourselves may not as yet have clearly perceived.

They are therefore greatly to be blamed who are at no pains to make known the counsel of God, in its full extent; but how much more those who satisfy themselves with insisting upon some things, which may be most agreeable to their own taste and disposition, to the entire neglect of others that are perhaps of equal or of greater moment? We see this happen too frequently, that things which fill almost

every page in the holy scriptures can scarce obtain a place in many sermons. We see some industriously avoid the truths of the everlasting gospel, and others the duties of the moral law. The evil of this is the greater, that there is such a relation between the several parts of God's revealed will, that if any one is left out, every view given of the rest must be not only partial but unjust. He who truly understands the scriptures, will soon perceive, that there is such an inseparable connection between one truth and another, that you can hardly admit one without admitting or rejecting the whole; and that none of them can be withdrawn, or concealed, without a manifest injury to the beauty and fulness of the general system.

But, of all others, the most wonderful set of men are those, who are for concealing some of the truths of God, lest they should be abused. The sovereignty of God, his eternal purpose, and the freeness of his grace, are often passed by under this ridiculous pretence. I would despise the wisdom of such persons; it is arrogance; it is impiety. I do not know any truth that cannot be abused by perverse and corrupt minds, or that has not, in many instances, been abused. But is this a reason for concealing them? No. I would preach them openly; I would preach them fully; I would endeavour to guard them against the abuse; and let sinners know, that, if they wrest the good word of God, they do it to their own destruction. Oh! that there were more subjection of mind to the wisdom of God: more of a deep and inward conviction, that whatever he hath appointed is, for that very reason, wisest and best.

There would not then be so many attempts to explain away what is clearly contained in the New Testament; but we should join from the heart, with the apostle Paul, in saying, Rom. xi. 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

2. Integrity in declaring *all the counsel of God*, implies preaching the truths of the gospel in their full and just proportion. Under the former particular, I have shewn the necessity of doing justice to every truth; let us now add the duty of giving their full room and place to important and fundamental truths. In order to make a just portrait of a human body, it is necessary, not only to have all the parts, but to have every one in the true proportion it bears to another. If one member is swelled to an unnatural or monstrous bulk, and others are shrunk or shrivelled away almost to nothing, it will make the most unseemly figure. Agreeably to this, he who would faithfully *declare the counsel of God*, must have a particular eye to the great and leading truths of the gospel, on which the rest depend, and from which they derive their force and meaning.

If we look into the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, we shall find certain leading truths which are of so great moment, that they ought hardly ever to be out of view; such as the lost state of man by nature; the absolute necessity of salvation through Christ; the suffering of the Saviour in the sinner's room; and free forgiveness through the blood of the atonement; the necessity of regeneration; and the gift of the Holy Ghost, to enlighten, sanctify, and

comfort his people. These truths are of such unspeakable moment in divine revelation, that they ought to be clearly explained, strongly inculcated, and frequently repeated; they are the doctrines of the reformation; they make the substance of all the Protestant confessions; they are the glory of the Protestant churches; and have been sealed by the blood of thousands of suffering martyrs. And, indeed, it comforts me, under the neglect with which they are treated at present; by many worldly persons in a state of outward ease and security to the church, that, if ever it please God, for our sins, to throw us into the furnace, they will then discover their honour, they will recover their lustre, because they will certainly manifest their influence.

How shall I make you more sensible what it is to give their full room to these important truths, than by putting you in mind of the regard that was paid to them by the apostles of our Lord, who received their commission immediately from himself, and were not only the first, but the best and most successful ministers that ever were employed in the church of Christ? What a multitude of passages might I cite to this purpose! Acts iv. 12. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." 1 Cor. iii. 11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 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." Without citing any more passages, I shall only observe, that though the apostles introduced a great variety of truths in their writings occasionally, such was, in their opinion, the importance of the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ, that they denominated the gospel by it. Preaching Christ, and preaching the cross of Christ, was, with them, the same thing as preaching the whole. I do not think the apostle Paul was defective in giving particular instructions upon every subject, to those churches which he either planted or watered; yet he says to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. ii. 2. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;" intimating, that such was his attachment to that great truth, that it would occupy, in a manner, the whole of his time and labour; or rather that it had such an intimate connection with every other part of the will of God, that, be the subject what it would, this could hardly be entirely out of view.

He who would declare the whole *counsel of God*, must still place these great and operative doctrines in a conspicuous point of view; he must not pass them over slightly; he must not even speak of them coldly, but in such a manner, as to shew, that he knows their truth, and feels their moment. What an inconsistency for a Christian minister, to speak

of the Lord Redeemer in such a style, as naturally leads the hearers to put him upon a level with Socrates or Plato, or other uninspired teachers, who never pretended to be saviours! What poison to the souls of men, for any to speak, as if they were speaking to Adam before the fall, and to sing those sinners asleep in security, whom they should endeavour to alarm, that they may be persuaded to flee from the wrath to come! What betraying of their trust, to entertain their people with an affected display of their own talents, or idle speculations, to amuse the fancy, when they should be building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation! The very manner of preaching may be opposite to the doctrine of the cross, which hath so much of humility and self-denial in it, as will inspire, and give a colour, if I may speak so, to every word that is spoken by him that firmly believes it! On the whole, no other truth or duty will be neglected by a faithful minister; but the oftener he stands, as it were in the centre of the plan, the more frequently he contemplates the cross of Christ, in which all the lines of divine truth are united, the more clearly will he see them, and the better will he be able to judge at what time and place to introduce them.

This leads me to observe, in the

3. place, That to *declare all the counsel of God*, is to preach all the truths of God in their proper order and connection. To allude to the similitude formerly used of making a portrait of a human body, every member must not only be in its just proportion, but in its proper place. In teaching every science, there is a certain order that must be observ-

ed, otherwise the labour will be in a great measure lost; but it holds in nothing more strongly than in teaching religion, and opening the truths of the gospel. I might confirm this by many examples, or rather, indeed, by going through the whole system of divine truth, but shall only make a remark or two for illustrating the observation. The necessity of salvation by Christ, is founded upon the lost state of man by nature. Unless the one is first established, the beauty and meaning of the other will wholly disappear; unless we are now in a corrupt and guilty state; unless man has, indeed, lost the knowledge of the true God, the kindness of God to his peculiar people, the promises in the prophetic writings of light to the Gentiles, and the riches of divine grace in the gospel, spoken of in such magnificent terms, must all appear inconsiderable, and unworthy of regard. Unless you can convince men of their sins, and make them sensible of the holiness and justice of God, in vain will you preach the gospel to them; in vain will you call it "glad tidings of great joy to all people;" they do not understand the terms, they will deride the message, and spurn the offered mercy.

If you preach the free forgiveness of sin through Christ, without at the same time shewing the necessity of regeneration and sanctification by his Spirit, it will either not be embraced at all, or it will be turned into licentiousness. And, if you preach the duties of the law, without at the same time displaying the grace of the gospel, and the vital influence that flows from the head to the members, you will either build up men in a destructive system of

Pharisaical religion and self-righteousness, or bring them under the Egyptian bondage, of making brick though they are not furnished with straw. The privileges and duties of the gospel stand in an inseparable connection; if you take away the first, you starve and mortify the last. Hear what our Lord says, John xv. 4, 5. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." I say the same thing of not enforcing the duties of the gospel with the great and powerful motives drawn from its truths. You see in what a convincing and affecting manner the apostle Paul speaks of his own conduct, and that of the other apostles, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." It is doubtless lawful, nay, it is for the glory of God, to make occasional mention of every argument against sin, drawn from nature, reason, and experience, to shew that "the law is holy, the commandment holy, just, and good." But let us not hope to make conscientious, active, fruitful Christians, any other way, than by teaching them to live "the life that they live in the flesh, a life of faith on the Son of God, who loved them, and gave himself for them."

