

THE
WORKS

OF THE

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FERVENCY AND IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER.

A

S E R M O N.

GENESIS xxxii. 26.

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Second sermon on the text.

II. **W**E proceed now to the *second* thing proposed in the distribution of the subject; which was, To show you the duty and reasonableness of wrestling and importunity in prayer. Here I am sensible, that a corrupt and impatient mind may be able to muster up objections against it. There is something wonderful and unsearchable in all the works of God, and in none more, as it is reasonable to suppose, than in the methods of his grace. In particular, it may appear surprising, that he should exercise his people with such conflicts and trials, that it should be necessary to overcome him, as it were, by importunity, before we can obtain those blessings which himself hath commanded us to ask, and which he hath promised to bestow. Why, will it be said, does a God of mercy, and of infinite fullness, to whom all our wants and weaknesses are perfectly known, wait for our prayers, before he will part with what is so much needed by us? Why doth he, who knoweth our frame, and remembers that we are dust, unnecessarily throw obstructions in our way, and wrap himself up in darkness, to discourage our approach?

But how does this surprize increase, when we consider how unequal we are for the conflict, if no strength but our own is opposed to the Almighty! nay, that our strength for resistance must come only from himself: so that he wounds, and he heals; he oppresses, and he sustains; he discourages, and he invites. It is by prayer that we must obtain every blessing from the Father of lights; and one of the greatest and most necessary of these blessings is the spirit of prayer itself. My brethren, when either unbelief or profanity moves any such difficulties as these, I think it my duty to call upon you, in the first place, to bow yourselves before the sovereignty of God. There is an unsearchable impenetrable depth in the divine wisdom, whether we look upon the works of nature, or of grace. As Creator of the world, he could, no doubt, in a moment, with one word of his power, have raised the whole fabric in perfection; yet it pleased him, in a gradual manner, to finish every part by the addition of another, for the space of six days. When he gave the first promise to Adam, or when he renewed it to the father of the faithful, he could, no doubt, have sent the Saviour into the world, to finish transgression, and make an end of sin; yet he saw it proper to give only distant intimations of this blessed period, and to defer the long-expected appearance till the fulness of time, while the nations were suffered to sit for many ages in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death. In the same manner he often takes a great variety of steps with his people before they are made partakers of his promises.

But notwithstanding that something must still remain mysterious, and beyond the comprehension of a finite creature, in the management of God, who "giveth not account of any of his matters," we may see much propriety and beauty in this part of his procedure. And is it not our duty to attend to it? We may see the reasonableness, nay we may perceive the wisdom, of his requiring a holy fervency, wrestling, and importunity in prayer: for it serves to engrave upon our hearts, and even to work into our affections, some of the most important truths of religion, and such as will have the most powerful and ex-

tensive influence upon our temper and practice. This will plainly appear from the three following considerations.

1. Fervency of spirit, and importunity, in prayer, is suitable and necessary, because of the greatness and glory of that God with whom we hold communion, as well as it serves to strengthen and improve the sense of this upon our minds. The infinite majesty of God, and the unmeasurable distance at which he is removed from all created weakness, is often spoken of in scripture with admiration of his condescension: Psal. viii. 3, 4. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Under a deep impression of the same great truth, Solomon 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?" Is not, then, some fervor of affection due to the greatness and glory of that God whom we worship? Our affections should always, in their strength and exertion, be in proportion to their object, its dignity and worth. Indifference and carelessness in an inferior towards a superior is always counted a mark of disdain. We naturally suppose, that those in great and high stations ought to be approached with reverence, and solicited in the humblest manner, by their inferiors, who hope to share in their bounty; and the more exalted the person, the more submissive the posture, and the more earnest the supplication. Much more ought this to take place between God and us. On this account it is, probably at least on this amongst others, that indifference and coldness in religion is represented as peculiarly the object of divine detestation: Rev. iii. 15, 16. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

2. Our own great unworthiness, who are the objects of divine love, and admitted to this sacred intercourse,

should powerfully excite us to fervency in pleading. This is precisely a counterpart to the former consideration, and greatly strengthens the conclusion. Even the highest of the spirits above, most eminent in knowledge and sanctity, who stand nearest to the throne of God, we are told, cover their faces with their wings, as lost in respect and wonder, when they look to him who dwells in inaccessible light. How much more “man, who is a worm, and the son of man, who is a worm, whose foundation is in the dust, who dwells in houses of clay, and is crushed before the moth!” Accordingly, in some of the examples we have of the most importunate pleading and wrestling in prayer, this is the very difficulty which seems to stand in the way, and requires the greatest efforts of holy boldness to overcome; as in the account we have of Abraham’s intercession for devoted Sodom, Gen. xviii. 27. “And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.” And again, in the 32d verse, “And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.”

But, my brethren, I beseech you remember, it is not our frail nature, and limited powers only, that point out our unworthiness; but our guilt and impurity, so opposite and so odious to the divine nature. This, I have shown you in the preceding discourse, is one of the greatest hindrances of our access to God in prayer. And may we not say, How suitable, how necessary is it, that, in order to keep us still deeply humble, God should sometimes cover himself with a cloud, and exercise the sinner with strong crying and tears, before he will vouchsafe the intimations of his love? This reason will be felt, and that the most sensibly by the best and most dutiful of his children, as their sanctification continues imperfect so long as they are here below. How should a sense of guilt and misery at once increase our self-abasement, and add to the earnestness of our desires! There cannot be a juster description, both of our state and duty, where misery and weakness conspire in showing the necessity and difficulty of wrest-

ling with God, than the apostle hath given us, Rom. viii. 26. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

3. The duty and reasonableness of wrestling and importunity in prayer, appears from the inestimable value of the mercies to be obtained. Should there not be a proportionable strength of desire to the worth of the blessings in prospect? Now, who can compute the value of the divine favor, and all its happy effects? and therefore who can compute the guilt of indifference, and the necessity of fervor in asking it? The blessings of salvation in general are in their nature and source unspeakable, and in their duration without end.—On the one hand, deliverance from everlasting misery, from the wrath of an almighty and incensed God. True it is, that those who are but yet in the way must be very unable to form just conceptions of this. But we may in general conclude, from the glory of creating power, which is in so many instances displayed before our eyes, how fearful a thing it must be to be the monuments of the vengeance of such a God. He who is mighty to make and save, is also mighty to destroy. This is particularly felt by the sinner, when, humbled by conviction, and in every inward conflict there is a repetition of the same distress, as it arises from the same cause.

On the other hand, what must be the value of everlasting happiness in the presence and the enjoyment of God! How blessed, beyond expression, must the believer be when the fullness of the divine benignity, of which we have now access to taste only some smaller and more distant streams, shall be the portion of the soul! What supplications should we not make, when we are assured, that importunity may obtain so rich a treasure! And let me add, how valuable present fellowship and communion with God, which is the earnest and foretaste of complete deliverance from the one, and the eternal unchangeable possession of the other! Say now, my brethren, is it not just and reasonable, that these blessings should be desired with ardor, and sought with importunity? What fervent lan-

guage have we from the scripture-saints upon this subject ! Pf. xlii. 1, 2, “ As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ? ” Pf. lxiii. 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.” Is it any wonder that there should be often trials and conflicts in the way to so honorable a relation, and so happy a state ? What is cheaply obtained, is commonly esteemed of little worth. Is it to be expected, then, that God should prostitute the blessings of his love to cold and disdainful petitions, to lukewarm and indifferent petitioners ? And are there not alas ! too many who “ ask and have not, because they ask amiss,” who, by their feeble and heartless demands, do justify, and, if I may use such an expression, even solicit a refusal ?

III. We proceed to the *third* thing proposed in the method ; which was, To point out the great advantages which flow from wrestling with God, These in consequence of what hath been already said, may be considered as all centring in one point, *viz.* its power and efficacy in procuring the blessings. Nothing can be said stronger on the benefit of wrestling with God, than that we shall assuredly prevail. The success of Jacob’s wrestling is recorded in the passage immediately following the text, verse 27, 28, 29. “ And he said unto him, What is thy name ? ” “ And he said Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. ” “ And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name ? and he blessed him there.” But that I may illustrate this a little in a practical manner, observe, that the efficacy of wrestling with God in prayer, appears from the three following considerations.

1. It prepares and disposes the people of God for receiving his mercies, and in some cases is itself the actual possession of them. Every part of the divine conduct towards his saints is full of wisdom, and full of grace. One reason why he who knows our wants, requires us to pray, is, that we may be prepared for a profitable supply. We may also rest assured, that he will not delay his interposition one moment beyond the fittest season. Now, that ardent prayer, wrestling, and importunity with God, is the best preparation for receiving his mercies, is plain, both in respect of worth and capacity. It may seem indeed improper to speak of any fitness as to worth for receiving the divine mercies, which are all free and unmerited on our part, however dearly purchased on the part of our surety. But, my brethren, with due caution, we may also take in this consideration, the rather that it is in the exercise of prayer that this fitness is obtained: which plainly shews, that it cometh from God, that it is his own gift, and his own work. Is not that person the fitter for deliverance from distress of any kind, and for the communications of divine favor, who is wholly emptied of himself, truly and deeply humbled, brought prostrate before the Divine Majesty, convinced and satisfied of the vanity of all created enjoyments, and breathing after God, as his sole refuge and consolation, which he will not, and cannot forego?

May we not also say, that he is much more fit, than one, on the other hand, who flies from God with impatient complaints, or fullen disdain; or who, without asking help from above, when one earthly comfort fails him, cleaves the closer to another? The great, if not the only end of divine correction, is, to weaken the power of sin, to make us feel the vanity of the creature, and to break every attachment to the world that is inordinate and excessive. When this end is obtained, therefore, must not the rod be withdrawn? and will not this promise be certainly accomplished? that the Lord will “appoint unto them that
“mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the
“oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the
“spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of

“righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified;” *Is.* lxi. 3. If we look into the scripture-qualifications for receiving the communications of divine love, we shall find the chief of them to be, the earnestness of our own desires: *Is.* 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.”

Further wrestling and importunity in prayer gives a capacity of relishing the mercies of God. They are then, and not till then in the same degree, truly mercies, earnestly desired, infinitely prized. It is a common and beaten remark, That the worth of any mercy is never known till we are deprived of it. There is great access to observe this in the Christian life, not only in its beginning, but in every step of its progress. O how refreshing is the intimation of pardon to a convinced sinner, who hath long trembled through fear of wrath, or to the believer, who hath long groaned under a spirit of bondage! O how ravishing is a sense of divine love to that child of God who hath long complained of the hiding of his Father’s face! When, after he hath been lost on a sea of temptations, one wave or billow following close upon the back of another, he is at last received into a peaceful heaven! the *everlasting arms* are stretched round about him, the *faithfulness of God* is his shield and buckler, and the strength of the *Almighty* his impregnable security? There is no such stayedness or composure of mind as after a variety of trials. The exercised Christian has tried and thrown away every broken reed, one after another; he hath found the vanity of every refuge of lies; and hath settled his hope on the immoveable foundation of the rock of ages, which shall never fail.

I added, in entering on this particular, that wrestling and importunity in prayer is in many cases itself the possession of the very mercies we desire. It is the exercise of almost every gracious disposition. To increase in sanctification, to have his graces strengthened, and his corruptions subdued, is the habitual and prevailing desire of every real believer. But how can this be more effectually ob-

tained than by fervent prayer? How, and where, can any gracious disposition be either more improved and strengthened, or more clearly discerned, than when it is in exercise. Faith, love, penitential sorrow, trust, and resignation, are the very dispositions essential to a wrestling believer. Perhaps some will say, True indeed; but they are only attempting to shew themselves, often discovering their weakness, sometimes yielding to their opposites. Alas! says the Christian, my faith is often over-matched with unbelief, and my love contradicted by impatient complaints: what is my penitential sorrow but weeping over a hard heart? my trust and resignation is but a short-lived promise: in a little time my courage fails, and I am ready to tremble at the falling of a leaf. But, my dear brethren, is not the importunate wrestler maintaining the conflict, instead of yielding to the stream? and how infinitely preferable are his hours of deepest anguish to that slothful and unequal conduct to be observed in many secure and formal Christians! It is also certain, that many times deliverance comes unlooked for. As the Psalmist says, that whilst he was musing the fire burned; so it frequently happens, that a gracious God, visits distressed souls, even when they least expect it, with the joy of his salvation, and causeth the bones which he hath broken to rejoice.

2. The efficacy of importunate prayer appears from the promises of success which are annexed to it in scripture. I must here begin by observing, that there are many commands in the word of God to pray, to pray without ceasing, to continue instant in prayer. Now, every command to pray, contains in it a promise of a gracious answer from the hearer of prayer. It necessarily implies it. The truth of God is a pledge and security for it. He would not deceive us with vain hopes, or put us upon a fruitless attempt: for he is not a man, that he should lie. But besides this general consideration, there are many express promises particularly to the earnestness and importunity of the desire: Prov. ii. 3, 4, 5. "Yea, " if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice " for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and " searchest for her, as for hid treasures; then shalt thou

“ understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge
 “ God.” See also the parable of the importunate widow,
 and the unjust judge, Luke xviii. 1. which concludes
 thus, ver. 7. “ And shall not God avenge his own elect,
 “ which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long
 “ with them ?

Let me beg your attention to another passage recorded
 in the 17th chapter of Matthew, where there was brought
 to our Saviour a possessed person, whom his disciples could
 not cure: ver. 19, 20, 21. “ Then came the disciples
 “ to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him
 “ out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your un-
 “ belief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a
 “ grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain,
 “ Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove ;
 “ and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit
 “ this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting.”
 This passage is somewhat remarkable, and entirely to our
 present purpose. It shews, that in the œconomy of divine
 grace, there are some mercies that may be obtained by
 less, and some that require more earnest and fervent pray-
 er. This species of devils, it seems, would not yield to
 the same influence that others did. See only further
 James v. 16. “ Confess your faults one to another, and
 “ pray one for another, that ye may be healed: The ef-
 “ fectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth
 “ much.”

3. In the *last* place, The same thing appears from the
 daily experience of the people of God, and many memo-
 rable examples of the efficacy of prayer. I might cite a
 great number of these to you from the holy scriptures,
 which are not only a sacred repository of divine truth, but
 a history of divine Providence. You may take the few
 following instances. Abraham’s intercessory prayer for
 Sodom, in which that ancient patriarch, honored with
 the glorious title of the *friend of God*, was allowed to
 plead with him, to repeat and urge his request, as well
 as to strengthen it with arguments. It is true, it saved
 not the whole city from destruction; yet was it heard
 in every part of it, according to its tenor. Nay, even

though the ten righteous, which was his lowest supposition, were not found in it; yet the few righteous that were there, were not involved in the general calamity, but suffered to escape. Take also the example of Elias, as cited by the apostle James, chap. v. 17, 18. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." See the case of Daniel recorded in the 2d chapter of that book, particularly the 17th, 18th, 19th verses of that chapter, where you will learn, that, by the united prayer of Daniel and his companions, the secret of the king's dream was communicated to them in a revelation from heaven. I only add the instance recorded Matth. xv. 21. and downwards, where the woman of Canaan so importunately presses her request, and at last receives this answer: ver. 28. "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

I might easily mention many more recent examples of the efficacy of prayer; but those which have been already produced are abundantly sufficient. The truth is, I am persuaded that every serious Christian is able to recollect examples of it from his own experience; and surely they are of all others most inexcusable, who restrain prayer before God, after they have known the unspeakable benefit which flows from it.

IV. LET US now make some practical improvement of what hath been said on this subject. And,

I. Suffer me to improve what hath been said, for the conviction and reproof of those who are habitually unmindful of this important duty. Alas! my brethren, what reason have we to complain of the neglect of wrestling, and want of importunity in prayer! Is not the language itself become unfashionable, and liable to scorn? As a person as eminent in station as in piety once said, "Men have now devised a smooth and easy way to heaven,

“ quite consistent with the spirit of the world, in which temptations and spiritual conflicts, and inward trials, are unknown.” But be assured, however changeable we are in our fancy and inclination, the word of God abideth for ever. There is very great reason to fear, nay there is good ground to affirm, that those who are strangers to wrestling with God in prayer, are sleeping in security, and under the dominion of sin. You will say perhaps, you live at ease and undisturbed. It may be so, and it is so much the worse; for the prince of this world will always consult the peace and quietness of his own subjects.

I would earnestly intreat every hearer of the gospel to suffer this reproof to enter into his mind, as it is what can be certainly known only to God and your own souls. Though there is sufficient outward evidence of the general neglect of this duty, how far any person is particularly guilty, must be left to the determination of his own conscience, and the judgment of him who seeth and searcheth the heart. If there is any among you who habitually despiseth prayer, who makes every little business every little indisposition or laziness of mind, an excuse for neglecting or postponing it: if there are any who satisfy themselves with a dead cursory formality in duty; who call in question the reality of communion with God in others, because they are strangers to it themselves; without all doubt they have great cause to fear, that they are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Tell me, what is the reason of your backwardness to drawing near to God? Is it not, that you are afraid of coming into his presence? Is it not, that you cannot bear the opening of your hearts? Is it not from some dark jealousy and suspicion, that all is not right with you, though you had rather cover than confess it? My earnest prayer to God is, that though you keep at a distance from him, he may not keep at a distance from you; that he may, by his Spirit, convince you of your danger, and, in great mercy, deliver you from this miserable state.

2. You may learn, from what has been said, one great cause of the low state of religion, and the barrenness of ordinances among us at present. It is the neglect of prayer,

and that many, though they may condescend to ask, yet do not think it worth their while to wrestle for the blessing. The profane are not the only persons justly chargeable with a failure in this part of their duty. Many real Christians are apt to slacken their diligence in this important exercise, and many often read their sin in their punishment. But is it not very wonderful, my brethren, that those who have once tasted that the Lord is gracious, who have known the sweetness of communion with God, should ever lose it by their own indifference and backwardness to maintain it? Yet here we must, of necessity, lay the blame. We must still say, in justification of his procedure, *Is. lix. 1, 2.* "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." It seems to appear from the experience of Christians, that God is jealous of their treatment of his love, and deeply resents the alienation of their affections; and therefore, to have sensible joy in him, and to walk in the comfort of the holy Ghost, which is so great a privilege, cannot be preserved without the greatest watchfulness on their part, and the greatest constancy in prayer.

3. Suffer me now, in a few words, to exhort every person in this assembly, and in particular those who have so lately renewed their engagement to God, over the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, to give themselves unto prayer. Of what use is your being admitted to this sacred table, if it do not incline you to live nearer to God in the habitual tenor of your life? This is the very privilege which we obtain by the blood of Christ, that we have access with boldness and confidence through the faith of him. This is the very advantage that we obtain by his continual intercession before the throne, *Heb. iv. 14, 16.* "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Again, have you not

devoted your lives to the service of God? have you not promised to keep his commandments? How do you expect to fulfil your promise? Are you not ready to say, 'Not unless he be pleased himself to preserve and keep me; not unless he put his Spirit within me, and write his laws in my heart?' And do you not know, that he hath said, "Yet for all these things will I be enquired of "by the house of Israel to do it for them?" I will ask you one question more. Do you not know that you are yet in an evil world? Do you not know what variety of temptations and sufferings you may yet be exposed to? How shall you bear up under trials; how shall you "glorify God in the day of visitation," if you live habitually at a distance from him? Christians, it is to him you must look when trouble cometh upon you. All other refuge will soon fail: and vanity, vanity, be seen written upon the creature. But with what confusion must you then lift up your eyes to him, if you forget him in prosperity! Therefore let me beseech you, in the most earnest manner, to renew your diligence in the exercise of prayer. In a particular manner, I must recommend this exercise to young persons. You, my dear brethren, are exposed to many dangers, your strength small, your experience little, your knowledge imperfect. Live a life of prayer, and dependence upon God. Daniel and his companions were young persons, yet mighty in prayer: therefore learn it early, practise it diligently, and wait upon it habitually and constantly. Hear what the prophet says in commendation of it, *Is.* xl. 29, 30, 31. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

4. I shall conclude the subject, by giving you two or three directions for the preservation and improvement of the spiritual life; and particularly for enabling you to persevere with uniformity and comfort in the exercise of prayer.

1. Be watchful and circumspect in the whole of your conversation. Let it be your great aim, to keep consciences void of offence towards God and towards man. Prayer and watchfulness have a reciprocal influence upon one another. Neglect of prayer will make you yield to temptation, and the indulgence of sin will make you afraid to pray. But habitual watchfulness will carry you with comfort to God, at the hour of prayer, both in thankfulness for past mercies, and reliance on him for future strength.

2. Observe with attention the course of his providence towards you. Enumerate his mercies to you in prosperity, adore his righteous will in adversity. Let this be the work, not only of particular seasons, but of every day. This will at once shew you the necessity, and abundantly supply the matter of prayer. If you do otherwise, you will go to prayer without any clear and determinate views of what you are to pray for, and then it is no wonder that it degenerate into a lifeless form. Once more,

3. Be much employed in intercession for others. This noble testimony of Christian love, has the most powerful influence in warming the heart, and enlivening the affections in prayer. It happens frequently, that those who have hardly a word to say for themselves, and whose desires are quite heavy and languid as to what regards their own interest, no sooner come to supplicate for others, than they are enabled to pour out their whole souls before God with the greatest fulness of expression, and enlargement of affection; as if it were the purpose of God, to invite us to this exercise, by honoring it with a particular mark of his acceptance and approbation. Oh that it would please God to revive among professing Christians a spirit of prayer, that when they cannot unite in sentiment, they may unite in prayer; that when impiety and immorality are bold and insolent, they may oppose them by prayer; and that when they are slandered, insulted, or abused by their enemies, they may find unspeakable comfort in imitating their dying Saviour, loving them that hate them, blessing them that curse them, and praying for them who despise

fully use them and persecute them. I conclude with the words of the apostle Jude, ver. 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."

OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE COMPARED.

A

S E R M O N

I SAMUEL, xv. 22.

Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams.

THAT obedience is due to God from all his intelligent creatures, I suppose none here present will deny. It is the original unchangeable law of creation, which every after discovery served not to undetermine, but to support and confirm. It was the religion of man in his primitive state of innocence; and it shall be the religion of heaven, when we shall see our Maker as he is. The very excellence of truth itself lies in its influence on holiness, and the very purpose of every sacred institution is to form our minds to a habit of obedience, and subjection to the will of God.

In the mean time it is of the utmost moment, that we have clear and just conceptions of the nature and principles of obedience, and that we guard against the errors that are often committed on this subject. Some, from a partial or excessive attachment to one branch of duty, are apt to disparage another; and some are apt to make a merit of their zeal and diligence in one duty, as if it would procure indulgence for them in the wilful neglect of another. From the language in the remarkable passage of scripture which I have chosen for my text, it is plain, that sacrifices,

or the outward worship of God, are sometimes made a cover for the neglect of obedience. Nor are there wanting other passages where complaints are brought against the same mistake. On the other hand, this passage where the text lies, and another expression akin to it in the gospel, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," have been grossly misapplied, to bring contempt upon every positive institution, and even upon the whole exercises of piety; and that by such persons as do very little honor either to themselves or their opinions, by the perfection of their obedience. I have chosen these words, with a view to the information and conviction of both these sorts of persons, and for the instruction and edification of those who desire to walk in the straight path of duty, without turning to the right hand or to the left. In discoursing further upon them, I propose,

1. To open a little, and make a few remarks on the history which gave occasion to the words of the prophet.
2. To shew in what respect it is, that obedience is opposed and preferred to sacrifice, or justly called *better*, as in the words of the text.
3. In the last place, To make some application of the subject.

I. FIRST, then, I am to open a little, and make a few remarks upon the history which gave occasion to the words of the prophet. This will be the more proper, that the setting this part of the sacred story in a clear light, will both afford us some excellent instructions, and also obviate the cavils of unreasonable men. The people called *Amalekites* were derived, and had their name, from one *Amalek*, the son of Esau's eldest son Eliphaz, by a concubine, (Gen. xxxvi. 12.) The first mention we have made of them as a people, was their being engaged in a very unjust war with the children of Israel, (Ex. xvii. 8.) This provoked God to determine, or at least upon this occasion he was pleased to intimate, their being devoted to utter destruction; as Exod. xvii. 14, 15, 16. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly

“ put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.
“ And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it
“ Jehovah nissi. For he said, Because the Lord hath sworn,
“ that the Lord will have war with Amalek from genera-
“ tion to generation.”

The injustice and impiety of this action of the Amalekites, which provoked God, not only to threaten, but to swear their destruction, may be learned from the account of this matter given us in Deut. xxv. 17, 18, 19. “ Re-
“ member what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when
“ ye were come forth out of Egypt : how he met thee by
“ the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that
“ were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and wea-
“ ry ; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when
“ the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine ene-
“ mies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God
“ giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou
“ shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under
“ heaven ; thou shalt not forget it.” From this it appears, that the Amalekites attacked the Israelites unprovoked, and without any cause ; for the Israelites neither intended to possess themselves of their country, nor were they so much as passing by their borders, which might have given them some cause of suspicion. Without any thing of this sort, they came out of their own country, to attack the Israelites in the wilderness, either in consequence of the old grudge between Esau and Jacob, or from a principle of covetousness, to seize upon the riches which they heard the children of Israel had brought out of Egypt.

It is further observed, that they cut off those that were faint and weary, when the distressed condition of that people seemed rather to call for compassion and help. This was unjust and cruel ; and discovers them to have been a savage and profligate people ; especially if one circumstance more be taken notice of, that they did all this in open defiance and contempt of God. They had no doubt heard, that he interested himself in a particular manner in the preservation of the Israelites, and was, in a literal sense, their king and governor ; and therefore it is said particularly, ver. 18. of the last cited passage, that the

Amalekites “feared not God.” Is there any thing absurd or unfuitable to the majesty of the King of kings, in his declaring he would have war with such a people from generation to generation, and at last destroy them, as he certainly foreknew that they would not grow better, but worse and worse?

Let us not omit to observe the long-suffering and patience of God. It was not till some hundreds of years afterwards, that orders were issued out to put the sentence in execution against that people, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and were ripe for judgment. This appears evidently from the hints of their character given in the chapter where the text lies. They are called, verse 18. “the finners the Amalekites,” by way of emphasis, to shew, that they were eminently wicked above all other people. It is no less evident, that their king that ruled over them was a bloody cruel man, from the words of Samuel to him, ver. 33. “As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.” These circumstances make it highly probable, that this prince and his people were commonly employed in the trade of war, in plundering and murdering such of their neighbors as they were able to subdue. Now, how groundless are all the tragical outcries of unbelievers against this part of the history of the Bible! Is not God the supreme disposer of every event? Is not the fate of nations decided by his righteous will? Is he not known by the exercise of this his holy prerogative, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay?” It is incontestable, from many undoubted facts in the history of Providence, that “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.” Oh! that this were considered in time by many who are bold enough to impeach the conduct of their Maker, to whom one part of the character of the Amalekites seems very applicable, “They fear not God.”

It will perhaps be expected, that I should take particular notice of that part of the command given to Saul to destroy the “infants and sucklings,” together with those who were come to age. On this you may observe, that it was no more than the exercise of that absolute right which

God hath to the lives of all his creatures. He gave them at his pleasure, and he may recall them whenever he will. Those who offer this objection against the scripture history, do not seem to consider, that it militates equally against the daily and visible course of Providence. How many infants do we see daily carried off by the diseases incident to that state? Do not the half of mankind die before they grow up to the years of reason? Does this happen without the foreknowledge and Providence of God? or dare any charge him with being unjust in this part of his will? If we dare not presume to go so far, then, the commanding the children to be cut off by the hand of man, is a mere circumstance, that cannot alter the nature of the decree. The sovereignty of God appears in the clearest manner from the whole of his written word, and from what happens every day before our eyes. Instead, therefore, of raising presumptuous objections against such instances as this referred to in the text, it would be far more just, as well as dutiful, to infer from them, that we are "conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity;" that we lie under an universal forfeiture of life, and therefore a righteous God may execute it upon us at whatever time, and in whatever manner, it seems good unto himself.

I might also observe, that if we consider the circumstances in which these Amalekite children were, from the character of their parents, we shall see, in the conduct of God towards them, a mixture of mercy with judgment. I have already observed, from the sacred history, what wicked persons the Amalekites were. Now, supposing their children left to be trained up by their parents, the presumption is, that they would have been formed by their pernicious example, to murder and rapine, and all sorts of wickedness; and, in particular, to a hatred of the people and God of Israel. This would have rendered their condition infinitely more miserable than we can possibly suppose it by their being cut off in infancy, before the commission of actual guilt. Have we not every day before our eyes examples of persons living and dying in sin, to whom it would have been a great mercy if their eyes, as soon as ever they saw the light, had been closed up in everlasting

darkness? Upon the whole, we have reason to be fully satisfied on every such question as this, by resolving it into the sovereignty of God; but I have shortly mentioned this particular to show how incapable we are of forming a proper judgment of the procedure of Divine Providence; and that the order to destroy “both man and woman, infant and suckling,” when given by the Lord of nature, hath nothing in it either unjust or unmerciful.

This awful command was given to Saul, the king of Israel; which he, being fully satisfied of its coming from God, prepared himself to execute. But he and the people, from a principle of covetousness, reserved what was most valuable of the effects of the Amalekites for their own use, in direct contradiction to the command of God, who had ordered the cattle and substance of that people also to be destroyed. This was probably done to show, that their punishment was an act of pure justice, without any intention to enrich his inheritance by it. When the prophet Samuel challenged Saul for his disobedience, he endeavors to cover his conduct by a pretext of religion, verse 15. “And Saul said,——The people spared the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.” To this my text is the answer, made by Samuel, in the name of the Lord: “And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams.”

Before I proceed to the *second* general head, I will make a few observations on this piece of history, for your instruction.

1. How easily are people misled into disobedience by their present interest, or carnal inclinations! how ready are these to mix themselves in all our actions, and to turn what was intended as an instance of obedience, into an act of impiety and transgression! The children of Israel would not destroy the goodly substance of the Amalekites, according to the express command of God, that they might have it to themselves; though it is remarkable, that they do not appear from the history to have made any difficulty

in executing what was by far the hardest part of the command, *viz.* the slaying of man and woman, infant and suckling, that fell into their hands. Agag indeed, and him only, they excepted, perhaps to grace their triumph, or from some other selfish motive. Interest seems to have prevailed here; but there are other passions also which too often mix themselves with our religion. Malice and anger, for example, and a desire of revenge, are often seen to intermingle themselves with our zeal for the glory of God, and convert one of the most amiable virtues into a detestable crime.

2. You may observe how natural it is for people, when challenged for any fault, to lay the blame of it upon others, even when there is little prospect of hiding their own guilt. "But the people," says Saul, ver. 21. "took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed." Whereas, though no doubt they were also in the fault, he was much more guilty than they. He had received the particular command from God: he was king and leader of the people, and ought to have restrained them from acting contrary to the divine purpose. This, however, he was so far from so much as attempting, that he is spoken of as consenting to, and a chief actor in the offence, ver. 9. "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen." This disposition seems to be as old as sin itself; for we see it in the case of Adam, after eating the forbidden fruit: Gen. iii. 11, 12. "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." We ought to be humbled for it, as a part of the corruption of our nature, which is not only prone to the commission of sin, but backward to repentance or confession.

3. We may see it is no unusual thing for men to imagine they have been obedient to God even in that very action by which they have in a remarkable manner shown their disobedience. This was plainly the case with Saul, whom we find maintaining and insisting upon his innocence, ver. 20. "And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I

“ have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.” Where ever any duty, in its substance, in its circumstances, or even in its principle, varies from the rules laid down for it in the word of God, it is essentially defective; and where the fault is capital, it becometh a sin. This, I believe, will be always found to be the case where merit is pleaded from human performances. True obedience is always humble, and sensible of the imperfections attending it. Ostentatious obedience, if it were for no other reason, is an abomination in the sight of God.

4. How often does it happen, that the excuses for sin are the aggravations of it! It seemed to Saul, that he had fully justified his conduct by saying, that he spared of the best of the spoil, to sacrifice unto the Lord. If there was no such thing in his or the people's mind, when they departed from their commission, then it was a fearful aggravation of his sin, to add to it the guilt of falsehood and hypocrisy; nor did it seem to want impiety, to pretend to offer sacrifices from the accursed substance of that devoted race. If, on the other hand, they really from the beginning intended to present a part of the spoil as a sacrifice to God, it shows the great deceitfulness of sin, which suggested this unholy composition, and made them think, that their disobedience might be atoned for by a gift at the altar. Many like instances might be given, in which the excuses for sin are an addition to the guilt. There are not wanting some who, either in a doubtful or explicit manner, would lay the blame of their sins upon their Maker, and impute to the influence of his providence what belongs to the freedom of their own wills. At the same time, it is very remarkable, though melancholy to reflect upon, that those excuses for sin which carry in them the most daring profanity, are commonly most stupifying to the conscience. Such is the state of all those who fortify themselves in an evil practice, by embracing loose principles, who, having first given way to unbridled inclination in the breach of God's laws, steel themselves against conviction and repentance, by a denial of his truth.

5. How great is the folly of men who hope to atone for their disobedience by any compensation, but particularly by religious rites! Saul and his people, whatever were their views at first, seem to have hoped that they might escape the punishment of disobedience by offering sacrifices. There seems to have been a tendency to this among the Jews, in general, in after times; and it is the mistaken hope of hypocrites in every age. But how manifest is the error! how gross is the delusion! Sacrifices, and all acts of worship, derive their very beauty and excellence from the disposition of the worshipper. Solomon tells us, Prov. xv. 8. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight." How absurd and contradictory, how dishonorable to God, is it, for the same person to be a zealous worshipper and a wicked liver, a man fervent in prayer and deceitful in dealing, heavenly in his language and sensual in his heart! One would think the dreadful inconsistency of such a conduct would alarm the most drowsy conscience; but God, in righteous judgment, gives up to a spirit of slumber, that they may be the standard of punishment for the greatest sinners, who shall be appointed their portion "with hypocrites and unbelievers, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone for evermore."

II. I PROCEED to the *second* thing proposed; which was, To show in what respects it is that obedience is opposed and preferred to sacrifice, or justly called *better*, as in the words of the text. It is not uncommon to hear this passage produced in order to prove the value of moral above positive precepts. Moral precepts, I suppose you know, are precepts of perpetual and unchangeable obligation; and positive, such as either have not, or do not seem to have, any intrinsic excellence in themselves, but depend upon the immediate and express institution of God. Now though, no doubt, if it is done with proper care, and upon legitimate principles, a distinction may be stated between these different kinds of duties: yet it is plain, that this cannot be the spirit of the passage before us. There needs no more to satisfy us of this, than to reflect upon the

history illustrated above, which gave occasion to the words of the prophet. That command of God, for disobedience to which Saul was so severely reprov'd, and afterwards so signally punished, was so far from being in itself a moral duty antecedent to the command, that it was not merely a positive, but an occasional and temporary duty; nay without the express appointment and authority of God, it would have been an atrocious crime, *viz.* "Utterly destroying the Amalekites, man and woman, infant and suckling." We have not therefore the least encouragement from this example to make light of any command that is supported by the institution and authority of God. Well then, may it be said, were not sacrifices instituted by him? and how does the prophet affirm in this passage, that "obedience is better than sacrifice?" For illustrating this, and at the same time guarding it against perversion and abuse, I intreat your attention to the following observations.

1. Obedience is preferred to sacrifices as they were uncommanded, free, and voluntary. If we attend to the sacrifices under the law, we shall find them of different kinds; particularly, we shall find them distinguished in this respect, that some of them were expressly and positively ordained, and others were left to the good-will or spontaneous inclination of the offerer. The first were binding upon the whole of that people in the strongest manner, and could not be dispensed with; the other were left to themselves, as the occasion should point out the propriety, and the piety or gratitude of their hearts should dispose to the performance. It would be a great mistake to suppose, that the appointed service of the sanctuary might be omitted or altered by any human prudence, or dispensed with, even under pretence of obedience to the moral law. The observation of the sabbath, of circumcision, of the passover, the daily burnt-offering, the annual sacrifice on the great day of expiation, the trespass-offering, and many others, were so indispensibly necessary, that no opposition was to be presumed or imagined between them and the moral law. Nay, the whole circumstances of these rites were precisely specified, and those who varied any thing

in the manner of their observation were to be cut off from their people. For this see Exodus xii. 19. : xxxi. 14. and many other passages. I must further observe, that even with respect to voluntary or free-will offerings, though they were left at liberty whether they would offer such at all or not; yet if they did offer, the manner in which it behoved to be conducted, was appointed precisely, and they were forbidden to depart from it, under the same awful sanction. You may see the rules laid down for peace-offerings in the 2d and 3d chapters of Leviticus; and for the danger of any error in attending on them, see Lev. vii. 20, 21.; Lev. xvii. 8, 9. Now, nothing can be more plain, than that the sacrifices which Saul and his people had in view to offer, or at least pretended to have had in view, were voluntary or free-will offerings: they were no part of the regular, stated, unalterable service of the sanctuary; but might be offered or not as they themselves thought proper. When you remember this, my brethren, you will see with how great justice and force the prophet opposes sacrifices of this kind, to obeying the voice of the Lord: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" As if he had said, Can you imagine that God will be as well pleased with gifts of your own devising, as with a strict and punctual execution of the orders which himself had given; especially when the very sacrifices you would offer to him, are purchased by the breach of his own express command?

The words of the text having been spoken by the Old-Testament prophet, and in language directly suited to the circumstances of that dispensation, I have kept the laws of the Mosaic œconomy closely in view. The spirit however of the whole, and the truth resulting from it, belongs as clearly and sensibly to us as to the fathers. We are not to presume to make light of any institution of God, though, either in whole or in part, of a positive nature. But considering sacrifices as including all acts of worship, nay all acts of religion or service to God, of whatever kind, so far as they are voluntary in their circumstances, let us not think to put them in the room of obedience to his law. If any man, from this passage of scripture, shall take liberty to despise the sabbath, to forbear prayer in se-

cret and in family, to neglect the sacraments or instituted worship of God, he perverteth and wresteth the scriptures; to his own destruction. On the other hand, if any person, under pretence of extraordinary prayer, shall neglect his calling, if he shall put voluntary fasts and bodily mortification in the room of repentance; if he shall make donations to the poor, or to sacred uses, instead of paying his just debts, to the prejudice of others, it may, with great propriety, be said to him in the words of Samuel, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

2. Obedience is opposed to sacrifices as they are false and hypocritical. Even in those sacrifices that were most expressly appointed, and of the most indispensable obligation, there might be an essential defect, from the inward disposition not corresponding to the outward action. Reason, as well as scripture, teacheth us, that in all acts of worship, the sincerity of the heart makes the chief ingredient. It is the prerogative, and the glory of God, that he searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Therefore, in every part of his service, he requires integrity and uprightness of heart: "He desireth truth in the inward parts." That I may treat this part of the subject with the greater distinctness, you may observe, that our sacrifices or worship may be polluted by a two-fold hypocrisy. These may be called, hypocrisy towards God, and hypocrisy towards man; or, in other words, inconsistency or unsoundness in the character, and disguise or insincerity in the act of worship.

(1) Our sacrifices may be polluted by inconsistency or unsoundness in the character. This is the case where men are careful in attending upon the institutions of religion, but do not make conscience of keeping the commandments of God in their ordinary conversation; when they are punctual in the outward performance of the duties of the first table of the law, but are under no restraint as to sins against the second; but, in a particular manner, when they are under the unhappy delusion of imagining, that the one will make atonement for the other. I believe

it will be found, that this is the meaning of many passages of scripture, where sacrifices are spoken of with disregard. The word of God could never be so inconsistent with itself, as to condemn them simply, while the law concerning them stood in force; but when they were offered by wicked men, when they were rested on as the whole of religion, or made to compensate for the neglect of moral duties, then they are spoken of with abhorrence: Hosea vi. 6. "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God, more than burnt-offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me." If. i. 10. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of your God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new-moons, and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Pfal. l. 16. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes; or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?" Amos v. 21,—24. "I hate, I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of

“thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and
“righteousness as a mighty stream.”

Indeed, my brethren, what can be more abominable, than the worship of such persons as live in the habitual indulgence of sin? what more provoking to God? what more presumptuous in the sinner? And who can sufficiently wonder at the blindness of all of this character? That their very access to God, which should increase their abhorrence of sin, should, notwithstanding, set them at ease in the commission of it? Will he bear more in you, think you, than in others? He will bear less: He will visit you sooner in his providence, and he will punish you heavier to all eternity. Things are quite opposite to what you suppose. Instead of your duties rendering your sins pardonable, your sins render your duties insupportable.

(2) The other kind of hypocrisy is, when men put on religion as a cloak and covering on their wickedness, and, without any inward regard or sense of duty to God, aim only at the praise of men. This is, if possible, more daring and presumptuous than the other, or rather is a more advanced stage of the same character. It was for this that our Saviour so severely reprehended the Pharisees: Matth. vi. 1, 2. “Take heed that ye do not your alms before
“men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward
“of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when
“thou dost thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before
“thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues, and in the
“streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say
“unto you, they have their reward.” And ver. 5. “And
“when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are:
“for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in
“the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.
“Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.” But truly this is not all. Some are not satisfied with doing things in themselves praise-worthy from ostentation, or the hope of applause from men, but they endeavor, by their shining and burning zeal in such things, to blind the eyes of others, and hinder them from discovering and punishing their secret wickedness: Matth. xxiii. 14. “Wo
“unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye de-

“ your widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayers ; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.” Whenever this is the case, it is no wonder that obedience should be preferred before sacrifice, and indeed set in opposition to it. You see, however, that this is no more than what our Saviour says of almsgiving, which is so eminent a moral duty, but which can never find acceptance with God, when done merely from a principle of ostentation. It is impossible, upon the whole, to set this matter in a juster light than our Saviour has done, in speaking of the same Pharisees, Matth. xxiii. 23. “ Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; “ for ye pay tithe of mint and annise, and cummin, and “ have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, “ mercy, and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not “ to leave the other undone.”

3. Obedience is opposed to sacrifices, as they are *dead* and *formal*. I am not at this time to mention all the ends which an infinitely wise God intended to serve by the appointment of sacrifices : but every one must be sensible, that they could be of no avail without taking in the principle from which they were brought, and the temper and disposition of the offerer. There was no doubt very much of outward form in the Mosaic œconomy ; and the ritual practices bore so great bulk in it, that, by way of comparison with the spirituality of the gospel, it is called the *law of a carnal commandment*. But it would be mistaking it very much to suppose that God was fully satisfied with, or desired that his people should rest in the outward form. This is plain from many passages of scripture. What an example of fervor and elevation of spirit have we in the exercise and language of the Psalmist David, through the whole of his writings ! You may see, Ps. v. 7. “ But as “ for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of “ thy mercy : and in thy fear will I worship toward thy “ holy temple.” Ps. xxvi. 6, “ I will wash my hands in “ innocency : so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.” To this you may add what he says, Psal. li. 16, 17. “ For “ thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it : thou “ delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God

“are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O
“God, thou wilt not despise.”

In opposition to this, however clear a dictate, both of reason and scripture, it seems to have been the disease of ancient times, to imagine, that the sacrifices were somehow necessary or useful to their Maker in themselves; and that he was pleased with the possession of the gift, independent of the disposition of the giver. This led both Jews and Gentiles to suppose, that the more numerous and costly the victims, the greater would be their influence: Micah vi. 6. “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, “and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come “before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year “old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, “or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my “first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for “the sin of my soul?” To such an excessive height did this error proceed, that on extraordinary occasions the Heathens of many different nations offered human sacrifices, and endeavored, by their number, their youth, or the high rank of their parents, to increase their value in the sight of God. In opposition to this gross delusion, God often asserts his all-sufficiency, as well as sovereignty; as particularly in that admirable passage, Ps. l. 7.—14. “Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I “will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I “will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-of- “ferings, to have been continually before me. I will “take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of “thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the “cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of “the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are “mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the “world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat “the flesh of bulls. or drink the blood of goats? Offer “unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the “Most High.” And even with regard to their ordinary attendance on instruction, he says, Ezekiel xxxiii. 31. “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and “they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy

“ words, but they will not do them : for with their mouth
“ they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their
“ covetousness.”

This conduct, so dishonorable to God, and so inconsistent with the holiness and purity of his nature, had no sufficient excuse either among Jews or Heathens. But surely it is still more criminal among Christians. The gospel, as a dispensation of clearer light, and greater purity, is called *the ministration of the Spirit*. And in opposition to all ceremonial and local worship, our Saviour says, John iv. 23, 24. “ But the hour cometh, and now
“ is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father
“ in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to
“ worship him. God is a spirit ; and they that worship
“ him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” But are there not some amongst us who may be justly charged with guilt in this respect ? or rather, who is there amongst us that does not in some degree fall under the reproof ? Are there not some who rest in the form of worship, and are strangers to the spirit of it ? Are there not some who value and trust in their forms while they are regardless of the spirit ? Nay, are there not some who not only submit to, but are pleased with the form, and yet have no relish for that nearness to God, and sense of his presence, which constitutes the spirit of worship ? How many sinful motives may bring us to the house of God ! If you come to avoid the reproach of men, is that a real sacrifice to God ? If you come from ostentation, to be seen of men, is that an offering acceptable to God ? If you come to gratify your fancy, by hearing the performance of man, you are offering the incense to the creature that is due only to God. Consider further, how often we may be sinfully employed in the house of God. Are careless inattentive persons offering acceptable sacrifices to God ? Are those who indulge vain, proud, sensual, covetous thoughts in worship, offering sacrifice to God ? Are those who come to censure or admire the speaker, offering sacrifice to God ? In all such cases, without any disparagement to the holiest institutions of God, or rather from a just concern to defend them from profanation, we may say, in the words of the

text, "Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

4. In the *last* place, obedience is opposed to sacrifices as they are misplaced and unseasonable. In the ancient dispensation, time and place were as much ascertained as any circumstance that belonged to the temple-service; and nothing could be more contrary to the spirit of that œconomy, than taking any liberty with the order which God himself had established. There are several instances of heavy judgments denounced against princes, whose chief fault seems to have been, offering the appointed sacrifices in forbidden places, or at improper seasons. If, therefore, he would not suffer any variation in circumstances which he had prescribed, how could Saul suppose, that he would accept of a sacrifice in the place of a duty which he had commanded? It is also to be observed, that the duties of the moral law are perpetually binding; and therefore, when in Providence any example of them occurs, strengthened with the urgent call of necessity and mercy, they become exceptions to an ordinance of a positive nature. Thus our Saviour does not contradict the law of Moses in what he teaches concerning the Sabbath; but shows in what manner that command was, or ought always to have been understood by the Jews themselves. See an instance of this, Luke xiii. 14, 15, 16. "And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath-day, and said unto the people, 'There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come, and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day. The Lord then answered him, and said, 'Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox, or his ass, from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?' See also two other examples of the same thing, in the 12th chapter of the gospel according to Matthew; in support of which our Lord cites a passage from the Old Testament, ver. 7. "But if ye had known what

“ this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.”

The same general rule is to be observed at all times. We must attend to the intimations of Providence, and as far as they can be clearly discerned, discharge those duties to which we are immediately called. Every thing is beautiful in its place and season, and is then not only most acceptable to God, but most useful to men. It is so far from being any disparagement of sacrifices, that it is their very excellence, to be confined to their time and place. And the maxim in the text will apply with equal propriety to every duty of the moral law. The most excellent of them may be misapplied. True religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is, to visit the fatherless and the widow; and yet, if the time of divine worship be unnecessarily chosen for that purpose, or if too much time be consumed in it by those whose presence cannot be useful, it is a rejected sacrifice. Feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, is the character that shall meet with the approbation of our final judge; and yet, if any shall, out of ostentation, feed the poor abroad, and starve their families at home, or perform this duty at the expence of any other more immediately binding, he falls under the condemnation of the prophet in the text: “ Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams.” To conclude this head, we shall greatly misinterpret this passage of scripture, if we pretend to honor one part of religion to the prejudice of another. The sacrifices condemned by the prophet are not to be understood of positive duties, as opposed to moral, nor of acts of worship, as opposed to the duties of the second table; but of every act of religion, however excellent in itself, or necessary in its place, if it is done from an ill principle, with a sinful purpose, in a sinful manner, or substituted in the room of that which God in his Providence doth immediately require.

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

1. From what hath been said, you may learn what are the great characters of acceptable obedience ; and, I think, they may be reduced to the three following. 1. It must be implicit obedience. It must be founded immediately and directly on the authority of God. We must not take upon us to judge of the moment and importance of any part of his will, further than he hath made it known himself. It is a very dangerous thing for us to make comparisons between one duty and another, especially with a view of dispensing with any of them, or altering their order, and substituting one in another's place. 2. A second character of true obedience is, that it be self-denied and impartial, that it be not directed or qualified by our present interest. It was the best of the spoil that Saul and the people saved ; that which was vile and refuse, they utterly destroyed. It is too common, that our own interest both points out the object, and assigns the measure of our obedience ; and in that case, it does not deserve the name of obedience to God at all. But when the Christian is devoted to God, ready at his call, and equally disposed to any employment assigned him in Providence, he then may be said indeed to do his will. 3. A third character of obedience is, that it be universal, without any exception. Saul, and the children of Israel, had complied so far with the order given them, that the greatest part both of the people and substance of Amalek was destroyed ; but he stopped short, and knowingly left unfinished what had been enjoined him by the same authority.

2. From what hath been said on this subject, you may see, that the true notion of obedience is inconsistent with the notion of merit, as if we could lay our Maker under some sort of obligation. This is as fatal and dangerous an error as any whatever, to think we may merit at the hand of God, and yet very common. Nay, it seems to be natural to us all, with great difficulty restrained, and never in this life wholly overcome. You see how Saul justified himself, and said, " Yea, but I have obeyed the voice of the Lord." But, in the judgment of God, there was no consideration had of what he had done, but a severe

sentence of condemnation upon him for what he had neglected. True obedience is always considered, in this light, as a debt due to God, for the performance of which nothing can be claimed, but for the neglect of which a penalty is incurred. I wish this were properly attended to. The guilt of transgression is plainly inconsistent with the merit of obedience. If we are liable to punishment for not obeying, the right of our Maker to our service must be complete, there is no room to plead any merit in compliance, and the reward must be of grace, and not of debt. Thus, I think, it is always felt by good men; and the more that they are devoted to God, they are the less disposed to avail themselves of any thing they have done, and the more inclined to ask forgiveness for what hath been either omitted, or ill done.

3. From what hath been said, you may learn the great defects of our obedience in general. If we consider the characters of true obedience, implicit, impartial, and universal, we must be sensible what great blemishes attend every act of duty to God which we perform. We shall always find something amiss, either in its extent, its principle, or its end. What reason this for humiliation? what a powerful argument to every Christian to live a life of continual dependence on divine strength to enable him to obey, and divine mercy to accept of his imperfect obedience? Nothing but great ignorance of themselves, or great inattention to what passes in their own hearts, can embolden men to put confidence in themselves. And indeed their doing so is commonly attended with very mortifying effects. When God leaves them, in fatherly displeasure, to prove and try them, or when he leaves sinners to themselves, to fill up the measure of their iniquities, it soon affords a satisfying proof, that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing. To will may be present with us, but to do that which is good, we find not.

4. In the *last* place, Suffer me earnestly to exhort you to make it your daily study, not only to keep the commandments of God, but to take particular notice from what principle your obedience flows. See how much there is in it of self-denial of devotedness to God, of subjection to his providence. One act of silent submission, or

a quiet application to those duties that are immediately necessary, though neither easy nor honorable, is of much more value, than a long tract of activity and zeal in a public and visible sphere of action, sweetened by reputation and applause. As the submissive Christian lives upon the Creator alone, independent of the creature: so the obedient Christian serves his God and Redeemer alone, without paying any regard to the esteem or approbation of his fellow-sinners. In this way only is your obedience given to God, and in this way only will you find it pleasant or profitable to yourselves. If you keep clearly and closely to the command of God, and have not so much as any other desire, or inclination, than to know what it is, you will hardly ever be mistaken. But if you allow other motives to have place, if you take upon you to judge of what is most proper or expedient, or even practicable, you will pollute every part of your duty, and find yourselves often involved in impenetrable darkness. If what is duty be the inquiry, and interest set a side, if duty be the object of your attention, and events left to God, you will find unspeakable consolation from it in the mean time, as well as the success more effectually secured than it could possibly have been by any anxiety or foresight of your own. Let God then have the unadulterated obedience of all his creatures; and let us ask of him, according to his promise, "to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure."

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD.

A

S E R M O N.