All who know the grace of God in truth, will

desire to have this connection between one truth and another, and the influence of truth on duty inviolably preserved. It is, indeed, common with some to alledge, that the friends of the gospel, those who are attached to the doctrine of redemption, are enemies to the law, and that they do not love to hear their duty preached to them. I look upon this as an unjust and detestable slander, and commonly spread by those who know nothing of the subserviency of the law to the gospel, or rather who understand very little either of the one or the other. If a minister preaches the holiness of God's nature, with whom evil cannot dwell; if he preaches the duties of the moral law, in all the force of its unchangeable obligation, and all the terror of its awful sanction, in order to convince his hearers, that they are liable to wrath, I know no sound Christian who will find fault with it: nay, I am persuaded, that ministers who love the doctrine of salvation by grace, do often preach the moral law in such terms, that many legal persons are ready to tremble at the hearing of it; for they willingly use the words of the apostle Paul, Gal. iii. 10. "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But if serious persons hear the duties of the law preached as the grounds of their acceptance, and the foundation of their peace with God, it is no wonder that they say, after an approved example, "If righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Again, if a minister preach the duties of the gospel, explain them in all their extent, and press them by arguments drawn from the New Testament, as the fruits of faith, as the evidences of their change, as a debt of gratitude to their Redeemer, as the marks of their relation to him, and necessary to fit them for his presence, I believe it will not be unacceptable to any of his people. On the contrary, they do usually both approve and delight in these sermons which are most searching to the conscience, and most clear and explicit in the trial of their state. Titus iii. 8. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men." It is our duty to shew, not only that professing Christians ought to be holy, but that they must be holy; and that if they live and die the slaves of any known sin, Christ, and all that he hath done, shall profit them nothing, but only aggravate their condemnation. I will bear this testimony to my own hearers, that, as it was always a principle with me, to preach the doctrines of redemption where they are, and not to attempt to find them where they are not, by a boundless allegorical interpretation; so these sermons which have been wholly employed in explaining and enforcing particular duties, opening their principles, distinguishing them from their counterfeits, and pressing them upon the conscience, have met with as much approbation, and been heard with as little suspicion as any whatever. But if any minister had preached in such a manner, as to set the doctrine of salvation

altogether aside, and to suppose, that we could obey in our own strength, or that God was indebted to us for our works, instead of our being indebted to him, both for strength to perform them, and mercy to accept them, I believe it would not have passed without censure; and I sincerely pray, that the time may never come, when it will, in any corner of this church, but especially from the pulpit in which I now stand.

The delusion and absurdity that finds place with many, deserves the greatest pity. Is it not uncommon to hear certain persons pouring out the bitterest invectives in pulpit and conversation against others, as enemies to morality, as turning the grace of God into licentiousness, as not only neglecting, but even opposing the obligation of his law. In the meanwhile, if you hear the first, you shall rarely meet with any thing but what is quite loose and general, a declamation on the beauty of virtue, and the necessity of holiness, or a very imperfect sketch of the offices due from man to man in the common intercourse of social life. And, if you hear the other, it is probable you may hear many of the hard sayings of the gospel, not only the necessity of doing justice, and loving mercy, with the certain damnation of those who hold unjust gain without restitution; but the necessity of loving God above all created comforts, habitually directing every part of our conduct to his glory, and being sincerely, and without reserve, submissive to his providence. You may also, probably, hear the duties of every relation descended to with a particularity, and the neglect or breach of them reproved with a severity, that is no where else

to be found. Now, I desire to know which of these are the greatest friends to morality. So strong is the deception, that I have known several of the hearers of the most boasted moral preachers, who could not avoid betraying by their discourse, that they considered the exercises of piety, as no part of morality, and very consistently, indeed, with these principles, treated them with the most absolute neglect.

I have little hope of the conviction, but would gladly, if possible, stop the mouths of gainfayers on this subject. Is it not usual to mark out the friends of salvation by grace, under the title of extraordinary strict, and eminent professors; generally, indeed, with a view to challenge the sincerity of that profession, and load it with obloquy and reproach? But consider, I pray you, with what propriety you give them the name of professors? what is it that they profess? It is, that they are nothing in themselves, and deserve nothing at the hand of God but wrath for their sins; that they have no hope of acceptance, but by the free grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ; that they can do nothing of themselves that is good, but, by the grace of God, are what they are; so that there is no room left for them to glory. Is not this their faith and persuasion? Why are they then called professors? You are the professors, who make your boast of the law, and glory in the excellence and perfection of human virtue. Shew us then your faith by your works; justify your profession by your practice; boasting will bring you little credit. But let us see who have the most sober, honest, holy, heavenly

lives ; these are certainly actuated by the best principles.

But, I must, in part, retract what I have said ; for, after all, the servants of Christ are indeed professors. They have taken on the holy profession of the gospel : and, in fact, any instance of irregular conduct in them is more observed, more deeply reproached, and gives greater offence than the very same in persons of a different character. When they depart from their duty, and from strictness of conversation, I give them freely up to the censures of their enemies ; they have richly deserved them, and therefore they ought to bear them. In the meantime, let me put those in mind, who, in the midst of their triumph, stigmatize them with the name of *professors*, that they do them, or rather their profession more honour than they are aware of ; for they shew that they themselves are sensible that such principles ought to have produced holiness in the conversation. So far as they reproach the sinner, or the detected hypocrite, they do what is right, and it can scarcely be over-done. But, when they take occasion to bring a reproach on the *profession* itself, their very success is a condemnation of themselves ; for that the gross crimes of their own admirers are less offensive, is just because their *profession* is less holy. Nothing would give me greater pain, than to understand that my doctrine were to the taste of midnight rioters, swearers, and Sabbath-breakers ; and, if any such are found among the admirers of moral preaching, their teachers could not do themselves a greater honour, than by renouncing the connection.

4. Fidelity in declaring the whole *counsel of God*, implies preaching every truth in its proper season. "There is, as Solomon tells us, a time for every thing under the sun;" and, where the truths of the gospel are taught in their season, it gives them a particular lustre, as well as an uncommon force. That you may understand what I mean by preaching the truths of religion in their season, you may observe, that, besides giving with assiduity and care, the necessary instructions for every particular duty incumbent on persons, families, or congregations, the season may vary, and the propriety and necessity of insisting upon some truths, may arise from two circumstances;—the state of religion among a people;—and the aspect of providence towards them.

Ist, It may arise from the state of religion among a people. Surely it is the duty of a minister to suit his instructions to the present and most pressing necessities of his hearers; not to foster their prejudices, but with care and judgment to correct them; not to pardon or overlook their prevailing errors, but to rectify them; not to bear with epidemic sins, but, with boldness and severity to reprove them. It will be seen, on the following head, that some of the greatest difficulties that lie in the way of ministers, and the strongest temptations to unfaithfulness, come from this quarter. At present I shall only shortly illustrate the observation, and support it by the practice of the apostles. We see that in speaking either to persons or churches, they took care to have a particular eye to their state and character, and adapted their instructions, and even their expressions, to these circumstances with the ut-

most fidelity, and the greatest skill. Neither is there any way by which we can so well enter into the meaning of the scriptures, or perceive their beauty, as by considering the condition and characters of those to whom the several parts of them are immediately addressed. We shall also see a mixture of zeal and prudence in the holy apostles, when acting under the direction of the Spirit of God. What an admirable example have we of propriety and fidelity in the apostle Paul's discourse to Felix, the Roman governor, when he desired to hear him concerning the faith of Christ? We are told, Acts xxiv. 25. that he took occasion to "reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." In speaking to one who had probably no other intention in desiring to hear him, than to gratify his curiosity, by obtaining a distinct account of the wonderful history of Christ, he thought proper to apply to all those principles of natural conscience which might be supposed yet to retain some power over him. And if (as many judicious interpreters think) instead of *temperance*, we should read *continence*, it was a bold and severe, yet well-timed reproof to him and Drusilla, who were then living in adultery. We cannot help also being struck with the unshaken boldness of the Apostle, who could speak with so much freedom to the governor, in whose hands he was then as a prisoner, and before whom he expected soon to stand and receive sentence from him as a judge.