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 show 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 vigor 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, entangle themselves the more, drawing the cords which bind them still more strait, and increase their confinement by their endeavors 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 connection 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 endeavor, 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 pronunciation 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. Hu-

man 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, alledging, either that they cannot pronounce it, or that it is unlawful to utter it. We may also observe, that, in our neighbor 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.

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 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 Psa. 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 regard 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.

I. 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 up-rising, 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 all together. Thou hast be-
 “ set 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 spi-
 “ rit ? 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 mea-
 “ sured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted
 “ out heaven with a 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 direct-
 “ ed 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 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, ex-
 cellent 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 dark-
 ness 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 favor. 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 de-

“clared 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 observation of Providence, as an excellent mean of being partakers of divine mercy. Psal. cvii. 42, 43. “The righteous shall see it and rejoice, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.

“Whoſo 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 endeavor 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 crouds 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 obſervation 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 favors 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 myſelf or my family? is there not a great danger of running into viſionary folly and enthuliaſm? 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 falleth 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 awakened 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 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. 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 explanation; 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.

I. 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 mean 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 mean 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 faints; 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 endeavors to reason down his anxiety and fear. Perhaps he may do it in the words of our blessed Saviour, Matth. vi. 25. to the 33. 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 grass 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 wherewithal 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 suffer-

ing 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. Arise, 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 endeavors 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 Abednego, 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: Psal. 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 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 pesti-
 “ lence 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 appli-
 cation 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; 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 wel-
 fare: 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 a former head,
 to which we are to flee, as revealed in his written word;
 and much of the life of practical religion consists in attend-
 ing to the tenor, and in a daily application of the promi-
 ses. 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 forever ? 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 Daniel 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 each other, how much more must the past goodness of God towards themselves, encourage his children 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 favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? 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 fortress, will speak to his enemies in the language of disdain and defi-

ance; 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 Thes. 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.”—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. 4, 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 favor 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 favor, 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 par-

ticularly 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 mean 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 Aha. 2 Chron. xvi. 12. "And Aha, 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." Psalm 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 attended, 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, Meshech, 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 support 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 banished 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 endeavoring to wreak 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 per-

fection, the divine promise, and the experience of the faints. 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 hairs 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. Psalm xci. 1,—4. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; 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 faints; 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, first, 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 dishonored 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 intreated 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, Psalm 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, endeavor by the renewed exercise of faith in your Redeemer's blood, to

ascertain your title to the favor of God; endeavor by a stedfast 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 32. 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?"

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

A
S E R M O N.

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 highly 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 desire, 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 Shechinach, 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 unsearchable: 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 what ever 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 irresistible 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, seest 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 further 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 goodnes 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 transgression, 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 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, xlv. 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 independance, 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. Cor. 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 labor 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.

2dly, 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, Psal. 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 favored 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 unto 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. 1st, 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 a such state, is implied blasphemy, and the greatest dishonor we can possibly do to him.

2. In order to see the glory of God, you must be clothed with humility. No disposition 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, in-
deed, 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 re-
“ pent in dust and ashes.” Let us endeavor, therefore,
to be truly and inwardly humble. Let us remember the
grace of redemption, what guilty criminals we were, be-
fore 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 hum-
ble and mortified state of mind? May almighty God, by
his power, make us humble; and do thou, O blessed Je-
sus! “ cast down every high thought, and lofty imagina-
“ tion, 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 fervor, 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."

THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN HIS HUMILIATION.

A

S E R M O N.

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 contemplation 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 contemplation 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 comparison 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 sal-

vation is an agreeable sound, 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 endeavor 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 sufferings, 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 these 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.

I. 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 honor 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. Psa. 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 proba-
 ble, 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 councils of heaven
 it was actually proposed to those glorious spirits that sur-
 round the throne of God, and their strength and inclina-
 tion both were found insufficient. Neither is there any
 thing improbable in the supposition, that God might disco-
 ver to them his purpose of mercy, upon a proper media-
 ator interposing, and that none was found willing to sub-
 ject 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 5th 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 Phi-
 “ lip, 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 in-
 terests 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 there-
 “ on. And I wept much because no man was found wor-
 “ thy to open, and to read the book, neither to look there-
 “ on. 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 to 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 to 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. Matt. 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 Jerusalem." 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 second 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 de-

“spised, 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 astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.” Psa. 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 that 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 upon me, beareth witness to my face.”

3. His afflictions were of the severest kind. This I might show you, at large, from the history, by particularizing 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 substance; 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 feelings 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 suf-

ferings 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 stiled 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 open-
 " eth 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 un-
 " to 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 fore ama-
 " zed, 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, lamafabachthani ! that

“ 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 dishonor 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 3d 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 touchstone 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 convinced 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 honor, 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 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 inquiry of glorified saints to eternal ages; and we ought to begin it here, saying with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxii. 17. “ His

“ name shall endure forever : his name shall be continued
“ as long as the sun ; and men shall be blessed in him : all
“ nations shall call him blessed !”

adly, 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 stedfast, 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 favored 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 a 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 bondman, and every freeman, 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 3d 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 recovery 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 favor 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 natural and unavoidable consequence of this, they meet with frequent disappointments; these make them ready to

fit 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 displea-

“sure.” 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.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

A

S E R M O N.

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 soliciting 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 im-

portant 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 anything 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 distresses, as well as bad men into ruin.

In further discoursing on this subject, I shall,

I. Endeavor 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.

First, then, I shall endeavor 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.

1st, 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 favorable judge. Every one may find a great num-

ber 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 observations: (1.) Sometimes it shows 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 proselytes 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 favor 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 honor, 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, cheerfulness, and good humor. So great is the deceit, and so secure does the sin lye 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 reprover, 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 devour-eth 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 honor, 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 deceit-

fulness 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 watchfulness 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 Christian's 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 prosecuted 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 endeavor 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 shouldest 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 favor 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 practiced. 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 favor 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 spirit 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 comparisons, whether they be just or unjust, are unspeakably pernicious. It is not your being better

or worse than others, that will justify you before God, or be the matter of inquiry at the last day. You will not then be asked, whether you were as profane a blasphemer as such a person? as great a liar as another? as great a drunkard as another? as great a whoremonger as another? No. You must be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and all that are there found wanting, shall be cast into the lake of fire. You may leave it to a wise and righteous God to proportion the severity of his judgment to the atrociousness of the sinner's guilt. "But except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." A man may be drowned in five fathom water, as well as in five thousand; and, therefore, let none foolishly flatter themselves with the hope of security, even though they really see many (to speak in the language of scripture) "tenfold more the children of hell than themselves."

(3.) Sinners are apt to look for another source of excuses for their sins in themselves. They are strongly inclined to make a merit of any actions they have done that are materially good, and think that some indulgence is due to their faults and miscarriages on that account. They set their good works and their faults, as it were, in opposite columns, as if they intended, in that manner, to strike the balance. There is very much of this disposition in the natural unenlightened mind. We find many sentiments similar to this in the heathen world. 'Every man,' says a certain author, 'has some virtues, and some 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 vicious man endeavors 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 endeavor 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 endeavors 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 expresses 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 pre-
 “ sent 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 mem-
 “ bers. 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 sub-

due 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 transactions 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 the 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 deceitfulness 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 these 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 panel. 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.

2dly, 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, Psal. 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 finner 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 endeavor 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 sinner; 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 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 fight 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 with-held 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 sweat-meats, but happening to see something very valuable lying open, which might be easily concealed, could not resist the temptation, but commenced thief, and, come, 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 unsubdued, to reproach and sting them; whereas, in society like themselves, they are greatly emboldened, by seeing vice practised, and by hearing it justi-

fied. 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 rend 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 reproving 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 trustest, 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 been long 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, useful lesson which young persons may learn from what they see in the world about them. These 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 intemperance, 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 dishonorable 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 "destructive" on 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, Jeremiah 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-rope.* 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, loosens the reins, and suffers him to take his course. Now, what must be the condition of a man, who has out-sinned 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 honorable. 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 art 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.

(8.) 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 endeavors 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 "two-fold 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 Thess. ii. 11, 12. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they shall 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 practice 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 forever. 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 possesser of a prevailing love to God and holiness ; so that it is his very nature, 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 espoules 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.

I. 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 endeavor 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 forever 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 neighbor, 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 subtil 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 anothers 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, 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." 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 succored 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 shown 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 rumor 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 neighbor, especially to the precious soul; yet it is worse than losing time to attempt it, when he is in a disposition to re-

ject 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 forwardness 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 dishonor 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,

1st, 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, "Thou shalt 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 show 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 same 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." Though 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 despised

for its folly; but, at the same time it ought to be deeply abhorred for its guilt.

4thly, In the last place. 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 vicious 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 unsuitable, 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 neighbor? 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 neighbor, 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 un-

happily, 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 favor. 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 so 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 there-

“fore the light that is in thee be darknes, how great is that darknes !” 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 discourse 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 comparison. How common is the pretence of the drunkards: We are harming nobody; we are not speaking ill of our neighbors; we are not oppressing the poor. In the mean time, they are soon led to cursing and blasphemy; and, perhaps, by their riotous living, they are unable to pay their just debts, rob the industrious poor of their right, and, for the indulgence of a beastly appetite, bring their own offspring to beggary and ruin. Such is the behavior of many of your harmless people; men of social friendly dispositions, that, if you believe them, would not wrong their neighbor of a

farthing to their knowledge ; and yet it would be happy for any man to fall into the hands of highway robbers, rather than into their society. How short-sighted men are ! they not only forget to look forward to the other world, but look not even to any distance in this. From time to time we are made fools by sin, which never asks more of us than the present compliance ; yet, if this is granted, never leaves us till our state is irrecoverable. What reason have all to be afraid of that deplorable hardness of heart which is the consequence of the continued indulgence of sin. Let us never consider any sin by itself, but together with that ugly train which it draws behind it ; and, then, though our false 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 insupportable 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 com-
“eth 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: there-
“fore 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.

THE BELIEVER GOING TO GOD AS HIS EXCEED-
ING JOY.

A

S E R M O N.

=====
Pſalm xliiii. 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 lye 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.

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, 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 labor, "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 unsearchable wisdom is mentioned, 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!" 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, Romans 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 surprise 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 favors 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, there 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 show 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 promise! 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. xxxiii. 16.* “ He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his water 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

buffle 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 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 foretaste 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 vail. 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 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 steadfast, 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 show 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 no-

tions of it. This, however, is not the case with all; and 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 on 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 now have 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 hath given us this as a token and pledge of his love, before the full manifestation of it. Here is food to give us vigor 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 surprise, that the only begotten Son of God should do honor 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 explanation? 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 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 honor 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 show how well it is fitted for strengthening the weak, and comforting 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 honor 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 mercy, 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 yourselves 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 show 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 in-
" to 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.

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

A
S E R M O N.

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 shows 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, Psal. 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 village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off, and they lifted up their voi-

“ ces, 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, they 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 Saviour.

It is no way difficult to account for this behavior 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 solicitude 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 return 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 chearful 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,

I. 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 pray-

ed.—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 lye down and rise up in safety.—If any had reason to fear confinement from ordinances, or from usefulness, they should say, with the Psalmist, Psal. 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 honored 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 Psal-

mist, 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 par-
doning 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 forbid-
ding 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 com-
plained 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 provi-
dence 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 bleſſ-
ings 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 con-
viction from whom they flow, to be ſenſible of the abſo-
lute 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.

1st. When the means by which any mercy is brought about are extraordinary, and far beyond the reach of human wisdom, it serves to show 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 slipped.” 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 car-

ry 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 sound 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, Psal. 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 observed 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; nay, 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 forever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? 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 to 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 showing 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. “Al-
“though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be
“in the vines; the labor 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 miti-

gated 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 fought, 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 Jerusalem, 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 tribulation 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 hu-

mility, 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 favored 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

4th, 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 de-

gree 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 talk- "ing with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Je- "sus, 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 finfulness 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 further 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 splendor 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 wear 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. 13. "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:

1st, 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 favored, 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 favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison." Acts vii. 9, 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 favor 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 favor 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." Psalm 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 favored 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 vigor 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 gratification, 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, Psal. iv. 6, 7, 8. "There be

“ many that say, Who will show 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. Pfal. lxxiii. 23, 25. Never-
 “ theless 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 interrup-
 tion in the present life. Sin is the chief cause of inter-
 ruption; it raises an interposing cloud, and separates be-
 tween 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 squeezes the bitterest ingredients into the cup of afflic-
 tion; 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.” Pfal. 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 labor, and even weariness before. Rest also seems to imply that which is the end of labor, 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 favor, 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 heartfelt joy into a haven of security and peace?

3. In the last place, this expression implies a confidence and reliance on God for protection and security against future dangers. This seems necessary to the com-

pleteness 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 dependence 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 true for ever."

My brethren, this trust and dependence 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 favor, 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 unto 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 endeavors 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 warnings. 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 favor? 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 endeavors 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 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 publick-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, Psal. 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 honor 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 gaities 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 depending 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 publick. 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 honorably 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 a gain 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 well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

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S E R M O N

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A VIEW OF THE GLORY OF GOD HUMBLING
TO THE SOUL.

A
S E R M O N.

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.*

MY brethren, we can have no experimental know-
ledge; 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 infi-
nite disproportion between themselves, as derived, depen-
dent, limited, imperfect beings, and the eternal, immu-
table, 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 favor 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 far into the dispute between Job and his friends, although, 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 endeavors 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 sovereignty 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 pleas'd 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 clos'd. But, no doubt, the discovery which chiefly affect'd 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 potsherd 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 further 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 knowledge 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 show 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 show 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 incensed 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, ch. 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

fenfibly as a comparifon with its oppofite. The application of a ftraight rule marks the obliquity of a crooked line; nay, it marks even the leaft degree of variation, which by a lefs accurate trial would not have been difcovered. Any piece of deformity appears more hideous and fhocking when compared with perfect beauty. For the fame reafon, a clear view of the holinefs of God, and a fenfe of his intimate préfence with us, tends to bring fin to remembrance, as well as to cover us with confufion for thofe fins, which before we were able to juftify, palliate, or conceal. We are exprefsly affured that our firft parents immediately after eating the forbidding fruit were fenfible of their guilt, and I cannot think they were wholly infenfible of the omnifcience and omnipréfence of God. Yet we find that their fear greatly increafed (doubtlefs from a fenfe of fin) 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 themfelves from the préfence of the Lord God amongft the trees of the garden."

You may take a very plain and fimple illuftration of this from daily experience. Are there not fome perfons of loofe principles and irregular practice, who, when by themfelves, or in fociety like themfelves, juftify many of their fins, and to all appearance, commit them without remorse, as innocent, if not laudable? But let the fame perfons be carried into fober company, efpécially into the préfence of any perfon eminent for piety and gravity, and they will be reftained and afhamed, and not able to open their mouths in defence of their licentious carriage. The mere préfence of fuch a perfon carries instant irrefiftible conviction with it, by forcing a comparifon between piety and profanity; that is to fay, good and evil, light and darknefs. So certain a truth is this, that one of the ancient heathen authors gives it as a rule for moral conduct, "that men fhould always imagine themfelves in the préfence of fuch a man as Cato, renowned for gravity and virtue." But if the fancied préfence of a mortal, in whom fome faint rays, if I may fpeak fo, of the divine Image appear by reflection, has fo 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 dependence 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 dependence 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, do-

minion, 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 darkenneth 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 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 continues 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 endeavors 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 hardeneth 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 further 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, *Hos. 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 discovery 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 convincing 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. v. 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 perpe-
 “ tual 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 rent your heart, and not your gar-
 “ ments, 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,

1. 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 understand-
 “ ing.” The same thing is affirmed by our blessed Sa-
 viour, 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 cha-
 racter, 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 labor 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 chearfully 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 behavior, sweetness of temper, integrity, and diligence, and are ready to storm upon the least defect, while, at the same time, they show no example in their own conduct, but of a visible neglect of duty both to God and man. Oh! 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 religion 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 thunders, 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 honor 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 perish 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 im-

plies, 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. 18. "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 intreat 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 neighbor, 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.*

THE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

A

S E R M O N.



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 came 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 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 “ ministering 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, the 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 favor. 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 honored, 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 honor 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 a 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." Revelation 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 evident 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 fervor 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 disinter-

ested 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 supercede acts of thanksgiving, but rather lays the justest and noblest foundation for their exercise; because it subjects the creature to the Creator; keeps its dependence and obedience continually in view, and greatly enhances the favors 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 peo-

“ple, 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 nei-
 ther waste nor change. How animated, then, must be
 the praises of the higher house, especially when the reflec-
 tion 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 discernable 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 cot-
 tage, 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 unwor-
 thiness as sinners: this it is which makes all the gifts of
 God of seven-fold 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 their 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 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 constantly 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, 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 splendor 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. 1, 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 splendor 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 honor 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 others 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 without 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 honor, and power, and might, be unto our God, forever 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." These 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 show 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 shows the weakness and feebleness of these 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 vigor 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, shows 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 honor God in his house and ordinances, if you expect that ever he should honor you: and, remember, that this 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 cannot 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 honorable; 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 vigor 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 made 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.

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY IN DECLARING THE
WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD.

A
S E R M O N.

A Farewell Discourse, delivered at Paisley, May, 1768.

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 honor and happiness of being intrusted 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 endeavor 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 endeavor, 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.

First 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 Je-

“*ius Christi.*” 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 fought 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.

I. 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, endeavor to make his people 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 the 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 endeavor 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 of 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 honor, 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 attach-
 ment to that great truth, that it would occupy, in a man-
 ner, the whole of his time and labor ; 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 con-
 spicuous point of view ; he must not pass them over flight-
 ly ; he must not even speak of them coldly, but in such a
 manner, as to show, 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 ne-
 ver 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 endeavor 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 specula-
 tions, to amuse the fancy, when they should be building
 them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto sal-

vation? The very manner of preaching may be opposite to the doctrine of the cross, which hath so much humility and self-denial in it, as will inspire, and give a color, 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

3d 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 observed, otherwise the labor 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 himself 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. It is 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 mean while, 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 reprov'd 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 of-

fence 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 mean time, 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 honor than they are aware of; for they show 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 honor, than by renouncing the connection.

4th. 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.

1st, 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 utmost 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 Drufilla, 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 honor of Christ. He endeavors 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 labors, 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 supposed 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 tribula- “ tion, 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.” Impend- ing calamities of such an alarming nature that they speak, as it were, of themselves, and afford the noblest opportuni- ties 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 ani- mated with uncommon zeal.

But a different aspect of Providence calls also for instruc- tion 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 cir- cumstance 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 disci- pline, 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 as soon there 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 neighbors, 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 forever? 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 falvation, for the glory of thy name : and
 “ deliver us, and purge away our fins for thy name’s
 “ fake.”

But the courſe of Providence, towards 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 with them, 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 light 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 opportunity, 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 diſtreſt, 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 wife 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 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 up 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 message from the King of kings, they ought to do it with the dignity that becomes an ambassador from him. They ought not to be disinayed 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 honor of an anti-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, immediately, 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 impresson 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.

I. 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 slur 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 dishonorable 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 di-

ligence, 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 endeavor 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 intrusted 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 labor 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 these 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 endeavor 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 disciples 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 clamors of the multitude. And if neither humor nor interest, but conscience, has in

deed 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 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 covenant, and the appointed means of the confirmation and comfort of his own people. Without mentioning, however, the sacrament 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 baptized 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 honor to the sacrament of baptism, by representing the rite itself as of so great necessity; but it is precisely that sort of honor 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 in 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 unfuitable, 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 so deeply rooted with many, that they will not probably be soon destroyed; but I think it is the duty of every minister, in that, and all such cases, to speak his mind plainly, and, to the utmost of his power, to act consistently and uniformly, though he should suffer by the slanders both of the ignorant and profane.

3. The last difficulty which I shall mention, as lying in the way of ministers, is the opposition of their enemies. No faithful minister 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 silence and forbearance, in a great measure, escape the resentment or injuries of violent men. And to be as little embroiled with others as possible, is both our interest and our duty. "If it be possible," says the Apostle, "and as much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men." But it is certain, from long and invariable experience, that there is such enmity and rancor in the hearts of wicked men against all who are in good earnest about religion, that they may lay their account with continual opposition, and continual slander. This our Saviour teaches his disciples to expect, and shews them, that it is the necessary consequence 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, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than the Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep your's 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, shall 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 unfuitable 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,

through 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 dangerous 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 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 resentment. 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

furrounded, 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 harbor it in his breast; he must love his enemies; he must bless them that curse him, and pray for them that spitefully 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 authorizes 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 be-

lieve 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 broken 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, in 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 your repentance unto life.—The wicked having received warning,

I must now endeavor 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. Endeavor, 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 evidence 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 favor; 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 chearful 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 traditional 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 favorable 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 sound in his principles, but of thorough knowledge and capacity, always preferring solid before specious parts. After having made the choice, endeavor 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 these means they enter into his views; and as he will naturally endeavor, 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 endeavor, 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 criticize 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 traffick, 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 fordid, 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 intirely 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 labor. I look upon it as the indispenfible 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 endeavor to prepare your

minds, and those others 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 where-ever there is a deep impression 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 drunkennes, 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 fotted 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 impresson 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 endeavor 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 endeavor 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 further 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.

MINISTERIAL CHARACTER AND DUTY,

A

S E R M O N.

2 COR. IV. 13.

We also believe, and therefore speak.

TO understand what ought to be the character, and what principles should animate the conduct of a minister of the Gospel, cannot be without profit, even to private Christian. It will teach him whom to prefer, when he is called, in providence, to make a choice. It will teach him to hold such in reputation for their office sake, and to improve the privilege of a regular gospel ministry, if he himself is favored with it. And I think it must incline him to make daily supplication to the Lord of the harvest, to send forth faithful laborers into his harvest.

But though there were no such general advantage to be derived from it, my particular charge, and the very aspect of this audience, would easily justify me in making this, for once, the immediate subject of discourse.

Now, if we would know the character of a faithful minister, we cannot better, or more immediately reach our purpose, than by looking into the character, and observing the conduct, and springs of action, of the apostles of our Lord, who received their commissions 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.

The Apostle Paul, whose call was so singular, and whose labors were so distinguished, has, in his epistles to the several churches, planted or watered by him, given us a great light into the chief aims he had in the exercise of the ministry. In this chapter, and the preceding part of this epistle, he shews the Corinthians, with what visible faithfulness and sincerity he had acted, and what diligence he had used in promoting their eternal happiness.

To save time, I forbear going through the connection of his discourse, and only observe, that in the words of our text, he shows what kept him faithful and influenced him to so much diligence in the work to which he was called by alluding to an expression in the 116th Psalm. It is written, *I have believed, therefore have I spoken. We also believe, and therefore speak.* In this he intimates that our inward persuasion of the great truths of the everlasting Gospel, could not but have a powerful influence upon him and others, to press the important message and watch over the souls of those committed to the charge.

In discoursing further at this time, I intend to confine myself to this single truth, which may be easily deduced from the text: That one of the most essentially necessary and the most extensively useful qualifications of a good minister, is, that he be a good man, that he have a firm belief of that Gospel he is called to preach, and a lively sense of religion upon his own heart. After I shall have explained and confirmed this observation, I will conclude with some practical reflections.

Though I have mentioned real religion as one of the most essentially necessary qualifications, I am not ignorant that taking the words in a strict sense, gifts are more necessary to the being of a ministry, than even grace itself. To make the efficacy of the ordinances to depend upon the inward state of the administrator, is a Popish error and is expressly guarded against by the Assembly of Divines, in our shorter Catechism, in the following words:

The sacraments, and it is equally true of every other ordinance, become effectual to salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them, that by faith receive them.

But some degree of capacity is evidently necessary in the most absolute sense. A man who is altogether void of knowledge and utterance, or who is deaf and dumb, may be a saint, but cannot be a minister. This concession, however, takes nothing from the force of the observation, that real religion is of the greatest importance, and most absolutely necessary to the *faithful* discharge of a minister's sacred trust. That I may set this in as clear and strong a light as I am able, let me intreat your attention to the following observations.

I. Real religion in a minister will make him knowing, and able for his work. It is necessary for any one who attends himself for the office of the ministry, by diligent study, and the use of those means, with which God in his providence hath furnished him, to improve his understanding and acquire a stock of knowledge, that he may be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. In this he can have no such excitement as concern for his Master's glory. Nay, he that is truly religious, is taught of God, the best of master's, and will have some of his most profitable lessons from his own experience.

Let me the rather intreat your attention to this, that those who are most apt to disparage piety, are also apt to speak in terms of high approbation on the subject of literature and science.—Observe, therefore, that true religion serves both to give a man that knowledge which is necessary to a minister, and to direct and turn into its proper channel the knowledge which he may otherwise acquire. It is an approved maxim in every science, that practical and experimental knowledge far exceeds that which is merely speculative; at least, though the last may make the prettiest show, the first is by much to be preferred for use. Any wise man, if he was to go a dangerous

voyage, would readily prefer as his pilot, one who had much experience, and had failed often that way himself, to one, who had studied navigation in the most perfect manner ashore. So, my brethren, every man who regards his soul would choose for his *spiritual* guide, one, who appears to have the wisdom to save his own, and would expect by him to be best directed how to avoid the rocks and shelves in his passage, through this dangerous and tempestuous ocean of life.

But if this maxim holds true in other science, it holds yet more strongly in Religion, which cannot be truly known unless it be felt. There is an inseparable connexion between faith and practice, truth and duty; and therefore he that is a stranger to the one, is ignorant of the other. I am not insensible that a bad man may espouse, and plead for a great part of the system of divine truth; but as he cannot cordially embrace it, so I am inclined to think that he never truly understands it. The Apostle Paul declares, that it is only by the Spirit of God which is given to every real Christian, and more especially to every faithful Minister, that a man is enabled to treat rightly of Divine Things, *Now we have received, not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God; which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.* As the real Christian from that character is best disposed to seek after, so he is by the same means best fitted to improve and apply his knowledge of spiritual things. This will appear, if we consider what ought to be the great work of a minister. He hath to do chiefly with the hearts and consciences of his people. His business is to convince the ungodly; to awaken the secure; to enlighten the ignorant; to direct and strengthen the weak in the faith, and in general as a wise physician, to administer the medicine proper to the various conditions and disorders of his hearers. Now it must, at first sight,

appear, that he who is a stranger to the power of godliness, and knows nothing of the spiritual life himself, must be utterly unfit for discerning how it thrives, or assisting and promoting it in others. That man must surely be most powerful in searching, and most skilful in guiding the consciences of others, who has been accustomed to examine and direct his own.

I only farther observe upon this particular, that true religion will purify, and direct into its proper channel, the knowledge he may otherwise acquire. It is a great mistake to think, sound learning is an enemy to religion, and to suppose that an ignorant ministry is the best or safest. There is no branch of human knowledge of which a Divine may not be the better, or which a good man will not improve to the glory of God and the good of others; though some of them are more important than others; and it is necessary to give to any of them, only such proportion of our time, as is consistent with our great and principal aim. Now true Religion is the great preservative against mistake or abuse of any kind on this subject. A bad man is apt to study, merely to gratify his own fancy; and there is a false luxury and delicacy in feeding the mind as well as the body. A bad man is also exceedingly prone to intellectual pride and self-sufficiency; than which, there is not a vice more dangerous in itself, or more contrary to the character of a Minister of the New Testament. But he who is sanctified by divine grace, as he has every motive to diligence in acquiring knowledge, so the single purpose to which he will wish to apply it, is to serve God in the Gospel of his Son.

II. Real religion in a minister will make him happy and chearful, ready and willing to do his duty. There is a great difference between the prompt, and speedy obedience of a servant who loves his master and his work, and the reluctant labor of him who only deceives him, that he may eat of his bread. A truly pious man undertakes the office of the ministry from love to God, with a view to promote his glory, and what he hath counted his interest in the world: viz. the welfare of the souls of men. An unholy Minister undertakes this employment only as a

trade to earn by, and has it at least as his highest aim to promote his own worldly advantage. It is easy to see in what a different manner these different persons will act, and in what different light they will view the sacred duties of their function. He who truly believes the Gospel and loves its Author, will reckon it his highest honor when he is called to recommend it to the belief of others. He will be apt to teach, and will find a pleasure in carrying his message; besides the reward he expects from him who employs him, and will undergo with cheerfulness every fatigue he is subjected to, in the execution of his office. On the other hand, he who is actuated by a contrary principle, though he is obliged, that he may raise his wages, in some sort to do his duty; yet how heavily must it go on, how tedious and burthensome must it be, both in preparation and performance? He will count his service at the altar, and his work among his people, as a toil and drudgery, and reckon all that redeemed time that he can save for himself, from the duties of his office.

Perhaps it may be thought that there lies a strong objection against this observation from experience; as it appears that such ministers as have least of religion, commonly go most lightly under the charge, and are far from feeling any burthen in what is committed to them; whereas the most pious and faithful ministers seem to have a weight upon their spirits, and such a concern for the salvation of their people, as cannot but take much from their cheerfulness in the work to which they are called. In answer to this, observe, that an unfaithful minister is not easy and cheerful because his work is agreeable to him, but because he takes as little of it as may be, and seeks his pleasure more than his duty. Certain it is, that the work of the ministry must be irksome and uneasy to him that believes not, except so far as he makes it subservient to ambition, and displays his own talents when he should be feeding his people's souls. This I confess, which the apostle justly calls preaching ourselves, may be abundantly gratifying to the most corrupt heart. On the other hand, that concern for his people which is upon the heart of every faithful pastor, is far from being inconsistent with the

most solid peace and desirable pleasure arising from the discharge of his duty. It is like the exercise of pity and compassion to the distressed, in him, who is acting for their relief, which, though in some sense painful, is yet accompanied with the approbation of God, and conscience, as flowing from a rightly disposed mind, and therefore to be cherished and cultivated rather than suppressed. There is a time for every good man to mourn, and a time to rejoice, and perhaps the one is even more salutary than the other; for we are told, that God will appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, *to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.* it

III. Real religion in a minister will make him faithful, and impartial, in the discharge of his trust. The God in whose presence we stand, and in whose name we speak, is no respecter of persons, and neither should we be in doing his work. There is commonly a great variety of persons, of different stations and of different characters, committed to the inspection of a minister; the pleasing or displeasing of whom, has a considerable influence in his worldly ease and interest. This is a great temptation to be unfaithful, and often leads to speak unto them *smooth things*, and *prophecy deceit*; or at least, not to deal with all that freedom and impartiality, that his duty to God requires. In every unregenerate man, worldly interest in one shape or another, either vanity or gain, is the supreme motive of action: and therefore, as most men are impatient of reproof, it cannot be supposed, that an un sanctified minister will venture to provoke their displeasure, or to gall them with unacceptable truths. The favor of the great, or the applause of the multitude, he certainly will seek, more than the edification of any. On the other hand, he who truly fears God and believes what he teaches, will act with faithfulness and boldness. He will remember that if he seeks to please men, he cannot be the servant of Christ. He will therefore no farther obtain, and indeed no farther wish to obtain their favor, than as a diligent discharge of his duty approves him to their consciences in the sight of God; or forces the approbation of the impar-

tial, notwithstanding the resentment of particular offenders. It is only the fear of God, can deliver us from the fear of man. I do not pretend that all who fear God, are wholly delivered from it: but surely, bad men, must be far more under the government of this sinful principle. The one may fail occasionally, the other is corrupted wholly. There are two reasons which incline me particularly to insist on that faithfulness, which can only flow from true piety.

1. That preaching, in order to be useful, must be very particular, and close, in the application. General truths and abstract reasoning have little or no influence upon the hearers, as the ignorant cannot, and the wise will not apply them to themselves.

2. The other reason is, that private admonition, and personal reproof, are a great part of a minister's duty, and a duty that cannot be performed by any man, who hath not a steady regard to the presence and command of that God, who hath set him to watch for the souls of his people, as one that must give an account.

IV. Real religion in a minister, will make him active, and laborious in his work. Diligence is absolutely necessary, to the right discharge of the pastoral duties, whether public or private. It requires no small attention and labor, to seek out fit and acceptable words, as the preacher expresses it, to stir up the attention of the inconsiderate, to awaken secure, and convince obstinate sinners, to unmask the covered hearts of hypocrites, to set right the erring, and encourage the fearful. An unbelieving minister, must be careless and slothful. As he is unconcerned about the success of his work; he cannot have any great concern about the manner of performance. But he, who believes the unspeakable importance of what he is employed about, both to himself, and to his people, cannot fail to be diligent. He knows that he himself must answer to God, for the care he has taken of the souls committed to his charge; and that if he does not faithfully warn the wicked to turn from their ways, their blood will be required at his hand.

Oh! my brethren, what a striking consideration is this, to suppose ourselves interrogated by the Supreme Judge, concerning every sinner under our charge? Did you earnestly warn this unhappy soul, by earnest exhortations in public, and by serious affectionate expostulations in private, to consider his ways? It is an easy thing, by a partial, or cursory performance of our duty, to screen ourselves from the censure of our fellow-men; but to stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and answer there for our diligence, is a more awful trial.

Will not also a concern for his people's interest, animate a pious minister to diligence? If he is truly pious, as he loves God, he loves his brother also. The Apostle Paul says, *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.* If a man in good earnest, believes, that everlasting misery must be the portion of all who die in an unrenewed state; what pains will he not take, to prevent sinners from going to that place of torment?

One who could see a fellow-creature, in the rage of a fever, rushing to the brink of a precipice, and not restrain him, would fall under lasting infamy. Must not the same compassion move the heart of a serious person, who sees his fellow-sinners, going blindfold to the pit of perdition?

It is their not believing these things, that makes them so fearless in sinning; if you truly believe them, will you not make an effort to alarm them? There are no motives like these to diligence—he that believes, will certainly speak.

V. In the last place, real religion, will make a minister successful in his work. This it does, both as it fits him for doing his duty to his people, which has been illustrated above, and as it adds to his precepts, *the force of his example.* First, it makes him successful as it fits him for his duty. It is true indeed, that God only can give the blessing upon a minister's labors, and that he can save by many, or by few, by the weakest, as well as by the ablest instrument: yet we see from experience, that in all ordinary cases, he proportions the success, to the propriety,

or sufficiency of the means. Neither is there any surer mark, that God intends effectual benefit to any part of the world, or the church, than when he raises, and commissions men, eminently qualified, to plead his cause. Therefore, real piety, even in this respect, contributes to a minister's success. If diligence in all other things produces success, it must be so also in the ministry. If he that lays out his ground with the greatest judgment, prepares and dresses it with the greatest care, has the most plentiful crop: if the shepherd that waits most diligently upon his flock, feeds them in the best pasture, and leads them to the safest shelter, has the most increase; then that minister, who does his duty most wisely, and most powerfully, will also see most of the fruit of his labors.

But real, and unaffected, yet visible seriousness, has also its own proper additional influence on a minister's success. An apparent and visible impression upon the speaker's mind, of what he says, gives it an inexpressible weight with the hearers. There is a piercing heat, a penetrating force, in that which flows from the heart, which distinguishes it not only from the coldness of indifference, but also, from the false fire of enthusiasm or vain glory. Besides all this, the example of a pious minister, is a constant instruction to his people. It ratifies his doctrine while he not only charges them to do what he says, but to be what he is. This will receive much illustration from its contrary.

A minister who has a careless, untender walk, defeats by his life, the intent of his preaching. Though in reason, it cannot justify any one in disobeying wholesome instructions; that the instructor despises them himself; yet it is one of the most common excuses men make for themselves, and few excuses seem to set their consciences more at ease. Loose and careless persons, think themselves quite at liberty to despise the reproofs of their pastor, if, while he teaches others, he teaches not himself.

Nay, not only is it thus with the profane, but even those who have the greatest regard for religion, are not so much affected with the same truths, when spoken by one they think indifferent about them, as when spoken by

one, who seems to feel what he speaks, and who lives as he teaches.

Experience greatly confirms the whole of this reasoning—for wherever an eminently pious minister has lived, and labored long, there is commonly to be found the most knowing, serious, sober-minded, and judicious people; nay, the very memory of such a minister, is often long continued, after he is gone, and his example is proposed by his hearers, to their children's children.

From all these considerations, I conclude, that the most important qualification of a good minister, is, to be a *believing preacher*, and that, if he saves his own soul, he will be the probable mean of saving them that hear him.

I proceed now, to make some improvement of the subject.

Reverend fathers and brethren,

As we would wish our people to do, let us take heed how we hear, and make a faithful application to ourselves, of what hath been said upon the subject. Let it engage us to a serious examination of ourselves, lest while we preach the gospel to others, we ourselves should be reprobates. This ought to be the subject of our frequent and serious thoughts, for several reasons. We are in danger of thinking ourselves too easily safe, by comparing that outward regularity, to which our office itself, even from secular motives, obliges us, with the licentious extravagance of profane sinners. We are in danger of mistaking our frequent thinking and speaking of the things of God, in the way of our calling, for an evidence of true religion, in ourselves. We may also, perhaps, mistake those gifts with which God hath furnished us, for the benefit of his own people, as the fruits of the spirit, and of gracious dispositions in our hearts. A minister, is as much liable to self-deceit as others, and in some respects, more so. We have therefore much need, often to make trial of our state, as well as to give all diligence, to make our calling and election sure.

But let us beware of imagining, that this discourse is only applicable to such, as have no real faith in Christ. God forbid! that there were any minister among us, a

complete unbeliever, counting the Gospel a fable. But faith, and every other gracious disposition grafted upon it, are capable of many degrees of improvement and strength; and in proportion to the strength of our faith, and the impression we have of divine things, will be our diligence, and consequently our success, in the work of the ministry. Let us therefore impress our minds, with a more and more lively sense, of the important truths which we teach and hear. Let us not starve ourselves, while we are feeding others: but study to arrive at a greater degree of love to God, and delight in him; a greater conformity to his blessed image, in purity of heart, and integrity of life. Let us in a special manner, study to attain to more and more intimate communion with God in secret, which is the sign of our dependance upon him, and the very exercise of love to him, which is the mean of constancy, and the source of joy in religion.

Above all, let us set our affections upon the things that are above, where our Redeemer sits, at his Father's right hand. As our profession is to be pilgrims, and strangers in the earth, to live by faith, and not by sight; let us study to raise our hopes of, and desire after, the heavenly inheritance. By this, we shall not only believe, but know, and feel the value of true religion, which cannot fail to make us diligent in seeking the good of others.

Oh! my brethren, what reason have we to be inwardly ashamed at the weakness of our faith, and the coldness of our love, as they show themselves, by our indifference in the duties of our office? We are often ready, both to complain, and wonder that our hearers are so little affected with the most awful considerations: that they can hear with indifference of everlasting happiness, and set without fear under the denunciations of eternal wrath: that we cannot persuade them, it is of importance to think what shall become of them forever. But is it not also to be wondered at, that we ourselves can often speak of these things with so little emotion? Can we ever be sufficiently affected with the danger of our hearers, when we consider, that we must either save them by convincing and converting them now, or deliver our own souls, by wit-

nessing, justifying, and perhaps pleading for their condemnation at the last day? However plain and simple these truths are, of the final judgment of ministers and people, they are quite unfathomable in their meaning and importance to both. It is strange that we can think of them without the deepest concern, or even speak of them without tears.

Let us pray that the Lord would increase our faith, that believing we may speak, and that our speech may be with such efficacy, by the blessing of God, as many sinners may be thereby brought to everlasting life; that we may approve ourselves to him that sent us; and that when Christ, the chief shepherd shall appear, we may receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.



MAN IN HIS NATURAL STATE.

A

S E R M O N.

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

IN order to preach the Gospel with success, it is necessary that we should begin, by establishing the great and fundamental truths, on which all the rest are built, and to which they constantly refer. Nay, it is necessary, that we should often look back to these, and see that we be not off the foundation, or that it be not weakly, or imperfectly laid. Of this sort, I take the guilt, misery and weakness of our nature to be; and therefore have chosen the words now read, as the subject of discourse, in which the spirit of God reproves the sufficiency, and self-righteousness of the church of Laodicea.

Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased in goods, &c. I suppose you will all easily understand, that the words are figurative, and are spoken entirely, with a view to the spiritual state of that church. In this light, let us consider what is precisely their meaning.

We may either suppose, that this charge is brought against the church of Laodicea, because there were many

there, under the profession of the Gospel, who were notwithstanding, still in a natural and unrenewed state—strangers to the power of religion; of which, their being thus unhumbled, and insensible of their guilt, and misery, was the evidence; and for which, the remedy is prescribed, in the following words: *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.*

Or we may suppose, that this reproof was in a great measure applicable to them all, in general; believers and unbelievers; the best of them being exceedingly prone to trust in themselves, that they were righteous; instead of that humble dependance on the merit, and grace of their Redeemer, which ought not only to be the refuge of the sinner, but the confidence of the saint. And there is no question, that this is a proper caution to professing Christians in every age, to beware of splitting on the rock of self-sufficiency.

But as this disposition reigns in the heart of every one, that is yet at a distance from God—is the foundation of their security and impenitence, and is what they must be brought off from, before they can be reconciled to God; it is for their benefit, that I chiefly design this discourse, though it may also be useful, and shall be in part applied to the children of God. It is an affecting thought, when pursued to its consequences; yet alas! it is unquestionably true, that in every assembly, *such as this*, of professing Christians, there are not a few, who are in *the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*, under the wrath of God, and liable to the condemning sentence of his law; and at the same time, that the far greatest part of them are ignorant of it, and know not, that they are *wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

In discoursing farther upon this subject, therefore I shall

I. Endeavor to prove and illustrate this truth: that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery,

under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God.

II. I shall briefly shew you, that being brought to a lively sense, and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step, to the saving knowledge of God, in Christ—And in the *last place*, shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place then, I am to prove and illustrate this truth; that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God. What is said in this passage of the Laodiceans, is universally true, of the posterity of Adam. Unless an inward and essential change has been wrought upon them by the grace of God; they are *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. It is also true of them, as well as the Laodiceans, that they know it not; but vainly presume themselves to be rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing. If these two things are jointly true of many of you my hearers, there is nothing in which you can have so great a concern: therefore, let me earnestly beseech your most serious attention, to what shall be said: as the success of this conviction is necessary, to your understanding, or profiting by any other part of divine truth, as I shall afterwards shew you.

The proof of the truth here asserted, can be only of two kinds. 1. From scripture, which is the testimony of God declaring it. 2. From the visible state of the world, and our own experience finding it to be so.

1. That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, appears from the express, and repeated testimony of the word of God. And this testimony we have, not only in particular passages, carrying the truth, but in the strain and spirit of the whole, and the several dispensations of Divine Providence there recorded, which are all of them, built upon this supposition, and intended to remedy this universal evil.

See what God declares: Gen. vi. 5. *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart, was only evil continually. And again, the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* We may take the psalmist David's testimony of himself, as a sample, of the rest of mankind; and indeed he plainly intimates, that it is a common calamity. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Behold! I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

We may take also the testimony of the apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, which is the more full to our present purpose: that as he had never been at Rome, he is there laying the foundation of religion in general, and the Christian dispensation in particular, by a clear and explicit proof, of the need the world had of a Saviour, from its universal corruption and depravity. See then what he says—*What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one. And again—Now we know that what things soever the law saith: it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty, before God.—For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*

You may also see that the apostle traces this disorder, to its very source—*Wherefore as by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*

I shall add but one express scripture testimony more.—*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*

But besides the particular passages of scripture, positively declaring this truth, the whole frame and contexture of the scriptures, and all the dispensations of Divine Providence recorded in them, are a proof of the same thing. Man is every where considered as in a fallen and sinful state. Every thing that is prescribed to him, and every thing that is done for him, goes upon that supposition. It is not one man, or a few men, that are in scrip-

ture called to repentance, but all without exception. Now repentance is only the duty of a sinner. An innocent person cannot repent; he has nothing to grieve for in his heart, or to forsake in his life. It is also proper to observe, that one of the scripture characters of God is, *Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin*. Now, he could not be to us a forgiving God, and there would be no need that he should be revealed under that character, unless we were sinners, that stood in need of pardon. Mercy, indeed, is the distinguishing attribute of God, and this can only have respect to offenders. All the other perfections of God, might be exercised towards pure and holy creatures; but mercy, only towards sinners. He might be a good, holy, just, wise, powerful God, to persons in a state of innocence, but he can shew mercy, only to the guilty.

Do not the dispensations of God's providence, shew the same thing? He sent the flood, as a testimony of the wickedness of the world, and for the punishment of a guilty race. Remember also the sacrifices, which were appointed, and accepted by God from the beginning of the world. Sacrifices are for atonement, and expiation. They are plainly a substitution in the room of a forfeited life. It is doing violence to common sense, to make them any thing else. The whole Jewish œconomy, which had in it so many sacrifices, so many offerings, so many washings and purifications, does plainly suppose, the person using them, to be infected with sin, or moral pollution. Had not this been the case, they had been extremely absurd and improper.

But the strongest testimony of all, that God hath given to the guilt and corruption of mankind, is his sending his own Son into the world, to redeem them, by the sacrifice of himself—To what purpose redeem them, if they were not in bondage? Why so costly an expiation, if our lives had not been forfeited to divine justice? But that it was for this purpose, that Christ came into the world, is so plain, from the whole of the scriptures, that I shall select but one passage out of many, to prove it—*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his*

blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

What is said already on this head, is a full proof from scripture, that man is now, by nature, in a state of sin; that he is also, in consequence of that, in a state of misery, and liable to the wrath of God, is proved by many of the same passages, and by many others—*For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness—For the wages of sin is death, &c.* But I need not multiply passages to this purpose; for in all God's dispensations, the deserved punishment of sinners, is as evident, as their sinfulness itself. It is indeed fully proved, from the essential perfections of God, particularly his holiness and justice. He is of purer eyes, than that he can behold iniquity. *Evil cannot dwell with him, nor fools, that is, sinners, stand in his sight.*

Is not all this then my brethren, a sufficient proof, from the testimony of God, that man in a natural state, is sinful and miserable? Shall we affirm ourselves to be whole, if he saith we are unbound? Do we know more than God? Will we not give credit to the fountain of truth? Nor is it any objection to this, that we ourselves know it not, or are but little sensible of it. One considerable part of the disease, is blindness of understanding: so that we may, and must, till our eyes are opened, be ignorant of our danger—We may think and say, that we are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, while we are *wretched and miserable, and blind and naked.*

2. The same thing appears from the visible state of the world, and our own experience. Unbelievers are apt to hear with indifference and neglect, what they are told from scripture testimony, unless otherwise confirmed to them; and it is with the unbeliever we have now to do. Besides, the establishment of this truth, upon other evidence than that of scripture, ought to have a powerful influence, in inducing men to believe the other truths in scripture, that are connected with and founded upon it. I think it therefore, highly proper, to lay before you what

evidence we have of our lost state, from the observation of the world, though the scriptures had been silent. I would likewise recommend to all, what shall be said on this subject, to preserve your faith unshaken, and keep you from blasphemous, unbelieving thoughts, if at any time, you should be tempted to them: since, even unenlightened reason, confirms the foundation of divine truth, and nature, and providence conspire in preaching the doctrine of divine grace.

Now, doth not our experience, as well as the observation of others, shew us, that we are born in sin, and conceived in iniquity? May we not say from our own knowledge, that the imaginations of the heart of man, are only evil from his youth, and that continually? Is there not a proneness, and tendency to evil, universally to be observed in mankind? and a backwardness and aversion to that which is good? Is not this apparent even in children, upon the first dawn of reason in their minds, and the first sight of choice or inclination in their hearts? Surely it must be owned, that in that early period, they are at least *comparatively* innocent—If any among us, is without sin, it must be the youngest; *yet folly is bound in the heart of a child*. How hard is it to guard them from evil, and to inspire them with good dispositions, even by the wisest, and earliest care, in their instruction? And even after the most successful pains, are there not still many remaining blemishes, through the prevalence of corrupt nature, which shew, that the ground-work itself, was faulty? But on the contrary, how easily do men learn, that which is evil? Do they need to be taught? Is it not enough to give them licence? How just is that description in Jeremiah? *They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge*. I am far from denying, that men are improved and forwarded in sin, by instruction and example, as well as in that, which is good: but it is plain, they are far apter scholars, in the first, than in the last; which plainly shews, they are more powerfully disposed to it, by nature. Nay, is it not evident, from the universal experience and testimony of those, who act from a principle of Religion; that it is extremely difficult, with all the care they can take, to resist the propensity of nature, to the contrary? And

that in the best, it often gets the superiority, when they are off their guard? Is not this an evidence of the depravity and corruption of human nature, and its tendency to evil? Are those who hate sin, often overcome by it, and shall those who love it, presume to say, they are free from it?

If any should ask, how I prove that that course of action, to which human nature is inclined is evil, without the assistance of scripture? I answer, from reason; and that many ways—from its pernicious effects on societies, and private persons; from the testimony of the world in general, when others, than themselves, are concerned, and from the testimony of every man's conscience, in his own case. Who is there, that does not often feel in himself, a powerful tendency to what he cannot but in his heart condemn? Is not his conscience God's vicegerent? and doth not natural religion, as well as the religion of Christ, declare him corrupt? So that I may say with the Apostle Paul, not citing the passage as a proof, but as an illustration and description of the character, and state of natural men—*For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law: these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the mean while, accusing or else excusing one another.*

Thus there is as much light remaining with us since the fall, as to shew, that we are out of the way, but not to bring us back to it again.

As a serious consideration of the state of the wicked, may shew us our natural impurity: so it hath been long ago discovered, and confessed by many of the ancient heathens, who never heard of the name of Christ, nor knew of the remedy. These, discerning by nature, the perfectly pure, and holy nature of God, and comparing it with the dispositions prevalent in man, could not reconcile them together; but concluded, that a creature, so corrupt, could not come in that condition out of the hands of its Creator. This difficulty, some of them endeavored to solve, by a state of pre-existence; which bears some resemblance to the true solution, given of it in the holy scripture: viz.

the apostacy of our first parents; which entailed a corrupted nature upon their posterity, in which, the light of nature, and revealed truth, seem almost wholly to coincide.

It is to the same thing that I cannot help attributing the practice, that so universally prevailed over the heathen world, before the coming of Christ, *of offering sacrifices*, to appease the wrath of the deity, supposed to be offended. That the custom of sacrificing, prevailed very generally, perhaps universally among the heathen nations, at the greatest distance from, and having no correspondence with each other, is a certain and unquestionable fact. Neither do I see to what cause we can ascribe it, unless to one of these two; either an ancient tradition, from the beginning of the world, and spread with the inhabitants, through the several parts of it, as they separated and peopled it; or to the common condition of human nature, which dictated the same thing, to persons, in such distant places.

If the first of these suppositions is embraced, which indeed I suppose to be the truth, it appears that sacrifices were appointed by God to man, in his fallen state, for the pardon of sin, and that they had reference, to the great propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, upon the cross.

If we prefer the last supposition, it would seem as if the consciousness of guilt, had uniformly prompted men in all ages and nations, to offer up some atonement for their offences. In both cases, it equally serves, to prove the corruption, and sinfulness of human nature.

Now, as what hath been said, plainly proves the impurity of man, in his natural state: so his misery and liability to punishment, may also be proved; both as a natural consequence of his sinfulness, and even, more plainly, by itself. There is not only a considerable degree of actual misery in the world, but plain presages of more to follow it in the world to come. Need I take up much time, in enumerating the several miseries and calamities incident to human life? Are not oppression and injury from one another, poverty, sickness, pain and death, the plain fruits of sin, and visible tokens of God's displeasure? Man with some marks of superiority and excellence of

nature, is even, by means of his superiority, his knowledge, and foresight of his own sufferings, more miserable, than any other of the creatures, that is equally subject to the stroke of death.

To the whole, I shall only subjoin one consideration more, which is applicable to both parts of the argument—I have often thought, that the *natural terror and fear, with which men are possess of the presence of God, or any remarkable token of his power, is nothing else, but an indication of guilt, or an apprehension of wrath.*

You may see some incidents in scripture, from which it is natural to conclude, that when God makes any visible manifestation of his glory, or sends any of his angels or ministers from heaven to earth; those who are present, are filled with the utmost dread and terror.

Thus in the relation given of God's appearance upon Mount Sinai, it is said; *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.* See another example, in Isaiah—*Then said I, woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.* And in the New Testament, in the apostle John—*And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.*

And is not this always the case, in all ages, that upon any remarkable appearance of an inhabitant of the other world, or even when any such thing is falsely apprehended, the inhabitants of this world are filled with extraordinary terror? What is this do you imagine, but consciousness of guilt, and apprehension of vengeance?

Innocence has no enemy, and it has nothing to fear. We are all in much the same case with Adam, immediately after his first transgression; when he heard God's voice in the garden, *he was afraid, and fled, and hid himself*—We read of no such fear possessing him, while he retained his innocence, but as soon as he had sinned, he began to dread an avenging God.

From all this then, I would conclude, that reason accords with scripture, in saying, that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God:* that man in a natural state, is *wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

AN INDUCEMENT TO COME TO CHRIST,

A

S E R M O N

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

HAVING in a former discourse, proved, and illustrated this truth; that all mankind are by nature, in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God:—I proceed now to the *second thing* proposed, which was to shew you, that being brought to, a lively sense, and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step, to the saving knowledge of God, in Christ.

On this, I shall not need to spend much time, as it is so exceedingly plain, both in itself, and from what hath been already said—It is however necessary to set it clearly before you, in order to lay a foundation, for the improvement of the subject.

If the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified, proceeds upon the supposition of our sinful, and miserable condition by nature; then surely, it can neither be valued, embra-

ced, nor improved; and indeed, I think hardly understood, by those, who know not this their natural state. What Christ hath done, and promises to do in our behalf, is designed as a remedy, for our distressed condition; and therefore, till the distress is known, the remedy will be set at nought. If a physician should offer his care and skill, for the recovery of a man, who esteemed himself in perfect health, would he not deride the proposal, so long as he continued in that opinion? If any man should offer a charitable supply of clothes and food, to one, who imagined himself immensely rich, and gloried in his riches; would he not look upon it, as the grossest insult?

Just so is the gospel treated, by all such as see not their misery. What is the substance of the gospel? ‘To you
 ‘ O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.
 ‘ Behold! I preach to you Christ crucified, a Saviour,
 ‘ suited to your necessities, able to save, to the uttermost,
 ‘ all that come to God through him. He is well fitted to
 ‘ be a mediator, between you, and your offended Maker.
 ‘ He hath offered himself up, a sacrifice to the justice of
 ‘ God, for your sins, by the merit of which, you may be
 ‘ saved from deserved and impending ruin. He offers
 ‘ himself as a guide, to direct your feet in the way of peace
 ‘ —to stand by you in the difficulties and dangers to
 ‘ which you are exposed, and to give you by his com-
 ‘ municated strength, a complete victory over all your
 ‘ enemies.’

What reply doth the unconvinced sinner make, to all this? Why he saith, ‘ I know nothing of this misery you
 ‘ suppose, wherefore then a Saviour? I see no sin, what
 ‘ necessity then, for an atonement? I fear no wrath,
 ‘ therefore will seek for no Intercessor. My eyes are open,
 ‘ therefore I will have no guide. I know of no enemies,
 ‘ and therefore, will not enter into contention with a sha-
 ‘ dow, or flee, when no man pursueth.’

These my brethren, are either directly, or implicitly, the thoughts of men, in a secure, and unconvinced state; and while they are so, they can see no form, nor comeliness in the Saviour, nor any beauty, that they should desire him.

It is otherwise with the broken in spirit. He sees his own vileness, and unworthiness, and therefore cannot lift his eyes to God, but through the atoning blood of Christ. He fears the *avenger of blood*, and therefore flees to the *city of refuge*—The message of the gospel, is to him, indeed glad tidings of great joy, and he counts it a faithful saying, and *worthy of all acceptation*.

The justice of this representation, you may see, from what our Saviour himself says, of the end of his coming. “They that be whole, need not a physician, but they that are sick: But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

See also the terms of his invitation. “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Appetite, and knowledge of necessity, is first required, or supposed, to the bestowing of Gospel blessings—“Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.”

I shall only add, that we find by the instances recorded in scripture, of such as were converted by the preaching of the gospel; that their conversion, took its rise, from conviction of sin—“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?” See also the instance of the jailor—“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: And brought them out, and said sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Repentance unto life, and the return of the sinner to God, proceeds from the same cause, in every age. Who are the persons who believingly apply to Christ for the pardon of their sins, but those who see they are undone without him? Who are the persons in whose eyes he is most precious, and who maintain the most habitual dependance upon him? Are they not those who have been most effectually humbled, and see their own insufficiency for any thing that is good?

From all this I conclude, that none can come to Christ by faith, but those who see themselves to be *wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked*.

Let us now make some improvement, of what hath been said upon this subject, for your instruction and direction.

I. I would improve what has been said on this subject, for discovering the danger of many among us, who have never yet been brought to a just sense of their character, and state. Even the general belief, that such often have in the scriptures, may shew them what they have to fear. I might no doubt first of all observe, how very guilty and miserable those are, who are most notorious for sins, of the grossest and most shameful kind. But my subject leads me more directly to consider, who are in general, *unrenewed*, than to mark the several degrees of guilt in particular sinners. From the text therefore, and the illustration of it, I am authorized to declare to you, and *I beseech you to hear it with application*; that all such as were never brought to a real discovery, and inward sense, of their miserable condition by nature, are still in a state of wrath, and strangers to the power of religion, whatever may be their profession, and whatever may be their present peace. Oh! how easy is it, to lay asleep a natural conscience, and to keep a deceitful corrupt heart, in a state of ease and security? Some formality in outward duty, some moderation in sin, so to speak, the natural decay, and weakness of human passions, or youthful lusts, in a character, formed by human prudence, and regulated by health, credit or gain, is often made to supply the place, of a heart renewed by the spirit and grace of God. But consider, I beseech you, that though some may be ten fold more the children of the devil than others, yet all by nature, are the servants of sin; and “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”—It is not only such as are profane, or unclean; such as riot in brutish sensibility; such as are the plagues of human society; who live in brawls and contention; but all; in whom an essential change, has never been wrought, that are thus *concluded* under condemnation.

It is usual for men to take encouragement, from seeing others worse than themselves; and to consider all the threatenings in scripture, as levelled against the chief and

capital offenders ; but my text is chiefly directed to such, as say they are “ rich, and increased with goods.” Can you say then, my brethren, that you have been brought under genuine convictions of sin ? Have you been obliged to fall down prostrate before God, when sitting upon the throne of his holiness ? Have you found the sentence of death in yourselves, and discovered no remedy but in Christ ? If this has never been your case, you have reason to fear, that you are yet “ in the gall of bitterness, and in “ the bond of iniquity.”

But I must tell you also that this is matter of feeling, more than of profession. It is not enough to speak honorably of Christ, or of his works. Many do so, who never felt their necessity, or seriously and in good earnest, applied to him. It were a happy thing, if all among our hearers, who call for evangelical preaching, who quarrel with us when they think we do not preach the Saviour’s cross—the lost state of man, and the doctrine of free grace, were experimentally acquainted with these truths. Many such, have only been accustomed to hear the Redeemer spoken of with reverence. They may be able to imitate the language of some of his servants, though they know very little of that brokenness of spirit, which accompanies true repentance.

But lest this should be in any measure mistaken, I must make these two observations—the *first* is, that a lively sense and deep conviction of sin, is, properly speaking, but a negative mark of true religion ; giving us to know, that the unhumbléd are yet impenitent. For it is certain, that many have been under very strong convictions, nay, have been driven to the very borders of despair with terror, who yet never were effectually changed, but stifled their convictions, and returned to their former security of heart, and carelessness of life.

Secondly, there may be some on the other hand, who are truly *born of God*, in whom the terrors of conviction have not been very remarkable. This happens most frequently in the case of those, who are called in their infancy, or earlier years, and who have had the advantage of a careful, and pious education. It would be destructive of

the comforts of God's children to lay down *one method*, in which he always proceeds. He is free and sovereign, in the manner of his dealing with sinners; and softens some hearts by kindness, as well as others by correction. So that if the end be brought about, we need be less solicitous about the steps of his procedure. Yet I think humility of spirit, is inseparable from real religion; and if it be less visible, in the anguish of repentance, it will be still manifest in the temper of the penitent.

II. Let me now, for the improvement of this subject, lay down a few of the best and most solid evidences of genuine conviction of sin. And,

1. It is a good sign that conviction is genuine, when there is a clear and deep apprehension of the *evil* of sin, as well as the *danger* of it. When the mind dwells not only on the atrocity of particular crimes, but on the aggravation of all sin, as such: When the sinner is truly offended with himself, for departing from his Maker's service; breaking his holy laws; forgetting or despising his innumerable mercies: there may be, and there is often an apprehension of suffering when there is little sense of the evil of sin: but the conviction is then genuine, when it makes the sinner not only remember what he has done, *but confess what he has deserved.*

2. It is a good evidence, when the sense of the evil of sin abides and grows, even though the fear of wrath may in a great measure have abated.

It is observable, that conviction of sin usually takes its rise from some gross or heinous acts, which first alarm the conscience, and in such a situation the attention of the penitent is fixed on nothing else, but the enormities of his life. If this view continues, and produces its effects, he is soon brought to see, and confess, the inherent vanity of his heart; the worldliness of his affections; and the unprofitableness of his conversation. It is a very common thing for persons who seem to have some sense of the commission of crimes, to have little or no sense at all, of the neglect of duty, and of living daily to themselves. It was a heavy charge, however, brought by the prophet

against Belshazzar : “ And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.” Wherever there is true repentance, though there may be the greatest peace of mind, there will be also a deep and growing sense of the evil of sin, and the obligation of being habitually devoted to God.

3. It is a good evidence, when there is a continued and growing esteem of the necessity, and value of the mediation of Christ. It was to save sinners that he came. A sense of sin is necessary to our receiving him ; and in proportion to its strength, will certainly be our attachment to him. This indeed, is the great, and vital principle of the spiritual life—“ 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 to die for me.”

4. The best and surest mark of real conviction of sin, is, if it leaves you possessed of a deep hatred, and abhorrence of it, and a daily solicitude to fly from it. Some may counterfeit a sense of the evil of sin, to their own hearts ; may have a real fear of its bitter consequences ; and even a presumptuous reliance on Christ for pardon ; and yet may in some instances, adhere to the practice of it.

Floods of tears from such a person, avail nothing : but he hath certainly, truly sorrowed for sin, who in his practice forsakes it ; that is to say, he is not willingly subject to any known sin—but says with Elihu, “ That which I see not, teach thou me : If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.”

III. Let me beseech all serious persons, to improve this subject for the trial of their state. Examine, by the principles above laid down, the reality, and the progress of religion in your souls. Have you a growing sense of the evil of sin, and of your own unworthiness ?—This is at once an evidence, and a mean, of growth in grace. He that thinks least of himself, is highest in God’s account ; and the more a believer increases in holiness and real

worth, the more he increases in humility. As it is an evidence, it is also a mean, of further improvement; for he that hath the deepest sense of his unworthiness and weakness, will certainly live most by faith, in the merit and grace of his Redeemer.

Therefore, Christians, try yourselves by this important sign. Whether do you, by religious duties, build yourselves up on self-righteousness, or do you only learn by them, how far you fall short of what is incumbent on you? What innumerable evils compass you about? and therefore how much you have need of mercy instead of reward? Do you look upon the works of righteousness which you have done, as something, by which you *merit* at the hand of God; or do you look upon them, as the *evidence* of his own work in you, and for you, and give him the glory, to whom it is due?

IV. I shall now conclude the whole, with a few directions for producing and preserving this profitable sense, and conviction of sin. And,

1. Let me beg of every hearer, the serious consideration of himself, and his ways. Many have no sense of their sinfulness, because they have no knowledge of themselves at all; but go through the world, in uninterrupted thoughtlessness, and unconcern. Is there any thing of greater moment than the state of your minds, and your hope towards God? Inattention, is perhaps a more universal cause of impiety, than high handed, and obstinate profanity. Would you but seriously consider your ways, and lay to heart the things that belong to your peace, I would count it a hopeful circumstance; and expect, you would speedily see your danger, and God in his mercy would lead you to the cure.

2. Give yourselves much to reading, and hearing the word of God. The entrance of his word, giveth light.—It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, and correction: but it is particularly necessary for *conviction*; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. What wonder, if those who never open a bible, and seldom enter into the house of God, should be ignorant of their guilt and misery? The word of God shews his right in you, pleads his cause, and

challenges your apostacy. It is exceedingly rare that those who have fairly turned their backs upon God's instituted worship, are disturbed in their security; but are suffered to sleep on, till they sleep the sleep of death. But it frequently happens, that those who attend ordinances, even from no higher principle than curiosity, custom, or form, find that the word of God is *a fire and hammer*, that breaketh the rock in pieces: "that it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts, and intents of the heart."

3. In the last place. Let me beseech you, often to seat yourselves, in the immediate presence of God, or rather, frequently to recollect, that you can no where go from his spirit, or fly from his presence. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God, that discerns, and discloses the works of darkness. We may often excuse, or palliate our conduct to men, and even hide its deformity from our own view, when we could not justify it to ourselves, if we reflected, that "it is open and manifest, in the sight of God."—If therefore there is any thing in your practice, which you are inclined to palliate, and apt to excuse—suppose, you were standing at the judgment seat of Christ, where all of us shall shortly be; and think, whether your excuses will then stand the test of his impartial search."

"If our hearts condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." It is therefore the duty, and interest of every sinner, to take shame and confusion of face to himself, and apply to the "blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things, than the blood of Abel."

TRUST IN GOD.

A

S E R M O N.

I S A I A H I. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

IT is said of every real believer, that he walks by faith and not by sight. If this is true, it will follow, that his faith must be exposed to a variety of trials, while he continues in a world of sense. These trials arise from the state of his own mind—from his outward condition—from the state of the world with which he stands connected, and from the mutual influence of all these, one upon another. From this situation it is easy to see, that there are few duties, for the exercise of which, a good man will have greater or more frequent occasion, than that of trust and reliance upon God. Trust is the duty and the refuge of the needy—of the dependant—of the weak—the timorous, and the distressed. How many are included under one or more of these characters; or rather, who is it that can say he is altogether excluded?

Agreeably to this, we need but open the sacred volume, to perceive how frequent the exhortations are to trust in

God, and how many views are given us of his power, wisdom, mercy and faithfulness, to encourage us to an unshaken reliance. At the same time, I am sorry to say, that there are few duties which are more imperfectly understood by many professing Christians. Even pious persons often sin both on the right hand and on the left, that is to say, both by diffidence and presumption. I have, therefore, laid hold of this opportunity, and made choice of this passage of scripture, in order to open and illustrate a little this important duty of a servant of God. How reasonable it is you will easily perceive, for in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we have set before us Christ Jesus the unspeakable gift of God—the great pledge of his love, and the great foundation of our reliance upon him, not only for his saving mercy in general, but for every necessary blessing in our way to eternal rest.

This passage of scripture is also well suited to the subject. It was spoken to the Jews in a lax and dissolute age, when many had turned their backs upon the service of God—had deserted his ordinances, and despised his servants, which is always an occasion both of affliction and temptation to his own children. This appears from the first words of the chapter. “For thus saith the Lord, where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? and which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.” As also from the 3d and 4th verses. “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. 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.

In discoursing further on this subject, it is proposed, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To open a little the character and state of those who are called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

II. To explain the duty of trust, and point out the foundation of it.

III. To apply the subject for your instruction and comfort.

In the First place then, I am to open a little the character and state of those who are here called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

Their description is as follows: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God." It will help us to enter into the spirit and meaning of the prophet's words, if we keep in view the state of the Jewish church, hinted at a little while ago. "Who is among you;" that is, if there is one or more—if there is a small select number in the midst of general corruption and depravity, who have kept their garments unpolluted, though iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold; "That feareth the Lord?" You know it is common in scripture to describe religion in general by some particular leading branch of it. The fear of God is often made use of for this purpose, as in that passage, there shall be no want to them that *fear him*. It may, therefore, signify those who have a sincere and unfeigned regard to the commandments of God, and have chosen him as their portion and hope. Those who desire and deserve to be distinguished from the profane despiser—the secure formalist, or the disguised hypocrite. Those, in a word, who are, and who desire to appear, to use the strong language of scripture, upon the Lord's side in every struggle, and who resolve with Joshua, that whatever others do, for their part they will serve the Lord.

But I cannot help thinking, we may also, with great safety, explain the words in a closer and stricter sense, and suppose, that by fearing the Lord is to be understood a due reverence for his infinite majesty, a humble veneration for his sacred authority. This is a most excellent fence or guard to the conscience in an evil time, and a noble preservative from the spreading infection and insinuating poison of prevailing or fashionable sins. It is also the usual character of a dissolute age to have cast off fear, to treat the most sacred things with scorn, and to

look upon that holy solicitude to avoid sin, which appears in the carriage and language of a child of God, as a mark of meanness or weakness of mind. In such an age, one who fears God is well described by the prophet Isaiah. "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

The next part of the character is, "and obeyeth the voice of his servant;" that is to say, is willing to hearken to the message of God, by the mouth of his servants. The words of the text, no doubt, may be considered as primarily referring to the inspired prophets, who bore an immediate commission, miraculously attested from God. Many, even of these, were set at nought, their message derided, and their persons insulted, when they attempted to stem the tide of prevailing vice, or boldly denounced the divine vengeance against high-handed sinners. But the sincerely pious obeyed their voice. I shall make no scruple to apply this to ourselves, and the present age. Our blessed Redeemer hath established in his church a standing ministry, and the regular administration of ordinances. And though we have this treasure in earthen vessels, yet in no other way doth he now communicate his will, and vouchsafe his presence to his people, but by the reading and hearing of his word, and attendance upon his instituted worship. It will, no doubt, therefore, be a part of the character of a good man, that he will love the ordinances, and obey the voice of the servants of God, that he will consider him who hath sent them, and receive instruction, not as the word of man, but as it is in deed and in truth the word of God.

On the other hand, when iniquity prevails, when irreligion and profaneness lift up their heads, one of the most usual concomitants, and one of the surest proofs of it is, a neglect of ordinances, and contempt of those who are concerned in their administration: How far this is at present the case, I leave to yourselves to judge. While I speak this, my brethren, I do by no means desire to see an ignorant people distracted by the gloomy terrors of superstition, or led blindfold by the enchanted cord of implicit faith. But sure I am, there is an extreme on either hand, and those

who truly fear the Lord, will honor the persons, and obey the voice of such as plead his cause and speak in his name. You may rest assured, that though they neither deserve nor claim any authority on their own account, yet so long as they stand in the divine councils, and speak the divine word, their message will be attended with this awful sanction, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

The last part of the character here drawn, which lays the foundation for the subsequent direction is, "that walketh in darkness and hath no light." Darkness and light, besides their literal, have often a metaphorical sense in scripture. They are, indeed, used with a good deal of latitude and variety. But I think their metaphorical signification may be reduced to these two general heads.

1. Sometimes light signifies knowledge, and darkness signifies ignorance—as in Eph. v. 8. "Ye are sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light." Acts xxvi. 18. "To turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Job xxxvii. 19. "Teach us what we shall say unto him, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness."

2. Sometimes darkness signifies distress or trouble, and the correspondent signification of light is deliverance and joy, as 2 Sam. xxii. 28, 29. "And the afflicted people thou wilt save, but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down, for thou art my lamp, O Lord, and the Lord will lighten my darkness." Job xix. 8. "He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass; he hath put darkness in my paths." Ps. xcvi. 11. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Esther viii. 16. "And the Jews had light, and gladness, and joy and honor."

None of these senses is to be excluded in the passage before us. Believers may walk in darkness, when ignorant or uncertain as to what nearly concerns them, as well as under distress and trouble. They have also a mutual influence upon, produce, and are produced by one another. For illustrating this a little more particularly, observe,

that a good man may walk in darkness, 1. When he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the divine favor. 2. When he is under the pressure of outward calamity. 3. When the state of the church is such, that he cannot understand or explain, in a satisfying manner, the course of divine providence. These particulars I have it not in view to enlarge much upon, but only to explain them so far as is necessary to lay a foundation for what shall be afterwards offered on the duty to trust in God.

1. Then, a good man may walk in darkness when he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the divine favor. I apprehend that some measure of hope in God's mercy is essential to true piety, and not only the right, but the possession of every child of God. Faith and despair are beyond all question inconsistent. Faith and hope are inseparable. Yet certainly the excellent ones of the earth may be sometimes involved in great perplexity and doubt. This is plain from scripture examples, from daily experience, and from the nature and reason of the thing. How violent a struggle do we often find the Psalmist David in, between hope and fear? "O my God, my soul is cast down in me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." How many do we see every day under a spirit of bondage, who, though they still cleave to God as their portion, yet are often full of fears, and seldom dare confidently affirm their interest in, or relation to him. And indeed how can it be otherwise? While we are here, our sanctification is but imperfect; and alas! with regard to many, it is often hard to determine, whether we should not write upon it, *mene tekcl*, as essentially defective.

Sin separates between God and his people, and causes him to hide his face from them. Nay, sometimes, though there be no particular, or provoking crime as the cause of his controversy with them, he may withdraw from them the light of his countenance, to exercise their vigilance, or to try their patience. I know, my brethren, that the distress of serious souls, when mourning after an absent or an angry God, crying to him in secret, and following hard after him in his ordinances; is by many treated with the

highest degree of contempt. But surely, if peace of mind from a well-founded hope of the divine favor, is the greatest of all present blessings: and if this, from the variability of our own conduct, is sometimes more, sometimes less strong, and sometimes wholly suspended. When this last is the case, it must occasion inexpressible concern, and there can be no greater evidence of irreligion and impiety than to call it in question.

2. A good man may walk in darkness when under the pressure of outward calamity. This, in a real believer, is never wholly separated from the former. Even in itself, indeed, no affliction for the present is joyous but grievous. The disorders of this feeble frame, poverty and straitness of provision, unjust slander and reproach, must be deeply and sensibly felt by every good man, even as he is a man. To this may be added, the loss of relations, and concerns for the sufferings of others of every kind, which is always most distressing to the best and tenderest spirits. But outward calamities by those that fear God, are felt most sensibly when they are considered as the rod of his anger, and bring sin to remembrance.

When he visits his own children with any of his fore judgments; when he follows them with breach upon breach, they are ready to say, "Surely he is setting me up as a mark for his arrows, he is counting me his enemy."—They are often at a loss to understand the cause of his controversy with them; and they also find it often extremely difficult to bring their minds to a patient and submissive resignation to his holy will. To those who know their duty, and desire through divine grace to comply with it, it is no small difficulty to be obliged to struggle with a rising and rebellious heart within, as well as suffering from without, and to be alternately calling in question, the certainty either of the love of God to them, or of their love to him.

3. A good man may sometimes walk in darkness from the aspect of Providence, and the state of the Redeemer's kingdom. The works of God are sought out of them who have pleasure in them. But when they are not able to penetrate the depths of the divine counsels, this be-

comes often a source both of distress and temptation. When wicked men are suffered to prosper at their will—when the good are oppressed by the power and tyranny, or persecuted by the malice of their enemies—when the most generous attempts for the revival of truth and righteousness are rendered abortive—when the professing servants of God are divided into parties, or marshalled under names, and their zeal made to spend itself in unnecessary, sinful and hurtful contentions—when offences come, and those of the highest profession or attainments are suffered to fall into gross crimes, by which the mouths of enemies are opened to blaspheme; then may, and must we adopt the words of the Psalmist—Ps. lxxiii. 10—14. “Therefore, his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them: And they say, how doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

I proceed now to the *second* and chief thing proposed from this passage, which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation.

Trust, in the most general view we can take of it, may be thus explained. It is a reliance or confidence in God, that however discouraging appearances may be for the present time, yet, by his power and wisdom, our desires and expectation shall take place, whether as to deliverance from trouble, or the obtaining of future blessings. When we can attain this happy frame of spirit, it is an inconceivable relief and ease to the mind under suffering, and is excellently expressed by the Psalmist—Ps. lv. 22. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Let us then endeavor to explain the grounds of this as distinctly as possible. And God grant that it may be done not only in a clear, but in a solid and satisfying manner, so as to assist you in the practice of real and vital religion.

I have already said, that our expectation is from the power and wisdom of God. May we, then, reasonably expect, is it our duty to believe, that we shall receive all that we desire, and that is within the reach of divine power and wisdom? These have no bounds at all. We know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. This suggests to us that there is something more necessary, in order to lay a proper foundation for trust, viz. his goodness to make our expectation probable, and his promise to make it certain. Even created beings can often do what they will not. This holds particularly with regard to God, whose power is directed in its exercise by his goodness, and limited by his wisdom. His goodness, in general, encourages us to go to him with a peradventure, or who can tell whether he may not be gracious? But in order to make our trust both distinct and strong, we must go to his promise "for he is faithful and keepeth covenant and truth for ever." Trust then, my brethren, rests ultimately on the promise. It must be precisely commensurate, or of the same extent with the promises. Whoever doubts or calls in question the certainty of what God hath promised, is chargeable with distrust; and whoever expects to receive, in kind or degree, more than he has promised, is so far guilty of presumption. This is the general rule, and I think it carries such evidence with it, that every one must be sensible it is just, who hath heard it with any measure of attention.

But the great difficulty yet remains, which is, to apply this rule to the various cares that occur in the spiritual life, and to tell any particular person what it is his duty firmly to believe, and hope he shall receive from God, and what it would be presumptuous and simple in him to fix his expectation on. This is plainly of the greater importance, that the more particular our trust is, as to the object of desire, it is the more powerful a support to the mind. At the same time it frequently happens, that the more particularly our desires are formed, the foundation of our hope appears the more uncertain and questionable.

On this account you may observe, that it is of the greatest moment to understand the nature and tenor of the promises; or rather, indeed, to explain the foundation of trust, and to explain the nature and tenor of the promises is one and the same thing.

For this end, it may be proper to distinguish the promises of God, as to futurity, into two heads, absolute and conditional. By absolute promises, in this place, I understand only those that are so in the most unlimited sense, that is to say, revealed as a part of the fixed plan of Providence, suspended on no terms but what all, of every character, may expect will certainly come to pass. Such are the promises after the flood, that summer and winter, seed time and harvest should not fail—the coming of Christ in the flesh at the fulness of time, to the ancient Patriarchs, and to us—the downfall of Antichrist—the preservation of a church on earth, let its enemies be or do what they will—the calling of God's ancient people, the Jews, and the coming of Christ to judge the world at the last day. These are all called promises in scripture, and so far as they can be of any use to the people of God, either for direction in duty, or restraint from sin, or consolation under trial, they are to be depended on, in the most absolute manner, for they rest upon the certainty of the holy scriptures, and the truth of the unchangeable God, who “is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.”

T R U S T I N G O D.

A

S E R M O N.

I S A I A H l. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

HAVING, in a former discourse, opened the character and state of those who are called upon, and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord, and entered upon the second thing proposed; which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation; and having in this view considered the nature of absolute promises—I proceed,

2. To consider the nature and use of conditional promises. These I am obliged, for greater distinctness, to divide into three different heads.—1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state.—2. There are promises, the performance of which is suspended on our compliance with something previously required, as the condition of obtaining them.—3. There are promises, not only suspended on both the preceding terms, but upon the supposition of some circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unknown. Let us consider each of these with care and attention.

1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state, which are, therefore, to be applied, and rested on, according as the evidence of our being of this character, or in this state, is clear or obscure. In this I have particularly in view, the blessings of salvation, the pardon of sin, peace with God, the spirit of sanctification, and a right to everlasting life. These all lie in an unbroken chain, and inseparable connexion, and might have been more briefly expressed, by an interest in Christ the Saviour, who is the author, source and sum of these blessings; "for all the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us." Let no judicious attentive hearer be surpris'd or dissatisfied, that I have ranked these among conditional promises, for you may observe that I have expressed myself thus, they are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. In this, they certainly differ from the promises properly absolute, mentioned above. It is far from my intention to do injury to that fundamental truth, that salvation is by grace. I esteem that doctrine which proceeds upon a self-righteous system, to be contrary to the word of God, and most pernicious to the souls of men. There is nothing at all required in scripture to be performed by us, as a purchasing or meriting condition. Every gracious act of the divine government, in our favor, is the fruit of the Redeemer's purchase, and every holy disposition wrought in us, is the effect of his almighty grace. But it is certain at the same time, that in order to our accepting those blessings, we must be truly and deeply humbled, and see ourselves to be incapable and helpless. We must be unfeignedly willing to renounce all claim of merit, and accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; that is, in its full extent, and in the free and sovereign manner of its communication. So far, surely, we must say, the promises of the gospel are conditional, or wholly pervert the word of God. I know of no promises then to the unbelieving and impenitent, unless you call that a promise, that they shall have "their portion in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

Hear it, my dear brethren, it is the needy, thirsty, sensible soul that is invited to come and find rest. "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. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If any shall think fit further to say, that the very destination of the vessels of mercy, is of God's sovereign pleasure, that conviction itself is by a day of his power, and that faith which interests us in Christ's righteousness is his gift: I agree to the whole, but observe that it is improperly introduced here. No use can possibly be made of the divine decree in the application of the promises. It is inverting the order things. Can any man say, I trust in the mercy of God, because I have been ordained to everlasting life? No man can derive comfort from this, till by his effectual calling it is published, and begins to be accomplished; and then he may look back with wonder and gratitude to that everlasting love, by which he was chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Can you judge of the fruit of a tree by looking upon the root? No, but you judge of the strength and deepness of the root, by the fulness of the fruit, and the vigor and verdure of the branches. From an improper mixture of what belongs to the secret will of God, and what belongs to us, as our duty, much error and confusion arises.

Now, my brethren, as to the application of these promises of pardon and peace, the humbled sinner, the man among us who walketh in darkness and hath no light—who is burdened with a sense of guilt, and discouraged by the threatenings of the law, the accusations of conscience, and the pure and holy nature of God; who perhaps has all this aggravated by distress and trouble, is called to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. He is invited to consider and rest on the extent of the call, the immutability of the promise, and the riches of divine grace. If he is so far from pleading any merit in himself, or being dissatisfied with the plan of salvation laid down in the Gospel, that he is making every thing an argument

against himself, and dare not lay hold of, or appropriate so unspeakable a mercy: This is just the effect of distrust, and he is called, in the strongest manner, in the text, to “trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” With how many gracious assurances for this purpose is the scripture filled. John vi. 37. “All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” Heb. vii. 25. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” 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 of the water of life freely.” All things, Christ excepted, are to be renounced to the all sufficiency of a Redeemer, to be the foundation of our hope. The penitent will say with the apostle, Phil. iii. 8. “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, even the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

2. There is a second class of promises, the performance of which is suspended on our previous compliance with something required as the condition of obtaining them. In these we are not only called to accept of the divine mercy, but commanded to obey the divine will. The order in which I have placed these, will, I hope, prevent you from misunderstanding or misapplying what may be said on them. This class includes all the promises in scripture regarding the daily progress of a believer in his sanctification and conformity to God, as well as the increase of his comfort and peace. I am sensible, that as the reconciliation of a sinner to God, and his right to what is called in scripture *the promise* of eternal life, is of free and unmerited mercy, so, no doubt, all the inferior or subordinate promises flow from the same source, nay, in a certain measure, they are entirely upon the same footing with

those formerly mentioned; that is to say, final perseverance, real growth in the spiritual life, and necessary comfort, are the sure and purchased portion of every one that is born of God. Rom. viii. 29. "For whom he did fore-know, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." But in the distribution of those gifts, particularly in their measure, there is not only an unknown regard to the good pleasure of God, but a known and established regard to our conduct in duty. Thus the abundant supply of the spirit is the fruit and return of diligence in prayer. Matt. vii. 7. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." See also Ezekiel xxxvi. 25. compared with the 37th. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you," &c. Thus faith the Lord, yet for all this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Thus also inward consolation, as well as outward security, is expressly promised as the effect and reward of uniformity and diligence in duty. Isa. xxxii. 17. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." As the counterpart and illustration of this, you see, that a departure from the path of duty brings on the threatened, or perhaps I ought to call it the promised, rod of correction. Ps. lxxxix. 30—33. "But if his children shall forsake my law, and not walk in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." In the same manner, Isa. xl. 30, 31. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary—they shall walk and not faint." Agreeably to all this, you know, our blessed Lord prescribed watchfulness and prayer as the great preservatives

against temptation, and whoever expects either spiritual strength or comfort, while he relaxes his diligence in the way of duty, is guilty of that sin, which is called in scripture, tempting God; and shall assuredly meet with a dreadful disappointment.

My brethren, as much of the daily exercise of real believers regards their progress in sanctification, and their peace and comfort, it is proper that you should carefully attend to the tenor of these promises, and to what ought to be your reliance upon them. I shall sum up, in a few particulars, what I apprehend to be of most importance.

1. Trust in these promises implies self-denial, and a deep sense of your own weakness. These promises would be unnecessary and superfluous were we not insufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good. Trust in God stands directly opposed to all self-dependance. Prov. iii. 5. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. How jealous God is, if I may speak so, of the honor that is due to him in this respect, may be seen from the many foul and shameful crimes into which he permitted some of his best saints to fall, when they were off their guard, by sloth, or still more provoked him by pride and presumption. Noah's drunkenness, Moses's passion, David's adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of his master. 1 Cor. x. 11, 12. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition," upon whom the "ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." For this reason the apostle Paul says with great propriety, and with great force, which is equally applicable to himself and other believers, a seeming paradox. 1 Cor. xii. 10. "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2. As we are to put no trust in ourselves, so we are to exercise the most unshaken confidence of our being able to discharge any duty or undergo any trial by the help of the Almighty.—Oh! how ready are we to sin on both hands? How often do we presume upon our own strength and forget the necessity of applying for divine aid?—And on the other hand, how prone are we to timidity or despon-

dence in difficult cases? When corruptions have long kept their ground, we are ready to dread their influence, and to make but little out of the promises in scripture, that we shall be made "more than conquerors through him that loved us." We have learned, by sad experience, that in us dwelleth no good thing, and yet it is long before we will attend to the lesson that follows hard upon it, "My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness."

3. As these promises are expressly made to the diligent, you must still remember that your own attention and application to duty is essentially necessary, and that the assistance promised from on high, is always represented in scripture as an argument and encouragement to diligence, and not a warrant or excuse for sloth. Philip. ii. 12. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is also well worthy of notice, that the same prophet Ezekiel, who says, chap. xxxvi. 26. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," changes the form of his expression; and in another place, chap. xviii. 31, 32. speaks in the following terms; "Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." In consequence of this,

4. In the last place, trust in God will make us ready to acknowledge, that when we fail in duty, when we forget or break our resolutions, the fault is certainly in ourselves. It is impossible to excuse or justify ourselves in any degree, without laying the blame, in the same proportion, upon God, and calling in question his faithfulness and truth. But whatever our treacherous hearts may sinfully suggest, we are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels. We find him pleading his own cause, in this respect, in many passages of scripture. Isa. lix. 1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened,

“ that it cannot save ; neither his ear heavy, that he cannot hear ; but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Upon the whole, trust in these promises is no other than an humble and diligent application to duty, under a deep sense of weakness, and dependance on promised strength, accompanied with a firm persuasion, that “ in the name of the Lord we shall tread down our enemies,” and go on from strength to strength, “ till we appear before God in Zion.”

3. Another class of promises are those that are suspended, not only on the same conditions with the two former, but upon some other circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unseen. These are temporal mercies or rather temporal prosperity, deliverance from present distress, and abundance or affluence of outward enjoyments. Perhaps we may also add spiritual consolation, and sensible joy in God. I find no temporal promise precisely fixed to the servant of God but this: “ Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure ;” and it is certainly his duty, in the most straitening circumstances, to maintain a confident dependance on the power and wisdom of Providence for necessary supply. I do not condemn those, who, when reduced to extremity, have actually pleaded this divine promise, and against hope, have believed in hope ; and I am persuaded, instances have not been wanting of relief, furnished in a manner next to miraculous. But as to every other degree of temporal prosperity, God hath reserved it in his own hand to give or withhold it at his pleasure, that is, as he sees it will be most for his glory, and the benefit of his people. It is lawful then, my brethren, for you to endeavor to procure, by honest industry, the increase of your substance, to look well to the state of your flocks and your herds, and to ask by prayer the blessing of God upon your labors. It is lawful, and it is your duty by regularity and care, to preserve life and health, as well as to ask of the Father of your spirits, recovery from sickness, or deliverance from any other kind of distress. But you are not warranted to believe that these petitions shall be granted in hand, or in

your own time and measure, even though you ask them in sincerity with the prayer of faith. There may be reasons for with-holding them, and yet you may be accepted in your prayers. An infinitely wise God knows best what is for your good, and he only hath a right to determine in what part of his own service; where and how long he shall employ you. Trust in God, therefore, in this respect, implies a careful attention to the tenor of the promises with regard to temporal mercies, and not to look for, or even, if possible, desire what he hath not promised to bestow.

If I am not mistaken, we shall find it of moment, upon this subject, to observe, both what he hath not and what he hath certainly promised. He has no where promised that his own people shall be the richest or the greatest on earth; but he hath certainly promised to bless their provision, and assured them that a little that a just man hath, shall be better than the riches of many wicked. He has not promised that they shall be free from suffering; but he hath certainly promised to support them by his own presence under their distress. 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 truth is, he hath promised that "all things shall work together for their good." In one word, they have indeed all mercies promised, only they themselves are not in a condition, at present, to judge what they may use with safety, and what not. As the heir of an opulent estate, though he is proprietor of all, yet is laid under restraint while in infancy and nonage, because he would soon ruin himself if it were committed to his own management; so the believer, though an heir of God, and joint heir with Christ, yet till he is meet for the inheritance, he must be at his Maker's and Redeemer's disposal. Take in, therefore, only this limitation, and then see his extensive charter. 1 Cor. iii. 21. "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and

“ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” What then is the duty of a child of God? It is to breathe after more and more submiffion to the divine will, and to annex this refervation to every petition of a temporal nature, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And oh! my brethren, how happy the person who hath seen the weakness of human judgment; who waits the intimation of God’s will, before he will suffer his desires to fasten with eagerness on any earthly comfort, and who endeavors to keep himself free from perplexity, by an humble and submiffive reliance on the all-sufficiency of God!

I observed in entering on this part of the subject, that spiritual consolation, or sensible joy in God, is to be considered as a promise of the same class, which must, therefore, be asked with submiffion, and is dispensed according to the good pleasure of a gracious but fovereign God. I am sensible, as has been formerly observed, with another view, that some degree of comfort necessarily follows from a believer’s relation to God, but many pious persons seem to desire and to expect sensible comfort in a higher measure than God sees it meet to give them, or, than is proper for them in the present state. It is with spiritual prosperity as with temporal, every one cannot bear it. Therefore, it is our duty still to be sensible that we have much more comfort and peace than we deserve, and as we desire and strive for greater degrees of it, to accompany these desires with much humility and resignation to the will of God.

I proceed now to the last thing proposed, which was to make a practical application of this subject for your instruction and direction.

1. From what has been said, you may see what judgment you ought to form of inward suggestions, and strong or particular impressions upon your minds. There are some extremely prone to interpret a text of scripture, suddenly suggested to their minds, or any strong impression made on them, as an immediate message from God, to be directly applied to themselves: Others, in opposition to this, as enthusiastical and visionary, seem to give up every expectation of being able to say with the Psalmist,

“ I bless the Lord who hath given me counsel, my reins
“ also instruct me in the night season.” I beg, therefore,
that you may observe, that the suggestion of a passage of
scripture, of itself gives no title to the immediate appli-
cation of it, because the great deceiver may undoubtedly
suggest scripture, as we find he could reason from it in our
Saviour’s temptation. We are, in every such case, to
consider the tenor of it, if it be a promise or encourage-
ment, that is, how and in what manner it may be safely
applied. If any thing happens to be suggested that ex-
pressly suits our present condition, either by setting home
the obligation of duty, with particular evidence upon the
conscience, or pointing out the grounds of comfort, it
ought to be thankfully acknowledged as from the spirit of
God. For example, if a person, under the power of a
spirit of bondage, and fear of divine wrath, hath suggested
to him any of the extensive gracious assurances of mercy
to the chief of sinners, it is his duty to lay hold of it. It
is directly suited to his condition, and would be the very
thing that a wise and judicious pastor would recommend
to him for his relief. He may therefore, without hesita-
tion, bless God for it, if it is brought with power and ef-
ficacy upon his heart. In the same manner, if a person
under trouble hath suggested to him any of the promises of
support under it, surely he ought, in the discharge of his
duty, firmly to rely on the accomplishment of that part of
the word of God. But in the reflex examination of a
person’s character or state, to apply the sudden suggestion
of a promise or privilege, perhaps of a conditional nature,
is certainly both sinful and dangerous. Sinful, because
without warrant ; and dangerous, because leading to de-
lusion.

2. From what hath been said, you may see what it is
that we ought to seek for, with the greatest earnestness,
and may hope to obtain, with the greatest confidence.
Recollect, I beseech you, the order in which I have men-
tioned the promises of God as the objects of trust and re-
liance. First of all the promises of salvation, deliverance
from the guilt of sin, and a right to everlasting life ; next

whatever is necessary to the preservation and improvement of the spiritual life; and then in the third place, proper accommodation, and suitable provision in our passage through the present world. They are here ranked according to their value in themselves, and the value which we should put upon them. Let us, therefore, take care that we never violate this order, which is necessary, not only because of their comparative value, but because of their mutual influence one upon another. It is in vain for us to expect to attain to the habit or practice of holiness, till we are united to God by faith in Jesus Christ. All the promises of the gospel are ratified in him. All the divine fulness is treasured up in him. Every divine gift is dispensed by him. Therefore, he says John xv. 4. "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 me." And the apostle Paul, 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."

In the same manner nothing can be more preposterous, than to fix our affections upon temporal mercies, or our attention upon the promises that relate to them, so as to lose view of our interest in God's favor, and the progress of our sanctification. All the temporal promises in scripture are made to the children of God as such, and for carrying on the purposes of his grace in them.—Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. There is no promise in the whole volume of inspiration to the wicked and impenitent. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." He will either rebuke them in his wrath and chasten them in his hot displeasure, or give them up to a cursed, hardening, stupifying prosperity, than which, no state on earth is more to be dreaded.—Christian! never suffer an anxiety about your outward state to supplant or go before, or even to be separated from a concern, that you may not be found wanting when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. Let me beseech you to adore the wisdom, justice and mercy of God, in the order he hath established, according to the different nature of the promises. That which is of most, nay, properly speaking, of unspeakable value, and radically contains all the rest, is placed first in order, and offered in the most free and gracious manner, without money and without price. Salvation is preached to the chief of sinners, and a Saviour held forth as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. Many uses might be made of this, but the single use I intend to make of it, at present, as connected with the duty of trust, is to silence the complaints of envy and impatience. How prone are many to look with an evil eye upon the more extensive possessions and greater apparent outward comfort which others enjoy? Does it not astonish you to think how much unbelief and ingratitude there is in those repining thoughts? Meanness of rank, and poverty of state, are no hinderance at all to an interest in Christ, and a right to everlasting life. Nay, the gospel is preached to the poor.—Many a Lazarus has been carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich and luxurious have lifted up their eyes in torments. Will you, can you, dare you then complain? Will you envy the man of the world, his stately palace—his elegant furniture, and his sumptuous fare? What is the amplest portion in the present life compared with the sure mercies of David? What child of God would exchange with any wicked man a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne?

I beseech you to add to all this, that, even with regard to present peace or comfort, there is no comparison between a good man and a bad. "A man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses." This is a truth not only often repeated in the sacred oracles, but written in the clearest and most legible characters in the history of Providence.—Nay, even independently of virtue or religion itself, every human calamity, whether arising from sickness, reproach, contention, fear, or ungratified desire, rages with greater violence in the higher, than in the lower stations of life. A vain and conceited monarch once sent to ask at an heathen oracle,

who was the happiest man on earth? and met with a deserved disappointment in the reply. If we should put a question much more profitable as well as much more easily resolved, in what rank of life the most exquisite human misery has been found? I have no doubt but it ought to be answered upon a throne. Experience will always ratify the wise man's observation: *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.* A sanctified lot is an inestimable treasure. The blessing of God on a cruise of oil, and a pot of meal, is better than inexhaustible mines of gold and silver. What cause of contentment and patience to the child of God!

In the last place, you may learn from what has been said on the subject, what is the plainest, the shortest, and indeed the only sure way to deliverance from distress or calamity of whatever kind. It is to fly to the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, to renew the exercises of faith in him, and, in proportion as it pleases God to fill you with all joy and peace in believing; you will perceive every other covenant-blessing flow clear and unmixed from this inexhausted source. It will lead to repentance, humiliation and submission. The sanctified use of the affliction will be obtained, and this brings deliverance of itself; for no rod will be continued longer, than it hath answered its end. At any rate, when suffering is necessary, grace, to suffer with patience, shall not be withheld. Would you have any more, and is not this remedy always at hand? Can the poorest man say it is not within the reach of his purse? It is, at once, effectual and universal. It was once said in contempt of a worthy and pious minister, that he made so much of the blood of Christ, that he would apply it even to a broken bone. But bating what may be thought indecent in the expression, chosen on purpose to bring a good man into ridicule, the thing itself, I make bold to affirm, is a great and a precious truth. Faith in the blood of Christ makes a man superior to all sufferings, It softens their aspect—it abates their severity—nay, it changes their nature. When a man is under distress or calamity of any kind, and considers it only in itself, and independently of his relation to God, it retains its old

nature, and tastes with all the bitterness of the original curse; but when it is considered as limited in its nature—Its measure, and its continuance by a kind Saviour, the believer submits to it with patience, as a part of his Creator's will; bears it with patience in his Redeemer's strength, and sometimes is enabled to embrace it with pleasure, as serving to carry him to his Father's presence. Is this going too far? No, my dear brethren; there are great realities to which the word of God, and the experience of his saints, bear united evidence. Many here present, I doubt not, have been witness of this truth, in the carriage of their relations now with God; and not a few, I trust, will repeat the testimony to succeeding ages. I conclude all with that animated passage of the apostle Paul—2 Cor. iv. 16, 17. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Received of the Honble the Secretary of State
the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds
for the purchase of the office of Secretary of State
for the Colonies and the West Indies

Witness my hand and seal this 15th day of
January 1840

John Lubbock
Secretary of State for the Colonies and the West Indies

John Lubbock
Secretary of State for the Colonies and the West Indies

John Lubbock
Secretary of State for the Colonies and the West Indies

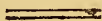
John Lubbock
Secretary of State for the Colonies and the West Indies

John Lubbock
Secretary of State for the Colonies and the West Indies

ON THE PURITY OF THE HEART.

A

S E R M O N.



PROVERBS xxx. 7, 8, 9.

Two things have I required of thee, deny me them not before I die: remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.—

MY BRETHREN,

OUR dependent condition as creatures, and much more our dangerous condition as sinners, exposed to daily temptation, renders prayer a duty of the most absolute necessity. You must all be sensible, how frequent and pressing the exhortations to it are in the holy scriptures. And, indeed, there cannot be a better evidence of a right temper of mind, than an habitual disposition to the exercise of this duty.

But as prayer is a necessary duty, we ought to give the greater attention to the manner in which it is performed. We ought to ask only for such things as are truly safe and useful. We ought also to offer up our prayers with importunity, or reserve, according to the nature and comparative importance of those blessings we desire to obtain.

All our wants are perfectly known to God ; he is also the best judge of what is fit for us, and therefore, our petitions should be well weighed, and expressed in such terms, as, at the same time that they intimate our desires, leave much to himself, as to the measure and manner of satisfying them.

We have an excellent example of this pious and prudent conduct, in the prayer of the prophet Agur, just read in your hearing. All his requests are summed up in two general heads. These he seems to insist upon, as absolutely necessary to ask, with that humble, holy confidence which is founded on the divine promise, that if we ask any thing agreeable to his will, he heareth us. He seems also to ask them, as what would fully satisfy him, and be sufficient for the comfort of the present life, and the happiness of the life to come. "Two things," says he, "have I required of thee, deny me them not before," or, as it ought rather to be translated, "until I die."

These two requests are conceived in the following terms. "Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches." The first, viz. "remove far from me vanity and lies," evidently relates to the temper of his mind, and the state of his soul. The second, viz. "give me neither poverty nor riches," relates to his outward condition or circumstances in the present life. There are two things in the general structure of this comprehensive prayer, that merit your particular attention. First, The order of his request ; beginning with what is of most importance, the temper of his mind, and his hope towards God ; and then adding, as but deserving the second place, what related to his present accommodation.

Secondly, The connection of his requests. The choice he makes as to his temporal condition, is in immediate and direct subserviency to his sanctification. This is plain from the arguments with which he presses, or the reasons which he assigns for his second petition. "Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

My brethren, I am persuaded that this subject can hardly be, at any time, unseasonable to a Christian assembly, as our misplaced, excessive, and unreasonable desires are the greatest enemies to our progress in holiness, as well as to our comfort and peace. Perhaps, however, there are some circumstances that render it peculiarly proper for this auditory. Young persons are very apt to cherish vast and boundless desires as to outward things; and having not yet experienced the deceitfulness of the world, are apt to entertain excessive and extravagant hopes. The truth is, rich and poor, young and old, may here receive a lesson of the utmost moment.

Let me therefore intreat your attention, while I endeavor to open and improve this passage of the holy scriptures; beginning, at this time, with the first request—
 “Remove far from me vanity and lies.”

In discoursing on which, I will endeavor,

I. To explain the import of it, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend.

II. Apply the subject for your instruction and direction.

I. I am to explain the import of the prophet's prayer, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend, in the petition, “Remove far from me vanity and lies.” The word *vanity*, especially when it is joined, as it is frequently in scripture, with *lying*, or *lies*, is of a very large and comprehensive signification. The word in the original, translated *vanity*, properly signifies *lightness* or *emptiness*; and *lies* signify *falsehood*, in opposition to *truth*.

I imagine we shall have a clear conception, both of the meaning and force of this phrase, if we make the following remark: God himself is the great fountain of life and existence; the great I AM, as he emphatically styles himself to Moses; the *original* and the *only reality*, if I may so speak. All other beings have only a dependent and precarious existence; so that the creation itself, though his own work, compared to him, is vanity. “Vanity of va-

“nities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Therefore, in a particular manner, the word is often used to denote the folly of all idolatrous worship; or the giving the respect and honor to any thing else, which is due to God alone. “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain; or can the heavens give showers, art thou not he, O Lord our God?”

Sometimes it is used to denote the *folly or unprofitableness* of any vice, and particularly of an ill-founded conceit of ourselves, as well as of all fraud and dissimulation in word or action. So that this prayer for our souls, shor as it appears to be, when considered in its full extent, will be found to contain a great variety of important matter.— This I shall endeavor to give you a brief account of, under the following particulars.

I. We are hereby taught to pray, that we may be preserved by divine grace, from all false and erroneous principles in religion; so as we may neither be deceived by them ourselves, nor any way instrumental in deceiving others. This, by what has been said of the use of the words in scripture, appears to be implied in the request, and it is of more moment than some are willing to allow. The understanding being the leading faculty, an error *there*, spreads its unhappy influence through the whole temper and life. Whereas, on the contrary, light in the mind, produces fidelity and security in the conscience, and tenderness in the conversation. You may observe, that through the whole history of the old testament, idolatry, or a departure from the knowledge and worship of the true God, is the leading sin, and the fruitful source of every other vicious practice. We sometimes, indeed, seem to stand astonished at the excessive proneness of the ancient Jews to this sin. But we need only a little reflection to discover, that an evil heart of unbelief continues the same at bottom, and daily produces the like dangerous effects. How prone have men been in all ages, to depart from the simplicity of the truth! In how many different shapes have they perverted it!

One age, or one country, has been polluted by one error; and another by an opposite; impelled by the unstable and irregular fancies of men of corrupt minds. In the last age, the great theme of the carnal reasoner was, to attempt to expose the scripture doctrine of God's certain knowledge, and precise ordination of all events; and in this, fate and necessity, have become the strong hold of infidelity, and are embraced, or seem to be embraced, by every enemy of true religion without exception. Error, shifting its ground, indeed, is but natural; for lying vanities are innumerable; but the true God is the same "yesterday, to day, and forever."

At this very time, how abounding and prevalent is infidelity, calling in question the most important and fundamental principles, both of natural and revealed religion! And how properly is this described, by the expression in the text, *vanity and lies*; for it always takes its rise from the pride and vanity of the human heart? Sometimes a pride of understanding, which aspires to pass judgment on things far above its reach, and condemn things long before they are examined and understood: Sometimes, also, from a pride of heart, or self-sufficiency, that is unable to endure the humbling and mortifying view, given us in scripture, of our character and state. Oh how readily do men turn aside from the truth! With what greediness do they drink in the flattering but destructive poison! Need I point out to you the fatal effects of such principles taking place? It loosens the obligations to obedience, takes off the edge of the reproofs of conscience, and thus removing restraints, leaves men, in the emphatical language of the holy scripture, "to walk in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes."

But in this request, "remove far from me vanity and lies," I would not have you confine your views to the most gross infidelity and avowed opposition to God. Pray also, that you may be preserved from error, or mistake of any kind; but especially such as have the greatest influence on the substance of religion.