You may also observe the apostle Paul's attention to, and concern for the particular state of the churches to which he wrote his epistles. The church of

Corinth seems to have been greatly infested with divisions and contentions, and these unhappily inflamed by ambitious and factious teachers, under whom they were marshalled as so many leaders, and to whose name and interest they seem to have been more devoted, than even to those of their Master, 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For, while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" Against this the Apostle writes with the greatest zeal and warmth, and at the same time with the greatest prudence. He shews how inconsistent it was with the spirit of the gospel, and how derogatory to the honour of Christ. He endeavours to make them sensible, that the most able and faithful ministers were no more than instruments in his hand, and owed their success entirely to the blessing of God accompanying their labours, as in the same chapter, ver. 5, 6, 7. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." What deserves particular notice is, that in all probability, the mention of himself and Apollos here was merely hypothetical, or to serve by way of example. The real heads of the parties in the Corinthian church, were other teachers than either Paul or Apollos, whom he did not chuse to name, but stated his argument in this less offensive and more convincing form. The truth is, there is

no disorder in a church that is harder to deal with, than a spirit of contention. Other sins may be reprov'd with severity, and you will be suppos'd to be in the exercise of your duty when doing so; but this will not allow itself to be reprov'd, because it will not confess itself to be a crime, and is therefore often exasperated by the attempts to heal it. You may see sometimes a man of strife cover all under a flaming profession of religion, and yet conduct it in such a manner, that we may say of him as the servants of Nabal said of their master, "He is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him."

I might produce many other examples from the holy scriptures; but these are sufficient to shew, that it is the duty of a minister to suit himself to the state of religion among his people, by with-holding nothing that is profitable, but particularly insisting on what is most needful. If any of the truths of the gospel are in danger of being neglected, if they are undermined by secret, or assaulted by open enemies, it is the duty of a minister to make frequent mention of them, lest they should be forgotten; and to support and confirm them, that they may obtain acceptance. If any duty is in danger of falling into disesteem, and a false shame makes many decline the practice, a faithful minister should stand forth an open and zealous advocate for its continuance. If any particular sin, or sins, prevail remarkably in a place, and appear to be gaining ground, it is the duty of a minister to beware of yielding to the stream, or seeking his own quiet by silence; on the contrary, he ought to double his diligence, and make the most resolute and vigorous opposition to the incroaching

evil. Of all this, I suppose, you will clearly perceive both the meaning and the justice. These circumstances are the intimations of Providence, and point out, in the most significant manner, not only what is a part of a minister's work in general, but also what is the immediate will of God as to his present duty.

2dly, The proper season of insisting on particular truths may arise from the aspect of providence towards the church in general, or a congregation, family, or person, in particular. You see the apostles constantly make use of the state of the church in their time, the number and violence of its enemies, to excite the servants of Christ to vigilance, to exhort them to constancy, and to exercise them to patience. They also seem particularly attentive to teach their converts to make use of the consolations of the gospel with this view, Rom. viii. 18. "For I reckon, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"—and the same chapter, verses 35, 36, 37. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ: shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." Impending calamities of such an alarming nature that they speak as it were of themselves, and afford the noblest opportunities of awakening the attention, and moving the affections, of bringing the careless to conviction, and stirring up the holy to watchfulness.

In times of public danger too the self-seeking minister throws off the mask, and deserts the cause, while the faithful who remain, are necessarily animated with uncommon zeal.

But a different aspect of providence calls also for instruction in season. In times of public quiet and security, there is the greatest reason to dread, and, by consequence, to guard against indifference and formality in religion, on the one hand, or unnecessary contention about it on the other. When the profession of the gospel is at any rate safe, and in some degree profitable, the church is always incumbered with a dead weight of customary Christians, who receive their religion from their fathers, and continue to tread, as it were, in the beaten path. It is no easy matter, to shake their security, when every outward circumstance conspires to increase it. And as the spiritual slumber takes hold, in some measure, even of those who are alive unto God, it is no trifling task to exercise discipline, at once with prudence and with firmness, and to preserve the life and power of religion, when every thing is stiffening into form. It is very easy, indeed, when there is a hard conflict between health and corruption, in the body of Christ, that is to say, in his visible church, for one, or a few members, to pour out complaints against those who govern it; to lay to the charge of ministers those abuses which are the grief of their hearts; and all at once, to set about making a new model according to their own fancy. But I apprehend it is a much better, though a more difficult duty, to obey the Redeemer's counsel, to "be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain and are

ready to die." Alas! how often do the new disorders that break out in separating societies betray the naughty materials of which they are composed. They are much in the same way as the fool who ran away from his own shadow, but run where he would it was there as soon as he. They run away from the corruption of human nature, and they shall never be quit of it, because they carry it with them.

There is one other temptation which I shall briefly mention, as almost inseparable from a state of outward quiet in the church of Christ. Those, if I may speak so, who keep their garments clean, as to the *sins*, are scarcely able to bear up under the *trials* of the times. When they see one attempt after another, for the revival of truth and righteousness, defeated by the strength of corruption, they are in danger of impatience and fretfulness against providence, and sometimes are even tempted to call in question the reality of religion altogether; as if it did not meet with that support and countenance, from the great Ruler, which they think is its due. But the most common danger is, that of falling into a despondent neglect of duty, of not doing what they ought, because it has not hitherto had the effect which they desire. In such a case, no doubt, it is the duty of ministers to fortify them, by giving proper views of the wisdom and sovereignty of Providence; by shewing the paths of God towards his church, in ancient times; and that these have, in every age, been the complaints and fears of good men, from the weakness of their faith, and the imperfection of their knowledge. It was the complaint of the Psalmist, Psal. lxxix. 4. "We are become a reproach to

our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us." But it led him to prayer for the revival of religion, as well as the prosperity of his country, verse 5, "How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry? for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire?" and in the 8th and 9th verses, "O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins for thy name's sake."

But the course of providence, toward the church in general, is not only to be observed and improved, but whatever is remarkable or singular, in particular congregations. I shall not dwell upon examples of this, because it is my purpose to put it into practice, and by that means, to illustrate it in the application of this discourse. Let it suffice to say, that those truths or exhortations, which are founded on the visible state of providence, carry a degree of evidence and weight that is peculiar to themselves. Known characters and scenes illustrate the description, facilitate the application, and increase the conviction. I do not mean the exposing of particular persons, by the introduction of single and recent facts. But if a minister is able with judgment and propriety, to reflect upon divine truth, by pointing out the evil consequences of sin in general, the causes of the prevalence of one sin more than another, and the insensible changes that are produced in the manners of men, by the change of their outward condition, it is certainly his duty; and when the state of his own people furnishes the op-

portunity, if he would speak the word in season, he ought not to let it pass.

To these observations I only add, that, in the whole course of private parochial duties, a faithful minister will speak the truths of God in their proper season. If in family visitation, or private and personal admonition, he hath not a particular view, either to their character, as far as it is known, or their state in providence, however excellent or important his instructions may be, in other respects, he declareth not the whole counsel of God. But if he is truly actuated by a desire of being useful, and keeps this circumstance in his eye, with what readiness will he communicate instruction to the ignorant, consolation to the distressed, and reproof to the obstinate! He will recommend to the rich, humility and liberality; to all who are in poverty, patience and industry; to parents, assiduity in teaching and government; to children, obedience, attention, and subjection; and to servants, integrity and faithfulness in their trust; or in the language of the Holy Ghost, as a wise servant, "he will give to every one his portion of meat in due season."

5. In the last place, *declaring the whole counsel of God*, implies preaching the truths of the gospel, honestly and boldly, without respect of persons. I am persuaded the apostle Paul, who was of himself so remarkable for an undaunted courage in his Master's cause, had this, amongst other things in view, when he says, he had not *shunned* to declare the counsel of God. There are few temptations more dangerous to a minister, than the fear of man. Such is the malignant enmity of the wicked against the good, that

he may suffer injury from them in his name, his substance, and even his person. Against this danger our Saviour has warned his disciples in the following passage, Luke xii. 4. "And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." It is remarkable, that in the prayers recorded in scripture, as offered by the apostles for divine assistance in their sacred office, as well as those passages in which they ask the prayers and intercession of their fellow Christians, this circumstance is almost never forgotten. Boldness and resolution was what they saw they should always stand in need of. Acts iv. 29. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness, they may speak thy word." Eph. vi. 18, 19. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints: and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel."