A clear apprehension of the holy nature, and righteous government of God—the infinite evil of sin—the founda-

tion of our peace in the blood of the atonement—and the renewing of our natures by the Holy Ghost, seem to me absolutely necessary to true and undefiled religion. And they are the truths, which particularly serve to exalt the Creator, and lay the creature in the dust. When, therefore, we consider how grateful to corrupt nature every thing is, that tends to foster pride—to create security, and set the mind at ease, in the indulgence of sin: we must be sensible of how great importance it is, to pray for divine direction, and divine preservation. Nothing is more dangerous to men than confidence and presumption—nothing more useful in faith and practice, than humility and self-denial.

2. This prayer implies, a desire that we may be preserved from setting our affections on such objects, as are but vain and unsatisfying, and will, in the end, disappoint our expectation. I take this to be not only a part, but a very important part of the prophet's meaning. The world is the great source of temptation; the powerful and unhappy influence of which we may daily see; or rather, all of us daily and sensibly feel. What it possesses the fancy, misleads the judgment, inflames the affections, consumes the time, and ruins the soul, but these present enjoyments, of which the wisest of men, after a full trial of them, hath left us their character *vanity of vanities*.

I am sensible that I have now entered upon a subject, which is far from being difficult to enlarge upon, and yet perhaps, very difficult to treat with propriety, or in such a manner; as to have the intended effect. There is nothing more easy than, in a bold declamatory way, to draw pictures of the vanity of human life. It hath been done by thousands, when, after all their broken schemes, and disappointed views, they have just suffered shipwreck upon the coast of the enchanted land of hope. But from such men we may expect to hear the language of despair, rather than of experience; and as it is too late for the instruction of the sufferers, so it very rarely has any effect in warning others to avoid the danger. What I would, therefore, willingly attempt, is, to consider this matter in a sober scriptural light; if so be, that it may please God

to carry conviction to our hearts, and make it truly useful, both to speaker and hearers.

Let me, therefore, my brethren, point out to you, precisely, wherein the vanity of the world lieth. The world; in itself, is the workmanship of God, and every thing that is done in it, is by the ordination, or permission of God: As such, it is good, and may be used in subserviency to his honor, and our own peace. But through the corruption of our nature, the creature becomes the rival and competitor of the Creator for our hearts.—When we place our supreme happiness upon it, instead of making it a mean of leading us to God, then its inherent vanity immediately appears.—When men allow themselves in the indulgence of vicious pleasures, how justly may they be called *vanity and lies*? They are smiling and inviting to appearance, but how dreadful and destructive in their effects? “Whoredom and wine, and new wine taketh away the heart.” Those who refuse to be confined by the laws of piety and sobriety, *vainly* think they are walking at liberty, when they are bringing themselves into subjection to the severest and most inflexible of all masters. Read the just and striking description, by Solomon, of the effects of whoredom; and reflect on the innumerable calamities brought, in every age, on persons and families by unbridled lust. See also the effects of intemperance and excess—“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” And again; “the drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; at last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

Think on the unhappy consequences, of dishonesty and fraud. “Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.”—You may also see, in innumerable passages of scripture, that oppression of others, as it is a sin of the deepest dye, so it is often remarkably overtaken, and punished in the course of Providence, even in the present life. “Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the

“ righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he bleseth the habitation of the just.”

But there is something more in this request, than being preserved from practices directly vicious ; for the setting of our hearts upon worldly things, and making them our chief portion and delight, is certainly seeking after vanity and lies. They are far from affording that happiness and peace, which we demand of them, and expect from them. “ A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked.” Can there be any thing more comfortable to experience, than that strong expression— “ Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.” You may else find in the word of God, many warnings of the folly of those, who travel in the path of ambition, and put their trust in man. “ Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” But the most comprehensive remark of all, upon this subject is, that human life itself is so exceedingly precarious, that it must write ‘ vanity and emptiness’ on every thing, the possession and use of which is confined to the present state. “ Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth.” What a striking picture does our Lord draw of the vanity of human happiness, in that parable of the ground of the rich man, which brought forth plentifully ? “ And he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits ?”—And while this man is sedulously employed in making provision for a long and happy life, “ God said unto him, thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided ?”

The whole of the preceding representation may be summed up in this excellent sentence of the wise man : “ The wicked worketh a deceitful work ; but to him that soweth righteously shall be a sure reward.”

Now, my brethren, need I add, how prone we are to be led astray, in a greater or less degree, by such "vanity and lies?"—I do not insist upon the many victims, which, in every age, have been seen to fall by the destructive hand of vice. How many have been ruined by lust, slain by intemperance, or beggared by dishonesty! But I intreat you particularly to observe, that when we set our affections immoderately upon any earthly object or enjoyment, or when they are not truly sanctified; how much they disappoint our expectation in possession, and what scenes of distress we prepare for ourselves by their removal.

3. This request, "remove far from me vanity and lies," implies, that God would graciously preserve us from deceiving ourselves, and thinking our character better, and our state safer than it really is. When we take a view of the state of the world, and the conduct of those who have not yet cast off all belief of eternity, and a judgment to come, it is impossible to account for their security, but by a great degree of self-deceit. We may say of them with the prophet Isaiah, "He feedeth of ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And from the representation given by our Saviour, it is plain, that many shall continue in their mistake, and only be undeceived at the last day. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." How awful a reflection this! How dreadful a disappointment to discover our misery, only when there is no more hope of escaping it! Is there not a possibility of this being the case with many of you, my brethren; and do you not tremble at the thought? I would not wish any, in general, to give way to a spirit of bondage, or slavish fear; but the best of the children of God have often discovered this holy jealousy of themselves. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me, then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." And again; "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.”

This leads me naturally to add upon this subject, that we ought to pray for preservation from self-deceit, as to particular branches of our character and conduct, as well as our general state.—Many, even upon the whole good men, are occasionally and insensibly brought, for a season, under the direction of sinful passions. They may be indulging themselves without suspicion, in what is, notwithstanding, really provoking to God, injurious or offensive to others, and, in the issue, hurtful to their own peace. They may be making an enjoyment a talent, a relation an idol, when they think they are keeping within the bounds of duty. They may be indulging a sinful resentment, when they think they are promoting the glory of God. Many an excuse for neglecting commanded duty, from prudence or difficulty, satisfies ourselves, which will not stand in the day of trial. What reason for the prophet’s prayer in the sense just now assigned, “ Remove far from me vanity and lies.”

4. In the next place, this request implies, a desire to be preserved from pride and self-conceit, upon any subject. There is not any thing that affords a stronger evidence of our being unacquainted with ourselves, and our own state, than that propensity to pride and vanity, which is so common to us all. It is thought by many, that pride was the sin of the angels, that cast them down to hell. It is plain, that pride was the main ingredient in the first sin of man. And perhaps it is a just, and proper description of all sin as such, that it is a dethroning of God, and setting up self to be loved, honored and served in his room. This sin is by no means confined to the worst of men, in whom it hath an absolute dominion ; but retains and discovers an unhappy influence in the very best.—Every thing may be the fuel of pride : our persons our performances, our relations, our possessions ; nay, so pliable, and at the same time so preposterous is this disposition, that men are found sometimes proud of their very vices and defects. But how ill do pride and vanity suit such poor mortals as we are, who seem born but to die ?—Who af-

ter passing through a longer or shorter series of weaknesses, disappointments and troubles, must, at last, be laid in the silent grave, to moulder in the dust. We are dependant creatures, who have nothing, and can have nothing but what we receive from the unmerited favor of God. We are unwise and ignorant creatures, who know nothing to the bottom, and therefore, are liable to continual mistakes in our conduct. Those among us, who have the greatest comprehension of mind, and know most; as it serves to shew the comparative ignorance of the bulk of mankind, so it serves to convince themselves how little they do know, and how little they can know after all, compared with what is to them unsearchable.

But above all, we are sinful creatures, who have rendered ourselves, by our guilt, the just objects of divine displeasure. Is there any who dares to plead exemption from this character? And do pride and vanity become those, to whom they manifestly belong? Can any thing be more foolish, than indulging such dispositions? There is a very just expression of one of the apocryphal writers: "Pride was not made for man, nor a high look for him that is born of a woman." Indeed they are so evidently unsuitable to our state and circumstances, that one would think, we should need no higher principle than our own reason and observation to keep us free from them. We do, however, need the most earnest and assiduous addresses to the throne of grace, to have all pride and vanity removed from us.—How hateful is pride to God! We are told, "he resisteth the proud." On the contrary, no disposition is more amiable in his sight, than humility. "He giveth grace to the humble." And again: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

It must, therefore, be the duty, and interest of every good man, not only to resist pride and vanity, but to

make it a part of his daily supplication to God, that he may effectually be delivered from both.

5. In the last place: This request implies a desire to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation of every kind. It is one of the glorious attributes of God, that he is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He also requires of all his servants, and is delighted with truth in the inward parts. But there seems to be some difficulty in this part of the subject, more than in the others. Some will say, why pray to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation? This might be an exhortation to the sinner, but cannot be the prayer of the penitent. If they are sincere in their prayer, it seems impossible there can be any danger of fraud. Fraud implies deliberation and design; and though it may be concealed from others upon whom it is exercised, it can never be concealed from the person in whom it dwells, and by whom it is contrived. This is the very language of some reasoners, who infer from it, that though there are many other sins to which a man may be liable without knowing it, yet this can never be the case with dissimulation.

But, my brethren, if we consider how apt men are, upon a sudden temptation of fear or shame, or the prospect of some advantage to themselves, to depart from strict veracity, and even to justify to their own minds, some kinds and degrees of deceptions, we shall see the absolute necessity of making this a part of our prayer to God. Nay, perhaps I may go further and say, that we are as ready to deceive ourselves in this point as in any other.

Upon this important subject, there is one consideration to which I earnestly intreat your attention. Thorough sincerity, simplicity and truth, upon every subject, have, in the world, so much the appearance of weakness; and on the contrary, being able to manage and over-reach others, has so much the appearance of superior wisdom, that men are very liable to temptation from this quarter. It is to be lamented that our language itself, if I may so speak, has received a criminal taint; for in common discourse the expression, *a plain well-meaning man* is always apprehended to imply, together with sincerity, some degree

of weakness; although, indeed, it is a character of all others the most noble. In recommendation of this character let me observe, that in this, as in all the particulars mentioned above, “the wicked worketh a deceitful work; but he that walketh uprightly walketh surely.” Supposing a man to have the prudence and discretion not to speak without necessity; I affirm there is no end which a good man ought to aim at, which may not be more certainly, safely, and speedily obtained by the strictest and most inviolable sincerity, than by any acts of dissimulation whatever.

But after all, what signify any ends of present conveniency, which dissimulation may pretend to answer, compared to the favor of God, which is forfeited by it? Hear what the Psalmist says. “Who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.”—Let us, therefore, add this to the other views of the prophet’s comprehensive prayer—“Remove far from me vanity and lies.”

For the improvement of this part of the subject, observe,
1. You may learn from it how to attain, not only a justness and propriety, but a readiness and fulness in the duty of prayer.

Nothing is a greater hinderance, either to the fervency of our affections, or the force of our expressions in prayer, than when the object of our desires is confused and general. But when we perceive clearly what it is that is needful to us, and how much we do need it, this gives us, indeed, the spirit of supplication. Perhaps it is more necessary to attend to this circumstance, in what we ask for our souls than for our bodies. When we want any thing that relates to present conveniency, it is clearly understood, because it is sensibly felt.—There is no difficulty in crying for deliverance from poverty, sickness, reproach, or any other earthly suffering; nay, the difficulty here is not in exciting our desires, but in moderating them: not in producing fervor, but in promoting submission: But in what relates to our souls, because many or most temptations are agreeable to the flesh, we foresee danger less perfectly, and

even feel it less sensibly; therefore, a close and deliberate attention to our situation and trials, as opened in the preceding discourse, is of the utmost moment, “both to carry us to the throne of grace, and to direct our spirit when we are there.”

2. What hath been said will serve to excite us to habitual watchfulness, and to direct our daily conversation. The same things that are the subjects of prayer, are also the objects of diligence.—Prayer and diligence are joined by our Saviour, and ought never to be separated by his people.—Prayer without watchfulness is not sincere, and watchfulness without prayer will not be successful. The same views of sin and duty—of the strength and frequency of temptation, and the weakness of the tempted lead equally to both. Let me beseech you then, to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Maintain an habitual diffidence of yourselves—Attend to the various dangers to which you are exposed. Watchfulness of itself will save you from many temptations, and will give you an inward warrant, and humble confidence, to ask of God support under, and deliverance from such as it is impossible to avoid.

3. In the last place, since every thing comprehended in the petition in the text, is viewed in the light of falsehood and deceit, suffer me, in the most earnest manner, to recommend to my hearers, and particularly to all the young persons under my care, “an invariable adherence to truth, and the most undisguised simplicity and sincerity in the whole of their conversation and carriage.” I do not know where to begin or end in speaking of the excellency and beauty of sincerity, or the baseness of falsehood. Sincerity is amiable, honorable and profitable. It is the most shining part of a commendable character, and the most winning apology for any miscarriage or unadvised action. There is scarcely any action in itself so bad, as what is implied in the hardened front of him who covers the truth with a lie: Besides, it is always a sign of long practice in wickedness. Any man may be seduced or surprized into a fault, but none but the habitual villain can deny it with steady calmness and obstinacy. In this respect, we unhappily find some who are young offenders, but old finners.

It is not in religion only, but even among worldly men, that lying is counted the utmost pitch of baseness; and to be called a liar *the most insupportable reproach*. No wonder, indeed, for it is the very essence of cowardice to dare to do a thing which you have not courage to avow. The very worst of sinners are sensible of it themselves, for they deeply resent the imputation of it; and, if I do not mistake, have never yet arrived at the absurdity of defending it. There is scarcely any other crime, but some are profligate enough to boast of it; but I do not remember ever to have heard of any who made his boast, *that he was a liar*. To crown all, lying is the most wretched folly. Justly does Solomon say: "A lying tongue is but for a moment." It is easily discovered. Truth is a firm consistent thing, every part of which agrees with, and strongly supports another. But lies are not only repugnant to truth, but repugnant to each other; and commonly the means, like a treacherous thief, of the detection of the whole. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to every one of you, the noble character of sincerity.—Endeavor to establish your credit in this respect so entirely, that every word you speak may be beyond the imputation of deceit; so that enemies may, themselves, be sensible, that though you should abuse them, you will never deceive them.

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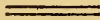
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SEEKING A COMPETENCY IN THE WISDOM OF
PROVIDENCE.

A

S E R M O N.



PROVERBS XXX. 8.

*Give me neither poverty, nor riches ; feed me with food
convenient for me.*

I PROCEED now to consider the second branch of the prophet's prayer, which regards his outward condition, or circumstances, in the present world. On this subject he expresses himself thus : " Give me neither poverty nor " riches."

Do not think, my brethren, that this is a subject of little importance ; or that it is unconnected with the spiritual life. On the contrary, there are few things of more moment, than to have our desires of temporal blessings limited and directed in a proper manner. Not only is worldly mindedness the everlasting ruin of those who are entirely under its dominion ; but even good men are liable to many temptations from the same quarter. They may hurt their own peace, give offence to others, or lessen their usefulness by a sinful excess in their attachment to the world, or by a criminal negligence in not giving a prudent and proper attention to it. Be not surprised that

I have mentioned the last of these as well as the first, for the prophet prays for deliverance from the temptation arising from both extremes. Idleness and sloth are as contrary to true religion, as either avarice or ambition; and the habit when once taken, is perhaps more difficult to remove.

In order to treat this subject with the greater distinctness, I shall first shew you what we may learn in general from this prayer: secondly, explain the particular object of the prophet's desire; and in the last place, make applications of what may be said by recommending it to your choice.

I. In the first place then, we may learn in general from this request, that it is lawful to pray for temporal blessings. It is not unworthy of a Christian, whose conversation is in heaven, to ask of God, what is necessary to his support and preservation in the present life. If I were to mention all the examples of this in scripture, I should transcribe a great part of the Bible. Though inferior in their nature and value to spiritual blessings, they are necessary in their place; and it is upon this footing they are expressly put by our Saviour. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." They are needful to the prolonging of our natural life till we finish our work, and are fitted for our reward. Therefore, though miracles are a kind of suspension of the laws of nature, and the ordinary course of providence; yet we find God sometimes working a miracle to supply the wants of his servants. It had been no more difficult for God to have kept Elijah from hungering, than to have made the eagles fetch him provision; or to have made, as in another case, a barrel of meal, or a cruise of oil, the lasting and sufficient support of a whole family. But he chooses rather to supply the wants of his people, than cause them to cease, that he may keep their dependance constantly in their view, and that a sense of their necessities may oblige them to have continual recourse to him for relief.

Again, we may here learn, that God is the real and proper giver of every temporal, as well as of every spiri-

tual blessing. A sentiment this, of the utmost consequence, to be engraven upon the heart. We have here an instance out of many, in which truths known and confessed by all, have notwithstanding little hold upon the mind. How few are truly sensible of their continual obligations to the God of life? Consider, I beseech you, that whatever you possess of any kind, it is the gift of God. He holdeth your soul in life, and guards you by his providence in your going out and in your coming in. He covereth your table and filleth your cup. Have you riches? It is by the blessing of the God of heaven——“The blessing of the Lord,” saith the Psalmist, “it maketh rich. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.” Have you credit and reputation? It is God that hideth you from the stripes of tongues. “Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue, neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.” Have you friends? It is he that giveth you favor in their fight. Have you talents and parts? It is the *inspiration of the Almighty* that giveth thee understanding.

II. Let us now explain the particular tenor of this petition, and point out the object of the prophet's desire; “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” It is plain we are not to suppose the prophet, in any degree, refusing submission to the will of God, by his thus making choice of a particular state of life—Doubtless he resolved to be at God's disposal, and believed that he was able to sanctify to him a state of the highest prosperity, or of the deepest adversity. It was no distrust on God, but self-denial and diffidence of his own strength that suggested this prayer. Therefore, in adjusting his desires and expectations, he pitches upon that state that appeared to him liable to the fewest snares. Thus our blessed Saviour, though it is his will that we should fear no enemy when going out in divine strength, yet teaches us to pray——“Lead us not into temptation.”

Poverty and riches are here mentioned as the two extremes; in neither of which we should wish to be placed, but in a safer middle between the two; so as, if it please

God, we may neither be urged by pressing necessity nor over-loaded with such abundance as we may be in danger of abusing.

But perhaps some will say, where is the middle? How shall we be able to determine what we ought to desire, since there is so immense a distance, and so many intermediate degrees between the extremity of want, and the countless treasures of the wealthy?

But, my brethren, if we do not hearken to the illusive calls of ambition, avarice and lust, it is by no means difficult to apprehend the meaning of the prophet, and apply it to persons of every rank. Regard, no doubt, is to be had to the various stations in which God hath thought fit to place us. This difference of station requires supplies of the conveniencies of life, suited to the part we are bound to act. That manner of life which would be decent and liberal in one station, would be reckoned mean and fordid in another. Therefore, what would be plenty and fulness to persons in inferior stations, would be extreme poverty to persons placed, and called to act, in higher and more exalted spheres. But after we have taken in the consideration of every difference that may happen on this score, there is something in the prayer that belongs in common to *persons of all stations*, namely, that we should be modest in our desires after temporal good things, and take care not to ask only to gratify a sensual inclination, but for what is really necessary or useful to us. The last is reasonable and allowable, the other is unreasonable and justly condemned by the apostle James. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

But the first part of this request is explained by the last, contained in the words, "feed me with food convenient for me." That we may be able to enter into the true spirit of this petition, I shall just compare it with some other scriptural forms of prayer on the same subject, and then endeavor to point out what I take to be the chief instruction intended to be conveyed to us by it.

As to the scripture forms of prayer for temporal provision, the precedence is undoubtedly due to that excellent

form left us by our Saviour, in which we find this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." You may next attend to the prayer put up by Jacob in ancient times. "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, if God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." It is more than probable that the apostle Paul alludes to Jacob's expression, in his excellent advice to all Christians. "But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition—for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

It is obvious to remark, that all these prayers and this apostolic counsel run in the same strain. They all begin and are founded upon a regard to God, and a mind rightly disposed towards him: "If the Lord," says Jacob, "will be with me"—"Remove," says Agur in my text, "far from me vanity and lies." Our Saviour begins his prayer with petitions for the glory of God, with which the happiness of our souls is inseparably connected; and the apostle maintains *godliness* as the great source of contentment with our portion in this life.

We may further observe, that there is the same method observed in all these prayers. The expressions vary a little, but the request is the same. Jacob wishes for the divine protection, with food to eat, and raiment to put on. Agur for food convenient for him; and in the Lord's prayer we ask for our daily bread. There is no specifying of any particulars—no mention made of this or the other quantity of provision. Their desires are summed up in this general request, and the quantity and quality wholly referred to the good pleasure of God. It is certain that God hath sometimes granted to his own people, riches

in great abundance; and, at the same time, has given his blessing to enjoy them, and honored the possessors, by enabling them to glorify him in the use and application of them. But the direct desire of riches, I do not think, hath any warrant from precept or example in his word. And when they are bestowed as a blessing, and not a curse, it is commonly on those who, by their superior concern about the better part, shew that they will put them to their proper use, as in the case of Solomon, recorded in the first book of Kings. “ In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ask what I shall give thee. And he said, give thy servant an understanding heart. And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said, because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding, to discern judgment: Behold I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wife and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor.”

Now this I take to be the main instruction intended to be given us with respect to our prayers for temporal mercies; that we should not pretend to set bounds to God, but leave the measure of them to his determination.

For further explaining this truth; and, at the same time recommending it to your regard, be pleased to attend to the following observations.

1. Consider that God, infinitely wise, as well as gracious, is certainly the best judge of what is most fit and convenient for us. We know so little of ourselves, that we really know not how we should behave, if placed in particular circumstances, until we are tried. The world has actually seen many examples of those, who were loud in their accusations of others, behaving worse when placed in the same stations. And, indeed, I should naturally expect, that an impatient, envious, disobedient

subject would, if raised to power, be a cruel, insolent, unjust oppressor; that a petulant, peevish obstinate servant would make a capricious, severe, unreasonable master.

If we were to carve out our own lot, and to have all our own desires gratified, there is great reason to presume, we would throw ourselves into the most disagreeable circumstances with regard to our souls, and probably consult but ill for our peace and comfort in this world.

Let me put a few questions to every one that secretly murmurs at his state. Are you sure, that if you were advanced to a place of power and trust, you would be able to carry with prudence, resolution and integrity? Are you sure, that if you were supplied with riches in great abundance, you would not allow yourselves to wander in pleasure, or to swell in pride? Are you sure, that if you were raised to high rank, surrounded by flatterers, and worshipped by servants, you would, in that standing, behave with humility and condescension; or that pressed on all hands by business, company, or amusements, you would still religiously save your time for converse with God?

A life of piety in an exalted station is a continual conflict with the strongest opposition. What says experience upon this subject? Solomon did not wholly, and to the end, resist the temptation of riches and dominion. In the whole compass of history, sacred and profane, I do not remember any example of a man's behaving better in point of morals, in a prosperous, than an afflicted state, excepting one that hath this appearance, viz. Cicero, the Roman orator. His conduct in prosperity was full of dignity, and seemed wholly directed to the public good; whereas in adversity, it was to the last degree mean and abject—But probably the reason of this was, that pride, or rather vanity, was his ruling passion, and the great motive to his illustrious actions; and when he fell into adversity, this disposition had no scope for its exercise.

Christians, the Lord knoweth our frame, and is well acquainted with what we are able to bear, and consequently what state of life will be upon the whole most convenient for us. It is, therefore, our interest, as well as duty, to refer ourselves entirely to him, and leave him to choose

for us. This is not only the doctrine of scripture, but so agreeable to reason and good sense, that it has been acknowledged by several of the Heathen Philosophers, who have expressed themselves in terms perfectly similar to those of the inspired writings. The prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades, is very remarkable; that he should beseech the Supreme God to give him what was good for him, though he should not ask it; and to withhold from him whatever would be hurtful, though he should be so foolish as to pray for it.

2. As God is certainly the best judge of what is good for us, so resignation to him is a most acceptable expression both of our worship and obedience. Single duties are particular acts; resignation is the very *habit* of obedience. The wisdom and goodness of God are acknowledged in the most authentic manner, when his holy and sovereign Providence is humbly submitted to, and cordially approved. Every impatient complaint is an impeachment of Providence; every irregular desire is an act of rebellion against God. Therefore a submissive temper must be highly pleasing to God, and is the way to glorify him in the most unexceptionable manner. The rather indeed, as it is impossible to attain this temper, but by sincerely laying hold of the covenant of peace, which is ordered in all things and sure. This teaches us the grounds of submission. This procures for us the grace of submission. This stains the pride of all human glory. This changes the nature of our possessions to us, and us to them. This spiritualizes a worldly mind, and makes us know, in our own experience, that all the paths of the Lord to his own people, are mercy and peace.

3. Such a temper of mind will greatly contribute to our own inward peace. It will be an effectual preservative from all unrighteous courses, and unlawful, or even dishonorable means of increasing our worldly substance, and consequently save us from the troubles or dangers to which men expose themselves by such practices. It will preserve us from perplexing anxiety, and many uneasy fears for futurity. It will bring us the near and sure way to the greatest of all earthly blessings—a contented mind.

Such will be the sweet and delightful effects of depending upon God, and leaving it to him to furnish our supplies as he sees most convenient for us. Whoever can pray with the prophet—“give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me”—may be fully assured, that his desire shall be gratified, as it is perfectly agreeable to the will of God.

I conclude with reading to you our Saviour's exhortation on this subject—“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 not ye much better than they? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY.

A

S E R M O N.

 PROVERBS XXX. 9.

*Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?
Or, lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my
God in vain.*

I PROCEED now to consider the arguments by which the prophet enforces his wise and well conceived prayer. These, in connexion with the two branches of the prayer, stand thus: "Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? And give me not poverty, lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." If Agur's prayer is conceived in the most modest and humble terms, the reasons, with which he supports it, are every way becoming a truly wise and good man. You see in them a prevailing concern for the honor and glory of God, and his own preservation in the paths of piety and virtue. You see in them a humble sense of his own weakness, and the danger of temptation; he, therefore, desires to be placed in such a state of life, as will expose him to the fewest trials. An excellent disposition this, and highly worthy of our imitation. How happy would it be for us all, if a desire to please God and preserve our integrity, lay always nearest

our hearts, and had a constant and commanding influence on every step we took in our journey through life.

Neither riches nor poverty are bad in themselves. Neither of them is any recommendation, or hinderance to the favor of God, who is no respecter of persons—there are good and bad in all ranks. Men may be rich and yet pious, or poor, yet strictly just and honest. It is, I confess, often done, yet it is highly criminal to look upon all that are rich in this world as profane; and it would be equally so to look upon all that are poor as destitute of integrity. Yet it is undeniable, that, from the corruption of the human heart, these two extremes do often become strong temptations to the particular sins mentioned in the text; which we shall now consider separately, in the order in which they lie in the passage before us.

“Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?”

As to the fact, that riches do often lead to profanity and contempt of God, experience, and the state of the world prove it in a manner too plain to be denied. We not only see that those, who are born and educated from their infancy in the higher ranks of life, are most prone to neglect the duties of religion; but those who, from a low or mean condition, are remarkably raised in the course of Providence, do often change their temper with their state, and show the unhappy influence of riches in leading them to a forgetfulness of God. Are there not some, who were regularly in God’s house when they but barely subsisted, who have not time for it now, when they are busy and wealthy? Are there not some families, where the worship of God was constant and regular in early life, while they were undistinguished, and now it is no more to be heard in their sumptuous palaces and elegant apartments? Shall I say, that any worm of the earth is become too considerable to fall down before the omnipotent Jehovah?

I may add, as being of great importance in the present subject, that such changes do often take place gradually and insensibly, very much contrary to men’s own expectation; so that we really do not know ourselves, nor can we determine before trial, how far we would resist or

yield to the force of temptation. The prophet Elisha foretold to Hazael, the cruelties he would be guilty of when raised to an higher station ; to which he replied with disdain and abhorrence ; “ What, is thy servant a dog, “ that he should do this great thing ? And Elisha answered, “ the Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over “ Syria.” The conduct of the children of Israel in their prosperity, is but an emblem of the general conduct of the children of men. “ But Jeshurun waxed fat, and “ kicked. Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, “ thou art covered with fatness : Then he forsook God “ which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his “ salvation.”

What hath been said might be sufficient to shew the propriety of the prophet's prayer ; for if such hath been often, or generally, the influence of worldly greatness upon other men, why should any be so confident as to presume it would be otherwise with themselves ? But perhaps it may afford matter of useful instruction, to inquire a little further into the subject—to trace the causes of this effect, and shew how, and why riches become an inducement to irreligion and profaneness, for this will best enable us to apply the remedy. When I speak of examining the causes of this effect, I confess that no reason can be given for it, but what reflects great dishonor upon human nature in its present state. Were we to judge of the matter by the dictates of sound reason, we should naturally expect to find it directly contrary. God is the author of every blessing which men possess, and his gifts should lead us to gratitude and acknowledgment. It seems natural then to suppose, that those who are most highly favored in the course of Providence, should discover the greatest sense of obligation, and be ready to make every dutiful return. One would think that though the poor should be impatient, surely the rich will be content and thankful. Is not this reasonable ? Had any of you bestowed many favors upon others, would you not expect that their gratitude should bear some proportion to the number and value of benefits received ? Had any of them been remarkably distinguished from the rest, would you not expect from

them the most inviolable fidelity and attachment? Strange, that our conduct should be so directly opposite in the returns we make for the goodness of our Maker! That those who are distinguished from others by the largest possessions, and the greatest fulness of all temporal mercies, should be the most prone to wickedness of all sorts; but especially, that they should be peculiarly inclined to forgetfulness and contempt of God. Yet so it is in truth. But however dishonorable it is to human nature, let us search into it a little, and perhaps we may discover the cause of impiety in persons in affluent circumstances, and the danger the prophet would avoid, by attending to the following observations:

1. An easy and affluent fortune affords the means, not only of pampering our bodies, but of gratifying all our lusts and appetites. They are as strong probably in persons of inferior stations, but Providence has rendered the gratification more difficult, and in some cases impossible. Many work through necessity, who would be as idle and slothful as any, but for the fear of want. These will be the first and readiest to reproach the rich, and call them idle drones, who revel in that abundance for which they never toiled; and to put to their own credit that, which is wholly owing to the restraints under which they are laid. Many are generally sober, because they cannot afford the charges of intemperance, who want nothing but the means, to riot in the most brutal sensuality. But to persons of great wealth, the objects of desire are always placed in full view, and are evidently within their reach: so that the temptation has uncommon force, and few are able entirely to resist it.

2. The indulgence of pleasure insensibly induces a habit, and leads men to place their happiness in such enjoyments. Habit you know is very powerful, and while the habit acquires strength, the power of resistance is gradually weakened. These gratifications consume so much time, that there is little left to reflect upon God, and our relation to him. I reckon it none of the least temptations to persons of high rank, that not only their self-indulgence, but the attendance and obsequiousness of others, so en-

grosses their attention, and wastes their time, that they have few opportunities of calm and sober reflection ; or at least, can easily escape from it, and take refuge in company and amusement. Add to this, that a great variety of sensible objects and enjoyments render the mind, not only less attentive to things of a spiritual nature, but indeed, less able to understand them.

3. Observe further, that when the better part is thus neglected, and no care taken of the cultivation of the mind, every vice will spring and shoot up in the soul, as briars and thorns do upon uncultivated ground. Sin, my brethren, is natural to us ; it is the produce of the soil ; if it is not destroyed, it will not die ; if it is but neglected, it will thrive. Now when ever persons fall under the power of vice, they begin first to excuse, and then to vindicate it. Those who are under the government of lust, soon find it would be their interest that there was no such thing as religion and virtue. Whatever we wish, we are easily led to believe to be true. Loose and atheistical principles then find a ready admittance, and are swallowed down greedily. This is a short sketch of the steps by which people in affluent and easy circumstances, are often led to deny God, and to say : “ What is the Almighty that we should serve him, “ and what profit should we have if we pray unto him ? ” — Loose principles are, at first, more frequently the effect, than the cause of loose practices ; but when once they have taken deep root, and obtained full dominion in the heart, they have a dreadful and fatal influence on the devoted victim.

But, my brethren, I find a strong inclination to make another remark, though perhaps it may be thought of too refined and abstract a nature. It is, that the danger of affluence in leading to contempt of God, arises from the nature of all sin as such. The original and first sin of man, was plainly affecting independence. They desired and expected to be as gods, knowing good and evil. And still sin properly consists in withdrawing our allegiance from, and throwing off our dependance upon God, and giving, as it were, that esteem, love and service to ourselves, in one shape or another, that is due only to him.

Now observe, that affluence nourishes this mistake, and suffering kills it. The more every thing abounds with us, the more our will is submitted to, and our inclinations gratified on every subject; the more we look upon ourselves as independent, and forget our obligations to God. Whereas, on the other hand, disappointments and calamities open our blind eyes, and make us remember what we are. Was not the proud monarch of Babylon inspired with this delusive sense of independence, when he expressed himself thus: "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake and said, is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" But mark the more powerful word of the King of kings. "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee!" That this is the proper source of worldly greatness, may be seen in the temper, such persons usually acquire and settle in, which is pride, insolence and contempt of others. Nay, it appears still more clearly in some few instances, in which the intoxication comes to its height, and the poor deluded mortal literally aspired to be considered and treated as God. It may seem incredible, but we have the most authentic evidence that history can afford, that some men have demanded and received divine worship. This was the case, not only with Alexander the Great, who was really an illustrious prince, but with some of the later Roman emperors, who were the meanest and basest of all men. No wonder then, that prosperity makes men neglect God, when it prompts them to sit down upon his throne, and rob him of the service of his other subjects.

Before I proceed to the other part of the prophet's argument, suffer me to make a few remarks, for the improvement of what has been already said, And,

1. See hence the great malignity and deceitfulness of sin. It hardly appears more strongly from any circumstance, than that which has been the subject of this discourse, viz. that the gifts of God, in the course of his Pro-

vidence, are so far from exciting our gratitude, in proportion to their number and value, that on the contrary, those who *receive most* are usually *most profane*. They make his favors, instruments of rebellion against him, and return contempt for his indulgence, and hatred for his love.

Let us not take occasion from this to gratify our own envy, by particular or personal reproach against those who are great, or have become rich amongst themselves; but let us act a far wiser and juster part, and be humbled for the sinfulness of our nature, and warned of the deceitfulness of sin. We may feel the seeds of this disposition in us all. You find the wise man charging a similar ingratitude upon man in general. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." And do you not observe every day, nay, has it not turned into a proverb, that we think light of our mercies, spiritual and temporal, when they are common and abundant? And what is the true and proper interpretation of this, but that the greater God's goodness is to us, commonly the less is our gratitude to him?

2. Let me beseech you to make a wise improvement of the advantages you enjoy over one another. Let them excite in you a holy emulation to testify your sense of superior blessings, by superior piety and usefulness. Do you excel others in any respect? Are you successful in trade? Have you risen to reputation? Are you exalted to offices of dignity? Are you endowed with capacity of mind? Can you remember the time when those were your equals who are now your inferiors? Do not look with insolence upon others, making odious, and perhaps unjust comparisons. Do not swell in pride and self-complacence, as if by your own power you had made yourselves to differ, but rather look the other way to God, who is the maker both of rich and poor, and pray that your thankfulness and duty to him may exceed that of the poor man, as much as his liberality to you exceeds what he has thought proper to bestow upon him. This affords me an opportunity of relating a little piece of private history, that happened in Great

Britain, and appears to me very worthy of remembrance, and very conducive to the ends of edification.

A gentleman of very considerable fortune, but a stranger to either personal or family religion, one evening took a solitary walk through a part of his own grounds. He happened to come near to a mean hut, where a poor man with a numerous family lived, who earned their bread by daily labor. He heard a voice pretty loud and continued. Not knowing what it was, curiosity prompted him to listen. The man, who was piously disposed, happened to be at prayer with his family. So soon as he could distinguish the words, he heard him giving thanks with great affection to God, for the goodness of his providence, in giving them food to eat, and raiment to put on, and in supplying them with what was necessary and comfortable in the present life. He was immediately, no doubt, by divine power, struck with astonishment and confusion, and said to himself, does this poor man, who has nothing but the meanest fare, and that purchased by severe labor, give thanks to God for his goodness to himself and family, and I, who enjoy ease and honor, and every thing that is grateful and desirable, have hardly ever bent my knee, or made any acknowledgment to my Maker and preserver. It pleased God that this providential occurrence proved the mean of bringing him to a real and lasting sense of God and religion.

Let all persons in health, quiet and plentiful circumstances, learn from the preceding discourse, what it is they ought clearly to guard against.—Pride, security, forgetfulness of God, are peculiarly incident to that state. “Lo “ this,” saith the Lord to Jerusalem, “ was the iniquity of “ thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance “ of idleness was in her, and in her daughters, neither “ did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.” A serious reflection on the obligation such lie under to God for what they have received in their continued dependance upon him, and the instability of all earthly things, would save them from the hurtful influence of worldly prosperity. To enforce this, I shall only read the apostolic charge to Timothy. “ Charge them that are rich in this world, that

“ they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches,
“ but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly
“ to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good
“ works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ;
“ laying up in store for themselves a good foundation
“ against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eter-
“ nal life.”

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THE DANGER OF ADVERSITY.

A

S E R M O N.

 PROVERBS XXX. 9.

*Lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God
in vain.*

I PROCEED now to consider the argument by which the prophet urges the second branch of his request, which, in connexion, runs thus—"Give me not poverty, lest I be poor and steal." Having not only explained the general principle that runs through the whole of this subject, but also very particularly pointed out the dangers attending an opulent and wealthy state; I shall endeavor to do the same thing with respect to a state of poverty and straitness. While I attempt this, I am sincerely sorry that there is so much propriety in the subject; and that it is so well suited to the circumstances of the inhabitants of this place. You see the prophet considers the great and general temptation to which the poor are exposed, to be dishonest, by using fraudulent means of relieving their wants, or bettering their condition. You see also, he considers this temptation in its progress, not only inclining them to act unjustly, but sometimes proceeding to the terrible degree of concealing or supporting the fraud by false-

hood, and perhaps at last by perjury or false swearing; “lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God “in vain.”

Let us first consider a little the matter of fact, as it appears in experience, and then a few of its principal causes.

As to the first of these, shall I be afraid to affirm, that extreme poverty often inclines persons to dishonesty and fraud? Will it be thought harsh and severe to those already sufficiently depressed? As I would not seem to stand in this place, and flatter the pride of the greatest and most eminent of my fellow-sinners, so neither will I dissemble the truth from a false compassion for the poor. This would indeed be doing them the greatest possible injury; it would be treating them, from mistaken tenderness, as the rich are often treated from the fear or partiality of those who are about them; fostering their self-deceit, and not suffering them to hear the most salutary truths, because they are not pleasing to the flesh.

It is undoubtedly matter of experience, that great poverty makes many take unjust and unwarrantable methods of procuring relief. Not only so, but they seem often disposed to justify and defend them, as if they had a title to rectify the mistakes of Providence, in the distribution of worldly possessions. This, in the event, receives great encouragement from some who seem to have imbibed a general false principle, and act upon it, both in their own conduct, and in their judgment of others. In the division of controversy, or dividing disputed property, when one party is, or is supposed to be rich, and in easy circumstances, and the other poor, and in a mean condition they think that instead of acting according to strict justice the advantage should always be made to fall to the poorer side. This conduct is considered by some, not only as lawful, but as laudable. It is however a false principle and is condemned in scripture, which says, “Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.” I may be thought, perhaps, that the other is the more common and dangerous partiality, and probably it is so; yet this also is blame-worthy, and when followed out, as I am

afraid it too often is, must involve numbers unawares in the guilt of stealing; for when they have once laid down this rule, that the poor have some claim upon the rich, they are ready to apply it to their own case, and extend it very far. But in all matters of property, or right and wrong, whether a person is rich or poor, ought to be utterly out of the question; the only thing to be considered is, what is just and lawful. The rich are indeed, in point of conscience, bound to assist the poor; but this must be their own act; no person can take the smallest part of their property, without their consent, but he is guilty of an act of injustice, and violation of the law of God. No person has a right to make them generous and charitable against their wills, or to exercise their own generosity and charity at their expence. This must be left to the Supreme Judge at the last day, who will say to them, "I was a stranger
" and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not,
" sick and in prison and ye visited me not." But what will give us the most distinct view of the influence of poverty, as a temptation, is the too frequent conduct of those who are reduced from what was once their state, to poverty or debt, by misfortunes or extravagance, or mismanagement of their affairs. The temptation of poverty is not by far so great to those in the meanest ranks of life, whose income, though small, is not very disproportionate to what hath always been their condition; as to those who are reduced from a higher to a lower state—The few, who in such a situation preserve their integrity inviolated, and their sincerity of speech unsuspected, deserve the highest honor. Nay, I am persuaded that, bad as the world is, every person in reduced circumstances, would meet with compassion and assistance, if all about him were sensible that he had neither lost his substance by neglect, nor wasted it by riot, nor concealed it by fraud. But though we cannot help ascribing some measure of what is laid to the charge of persons in this unhappy state, to the rage and resentment of those who have suffered by them; yet alas, there is too great reason to affirm, that they are too often guilty of prevarication and fraud: as is mentioned in the text.

I will dwell no longer upon the fact, but will consider a little the reasons of it, which will directly serve to promote the design of this discourse, by exciting men to concern and solicitude, as well as pointing out the proper means of avoiding the temptation. The general reason of this, to be sure, is obvious to every body, that persons in poverty, being strongly solicited by the appetites common to all men, and not having their own wherewith to gratify their desires, are tempted to lay hold of the property of others. They grudge to see that others have the enjoyments from which they are debarred; and since they cannot have them in a lawful, make bold to seize them in an unlawful way. But this I do not insist on, that I may mention one or two particular reasons, which will suggest suitable exhortations to duty.

1. The first I shall mention, is ignorance. This is peculiarly applicable to those in the lowest ranks of life. Through poverty they are not so well instructed as they ought to be, in the principles of religion, and the great rules of duty. An ignorant state is almost always a state of security.—Their consciences are less tender, and they are less sensible of the great evil of prevarication and fraud. I am obliged, in fidelity, to say, that in the private inspection of my charge, though I have found some instances both of poverty and sickness borne with the most pious resignation, there are also some whose condition might move the hardest heart, living in the most sordid poverty, grossly ignorant, and, at the same time, so dispirited, so slothful, or so proud, that they will do little to obtain knowledge for themselves, or communicate it to their children. Many will not attend upon the public means of instruction, because they cannot appear in such a decent garb as they could wish; and for the same reason they keep their children from them, till they contract such habits of idleness and vice, that they come out into the world without principle, obstinate and intractable. Is not the duty here very plain? All such should exert themselves to obtain the knowledge of the things which belong to their peace. They should neither be unwilling nor ashamed to make application for supply; and even the coarsest raiment should not hinder them from

appearing in the house of God. Thus they will find acceptance with him, if they worship him in the beauty of holiness, preferable to those who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and their hearts are after their covetousness.

2. Another great reason why poverty becomes a temptation to fraud is, that they are introduced to it insensibly, and led on by degrees. The sin steals upon them by little and little. People involved in their circumstances, to get rid of importunity and sollicitation, make promises, more of what they hope or wish, than of what they are able to do. Necessity serves as an excuse for their failing to their own minds, and thus they are gradually brought into a breach of sincerity, and proceed from lower to higher degrees of falsehood. Little arts of evasion are first made use of, and doubtful practices are entered upon. One sin seems necessary to strengthen or conceal another, till at last the grossest fraud, and sometimes perjury itself, closes the unhappy scene. I have read an excellent observation, that there is hardly such a thing as a single sin; they are always to be found in clusters. I am sure, this holds in a particular manner as to sins of injustice. They are so interwoven and connected together, that you cannot receive any one without being obliged to admit the rest. This is one great branch of the deceitfulness of sin in general; with a view to which the apostle says; "But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

3. I only mention one other reason of poverty being a temptation to fraud, viz. that in time it destroys the sense of shame. I am not ignorant, that a sense of shame, which is nothing else but a fear of the censure of others, neither is, nor ought to be the main principle of a good man's actions. But as there is no other principle at all in many, so it is a good assistant, and corroborative when justly directed; But now, through the corrupt maxims of the world, poverty is so much the object of contempt, and those who are in this state, meet every day with so many marks of neglect from all, that before their condition is known, they will do almost any thing to conceal it, and

after it is known, they become in time so destitute of shame, that they are under no further restraint.

From this particular branch of the subject, let me put you in mind,

1. What reason many have to be thankful to the God of life, who hath given them their daily provision, if not in all the abundance of immense riches, yet in fulness and sufficiency. An humble, thankful disposition is not only your duty, in return for the divine bounty, but is itself the richest and sweetest ingredient in all temporal mercies.—It is that, indeed, which makes them mercies.—Envious persons do not taste what they have, their evil eye being fixed on what they cannot obtain. Things in this respect are just what they seem to be. Our comforts are as we are enabled to relish them. The same possessions which are despised by the impatient or ambitious, are a treasure and abundance to the humble and grateful.

2. If poverty is a temptation, it ought to be an argument to all to avoid it, or seek deliverance from it by lawful means. Apply yourselves with steadiness and perseverance to the duties of your calling, that you may provide things honest in the sight of all men. It is a duty of the land, and of the gospel; and it hath this promise, in general, annexed to it, that “the hand of the diligent maketh rich.” Read, I beseech you, that vast treasure of useful instruction, the book of Proverbs; where you will meet with many excellent counsels and wise observations upon this subject. Of these I shall mention at present, but two passages, selected both for the soundness of the instruction, and the beauty of the illustration. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.” And again; “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles

“ had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof
“ was broken down.”

3. Are any of you poor and reduced in your circumstances, set a double watch upon your conduct, and earnestly pray that God may preserve you from fraud and dissingenuity of every kind. Rather suffer yourselves to be stripped of every thing, and apply to the charity of others, which is not sinful, and ought not to be shameful, than take any dishonest methods of bettering your state. O melancholy thought, that many, when they become desperate in their circumstances, become also desperate in their courses, and drown the reflection of their consciences in slothfulness and sensuality! Sincerity, integrity, patience and sobriety in a ruined fortune are doubly eminent, at least, whatever they may be in the sight of the world, they are honorable and precious in the sight of God, and of all good men.

Before concluding, suffer me to make one or two reflections on the subject in general; the several parts of which I have now explained. And,

1. On what hath been said on this subject, I would graft this important lesson; that you should not only study to preserve yourselves from sin, but from all such circumstances of temptation as are dangerous to human constancy. This was the very ground of the prayer of the prophet in my text, and is the substance of the reasons he assigns for his request. We are taught the same thing in the strongest manner, by the several instances of human frailty, and the folly of presumptuous confidence, recorded in scripture. “ Now all these things happened unto
“ them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.
“ Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed
“ lest he fall.” We are also taught the same thing by him who knew what was in man, as he has given us directions in the form of prayer which he taught his disciples, to say, Lord, “ lead us not into temptation.”

Are you really unwilling to do evil, you will be concerned to keep yourselves out of the way of every solicitation to it. This is constantly the effect of a judicious

and solid piety, and those who act otherwise shew, that they either have no real goodness, or that they are very weak Christians, and little acquainted either with themselves, or this present evil world.

2. You may learn how necessary it is, that you should look for the divine assistance and direction, to avoid the temptation of every state of life. We are truly of ourselves unequal to the trials with which we are surrounded. Not that there is any thing unjust or oppressive in the measures of Providence; but because it seems good to our Maker, to oblige us to a constant dependance upon himself and his promised help. "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The least temptation may prove too hard for us, if we neglect to apply for supreme aid; but in divine strength, we may bid defiance to the most formidable opposition. This temper is well exemplified and described by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecution, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then am I strong."

3. From what hath been said, you may see what an inseparable connexion there is between true religion, and your employments, and state in this present world. They have a mutual, strong, and constant influence upon one another. It is a fatal, though a common error to separate them; entirely to confine religion to the times and places of immediate worship, and suppose that it hath nothing to do with the maxims of trade and commerce, or other worldly callings. On the contrary, your impressions of things spiritual and eternal, will direct and regulate your views as to the present life; and your success or misfortunes in worldly schemes, will have a certain and visible effect upon your Christian conversation, and the state of

your souls. Therefore, let them never be separated in your own views, and let them still be kept in their proper order and subordination. Though the light and trivial use, not only of the name of God, but of scripture-language, is both sinful and dangerous; and though a forward ostentatious piety may sometimes look suspicious, yet it were to be wished we had more of a grave and habitual acknowledgment of God in all our ways. This was the language of the Patriarchs of old. In one of the former discourses upon this subject, I took notice of Jacob's prayer, when he set out for Padan-aram. See after the increase of his family, how he expresses himself in answer to his brother Isaac. "And he lift up his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, who are those with thee? And he said the children which God hath graciously given thy servant." See also the apostolical direction for the manner of projecting our future purposes.— "Go to now, ye that say to-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."

4. In the last place, let me beseech, in the tenderest manner, every one of you, rich and poor, to remember an approaching eternity. It will not be long till the honorable, and despised, the wealthy and the needy, the master and the servant, shall lie down in the dust. Lay hold of that covenant of peace which is ordered in all things and sure. Hear a great and constant truth. "What is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" How many a Lazarus is now in Abraham's bosom; and how many a rich man, that once lived delicately on earth, is at this moment tormented in hell-fire! The gospel of peace is now preached in your ears. Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved. I cannot promise that you shall be rich, but all things necessary are assured to you by the divine promise; food and raiment, support under trials, strength for duty, and in the world to come, everlasting rest:

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ON THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN,

A

S E R M O N,

*Preached in the Old Presbyterian Church in New-York,
to a very numerous audience, on the evening of the se-
cond Sabbath in May, 1789.*

MARK X. 13, 14, 15, 16.

And they brought young children unto him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeas- ed, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

THERE are few things in which persons of reflection, in general, and especially those who fear God, are more agreed, than the importance of the rising generation; or, which is the true meaning of that expression, the importance of the instruction and government of youth.

This is a subject of great extent, and may also be taken up in a great variety of lights. I am one of those who think

that it may, as well as many others, be, with much advantage, considered doctrinally; and that a clear view of divine truth upon every subject, will have the most powerful and happy influence, not only in directing our sentiments, but in governing our practice.

There is much to be seen of the proper glory of the Redeemer in this passage of scripture. His usefulness—his attention to improve every seemingly accidental occurrence for the purpose of instruction, and his amiable condescension to all who humbly applied to Him, and tender feeling for their wants and weaknesses. It appears from this passage, that the inhabitants about Jordan, where he then was, not only brought their sick to be healed, as they did in most other places, but brought young children “that he should touch them.” In Luke they are called infants; and in the latter end of the passage now read, it is said, he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them; so that it is probable they were all of them of very early age, and some of them, perhaps literally what we call infants, who could not yet speak or walk. I see not the least foundation for what some commentators suppose, that they might labor under some disorder, from which the parents supposed he would cure them: If this had been the intention, the disciples would not, probably, have found any fault with it. The probability is, that the parents or relations of the children brought them, expecting that he would lay his hands on them—authoritatively bless them, and pray for them; from which they believed important benefits might be derived to them. The disciples, we are told, “rebuked those that brought them,” supposing, doubtless, that it was an impertinent and unnecessary interruption of their master, and that the children could receive no benefit at that early time of life; and who knows but, like the human wisdom of later times, they might think the attempt superstitious as well as unnecessary; however, our Lord was of a different opinion, and said—“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.”

Now the single subject of this discourse shall be to inquire, What is the import of this declaration? and, What we may understand our Saviour as affirming, when he says, of young children or infants, “of such is the kingdom of God?” After this, I will give such advices as the truths that may be established shall suggest, and as they seem to me most proper to enforce.

Let us then consider what we may understand our Saviour as affirming, when he says, of young children or infants, “of such is the kingdom of God.”

And, in the first place, we may understand by it, that children may be taken within the bond of God’s covenant; become members of the visible church, and, in consequence, be *relatively* holy. I do not found the lawfulness of infant baptism on this passage alone, and mean to enter into no controversy on the subject at this time; but, as it is clearly established in other passages, it may well be understood here. At any rate so far as I have affirmed is undoubtedly certain, that they *may be* admitted within the bond of God’s covenant. We know, that under the Old Testament, they received the sign of circumcision, which in the New Testament, is said to be “a seal of the righteousness that is of faith.” (Rom, iv. 11.) Many benefits may arise from this. As in the natural constitution of man many advantages and disadvantages are derived from parents upon the offspring, so in the moral constitution of divine grace many blessings, spiritual and temporal, may be inherited from pious parents. Children are the subjects of prayer; and, of consequence, within reach of the promise. The believer may justly hope for his seed dying in infancy, and in after life, many eventual providential mercies may be expected from that God who “sheweth mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him.”