The trials of the apostles were indeed in this respect uncommonly severe; but, even setting aside the case of open persecution, there is great reason for ministers to guard against that fear of man which bringeth a snare. As their hearers are of all different ranks and degrees, they ought, with the utmost impartiality, to preach the duties incumbent upon, and reprove the sins that cleave to men of every station. As they speak in the name of God, and carry a mes-

face from the King of kings, they ought to do it with the dignity that becomes an ambassador from him. They ought not to be dismayed at the presence of the most high and mighty of their fellow sinners, when they remember the continual presence of him before whom "mean men are vanity, and great men are a lie." I know, my brethren, that there is a respect and deference due to men, according to their station, and that a conscientious Christian will give them the subjection that belongs to their rank and authority in civil life, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." But this does not hinder him, who watches for their souls, to give them faithful warning, and, where it is necessary to debar them from the seals of God's covenant, lest they should at once profane his ordinance, and ruin their own souls.

I say, and I pray you to attend to it, *ruin their own souls*; because I know not a greater injury that can be done to the great, than that constant adulation that is paid to them, and that indulgence to their faults, which, by weakening the reproofs of conscience, tends to hinder their repentance and reformation. I take this opportunity to say, that if eternity is of any moment the great are not to be envied but pitied. Some are hindered by interest, and some by fear, from dealing plainly and faithfully with them; and it is wonderful to think how much the opinions and conduct of others blinds them as to the state of their own souls. It is recorded, to the honour of an ancient bishop, that for an act of cruelty he debarred the emperor himself from the Lord's table. I know there are many who would pronounce this immedi-

ately, the act of an ambitious and assuming priest; but it will always be in my eyes, a revered example of honesty and faithfulness in a minister of Christ.

II. I proceed, now, to the second thing proposed, which was to consider the difficulties which may lie in a minister's way, and tempt him to *shun* any part of his work. These are very various, and not easy either to enumerate or describe. What hath generally made the greatest impression upon me, either from experience or observation, I shall dwell upon a little; it may be reduced to the three following heads,—Sloth or worldliness in ourselves,—the prejudices of our people,—and the opposition of our enemies.

1. Sloth or worldliness in ministers themselves, may tempt them to shun some part of their work. You will see from the preceding observations, that the work of a minister is both extensive and difficult. It requires the greatest intention of mind, the application, so to speak, of the whole man. It requires judgment to lay down the plan, diligence and perseverance to carry it into execution. Now slothfulness, and a love of ease or pleasure, to which we have all too great a bias, must be a very dangerous temptation; to evade some part of the duty, or flur it over in a slight or careless manner. There is a very great difference between doing our work in some sort, or so as to avoid punishment from our superiors, especially at a time when the reins of government are not held very hard, and doing it with that zeal and application which a concern for the glory of God, and love to the souls of men, should

habitually inspire. We have all reason to be ashamed, that the important objects we have in view, and the interesting subjects we have to treat of, do not put an edge upon our spirits, and deliver us from that lazy unconcerned manner, which is equally dishonourable to God, and hurtful to the souls of men. I take the liberty to observe, that slothfulness is very incident to persons of considerable abilities; instead of being excited to improve their talents, they are inclined to trust to them. Finding, by experience, that they can do tolerably with but little pains, they soon come to content themselves with next to none. Perhaps I might apply here the common observation, that as few know their own weakness, so as few know their own strength, or what they might do by the conscientious improvement of their natural powers. We have seen many examples of persons of weak capacity, who, by the help of piety and diligence, have done every part of their ministerial duty in a manner far superior to those of much greater talents, whose heart did not lie to their work.

The danger of sloth, as a temptation, will appear in the strongest light, from what has been said on the fidelity of a minister in declaring *all* the counsel of God. He may not only deal with a slack hand and do his work imperfectly; but as it consists of very different parts, he may chuse the easier, and leave the harder. He may apply chiefly to what is most pleasant to himself, or what gives him the greatest opportunity to shine in the eyes of others, while he neglects those parts that are more burdensome to the flesh. The danger of this is the greater, that

those parts of a minister's work, to which a slothful mind is usually most reluctant, are also those, the neglect of which can be most easily palliated or concealed. And, indeed, it is wonderful to think what ingenious excuses men will invent for the neglect of those duties which they have no inclination to perform. I have often heard ministers endeavour to prove that visitation of families, which doubtless is a very fatiguing, was also a very unprofitable and unnecessary piece of service, than which, I think, there never was any thing more manifestly false. It is not only, when executed with fidelity, of great immediate use in itself, but, by giving a minister a thorough knowledge of his people, enables him to perform every other part of his work with the greater propriety and success. A minister ought to be like a servant, wholly at his master's disposal, who has no choice as to his work, but is ready to obey what God in his providence shall see fit to command him.

I joined worldliness with sloth, because they are near of kin, and commonly co-operate one with another. It is not my intention, in any part of this reasoning, to point out those who are wholly unfaithful, and mean no more but to shear the fleece, without caring for the flock; but to shew how those sinful dispositions, which, in part, take place in every one of us, if they be suffered to gather strength, may obstruct us in our duty. Too many worldly cares, or too much indulgence of worldly pleasure, must be a very dangerous temptation to those who are entrusted with the care of souls. The apostle Paul says of himself, that he was "separated to the gospel

of God," so is every minister of Christ. A prudent attention to his necessary provision, indeed, and ordering his affairs with discretion, is not only lawful, but highly useful and expedient; as it frees him from anxiety, and gives him greater liberty of mind for prosecuting the ends of his calling. But for one appointed to labour in holy things, to be either fordidly covetous, or from interested ambitious views to follow worldly occupations, is certainly either a sacrilegious breach of trust, or an unreasonable and offensive distrust of God.

2. Another very great difficulty, which often lies in the way of a minister, arises from the prejudices of his people. It would be idle to suppose, that ever we shall find a people, among whom there are no mistaken notions, or unjust prepossessions, which it is our duty, with prudence, but at the same time with honesty, to withstand. As no congregation can expect to meet with a perfect minister; so no minister should expect to meet with a faultless congregation. If there were any such, there would be little need of a minister at all. You are to observe, that I do not here chiefly intend that bias and propensity to sin, which is natural to us all, which reigns in the wicked, and struggles for indulgence in the good; and which therefore calls for "doctrine, reproof, and correction, and instruction in righteousness;" though I must observe, that even with regard to this, when any sin is common and prevalent in a place, when it has long kept possession, and has been generally overlooked, if a minister sees it his duty to reprove it with severity, and especially, if he will not tolerate it without censure,

he may expect no little difficulty and opposition. There are many who will complain of him, as too rigid, and impute to ill-nature and indiscretion, what arises from the dictates of conscience, and a sense of duty. By bearing open testimony against the introduction of fashionable amusements, or conformity to the world, he will often incur not only the hatred of the profligate, but the disapprobation of those prudent compliers, who are at once ashamed to approve, and unwilling to oppose any sinful relaxation.

But what I had chiefly in view, was, to mention those prejudices that may prevail with regard to religion; and which may be of such a nature, as a minister may be under a necessity not only of refusing to comply with, but of opposing in the most direct and positive manner. If any error or mistake of consequence prevail, either among his people in general, or any part of them, either among the high or the low, the learned or the vulgar, he must endeavour to destroy it. There may be indeed prejudices of so trifling a nature, that though he will never approve them, it is better entirely to overlook them; or in things that are merely indifferent, though unnecessary, according to the apostolic example, of "becoming all things to all men," it may be his duty sometimes to comply with them. But this is not the case with any thing that affects the substance of religion, as to all which, if he attempt to please men, he is not the servant of Christ. Now, how great a difficulty must often arise from such circumstances! He is unwilling to lose his place in the esteem and affection of his people in general, but especially of those whom he reckons to be the dis-

ciples and friends of Christ. Yet this he must sometimes forfeit for a season, unless he will sin against God, and thereby destroy his own peace. The best way for a minister to support himself in such a situation, is, to remember, that as to his integrity before God, and the comfort of his own mind, the less regard he pays to the judgment of men, so much the better; if God be for him, it signifies little who be against him. And as to his usefulness, he may safely commit it to God in his providence, who will certainly take care of it. Since he will not have it preserved by sinful compliance, he can easily restore it after it hath been a short time suspended for conscientious opposition. The truth is, an unsteady person, shaken by the breath of popular opinion, is unworthy of filling the station of a minister of Christ. As he should not be terrified by the threatenings of the great, neither should he be overcome by the clamours of the multitude. And if neither humour nor interest, but conscience, has indeed been his guide, he may rest assured that God, infinitely wise, will “bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon day.”

My brethren, I thank God, that I speak this from a conviction of the general truth, more than from having suffered much in this respect in my own experience. I shall mention to you, however, one example, that I may illustrate the remark, and, at the same time, further to discharge my own duty. It hath always seemed to me of great moment, to preserve just views of the sacraments, which are the seals of God's covenants, and the appointed means

of the confirmation and comfort of his own people. Without mentioning, however, the sacraments of the Lord's supper, I have found the greatest difficulty in preserving the sacrament of baptism from profanation, and from that comparative disregard under which it now lieth. This arises not only from the laxness of discipline in general, but from some mistakes and prejudices on the subject of religion. It appears to me a thing undeniable, that both sacraments are the seals of the same covenant, require the same terms of admission, and operate to the benefit of the receivers upon the very same principles; that is to say, according to the excellent words of our Catechism, "Not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of God, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them." The only difference is, that, in the Lord's supper, every believer acts for himself personally; in the sacrament of baptism, when administered to infants, the parent acts as a representative, and sponsor for his seed. None, therefore, ought to be admitted to baptism, more than to the Lord's supper, who have not a credible profession of faith in Christ, and, in the judgment of charity, or rather the judgment of men, may be supposed real Christians. Yet, is it not certain, that many who are justly excluded from the Lord's table, and some who never asked admission to it, do insist on presenting their children to baptism, and are pleaded for by not a few of better character, who cry out against the refusal, as an injury to the child, besides other bad consequences sometimes pretended?

The chief complaint is, that it is a pity the child should suffer for the fault of the father. This is the very error and prejudice in religion, which I think it my duty to oppose. It arises from a remaining degree of Popish superstition, to look upon the sacraments as spells, or charms, which have some effect independent of the exercise of faith in the receiver. The sacraments, my brethren, are not grace, but the means of it; they are not faith, but are appointed for the confirmation and growth of it. They belong to believers alone. They are seals of God's covenant; but they cannot seal that which was never made. It is just as if a man, who wanted to make a purchase from me, whose terms I had utterly rejected, and refused to give him my possession, should, notwithstanding, persist in writing out his contract, and signing it. Would this be of any effect? A contract is a sure title to the bargain, where the consent of both parties is ascertained; but where one of these is wanting, it is absolutely void, and of no effect. Infants cannot receive the sacraments, by exercising faith themselves; they have no right to receive the sign at all, but as they are the seed of believing parents by profession. Neither do they receive any real benefit from it, but when they are the seed of those who believe sincerely. If it be allowed, that an unbeliever, who receives the bread and wine at the Lord's table, receives no benefit to his own soul, how can it be imagined or supposed, that an unbelieving parent in baptism can first receive, and then convey benefit to his new born child? His coming there at all, in such a state, is a presumptuous profanation of a holy institution. Now,

though I can conceive easily, and do believe firmly, that many blessings are conveyed to children by an act of duty in their parents, I can neither conceive nor believe, that they can receive any advantage from an act of profanity and disobedience.

The children of wicked parents, then, can receive no benefit by baptism, but what they would have whether they were baptised or not, viz. that they are brought up among professing Christians, and by that means have some opportunities of knowing the truths of the gospel. And I cannot help thinking it would, in the course of providence, be an inducement to them to attend more seriously to what they are taught, if they considered themselves as no members of the visible church, till they understood the terms of admission, and desired it as their own choice. The case is very different with the children of real believers; they have a right to all the promises that are made to the seed of believers as such, by that God who "sheweth mercy to thousands of generations of them that keep his commandments." Some, I believe many, think that they are doing honour to the sacrament of baptism, by representing the rite itself as of so great necessity; but it is precisely that sort of honour that the Papists do to it, by causing midwives and physicians instantly baptize the children that are in a weak state, or by running to the beds of the sick, with a little of the consecrated wafer, and putting it into the mouth of a person either wholly insensible, or perhaps already dead. Our fathers in the purer times of this church, whose institutions and practice, the longer I live I do the more esteem and revere, in the most absolute

manner, prohibited all private baptism. Their great reason for this was to prevent the very abuse I have been speaking of, viz. the superstitious notion of the necessity of the outward rite to salvation, without a due attention to the manner of receiving it. And, indeed, it was their only reason; for they who were so great enemies to the consecration of places, and the holiness of stones or timber, could never think that baptism, administered according to Christ's appointment, was invalid for being done in a private house, and not in a church, or in the presence of a small rather than a numerous assembly.

These things, my brethren, which I have often mentioned occasionally, I have now repeated, and will add to them, that I think there is something very incongruous, at least unsuitable, in admitting any parent to present his child in baptism, whatever be his character in other respects, who has never asked admission to the Lord's table. Consider, that in the administration of baptism, the parent is constantly taken bound to command his children, so soon as they come to years, to renew their baptismal engagement in their own persons. Now what consistency is there, in allowing a man to pledge his faith solemnly to God and his church, that he will command his child to do that which he habitually neglects to do himself. The pretence of fear, and unpreparedness for the Lord's table, is a condemnation of those who offer it, because it shews, that they suppose the one sacrament requires a different character, or easier terms of admission than the other. After all, the above prejudices seem to

me fo deeply rooted with many, that they will not probably be soon destroyed ; but I think it is the duty of every minifter, in that, and all fuch cafes, to fpeak his mind plainly, and, to the utmoft of his power, to a t confiftently and uniformly, though he fhould fuffer by the flanders both of the ignorant and profane.

3. The laft difficulty which I fhall mention, as lying in the way of minifters, is the oppofition of their enemies. No faithful minifter can expect to be without enemies. In a private character, and retired way of life, a man may, by very great prudence, and particularly by filence and forbearance in a great meafure, efcape the refentment or injufies of violent men. And to be as little embroiled with others as poffible, is both our intereft and our duty. “ If it be poffible, fays the Apoftle, and as much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men.” But it is certain from long and invariable experience, that there is fuch enmity and rancour in the hearts of wicked men againft all who are in good earneft about religion, that they may lay their account with continual oppofition, and continual flander. This our Saviour teaches his difciples to expect, and fhews them, that it is the neceffary confequence of their relation to him, John xv. 18, 19, 20, 21. “ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own ; but becaufe ye are not of the world, but I have chofen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I faid unto you, The fervant is not greater than the Lord. If they have perfecut-

ed me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."—The apostle Paul also bears his testimony to the same truth, 2 Tim. iii. 12. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, will suffer persecution."

But, if wicked men are injurious to the children of God in general, their malice must be particularly whetted against a minister, so far as he does his duty. He is placed in a public station, and is obliged to be active in his Master's cause. Time-serving or neutrality, as to the interest of religion, is commendable in none, but it is unpardonable in him. He must bear testimony openly and resolutely against vice and wickedness. And reproof, when administered with severity, is certain of making either a friend or an enemy. A faithful minister will not suffer Satan's kingdom to be at peace; and, therefore, it is no wonder, that when they are gnawing their tongues with pain, they should pour out their venom against him, who gives them so much disturbance. The effect of reproof, in kindling the rage and malice of the guilty, was never better described than in the account of the trial and martyrdom of Stephen, particularly Acts vii. 54. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth."