It was usual in the most ancient times, for aged or holy persons to bless children formally. I do not recollect in ancient history, a more beautiful, or more tender scene, than that we have recorded, Gen. xlviii. 15. of the patriarch Jacob’s blessing his grand-children, the sons of Joseph, when he was about to die—“And he blessed Joseph and

“ said, God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which fed me all my life long to this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac: And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” We are told by an ancient writer of the Christian church, that Ignatius, afterwards bishop of Antioch, was one of those children thus brought to Christ for his blessing; and there is no reason, that I know of, to oppose the tradition: For supposing him to have been an infant, or even from 2 to 5 years of age, it would make him only between 70 and 80 at the time of his martyrdom, in the year 108 from the birth of Christ.

2. The declaration “ of such is the kingdom of God,” may be understood to imply, that children may, even in infancy, be the subjects of regenerating grace, and thereby become *really* holy. This is plain from the nature of the thing; for if they can carry the corrupt impression of Adam’s nature in their infant state, there can be no doubt but they may be renewed after the image of him that created them. Almighty power can easily have access to them, and can, in answer to prayers, as well as endeavors, form them for their Maker’s service. See what the prophet Isaiah says, xxviii. 9. “ Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Those that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.” Samuel was a child of prayer, and dedicated to God from his infant years, and it is said of him, 1 Sam. ii. 26. “ And the child Samuel grew, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men.” It is an expression frequently to be found in pious writers, and among them that are far from denying the universal corruption of human nature, that some may be said to be sanctified from the womb—that is, that the time of their renovation may be beyond the reach both of understanding and memory; and this being certainly possible, may justly be considered as the object of desire and the subject of prayer. Few, perhaps, have failed to observe, that some children discover upon the first dawn of reason, an amiable and

tractable disposition, and drink in spiritual instruction, with desire and delight; while others discover a frowardness and repugnance that is with much difficulty, if at all, and sometimes never overcome.

3. I think this declaration implies, that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit, even by outward means, than is generally supposed. No doubt the reason of the conduct of the disciples was, that they supposed the children could receive no benefit. In this, from our Lord's answer, it is probable he thought them mistaken. I will not enlarge on some refined remarks of persons as distinguished for learning as piety; some of whom have supposed, that they are capable of receiving impressions of desire and aversion, and even of moral temper, particularly, of love or hatred, in the first year of their lives. I must, however, mention a remark of the justly celebrated M. Fenelon, archbishop of Cambray, because the fact on which it is founded is undeniable, and the deduction from it important. He says, that 'before they are thought capable of receiving any instruction, or the least pains are taken with them, they learn a language.—Many children at four years of age can speak their mother tongue, though not with the same accuracy or grammatical precision, yet with greater readiness and fulness than most scholars do a foreign language after the study of a whole life.' If I were to enlarge upon this I might say, they not only discover their intellectual powers by connecting the idea with the sign, but acquire many sentiments of good and evil, right and wrong, in that early period of their life. Such is the attention of children, that they often seem to know their parents tempers sooner and better than they know their's, and to avail themselves of that knowledge to obtain their desires.

To apply this to our present subject, or rather the occasion of it, allow me to observe, that the circumstances of solemn transactions are often deeply engraven upon very young minds. It is not impossible that some of those young children might recollect and be affected with the majesty and condescension of Jesus of Nazareth, and

the impressiion be attended with happy fruits. At any rate, as no doubt the parents would often relate the transaction to their children, this would be a kind of secondary memory, and have the same effect upon their sentiments and conduct.

4. This declaration implies, that the earliest, in general, is the fittest and best time for instruction. This part of the subject has been treated at full length by many writers in every age, I therefore shall say the less upon it—Only observe, That the importance of early instruction is written upon the whole system of nature, and repeated in every page of the history of Providence. You may bend a young twig and make it receive almost any form; but that which has attained to maturity, and taken its ply, you will never bring into another shape than that which it naturally bears. In the same manner those habits which men contract in early life, and are strengthened by time, it is next to impossible to change. Far be it from me to lay any thing in opposition to the infinite power and absolute sovereignty of God; but let us also beware of considering these as opposed to the natural course of things, or the use and efficacy of means. We have many warnings upon this subject in scripture, where the recovery of an habitual and hardened sinner, is likened to a natural impossibility, Jer. 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.” God will reserve to himself his own absolute sovereignty, but it is at every sinners own peril if he presume upon it and abuse it.

5. This declaration of our Saviour—“Of such is the kingdom of God”—may imply, that, in fact, the real disciples of Christ chiefly consist of those who are called in their earlier years. The visible church of Christ is a numerous and mixed society; but his mystical body, consisting of real believers, I think we are warranted from this passage of scripture and others, as well as the analogy of faith, and the reason and nature of things, to suppose, consists for the most part of those who are called in infancy and youth. This is an important truth, and deeply fraught with instruction to all, of every rank. There are

some called after a course of opposition to God, but there are few in comparison; therefore the apostle Paul styles himself—"One born out of due time." Perhaps experience and a deliberate view of the state of the world, is sufficient to prove this assertion. The instances of conversion in advanced life, are very rare: and when it seems to happen, it is perhaps most commonly the resurrection of those seeds which were sown in infancy, but had been long stifled by the violence of youthful passions, or the pursuits of ambition and the hurry of an active life. I have known several instances of the instructions long neglected of deceased parents, at last rising up, asserting their authority, and producing the deepest penitence and real reformation. But my experience furnishes me with no example of one brought up in ignorance and security, after a long course of profaneness turning, at the close of life, to the service of the living God. The most common case is, that the deep sleep continues to the last, and, as the saying is, they die as they live; though in some instances, when the sins have been of the grossest kind, conscience awakens at their going off the stage, and they seem, as it were, to begin the torments of hell with the terror of despair.

You will find in some practical writers an opinion, or sentiment, that seems not ill founded to the following purpose, 'Some are called at the eleventh hour that none may despair,' and there are few that now may presume. Others make a distinction, not without ground, as it seems founded upon the wisdom and equity of the divine government; That when the gospel comes to a people that had long sitted in darkness, there may be numerous converts of all ages; but when the gospel has been long preached in plenty and purity, and ordinances regularly administered, few but those who are called in early life are ever called at all. A very judicious and pious writer, Mr. Richard Baxter, is of opinion, that in a regular state of the church, and a tolerable measure of faithfulness and purity in its officers; family instruction and government are the usual means of conversion, public ordinances of edification. This seems agreeable to the language of

scripture; for we are told God hath set in the church "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers," (not for converting sinners, but) "for perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ." It seems to add further weight to this, that most of those who are recorded in scripture as eminent for piety, were called in early life; and we know not but it may have been the case with others, though not particularly mentioned: Those I have in view, are Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Josiah, Daniel and the three Children, in the Old Testament, and in the New, John Baptist and John the beloved disciple; of whom I may just observe, that no other reason has ever been given for the Saviour's distinguishing him by particular affection, but that he was the youngest of the twelve.

6. In the last place, this declaration implies that the comparative innocence of children is a lesson to us, and an emblem of the temper and carriage of Christ's real disciples. This instruction we are not left to infer for ourselves. Our Lord has made the remark in the passage where the text lies, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein." This is directly levelled against the pride of self-sufficiency, and every rough and boisterous passion. It is remarkable that the very same image is made use of in several passages of scripture. Thus, Mat. xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4. "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." So also the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xiv. 20. "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men:"—And further 1 Peter ii. 1, 2. "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speak-

“ings,—as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” The graces of the spiritual life recommended to us by this beautiful image, are humility, gentleness, teachableness, sincerity, and easiness to be reconciled: all which are remarkable in young persons, and are frequently lost or vitiated by growing years.

I come now to make a practical improvement of the subject, which shall be confined to pointing out the duties suggested by the foregoing truths, as they are severally incumbent on, 1. parents; 2. children; 3. every hearer of the gospel.

1. Let us consider the duties incumbent on parents. Is it so, that of children or infants the Redeemer said, of such is the kingdom of God? Then parents should be (1) thankful. Thankfulness is a happy frame of spirit in itself, and powerfully reconciles the mind to difficult, and animates it to important duties. Be thankful then for the honor that is done you, for the trust that is reposed in you, and for the encouraging promise of God to assist and accept of you in the discharge of it. “Children are the gift of God, and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” I cannot easily figure to myself any greater earthly blessing than to have children to be the objects of your care and diligence while you live, and to inherit your name and substance, when you yourselves must, in the course of nature, go off the stage. And is it a little honor to be intrusted with the care of these rational creatures of God, born for immortality, and whose present peace and future welfare depend so much on your conduct? Are you not called to prepare members for the church of Christ?—“for of such is his kingdom;” and however important the ministry of the gospel is (which I should be the last to detract from) you may know, that it is out of a minister’s power to speak to the understanding of those who are not prepared by previous instruction. But above all, how thankful should you be for the encouragement given you to bring your children to the Saviour, and the promise of his blessing. “He took them up in his arms, laid his

“hands on them and blessed them.” Fathers! Mothers! What ground of praise to the condescending Saviour!

(2.) Be early and diligent in instruction. This is the great and substantial evidence you are called to give of your thankfulness for the mercy. You have heard that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit by outward means than is commonly supposed: Let not, therefore, the devil and the world be too far before-hand with you, in possessing their fancy, engaging their affections, and misleading their judgment. Is it a fable, or do I speak truth when I say, many children learn to swear before they learn to pray. It is indeed affecting, to a serious mind, to hear children lisping out ill-pronounced oaths, or scurrilous and scolding abuse, or even impurities which they do not understand; so that the first sentiments they form, and the first words they utter, are those of impiety, malice, or obscenity. Nay I have seen children in their mother's arms actually taught to scold, by uttering angry sounds, before they could speak one word with distinctness. It is wholly impossible for me here to introduce a system of directions as to the method of early instruction; this must be learned elsewhere and at another time; but I mean to impress your minds with a sense of the importance and necessity of the duty, and I will add the *efficacy* of it. Remember the connection between the duty and the promise—“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” I knew a pious and judicious minister, who affirmed, that we did not give credit to that part of God's word if we did not believe the certainty of the promise, as well as the obligation of the duty; he was of opinion, that every parent, when he seemed to fail, should conclude that he himself had been undutiful, and not that God had been unfaithful.

(3.) Be circumspect and edifying in your example. All the arguments that press the former exhortation, apply with the same, perhaps I may say, with double force to this. Example is itself the most powerful and successful instruction; and example is necessary to give meaning and influence to all other instruction. This is

one of the oldest maxims upon the subject of education;—The Roman satyrift says, “*Ni'l dictu vifuve fœdum hæc limina tangat intra quæ puer eft.*” Let nothing bafe be feen or heard within thefe walls in which a child is. And if children naturally form their fentiments, habits and manners, by imitation of others in general, how much more powerful must be the example of parents, who are every hour in their fight, whom nature teaches them, and whom duty obliges them to love, and when it comes recommended by the continual intercourfe, and the endearing fervices that flow from that intimate relation.

(4.) Laftly, Parents are taught here perfeverance and importunity in prayer. This, indeed, is an important thing upon every fubject of our requests to God. Our Saviour fpoke a parable on purpofe to teach men, that they fhould pray and not faint, Luke xviii. 1. And if we are called to believe, that “if we ask any thing agreeable to his will he heareth us,” what more agreeable to his will than frequent and importunate prayer for the temporal and fpiritual happinefs of children—What a fupport this to the faith of prayer. You ought, at the fame time, to remember that, as the prophet Jeremiah fays, “it is good for a man to hope and quietly to wait for the falvation of God.” The answer of prayer may come at a much greater diftance than we are apt to look for it. There is a remarkable anecdote handed down to us, refpecting the famous St. Auguftine. He was the fon of an eminently pious woman, whose name was Monica, yet he was in his youth very loofe and diforderly. One of his fellow citizens, it is faid, feeing him pafs along the ftreet, reflected upon him with great feverity, as a difgrace to fociety; but another made answer, that he was not without hopes of him after all, for he thought it next to impoffible that the fon of fo many prayers fhould perifh.—And we know, that in fact, he became in due time one of the moft eminent champions for evangelical truth. There is not the leaft doubt that many prayers, and efpecially of this kind, may have their answer and accomplifhment after the believer that offered them has been many years fleeping in the duft.

2. The truths above illustrated, suggest important advices to children, that is, to such young persons as are able to understand and apply them. (1.) Preserve a tenderness of heart, and be thankful that you are not yet hardened by habitual guilt, nor sentenced to perpetual barrenness by the judgment of a righteous God. Esteem, embrace, improve the precious but flying season. Harken to the instructions of parents; the admonitions of pastors; the lessons of providence, and the dictates of God's holy spirit speaking by the conscience. Think of the amiableness of early piety in the sight of men; and its acceptableness in the sight of God—"I love them that love me," says he by his prophet; "and they that seek me early shall find me."

(2.) Be not satisfied with, or trust in outward privileges. If you are the children of pious parents, who have lived near to God; if you have been favored with early instruction, unless these advantages are improved, they will not plead for, but against you at the great day. This is the dictate both of scripture and reason, "to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required." There is a common saying, that is neither agreeable to truth nor experience, and yet sometimes obtains belief in a blinded world, that the children of good people are as bad as any: as if early education, which is of so much influence in learning every thing else, should have no effect in religion. On the contrary, where do we expect to find pious youth; but in pious families, or sober and industrious youth, but in sober and industrious families? I should call that man prudent in the conduct of life, who in the choice of a servant, an apprentice, or a partner in business, would pay almost as much attention to the blood and parentage, as to the person with whom he was to be immediately connected. But if we take notice of what probably gave occasion to the mistake, viz. that the wicked children of pious parents are the worst of any, it is a truth of the utmost moment, and easily accounted for. They burst asunder the strongest ties, they are under the unhappy necessity of mastering conscience by high handed wickedness, and commonly come to speedy and deserved ruin: "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

(3.) Do not satisfy yourselves with a name to live while you are dead. Though some young persons, religiously educated, by falling into dissolute society, become open profligates, there are others who retain the form without the life of religion: Therefore, if nature hath given you amiable dispositions; if these have been cultivated by a pious and prudent education; if you feel the restraint of natural conscience; if you are desirous of public praise, or afraid of public shame, do not neglect any of these preservatives from sin; but yet endeavor to obtain, and see that you be governed by a principle superior to them all, the hope of final acceptance with God through Christ. Ask of him to give you a new heart, and a new spirit, to "create you a new in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them."

In the last place, this subject suggests some important instructions to the hearers of the gospel in general. (1.) Lose no time in providing for your great and best interest. Every argument that tends to shew the importance of early piety, may be applied, with equal or greater force, to shew the danger of delay in more advanced years. What is wise or amiable in youth, is necessary to those who are nearer their journey's end. But considering myself as speaking to professing Christians, what I would earnestly advise you, is, to apply the principles above laid down, to particular purposes, as well as to your general conduct. If conscience or providence has pointed out to you any thing that you may do to advantage, either for yourselves or others, lose no time in setting about it, because you do not know how little time may be yours: So says the wise man, Ecc. 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."

(2.) Do not forget the improvement of this subject, which our Saviour himself has pointed out; imitate the temper of children; learn to be humble and teachable, gentle and easy to be intreated. Both watch and pray against all violent attachments, rude and boisterous passions, and deep rooted resentment. Observe how the lit-

the lambs lay down their resentment, and forget their quarrels. Under this particular, it is proper to recommend a decency of deportment, and a contempt of all vanity and affectation, as well as simplicity and sincerity of speech, and a contempt of all artifice and refinement. The apostle has given an excellent description of this, 2 Cor. i. 12. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

(3.) Set a good example before others in general, but especially young persons. The old rule, *Maxima debetur pueris reverentia*, ought to be pondered as well as recollected. It is of much importance what our visible conduct is, at all times and in all places, because we continually contribute to form each others tempers and habits; but greater caution is necessary in presence of young persons, both because they are most prone to imitation, and because they have the least judgment to make proper distinctions, or to refuse the evil, and choose the good. Some instances might be given, in which things might be said or done, before persons of full understanding, without injury, that could not be done without injury, or at least without danger, before persons in early life.

(4.) In the last place, be not wanting in your endeavors and prayers for the public interest of religion, and the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. Support, by your conduct and conversation, the public credit of religion.—What is more powerful over the minds of men and the manners of the age, than public opinion. It is more powerful than the most sanguinary laws. And what is public opinion? It is formed by the sentiments that are most frequently heard, and most approved in conversation. Had we a just sense of the importance of visible religion, what a powerful principle would it be of prudent, watchful, guarded conduct in every state and circumstance of life. Whatever reason there may be to complain of the frequency of hypocrisy, or seeking the applause of men, I am afraid there is no less reason to complain of the want of attention to that precept of the apostle, "Look not

“ every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others ;” or of our Lord himself, Matt. v. 16. “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” I apprehend that these seemingly opposite faults, are not always separated, but often found in the same persons ; that is to say, there may be a strong desire after, and endeavor to obtain public applause by a few splendid and popular actions, and yet but little attention to that prudent and exemplary conduct, which promotes public usefulness. Consider what you have heard, and the Lord give you understanding to improve and apply it, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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S E R M O N

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S E R M O N

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THE DOMINION OF PROVIDENCE OVER THE
PASSIONS OF MEN.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached at Princeton, on the 17th of May, 1776. Being the General Fast appointed by the Congress through the United Colonies. Dedicated to the Hon. John Hancock, Esq. President of the Congress of the United States of America. To which is added, an Address to the natives of Scotland residing in America.

PSALM lxxvi. 10.

Surely the Wrath of Man shall praise thee ; the remainder of Wrath shalt thou restrain.

THERE is not a greater evidence either of the reality or the power of religion, than a firm belief of God's universal presence, and a constant attention to the influence and operation of his providence. It is by this means that the Christian may be said, in the emphatical scripture language, "to walk with God, and to endure as seeing him who is invisible."

The doctrine of divine providence is very full and complete in the sacred oracles. It extends not only to things

which we may think of great moment, and therefore worthy of notice, but to things the most indifferent and inconsiderable; "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing," says our Lord, "and one of them falleth not to the ground without your heavenly Father; nay, the very hairs of your head are all numbered." It extends not only to things beneficial and salutary, or to the direction and assistance of those who are the servants of the living God; but to things seemingly most hurtful and destructive, and to persons the most refractory and disobedient. He overrules all his creatures, and all their actions. Thus we are told, that "fire, hail, snow, vapour, and stormy wind, fulfil his word," in the course of nature; and even so the most impetuous and disorderly passions of men, that are under no restraint from themselves, are yet perfectly subject to the dominion of Jehovah. They carry his commission, they obey his orders, they are limited and restrained by his authority, and they conspire with every thing else in promoting his glory. There is the greater need to take notice of this, that men are not generally sufficiently aware of the distinction between the law of God and his purpose; they are apt to suppose, that as the temper of the sinner is contrary to the one, so the outrages of the sinner are able to defeat the other; than which nothing can be more false. The truth is plainly asserted, and nobly expressed by the Psalmist in the text, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

This psalm was evidently composed as a song of praise for some signal victory obtained, which was at the same time a remarkable deliverance from threatening danger. The author was one or other of the later prophets, and the occasion probably the unsuccessful assault of Jerusalem, by the army of Sennacherib king of Assyria, in the days of Hezekiah. Great was the insolence and boasting of his generals and servants against the city of the living God, as may be seen in the thirty-sixth chapter of Isaiah. Yet it pleased God to destroy their enemies, and, by his own immediate interposition, to grant them deliverance. Therefore the Psalmist says in the fifth and sixth verses of

this psalm, "The stout hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep. None of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob! both the chariot and the horse are cast into a deep sleep." After a few more remarks to the same purpose, he draws the inference, or makes the reflection in the text, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain: which may be paraphrased thus, The fury and injustice of oppressors, shall bring in a tribute of praise to thee; the influence of thy righteous providence shall be clearly discerned; the countenance and support thou wilt give to thine own people shall be gloriously illustrated; thou shalt set the bounds which the bold-est cannot pass.

I am sensible, my brethren, that the time and occasion of this psalm, may seem to be in one respect ill suited to the interesting circumstances of this country at present. It was composed after the victory was obtained; whereas we are now but putting on the harness, and entering upon an important contest, the length of which it is impossible to foresee, and the issue of which it will perhaps be thought presumption to foretell. But as the truth, with respect to God's moral government, is the same and unchangeable; as the issue, in the case of Sennacherib's invasion, did but lead the prophet to acknowledge it; our duty and interest conspire in calling upon us to improve it. And I have chosen to insist upon it on this day of solemn humiliation, as it will probably help us to a clear and explicit view of what should be the chief subject of our prayers and endeavors, as well as the great object of our hope and trust, in our present situation.

The truth, then, asserted in this text, which I propose to illustrate and improve, is,—That all the disorderly passions of men whether exposing the innocent to private injury, or whether they are the arrows of divine judgment in public calamity, shall, in the end, be to the praise of God: Or, to apply it more particularly to the present state of the American Colonies, and the plague of war,—'The ambition of mistaken princes, the cunning and cruelty of oppressive and corrupt ministers,

and even the inhumanity of brutal foldiers, however dreadful, fhall finally promote the glory of God, and in the mean time, while the ftorm continues, his mercy and kindnefs fhall appear in prefcribing bounds to their rage and fury.

In difcourfing of this fubject, it is my intention, through the affiftance of divine grace,

I. To point out to you in fome particulars, how the wrath of man praiſes God.

II. To apply theſe principles to our preſent ſituation, by inferences of truth for your inſtruction and comfort, and by fuitable exhortations to duty in the important criſis.

In the *firſt* place, I am to point out to you in ſome particulars, how the wrath of man praiſes God. I ſay in *ſome* inſtances, becauſe it is far from being in my power, either to mention or explain the whole. There is an unſearchable depth in the divine counſels, which it is impoſſible for us to penetrate. It is the duty of every good man to place the moſt unlimited confidence in divine wiſdom, and to believe that thoſe meaſures of providence that are moſt unintelligible to him, are yet planned with the ſame ſkill, and directed to the ſame great purpoſes as others, the reaſon and tendency of which he can explain in the cleareſt manner. But where revelation and experience enables us to diſcover the wiſdom, equity, or mercy of divine providence, nothing can be more delightful or profitable to a ſerious mind, and therefore I beg your attention to the following remarks.

In the *firſt* place, the wrath of man praiſes God, as it is an example and illuſtration of divine truth, and clearly points out the corruption of our nature, which is the foundation ſtone of the doctrine of redemption. Nothing can be more abſolutely neceſſary to true religion, than a clear and full conviction of the finfulneſs of our nature and ſtate. Without this there can be neither repentance in the ſinner, nor humility in the believer. Without this all that is ſaid in ſcripture of the wiſdom and mercy of God, in providing a Saviour, is without force and without meaning. Juſtly does our Saviour ſay, “The whole

“ have no need of a physician, but those that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Those who are not sensible that they are sinners, will treat every exhortation to repentance, and every offer of mercy, with disdain or defiance.

But where can we have a more affecting view of the corruption of our nature, than in the wrath of man, when exerting itself in oppression, cruelty, and blood. It must be owned, indeed, that this truth is abundantly manifest in times of the greatest tranquillity. Others may, if they please, treat the corruption of our nature as a chimera: for my part, I see it every where, and I feel it every day. All the disorders in human society, and the greatest part even of the unhappiness we are exposed to, arises from the envy, malice, covetousness, and other lusts of man. If we and all about us were just what we ought to be in all respects, we should not need to go any further for heaven, for it would be upon earth. But war and violence present a spectacle, still more awful. How affecting is it to think, that the lust of domination should be so violent and universal? That men should so rarely be satisfied with their own possessions and acquisitions, or even with the benefit that would arise from mutual service, but should look upon the happiness and tranquillity of others, as an obstruction to their own. That, as if the great law of nature, were not enough, “ Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return,” they should be so furiously set for the destruction of each other. It is shocking to think, since the first murder of Abel by his brother Cain, what havoc has been made of man by man in every age. What is it that fills the pages of history, but the wars and contentions of princes and empires? What vast numbers has lawless ambition brought into the field, and delivered as a prey to the destructive sword?

If we dwell a little upon the circumstances, they become deeply affecting. The mother bears a child with pain, rears him by the laborious attendance of many years; yet in the prime of life, in the vigor of health, and bloom of beauty, in a moment he is cut down by the dreadful instruments of death. “ Every battle of the warrior is with

“ confused noise, and garments rolled in blood ;” but the horror of the scene is not confined to the field of slaughter. Few go there unrelated, or fall unlamented ; in every hostile encounter, what must be the impression upon the relations of the deceased ? The bodies of the dead can only be seen, or the cries of the dying heard for a single day, but many days shall not put an end to the mourning of a parent for a beloved son, the joy and support of his age, or of the widow and helpless offspring for a father, taken away in the fullness of health and vigor.

But if this may be justly said of all wars between man and man, what shall we be able to say that is suitable to the abhorred scene of civil war between citizen and citizen ? How deeply affecting is it, that those who are the same in complexion, the same in blood, in language, and in religion, should, notwithstanding, butcher one another with unrelenting rage, and glory in the deed ? That men should lay waste the fields of their fellow subjects, with whose provision they themselves had been often fed, and consume with devouring fire those houses, in which they had often found a hospitable shelter.

These things are apt to overcome a weak mind with fear, or overwhelm it with sorrow, and in the greatest number are apt to excite the highest indignation, and kindle up a spirit of revenge. If this last has no other tendency than to direct and invigorate the measures of self-defence, I do not take upon me to blame it, on the contrary, I call it necessary and laudable.

But what I mean at this time to prove by the preceding reflections, and wish to impress on your minds, is the depravity of our nature. James iv. 1. “ From whence come wars and fighting among you, come they not hence even from your lusts that war in your members.” Men of lax and corrupt principles, take great delight in speaking to the praise of human nature, and extolling its dignity, without distinguishing what it was, at its first creation, from what it is in its present fallen state. These fine speculations are very grateful to a worldly mind. They are also much more pernicious to uncautious and unthinking youth, than even the temptations to a dissolute and sensu-

al life, against which they are fortified by the dictates of natural conscience, and a sense of public shame. But I appeal from these visionary reasonings to the history of all ages, and the inflexible testimony of daily experience. These will tell us what men have been in their practice, and from thence you may judge what they are by nature, while unrenewed. If I am not mistaken, a cool and candid attention, either to the past history, or present state of the world, but above all, to the ravages of lawless power, ought to humble us in the dust. It should at once lead us to acknowledge the just view given us in scripture, of our lost state; to desire the happy influence of renewing grace each for ourselves; and to long for the dominion of righteousness and peace, when "men shall beat their swords into plow shares, and their spears into pruning hooks; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."* Mic. iv. 3.

* I cannot help embracing this opportunity of making a remark or two upon a virulent reflection thrown out against this doctrine in a well known pamphlet, *Common Sense*. The author of that work expresses himself thus: "If the first king of any country was by election, that likewise establishes a precedent for the next; for to say, that the right of all future generations is taken away, by the act of the first electors, in their choice not only of a king, but of a family of kings forever, hath no parallel in or out of scripture, but the doctrine of original sin, which supposes the free will of all men lost in Adam; and from such comparison, and it will admit of no other, hereditary succession can derive no glory. For as in Adam all sinned, and as in the first electors all men obeyed; as in the one all mankind were subjected to Satan, and in the other to sovereignty; as our innocence was lost in the first, and our authority in the last; and as both disable us from re-assuming some former state and privilege, it unanswerably follows that original sin and hereditary succession are parallels. Dishonorable rank! Inglorious connection! Yet the most subtle sophist cannot produce a juster simile."* Without the shadow of reasoning, he is pleased to represent the doctrine of original sin as an object of contempt or abhorrence. I beg leave to demur a little to the *candor*, the *prudence*, and the *justice* of this proceeding.

1. Was it *modest* or *candid* for a person without name or character, to talk in this supercilious manner of a doctrine that has been est-

* *Common Sense*, page 11. *Bradford's Edition*.

2. The wrath of man praiseth God, as it is the instrument in his hand for bringing sinners to repentance, and for the correction and improvement of his own children. Whatever be the nature of the affliction with which he visits either persons, families, or nations; whatever be the disposition or intention of those whose malice he employs as a scourge, the design on his part is, to rebuke men for iniquity, to bring them to repentance, and to promote their holiness and peace. The salutary nature, and sanctifying influence of affliction in general, is often taken notice of in scripture, both as making a part of the purpose of God, and the experience of his saints. Heb. xii. 11. "Now, no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: Nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them, which are ex-

poused and defended by many of the greatest and best men that the world ever saw, and makes an essential part of the established Creeds and Confessions of all the Protestant churches without exception? I thought the grand modern plea had been freedom of sentiment, and charitable thoughts of one another. Are so many of us, then, beyond the reach of this gentleman's charity? I do assure him that such presumption and self-confidence are no recommendation to me either of his character or sentiments.

2. Was it prudent, when he was pleading a public cause, to speak in such opprobrious terms of a doctrine, which he knew or ought to have known was believed and professed by, I suppose, a great majority of very different denominations. Is this gentleman ignorant of human nature, as well as an enemy to the Christian faith? Are men so little tenacious of their religious sentiments, whether true or false? The prophet thought otherwise, who said, *Hath a nation changed their gods which yet are no gods?* Was it the way to obtain the favor of the public, to despise what they hold sacred? Or shall we suppose this author so astonishingly ignorant, as to think that all men now, whose favor is worth asking, have given up the doctrine of the New Testament. If he does, he is greatly mistaken.

3. In fine, I ask, where was the justice of this proceeding? Is there so little to be said for the doctrine of original sin, that it is not to be refuted, but despised? Is the state of the world such, as to render this doctrine not only false, but incredible? Has the fruit been of such a quality as to exclude all doubts of the goodness of the tree? On the contrary, I cannot help being of opinion, that such has been the visible state of the world in every age, as cannot be accounted for on any other principles, than what we learn from the word of God, that *the imagination of the heart of man is only evil from his youth, and that continually.* Gen. vi. 5.—viii. 21.

“excited thereby.” But what we are particularly led to observe by the subject of this discourse is, that the wrath of man, or the violence of the oppressor praiseth God in this respect; for it has a peculiar tendency to alarm the secure conscience, to convince and humble the obstinate sinner. This is plain from the nature of the thing, and from the testimony of experience. Public calamities, particularly the destroying sword, is so awful that it cannot but have a powerful influence in leading men to consider the presence and the power of God. It threatens them not only in themselves, but touches them in all that is dear to them, whether relations or possessions. The prophet Isaiah says, *Is. xxvi. 8, 9.* “Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee,—for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” He considers it as the most powerful mean of alarming the secure and subduing the obstinate. *Is. xxvi. 11.* “Lord when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they shall see and be ashamed for their envy at the people, yea the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.” It is also sometimes represented as a symptom of a hopeless and irrecoverable state, when public judgments have no effect. Thus says the prophet Jeremiah, *Jer. v. 3.* “O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return.” We can easily see in the history of the children of Israel, how severe strokes brought them to submission and penitence. *Pf. lxxviii. 34, 35.* “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.”

Both nations in general, and private persons are apt to grow remiss and lax in a time of prosperity and seeming security; but when their earthly comforts are endangered or withdrawn, it lays them under a kind of necessity to seek for something better in their place. Men must have comfort from one quarter or another. When earthly

things are in a pleasing and promising condition, too many are apt to find their rest, and be satisfied with them as their only portion. But when the vanity and passing nature of all created comfort is discovered, they are compelled to look for something more durable as well as valuable. What therefore, can be more to the praise of God, than that when a whole people have forgotten their resting place, when they have abused their privileges, and despised their mercies, they should by distress and suffering be made to hearken to the rod, and return to their duty.

There is an inexpressible depth and variety in the judgments of God, as in all his other works; but we may lay down this as a certain principle, that if there were no sin, there could be no suffering. Therefore they are certainly for the correction of sin, or for the trial, illustration, and perfecting of the grace and virtue of his own people. We are not to suppose, that those who suffer most, or who suffer soonest, are therefore more criminal than others. Our Saviour himself thought it necessary to give a caution against this rash conclusion, as we are informed by the evangelist Luke, Luke xiii. 1. "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things, I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." I suppose we may say with sufficient warrant, that it often happens, that those for whom God hath designs of the greatest mercy, are first brought to the trial, that they may enjoy in due time, the salutary effect of the unpalatable medicine.

I must also take leave to observe, and I hope no pious humble sufferer will be unwilling to make the application, that there is often a discernible mixture of sovereignty and righteousness in providential dispensations. It is the prerogative of God to do what he will with his own, but he often displays his justice itself, by throwing into the furnace those, who, though they may not be visibly worse than others, may yet have more to answer for, as having been favored with more distinguished privileges, both civil and

sacred. It is impossible for us to make a just and full comparison of the character either of persons or nations, and it would be extremely foolish for any to attempt it, either for increasing their own security, or impeaching the justice of the Supreme Ruler. Let us therefore neither forget the truth, nor go beyond it. "His mercy fills the earth." He is also "known by the judgment which he executeth." The wrath of man in its most tempestuous rage, fulfills his will, and finally promotes the good of his chosen.

3. The wrath of man praiseth God, as he sets bounds to it, or restrains it by his providence, and sometimes makes it evidently a mean of promoting and illustrating his glory.

There is no part of divine providence in which a greater beauty and majesty appears, than when the Almighty Ruler turns the councils of wicked men into confusion, and makes them militate against themselves. If the psalmist may be thought to have had a view in this text to the truths illustrated in the two former observations, there is no doubt at all that he had a particular view to this, as he says in the latter part of the verse, "the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." The scripture abounds with instances, in which the designs of oppressors were either wholly disappointed, or in execution fell far short of the malice of their intention, and in some they turned out to the honor and happiness of the persons or the people, whom they were intended to destroy. We have an instance of the first of these in the history to which my text relates.* We have also an instance in Esther, in which the most mischievous designs of Haman, the son of Hamedatha the Agagite against Mordecai the Jew, and the nation from which he sprung, turned out at last to his own destruction, the honor of Mordecai, and the salvation and peace of his people.

From the New Testament I will make choice of that memorable event on which the salvation of believers in every age rests as its foundation, the death and sufferings of the Son of God. This the great adversary and all his

* The matter is fully stated and reasoned upon by the prophet Isaiah ch. x. from the 5th to the 19th verse.

agents and instruments profecuted with unrelenting rage. When they had blackened him with slander, when they scourged him with shame, when they had condemned him in judgment, and nailed him to the cross, how could they help esteeming their victory complete? But oh the unfearcheable wisdom of God! they were but perfecting the great design laid for the salvation of sinners. Our blessed Redeemer by his death finished his work, overcame principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross. With how much justice do the apostles and their company offer this doxology to God, "They lift up their voice with one accord, and said, Lord thou art God which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the Heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth, against thy holy Child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Acts iv. 24. 28.

In all after ages in conformity to this, the deepest laid contrivances of the prince of darkness, have turned out to the confusion of their author; and I know not, but considering his malice and pride, this perpetual disappointment, and the superiority of divine wisdom, may be one great source of his suffering and torment. The cross hath still been the banner of truth, under which it hath been carried through the world. Persecution has been but as the furnace to the gold to purge it, of its dross, to manifest its purity, and increase its lustre. It was taken notice of very early, that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of christianity; the more abundantly it was shed, the more plentifully did the harvest grow.

So certain has this appeared, that the most violent infidels, both of early and later ages, have endeavored to account for it, and have observed that there is a spirit of obstinacy in man which inclines him to resist violence, and

that severity doth but increase opposition, be the cause what it will. They suppose that persecution is equally proper to propagate truth and error. This though in part true, will by no means generally hold. Such an apprehension however gave occasion to a glorious triumph of divine providence of an opposite kind, which I must shortly relate to you. One of the Roman emperors, Julian, surnamed the apostate, perceiving how impossible it was to suppress the gospel by violence, endeavored to extinguish it by neglect and scorn. He left the Christians unmolested for sometime, but gave all manner of encouragement to those of opposite principles, and particularly to the Jews, out of hatred to the Christians; and that he might bring public disgrace upon the Galileans, as he affected to stile them, he encouraged the Jews to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, and visibly refute the prophecy of Christ, that it should lie under perpetual desolation. But this profane attempt was so signally frustrated, that it served as much as any one circumstance to spread the glory of our Redeemer, and establish the faith of his saints. It is affirmed by some ancient authors, particularly by Ammianus Marcellinus, a heathen historian, that fire came out of the earth and consumed the workmen when laying the foundation. But in whatever way it was prevented, it is beyond all controversy, from the concurring testimony of Heathens and Christians, that little or no progress was ever made in it, and that in a short time, it was entirely defeated.

It is proper here to observe that at the time of the reformation, when religion began to revive, nothing contributed more to facilitate its reception, and increase its progress than the violence of its persecutors. Their cruelty and the patience of the sufferers, naturally disposed men to examine and weigh the cause to which they adhered with so much constancy and resolution. At the same time also, when they were persecuted in one city, they fled to another, and carried the discoveries of Popish fraud to every part of the world. It was by some of those who were persecuted in Germany, that the light of the reformation was brought so early into Britain.

The power of divine providence appears with the most distinguished lustre, when small and inconsiderable circumstances, and sometimes, the weather and seasons have defeated the most formidable armaments, and frustrated the best concerted expeditions. Near two hundred years ago, the monarchy of Spain was in the height of its power and glory, and determined to crush the interest of the reformation. They sent out a powerful armament against Britain, giving it ostentatiously, and in my opinion profanely, the name of the Invincible Armada. But it pleased God so entirely to discomfit it by tempests, that a small part of it returned home, though no British force had been opposed to it at all.

We have a remarkable instance of the influence of small circumstances in providence in the English history. The two most remarkable persons in the civil wars, had earnestly desired to withdraw themselves from the contentions of the times, Mr. Hampden and Oliver Cromwell. They had actually taken their passage in a ship for New-England, when by an arbitrary order of council they were compelled to remain at home. The consequence of this was, that one of them was the soul of the republican opposition to monarchical usurpation during the civil wars, and the other in the course of that contest, was the great instrument in bringing the tyrant to the block.

The only other historical remark I am to make, is, that the violent persecution which many eminent Christians met with in England from their brethren, who called themselves Protestants, drove them in great numbers to a distant part of the world, where the light of the gospel and true religion were unknown. Some of the American settlements, particularly those in New-England, were chiefly made by them; and as they carried the knowledge of Christ to the dark places of the earth, so they continue themselves in as great a degree of purity of faith, and strictness of practice, or rather a greater than is to be found in any protestant church now in the world. Does not the wrath of man in this instance praise God? Was not the accuser of the brethren, who stirs up their enemies, thus taken in his own craftiness, and his king-

dom shaken by the very means which he employed to establish it.*

II. I proceed now to the second general head, which was to apply the principles illustrated above to our present situation, by inferences of truth for your instruction and comfort, and by suitable exhortations to duty in this important crisis. And,

In the first place, I would take the opportunity on this occasion, and from this subject, to press every hearer to a sincere concern for his own soul's salvation. There are times when the mind may be expected to be more awake to divine truth, and the conscience more open to the arrows of conviction than at others. A season of public judgment is of this kind, as appears from what has been already said. That curiosity and attention at least are raised in some degree is plain from the unusual throng of this assembly. Can you have a clearer view of the sinfulness of your nature, than when the rod of the oppressor is lifted up, and when you see men putting on the habit of the warrior, and collecting on every hand the weapons of hostility and instruments of death? I do not blame your ardor in preparing for the resolute defence of your temporal rights. But consider I beseech you, the truly infinite importance of the salvation of your souls. Is it of much moment whether you and your children shall be rich or poor, at liberty or in bonds? Is it of much moment whether this beautiful country shall increase in fruitfulness from year to year being cultivated by active industry, and possessed by independent freemen, or the scanty produce of the neglected fields shall be eaten up by hungry publicans, while the timid owner trembles at the tax gatherers approach? And is it of less moment my brethren, whether you shall be the heirs of glory or the heirs of hell?

* Lest this should be thought a temporising compliment to the people of New-England, who have been the first sufferers in the present contest, and have set so noble an example of invincible fortitude, in withstanding the violence of oppression, I think it proper to observe that the whole paragraph is copied from a sermon on Psal. lxxiv. 22: prepared and preached in Scotland, in the month of August, 1753:

Is your state on earth for a few fleeting years of so much moment? And is it of less moment, what shall be your state through endless ages? Have you assembled together willingly to hear what shall be said on public affairs, and to join in imploring the blessing of God on the councils and arms of the united colonies, and can you be unconcerned, what shall become of you for ever, when all the monuments of human greatness shall be laid in ashes, for “the earth *itself* and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up.”

Wherefore my beloved hearers, as the ministry of reconciliation is committed to me, I beseech you in the most earnest manner, to attend to “the things that belong to your peace, before they are hid from your eyes.” How soon and in what manner a seal shall be set upon the character and state of every person here present, it is impossible to know; for he who only can know does not think proper to reveal it. But you may rest assured that there is no time more suitable, and there is none so safe as that which is present, since it is wholly uncertain whether any other shall be yours. Those who shall first fall in battle, have not many more warnings to receive. There are some few daring and hardened sinners who despise eternity itself, and set their Maker at defiance, but the far greater number by staving off their convictions to a more convenient season, have been taken unprepared, and thus eternally lost. I would therefore earnestly press the apostles exhortation, 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye 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.”

Suffer me to beseech you, or rather to give you warning not to rest satisfied with a form of godliness, denying the power thereof. There can be no true religion, till there be a discovery of your lost state by nature and practice, and an unfeigned acceptance of Christ Jesus, as he is offered in the gospel. Unhappy they who either despise his mercy, or are ashamed of his cross! Believe it, “there is no

“salvation in any other. There is no other name under “heaven given amongst men by which we must be saved.” Unless you are united to him by a lively faith, not the resentment of a haughty monarch, but the sword of divine justice hangs over you, and the fulness of divine vengeance shall speedily overtake you. I do not speak this only to the heaven daring profligate, or grovelling sensualist, but to every insensible secure sinner; to all those however decent and orderly in their civil deportment, who live to themselves and have their part and portion in this life; in fine to all who are yet in a state of nature, for “except a man be born again, he cannot see the “kingdom of God.” The fear of man may make you hide your profanity; prudence and experience may make you abhor intemperance and riot; as you advance in life, one vice may supplant another and hold its place; but nothing less than the sovereign grace of God can produce a saving change of heart and temper, or fit you for his immediate presence.

2. From what has been said upon this subject, you may see what ground there is to give praise to God for his favors already bestowed on us, respecting the public cause. It would be a criminal inattention not to observe the singular interposition of providence hitherto, in behalf of the American colonies. It is however impossible for me in a single discourse, as well as improper at this time to go through every step of our past transactions, I must therefore content myself with a few remarks. How many discoveries have been made of the designs of enemies in Britain and among ourselves, in a manner as unexpected to us as to them, and in such season as to prevent their effect? What surprising success has attended our encounters in almost every instance? Has not the boasted disciple of regular and veteran soldiers been turned into confusion and dismay, before the new and maiden courage of freemen, in defence of their property and right? In what great mercy has blood been spared on the side of this injured country? Some important victories in the south have been gained with so little loss, that enemies will probably think it has been dissembled; as many, even of ourselves thought, till

time rendered it undeniable. But these were comparatively of small moment. The signal advantage we have gained by the evacuation of Boston, and the shameful flight of the army and navy of Britain, was brought about without the loss of a man. To all this we may add, that the counsels of our enemies have been visibly confounded, so that I believe I may say with truth, that there is hardly any step which they have taken, but it has operated strongly against themselves, and been more in our favor, than if they had followed a contrary course.

While we give praise to God the supreme disposer of all events, for his interposition in our behalf, let us guard against the dangerous error of trusting in, or boasting of an arm of flesh. I could earnestly wish, that while our arms are crowned with success, we might content ourselves with a modest ascription of it to the power of the Highest. It has given me great uneasiness to read some ostentatious, vaunting expressions in our news papers, though happily I think, much restrained of late. Let us not return to them again. If I am not mistaken, not only the holy scriptures in general, and the truths of the glorious gospel in particular, but the whole course of providence seems intended to abase the pride of man, and lay the vain-glorious in the dust. How many instances does history furnish us with of those who after exulting over, and despising their enemies, were signally and shamefully defeated.* The truth is, I believe, the remark may be applied universally, and we may say, that through the whole frame of nature, and the whole system of human life, that which promises most, performs the least. The flowers of finest colour seldom have the sweetest fragrance. The trees of quickest growth or fairest form, are seldom of the greatest value or duration. Deep waters move with least noise. Men who think most are seldom talkative. And I think it holds as much in war as in any thing, that every boaster is a coward.

* There is no story better known in British history, than that the officers of the French army the night preceding the battle of Agincourt, played at dice for English prisoners before they took them, and the next day were taken by them.

Pardon me, my brethren, for insisting so much upon this, which may seem but an immaterial circumstance. It is in my opinion of very great moment. I look upon ostentation and confidence to be a sort of outrage upon Providence, and when it becomes general, and infuses itself into the spirit of a people, it is a forerunner of destruction. How does Goliath the champion, armed in a most formidable manner, express his disdain of David the stripling with his sling and his stone. 1 Sam. xvii. 42, 43, 44, 45. "And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods, and the Philistine said to David, come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." But how just and modest the reply? "Then said David to the Philistine, thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come unto thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." I was well pleased with a remark of this kind thirty years ago in a pamphlet,* in which it was observed, that there was a great deal of profane ostentation in the names given to ships of war, as the *Victory*, the *Valiant*, the *Thunderer*, the *Dreadnought*, the *Terrible*, the *Firebrand*, the *Furnace*, the *Lightning*, the *Infernal*. and many more of the same kind. This the author considered as a symptom of the national character and manners very unfavorable, and not likely to obtain the blessing of the God of Heaven.†

* *Britain's Remembrancer.*

† I am sensible that one or two of these were ships taken from the French, which brought their names with them. But the greatest number had their names imposed in England, and I cannot help observing, that the *Victory* often celebrated as the finest ship ever built in Britain, was lost in the night without a storm, by some unknown accident, and about twelve hundred persons, many of them of the first families in the nation, were buried with it in the deep. I do not mean to infer any thing from this, but, that we ought to live under the practical persuasion of what no man will doctrinally deny, that there is no warring

3. From what has been said you may learn what encouragement you have to put your trust in God, and hope for his assistance in the present important conflict. He is the Lord of hosts, great in might, and strong in battle. Whoever hath his countenance and approbation, shall have the best at last. I do not mean to speak prophetically, but agreeably to the analogy of faith, and the principles of God's moral government. Some have observed that true religion, and in her train dominion, riches, literature, and arts, have taken their course in a slow and gradual manner, from east to west since the earth was settled after the flood, and from thence forebode the future glory of America. I leave this as a matter rather of conjecture than certainty, but observe, that if your cause is just,—if your principles are pure,—and if your conduct is prudent, you need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts.

If your cause is just—you may look with confidence to the Lord and intreat him to plead it as his own. You are all my witnesses, that this is the first time of my introducing any political subject into the pulpit. At this season however, it is not only lawful but necessary, and I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies, has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction, that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity depended on the issue. The knowledge of God and his truths have from the beginning of the world been chiefly, if not entirely confined to these parts of the earth, where some degree of liberty and political justice were to be seen, and great were the difficulties with which they had to struggle

with the elements, or him who directs their force; that he is able to write disappointment on the wisest human schemes, and by the word of his power to frustrate the efforts of the greatest monarch upon earth.

from the imperfection of human society, and the unjust decisions of usurped authority. There is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.

You shall not, my brethren, hear from me in the pulpit, what you have never heard from me in conversation, I mean railing at the king personally, or even his ministers and the parliament, and people of Britain, as so many barbarous savages. Many of their actions have probably been worse than their intentions. That they should desire unlimited dominion if they can obtain or preserve it, is neither new nor wonderful. I do not refuse submission to their unjust claims, because they are corrupt or profligate, although probably many of them are so, but because they are men, and therefore liable to all the selfish bias inseparable from human nature. I call this claim unjust of making laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever, because they are separated from us, independent of us, and have an interest in opposing us. Would any man who could prevent it, give up his estate, person, and family, to the disposal of his neighbor, although he had liberty to chuse the wisest and the best master? Surely not. This is the true and proper hinge of the controversy between Great-Britain and America. It is however to be added, that such is their distance from us, that a wise and prudent administration of our affairs is as impossible as the claim of authority is unjust. Such is and must be their ignorance of the state of things here, so much time must elapse before an error can be seen and remedied, and so much injustice and partiality must be expected from the arts and misrepresentation of interested persons, that for these colonies to depend wholly upon the legislature of Great-Britain, would be like many other oppressive connexions, injury to the master, and ruin to the slave.

The management of the war itself on their part, would furnish new proof of this, if any were needful. Is it not manifest with what absurdity and impropriety they have

conducted their own designs? We had nothing so much to fear as dissension, and they have by wanton and unnecessary cruelty forced us into union. At the same time to let us see what we have to expect, and what would be the fatal consequence of unlimited submission, they have uniformly called those acts *Lenity*, which filled this whole continent with resentment and horror. The ineffable disdain expressed by our fellow subject, in saying, 'That he would not hearken to America, till she was at his feet,' has armed more men, and inspired more deadly rage, than could have been done by laying waste a whole province with fire and sword. Again, we wanted not numbers, but time, and they sent over handful after handful, till we were ready to oppose a multitude greater than they have to send. In fine, if there was one place stronger than the rest, and more able and willing to resist, there they made the attack, and left the others till they were duly informed, completely incensed, and fully furnished with every instrument of war.

I mention these things, my brethren, not only as grounds of confidence in God, who can easily overthrow the wisdom of the wise, but as decisive proofs of the impossibility of these great and growing states, being safe and happy when every part of their internal polity is dependant on Great-Britain. If, on account of their distance, and ignorance of our situation, they could not conduct their own quarrel with propriety for one year, how can they give direction and vigor to every department of our civil constitutions from age to age? There are fixed bounds to every human thing. When the branches of a tree grow very large and weighty they fall off from the trunk. The sharpest sword will not pierce when it cannot reach. And there is a certain distance from the seat of government, where an attempt to rule will either produce tyranny and helpless subjection, or provoke resistance and effect a separation.

I have said, if your principles are pure—The meaning of this is, if your present opposition to the claims of the British ministry does not arise from a seditious and turbulent spirit, or a wanton contempt of legal authority; from

a blind and factious attachment to particular persons or parties; or from a selfish rapacious disposition, and a desire to turn public confusion to private profit—but from a concern for the interest of your country, and the safety of yourselves and your posterity. On this subject I cannot help observing, that though it would be a miracle if there were not many selfish persons among us, and discoveries now and then made of mean and interested transactions, yet they have been comparatively inconsiderable both in number and effect. In general, there has been so great a degree of public spirit, that we have much more reason to be thankful for its vigor and prevalence, than to wonder at the few appearances of dishonesty or disaffection. It would be very uncandid to ascribe the universal ardor that has prevailed among all ranks of men, and the spirited exertions in the most distant colonies to any thing else than public spirit. Nor was there ever perhaps in history so general a commotion from which religious differences have been so entirely excluded. Nothing of this kind has as yet been heard, except of late in the absurd, but malicious and detestable attempts of our few remaining enemies to introduce them. At the same time I must also for the honor of this country observe, that though government in the ancient forms has been so long unhinged, and in some colonies not sufficient care taken to substitute another in its place; yet has there been, by common consent, a much greater degree of order and public peace, than men of reflexion and experience foretold or expected. From all these circumstances I conclude favorably of the principles of the friends of liberty, and do earnestly exhort you to adopt and act upon those which have been described, and resist the influence of every other.

Once more, if to the justice of your cause, and the purity of your principles, you add prudence in your conduct, there will be the greatest reason to hope, by the blessing of God, for prosperity and success. By prudence in conducting this important struggle, I have chiefly in view union, firmness, and patience. Every body must perceive the absolute necessity of union. It is indeed in every body's mouth, and therefore instead of attempting to

convince you of its importance, I will only caution you against the usual causes of division. If persons of every rank, instead of implicitly complying with the orders of those whom they themselves have chosen to direct, will needs judge every measure over again, when it comes to be put in execution. If different classes of men intermix their little private views, or clashing interest with public affairs, and marshal into parties, the merchant against the landholder, and the landholder against the merchant. If local provincial pride and jealousy arise, and you allow yourselves to speak with contempt of the courage, character, manners, or even language of particular places, you are doing a greater injury to the common cause, than you are aware of. If such practices are admitted among us, I shall look upon it as one of the most dangerous symptoms, and if they become general, a presage of approaching ruin.