There are many ways by which the enmity and opposition of wicked men to the truth may prove a temptation to a minister: a few of which I shall mention, as I hope the distinct knowledge of them

may be profitable to you in the way of caution: *1st*, As one of their chief weapons is contempt and derision, he may be in danger of concealing or perverting truth in some degree, in order to avoid it. When the gospel of Christ was first published, the doctrine of the cross, we are told, was “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” The same truth, in its simplicity, is still treated with scorn by profane and worldly men. All that relates to it is considered as weakness and absurdity; and the minister who insists upon it, must lose his character with many for capacity and judgment. Is not this known to be true in daily experience? Are not such immediately stigmatized as weak and babbling creatures? Now, it is not altogether an easy sacrifice for a minister, to be indifferent as to the opinion formed of his parts and sufficiency, to wait till time shall do him justice, or to be altogether unconcerned whether it ever do him justice or not. It is no trifling thing to become *a fool* in the eye of the world *for Christ's sake*, and *not to be ashamed of his cross*. It may make many avoid such subjects, at least, more than they ought, or, perhaps, attempt to give them a polite or modish dress, which of all others, is the most unsuitable to them; or it may make others go to the opposite extreme, who, because they find that such truths will be despised, are at no pains to avoid adding to the offence, by a silly and contemptible, or a crude and indigested manner of handling them. I know not indeed a more difficult thing, nor do I know any thing more noble in a minister, than to “cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, to be truly superior

to the applause or censure of either one class or another of his hearers, and therefore to avoid a vain display of human art; but at the same time, from a sense of duty to God, and veneration for his truths, to be at all due pains to treat them properly, so as they may appear with light and evidence to the understanding, and come home with force upon the conscience. Such a man will bring forth the doctrines of the gospel in their own unadorned majesty and native simplicity; he will not consider himself as preaching *before* his hearers as critics: for what are they to him in this view? but he will consider himself as preaching *to* them as sinners, and pleading with them as immortal creatures, tottering upon the very brink of eternal perdition.

2dly, The opposition of enemies may tempt men of little courage to sinful silence for their own quiet. When vice is prevalent, it is also commonly insolent and resentful. Now, the hatred or ill-will of no person is desirable; and there are a thousand ways in which any person of a revengeful spirit may be hurtful. There are also very few so unconnected, but that they have many friends, whose hatred is to be encountered as well as their own. The influence of this is but too much seen in every place. Offenders are often screened from reproof or censure, thro' fear of provoking them or their relations. Neither is it at all difficult to find palliating arguments drawn from prudence, or other considerations, to make us think it is necessary to forbear. I believe this is very much the fault of the present age, and the greater and more general the relaxation of discipline in any age or place, the more difficult and danger-

ous it is for any one to step forth and assert its dignity and obligation. And yet I cannot help thinking, the great excellence of discipline, is its impartiality, not to respect persons in judgment. How can we defend ourselves, if we make one law for one, and another for another; if we censure the the small and forgive the great?

3dly, Ministers of weak minds may be apt to sink under the opposition of the wicked. It is said of Lot dwelling in Sodom, that he was, 2 Peter ii. 7, 8. "Vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." It certainly needs no small measure of fortitude and holy resolution, to persist in the discharge of our duty, notwithstanding the obstinacy of sinners, and to seek our comfort, under continual obloquy, from the approbation of him that judgeth righteously. At the same time, I must say that the friendship of wicked men is much more dangerous than their enmity; for the first brings with it the danger of seduction, and the last only exposes us to suffering, which, though itself is a species of temptation, as I shall immediately shew, is much less powerful than the other.

4thly, The opposition of wicked men may prove a temptation, as it may bring forth the remains of corruption that are in the hearts of good men, and make them sin, by imprudence or passion, if not by repentment. I have no where supposed that ministers are faultless in their conduct; they may, no doubt, err considerably in many circumstances, even

when their intention, upon the whole, is just and laudable. We see many examples of great imprudence, which we need not wonder at, when we consider the difficulties with which they are every where surrounded, and the enemies that wait for their halting. If we consider that Moses, the meekest man on earth, spoke unadvisedly with his lips upon great provocation, we shall perceive it is but a part of the weakness of humanity, when we see others fall into the same snare. But, as to lasting resentment, he deserveth not the name of a Christian, much less of a minister, who will continue to harbour it in his breast; he must love his enemies; he must bless them that curse him, and pray for them that despitefully use him, and persecute him. This is not merely a thing amiable and excellent, but of the most absolute necessity; for our Saviour says expressly, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses." And, blessed be God, there is nothing difficult or burdensome in this part of a Christian's duty. There is no such victory over evil, as overcoming it with good. There is no such consolation under the injuries of sinners, as requiting them by prayer. It composeth the spirit; it purifieth the heart, and authorises the believer to put his trust in God, and say with the Psalmist, Psal. xxvii. 1. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

III. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of this subject; particularly,

by giving you my parting advices in the spirit of this passage, and to the best of my judgment, in a manner suited to your situation. But, before I do this, in the

1st Place, Let me beseech every sinner in this assembly, to hearken to the message of the gospel, and to believe in the name of the Son of God, "that, believing, they may have life through his name." This is the substance of *the counsel of God*, "that Christ died on the cross to save sinners, and that there is no salvation in any other." You are blessed who hear the joyful sound, but infinitely more blessed, if you lay it to heart, and, renouncing every other claim, rest your dependance upon this Saviour. What ignorance doth it shew, if you trust in yourselves, that you are righteous? Will you be able to stand before God in judgment? It is to him you must answer, and from him you must receive your sentence. You may easily, indeed, stifle these reflections for a time, and bury every apprehension, in the hurry of worldly business, or the intoxication of worldly pleasure; but all these things are coming quickly to an end. After a few more turns in this vain world, the body must be laid in the dust, and the spirit must go to its own place; that is to say, either the mansions of glory, or the place of torment. I say these things to you my brethren, with all plainness. They need no additional force of language to give them weight. It is an amazing proof of the deceitfulness of sin, that we are ever able to forget them. It is wonderful, indeed, that sinners are able to sleep in quiet, and to indulge themselves in worldly pleasure, while they are suspended by nothing but the frail thread of life over

the bottomless pit. Gladly would I make use of every circumstance that could have any effect in carrying home these truths upon the consciences of all here present.

If that of my being now speaking to you, for the last time, in all probability, while in the body, can be of any use, I pray, let it not be forgotten. But is it not strange, that a circumstance of this nature should excite so much curiosity and attention, and things that happen every day, of the same or a like nature should be so little improved? It is not, indeed every day that a minister is removed from his charge; but there are not many days, in which some of his people are not removed from this state of trial. Many are hearing a farewell sermon, though not to the minister, yet to themselves, when they little think of it. I would, therefore, earnestly beseech all who are, or have reason to suspect themselves to be in an unreconciled state, to turn from their transgressions, that they may live; to lay hold of the mercy of God through Christ, for their pardon; and live, by faith, on his promised strength, for their sanctification.

2dly, Notwithstanding this general address, I have a few words to say to the loose and profligate. I am sorry to think, that, in a place like this, of no very great extent, there should be so many daring sinners, who set every thing sacred at defiance. It hath been observed, and I believe with truth, that the profane among us carry it with a greater degree of hardness and insolence, than in places of superior note, and where probably they are in much greater numbers. I believe it may be in part owing to this circumstance, that they are better known; so

that they must either be open profligates, or not profligates at all. There is no medium; the shame cannot be avoided; and therefore it must be overcome, since they will not be restrained, and cannot be concealed, it lays them under an unhappy necessity of keeping profanity in countenance. Perhaps also another reason may be, that not being tied by any principle of conscience, they are also destitute of that sense of decency which has a considerable influence on the outward conduct of those of higher rank. But whatever be the reason, their state is to be pitied. Let me beseech all such, to consider the terrible effects of vice which are every day to be seen. Remember, I pray you, how many have fallen a sacrifice to drunkenness and lust! Can you say deliberately, in a sober moment, that there is any profit in your choice? Is there any pleasure in reflecting on scenes of riot and dissipation? I know not whether to recal to your memory those whom death has taken away, or point out to your observation those who are suffered to remain. What a melancholy sight is an old worn out sinner, who has broke: his constitution, tainted his character, and wasted his substance! You let us see well enough in what manner you chuse to live; but I would gladly know in what manner you chuse, or indeed what manner you expect to die. You cannot live always. Some of you cannot live long. Suppose you had time given you for reflection on a death bed, or children to whom you would leave a few words of advice. Could you say to them, "O! my dear children, the many delightful nights that I have spent in roaring, and swearing,

and obscene jesting! O the delicious hours that I have spent in brothels among harlots! It gives me pleasure to think that you will follow so good an example, and revive the memory of your father's conduct. Guard against every thing that may tempt you to forsake it. Beware of those cunning priests that would seduce you to religion!" Are such sentiments, my brethren, to the last degree insupportable? Are they almost improper to describe? What then must be the life that lays an evident foundation for them? Why are you so impatient of the reproofs or admonitions of those who bleed inwardly for your folly? It is not inclination, but duty that prompts us. No man would provoke your rage and violence, if he could avoid it. Think then, I beseech you, on your condition, and pray that God for Christ's sake, may grant you repentance unto life.—The wicked having received warning.