By firmness and patience, I mean a resolute adherence to your duty, and laying your account with many difficulties as well as occasional disappointments. In a former part of this discourse, I have cautioned you against ostentation and vain glory. Be pleased farther to observe that extremes often beget one another, the same persons who exult extravagantly on success, are generally most liable to despondent timidity on every little inconsiderable defeat. Men of this character are the bane and corruption of every society or party to which they belong, but they are especially the ruin of an army if suffered to continue in it. Remember the vicissitude of human things, and the usual course of providence. How often has a just cause been reduced to the lowest ebb, and yet when firmly adhered to, has become finally triumphant. I speak this now while the affairs of the colonies are in so prosperous a state, lest this prosperity itself should render you less able to bear unexpected misfortunes—The sum of the whole is, that the blessing of God is only to be looked for by those who are not wanting in the discharge of their own duty. I would neither have you to trust in an arm of flesh, nor sit with folded hands and expect that miracles should be wrought in your defence.—This is a

sin which is in Scripture filed tempting God. In opposition to it, I would exhort you as Joab did the host of Israel, who, though he does not appear to have had a spotless character throughout, certainly in this instance spoke like a prudent general and a pious man. 2 Sam. x. 12. "Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people and for the cities of our God, and let the Lord do that which is good in his fight."

I shall now conclude this discourse by some exhortations to duty founded upon the truths, which have been illustrated above, and suited to the interesting state of this country at the present time; and,

I. Suffer me to recommend to you an attention to the public interest of religion, or in other words, zeal for the glory of God and the good of others. I have already endeavored to exhort sinners to repentance, what I have here in view is to point out to you the concern which every good man ought to take in the national character and manners, and the means which he ought to use for promoting public virtue, and bearing down impiety and vice. This is a matter of the utmost moment, and which ought to be well understood, both in its nature and principles. Nothing is more certain than that a general profligacy and corruption of manners makes a people ripe for destruction. A good form of government may hold the rotten materials together for some time, but beyond a certain pitch even the best constitution will be ineffectual, and slavery must ensue. On the other hand, when the manners of a nation are pure, when true religion and internal principles maintain their vigor, the attempts of the most powerful enemies to oppress them are commonly baffled and disappointed. This will be found equally certain, whether we consider the great principles of God's moral government, or the operation and influence of natural causes.

What follows from this? That he is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down profanity and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy

to God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country. Do not suppose, my brethren, that I mean to recommend a furious and angry zeal for the circumstantials of religion, or the contentions of one sect with another about their peculiar distinctions. I do not wish you to oppose any body's religion, but every body's wickedness. Perhaps there are few surer marks of the reality of religion, than when a man feels himself more joined in spirit to a truly holy person of a different denomination, than to an irregular liver of his own. It is therefore your duty in this important and critical season to exert yourselves every one in his proper sphere to stem the tide of prevailing vice, to promote the knowledge of God, the reverence of his name and worship, and obedience to his laws.

Perhaps you will ask, what it is that you are called to do for this purpose farther than your own personal duty? I answer this itself when taken in its proper extent is not a little. The nature and obligation of visible religion is, I am afraid, little understood and less attended to.

Many from a real or pretended fear of the imputation of hypocrisy, banish from their conversation and carriage every appearance of respect and submission to the living God. What a weakness and meanness of spirit does it discover for a man to be ashamed in the presence of his fellow sinners, to profess that reverence to almighty God which he inwardly feels: The truth is, he makes himself truly liable to the accusation which he means to avoid. It is as genuine and perhaps a more culpable hypocrisy to appear to have less religion than you really have, than to appear to have more. This false shame is a more extensive evil than is commonly apprehended. We contribute constantly, though insensibly, to form each others character and manners; and therefore, the usefulness of a strictly holy and conscientious deportment is not confined to the possessor, but spreads its happy influence to all that are within its reach. I need scarcely add, that in proportion as men are distinguished by understanding, literature, age, rank, office, wealth, or any other circumstance, their example will be useful on the one hand, or pernicious on the other.

But I cannot content myself with barely recommending a silent example. There is a dignity in virtue which is entitled to authority, and ought to claim it. In many cases it is the duty of a good man, by open reproof and opposition, to wage war with profaneness. There is a scripture precept delivered in very singular terms, to which I beg your attention; "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, but shalt in any wise rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him." How prone are many to represent reproof as flowing from ill nature and furliness of temper: The Spirit of God, on the contrary, considers it as the effect of inward hatred, or want of genuine love, to forbear reproof when it is necessary or may be useful. I am sensible there may in some cases be a restraint from prudence, agreeably to that caution of Solomon, "Cast not your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you." Of this every man must judge as well as he can for himself; but certainly, either by open reproof, or expressive silence, or speedy departure from such society, we ought to guard against being partakers of other men's sins.

To this let me add, that if all men are bound in some degree, certain classes of men are under peculiar obligations to the discharge of this duty. Magistrates, ministers, parents, heads of families, and those whom age has rendered venerable, are called to use their authority and influence for the glory of God and the good of others. Bad men themselves discover an inward conviction of this, for they are often liberal in their reproaches of persons of grave characters or religious profession, if they bear with patience the profanity of others. Instead of enlarging on the duty of men in authority in general, I must particularly recommend this matter to those who have the command of soldiers enlisted for the defence of their country. The cause is sacred, and the champions for it ought to be holy. Nothing is more grievous to the heart of a good man, than to hear from those who are going to the field, the horrid sound of cursing and blasphemy; it cools the

ardor of his prayers, as well as abates his confidence and hope in God. Many more circumstances affect me in such a case, than I can enlarge upon, or indeed easily enumerate at present; the glory of God, the interest of the deluded sinner, going like a devoted victim and imprecating vengeance on his own head, as well as the cause itself committed to his care. We have sometimes taken the liberty to forebode the downfall of the British empire, from the corruption and degeneracy of the people. Unhappily the British soldiers have been distinguished among all the nations in Europe, for the most shocking profanity. Shall we then pretend to emulate them in this infernal distinction, or rob them of the horrid privilege? God forbid. Let the officers of the army in every degree remember, that as military subjection, while it lasts, is the most complete of any, it is in their power greatly to restrain, if not wholly to banish, this flagrant enormity.

2. I exhort all who are not called to go into the field to apply themselves with the utmost diligence to works of industry. It is in your power by this means not only to supply the necessities, but to add to the strength of your country. Habits of industry prevailing in a society not only increase its wealth, as their immediate effect, but they prevent the introduction of many vices, and are intimately connected with sobriety and good morals. Idleness is the mother or nurse of almost every vice; and want, which is its inseparable companion, urges men on to the most abandoned and destructive courses. Industry, therefore is a moral duty of the greatest moment, absolutely necessary to national prosperity, and the sure way of obtaining the blessing of God. I would also observe, that in this, as in every other part of God's government, obedience to his will is as much a natural mean, as a meritorious cause of the advantage we wish to reap from it. Industry brings up a firm and hardy race. He who is inured to the labor of the field, is prepared for the fatigues of a campaign. The active farmer who rises with the dawn and follows his team or plow, must in the end be an overmatch for those effeminate and delicate soldiers, who

are nursed in the lap of self-indulgence, and whose greatest exertion is in the important preparation for, and tedious attendance on, a masquerade, or midnight ball.

3. In the last place, suffer me to recommend to you frugality in your families, and every other article of expence. This the state of things among us renders absolutely necessary, and it stands in the most immediate connection both with virtuous industry, and active public spirit. Temperance in meals, moderation and decency in dress, furniture and equipage, have, I think, generally been characteristics of a distinguished patriot. And when the same spirit pervades a people in general, they are fit for every duty, and able to encounter the most formidable enemy. The general subject of the preceding discourse has been the wrath of man praising God. If the unjust oppression of your enemies, which withholds from you many of the usual articles of luxury and magnificence, shall contribute to make you clothe yourselves and your children with the works of your own hands, and cover your tables with the salutary productions of your own soil, it will be a new illustration of the same truth, and a real happiness to yourselves and your country.

I could wish to have every good thing done from the purest principles and the noblest views. Consider, therefore, that the Christian character, particularly the self-denial of the gospel, should extend to your whole deportment. In the early times of Christianity, when adult converts were admitted to baptism, they were asked among other questions, Do you renounce the world, its shews, its pomp, and its vanities? I do. The form of this is still preserved in the administration of baptism, where we renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh. This certainly implies not only abstaining from acts of gross intemperance and excess, but a humility of carriage, a restraint and moderation in all your desires. The same thing, as it is suitable to your Christian profession, is also necessary to make you truly independant in yourselves, and to feed the source of liberality and charity to others, or to the public. The riotous and wasteful liver, whose craving appetites make him constantly needy, is and must be sub-

ject to many masters, according to the saying of Solomon, "The borrower is servant to the lender." But the frugal and moderate person, who guides his affairs with discretion, is able to assist in public counsels by a free and unbiassed judgment, to supply the wants of his poor brethren, and sometimes, by his estate and substance to give important aid to a sinking country.

Upon the whole, I beseech you to make a wise improvement of the present threatenng aspect of public affairs, and to remember that your duty to God, to your country, to your families, and to yourselves, is the same. True religion is nothing else but an inward temper and outward conduct suited to your state and circumstances in providence at any time. And as peace with God and conformity to him, adds to the sweetness of created comforts while we possess them, so in times of difficulty and trial, it is in the man of piety and inward principle that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the useful citizen, and the invincible soldier.—God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both.

A D D R E S S

TO THE

NATIVES OF SCOTLAND RESIDING IN

A M E R I C A.

Countrymen and Friends,

AS soon as I had consented to the publication of the foregoing sermon, I felt an irresistible desire to accompany it with a few words addressed to you in particular. I am certain I feel the attachment of country as far as it is a virtuous or laudable principle, perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say, as far as it is a natural and pardonable prejudice. He who is so pleased may attribute it to this last when I say, that I have never seen cause to be ashamed of the place of my birth; that since the revival of arts and letters in Europe in the close of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, the natives of Scotland have not been inferior to those of any other country, for genius, erudition, military prowess, or any of those accomplishments which improve or embellish human nature. When to this it is added, that since my coming to America at an advanced period of life, the friendship of my countrymen has been as much above my expectation as desert, I hope every reader will consider what is now to be offered as the effect not only of unfeigned good will, but of the most ardent affection.

It has given me no little uneasiness to hear the word *Scotch* used as a term of reproach in the American controversy, which could only be upon the supposition that strangers of that country are more universally opposed to the liberties of America than those who were born in South-

Britain, or in Ireland, I am sensible that this has been done in some news-papers and contemptible anonymous publications, in a manner that was neither warranted by truth, nor dictated by prudence. There are many natives of Scotland in this country, whose opposition to the unjust claims of Great Britain has been as early and uniform, founded upon as rational and liberal principles, and therefore likely to be as lasting, as that of any set of men whatever. As to Great Britain itself, time has now fully discovered that the real friends of America in any part of that kingdom were very few, and those whose friendship was disinterested, and in no degree owing to their own political factions, still fewer. The wise and valuable part of the nation were, and as yet are, in a great measure ignorant of the state of things in this country; neither is it easy for the bulk of a people to shake off their prejudices, and open their eyes upon the great principles of universal liberty. It is therefore at least very disputable, whether there is any just ground for the distinction between Scots and English on this subject at all.

This dispute, however, I do not mean to enter upon, because it is of too little moment to find a place here, but supposing that, in some provinces especially, the natives of Scotland have been too much inclined to support the usurpations of the parent state, I will first endeavor to account for it, by assigning some of its probable causes; and then offer a few considerations which should induce them to wipe off the aspersion entirely, by a contrary conduct.

As to the first of these, I will mention what I suppose to have been the first and radical cause, and which gave birth to every other, of the disaffection of some of the natives of Scotland to the just privileges of America. What I have in view was the friends of liberty in many places of America, taking the part of, and seeming to consider themselves as in a great measure engaged in the same cause with, that very distinguished person, John Wilkes, Esq. of London. This was done not only in many writings and news-paper dissertations, but one or two colonies, in some of their most respectable meetings, manifested their

attachment to him, and seemed to consider him as their patron and friend. No. 45, which was the most offensive number of a worthless paper, was repeated and echoed, by the most silly and ridiculous allusions to it, through every part of the country, and by many who could not tell what was signified by the term.

It will not be necessary to say much on the prudence of such conduct, because I suppose those who expected Wilkes's mob would pull down the parliament-house, or that there would be insurrections all over the kingdom in behalf of America, are by this time fully satisfied of their mistake. It appears now in the clearest manner, that, till very lately, those who seemed to take the part of America in the British parliament, never did it on American principles. They either did not understand, or were not willing to admit, the extent of our claim. Even the great Lord Chatham's bill for reconciliation would not have been accepted here, and did not materially differ from what the ministry would have consented to. The truth is, the far greatest part of the countenance given in Britain to the complaints of this country, was by those who had no other intention in it than to use them as an engine of opposition to the ministry for the time being. It is true, some of them have now learned to reason very justly, and upon the most liberal principles; but their number is not great, and it was not the case with any one speaker or writer, whose works I have had the opportunity of perusing, till the very last stage of the quarrel.

What effect this Wilkism (if I may speak so) of many Americans may be supposed to have had upon the minds of gentlemen from Scotland, it is not difficult to explain. That gentleman and his associates thought proper to found the whole of their opposition to the then ministry, upon a contempt and hatred of the Scots nation; and by the most illiberal methods, and the most scandalous falsehoods, to stir up a national jealousy between the northern and southern parts of the island. There was not a vile term or hateful idea, which ancient vulgar animosity had ever used, though long union had made them scarcely intelligible, which he did not rake up and attempt to bring into cre-

dit, by writing and conversation. The consequence of this is well known. Wilkes and some others were burnt in effigy in Scotland, and it produced so general an attachment to the king and ministry, as has not yet spent its force. In these circumstances is it to be wondered at, that many who left Scotland within the last fifteen years, when they heard Wilkes, and those who adhered to him, extolled and celebrated by the sons of liberty, should be apt to consider it as an evidence of the same spirit, and that they were engaged in support of the same cause. Perhaps we may go a little higher with this remark in tracing political appearances to their source. It is generally said that the King himself has discovered a violent rancorous personal hatred against the Americans. If this be true, and I know nothing to the contrary, it may be easily accounted for upon the very same principles.

I am far from supposing that this was a good reason for any man's being cool to the American cause, which was as different from that of Wilkes, as light is from darkness. It was indeed doing great dishonor to the noble struggle, to suppose it to have any connection with who should be in or out of court-favor at London; and therefore it was always my opinion, that those who railed against the king and ministry only, did not carry the argument home, nor fully understand the nature of their own plea. In order to justify the American opposition, it is not necessary to shew that the persons in power have invaded liberty in Britain; it is sufficient to say that they, with the concurrence of the whole nation, have refused to suffer it to continue in the colonies.—This leads me to the second part of my design, which was to lay before you the reasons which, I think, should induce every lover of justice and of mankind, not only to be a well-wisher, but a firm and steadfast friend to America, in this important contest.

It has been often said, that the present is likely to be an important æra to America. I think we may say much more; it is likely to be an important æra in the history of mankind. In the ancient migrations, a new country was generally settled by a small unconnected, and often an ig-

norant band. The people and the soil were alike uncultivated, and therefore they proceeded to improvement by very slow degrees; nay, many of them fell back and degenerated into a state vastly more savage than the people from whence they came. In America we see a rich and valuable soil and an extensive country, taken possession of by the power, the learning, and the wealth of Europe. For this reason it is now exhibiting to the world a scene which was never seen before. It has had a progress in improvement and population so rapid as no political calculators have been able to ascertain. I look upon every thing that has been said upon this subject to be mere conjecture, except in such places as there has been an actual numeration. When men say that America doubles its number in fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years, they speak by guess, and they say nothing. In some places that may be under or over the truth; but there are vast tracts of land that fill every year with inhabitants, and yet the old settled places still continue to increase.

It is proper to observe that the British settlements have been improved in a proportion far beyond the settlements of other European nations. To what can this be ascribed? Not to the climate; for they are of all climates: Not to the people; for they are a mixture of all nations. It must therefore be resolved singly into the degree of British liberty which they brought from home, and which pervaded more or less their several constitutions. It has been repeated to us, I know not how often, by the mercenary short-sighted writers in favor of submission to, or reunion with, Great-Britain, that we have thriven very much in past times by our dependance on the mother country, and therefore we should be loth to part. These writers forget that the very complaint is, that she will not suffer us to enjoy our ancient rights. Can any past experience shew that we shall thrive under new impositions? I should be glad any such reasoners would attempt to prove that we have thriven by our dependance, and not by the degree of independence which we have hitherto enjoyed. If we have thriven by our dependance, I conceive it is a necessary consequence that those provinces must have

thriven most which have been most dependant. But the contrary is self-evident. Those which have hitherto enjoyed the freest form of government, though greatly inferior in soil and climate, have yet out-stripped the others in number of people and value of land, merely because the last were more under the influence of appointments and authority from home.

When this is the undeniable state of things, can any person of a liberal mind wish that these great and growing countries should be brought back to a state of subjection to a distant power? And can any man deny, that if they had yielded to the claims of the British parliament, they would have been no better than a parcel of tributary states, ruled by lordly tyrants, and exhausted by unfeeling pensioners, under the commission of one too distant to hear the cry of oppression, and surrounded by those who had an interest in deceiving him. It ought therefore, in my opinion, to meet with the cordial approbation of every impartial person, as I am confident it will of posterity, that they have united for common defence, and resolved that they will be both free and independent, because they cannot be the one without the other.

As this measure, long foreseen, has now taken place, I shall beg leave to say a few things upon it; in which I mean to show, 1. That it was necessary. 2. That it will be honorable and profitable. And, 3. That, in all probability, it will be no injury, but a real advantage, to the island of Great-Britain.

1. It had become absolutely necessary. All reconciliation, but upon the footing of absolute unconditional submission, had been positively refused by Great-Britain; unless, therefore, the colonies had resolved to continue in a loose and broken state, with the name of a government which they had taken arms to oppose, the step which they have now taken could not have been avoided. Besides, things had proceeded so far, and such measures had been taken on both sides, that it had become impossible to lay down a scheme by which *they* should be sure of our dependence, and *we*, at the same time, secured in our liberties. While things continued in their ancient state, there was

perhaps a power on the part of each, of which they were hardly conscious, or were afraid and unwilling to exert. But after the encroachments had been made and resisted, to expect any thing else than a continual attempt to extend authority on the one hand, and to guard against it on the other, is to discover very little knowledge of human nature. In such a situation, though every claim of America should be yielded, she would soon be either in a state of continual confusion, or absolute submission. The king of England, living in his English dominions, would not, and indeed durst not, assent to any act of an American legislature, that was, or was supposed to be hurtful to his English subjects. This is not founded on conjecture, but experience. There is not (at least dean Swift affirms it) any dependance of Ireland upon England, except an act of the Irish parliament, that the king of England shall be king of Ireland. This last has a separate independent legislature, and in every thing else but the above circumstance seems to be perfectly free; yet if any man should assert, that the one kingdom is not truly subject to the other, he would in my opinion know very little of the state and history of either.

2. A state of independency will be both honorable and profitable to this country. I pass over many advantages in the way of commerce, as well as in other respects, that must necessarily accrue from it, that I may dwell a little on the great and leading benefit, which is the foundation of all the rest. We shall have the opportunity of forming plans of government upon the most rational, just, and equal principles. I confess I have always looked upon this with a kind of enthusiastic satisfaction. The case never happened before since the world began. All the governments we have read of in former ages were settled by caprice or accident, by the influence of prevailing parties, or particular persons, or prescribed by a conqueror. Important improvements indeed have been forced upon some constitutions by the spirit of daring men, supported by successful insurrections. But to see government in large and populous countries settled from its foundation, by deliberate counsel, and directed immediately to the public

good of the present and future generations, while the people are waiting for the decision with full confidence in the wisdom and impartiality of those to whom they have committed the important trust, is certainly altogether new. We learn indeed from history, that small tribes and feeble new settlements, did sometimes employ one man of eminent wisdom, to prepare a system of laws for them. Even this was a wise measure, and attended with happy effects. But how vast the difference, when we have the experience of all past ages, the history of human society, and the well known causes of prosperity and misery in other governments, to assist us in the choice.

The prospect of this happy circumstance, and the possibility of losing it, and suffering the season to pass over, has filled me with anxiety for some time. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, there has been great unanimity and public spirit. The inhabitants of every province, and persons of all denominations, have vied with each other in zeal for the common interest. But was it not to be feared that some men would acquire over-bearing influence? that human weakness and human passions would discover themselves, and prevent the finishing of what had been so happily begun. In the time of the civil wars in England, had they settled a regular form of government as soon as the parliament had obtained an evident superiority, their liberties would never have been shaken, and the revolution would have been unnecessary. But by delaying the thing too long, they were broken into parties, and bewildered in their views, and at last tamely submitted without resistance to that very tyranny against which they had fought with so much glory and success. For this reason I think that every candid and liberal mind ought to rejoice in the measures lately taken through the States of America, and particularly the late declaration of independance, as it will not only give union and force to the measures of defence while they are necessary, but lay a foundation for the birth of millions, and the future improvement of a great part of the globe.

I have only further to observe, 3. That I am confident the Independence of America will, in the end, be to the

real advantage of the island of Great Britain. Were this even otherwise, it would be a weak argument against the claim of justice. Why should the security or prosperity of this vast country be sacrificed to the supposed interest of an inconsiderable spot? But I cannot believe that the misery and subjection of any country on earth, is necessary to the happiness of another. Blind partiality and self interest may represent it in this light; but the opinion is delusive, the supposition is false. The success and increase of one nation is, or may be, a benefit to every other. It is seldom, indeed, that a people in general can receive and adopt these generous sentiments, they are nevertheless perfectly just. It is industry only, and not possessions, that makes the strength and wealth of a nation; and this is not hindered but encouraged, provoked, and rewarded by the industry of others.*

But to leave the general principle, or rather to apply it to the case of Great Britain and America: What profit has the former hitherto received from the latter? and what can it reasonably expect for the future? Only its trade, and such part of that trade as tends to encourage the industry and increase the number of the inhabitants of that island. It will be said, they intend to raise a large, clear, net revenue upon us, by taxation. It has been shewn by many, that all the taxes which they could raise would only serve to feed the insatiable desire of wealth in placemen and pensioners, to increase the influence of the crown, and the corruption of the people. It was by the acquisition of numerous provinces that Rome hastened to its ruin. But even supposing it otherwise, and that without any bad consequence among themselves, they were to acquire a great addition to their yearly revenue, for every shilling they gained by taxes, they would lose ten in the way of trade. For a trifling addition to the sums of public money to be applied or wasted by ministers of state; they would lose ten times the quantity distributed among useful manufacturers, the strength and glory of a state. I think this has been sometimes compared to the difference

* See David Hume's Essay on the jealousy of trade:

between draughts of spirituous liquors to intoxicate the head or weaken the stomach, and cool refreshing food to give soundness, health and vigor to every member of the body.

The trade, then, of America, as soon as peace is settled, will be as open to them as ever. But it will be said, they have now an exclusive trade, they will then but share it with other nations. I answer, an exclusive trade is not easily preserved, and when it is preserved, the restriction is commonly more hurtful than useful. Trade is of a nice and delicate nature; it is founded upon interest. It will force its way wherever interest leads, and can hardly by any art be made to go in another direction. The Spaniards have an exclusive trade, as far as they please to confine it, to their own plantations. Do they reap much benefit from it? I believe not. Has it made their own people more industrious at home? Just the contrary. Does it, in the natural course of things, make a people less careful to work as well, and as cheap as others, to procure voluntary purchasers, when they know they can send their goods to those who are obliged to take them? Does it not both tempt and enable great merchants in the capital, to import from other nations what they can export to such a forced market, to advantage? By this means a considerable profit may come into the coffers of a few particulars, while no essential service is done to the people, and the ultimate profit is carried to that country where the goods are produced or fabricated. It has been repeatedly said by political writers in England, that the balance of trade is against that country to every nation, excepting Portugal and their own plantations. I will not answer for the truth or universality of this assertion, but if it is true in any measure, I will venture to affirm upon the principles of general reason, that the cause which produces it, is no other than the exclusive trade they have hitherto enjoyed to the American settlements.

But the circumstance which I apprehend will contribute most to the interest of Great Britain in American Independence is, its influence in peopling and enriching this great continent. It will certainly tend to make the

American States numerous, powerful, and opulent, to a degree not easily conceived. The great and penetrating Montesquieu, in his *Spirit of Laws*, has shewn in the clearest manner, that nothing contributes so much to the prosperity of a people, as the state of society among them, and the form of their government. A free government overcomes every obstacle, makes a desert a fruitful field, and fills a bleak and barren country with all the conveniences of life. If so, what must be the operation of this powerful cause upon countries enjoying in the highest degree every advantage that can be derived from situation, climate, and soil? If the trade of America has hitherto been of so great benefit to England, how much more valuable may it be when these countries shall be still more highly improved, if she shall continue to enjoy it? This argument is liable to no objection but what may arise from the loss of an exclusive trade, which I have already considered. It may be added, however, that there is not now nor ever has been, any aversion in the Americans to the people of Great Britain, so that they may be sure of our trade if they treat us as well as others, and if otherwise, they do not deserve it.

I might illustrate the argument by stating the probable consequences of a contrary supposition. If Great Britain should prevail, or overcome the American States, and establish viceroys with absolute authority in every province; all men of spirit and lovers of freedom would certainly withdraw themselves to a corner, if such could be found, out of the reach of tyranny and oppression. The numbers of the people at any rate would sensibly decrease, their wealth would be speedily exhausted, and there would remain only a nominal authority over a desolate country, in return for a vast expence laid out in the conquest, and in place of a great and profitable trade, by which both nations were made happy. One of the arguments, if they may be called so, made use of against this country, and on which an obligation to obedience has been founded, is taken from the expence they have been at in blood and treasure for our protection in former wars. This argument has been often answered in the fullest manner, but if they shall

continue to urge it, how fearful to think of the obligations we shall be under, after this war is finished? Then shall we owe them all the sums which they shall have laid out in subduing us, and all that we have spent in attempting to prevent it; all the blood which they shall have shed in attacking us, and all that we shall have spilt in our own defence. There is unquestionably a loss to Great Britain by the one side of the account as well as the other; and it tends to show, in the clearest manner, the unspeakable folly, as well as great injustice of the promoters of this war.

Thus I have stated to you, though very briefly, the principles on which I think the American cause ought to be pleaded, and on which it ought to be espoused and supported, by every lover of justice and of mankind. But though the general plea in justice were less clear than it is, there is a light in which the conduct of the opposers of it has always appeared to me unreasonable and ungenerous to the highest degree. That resistance to Great Britain has been determined on, in the most resolute manner, through all the colonies, by a vast majority, is not only certain, but undeniable. In the beginning of the controversy, some writers, with an impudence hardly to be paralleled, called the fact in question, attempted to deceive the people in this country, and effectually deceived the people of England, by making them believe that it was only a few factious and violent men that had engaged in the contest. It is not very long since a writer had the courage to assert, that "nine tenths of the people of Pennsylvania were against independence." The falshood of such misrepresentations is now manifest, and indeed was probably known from the beginning by those who desired to have them believed. Taking this for granted, then, for an inconsiderable minority, whether natives or strangers, to set themselves in opposition to the public councils is contrary to reason and justice, and even to the very first principles of the social life.

If there is any principle that was never controverted upon the social union, it is, that as a body, every society must be determined by the plurality. There was a time when it was not only just and consistent, but necessary,

that every one should speak his mind freely and fully of the necessity or expediency of resisting the authority of Great Britain. But that time is over long ago. The measures being resolved upon, and the conflict begun, one who is barely neuter can scarce be forgiven; a secret plodding enemy must be considered as a traitor. Every person who continued among us after the decisive resolutions formed by all the colonies, ought to be considered as pledging his faith and honor to assist in the common cause. Let me try to illustrate it by a similar case. Suppose that a ship at sea springs a leak, which exposes the whole company to the most imminent danger of perishing. Suppose a counsel is called of all the persons on board to determine what port they shall endeavor to gain. Then it is not only the right but the duty of every one to speak his own judgment, and to press it upon others by every argument in his power. Suppose a great majority determines to push for a certain place, and to go to the pump by turns every quarter of an hour; but that two, or three, or one, if you please, is of opinion that they should have gone another course, because of the wind, current, or any other circumstance, and that it would be best to change hands at the pump only every half hour. All this is well. But if after the determination, this same gentleman, because his advice was not followed, should refuse to pump at all, should silyly alter the ship's course, or deaden her way by every means in his power, or even should only by continual complaints and despondent fears, discourage others, on whose activity the common safety depended, I desire to know what treatment he would receive or deserve? Without doubt he would be thrown over board in less time than I have taken to state the case. I am not able to perceive the least difference between this supposition and what takes place in America at the present time.

If this argument is just with respect to every inhabitant of the country, it ought to have some additional weight with those who are not natives, and whose residence is not certain or has not been long. There is a great degree of indecency in such taking any part against what the majority of the inhabitants think to be their interest and that

of their country. Were they even wrong, their mistake should be lamented, not resisted; on the contrary, it would be the part both of generosity and justice to support them effectually in a contest which wisdom would have declined. We see indeed, every day, melancholy instances of a base and selfish temper operating different ways. Many when they do not obtain that rank and honor which their pride and partiality think their due, or if their advice is not followed, immediately renounce the service of their country, and it may go to destruction for them. In opposition to this, let me recommend the example of the illustrious Fabius of Rome. He had given strict orders to all his officers not to engage the enemy, but to keep at a distance. Unluckily his lieutenant-general, by his own rashness, got entangled with a part of the army under his command, and was engaged. Fabius, preferring his country's good to fame, rivalry, and safety, came immediately to his support with all expedition, and thereby gained a glorious and complete victory.

I hope you will take in good part the above reflections, which I think contain nothing that is virulent or indecent against any man or body of men. They are the effects of judgment and conviction. The author, as is probably known to many of you, has been personally abused in news-papers at home, for the part he was supposed to have taken in the American cause, which was in some degree indeed the motive to this address. He hopes that an honest and faithful support of liberty and equal government in this part of the world, will be no just reproach to his character, either as a scholar, a minister, or a Christian; and that it is perfectly consistent with an undiminished regard for the country which gave him birth.

The above is submitted to your candid perusal, by,

Gentlemen,

Your sincere friend, and

Obedient humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

DELIVERED AT A PUBLIC THANKSGIVING
AFTER PEACE.

A

S E R M O N.

PSALM iii. 8.

Salvation belongeth unto the Lord.

MY BRETHREN,

WE are met together in obedience to public authority, to keep a day of solemn thanksgiving to God, for the goodness of his providence to the United States of America, in the course of a war which has now lasted seven years, with a powerful and formidable nation. We are particularly called upon to give thanks for the signal successes with which it hath pleased him to bless our arms and those of our allies, in the course of the last year, and the campaign which is now drawing to a close. I need say nothing of the importance of the great contest in which we have been so long engaged, or the interesting alternative which depends upon the issue, as these seem to have been felt in the fullest manner by all ranks in this country from the beginning. The language even of the common people will convince every man of reflexion that they are universally sensible how much is at stake. My proper business therefore is to engage every pious hearer to adore the providence of God in general, to offer with sincerity

and gratitude the sacrifice of praise for his many mercies; and to make a wise and just improvement of the present promising situation of public affairs.

Many who now hear me are witnesses that it has never been my practice, for reasons which appear to me to be good, to intermix politics with the ordinary service of the sanctuary, on the weekly returns of the christian sabbath, further than fervent supplications to the Throne of Grace for divine direction to the public counsels, and assistance to those who are employed in the public service. But on days of this kind it becomes part of a minister's duty to direct the attention of the hearers to events of a public nature. This you know I did with great concern and at considerable length six years ago on a public Fast Day. I would therefore willingly in this more advanced period, take a view of what is past, and endeavor to direct you in what remains of your duty to God, to your country, and to yourselves.

For this purpose I have chosen the words of the Psalmist David, now read which are part of a psalm generally thought to have been composed by the royal author before the war with Absalom his unnatural son, was wholly finished, but when he had such presages of success as made him speak the language of faith and confidence. "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. Arise 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."

In discoursing upon this subject, I propose, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To explain and state the proper meaning of this expression or sentiment of the inspired psalmist, "salvation belongeth unto the Lord."

II. To lay before you a succinct view of what the United States of America owe to divine providence in the course of the present war.

III. To make a practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction.

First then, I am to explain and state the proper meaning of this expression or sentiment of the inspired psalmist, "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." This I mean to do by adhering strictly to what appears to be the mind of the spirit of God, in the passage before us, as well as in a manner agreeable to the analogy of faith. As religion is the same in substance in every age, the reflexions of pious persons in the course of providence arise from the same examples and lead to the same end. The words may justly be supposed to contain the psalmist's thankful acknowledgment of the past mercies of God, as well as the foundation of his future security. They carry in them a general confession of the influence of divine providence upon every event, and in particular with respect to *salvation*, or deliverance from impending danger. In this view when he says "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." It seems to imply the three following things,

I. That "salvation belongeth unto the Lord," as distinguished from human or created help, and therefore all confidence in man stands opposed to the sentiment expressed by the holy psalmist in the text. It is not opposed to the use or application of, but to an excessive or undue reliance on human means, or second causes of any kind. It implies, that success in any attempt is to be ultimately attributed to God. That it is he who by his providence provides outward means, who raises up friends to his people, or causes *their enemies to be at peace with them*. That it is he who in cases of difficulty and danger, directs their hands to war and their fingers to fight, and finally crowns their endeavors with success. Whether therefore the outward advantages are great or small, whether the expectation, or the probability of success has been strong or weak, he who confesses that salvation belongeth unto God, will finally give the glory to him. Confidence before, and boasting after the event, are alike contrary to this disposition. If any person desires to have his faith in this truth, confirmed or improved, let him read the history of mankind, in a cool and considerate manner, and with a

serious frame of spirit. He will then perceive that every page will add to his conviction. He will find that the most important events have seemed to turn upon circumstances the most trivial and the most out of the reach of human direction. A blast of wind, a shower of rain, a random shot, a private quarrel, the neglect of a servant, a motion without intention, or a word spoken by accident and misunderstood, has been the cause of a victory or defeat which has decided the fate of empires. Whoever with these facts in his view, believes the constant influence and over-ruling power of divine Providence, will know what the Psalmist means when he says, "Salvation be-
"longeth unto the Lord."

2. In this sentiment, the Psalmist seems to have had in view the *omnipotence* of Providence; that nothing is impossible with God; that there is no state so dangerous, no enemy so formidable, but he is able to work deliverance. He has not only the direction and government of means and second causes, but is himself superior to all means. The word *salvation*, when it is applied in scripture to temporal danger, generally signifies a great and distinguished deliverance. Thus it is used by Moses, Exodus xiv. 13. "Stand still and see the salvation of God;" and in the same manner, 1 Sam. xiv. 45. "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?" When, therefore, a person or people are threatened with evils of the most dreadful kind: when they are engaged in a conflict very unequal; when they are driven to extremity, and have no resource left as means of defence: then, if the cause in which they are engaged is righteous and just, they may cry to God for relief. The sentiment expressed by the Psalmist ought to bear them up against despair; and they may say as the angel to the father of the faithful, "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" There are many instances in scripture of signal deliverance granted to the servants of God, some of them even wholly miraculous, which teach us to set our hope in his mercy, and not to suffer his mighty works to slip out of our minds. This is the exercise of faith in an unchangeable God—"the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

3. This sentiment has respect to the mercy and goodness of God, or his readiness to hear the cry of the oppressed, and send deliverance to his people. This circumstance is necessary to be taken in, to make him the proper object of faith and trust; and it must be combined with the other, to give us a complete view of the influence of Providence. Power and wisdom alone, give an imperfect display of the divine character. It would give little support under the pressure of affliction, to have a general or theoretical persuasion, that all things are possible with God; but if we believe his readiness to interpose, and see our title clear to implore his help, we have that hope which is justly called, "the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast." In this sense, salvation belongeth unto God; it is his prerogative; it is his glory. The promise so often repeated in the same or similar terms, is addressed both to nations and particular persons. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble, to deliver him, and to honor him. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth and delivereth him out of all his troubles. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

Having briefly stated these known and general truths, I proceed to the second and principal thing proposed, which was to lay before you a succinct view of what the United States of America owe to divine Providence, in the course of the present war. On considering this part of the subject, a difficulty presents itself as to the manner of handling it. I am desirous of doing it some measure of justice, and at the same time of avoiding excessive prolixity, or a tedious enumeration of particular facts. To unite these two purposes as much as possible, I will divide what I have to say into distinct branches; and after a few words of illustration on each of them, leave it to every hearer to add such further examples as may have fallen within his own observation. The branches I would separately consider, are the following: 1. Signal successes or particular and providential favors to us in the course of the war. 2. Preservation from difficulties and evils which seemed to be in our

situation unavoidable, and at the same time next to insurmountable. 3. Confounding the councils of our enemies, and making them hasten on the change which they desired to prevent.

1. Signal successes or providential favors to us in the course of the war. Here I must mention what happened at the beginning of the contest, and prevented us from being crushed in the very out-set, although it is now in a manner wholly forgotten. Let us remember our true situation, after we had made the most public and peremptory declarations of our determination to defend our liberties. There was a willing spirit, but unarmed hands. Our enemies have all along charged us with a deliberate concerted purpose of breaking with them, and setting up an independent empire. The falshood of this accusation might be made to appear from many circumstances; as there being no pre-contract among the states themselves, nor any attempt to engage allies or assistance in Europe, and several others. But though there were no other argument at all, it is sufficiently proved by the total want of arms and ammunition to supply us even during the first stages of resistance. The nakedness of the country in this respect is well known; and our enemies endeavored to avail themselves of it by taking every measure to prevent their being brought to us. This difficulty was got over by many providential supplies, without the care or foresight of those who were at the head of affairs, and particularly by many unexpected captures from our enemies themselves.

How contrary to human appearance and human conjectures have many circumstances turned out? It was universally supposed at first that we should be able to do nothing at all at sea, because of the great naval power of the enemy; yet the success of our private vessels has been one of the most powerful means of distressing them, and supporting us. I cannot help in particular taking notice, that the eastern states which were the first objects of their vengeance, were actually in their possession, and seemed to be devoted to pillage and destruction; yet in a short time they were delivered, and have in the course of the war

acquired a greater accession of wealth and power than it is probable they could have done in the same period of security and peace.

It falls to be taken notice of under this branch of the subject, that our most signal successes have generally been when we had the weakest hopes or the greatest fears. What could be more discouraging than our situation at the close of the year 1776? when, after general Howe's arrival with so powerful and well appointed an armament, our army enlisted but for a few months, was almost entirely dispersed? Yet then did the surprize of the Hessians at Trenton, and the subsequent victory at Princeton, raise the drooping spirits of the country, and give a new turn to our affairs. These advantages redounded greatly to the honor of the commander in chief who planned, and the handful of troops with him, who executed the measures, as is confessed by all; yet were they of still greater moment to the cause of America in general, than they were brilliant as military exploits. This place and neighborhood having been the scene of these actions, cannot but make them and their consequences fresh in the memory of every one who now hears me.

The great victory over general Burgoyne and his army, (weakened at Bennington, and taken prisoners at Saratoga,) which opened the eyes of Europe in general, and in some degree even of Britain, happened at a time when many were discouraged. It happened when after the losses of Brandy Wine and Germantown, the British were in possession of Philadelphia, and the Congress of the United States were obliged to fly to a distant part of the country. It happened not long after our disgraceful flight from Ticonderoga, and the scandalous loss of that post, which was every where said and thought to be the key of the continent, and the possession of it essential to our security. We must not omit to observe that this victory over a numerous army of British regulars, was obtained by an army composed in a great measure of militia suddenly collected, and freemen of the country who turned out as volunteers.

In the same manner our late astonishing success in the south began when our affairs in that part of the continent wore a most discouraging aspect. The year 1781 which began with mutiny in the northern army, and weakness in the southern, produced more instances of gallantry and military prowess than all the former, and was closed with a victory more glorious to us, and more humiliating to the enemy, than any thing that had before happened during the course of the war.

It was surely a great favor of Providence to raise up for us so great and illustrious an ally in Europe. This Prince has assisted us as you all know in a very powerful and effectual manner, and has granted that assistance upon a footing so generous as well as just, that our enemies will not yet believe, but there must be some secret and partial stipulations in favor of himself and his subjects, although no such thing exists.

Let me add to all these the providing for us a person who was so eminently qualified for the arduous task of commander in chief of the armies of the United States. I must make some apology here. None who know me, I think will charge me with a disposition to adulation or gross flattery of living characters. I am of opinion and have often expressed it, that the time for fixing a man's character is after death has set his seal upon it, and favor fear and friendship are at end. For this reason I do not mean to give a general or full character of the person here in view. But in speaking of the kindness of Providence to the United States, it would be a culpable neglect not to mention that several of his characteristic qualities seem so perfectly suited to our wants, that we must consider his appointment to the service, and the continued health with which he has been blessed, as a favor from the God of heaven. Consider his coolness and prudence, his fortitude and perseverance, his happy talent of engaging the affection of all ranks, so that he is equally acceptable to the citizen, and to the soldier—to the state in which he was born, and to every other on the continent. To be a brave man, or skilful commander, is common to him with many others; but this

country stood in need of a comprehensive and penetrating mind, which understood the effect of particular measures in bringing the general cause to an issue. When we contrast his character and conduct with those of the various leaders that have been opposed to him, when we consider their attempts to blast each others reputation, and the short duration of their command, we must say that Providence has fitted him for the charge, and called him to the service.

This head can hardly be better closed than with the extraordinary interposition of divine Providence for the discovery of the black treachery of Arnold, who intended to put one of the most important fortresses, and the general himself into the enemies hands. This design was ripe for execution, and the time of execution was at hand. As there was no suspicion of the traitor, no measures were, or could be taken for preventing it. The meeting of the spy with two friends of America, which was entirely casual, the unaccountable embarrassment of that artful person, when with a little address, he might easily have extricated himself; and indeed, the whole circumstances of that affair, clearly point out the finger of God.

I might have added many more instances of the favor of providence in particular events, but what have been mentioned, I think are fully sufficient for the purpose, for which they are adduced, and will lead the hearers to the recollection of others of a similar kind.

The second part of my observations, must be on the difficulties and dangers, which seemed to be in our situation, unavoidable, and, at the same time, next to insurmountable. The first of this kind, which I shall mention, is dissention, or the opposition of one colony to another. On this our enemies reckoned very much, from the beginning. Even before the war broke out, reasoners seemed to build their hopes, of the colonies not breaking off from the mother country, for ages, upon the impossibility of their uniting their strength, and forming one compact body, either for offence or resistance. To say the truth, the danger was great and real. It was on this account,

foreseen and dreaded, and all true patriots were anxious to guard against it. Great thanks, doubtless, are due to many citizens in every state, for their virtuous efforts to promote the general union. These efforts have not been without effect; but I am of opinion, that union has been hitherto preserved and promoted, to a degree that no man ventured to predict, and very few had the courage to hope for. I confess myself, from the beginning, to have apprehended more danger, from this, than from any other quarter, and must now declare, that my fears have been wholly disappointed, and my hopes have been greatly exceeded. In the public councils, no mark of dissention, in matters of importance, has ever appeared; and I take upon me further to say, that every year has obliterated colonial distinctions, and worn away local prejudices, so that mutual affection, is at present more cordial, and the views and works of the whole, more uniform, than ever they were, at any preceding period.

Having mentioned the union and harmony of the United States, it will be very proper to add, that the harmony, that has prevailed in the allied army, is another signal mercy, for which we ought to be thankful to God. It is exceedingly common, for dissention to take place, between troops of different nations, when acting together. In the English history, we meet with few examples of conjunct expeditions, with sea and land forces, in which the harmony has been complete. Our enemies did not fail to make use of every topic, which they apprehended, would be inflammatory and popular, to produce jealousies between us and our allies. Yet it has been wholly in vain. Not only, have the officers and soldiers of the American and French armies, acted together, with perfect cordiality, but the troops of our allies, have met with a hearty welcome, wherever they have been, from the people of the country; and indeed, just such a reception as shows they were esteemed to be of the utmost importance and utility to the American cause.

Another difficulty we had to encounter, was the want of money and resources for carrying on the war. To remedy this evil an expedient was fallen upon which I do

not look upon myself as obliged either to justify or approve. It was, however embraced by the plurality as necessary, and upon the whole, less hazardous than any other, which in our situation was practicable. The difficulty of raising, clothing, paying and supporting an army with a depreciated currency, which its own nature, the arts of interested persons, and the unwearied attempts of our enemies were pushing on to annihilation, may be easily perceived. Yet the war has not only been supported, but we have seen the fall and ruin of the money itself without the least injury, to the public cause. Without injury did I say, it was to the unspeakable benefit of the public cause. Many private persons indeed, have suffered such injury as not only merits pity, but calls for redress, and I hope the time will come, when all the redress shall be given that the nature of the thing and the state of the country, will admit. In the mean time, when we reflect upon what is past, we have a proof of the general attachment of the country to the cause of liberty, the strongest perhaps that can well be conceived, and we see a circumstance from which we feared the greatest evil, adding its force to many others in blinding our enemies, misleading their measures, and disappointing their expectations.

Another difficulty we had before us was the being obliged to encounter the whole force of the British nation, with an army composed of raw soldiers, unacquainted with military discipline. The difficulty was increased by our own conduct, viz. filling our army with soldiers enlisted for short periods. The views of those who preferred this method was certainly very honorable, though the wisdom of it is at least very disputable. They hoped it would make every man in America a soldier in a short time. This effect indeed, it has in a good degree produced by the frequent calls of the militia, wherever the enemy appeared. They also apprehended danger from a standing army, unconnected with civil life, who after they had conquered their enemies might give cause of jealousy to their friends. The history of other countries in general, and in particular that of the civil wars in England against Charles the first, seemed to give plausi-

bility to this reason, though from several circumstances there was less cause of fear in America, than would have been in one of the European states. However the measure was resolved upon by the plurality at first, and we felt the inconvenience of it very severely; but is pleased God to preserve us from utter destruction, to set bounds to the progress of our enemies, and to give time to the states to make better and more effectual provision for their final overthrow.

The only other danger I shall mention, was that of anarchy and confusion, when government under the old form was at an end, and every state was obliged to establish civil constitutions for preserving internal order, at the very same time that they had to resist the efforts of a powerful enemy from without. This danger appeared so considerable that some of the king of Great Britain's governors ran off early, as they themselves professed, in order to augment it. They hoped that universal disorder, would prevail in every colony, and not only defeat the measures of the friends of liberty, but be so insupportable to the people in general, as to oblige them to return to their subjection, for their own sakes, and to be rid of a still greater evil. This danger through the divine blessing, we happily and indeed entirely escaped. The governors by their flight ripened every measure, and hastened on the change, by rendering it visibly necessary. Provincial conventions were held, city and county committees, were every where chosen, and such was the zeal for liberty, that the judgments of these committees was as perfectly submitted to, and their orders more cheerfully, and completely executed, than those of any regular magistrates, either under the old government, or since the change. At the same time, every state prepared and settled their civil constitutions which have now all taken place, and except in very few instances without the least discord or dissatisfaction. Happily for us in this state, our constitution has now subsisted near seven years, and we have not so much as heard the voice of discontent. I speak on this head, of what is known to every hearer, and indeed to the whole world; and yet I am persuaded that to those who reflect upon it

it will appear next to miraculous. Although so much was to be done, in which every man was interested, although the colonies were so various and extensive, and the parliament of Great Britain was threatening, and its army executing vengeance against us, yet the whole was completed in little more than a year, with as much quietness and composure, as a private person would move his family and furniture from one house, and settle them in another.

The third branch of my observations shall consist of a few instances, in which the councils of our enemies have been confounded, and their measures have been such as to hasten on the change, which they desired to prevent. As to the first of these, nothing can be more remarkable, than the ignorance and error in which they have continued from the first rise of the controversy, to the present time, as to the state of things, and the dispositions of men in America. Even those at the head of affairs in Great Britain, have not only constantly given out, but in my opinion, have sincerely believed, that the great body of the people were upon their side, and were only misled into rebellion, by a few factious leaders. At the same time, the very same persons, without being sensible of the absurdity, have affirmed; that this country was groaning under the oppression of its rulers, and longed to be delivered from it. Now these things could not both be true. If the first had been true, these leaders must have been popular and acceptable in a high degree, and have had the most extensive influence. If the last had been true, they must have been inwardly and universally detested. But how many circumstances might have convinced them of the falsehood of both these assertions. The vast extent of the states, and the concurrence of all ranks and classes of men, which was so early, so uniform and so notorious, plainly prove, that no such thing could have happened, without a strong and rooted inclination in the people themselves, and such as no address or management of interested persons could have produced. Besides, those who know how fluctuating a body the Congress is, and what continual changes take place in it, as to men, must perceive the ab-

furdity of their making or succeeding in any such attempt. The truth is, the American Congress owes its existence and its influence, to the people at large. I might easily show, that there has hardly any great or important step been taken, but the public opinion has gone before the resolutions of that body; and I wish I could not say, that they have been sometimes very slow, in hearing and obeying it.

As to the other assertion, it was still more manifestly false, and they had greater opportunities of perceiving it to be so. If Congress, or those in public trust, in any state, had tyrannized over the people, or wantonly oppressed them, the usurpation would, in the nature of things, have come to a speedy period. But what if I should say, that this pretence of our enemies, in an equivocal sense, is indeed true; and yet this truth, doth but the more clearly demonstrate their error and delusion. It is true, that Congress has, in many instances, been obliged to have recourse to measures, in themselves hard and oppressive, and confessed to be so; which yet, have been patiently submitted to, because of the important purpose that was to be served by them. Of this kind, was the emission of paper money; the passing of tender laws; compelling all into the militia; draughting the militia, to fill the regular army; pressing provisions and carriages; and many others of the like nature. Two things are remarkable in this whole matter: one, that every imposition, for the public service, fell heaviest upon those who were the friends of America; the lukewarm or contrary minded, always finding some way, of shifting the load from their own shoulders: The other, that from the freedom of the press in this country, there never were wanting, the boldest and most inflammatory publications, both against men and measures. Yet neither the one nor the other, nor both united, had any perceptible influence in weakening the attachment of the people. If this account is just, and I am confident it is known to be so, by almost all who now hear me, what less than judicial blindness, could have made our enemies so obstinate, in the contrary sentiments? Such however we know has been the case,

and as the whole of their proceedings have been grounded on mistakes, it is no wonder that they have been both injudicious and unsuccessful.

This matter may be explained in the following manner. They supposed that they had only a few discontented particulars to apprehend and punish, and an army to conquer in no respects comparable to their own; but in addition to this they had the lost affections of a whole people to recover. The first which was almost of no consequence at all, they bent their whole force to effect in council and in the field. The other they supposed was already done, or not worth the doing; and therefore every measure they took had a quite different intention, and a quite opposite effect. In all this they were fortified and confirmed by the sentiments, discourse and conduct of the disaffected in America. These unhappy people, from the joint influence of prejudice, resentment and interest, were unwearied in their endeavors to mislead their friends. Their prejudice deserves to be mentioned first. This was great indeed. They had generally such an exalted idea of the power of Britain, that they really considered it as madness to resist. I could mention many sentiments uttered by them which could hardly fail of making the hearers to smile at their gross ignorance, and more than childish timidity. Resentment also joined its force. They were sometimes roughly handled by the multitude at the beginning of the controversy. This led them to wish for revenge, and as they could not inflict it themselves, to call for it from their friends in England. To these two circumstances we may add that the road to favor was plainly that of flattery; and therefore their opinions and intelligence were generally such as they supposed would be most acceptable to those who had it in their power to provide for them, or promote them. Such was the effect of these circumstances united, that time will constrain every body to confess, that the partizans and friends of the English in America, have done more essential injury to their cause, than the greatest and boldest of their enemies.

The above distinction between overcoming the armed force of the states, and regaining the people's hearts, is

the true key to explain the proceedings, and account for the events of the war. Every measure taken by Great-Britain, from the beginning, instead of having the least tendency to gain the affections of the people of this country, had, and one would think must have been seen to have, the most powerful influence in producing the contrary effect. Without mentioning every separate particular, I will only consider a little the cruelty and severity with which the war has been carried on; because I am firmly of opinion, that the spirit and temper of our enemies in this contest, has been the principal cause of the disappointment of their attempts. In this the cabinet and counsellors in Great-Britain, and the officers and soldiers of their armies in America, have nothing to reproach each other with. If the barbarity of the army has ever equalled, certainly it has never exceeded the cruelty of several of the acts of parliament. I will not enumerate these acts, which are so well known, and which some years ago were so often mentioned in every publication; but shall only tell you with what view I desire you to recollect them. Every one of these acts, on their being known in America, served to increase the union of the states, to fill the heart of the citizens with resentment, and to add vigor to the soldier's arm.

After the example of their employers at home, the commanders of the British armies, their officers and soldiers, and indeed all their adherents, seemed to have been animated with a spirit of implacable rancor, mingled with contempt towards the Americans. This is to be understood of the general run or greatest number of every class, always admitting that there were particular exceptions, whose honor and principle controuled or overcame the national prejudice. Neither perhaps is it in any of them to be ascribed so much to the national character, as to the nature and subject of the quarrel. It has been long observed, that civil wars are carried on with much greater fury, and attended with acts of greater barbarity, than wars between independent nations. The fact, however, of their barbarity is certain; and no less so is the powerful

influence which this conduct has had in defeating their expectations either of reconciliation or submission.

The barbarous treatment of the American prisoners through the whole war, but especially at the beginning, when their enemies were confident of success, is a melancholy subject indeed, and will be a stain upon the British name to future ages. No part of America can be ignorant of this, having witnesses in every state, in the few that returned alive out of their hands. But we in this state, through which they passed to their homes, can never forget the appearance of the emaciated spectres who escaped or were exchanged from British dungeons or prisonships. Neither was it possible for the people in general not to be struck with the contrast when exchanges took place, and they saw companies of British prisoners going home hale and hearty, bearing every mark of their having been supplied with comfortable provisions, and treated with humanity in every other respect. I am not to enlarge upon these known and fertile subjects. The only reason of their being introduced is to shew the effect which spectacles of this kind must have had upon the public mind, and their influence in rendering the return of the people of this country to submission to the parent state altogether impossible.

The inhuman treatment of the American prisoners by the the British, was not more remarkable than their insolence and rapacity towards the people of the country wherever their power extended. The abuse and contempt poured upon the inhabitants in discourse, and the indiscriminate plunder of their property, could not but in the most powerful manner alienate their affections. Many who hear me at present, have had so full conviction of this truth in their own experience, that it is unnecessary to offer any proof of it. It is of importance however to observe, that this impolitic oppression was the true and proper cause of the general concurrence of the inhabitants of this state to the American standard, in the beginning of the year 1777, and their vigorous exertions ever since against the incursions of the enemy from New-York. I confess I was not so much surpris'd at such conduct when

they possessed this part of the country ; because they were then flushed with victory, and had scarcely an idea that they would fail of final success. But when we consider that their conduct has been the same, or even worse, in the southern states, we can hardly help wondering at their infatuation. Surely there was time enough before the year 1780, to have convinced them that insolence and cruelty were not the means of bringing back a revolted people ; and yet by all accounts their treatment of the inhabitants in Georgia, South and North-Carolina, in that year, was even more barbarous than had been experienced by the people here three years before.

I shall only further mention, that it seems plainly to have been not by accident, but in consequence of general orders or a prevailing disposition, that they treated wherever they went, places of public worship (except those of the episcopal denomination,) with all possible contempt and insult. They were in general used not only for hospitals, but storehouses, barracks, riding schools and prisons, and in many places they were torn to pieces wantonly and without any purpose, to be served by it, but wreaking their vengeance on the former possessors. What influence must this have had upon the minds of the people ? What impression must have been made upon the few who remained, and were witnesses to these acts of profanation, when in those places where they had been accustomed to hear nothing but the word and the worship of God, their ears were stunned with the horrid sound of cursing and blasphemy. This was done very early in Boston, and repeated in every part of the continent with increasing rage.

I have chosen on this part of the subject to insist only on what was general, and therefore must be supposed to have had an extensive influence. It would have been easy to have collected many particular acts of barbarity, but as these might be accounted for from the degeneracy and savage disposition of the persons who were severally guilty of them, they would not have been so conclusive for the purpose for which they were adduced. I shall therefore omit every thing of this kind, except one of the earli-

est instances of their barbarity, because it happened in one of the streets of this place, viz. massacreing in cold blood, a minister of the gospel, who was not, nor ever had been in arms, and received his death wound, while on his knees begging mercy.

Upon the whole nothing appears to me more manifest than that the separation of this country from Britain, has been of God; for every step the British took to prevent, served to accelerate it, which has generally been the case when men have undertaken to go in opposition to the course of providence, and to make war with the nature of things.

I proceed to make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction. And,

In the first place, it is our duty to give praise to God for the present happy and promising state of public affairs. This is what we are called to, and making profession of, by our meeting together at the present time. Let it then be more than a form. Let the disposition of your hearts be correspondent to the expressions of your lips. While we, who are here alive before God this day, recollect with tenderness and sympathy, with surviving relations the many valuable lives that have been lost in the course of the war, let us give thanks to God who hath spared us as monuments of his mercy, who hath given us the satisfaction of seeing our complete deliverance approaching, and those liberties civil and religious for which we have been contending established upon a lasting foundation. It will be remembered by many, that I have early and constantly expressed my disapprobation of self confidence, and vain-glorious boasting. To many American soldiers I have said, seldom boast of what you have done, but never of what you only mean to do. This was not occasioned by any doubt or hesitation I ever had as to the probable issue of the war, from the apparent state of things, and the course of human events, but by a deep conviction of the sinfulness of this practice, either in a nation or person. Now therefore that we have come so far in opposition to a formidable enemy, it is certainly our duty to say that "salvati-

“on belongeth unto the Lord.” This indeed is not only the duty of every person with respect to what is past, but is the way to support and animate us in what remains of the warfare, and dispose us to make a suitable improvement of the settlement which we hope is not very distant.

2. We ought to testify our gratitude to God for the many signal interpositions of his providence on our behalf, by living in his fear and by a conversation such as becometh the gospel. This is not only a tribute we owe to him for every mercy, and therefore for those of a public nature, but it is the only way by which public prosperity can become a real mercy to us, eternity is of yet greater moment than any earthly blessing. Their state is little to be envied who are free as citizens, but slaves as sinners. All temporal comforts derive their value from their being the fruits of divine goodness, the evidence of covenant love and the earnest of everlasting mercy. It is therefore our indispensable duty to endeavor to obtain the sanctified improvement of every blessing, whether public or personal. There is the greater necessity of insisting on this at present, that though a time of national suffering or jeopardy has some advantages for alarming the consciences of the secure, it hath also some disadvantages, and frequently occasions such distraction of mind as is little favourable to the practice of piety. We know by sad experience that the regular administration of divine ordinances, the observation of the Sabbath; and the good order of the country in general have been much disturbed by the war. The public service seemed many times to justify what would otherwise have been highly improper. This contributed to introduce a licentiousness of practice, and to protect those from restraint or reproof, who I am afraid in many cases, rather yielded to inclination than submitted to necessity. Now therefore, when by the blessing of God our distresses are removed, we ought to return to punctuality as to public order, as well as conscientious strictness in every part of our practice.

3. In the third place it is our duty, to testify our gratitude to God, by usefulness in our several stations, or in other words by a concern for the glory of God, the

public interest of religion, and the good of others. This is the duty of every person, even of the lowest station, at all times. Even the meanest and most unconnected hath still some small bounds, within which his influence and example may be useful. But it is especially the duty of those who are distinguished from others by their talents, by their station, or by office and authority. I shall at present consider it chiefly as the duty of two sorts of persons, ministers and magistrates, those who have the direction of religious societies, and those who are vested with civil authority. As to the first of these, they are under the strongest obligations to holiness and usefulness in their own lives, and diligence in doing good to others. The world expects it from them, and demands it of them. Many of this class of men, have been peculiarly the objects of the hatred and detestation of the enemy, in the course of this war. Such therefore as have been spared to see the return of peace and security, are bound by the strongest ties, to improve their time and talents, in their master's service. But what I have peculiarly in view, is strickness in religious discipline, or the inspection of the morals of their several societies. By our excellent constitution, they are well secured in their religious liberty. The return which is expected from them to the community, is that by the influence of their religious government, their people may be the more regular citizens, and the more useful members of society. I hope none here will deny that the manners of the people in general, are of the utmost moment to the stability of any civil society. When the body of a people, are altogether corrupt in their manners, the government is ripe for dissolution. Good laws may hold the rotten bark some longer together, but in a little time all laws must give way to the tide of popular opinion, and be laid prostrate under universal practice. Hence it clearly follows, that the teachers and rulers of every religious denomination, are bound mutually to each other, and to the whole society, to watch over the manners of their several members.

(2) Those who are vested with civil authority, ought also with much care, to promote religion and good morals among all under their government. If we give credit to the holy scriptures, he that ruleth must be just, ruling in the fear of God. It is a truth of no little importance to us in our present situation, not only that the manners of a people are of consequence to the stability of every civil society; but that they are of much more consequence to free states, than to those of a different kind. In many of these last, a principle of honor and the subordination of ranks, with the vigor of despotic authority, supply the place of virtue, by restraining irregularities and producing public order. But in free states, where the body of the people have the supreme power, properly in their own hands, and must be ultimately resorted to on all great matters, if there be a general corruption of manners, there can be nothing but confusion. So true is this, that civil liberty cannot be long preserved without virtue. A monarchy may subsist for ages, and be better or worse under a good or bad prince; but a republic once equally poised, must either preserve its virtue or lose its liberty, and by some tumultuous revolution, either return to its first principles, or assume a more unhappy form.

From this results a double duty, that of the people themselves, who have the appointment of rulers, and that of their representatives, who are intrusted with the exercise of this delegated authority. Those who wish well to the state ought to chuse to places of trust, men of inward principle, justified by exemplary conversation. Is it reasonable to expect wisdom from the ignorant, fidelity from the profligate, assiduity and application to public business from men of a dissipated life? Is it reasonable to commit the management of public revenue, to one who hath wasted his own patrimony? Those therefore who pay no regard to religion and sobriety, in the persons whom they send to the legislature of any state, are guilty of the greatest absurdity, and will soon pay dear for their folly. Let a man's zeal, profession, or even principles as to political measures be what they will, if he is without personal integrity and private virtue, as a

man he is not to be trusted. I think we have had some instances of men who have roared for liberty in taverns, and were most noisy in public meetings, who yet have turned traitors in a little time. Suffer me on this subject to make another remark. I have not yet heard of any Christian state in which there were not laws against immorality. But with what judgment will they be made, or with what vigor will they be executed, by those who are profane and immoral in their own practice? Let me suppose a magistrate on the bench of justice, administering an oath to a witness, or passing sentence of death on a criminal, and putting him in mind of a judgment to come. With what propriety, dignity, or force can any of these be done by one who is known to be a blasphemer or an infidel, by whom in his convivial hours every thing that is serious and sacred is treated with scorn?

But if the people in general ought to have regard to the moral character of those whom they invest with authority, either in the legislative, executive or judicial branches, such as are so promoted may perceive what is and will be expected from them. They are under the strongest obligations to do their utmost to promote religion, sobriety, industry, and every social virtue, among those who are committed to their care. If you ask me what are the means which civil rulers are bound to use for attaining these ends, further than the impartial support and faithful guardianship of the rights of conscience; I answer that example itself is none of the least. Those who are in high station and authority, are exposed to continual observation; and therefore their example is both better seen and hath greater influence than that of persons of inferior rank. I hope it will be no offence in speaking to a Christian assembly, if I say that reverence for the name of God, a punctual attendance on the public and private duties of religion, as well as sobriety and purity of conversation, are especially incumbent on those who are honored with places of power and trust.

But I cannot content myself with this. It is certainly the official duty of magistrates to be "a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well." That society will

suffer greatly, in which there is no care taken to restrain open vice by exemplary punishment. It is often to be remarked, in some of the corrupt governments of Europe, that whatever strictness may be used, or even impartiality in rendering justice between man and man, yet there is a total and absolute relaxation as to what is chiefly and immediately a contempt of God. Perhaps a small trespass of a poor man on property, shall be pursued by a vindictive party, or punished by a tyrannical judge with the utmost severity; when all the laws against swearing, sabbath-breaking, lewdness, drunkenness and riot, shall be a dead letter, and more trampled upon by the judges themselves, than by the people who are to be judged. Those magistrates who would have their authority both respected and useful, should begin at the source, and reform or restrain that impiety towards God, which is the true and proper cause of every disorder among men. O the short-sightedness of human wisdom, to hope to prevent the effect, and yet nourish the cause! Whence come dishonesty and petty thefts? I say, from idleness, sabbath-breaking, and uninstructed families. Whence come deceits of greater magnitude, and debts unpaid? From sloth, luxury, and extravagance. Whence come violence, hatred, and strife? From drunkenness, rioting, lewdness, and blasphemy. It is common to say of a dissolute liver, that he does harm to none but himself; than which I think there is not a greater falsehood that ever obtained credit in a deceived world. Drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, and the whole tribe of those who do harm to none but themselves, are the pests of society, the corruptors of the youth, and in my opinion, for the risk of infection, thieves and robbers are less dangerous companions.

Upon the whole, my brethren, after we have contended in arms for liberty from foreign domination, let us guard against using our liberty as a cloak for licentiousness; and thus poisoning the blessing after we have attained it. Let us endeavor to bring into, and keep in credit and reputation, every thing that may serve to give vigor to an equal republican constitution. Let us cherish

a love of piety, order, industry, frugality. Let us check every disposition to luxury, effeminacy, and the pleasures of a dissipated life. Let us in public measures put honor upon modesty, and self-denial, which is the index of real merit. And in our families let us do the best by religious instruction, to sow the seeds which may bear fruit in the next generation. We are one of the body of confederated states. For many reasons, I shall avoid making any comparisons at present, but may venture to predict, that whatsoever state among us shall continue to make piety and virtue the standard of public honor, will enjoy the greatest inward peace, the greatest national happiness, and in every outward conflict will discover the greatest constitutional strength.

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SEASONABLE ADVICE TO YOUNG PERSONS.

A

S E R M O N

ON

PSALM i. 1.

Preached at the Laigh Church of PAISLEY, on Sabbath,
February 21st, 1762.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

An Authentic Narrative, of the disorderly and riotous meeting, on the Night before the Celebration of the Lord's Supper in that place, which gave occasion to the Discourse.

T O

ROBERT FULTON, Esq. }
CHARLES MAXWELL, } Bailies.
WILLIAM ORR, }
ANDREW SMITH, Treasurer.

And the remanent members of the Town-Council
of PAISLEY,

The following Sermon is humbly inscribed, by their

Most Obedient,

Humble Servant,

JOHN WITHERSPOON.

T O T H E

P U B L I C.

THE publication of the following sermon, is not owing to choice, but necessity. A process of scandal was carried on against the persons who gave occasion to its being preached; and they, instead of any submission or penitence, thought proper to make heavy complaints against the author of the sermon; and to give an account of what was said in it, very imperfect and unjust, as may well be supposed. In answer to this, he found it necessary to declare his willingness and resolution to publish the sermon, and to prefix a distinct narration of the proceedings, so far as they had come to light, of that impious assembly, held within the bounds of his charge, that the public might judge whether there was not more than sufficient cause given for what was then said. By the following narrative and sermon he now proposes to acquit himself of both parts of this promise.

On Saturday the 6th of February, 1762, being the day before the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper in Pailley, some young men, who it is generally believed had all been at church, dined immediately after sermon in James Chambers's room. After dinner, Robert Hunter, who never was a communicant, produced one of the church tokens, well knowing what use it was intended to serve. Being asked where he got it, said he got it from Judas Iscariot; and, as one of the company declares, offered to play odds or evens with him which of them should use it. They were then invited all to a glass in William Wilson's room, which he chose that night to take possession of; and indeed to give it a very dreadful

consecration. In the interval of their meeting, Robert Hunter sent the token to a young woman in the place, inclosed in a letter. What were the contents of the letter cannot be known. Common fame said it was inviting her to their sacrament: he himself pretended it was very innocent, but took care, as soon as the rumour broke up, to get the letter and burn it. The reader will immediately reflect what could be the intention, and what might have been the effects of this conduct: it was easy in this way, to send the most notorious profligate to the table of the Lord, to the unspeakable scandal of the congregation, as well as mischief to his own soul.

About six of the clock the same evening, or soon after, they met according to appointment in William Wilson's room, the said Robert Hunter, and William Wilson, manufacturers in Paisley, John Snodgrafs, writer there, William M'Crotchet, ensign or serjeant in the army, James and David Chalmers, and Robert Cross junior, merchants in Paisley. By their own confession, and the deposition of several witnesses, they employed a good part of the time in mock-preaching, and that not merely imitating the tones or gestures of ministers in indifferent words, but the only expressions that were distinguished by the witnesses who heard them on the street, were the words of scripture. Two witnesses depone, that to the best of their judgment, they heard them praying in mockery; and when asked if they were sure it was praying and not preaching, persisted in affirming it was praying. The only uncertainty this evidence labors under, is, that not hearing the particular words used, the only way by which they distinguished it, was by the sound; but it is to be observed, that both witnesses were positive; that they agreed together as to the time when this happened, and that it was not the same time that the other witnesses depone they were preaching, but at a very considerable distance; so that there is little probability of the one being mistaken for the other. By their own confessions, and the depositions of witnesses, they were guilty of profane swearing. The noise of their meeting was such, as alarmed the whole neighborhood; but what is most tremendous of all, by the declaration of

Robert Hunter, one of themselves, William M'Crotchet, used some of the words of the institution. The same thing is declared by William Wilson, of John Snodgrafs; and upon the strictest re-examination he persisted in declaring that he was certain it was done in the company, and he thought it was by that person.

When these facts are laid together, and all the circumstances of the transaction are weighed, is it possible in words to paint the atrociousness of their crime? Is there any ground to wonder at the greatness of the scandal? Is there reason to complain, that the minister in whose bounds the offence was committed, and under whose charge almost all the offenders live, should think of preaching on such a subject as it appears he did; and now with concern finds himself obliged to publish? The very choice of such a night for such a merry meeting, and the disturbance given to the place almost to the hour of midnight, though there had been no more in it, were surely highly indecent. But when we add to this the loud profanation of the Almighty's name, and spending the most part, if not the whole of the time, in mocking the exercises of piety, how deep and aggravated is the guilt! Above all, when it is considered that this seems to have been without bounds, not sparing even the most solemn and sacred rite of our holy religion! It is true, some of them obstinately deny this last, and heaviest part of the charge. It doth not indeed appear, and we hope it is not true, that there was a formal celebration, and general or common participation in mockery, of the sacrament of the Lord's supper; but if there had been no profane allusion to it in the performances of the acting mimies, it is not to be supposed or imagined, that it would have been confessed by two of the persons present. Though this should not militate against the rest, it certainly must militate against themselves. The time of the meeting; the token produced before it; the letter with the token sent; the other things which they certainly did; and the unsuspected declaration of two of the guilty; who seemed at first penitent, though afterwards they altered their conduct, and joined with the rest in a common defence; are so strong,

that it is impossible to destroy the belief of it in an impartial mind ; the rather when we add, that afterwards David Chalmers confessed it still more fully than any of the other two. This, though it was too late to be in the process, or rather by great art and influence kept out of it, may be safely affirmed, because it was in the presence of three persons. But to cut the matter short, the use of some of the words of the institution with a solemn air as of a minister, and also some of the other words of scripture, is affirmed, by William Wilson, of John Snodgrafs, in a voluntary declaration, when he was not adduced as an evidence. Let John Snodgrafs therefore, who considers this as so injurious to him, prosecute William Wilson for slander, and get him punished in the manner he justly deserves, if it be false ; and if this is not done, he must forgive many, and particularly the author of the following sermon, for believing it to be true.

SEASONABLE ADVICE TO YOUNG PERSONS:

A

S E R M O N.

PSALM i. 1.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

THERE is an old and beaten observation, that human nature, in all ages, is the same. To this I add, or rather offer, by way of illustration of it, that sin, which bears so much sway in human characters and actions, has been the same, in its operation and influence, in all ages, since the fall of Adam. For this reason the characters drawn in the holy scriptures, and particularly the observations on human life, contained in the Psalms of David; the Proverbs of Solomon, and book of Ecclesiastes, are as perfectly adapted to the present age, as if they were but of yesterday's date.

As the ten commandments, which are the sum of the moral law, consist mostly of prohibitions, the Psalmist, in this passage, draws the character of the good man in a negative form, by its opposition to the bad. At the same time, the danger to which the unwary are exposed, the enticing and deceitful nature of sin, and its monstrous enormity, when arrived at its full height, are couched in the

most admirable manner: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly;—nor standeth in the way of sinners;—nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

It is not agreed among interpreters, who was the author of this Psalm; and, indeed, it is a matter more of curiosity than moment, very critically to inquire. Some think it was the Psalmist David, because of the high esteem expressed in it for the law of God, a thing which so remarkably distinguishes his other writings. Others refer it to a later period; and suppose that Ezra, or some other after the captivity, who collected the sacred hymns of different authors into one volume, prefixed this as a sort of argument or preface to the whole. It is, indeed, a summary of all that follow. It plainly contains a character both of good men and bad; the usual course of divine Providence towards each of these classes; as well as the final issue of their conduct, in the everlasting happiness of the one, and the everlasting misery of the other.

Even the most cursory reader must observe, that there is a gradation in the expressions of the text, which rise one above another in their strength and energy: nay, it is the opinion of many, that they are chosen with peculiar art, and contain a double, if not a threefold gradation.

1. In the character, beginning with the *ungodly*, who are without proper impressions of religion; and habitually governed by other principles than the fear of God. Next, *sinner*s, or those who are more openly flagitious, and visibly guilty of gross crimes. And finally, the *scornful*, who set reproof at defiance, and treat every thing—serious and sacred with contempt and disdain.

2. In the communication of others with them, *walking*; which seems to imply occasional, unforeseen, and transient intercourse;—*standing*, which seems to indicate a greater degree of approbation and voluntary compliance with their example;—and *sitting*, which signifies being fixed and settled in an evil course, and refusing to depart from it.—To this some add the other expressions, the *counsel*, the *way*, and the *seat*; on which I forbear to insist, but proceed to observe,

That we have, in this passage, a most useful and instructive lesson of great moment in every place and age; and peculiarly suited, on several accounts, to the present circumstances of this congregation. It is, therefore, my resolution to discourse a little, through the assistance of divine grace, on the three distinct branches into which it may be naturally divided.

I. The infectious nature of sin, or the danger of “walking in the counsel of the ungodly.”

II. The deceitful and hardening nature of sin, which insensibly leads from “walking in the counsel of the ungodly,” to “standing in the way of sinners.”

III. The finishing stage of wickedness, the most criminal and most pernicious character, viz, of the *scornful*, who are bold enough to treat things serious and sacred with derision.

Having done this, I shall make some application of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

In the first place, let us consider the infectious nature of sin, or the danger of walking in the counsel of the ungodly. That the society of bad men is highly dangerous to all, but especially to young persons, is indeed a truth which no sober man will deny, and which hath been often set in the strongest light by religious and moral writers: it may therefore seem unnecessary to insist upon it. But, my brethren, I am persuaded, that it fares often with known and common truths, as with common mercies, they are despised for their cheapness. Though their certainty be readily allowed, their use and application is, notwithstanding, or, perhaps, for that very reason, in a great measure neglected. How seldom is it that men make the distinction with care, and act upon it with prudence and resolution; either in their own conduct, or in the disposal of their children? Bear with me, therefore, while I endeavor to impress your minds with a sense of your obligation to depart from the society of evil-doers, and to preserve, with the utmost solicitude, all young persons under your care, from the mortal contagion.

For the importance and necessity of this, you have the concurrent testimony of wise and good men, in every age and nation ; experience hath taught it to the most barbarous, as well as most improved and polished people. There is no nation of which history hath preserved us any account, but, in their proverbial sayings, which are the product of time, we find a warning against the infection of corrupt society. What dying parent, in his last or parting adieu to his children, ever omitted to caution them against the society of bad men ? nay, doth not daily experience prove this, beyond dispute, to every one who hath the least degree either of memory or reflection ? Is there among you any person, who has arrived at the unhappy distinction of being known for a profligate ? Whenever this happens, those about him are able to mark the progress of his corruption, and can even point out the persons, or societies, where he was first taught the rudiments of vice, and initiated in the principles of licentiousness and riot. I am none of those who either deny or conceal the original inherent, universal corruption of human nature ; and yet I scruple not to affirm, that example, instruction, and assistance, are necessary to our improvement even in vice. Without this, no single person is capable of arriving at that degree of depravity which we have sometimes occasion to observe.

Whoever would examine into the reasons, and impress his mind with a sense of the danger of corrupt society, especially to youth, may just reflect upon the following particulars.

1. We are all by nature prone to sin. It is the growth of the foil, as weeds of the cursed ground. If weeds can hardly be restrained by the utmost diligence and care of the husbandman, what an enormous product might he expect if he would directly apply himself to their encouragement and cultivation ? Just so, if by the utmost care and attention parents can hardly restrain the irregularities of their children, and form them to true piety and goodness ; what wickedness may they not arrive at, if they are delivered over to schools of profanity, and suffered to form their sentiments and manners, from those who have long “ walked

“ in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their
 “ own eyes,” without “ fearing God, or regarding man?”

2. Young persons are ignorant and unsuspecting; strangers to the world, they are alike ignorant of the characters of men, and the effects of vicious courses. What a prey must such be to the artful and insinuating language of those, who, enslaved by habit, and wearing the chains of vice, find their chief remaining pleasure in seducing others into the same miserable state? Justly is the great enemy of mankind called the deceiver, because he betrayed our first parents into rebellion by a lie; and in the same way he and all his servants continue to paint and varnish over sin with false colours, that it may be embraced without reluctance, by those who know not that afterwards “ it biteth
 “ like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Need I tell you in what a decent garb sin is often clothed; and what honorable names it often assumes in the world, to gain the easier admission? Sensuality and intemperance is social affection, and good fellowship: filthy obscene conversation is but harmless mirth and freedom: anger and resentment is but honor, resolution, and dignity of mind. In short, the whole tenor and strain of fashionable conversation is often little else than a strong illusion put upon the mind, to pervert the dictates of reason, and evade the reproofs of conscience. How dangerous such intercourse to young unwary minds, who are often deeply penetrated with the poison, before they so much as suspect the design of its being administered? It requires no common degree of fortitude and resolution, as well as no small measure of spiritual wisdom, to resist the importunity of sinners, and unravel the subtilty with which they lie in wait to deceive.

3. Vice is usually baited with pleasure, of which young persons are peculiarly sensible: their affections of every kind are in the most lively and vigorous state. One of the first and most important lessons, which parents and guardians must teach them, is moderation and restraint; whereas the immediate effect of associating with the profane, is not only to strengthen their passions by indulgence, but to instruct them how to plead in their defence; and above all, to inspire them with an abhorrence of confine-

ment and rule. From these unhappy attachments, these most pernicious friendships it is, that instruction, however excellent, is unwillingly listened to; and the most wise and gentle government is esteemed harsh and severe. It has been sometimes observed, that persons strictly and piously educated, when they have come into the world, have run headlong into the most vicious and abandoned course of life. This has been commonly ascribed to the rigor of their former confinement, and an advice grafted upon it, that parents should be less severe to their children, lest they should more than compensate this early restraint, by the liberties which they afterwards assume. But though I willingly admit, that every parent should temper his authority with gentleness and love; yet I am far from thinking the effect, just now mentioned, is ascribed to its proper cause; it is not owing so much to the rigor of parental authority, as to young persons getting into the society of men without principle, and there secretly imbibing these vicious desires, which afterwards they rejoice in an opportunity of gratifying to the full. However strict and severe any person's education may be, if he comes to maturity of age, before he contracts an intimacy with those who justify the commission of sin, conscience will have acquired so great authority, that all solicitation to gross wickedness will be received with abhorrence. This opinion is supported by a fact, which I imagine I have observed, that the children of pious parents, who are betrayed into vicious courses, are almost always such as have been most early removed from their immediate inspection.

4. The danger of corrupt society to young persons appears, from their being exposed to ridicule and scorn, which is of all other trials hardest for them to bear. I shall have occasion, on the third general head, to speak more fully on this subject; but in the mean time, it is certain, that a sense of shame is strong in young persons in general, and that ridicule is the usual weapon, by which adepts in vice assault the cause of truth and piety; by which indeed they commonly endeavor to destroy all regard to decency and order. It is lamentable to think, how often persons of excellent capacity, and admirable dispositions,

have been led astray by the abuse of this most amiable quality, a sense of shame.

From all these considerations, we need not be surpris'd at the frequent and strong cautions given in the word of God, upon this subject: Prov. xiii. 20. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."—Chap. xxviii. 7. "Who so keepeth the law, is a wise son; but he that is a companion of riotous men, shameth his father." But there is nothing more moving than that earnest and pathetic exhortation; Chap. iv. 14, 15. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it: pass not by it: turn from it and pass away." The wise man's insisting upon his important counsel, and the reiteration of the expressions, serves to convey, in the strongest manner, a sense of the certain ruin of those who neglect to observe it.

II. Let us now proceed to consider the hardening nature of sin, which leads from "walking in the counsel of the ungodly, to standing in the way of sinners." Upon this, as on the former particular, I may observe, it is a known and beaten subject, on which it is easy to say things strong, but difficult to say any thing new. There are several just remarks upon it, or striking similitudes, which have been handed down from the earliest ages; and were probably the first fruits of human experience. The little that I am at present to repeat or add, shall be divided into two parts: 1. The gradual and insensible progress of sin, which leads the sinner on from one step to another, till he is irrecoverably lost. 2. The strength and power of inveterate habit.

1. The insensible progress of sin. It is wonderful by what artful methods, what plausible pretences, and what slow degrees, sin makes its first approaches. Let some of those persons who are now lost to all sense of duty, or of shame, reflect, if possible, with what horror they would once have thought of the practices, which at present they are not able to forsake. Every sin, how small soever, opens a passage for the admission of multitudes of others; breaks the restraint of conscience; habituates and embol-

dens the sinner. The ancients were wont to say, That the way of sin is down-hill: every step a man takes on this declivity, accelerates his motion, so that it becomes more and more difficult, and at last impossible, to stop his course. This is what the apostle Paul had in his view, when he gave this excellent precept to the Christian Hebrews; Heb. 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 may say of sin, in general, what Solomon says of strife; "The beginning of it is like the letting out of water." If you watch against the beginning of sin, you may hope to prevail; but if you once grant it indulgence, it will establish and increase its own power. To attempt then to stop its progress, is like endeavoring to gather together a flood of water, after you have, with your own hands, opened the sluices which have caused it to overflow.

2. To the insensible progress of sin, add the strength and power of inveterate habit. This is represented to us in the strongest terms in scripture, where the changing of an inveterate habit is compared to a natural impossibility: Jer. 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."

As we may receive many useful moral lessons from the visible creation and the course of nature; so this in particular, of the force of habit, is, if I may speak so, written in the most legible characters, and repeated in every page of both. A stone, which has long continued in one place, makes itself a bed, and is with great difficulty removed: a plant or tree that has long been confined to one position, or made to grow in a particular shape, will seldom ever receive any other. This is also the case with our own bodily frame. Particular postures or motions to which we have been early habituated, can scarcely be altered by the utmost attention, and the strongest inclination of the will: the obstinacy is still greater in all habits where desire and affection have place. It is easy to see every day, the violent attachment men have to employments and pleasures, however trifling in themselves, to which they have been

long accustomed. But it is greatest of all in sinful habits, because in them the force of custom is added to the original strength of natural corruption.

Both the above particulars may be illustrated, by observing, how much habit and example together operate to the improvement and perfection of guilt, in large and populous cities. There we may often find so astonishing a degree of wickedness of every sort, as it is mortifying to think that human nature should be capable of: there we may find persons who will perpetrate calmly and sedately, what would surprize a less knowing sinner so much as to hear of. And what pity is it, that there should be found some, who, during their occasional residence in places of great resort, lay down their innocence, instead of their rusticity; and bring home no other accomplishment but an insolence and boldness of countenance, in the commission of sin? That instructed in the principles, as well as habituated to the practice of impiety, they are not content with doing evil, but discover an incredible industry and assiduity in deceiving and seducing others. And shall I not add, what pity is it, that some, instead of improving and adorning their minds by application to study, or storing them with useful knowledge, do more than lose their time, by drinking in the poison of infidel writings? Instead of fitting themselves to discharge the duties of public or private life, with propriety and dignity, they only acquire the unhappy talent of setting their minds at ease in the commission of sin, and make large additions to their own natural depravity of heart.

III. Let us consider the finishing stage of wickedness, the most criminal and the most pernicious character, viz. that of the scornful, who are bold enough to treat things serious and sacred, with derision.

This part of the subject, my brethren, merits your particular attention, and naturally divides itself into these two branches: First, The sin and danger of it to the persons who are guilty of it. Secondly, The unhappy influence it hath in polluting others.

1. The sin and danger of it to the guilty persons. Whoever will consider the state of mind from which such derision must flow, will immediately perceive that it implies the highest degree of profaneness and impiety. It is such an audacious attack upon the majesty of the living God, as must strike every thinking person with astonishment and horror. One of the first principles of all religion is reverence for the Deity, and for every thing that hath a visible relation to him. This we find written upon the conscience, in general, even of the most blinded heathens. The common and trivial use of the name of God is prohibited under the severest sanctions in the oracles of truth. We find also some instances there, of mere irreverence being punished in a very terrible manner. The angelic hosts, though perfectly pure and holy, are yet represented as deeply penetrated with a sense of the extreme disproportion between uncreated excellence, and created weakness, and filled with the highest veneration of him who only is HOLY: Isa. vi. 1, 2, 3. "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 co-
 " vered 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." It may seem unnecessary or improper to add, and yet it gives me pleasure that I can do it with truth, the same thing has evidently distinguished some of the best and greatest men on earth. We are well informed, that some of the greatest inquirers into nature, as they grew in years, and increased in the knowledge of the works of God, did also visibly grow in an awe and reverence of their almighty Maker. Of one in particular, it is said, that he never mentioned the name of God without a sensible pause in his discourse. After this, what can we think of any poor creature, whose breath is in his nostrils, being guilty of contempt and scorn of the name, attributes, works or worship of God!

There is a remarkable difference between sins of this kind, and many other sins which are, notwithstanding, very heinous and aggravated in the sight of God. Into many other sins of a very gross nature, a man may be hurried by the violence of passion, or betrayed by the suddenness of temptation; but, if I mistake not, scorn of things sacred must always be a deliberate crime: the sin cannot be committed without a good deal of composure and presence of mind: reason is not over-borne, as in other cases, by appetite; but reason itself (if the perverted gift of God in such persons may be called so) is principal in the guilt. A scorner is never tempted, properly speaking, but by these acts and exercises of religion, which should excite the veneration of all, and do excite the veneration of many, not excepting some of the most profligate.

Contempt of things sacred is an entire victory over conscience. In many cases men sin with some reluctance: it is not so much their choice, as they are over-borne by the strength of corruption, and vitiate the peace of their minds, to gratify the demands of lust: hence remorse often succeeds the indulgence; and though real reformation does not take place, yet it lays the sinner under frequent and considerable restraints. But in treating things sacred with scorn, the mind is wholly at ease; and finds its pleasure in the very impiety itself. The truth is, so entire is the victory over conscience, that nothing but settled atheism and infidelity can be guilty of it, according to that just expression of the psalmist, Psalm x. 13. Wherefore doth "the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, "thou wilt not require it."

It is also an entire victory over shame: this is commonly the last restraint that sinners overthrow. Many are confined and kept in awe by the fear of man, long after they have cast off the fear of God. From the shameful-ness of sin, religion preserves some degree of credit, even where a great plurality is in the opposite interest. For this reason the prophet Jeremiah mentions it as a great aggravation of the sins of his countrymen, that they were lost to 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.” But is it not evident, that scorers are destitute
 of shame ? They have, indeed, not only extinguished it
 in themselves, but the manifest design of their conversa-
 tion is to destroy it in the minds of others.

I need add nothing further to shew the guilt and dan-
 ger of persons of this character, but putting you in mind
 of the rank which it holds in several catalogues of crying
 sins in the holy scriptures, and the awful judgments of
 God which are denounced against it. The prophet Eze-
 kiel, in enumerating the sins of Jerusalem, among many
 enormities, hath this ; Ezek. xxii. 8. “ Thou hast despi-
 “ fed mine holy things, and profaned my Sabbaths.”
 And the prophet Isaiah, Isa. xxviii. 14, 21, 22. Now,
 “ therefore, hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men
 “ that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.—For the
 “ Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be
 “ wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his
 “ work, his strange work ; and bring to pass his act, his
 “ strange act. Now, therefore, be not mockers, lest your
 “ bands be made strong : for, I have heard from the Lord
 “ God of hosts, a consumption even determined upon the
 “ whole earth.” See also the state of things in Jerusalem,
 immediately before the Babylonish captivity : 2 Chron.
 xxxvi. 16. “ But they mocked the messengers of God,
 “ and despised his words, and misused his prophets, un-
 “ til the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till
 “ there was no remedy.”

2. How unhappy is the influence of this character upon
 others ! As it is highly criminal, it is pernicious in the
 same proportion. Considered only as an example, it must
 have dangerous effects : many sins shun the light ; and
 are, by those that commit them, concealed with the ut-
 most care. When that is the case, whatever they may
 be to the guilty person, they are far from being so danger-
 ous to the public, as those crimes that are not only often
 visible, but done on purpose to be seen. Now, scoffers at
 things sacred must always be an example, as the crime

cannot be committed alone; and, indeed, they often aspire at a kind of character for despising religion, and would be greatly mortified, were their accomplishments of this kind hidden from the world.

Neither is it merely a common example: scoffers are not only barely finners; they are advocates for sin: it is their constant study to break the restraints of conscience, and weaken every moral obligation in others, as well as in themselves. This too they endeavor to effect in the most agreeable manner: contempt of religion makes a part of their social mirth; and these two things are soon looked upon by the unwary youth as so inseparable, that the one is quite tasteless and insipid, unless it is seasoned by the other.

It deserves particular consideration on this subject, that scoffing at things sacred is apt to give natural modesty, and the sense of shame in young persons, a wrong and contrary turn. Modesty is the strongest natural fence to virtue. We find notwithstanding, very frequently, that persons of great natural modesty have not courage sufficient to profess or practise what conscience dictates to be their duty. How unhappy is it when so excellent a preservative from vice is thus quite perverted, and has an opposite effect! All history is full of the powerful effects of a sense of shame, both in doing good and evil. It breaks the strongest of all natural attachments: it is not to be overcome by the severest laws, though fortified with the most terrible sanctions. Now, as it needs no proof, that scoffing at sacred things tends to pervert the sense of shame, it must have the greatest and most immediate effect in bringing on a general dissolution of manners.

The malignant influence of profane scorn is not confined to young persons, there being very few of any character who are not hurt by it in a most sensible manner. Would you be convinced of this? How rarely do we find any possessed of a determined courage and resolution in opposing fashionable crimes! How unwilling are the best to suffer shame for adhering to their duty! What a variety of efforts will be made to escape it! Contempt is disagreeable at any rate; and it is intolerable to pride, some

remains of which, capable of being irritated, are to be found in the very best men on earth. For this reason, the most established Christians do carefully shun all unnecessary society with wicked men, knowing how difficult it is to avoid sin in one shape or other. If such is the case with the best, how dangerous must the society of scorners be to all who are able to bear them; but especially to those who “have pleasure in them!”

It will not be improper here to observe, that one great reason why scorn and ridicule is so hurtful to religion, is, that it attacks things sacred through the medium of human weakness. True piety and virtue is in itself so venerable an object, that it is not possible to render it ridiculous, but but by misrepresentation: however, as it is always, in this world, attended with human infirmity, this affords a handle to profane persons to load it with reproach. Their success, in this unhappy design, is no greater than may naturally be expected; few are able to distinguish between a person and his cause, nor, indeed, is it possible to attack the one, without wounding the other. It evidently appears, that it is impossible to treat religious persons in general, or the expressions, forms, and rites commonly appropriated to religious worship, with scorn; and not, at the same time, bring religion itself into contempt.

I do not mean by this to plead for approbation, or even indulgence, to any indecency, by which folly or vanity may abuse or disgrace the worship of God: far from it. I think every thing of that kind ought to be reprov'd with severity, and oppos'd with resolution: but I contend, that it is infinitely more proper to treat it with abhorrence and detestation, than with scorn. Whoever will give himself this liberty, may easily find an opportunity, from the weakness inseparable from humanity, to throw off that reverence for God and his service, which it ought to be his chief solicitude to preserve and improve. There are many whose visible weakness is to be lamented; and, perhaps, there is no human character at all so perfectly decent in every respect, but, by imitation, and a little aggravation, it may be rendered ridiculous.

Let it also be considered, that it requires far less compre-

hension of mind to expose the folly and weakness of others, or even to invent plausible falsehoods, and misrepresent them, than to reason with justness and propriety on the most common subjects : A very small degree of ability is sufficient to accomplish a scoffer, who is not restrained by any sense of duty. Nor is this to be wondered at ; for there is always a sufficient number, to whose understandings the most vile and miserable performance is perfectly adapted.

In support of all this, I could adduce many examples, abundantly known and familiar : but, for certain reasons, I shall only mention a very celebrated instance from antiquity. Socrates was certainly the wisest and the best man of all the heathens, whose characters have been transmitted to us. His behavior was such, as not only deserved, but seemed fit to command the esteem and veneration of all who knew him : yet was this worthy man successfully turned into ridicule, by a person, whose writings, which have come down to us, are to the last degree mean and contemptible. Nor was the effect merely transient ; for in the opinion of many, this contempt paved the way for the hatred which his enemies soon raised against him, and which brought him to his death.

I proceed now, in the last place, to make some improvement of what has been said : and I think I can discover in the aspect of the audience, that you already suppose I have been led to the choice of this subject, by the late atrocious and flagrant offence, committed in the near neighborhood of where I now stand ; and which hath affected every thinking and well-disposed person in the place, with a mixture of indignation and concern. That this is indeed the case, I have no intention either to deny or conceal. Many, I know, are of opinion, that fidelity to my charge calls for something of this nature on the present occasion : if to others the particular discussion and application of this subject should need any apology, there are two things, for which I hope to have the testimony of all my ordinary hearers. 1. That I have never omitted to mention with all freedom and plainness, the sins and

duties of every rank and class of men, as the subject led to it, or the occasion seemed to require it. 2. That in doing this, I have generally avoided bringing in particular accidents that have fallen out in the place; being much of opinion, that the less personal any thing of that nature is, it is the more likely to be useful. But though I continue in the same opinion in general, there are some things so flagrant and atrocious in their nature, so dangerous and hurtful in their effects, that bare silence concerning them would carry in it an imputation of unfaithfulness, or partiality in a minister of Christ. And as in the present case, the scandal seems loudly to call for some public notice of it, so it is impossible to make the persons more known than they are already by their own folly. If it could make them any more ashamed, it would be an unspeakable benefit both to the public and themselves.

With a view therefore to the scandal just now hinted at, suffer me to apply the truths above illustrated, by giving you some advice and direction, under the three following characters, one or more of which will include every person who now hears me.

I. To those who are young: in that lovely, precious, dangerous season of life; of all others the fittest for learning what is good, and unhappily prone to learn or imitate what is evil. My dear children, this is not the first of many times I have addressed instruction particularly to you, and I pray that God may open your hearts to receive it. Let me beseech you, first of all, to learn this important lesson, to distrust yourselves, be sensible of your inexperience, and be persuaded of your danger, from the admonitions of others. The greatest evidence you can give of real knowledge, is to be sensible of your ignorance; and of true wisdom, to be willing to learn: the solicitude and concern of your parents or other relations, to preserve you from the destructive paths of vice, is from their certain knowledge of what you are now unwilling to believe. Above all things, shun, as the pestilence, the society of profane scorers. Lost to all sense of piety, seared in their consciences, and enslaved to their lusts, they will do all in their power to destroy a rising sense of religion in your

minds: "While they promise you liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption." Think upon eternity approaching: no man can foresee or foretell to you now, whether your time on earth shall be long or short; whether you shall have much prosperity, or many trials in the present world; but as the blessing of God is the best ingredient in all temporal mercies, so being at peace with him is the best support under suffering, and the only preparation for death.

But as all the delusive arguments in favor of sin are drawn from this present life, suffer me to plead the cause of piety and truth in this respect. Be assured that true religion is the way to health, peace, opulence and public esteem. Hear the wisest of mere men: Prov. iii. 16, 17. "Length of days is in Wisdom's right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Do not look only on those libertines who are in the beginning or middle of their course, whose spirits are lively, and their vigor yet unimpaired: look on the few older practitioners. These were the good fellows and social spirits of a former period; their companions were cut off in the middle of their days, and they remain as beacons for your instruction and warning. Do you see them swollen in their deportment, mean in their attire, and despised by the world itself; their faces bloated with intemperance, and their miserable offspring pale with hunger, or crippled by neglect? these are the terrible fruits of midnight rioting. They were once as merry in their cups, as ready with their jests, and as great despisers of Sabbaths, and sermons, of whining and praying, as any of their more sprightly successors, who are in the high road to the same despicable end.

My dear friends, when you perceive any one stirring up your aversion to parental authority, and teaching you to despise the troublesome admonitions of ministers and mothers, know that he is enticing you to the ruin of soul, body, and estate. Hear again the wise man, or rather the Spirit of God speaking by him: Prov. xxiii. 19, &c. "Hear then, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the

“ way : be not amongst wine bibbers, amongst riotous
 “ eaters of flesh ; for the drunkard and the glutton shall
 “ come to poverty, and drowfiness shall clothe a man with
 “ rags. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and de-
 “ spise not thy mother when she is old.” Prov. xxx. 17.
 “ The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to
 “ obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it
 “ out, and the young eagles shall eat it.”

Do you indeed think, that any of your loose compa-
 nions, with all their professions of friendship and attach-
 ment, have the same concern for your true interest that
 a parent has ; or the same judgment to discern it ? You
 may esteem it as a favor when you are assisted in the in-
 dulgence of your pleasures, and your irregular courses
 are concealed from the knowledge of your relations ; but
 it is in truth the greatest injury that can possibly be done
 you : it is often distressing to those of riper years and more
 experience, to observe how difficult it is to persuade young
 persons of easy tempers and warm affections, of the dan-
 ger of associating with profligates. We reckon it hard
 that you will not believe that they are worthless, upon
 our testimony ; but must learn it from your own fatal ex-
 perience. Believe it, there is no true friendship but what
 is founded on the principles of piety and virtue : and if
 you confide in those of a different character, you will
 sooner or later be rewarded with treachery and falsehood :
 and indeed, the sooner the better ; for their friendship is infi-
 nitely more hurtful than any effects of their displeasure. Again
 therefore, let me beseech the younger part of my audience,
 who have not yet themselves thrown off all regard to de-
 cency, to give up all friendship with, and avoid the so-
 ciety, of those who have. It is usually a hard sacrifice, I
 confess ; but necessary to your preservation from the most
 destructive courses. What signifies the scorn or resent-
 ment of a few hardened wretches, compared to the peace
 of your own minds, the heart-felt pleasure you will give
 to every real friend, your comfort and happiness in this
 life, and the well grounded hope of a blessed immortality ?

2. Let me shortly address myself to parents, or others
 who are intrusted with the education of youth. And, oh

that I could make you sensible of the importance and difficulty of your charge ! There are many directions, which might be given you with respect to education in general ; but I choose to confine my thoughts at present to what is suggested by the occasion and subject of this discourse. Let it therefore be your care, to preserve your children, as much as possible, from the company and conversation of profane persons, especially those who are tainted with infidelity : and who, as its natural consequence, treat the exercises of piety with contempt and scorn. To suffer this, when you can hinder it, is treating their souls in the same manner, as you would do their bodies, if you placed doses of sweetened poison in every corner of the house. You will daily perceive how children are formed by imitation, in their temper and manners : they must bear a resemblance to those from whom they receive their first impressions : but if this is the case in general, how much more must they embrace the principles, and imitate the practice of their companions in pleasure ?

This caution is so necessary, that where counsel and intreaty are not sufficient to procure compliance, authority ought to be interposed. Mere authority indeed will be very ineffectual ; and therefore, I must particularly recommend to you an early attention to your children's opinion and judgment : they soon form a judgment, and will give early marks of approbation and aversion of persons and characters. Do your utmost to make them esteem religion, as the greatest happiness to every person, and the most amiable part of every character. Make them sensible, from your conduct, that it is not only your sincere choice, but greatest delight. It is very fatal to them, when they are led to look upon it as a burden and constraint. Habituate them early to consider all other qualities as good for nothing, when piety is wanting ; and a person of a truly Christian conversation as worthy of the highest esteem, whatever be his station or circumstances in other respects. Remember it makes a part of the character of a good man, as drawn by the psalmist David ; Psalm xv. 4. " In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honoreth them that fear the Lord." I am persuaded, that many,

who truly fear God themselves, are inadvertently guilty of a great mistake in this particular: they discover unhappily too much of their admiration or envy of the natural advantages of others, independent of their moral character. Dress, furniture and wealth, are looked upon as distinguishing advantages; and children are often suffered to indulge themselves in mockery and derision; even where deformity, poverty, awkwardness, and things perfectly innocent in themselves, are the only objects of their scorn. Intellectual abilities also, comprehension of mind, and sprightliness of fancy, are commonly much the objects of esteem; and young persons are insensibly led to admire these natural qualities, without at all considering to what purposes they are applied. This must necessarily have a fatal effect; and therefore parents should endeavor, as much as possible, to preserve upon their own minds, and inspire their children with an esteem of true piety, and a horror and aversion at a vicious character, whatever advantage may happen to accompany it.

If due care is taken betimes in this respect, I am persuaded it will, in a great measure, prevent the danger arising from the example or solicitation of the patrons of impiety. Their chief success depends on their real character's lying concealed, till it is safe and proper to avow it. They instill the principles of irreligion, as a wise man would do the most sacred truths, by little and little, as their disciples are able to bear them, and always do it under the disguise of pleasure. There is nothing more different than the conversation and carriage of a libertine, in the presence of those of whom he stands in awe, and among his select companions; and even these last are but gradually initiated into the concluding and horrid mysteries of profanity and blasphemy. Young minds therefore should be early formed to such a taste, as to look for piety and virtue, before they will give their approbation or affection to any human accomplishments. Were this the case, they would not be so often betrayed by specious appearances, and drawn in, by degrees, first, to fustler; then, to imitate; and, at last, to delight in the most vicious practices.

While I am giving you these directions, I cannot help observing, that you may see the great necessity of wisdom and prudence in the religious education of children. Apply yourselves to it with diligence. It is an extensive and difficult, but, at the same time, a noble, useful, delightful study. "And if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."

I shall now close this discourse with a few words to professing Christians in general.

My brethren, when vice rears up its head, and appears with insolence and boldness, as it will certainly affect every good man with concern, so it is of great importance what treatment it meets with from the public. If it passes without notice, we may conclude, that corruption hath deeply infected the whole mass. If men are afraid or ashamed to express their indignation at it, we may conclude the conspiracy is formidable; and that the interest of truth and piety is greatly on the decline. There are many, who in cases of gross scandal, rather choose to keep themselves at ease, by forbearance and indulgence to the guilty, than run the hazard of provoking their resentment by an honest declaration of their real sentiments. Nor is it seldom to be observed, that the very persons who do least in their own sphere, for stemming the tide of profanity, are the first and loudest in complaining of the negligence of magistrates or pastors, in inflicting public punishments or censures.

Whilst, therefore, I am endeavoring, in some measure, to discharge my own duty, I must also put you in mind of yours. It is evidently the duty of all who profess to fear God, to abstain from the society of those who are grossly profane, without discovering any sense of penitence or sorrow. The truth is, I ought rather to make this a mark of true religion, and affirm, that all good men will do so; than inform them that they should. There must be a likeness of disposition among familiar friends. Had you that abhorrence of impiety that you ought to have, you would count the society of impious persons a stain and reproach to your own characters. Of this I am able to give a very

strong, and, at the same time, a plain and familiar proof. Were any person known to be guilty of theft and dishonesty, or any fault that is odious and disgraceful in the world, every one would reckon his intimate companions almost, if not to the same degree, abandoned as himself. The same thing will certainly hold as to profanity or licentiousness; though indeed it carries in it a melancholy proof, that sins against piety or purity are far from being held in the same abhorrence, as what endangers our substance or temporal interest. I must, however, here beg of you, to attend to a singular and very strong passage of the epistle to the Romans. The apostle Paul closes his description of the profane world in the following terms: Rom. ii. 32, "Who knowing the judgment of God, (that they which commit such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." I have looked into the original, and find the words justly translated; and you see, from the construction of the sentence, the apostle represents having pleasure in sensual and wicked men, as implying a depravity of character superior even to that of sensuality itself.