I must now endeavour to execute what I chiefly intended in the close of this discourse, by giving you some advices as a people making profession of faith in Christ, and obedience to him. They will all, or most of them, consist of what I have frequently taken notice of occasionally, and have now only selected as matters of general moment.

1. Let me beseech you to do your utmost to understand the gospel well; but let it be always accompanied with practice, and applied to promote the power of the spiritual life. I would have your taste exercised to discern good and evil. Endeavour by reading, hearing, and meditation, and you may add mutual converse, to understand the doctrine of salvation, by grace in all its parts. Learn to know

the meaning of forgiveness being free, viz. that the sinner is justly liable to wrath; that Christ hath purchased, and God of his infinite unmerited mercy, has offered a full pardon to the chief of sinners, and grace to form them for his own service; that it is their duty to accept of it; that it is their interest to rely upon it; and that it is at their peril if they despise it. That, for a sinner to think he must first do some things that are good, in order to found his title to this very mercy, is injurious to the riches of divine grace, and the way to retard, if not to prevent his reformation. The renewing of his nature is a part of Christ's purchase; and, therefore, not to be performed by him as a condition, but accepted as a promise; nor does he truly receive Christ for salvation, unless he receive and submit to him in all the characters with which he is invested, as sent of God, viz. Prophet, Priest, and King. Holiness, or new obedience, is the fruit of faith. A real believer keeps the commandments of God by the strength of that grace that is treasured up in Christ, and watchfully observes his temper and practice, as the evidences of his change, and tending to shew that he is indeed an habitation of God through the Spirit. To have evangelical principles, is, by no means, to neglect the commandments of God; but to deny our own righteousness and strength, and obey, without glorying in that obedience. And that this is the just and scriptural view of the matter, I think, is undeniable, on this single account, "that it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure." If every thing that is good in us is the work of God, it is absurd to represent it as

the condition of his favour; for it is the effect of his grace. By setting the thing in this light, we shall perceive, that the freeness of salvation is not in the least degree giving liberty to sin, or taking away the necessity of holiness. Is it not just as necessary, if it must be received as a gift, as if it were to be performed as a condition? Is it not just as necessary when incorporated with faith, as when divided from it?

This system of gospel truth, my brethren, I would have you to understand, so as both to discern and disapprove what is contrary to it; but I would have you to understand it, in order to produce union with God, habitual and cheerful obedience to his laws. In recommending the connection between faith and practice, I mean to guard you against two things distant from one another. The one is habitual untenderness of conscience. There are certainly some who are either real, or at least pretended friends to the doctrine of the gospel, on whose hearts it never yet hath taken hold. They plainly and habitually live in the practice of sin, and therefore are of those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. I am indeed of opinion, that they never had any other than a customary traditionary belief. They are found because it is the mode where they live to be found, and not from any inward personal conviction. In the mean time, they are a reproach to their profession, and cannot be treated with too great severity by those who wish well to the gospel.

The other mistake I would guard you against is, a speculative religion. It is good to be well instructed in doctrinal truths; but there is often a

danger of going too much into controversy. We have seen many instances of ordinary Christians who, when they had attained a considerable degree of knowledge, and were able to speak with fulness and propriety on religious subjects, gave themselves up to a litigious and wrangling disposition, which was soon followed by a barren, and sometimes an offensive practice. The same thing also frequently leads to innumerable little parties and factions, into which Christians, I mean real Christians, are divided, which very much hinder their own profit, and grieve the hearts of those who are one with them in Christ. Therefore let it be your care to apply the truths of the gospel for your own sanctification and comfort. After you have believed them, be still more careful to live upon them, than even to defend them. Divisions should never be made without absolute necessity; and when they are made, they should be as soon as possible forgotten, that having escaped sin we may apply ourselves to duty; for controversy, be the subject what it will, I think, is not very favourable to the power of godliness.

2. Desire a faithful minister, do your utmost to obtain him; and then let it be your habitual study to profit by him. You have reason to be very thankful, that your situation in providence is such, as you may expect a minister who is a hearty friend to the gospel, and at the same time, one who is agreeable to your own choice. Let me exhort you, as far as you are consulted in that matter, to make the choice with much calmness and prudence; to look for one not only found in his principles, but of thorough knowledge and capacity, always preferring solid before specious parts. After having made the choice,

endeavour to strengthen his hands, and encourage his heart in the Lord, by a careful attendance on his ministry, and by a dutiful submission to instruction and reproof. You ought not to wish for one who will flatter you, nor ought you to lay such a temptation in a minister's way, as to shew that you are pleased with being flattered. The best testimony that you can give to a minister is to learn from him, and to obey him. This is infinitely better than noisy praise and admiration, according to the excellent remark of bishop Burnet, "That it is not the best sermon that makes the hearers go away talking to one another, and praising the speaker; but that which makes them go away thoughtful, and serious, and hastening to be alone." Has a minister any evidently profane persons among his hearers; if he cannot preach them from sin to God, it were much more for his credit to preach so as that they are not able to hear him, but flee away for ease to their conscience, than to have them continue in wickedness, and yet praise him every day, for an admirable speaker or an able man.

If you would truly profit by ordinances, after you have a fixed pastor, I think it is of moment to forget, as much as possible, the persons of men, and consider them as no more than instruments in the hand of God, for your daily instruction and comfort. The more you remember the appointment of God, and wait upon his ordinances, in the faith of his presence, and the expectation of his blessing, the more you are likely to receive both sensible and lasting benefit. I must therefore take the liberty to observe, that we have amongst us a set of wandering unsettled hearers, who run about from one

congregation to another, and even from one profession to another, and are scarcely ever to be seen a whole day in one place. If they be but deliberating where to fix, we may say of them, that they are ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth. But the probability is, that they have itching and curious ears, and go about not to serve God but to hear men. If I am able, at all to judge, either by reflection or observation, those are most likely to profit, who having deliberately made their choice, sit habitually and regularly under one minister. By this means they enter into his views; and as he will naturally endeavour, if any thing was wanting at one time, to complete his scheme by supplying it at another, they will thereby have a more comprehensive view of the whole counsel of God. At the same time, not having the charm of novelty to enchant them, they will have nothing to do but to reap instruction. On the other hand, by hearing separate, detached, and independent discourses, men may please their fancy more, but they will improve their understanding less. It is also plain, that as every minister will endeavour, not only to follow an order in his discourses on one subject, but to have a respect to the connection, and relation of the subjects themselves, the more accurate and exact he is, in suiting one part to the illustration of another, the less he will be understood by these desultory hearers, who take only a single branch, without being able to perceive its subserviency to the general design. I have many times known exceptions taken at ministers, for some parts of a discourse by such persons, when, if they had

heard the whole upon the same or corresponding subjects, they would have perceived there was no place for their objections. The great purpose, my brethren, of a serious and judicious people, in attending on ordinances, should neither be to please themselves, nor to criticise their teachers; but to hear the word of God, that they may do it. On this account it is, that humble and regular Christians are getting real advantage to their souls, while some are only watching the opinions, or others only passing judgment on the ability, perhaps no more than the style and outward manner of the speaker.

3. I must give you another advice, as a professing people, to guard against the introduction of a worldly spirit. I have often observed to you, that every situation a person or people can be in has its peculiar temptations, as well as trials. This place, engaged in commerce and traffic growing in numbers, and I suppose growing in wealth, is in great danger of a worldly spirit, and of importing, if I may speak so, fashionable vices, instead of real improvements. While I say this, I would not be understood as being against a liberal education, and elegant manner of life, or any thing that is truly becoming in an advanced rank. There is no more religion in being sordid, than in being sumptuous. But I think the spirit of the gospel is such, that it will dispose a truly pious person to be rather late than early in adopting new ornaments; rather sparing than excessive in dress, furniture and equipage; and careful not to be conformed to that vanity of the world which we renounced at baptism. Let men defend one practice after another, as they please, I shall always

expect to see something which a careless worldly person will do, but which a good man will not do.

However, not to keep entirely in generals, I must once more give my public testimony against what was lately attempted to be brought in here, equally contrary to the law of the land and the precepts of the gospel, the pernicious entertainments of the stage. The best and wisest men in all ages have borne witness against them, as the great means of corrupting the morals of a people; and I am certain, they must be of all others most hurtful to the inhabitants of this place, the far greatest part of whom live by daily labour. I look upon it as the indispensable duty both of magistrates and ministers, to do all in their power, to prevent the introduction of what may betray the young and unsuspecting into the destructive paths of vice, or the lower class of mankind into an idle and dissolute life. Much good of this kind may be done in matters of outward order, by a firm and resolute behaviour in those who are in place and authority. I must also here take particular notice of the duty of sabbath sanctification. I do hereby warn you against that most pernicious refinement of gadding abroad, paying private visits upon the Lord's day. Whoever knows any thing of the obligation of family government and instruction, must be sensible, that to receive promiscuous company on that day, is to render it utterly impracticable. Besides, the vain and unprofitable, and sometimes sinful conversation that prevails in such cases, must greatly weaken, or entirely obliterate any serious impressions made upon your mind, during the service of the sanctuary. Christians, is not the

rest of the sabbath from worldly cares and pursuits, a consolation to your own souls, as well as a happy opportunity of doing service to the souls of others? Why then will you suffer yourselves to be robbed of it, by the impertinent intrusions of idle or ill disposed persons? Let your houses be sacred on that day as well as your churches; and endeavour to prepare your minds, and those other members of your families, for an eternal sabbath in the world to come. This leads me, in the

4th Place, To exhort you to be careful and conscientious in family government and instruction. How inexcusable are those parents and masters, who suffer their children and servants to perish for lack of knowledge? What unspeakable advantages do you enjoy, having all the force of natural affection, as well as natural authority, to give your instructions weight? How many have remembered, with pious gratitude, through a whole life, the benefit they have received from family instruction and example? I know I speak to many who are accountable to God for this mercy; how shall you answer it then, if you do not give the same advantage to your own families? and how shall they answer to God, think you, who have banished the worship of God from the families in which they found it? One would think, the lifeless walls and furniture of your chambers might be awakening monitors. There is the greatest mutual influence between family and personal religion. Personal religion is the foundation of all family and relative duties. It would be speaking to the deaf to persuade any to watch over the souls of others, who have no concern for their own. But

wherever there is a deep impressi^on of the importance of eternity for ourselves, this will naturally and necessarily set before us its importance with respect to all that are dear to us. On the other hand, for the same reason, family religion is one of the best and surest evidences of the reality and the strength of personal religion. It is sometimes observed, that some very pious persons are extremely defective in this particular, and take little care of the instruction, and still less of the government, of their children. If they are truly pious, it is a very great blemish upon their piety. However, for my own part, I confess I do very much suspect the sincerity of religion, in those who are remarkably negligent in this particular, let them profess as much as they will. I know that pious persons, from the weakness of their judgment, will be guilty of great imprudence in the manner of family instruction, and from an absolute incapacity, may not be able to preserve their authority; but I cannot easily reconcile with true piety, the absolute neglect of either the one or the other.

I must add, that I take family religion, and the careful discharge of relative duties, to be an excellent mean of the growth of religion in a man's own soul. How can any person bend his knees in prayer every day with his family, but it must be a powerful restraint upon him from the indulgence of any sin which is visible to them? Will such a person, think you, dare to indulge himself in anger, or chuse to be seen by them, when he comes home staggering with drunkenness, unfit to perform any duty, or ready to sin still more by the manner of performance? When I figure to myself a master of a family, who

had come home fottèd like a beast, and half-supported to his house, rising in the morning, I am not able to conceive how he can bear the looks of those members of his family who had been witnesses of his shame. But, besides being a restraint from gross crimes, I cannot help saying, that, speaking of the things of God, with the concern of a parent, or the humanity of a master, must give a solemnity of spirit, and a sense of their moment, even greater than before. A man cannot speak to purpose, without feeling what he says; and the new impression will certainly leave behind it a lasting effect. Let me therefore, my beloved hearers, earnestly recommend to you the faithful discharge and careful management of family duties, as you regard the glory of God, the interest of his church, the advantage of your posterity, and your own final acceptance in the day of judgment.

5. Let religion be incorporated with your lawful employments, and improved by an attention to the whole course of providence to you and yours. Nothing is more hurtful to religion, than to confine it to particular times and places: I should have rather said, there is not a greater mistake in religion, than to imagine that it can be so confined. True religion will shew its influence in every part of your conduct. It is like the sap of a living tree, which penetrates to the most distant boughs. In your ordinary calling, see that you undertake nothing but what is lawful in its end, and endeavour to accomplish nothing by any but by lawful means, that you may have always the comfort of a conscience void of offence. Nay, you should even do more; you should

endeavour to act so single and sincere a part, as to be beyond the imputation of fraud, that all who know you may put the most unbounded confidence in your integrity. There are many other calumnies which we may naturally expect from a malicious world; and it ought to trouble us very little to hear them: but it must be extremely distressing to a good man to be but suspected of dishonesty. Oh, my brethren! how often hath it grieved me to see, that many persons, formerly of a decent character, when they lost their substance, lost their religion with it; and indeed, to consider how few, when they were reduced in their circumstances, could satisfy the public, that they had acted fairly.

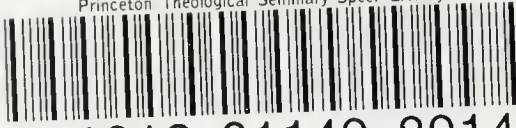
Let it be your care, I beseech you, to remember, that it is God that giveth you power to get wealth; and what thanks are due to him, if he hath given you abundance, especially if he hath given you withal a heart to bestow. Be diligent in your business, from a principle of conscience; and make it the daily subject of your prayer to God, that he would either keep you from the shame of poverty, or at least from the sin of it. Take notice of every step of his providence, whether of mercy or trial. Let the aspect of providence direct your exercise, and quicken your affections in religious duties; and take such views of the fulness of an all-sufficient God, in acts of worship, as may prepare you for every event of providence, whether prosperous or adverse.

Thus, my brethren, I have now finished what I proposed, in the way of advices; and for what I have to say with regard to the present dispensation of providence, that puts an end to my ministry among you,

I shall bring it within very narrow bounds. It were easy, by saying a few words, to move the concern both of speaker and hearers: this I have hitherto chosen to avoid; and, therefore, shall only say, that I am deeply sensible of the affection and duty of the congregation that attended my ministry, and others under my charge. I cannot express my sense of it better, than in the words of the late eminently pious Doctor Finlay, my immediate predecessor in this new office, who, on his death-bed, said to those about him, “I owe a long catalogue of debts to my friends, which will not be put to my charge; but I hope God will discharge them for me.” I cannot now do any thing better for you, than again to beseech you, to remember and put in practice the directions I have given you, and, I am persuaded, that it shall go well with you. The only farther request I have to make to you is, that you would give to me, and my family, an interest in your prayers. Intreat of God, that we may be preserved from perils and dangers, and carried to the place of our destination in safety; and that I may be assisted of him in every future duty, and not fall under the terrible reproach, of agreeing to make so distant a removal, and then being found unfit for the important task. I conclude with the words of the apostle Jude, 24, 25. “Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

THE END.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01149 8914