But as associating with the profane is a mark of profanity, so every degree of countenance given to them, by persons of entire character, is a sensible injury to the public. It serves to put honor upon vice, and in part to deliver it from that just reproach which ought to be the punishment of the guilty, and a warning to others not to tread in their steps. I have, on several occasions, observed that the present period or state of things, in this place and congregation, demands the greatest concern for the public interest of religion. Growing in numbers, and growing, I hope, in wealth, as the effect of your own and your fathers industry, you are in danger of the introduction of a worldly spirit by the rising generation. This every good man ought, with the utmost prudence and resolution, to oppose; particularly by doing all in his power to preserve the honor and respect due to true religion, and treating with contempt every open enemy to that important interest. I sincerely wish you improved, and possessed of every ac-

complishment that is truly valuable; but beware of that false politeness, which consists in little else than an opposition to religion and sobriety. And, indeed I am afraid we shall not soon attain to any other; at least, not by the help of those, who as they set religion at defiance, so are equally strangers to that elegance, and sense of decency which distinguishes persons of higher rank.

The late riotous meeting was without doubt the most audacious thing of the kind that ever was attempted in this place; and therefore calls for an open and vigorous testimony against it, by every person in his sphere. Regard for the glory of God, love to the souls of men, and solicitude for the rising generation, conspire in requiring you to exert yourselves in such a cause: and shall I not add, compassion to the persons themselves? Their worst enemies are those who treat them with indulgence, so long as they continue to justify or to palliate their offence. Nothing serves to harden sinners more, than when no notice is taken of their crimes; and they find themselves just as generally, and as well received, as if they had done no evil. On the other hand, when they perceive the deep concern of others on their account, it is an excellent mean of bringing them to serious reflection, and inducing them to tremble at themselves. Wherefore, my beloved hearers, let me beseech you to preserve your horror of sin, notwithstanding the boldness of sinners. Do every thing in your power to reclaim the offenders. Be earnest in your supplications to almighty God, that he would snatch them as brands from the burning, and raise them up as trophies of his victorious grace. But while they continue in their enmity to God, forget not, on your own account, the apostolic counsel; "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD.

A

S E R M O N.

 PSALM cxvi. 16.

*Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant,
and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my
bonds.*

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is something so fervent and affectionate in the language of the man after God's own heart, that it is extremely proper to be adopted by us in acts of adoration, trust, or supplication to God. I am at a loss to determine, whether we ought to consider the Christian's access to God, at his holy table, chiefly under one or other of these views. I am inclined to think that it is a sort of compound or union of the whole. Veneration and worship of the eternal God, and the incarnate Redeemer, exhibited to us, and as it were brought near to us by the help of the instituted signs. Reliance and confidence in God, from the opportunity given us of laying hold of his covenant. And thankful supplication to God for his support and countenance, in the surrender of ourselves to his ser-

vice. I cannot help looking upon the words of the Psalmist in this passage, as carrying in them a mixture of all these holy affections. "Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds: I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

This Psalm, of which David is universally admitted to be the author, seems plainly to have been composed after some signal deliverance, of which the remembrance was fresh upon his mind. It was such as had brought his life itself into the most imminent danger. He acknowledges in the verse preceding the text, the peculiar and gracious care which God takes of the life of his people: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints;" and then makes the profession of relation, gratitude, and duty, contained in the words of the text.—As they seem to me to be very comprehensive, and with great propriety to express what ought to be the habitual temper of a Christian, and the frame of spirit with which a communicant ought to draw near to God at his table; I shall endeavor, in dependance on divine grace,

I. To open the import of the Psalmist's declaration and purpose.

II. To apply it to you as hearers of the Gospel in general, as well as with a view to the sacred employment immediately before you.

First, then, I propose to open the import of the Psalmist's declaration and purpose in the text. This I think may be included in the following particulars, to which I intreat your serious attention.

I. This expression of the king of Israel, implies a very humble sense of his distance from, and dependance upon God, as his creature. This is the first view which a penitent hath of himself when he returns to God. It is the first view which a good man hath of himself in his approaches to or communion with God. And indeed it is what ought to be inseparable from the exercise of every other pious affection. To have as it were high and ho-

norable thoughts of the majesty and greatness of the living God, and a deep and awful impression of the immediate and continual presence of the heart-searching God. This naturally produces the greatest self-abasement, and the most unfeigned subjection of spirit, before our Maker. It leads to a confession of him as Lord over all, and having the most absolute right not only to the obedience, but to the disposal of all his creatures. I cannot help thinking this is conveyed to us in the language of the Psalmist, when he says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant." He was a prince among his subjects, and had many other honorable distinctions, both natural and acquired, among men; but he was sensible of his being a servant and subject of the King of kings; and the force of his expression, "truly I am thy servant," not only signifies the certainty of the thing, but how deeply and strongly he then felt a conviction of the truth.

Suffer me to say, my brethren, that there is much more in this, than many apprehend. The scripture speaks often of the knowledge of God, of a discovery of the glory of God, as a thing peculiar to his people, which is very different from merely speculative opinions as to his nature and perfections. It implies an awful impression of his power and greatness, a deep sense how little the creature is before him, and how entirely it is in his hand. I love that expression used by several pious writers of the last age, of bowing before the sovereignty of God. When a believer or a worshipper hath a proper view of this; when it is brought home upon his spirit; it as it were banishes all other things, all other relations, all other persons; and he is, to his apprehension, alone in the presence of the invisible God. And then what abasement of soul is of necessity produced! then no language can be found sufficient to express his vileness and nothingness in his own sight. He maybe a rich man among his poor neighbors, or a great man among his numerous attendants, or a learned man among the ignorant vulgar; but alas, he is no more than sinful dust and ashes before the omnipotent Jehovah. There is something very magnificent in the description given by the prophet Isaiah of the majesty of God, and the corres-

pendent sentiments of those who see and feel it, in the 2d chapter of his prophecies, verse 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." And again verses 19, 20, 21, 22. "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he riseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats: to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he riseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

2. This declaration of the Psalmist implies a confession of his being bound by particular covenant and consent unto God, and a repetition of the same by a new adherence. This, as it was certainly true with regard to him, having often dedicated himself to God; so I take it to be concluded on the reiteration of the expression here, "Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant." As if he said, 'Oh Lord, it is undeniable; it is impossible to recede from it. I am thine by many ties. I am by nature thy subject and thy creature; and I have many times confessed thy right, and promised my own duty.' I need not mention to you, either the examples in the Psalmist's writings, or the occasions in his history, on which he solemnly surrendered himself to God. It is sufficient to say, that it was very proper that he should frequently call this to mind, and confess it before God, as what, though it could not make his Creator's right any stronger, would certainly make the guilt of his own violation of it, so much the greater. It was certainly also a repetition of those engagements, and a solemn promise of continued adherence to them. There is no appearance in his language, that he either regrets or repents his subjection to God; on the contrary, he manifests his deliberate approbation of it, as his

interest as well as duty. What he says here to God, has something of the same meaning with what he says elsewhere to his own soul. Psal. xvi. 2. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord." And he afterwards expresses the greatest complacency in this choice, verses 5, 6, of the above Psalm, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

I take it to be very natural for pious persons to look back upon their former engagements to God. It is a part of the worship they owe to him, not only to glorify him as God, but to adhere to him as their God. It comes in with propriety as a part of confession of praise, and of holy resolution. It humbles the spirit under a sense of sin, as a breach of promise, as well as duty. It is matter of praise that we have been inclined and enabled to give ourselves to God, according to the beautiful sentiment of David, who gives thanks to God, that he and his people had been enabled to make such free and liberal contributions to the building of the Temple 1 Chron. xxix. 13, 14. "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." It is also plainly a part of our new engagement which is no more than a ratification of what we have often and willingly done before.

3. This declaration of the psalmist is an expression of his peculiar and special relation to God, "I am thy servant and the Son of thine handmaid." There is another passage of his writings, where the same expression occurs, Psalm lxxxvi. 16. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me, give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid." There is some variation indeed among interpreters in the way of illustrating this phrase. Some take it for a figurative way of affirming that he was bound in the strongest manner to God, as those children who were born, of a man servant, and born in his own house, are in the most absolute manner his

property. Others take it to signify his being not only brought up in a visible church of God, but in a pious family, and educated in his fear: and others would have it to signify still more especially, that the psalmist's mother was an eminently pious woman. And indeed I do not think that was a circumstance, if true, either unworthy of him, to remember, or of the spirit of God, to put upon record. In the New Testament, we find the apostle Paul, taking notice of a similar circumstance in the case of Timothy, 2 Tim. i. 5. When I call to remembrance the unfeigned "faith that is in thee, &c." Without determining precisely in what sense to take the words, it is certainly adjusted here to signify some peculiar and intimate relation to God, which laid him under the strongest ties of adherence and subjection.

As there was much beauty and propriety in the psalmist's mentioning this circumstance, so every pious person ought especially in the Lord's supper, to recollect the peculiar relations he stands under to God. Even as members of the visible church we are the servants of God, born in his house, baptized in his name, favored with the light of the gospel, blessed with clearness and fullness of instruction, animated by eminent and shining examples. As many as have been brought up either as children or servants in pious families, separated from the solicitations, and sheltered from the insults of wicked men; careful instruction, regular government, faithful admonition and kind invitation, laid as it were a strict and powerful constraint upon them, brought them into, and kept them in the paths of piety and truth; ought they not to remember it with humility and gratitude, nay, if by means of but one pious parent, or other relation had been brought to acquaintance with God, it ought to be remembered as laying them under peculiar ties. To all which I shall only add, that if by the goodness of a gracious God, any former means of instruction public or private, or singular dispensation of providence has been accompanied with power, it ought to be improved in this new surrender of ourselves to God, at once to increase our present gratitude and pro-

mote our future stedfastness in the paths of obedience. This leads me to observe,

4. That the declaration of the psalmist implies a sense of gratitude for signal mercies, "Thou hast loosed my bonds." I think it is probable that what he had in view immediately here was, deliverance from personal affliction, probably a dangerous sickness, threatening immediate dissolution. But the way in which it is introduced and the use to which it is applied, is equally suited to deliverances of every kind and use, to all signal mercies which were greatly needed or highly prized. He ascribes the honor of it to God, he puts it to his own charge as a debt due to God, and on this account proposes a return of duty and gratitude to God. It were no difficult matter to produce examples of a similar conduct in the psalmist, on his being favored with remarkable deliverances in his family from the enemies of his country, from slander and reproach, or in unexpected honor and advancement, as was his from the sheepfold to the kingdom of Israel.

Now ought not every good man, to follow the example of the Psalmist in this particular, to remember and acknowledge all instances of signal mercy. There is scarcely any person, but may recollect several examples of these in the course of their lives. They may remember how earnestly they desired deliverance in the time of danger, what a sense of gratitude was upon their minds, when the mercy was recent, and this may be profitably improved, for strengthening the ties which they lie under to God their Saviour. This will have a double effect, if the deliverance was implored by the prayer of faith, and if any marks can be discerned, of their having obtained the sanctified improvement of it. But above all, with what propriety may they adopt the language of the Psalmist, if they have been delivered from bondage of spirit, as well as fear and solicitude as to their outward state. And it frequently happens, that these two go together. It was almost always so with the Psalmist, and is natural to expect that it will be so with every serious person; for affliction brings sin to remembrance, and they not only tremble, for the issue of the trial under which they groan, but

apprehend the holy displeasure of that God, who cast them into the furnace, and with whom they have to do. But if the candle of the Lord again shineth upon them, and they are walking in the light of his countenance, they may well say with the Psalmist, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the son of thy hand: maid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

5. In the last place, This declaration implies a solemn dedication and surrender of himself to God, and his service for the time to come. This is the end of the retrospect which he takes of his character and state, "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." He was resolved to live a life of gratitude to God, to take all methods of openly and publicly acknowledging him as the author of his mercies. If we would see further his purpose, we may look back to the 8, 9, 10 ver. "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." He promises therefore a life of obedience, and as the source of thankful trust and acquiescence in God, he seems by the 11th verse, to have been disconcerted by discovering the treachery of men, but every thing is rectified and made up by the goodness and all-sufficiency of God.

So my brethren, ought every person who is this day to set down at the table of the Lord, after a serious recollection of all his past mercies, to devote and consecrate himself unto God. Take him for your portion: place your happiness in his favor; receive your daily bread from him as his gift; pay for every mercy the tribute of praise; live not upon the creature without God, but endeavor to enrich and sweeten created comforts, by communion with God: Resolve to serve him with your body and spirit which are his, serve him sincerely, resolving that nothing shall have quiet possession of your heart, or indulgence in your life, that is contrary to his will. Serve him with zeal, espouse his interest, plead his cause, and esteem it your honor, if by your authority, by your talents, by your substance, you can promote his glory. Put your trust in his providence. You are yet in the body, liable to all the

vicissitudes of this mortal state. Be persuaded of the infinite wisdom, and all sufficiency of God. Let him dispose of you freely. Resist excessive anxiety and fear, and oppose to all the gloomy horrors of a fruitless apprehension, the shield of faith in almighty strength, which is able to bear you up superior to every trial, and to every enemy. Do in every state of difficulty as the prophet Isaiah, in the name of God, invites the people of Israel to do on the approach of public judgment, Isaiah xxvi, 20. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thy self as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

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

I. Suffer me my brethren to plead with every sinner; to plead with every hearer in this assembly, the right of his Maker to his service. He hath made and formed you, and his visitation preserves your spirits. He only holdeth your soul in life, and unto him belong the issues from death—Of him, and to him, and through him, are all things. Have you therefore served him as your master, and placed your happiness on his favors. I choose my brethren to assert God's dominion over his creatures, that if it please him to accompany it with his spirit, it may carry conviction to many who are living in quiet and self satisfaction, although they are dead in trespasses and sins. Many, if they are free from grosser corruptions, are no way apprehensive of the danger of being *without God* in the world. Ignorance of themselves, extenuation of sin, foolishly placing a merit in a few common outside duties, and presumptuous hopes in God's general mercy, are the delusive grounds of the hope of such persons. Nay, sometimes, alas for their folly! the chief thing they have to trust to, is the ill that they have not done. I really do not swear says one, I hate drinking abominably, it is a beastly vice. What signify these partial justifications? I have known, though it is not common, I confess, an habitual adulterer that would swear, and I could shew you a covetous hard hearted wretch, grinding every day the faces of the poor, that will neither drink nor swear.

But are you the servants of God? are you devoted to his fear? believe it first, there is an absolute necessity of an entire change in your nature, to fit you for the kingdom of God. You are his creatures, you ought to be his servants, and in one sense indeed his enemies are his servants, because they are under the dominion of his Providence, and shall at last be the monuments of his vengeance. Be warned then in time, for you may rest assured that no man hath hardened himself against him, and prospered.

2. But in the next place, I must not omit giving warning of their danger, to such as are living in open and avowed profanity. They are so far from being the servants of God, that they are his enemies, his confederated enemies, and the enemies of every thing that stands in a visible relation to him. I will once more my brethren, take the liberty to denounce the judgment of God, against all such persons, and I am preaching the gospel of Christ, while I am doing so, for he shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire. And all profane swearers that speak the language of hell on earth, shall have it as their abode for ever. All despisers of the sabbath of rest.

THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY SAVED, AND THE
WICKED CERTAINLY DESTROYED.

A

S E R M O N.

1 PETER IV. 18.

*And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the
ungodly and the sinner appear?*

ALL mankind may be divided into two great classes, the righteous and the wicked, the friends and the enemies of God, the heirs of glory and the heirs of hell. These, though mixed together on earth, and in many cases not easily to be distinguished by men, are yet essentially different in their characters, and shall at last meet with a very different fate. Of how much moment would it be for every one to see his own character and state before the final separation, when the judge shall divide them, one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats!

There are many awful tokens of divine justice and holiness in the administration of Providence, which ought to be considered by us, as preludes to the great day of retribution, when God shall render to every man, according to his works. The apostle Peter, in the verses preceding

the text, is speaking of the divine judgments which were coming upon that generation, and which were in part, to fall even upon the church and people of God. From this he takes occasion, to point out the infinitely greater danger of impenitent sinners, who were exposed, not only to the same or heavier temporal strokes, but to a final and eternal destruction. verse 17. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" Considering also that God in righteous severity, sees it necessary to make even his own people to pass through the furnace, and through much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of God, he institutes the comparison in the text, to point out the dreadful state of the finally impenitent; "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

In discoursing further upon this subject, what I propose is,

I. To explain the import of the declaration, or supposition, in the first part of the text, that "the righteous scarcely are saved."

II. To consider the conclusion drawn from it, by the apostle, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

III. I shall make a practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction.

In the first place then, I am to explain the import of the declaration, or supposition, in the first part of the text, that "the righteous are scarcely saved." There is the greater necessity of this, that the expression is both strong and singular. There are many passages indeed, that carry in them truths akin to it, and founded upon it; but the sentiment itself, is almost peculiar to this passage, that "the righteous are scarcely saved." There are some, who suppose that the expression is borrowed from, or alludes to Prov. xi. 31. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." The meaning they give thus: Even the righteous must expect to meet with sufferings and ca-

lamities on earth, much more, wicked men, under the just displeasure of a holy God. But I think it is plain, that the apostle in our text, has an eye to the decisive judgment of the last day; for he says in the preceding verse, "What shall the end be of them, that obey not the "gospel of God." It is no where said in scripture, that wicked men shall be punished in the present life, in a manner fully adequate to their guilt, much less that a just and visible proportion, is to be observed between their sufferings, and those of the servants of God. On the contrary, they are called the men of the world; it is said, they have their part and portion in this life, and their prosperity, compared with the trials and sufferings of good men, appears to have been in every age, a source of temptation to the children of God.

We must therefore understand the apostle, as speaking of the eternal state, both of the righteous and the wicked, in the correspondent parts of this passage. What then is the meaning of the righteous being scarcely saved? It cannot mean that there is any defect or straitness in the mercy of God. The invitation to sinners, in the gospel, is not only urgent, but full, free, and infinitely gracious. It cannot mean that there is any defect in the mind or power of our Redeemer, or if the security of those who put their trust in him, were to be doubted, or their victory over all the enemies of their salvation, were uncertain. To affix any such meaning to the words, would be to set them in direct opposition to many other passages of scripture, and to do the greatest injury to the divine wisdom and truth. In order therefore, to open the import of this interesting declaration, you may observe the following things:

I. The righteous may be said to be scarcely saved, because all are justly liable to divine vengeance, and it is only of the free grace, and sovereign mercy of God, that any are saved. This, my brethren, is a truth of the greatest moment, repeated in almost every page of the sacred oracles, but which none can either understand or approve, till they are effectually humbled by the spirit of God: It is however, the sum and substance of the gospel. See in what terms it is described by the apostle Paul, Eph. ii,

4—10. “ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ: (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” There is not a believer on earth, nor a saint in heaven, but who is ready to acknowledge, that he was by nature an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works; that he had highly provoked him, and that if God had dealt with him in strict justice, he would have been forever banished from his presence and enjoyment. Probably many will recollect the time of their ignorance and security, and admire the patience of God towards them, and see that they are indeed scarcely saved, since they have been brought back from the very brink of destruction. If any malefactor had been arraigned, judged and condemned to die, and after apprehending the just punishment of his crime, should be saved by an act of royal clemency, at a stake or on a scaffold, would he not consider himself as scarcely saved. But this is no more than a just image of the state and views of a pardoned sinner, and what will continue to be the views of those who have entered into rest. They are clothed with white robes, as an emblem, not of innocence, but absolution, and the song of praise which they sing, intimates the condition from which they were brought, Rev. v. 9. “ 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;” verse 12. “ Worthy is the lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”

This leads me to observe, that as their salvation is of sovereign grace in the Father's love, so it was purchased by the most amazing sufferings of their Redeemer in their room. They are scarcely saved, not only from the want of merit in themselves, but from the infinite expence and cost laid out by him for their redemption. Such was the evil of sin, and so deplorable the state of the sinner, that the wisdom, truth, and holiness of God, seemed all to demand his perdition. The whole creation could not furnish a sufficient ransom; for the redemption of the soul was precious, and it ceased forever. Then the eternal Son of God, clothed with infinite mercy, and conveyed in sovereign power, presented himself as our Redeemer, saying, "Lo, I come," &c. O, amazing truth! Oh, unsearchable subject? Justly may we say, that the righteous scarcely are saved, since it required so costly an expiation. Let us remember in faith, what our Saviour endured in the garden and on the cross, before he could say it was finished; and we shall be constrained to confess that it was no easy undertaking to redeem those souls that were forfeited to divine justice.

To conclude this particular, the righteous are scarcely saved, because the application of this redemption to their souls, and their being brought to an unfeigned acceptance of it, required the almighty power and energy of the spirit of grace. This also is a part of that revealed truth, which the natural man hears with reluctance, and cannot receive. Yet it is not only plainly taught in scripture, but daily ratified in experience. John i. 13. "Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Without the power of the holy Ghost, the gospel may be preached to sinners from day to day, and from year to year, and yet they shall continue in their natural and miserable state.

It is the work of the spirit to open the blinded understanding, to awaken the secure and dozing conscience, and to bend the stubborn will to the obedience of the gospel. We are also plainly given to understand, that if a sinner long resists the motions of the Spirit, the consequence, in the economy of providence, is frequently that

this divine agent departs from him, and ceases any longer to strive with him. Every such person is left to himself, given up to the dominion of his lusts, and the enslaving power of habit; and so fills up the measure of his iniquities, till he is ripe for final judgment and destruction. Let us severally consider, that if such provision was made by an all-wise God, for the recovery of such of his creatures as had fallen by their iniquity, it could not be unnecessary. And surely the whole of these views conspire in opening the meaning and confirming the truth of what we are told in this passage, that the righteous are scarcely saved.

2. The righteous may be said to be scarcely saved, because their number is but very small. There are few that be saved in comparison of those that perish, and in comparison of those that seek and pretend to hope for salvation.

This, if it be a truth, is certainly pregnant with meaning, and deeply interesting. I know there are some who have no great love to any thing that directly tends to disturb the repose of a drowsy slothful spirit, who are fond of denying or calling in question this truth. They allege that our Saviour evaded it as an improper question, when proposed to him by his disciples. Luke xiii. 23. "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" But truly I cannot see how he could have answered it more plainly, or indeed more properly, than in the following words, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Especially if we compare them with the parallel place in Matth. vii. 13. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

What shall be the number of the redeemed at last, and what proportion it shall bear to the whole race of Adam, before the end of this state of things, it is impossible for us to know. It is pleasant to indulge the hope that it shall be very great, and that there are times yet to come, when the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom shall be glorious, and the triumphs of his grace perhaps universal. But when we speak of the number of such as shall be saved, we must speak of it as relating to those whom we now see,

and their characters as drawn in the oracles of truth. And surely if we pay the least regard to the marks of religion laid down in scripture, we must be sensible what multitudes are living in direct opposition to them, and that there are many who though they are called by the name of Christ, and maintain some degree of outward profession, yet they are far from being Christians indeed and in truth. Math. vii. 21. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord
" Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he
" that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

3. When the apostle says that the righteous scarcely are saved, it may mean that many make not only a common but an eminent profession of religion, who yet shall be found finally defective, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. It may mean, that not only the ungodly and openly profane sinners shall be rejected, but that all who seem to be righteous shall not be found so upon trial. This seems to lead us to consider the difference between the charitable, general, and uncertain judgment of man, and the strict, infallible, and decisive judgment of God. This is beautifully represented by our Saviour, in the parable of the tares of the field, Math. xiii. 24, and downwards; but you may particularly see what is said from the 28th verse. "The servants said unto him, wilt thou then
" that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay, lest
" while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat
" with them. Let both grow together until the harvest:
" and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ga-
" ther ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles
" to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

There is a circumstance to be particularly attended to here, that not only shall many deceive their fellow creatures by a false profession, but not a few shall more effectually and more fatally deceive themselves, saying they shall have peace though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. There are many exhortations in scripture, to guard against deceiving ourselves; of which I shall only mention one. Gal. iv. 7. "Be not deceived; God is not
" mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he
" also reap." If our Saviour found it necessary to say to

the twelve whom he had chosen, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of;" much more may the same thing be said to numbers of professing Christians in these last days. There are many sins that may adhere to a religious profession, or be covered with a sacred veil, which yet are inconsistent with true religion. See what the apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." And the apostle James i. 26. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." It is an awful description given us by our Saviour, Math. vii. 22. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

I shall only add one evidence, with which experience furnishes us, that even in an eminent profession there may be at bottom no sincerity. There never was a time of trial in the church by persecution; but there were several of the most eminent in station, gifts and profession who were guilty of apostacy, a sure evidence that they were not found in the faith, and a great lesson of humiliation and caution to us. True religion bears all trials, and it is only he that endureth to the end that shall be saved. It is highly probable, that the apostle had this very thing in view, in the passage where my text lies; for in the preceding verse, he had been animating them to suffer as christians, and concludes in the following verse thus, "Wherefore 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."

4. In the last place the righteous are scarcely saved, because those who are saved, shall be saved with much difficulty. That is to say, it will require the utmost exertion of their care and vigilance. They may expect a continual conflict with temptations and trials from without,

and the stirrings of corruptions from within. There is nothing more contrary to the scripture view of our christian course, than to suppose it a state of unmolested quiet, security and indulgence. It is represented to us by every image that carries in it the idea of opposition, activity and vigilance. It is striving Math. 7. 13. "Enter ye
" in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad
" is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be
" which go in thereat:" His contending in a race, Heb. xii. 1. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about
" with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every
" weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and
" let us run with patience the race that is set before us." It is fighting, 1. Tim. vi. 12. "Fight the good fight of faith," and it is represented as incessant labor, Phil. ii. 12. "Work
" out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Indeed when we consider from what, and how many quarters, we must expect opposition, this truth will appear with the fullest evidence. Consider the implacable hatred of the great adversary, the reproach and injuries of wicked men, their still more pernicious example and solicitation, the allurements of the world, in this sensible state, and the treachery and deceitfulness of our own hearts. Of the great danger of all these we have the greatest reason to be convinced from the confession and testimony of those who have gone before us, yet over them all the believer must obtain the victory, and shall obtain it in his Redeemer's strength. 1. John. v. 4 "For
" whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and
" this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our
" faith."

There is nothing here said contrary to what the scripture informs us, of the peace and consolation, that attends the practice of true religion. It is not said to discourage the believer; but to put him on his guard, and to warn him not to mistake the nature and foundation of that peace he is entitled to expect. It does not consist in a neglect of his enemies, far less in a confederacy with, or subjection to them, but in the assured prospect, and growing evidence of his victory over them. Further, the inward con-

solation of a Christian, does not consist in thinking light of sin, by excusing it, or justifying himself by denying it; but in unfeigned self-denial, a willingness to see the evil of sin, and taking shame to himself by confessing it, together with evangelical views of divine mercy in the pardon of it, and the promised strength of divine grace to enable him to resist and subdue it.

I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was to consider the inference drawn in the last part of the verse, "where shall the ungodly and the sinners appear?" I need scarcely tell you, that the form of a question used here, is a very common figure of speech to signify their dreadful situation. This just but very awful inference, is intended for the terror of those who live in open ungodliness, and avowed contempt of divine mercy. Perhaps it may be proper from the context, to consider a little the time when the wicked shall be exposed to this terrible danger: and then the import of the threatening itself. As to the time when the difference is to appear, it may be,

1. In a time of public calamity, or any remarkable visitation of divine severity. Such a time is described, Luke xxi. 25, 26. "There shall be upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Then the conscience of the most obdurate is sometimes alarmed. I am sensible, and I have formerly hinted, that good men have no charter of exception from outward sufferings. But in these times of general trial, the difference between them and others is very great. They have an anchor of hope in the favor of a reconciled, and in the wisdom and providence of an omnipotent God. But the profane and ungodly, terrified by the reproaches of a guilty conscience, are made to tremble through fear of the execution of deserved judgment.

2. In a time of personal distress, and apparent danger of death. This important change is no light matter, even to the best. They have often no small degree of solicitude and fear, as to the manner of going through this last and

decisive conflict. But how much more fearful an aspect must the king of terrors wear, to the inpenitent sinner? when the charm is dissolved, and all his sinful pleasures are turned into wormwood and gall; when he sees he must bid an eternal farewell to every sensual delight, enter into a world of spirits, and appear in the presence of God. But,

3. Both these are only preparatory to the day of judgment. "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." Then his people shall lift up their heads with joy, for the day of their redemption has arrived. But with what inexpressible confusion shall the wicked then be covered? In vain shall they call upon the mountains and hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb. Now they affront his person, oppose his reign, resist his spirit, and scorn his servants. But where shall they appear, and what will they do, when the "Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel."

This leads me more particularly to consider the import of the inference in the text, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinners appear?" And I think it plainly carries in it three things, that from the holiness and severity of God, and the righteous scarcely being saved, we may learn the certainty, the greatness, and the justice of the punishment of impenitent sinners.

1. The certainty of it. That as the threatenings are awful, the execution shall be inevitable. Men are exceedingly prone, from partiality to themselves, and from the suggestions of the father of lies, to disbelieve the threatenings as well as the promises of God. This was a great part of the temptation to the commission of the first sin, Gen. iii. 4. "And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die." And the credit that was given to it at that time, has been continued by sinners in every subsequent age. They are ready to presume upon the general goodness of God, and to flatter themselves that his threatenings shall be either wholly remitted or greatly abated. We find that some men of corrupt minds have even set themselves to reason against the rigor of the scrip-

ture denunciations against sin, and the eternal punishment of sinners.

But how fatal the delusion? The truth of God is an inseparable bar to this deceitful expectation. *Is. iii. 10, 11.* "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him." *Pf. l. 21, 22.* "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Nay, not only is this asserted in the word of God, but the whole procedure of divine Providence serves to confirm it. If the salvation of the righteous is with difficulty obtained; if their redemption is so dearly purchased; if Christ must bleed before they can be forgiven: how shall the ungodly be able to stand in the judgment! If even the servants of God must be exposed to so many sufferings in the day of trial, what must be the condition of his enemies in the day of retribution? If even the sins of the holy must be visited, how shall the crimes of the impenitent pass unpunished? This is plainly one part of the truth contained in this passage; and whoever will deliberately consider the uniform tenor of the holy scriptures, and compare it with the dispensations of divine Providence, will have reason to tremble at the dreadful state of incorrigible sinners, and to say with the apostle Paul, *Heb. xii. 25.* "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."

2. The expression in the text implies the greatness of the punishment of sinners. It is indeed, my brethren, every where represented in scripture in such terms, as serve to convey to us the most dreadful apprehensions of its weight as well as the deepest conviction of its certainty. It is represented as the blackness of darkness forever, and as a worm that shall never die. But

the image most commonly used is fire, which is the most terrible to sense, of all the elements we have any knowledge of. It is a lake that burns with fire and brimstone for evermore. Without entering at all into the question, how much is literal, and how much figurative, in these images, the just conclusion from them is, that those who shall be the final monuments of divine vengeance, shall be in a state sorrowful and comfortless as darkness, painful as a gnawing worm, and dreadful as fire.

This is also manifestly founded on the reflection in the text, "if the righteous are scarcely saved:" if they suffer so much at present by divine permission; if they suffer so much by the persecution of the ungodly, what a load of vengeance awaits the wicked in the day of reckoning, when he will recompense tribulation to the troublers of his chosen? If there is so much holy severity, a necessary account of sin even in the present life, which is the time of divine forbearance, even towards the children of God, who are the objects of his everlasting love, what shall be the state of those who have outsinned the season of his grace, and forfeited all title to his mercy, on whom he intends at once to glorify his justice, and to magnify his power. Hear the words of the Holy Ghost 2 Theff. i. 9. "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

3. The expression in the text, implies the justice of the punishment of sinners. This is a circumstance always to be taken in, for at the last day he shall judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained. He shall judge the world in righteousness and the people with his truth. This is a circumstance not only for the illustration of the glory of God, but for the manifestation of the present truth. If the punishment of sinners were not just, it could not be great; if it were not known and felt by themselves to be just, it would not be intollerable.

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Wm. O. W. H. H. H.

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THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL ENTIRELY OF GOD.

A

S E R M O N.

I CORINTHIANS iii. 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.

MY BRETHREN,

I HAVE been led to the choice of this subject, by that dispensation of providence, which, though contrary to all human probability, hath brought me to this new charge of presiding over the instruction of youth, in the liberal arts. I find also that in the course of my attendance on it, I shall have frequent opportunities of preaching the glorious gospel of the blessed God to you, of this congregation and neighborhood. Let me therefore beg your attention to the instructive passage which I have just now read, that both teachers and scholars, ministers and hearers, may preserve a just sense of their relation to one another, and

the common relation we all stand in to God. And particularly that in the discharge of our mutual duty of preaching and hearing, we may preserve on our minds, a deep sense of our dependance on superior strength, and may look for a blessing from the Father of lights, from whom alone it can possibly flow.

The text of itself and independent of its connexion, is so full of useful matter, that I am unwilling to spend your time by a long deduction of the particular circumstances of the church of Corinth, which led the apostle to express himself in the language contained in it. Let it suffice therefore to observe, that a spirit of pride and faction prevailed very much in that church, which had rent them into parties, denominated from this, or the other principal teacher who was, or had been among them. Thus in the 12th verse of the first chapter, "Now this I say that every one of you saith I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephass, and I of Christ," and in the verse immediately preceding the text. "For while one saith I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal." Possibly the converts from among the Jews counted themselves the disciples of Peter, and held him in the highest esteem, while those of the Gentiles supported the name and credit of the apostle Paul, who first planted the christian faith among the idolatrous heathens, and perhaps others who were much addicted to learning and philosophy, admired, and extolled the eloquence of Apollos. And yet after all, perhaps the fierce and unchristian contentions that prevailed in that church, were not owing to their divided attachment to particular apostles, but to the ambitious and corrupt teachers, which were among themselves. If this was the case, the apostle Paul only mentioned himself, Apollos and Cephass, by way of supposition, instead of naming the guilty heads of the contending parties, that the reproof being administered with so much prudence and delicacy, might be carried home with the greater evidence and force. This interpretation receives a good deal of countenance from what we find in chap. iv. 6. "And these things brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself, and to Apollos, for your sake; that ye might learn

“ in us, not to think of men above, that which is written, “ that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.”

Such a division and factious temper does infinite mischief wherever it prevails. It proceeds from people's being much under the power of a carnal mind, and exceedingly increases carnality by that envy, strife, and dissimulation, which it always produces. But the chief way in which it hinders the success of the gospel is, by leading men into the fatal mistake of seeking or expecting to find in ministers what can only be had in God, or ascribing to instruments and servants, what is due only to their Lord and master. Would you perceive the greatness of this sin? It is sacrilegiously robbing God of his own honor and glory, in order to invest a weak sinful creature with the sacred spoils.

I only add one other preliminary remark. You may see the perfect consistency and propriety of the apostle's conduct, according to the different circumstances in which he was engaged. For this purpose we must compare his expressions, here with those used by him when attempts were made to lessen his character, and detract from the dignity of his office, as an apostle of Christ. On these occasions he shews, that he knows very well what belonged to his station in the church, and is so far from speaking of himself in affected strains of humility, that he freely vindicates his own conduct, and magnifies the honorable trust that was committed to him by his Saviour. chap. ix. verse 1, 2. “ Am I not an apostle? am I not “ free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not “ ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle to “ others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine “ apostleship are ye in the Lord.” Thus the apostle speaks in vindication of his authority, when unjustly attacked. But when the question is changed, and some are disposed to excel him or any other, too much to the prejudice of his Lord and master, he changes his stile too, and speaks in the humblest manner of himself, and any thing he had contributed or could contribute to the success of the gospel. As a faithful servant he could not endure that any should put him in his master's place, and rejects with indigna-

tion all that false honor which flowed only from the mistakes and weakness of his fellow christians.

In this as in many other instances, the occasional directions given to the different christian churches, in the early ages carry the most important and useful admonitions to us who live in the latter days. From the passage before us, we learn that ministers should consider themselves, and be considered by their people, as entirely subordinate to God, and expect assistance in their labors, and success in their endeavors, only from himself. What I further propose, in dependance on divine grace, is first to illustrate and support the proposition just now laid down, and then to make a practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

I. First then, I am to illustrate and support this proposition, That ministers ought to consider themselves, and to be considered by their people, as entirely subordinate to God, and expect assistance in their labors, and success in their endeavors only from himself. In the course of this illustration, it is my intention, at once, to point out the meaning and import of the proposition, and to establish its truth from scripture and experience. For this purpose I beg your attention to the following observations.

1. The success of the gospel depends wholly upon God, and to him alone must the glory of it be ascribed, as it is he, who not only sends and employs, but who furnishes and qualifies all, whom he employs for promoting his service. He not only gives the commission to undertake, but he imparts the ability to discharge the trust. This truth is manifestly included in the apostle's words, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man." He considers himself and others, only as ministers, that is, as servants subject to the direction and authority of Christ their Lord and master, unto whom they are to be instrumental in carrying on the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of believers. This similitude however of itself, does not fully come up to the truth the apostle would inculcate. A man who is but a servant,

and does every thing by the authority, and under the direction of his master, may yet have real and just ground, for valuing himself upon what he performs; in case, for instance, he is possessed of uncommon talents, and an extraordinary capacity, to do his work to the best advantage. On this supposition, he is a treasure to his master, the success of whose direction may in a great measure be ascribed to the servant's skill and ability in the execution. But to exclude every pretence of this sort, the apostle subjoins what brings the allusion fully up to his purpose; "even as the Lord gave to every man." Ministers are not only servants, but their very capacity and ability to serve God, are received from himself, who divides to every man severally, as he will. From this it is evident, that the glory and honor of the whole work, and the success of every particular servant employed in it, is entirely owing to Christ, their great Lord and master, 1 Cor. iv. 7. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive! now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"

Let us, my brethren, consider and dwell upon this truth a little, for it is full of instruction, both to ministers and people. That we may view it with the greater clearness and precision, let me observe, that there are two distinct kinds of qualities, which are each in their place, of great importance on the work of the ministry. (1.) The endowments of the mind, whether original and natural, or acquired by industry; these last being only the former improved and perfected by education and exercise. (2.) Holy dispositions, which are of the utmost importance and necessity, to turn the other into their proper channel, and to give them force and influence in the application. Now both these are equally and entirely the gift of God, the first being indeed in scripture most commonly, in all their extent and diversity, called gifts; but the others are the effect of the gracious and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost.

(1.) All the endowments of mind, which fit a man for common or special service, are the gift of God. Whatever capacity or talents, whatever natural advantages of

any kind, ministers enjoy, it is plain, that they received them from God, and depend upon him for the continuance and use of them. He only endows them with knowledge and comprehension, to understand his sacred truths: He only, endows them with the talent of speaking well, and enables them to communicate their knowledge to others, in an agreeable and acceptable manner, *Exod. iv. 11, 12.*

“ And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.” There is something very noble, as well as instructive in these passages of scripture, which represent even the skill of the tradesmen to be employed in adorning the visible sanctuary, as the gift of God, and the inspiration of his spirit. *Exod. xxxi. 1, 2, 3, 4.* “ And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, see, I have called by name, Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass.” And again, *Exod. xxxvi. 1.* “ Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding, to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the Lord had commanded.”

Further, as it is the inspiration of the Almighty, that giveth understanding both in a general and comparative view, so the improvement of natural parts by acquired learning, is no less to be ascribed to him. As he gives the disposition and ability, so it is he who by the course of his providence furnishes the means, and presents the opportunity of making progress. Let human efforts be what they will, if God do not smile upon them, they will infallibly be blasted. An all seeing and sovereign God, has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation, and every person who will seriously reflect, may be sensible how all his purposes have

been controuled and over-ruled by the invifible direktion of the great Difpofer of every event, who hath pointed out the paths in which he was to walk.

(2.) Let us alfo remember that it is God, who endows his minifters with their brighteft ornaments, viz. holy and gracious difpofitions which ferve to turn their other talents into the proper channel, and to give them force and influence in the application. I am fenfible, my brethren, that gifts may be confidered as more affiftant to the being of the miniftiry, than even grace itfelf. We juftly renounce the popifh doctrine, that the efficacy of the facraments, or other ordinances, depends upon the intention or inward ftate of the adminiftrator. In oppofition to this the *Assembly's Shorter Catechifm* fays juftly, “ the facraments, (and it is equally true of every other ordinance) “ becomes effectual to falvation, not from any virtue in them, “ nor in him that doth adminifter them, but only by the “ bleffing of Chrift, and the working of his fpirit in them, “ that by faith receive them.” A hypocrite cannot be a faithful, but he may be in fome degree a fuccefsful minifter. I am perfuaded there are not a few now in heaven, who were converted and edified by the miniftiry of thofe who have taken up their abode in the place of torment: an awful reflection this indeed, to thofe who are intrufted with the office of the miniftiry. It brings to my mind a faying of an eminent and pious writer, minifters are in as great danger of deceiving themfelves as others, and in fome refpects greater, for they may be apt to miftake their readinefs in thinking and fpeaking of holy things, and thofe gifts which God beftows upon them, for the benefit of his chofen, for the fruit and evidence of gracious difpofitions in their own hearts.

But notwithstanding all this, it is beyond all controverfy, that one of the moft effential qualifications of a good minifter is, that he be a good man. It is a very difficult, as well as it is a very dreadful thing, to preach an unknown Saviour. But where the love of Chrift dwells and reigns in the heart, it gives fuch attachment to his caufe, fo much love to his people, fo much clearnefs and comprehension in underftanding his truths, fo great wil-

lingness, or rather desire to communicate them, as cannot fail to have the greatest influence on a minister's diligence, and at the same time gives reason to hope that he will speak from faith to faith. Thus the apostle expresses himself, 2. Cor. iv. 13. "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I have believed, therefore have I spoken: we also believe, and therefore speak."

Now to whom is a minister indebted for his holy dispositions? Who implanted in him that love to Christ, which inspires him with zeal and fidelity in his service? Take the answer in the words of the apostle, 2 Cor. iv. 5, 6. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord; and ourselves, your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." It was the power of God that brought him again from the dead, and it is by the spirit of God dwelling in him, that he is daily sanctified and enabled to adore the doctrine of God, his Saviour, in all things. So that the fire of his ministrations, and the light of his example, and the joint influence of both, are to be ultimately referred, and will by him be most willingly and thankfully attributed to the power and grace of God, his Redeemer, of whose fulness we all have received, and grace for grace.

2. But in the second place, the success of the gospel depends entirely on God, as it is he who gives efficacy to the instructions, even of the most eminent and best qualified ministers, by the immediate supernatural operation of his spirit and grace. Let us suppose a minister endued with the finest natural parts, and these improved and cultivated, by all the advantages of human learning. Let him have the most acute and penetrating genius, the most lively imagination, the most solid judgment, the most charming and persuasive eloquence; in fine let him have what alone is of more value than all these, an eminently pious and devout heart. With so many advantages he shall not be able to make one sincere convert, unless almighty God be pleased to open the way by his divine

grace into the hearts and consciences of the sinner. It is not then merely by furnishing the proper means and by the disposition of his providence, giving them an opportunity of exerting their influence, that God promotes the success of the gospel, but by an immediate and powerful agency, distinct from, and superior to every second cause.

I have endeavored to express this with the greatest fullness, and the greatest clearness, as a truth of the utmost importance. While we believe the use and necessity of means and second causes, we ought never to separate them from, or forget their subordination to God. There can hardly be a nobler illustration of this truth, than the apostle has given us in the text, by a natural similitude. "I have planted," says he, "Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." His expressions are taken from husbandry, or gardening, which is a particular branch of it. By an allusion to these arts, he explains his subject in a manner level to the capacity of every thinking person. The husbandman or gardener may manure, dig up and mellow the soil; he may sow his seed, and dress his field with the greatest diligence and care: but what a little way has he gone, or rather indeed he hath not so much as begun the great process of growth and vegetation, that daily miracle, may I not call it, before our eyes. How many things must necessarily concur, which are beyond the reach of his power? the enlivening heat of the sun, the refreshing dews and rain from the bottles of heaven, are wholly under the direction and disposal of the omnipotent Jehovah. Cannot he, when he will, make the heavens over your heads as brass, and the earth under your feet as iron? Nay, not only so, but the power of growing in the seed, by striking out its roots, and opening its bud, and the natural disposition in the earth to nourish it, are derived not from any virtue inherent in the things themselves, but only from that almighty word, "Let the earth bring forth every tree bearing fruit, and every herb bearing seed after its kind." Just so in that spiritual husbandry, of which the apostle is speaking, ministers may sow the good seed of the word of God, but it is his own prerogative to give it a regenerating and sanctifying

efficacy, and make it productive of faith in the heart, and good works in the life. Ministers may continue to water the seed already sown, with suitable instructions and exhortations, and the diligent use of all those means which God hath appointed for the establishment and growth of believers: but it is only the influence of his own spirit that makes these means productive of the desired effect. Therefore the apostle concludes, in language drawn from the similitude, "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

This important truth, my brethren, is capable of a very full and clear proof from the sacred oracles. Every thing we find recorded there, concerning the mission of the prophets, and the success of their message, carries this truth as it were in its bosom. Nay, the great prophet of the church gives us this very view of his own ministry as the Son of man. John vi. 44, 45, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." You see that, to the commission which our Lord gives to his apostles, is annexed a promise of his presence and power to accompany their ministrations. Math. xxviii. 19, 20. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen."

But instead of multiplying passages of scripture, I shall direct you to one, which will set this part of my argument in the clearest light. It is that passage which gives an account of the conversion of Lydia, recorded Acts xvi. 14. "And a certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul." Now if we attend to the circumstances of this conversion, we shall find

that if any thing could have been effectually done without the direct and immediate concurrence of the grace of God, it might have been expected here. The case was every way promising: The hearer was one who had renounced idolatry, and embraced the worship of the true God. She was, it is not improbable, a devout woman, so far as her knowledge reached; and wanted only to be instructed in the faith of Christ. Here was for a preacher the great apostle of the Gentiles. I need say no more to shew how well qualified he was to do his part; and yet we find that even in this most favorable case, the immediate concurrence of divine grace was necessary to complete the work. The Lord must by his own good Spirit, open the heart of Lydia, else even the apostle Paul, with all his divine accomplishments, and a heart glowing with the warmest zeal for the glory of Christ, and the salvation of souls, will be but an unsuccessful preacher.

I need not make use of any separate arguments to convince you, that this holds equally true of the growth and comfort of believers, as of the conversion of sinners. Whether ministers are employed in planting or watering, the instrument is nothing: success flows only from God. Let me therefore request and beseech you to hear and adore the striking truth, a Paul or Apollos in the pulpit will be altogether unsuccessful without the almighty power and grace of God. The most clear and distinct illustration of divine truths, without inward and spiritual illumination, will leave the hearer in ignorance, or lead him into error: The most awful denunciations of a son of thunder, without divine power, will leave the sinner hardened, or even increase the fearedness of conscience. The most melting and tender application to the affections, without divine energy, will be treated with contempt and scorn. In one word, the most lively administration of ordinances, without the blessing from above, will be but in the language of the prophet, as a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts.

My brethren you may not only be convinced of this truth, because it is recorded in the word of God, but may see it daily exemplified in every part of the visible church.

You may see the same ordinances acceptable, delightful, and profitable to some; deserted, despised and resisted by others. Under the very same administration, you may see some effectually persuaded to turn to the living God, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the holy Ghost, and daily multiplied: some on the other hand caring for none of these things, but sleeping in security; nay some whose corruptions are irritated, swelling with rage, contradicting and blaspheming, all which is well described by the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. "For we are unto God a sweet favor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the favor of death unto death; and to the other, the favor of life unto life; and who is sufficient for these things?"

3. The third and last observation I am to make for the illustration of this truth is, that success in the gospel depends wholly upon God, as he exercises much of his own sovereignty in the manner of bestowing it. He takes care if I may speak so, to shew that it is from himself by the measure in which he proportions the success to the nature and sufficiency of the means he sees proper to employ. All is from God, as you have already heard because the disposing and commissioning his ministers is originally his own work—again, because however well qualified they may be, his own almighty agency is necessary to give them success. But when there is a regular proportion always observed, between the means and the end, men are ready to overlook, or forget the great and first cause of all. For this reason he sees it often meet to manifest his sovereignty, in order to command our attention, by working without means, or by the weakest means, or even contrary to means, and blasting the effect of those that were most excellent and promising in human judgment. Just as the beautiful and regular order of the natural world, the mutual dependance of one part upon, and its subserviency to another, is a proof of the wisdom and omnipotence of the Creator. Yet he sees it necessary sometimes to interpose, in an extraordinary way, and to controul the course of nature, to shew that it is absolutely at his command.

Remember, however, my brethren, that in carrying on the work of the gospel, God usually proportions the success to the propriety and sufficiency of the means. When he has much work to do, he commonly raises up some persons eminently qualified; he draws from his quiver some polished shafts, to pierce the ranks of opposing hosts. Yet he often presents to our view such circumstances as serve to show the dependance of all means upon himself. When the gospel was first preached, the apostles were indeed fully fitted and furnished for their work; but it was by a miracle. They were originally poor illiterate fishermen, quite unequal in themselves to the astonishing undertaking, of producing a revolution in the state of religion, and the sentiments of mankind over the whole earth. Such persons seem to have been employed for this wise purpose, "that our faith might not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." I have often considered this matter with a mixture of reverence and admiration.

That proper respect might still be had to the qualifications of ministers, and that none might be justified in pouring contempt on human science, the apostle Paul, a man of eminent learning and ability, was the most active, useful and successful of all the apostles; and one third part at least, of the whole canon of the New Testament, was written by him. At the same time there were such circumstances in his calling and conversion, as made him one of the most illustrious monuments of the sovereignty and riches of divine grace, that any age has produced.

In the same manner, we see every day the clearest proofs of the power, wisdom, and sovereignty of God. We see that he many times gives extraordinary and sensible assistance to those whom he employs in his own work. So that they both perceive and confess that it is not they, but the grace of God, that is with them. Sometimes those of very moderate, or even of the weakest natural abilities, have an unction from the holy one, and by their piety and diligence become workmen, that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. This may be considered as an accomplishment of what Isaiah says of himself, Isaiah 1. 4. "And 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.” See also
 the expression of the Psalmist, Psal. xxv. 14. “ The se-
 “ cret of the Lord is with them that fear him : and he
 “ will shew them is covenant.” Our Lord promises to
 his disciples extraordinary assistance, in time of extraordina-
 trials and suffering, Luke xxi. 14. 15. “ Settle it there-
 “ fore in your hearts, not to meditate before, what ye shall
 “ answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which
 “ all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay, nor re-
 “ sist.” And to name one more passage, it is prophesied
 by Isaiah of the gospel times, chapter xxxii. 4. “ The
 “ heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the
 “ tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plain-
 “ ly.”

In a former part of this discourse, I have admitted that
 gifts may be considered as more necessary to the being of
 the ministry, than even grace itself. Yet certainly true
 religion in the heart, is of far greater importance to the
 success and efficacy of the ministry, than eminence or
 gifts. It seems often the very purpose of divine provi-
 dence, to pour contempt upon un sanctified talents. The
 humble pastor of meaner rank, who loves his master, his
 work, and his people, shall often have many seals of his
 ministry, while the person of superior parts is urged by
 ambitious views into the unprofitable paths of worldly hon-
 ours, or instigated by unmortified passion, to mar the suc-
 cess of his ministry, by launching out into the tempestu-
 ous ocean of political contest and faction. But besides
 the unfruitfulness of un sanctified talents, there are also ma-
 ny proofs of the sovereignty of God, in refusing his blessing
 and making the best ministers in a great measure unpro-
 fitable to a people, in righteous judgment for their past sins.
 Even Isaiah could say, chap. liii. 1. “ Who hath believed
 “ our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord reveal-
 “ ed ?” Our blessed Lord himself upbraided many of the
 cities where his mighty works were done, because of their
 unbelief and indeed upon any of his hearers his ministry,
 instead of a saving, had a hardening effect, John iii. 19.
 “ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into

“ the world, and men loved darknefs rather than light,
“ becaufe their deeds were evil. The fame thing is elfe-
where refolved into the lively and righteous judgment of
God. John xii. 39, 40. “ Therefore they could not be-
“ lieve, becaufe that Efaias faid again, he hath blinded
“ their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they fhould
“ not fee with their eyes, nor underftand with their heart,
“ and be converted, and I fhould heal them.”

I proceed now to make fome practical improvement of what hath been faid. And in the

First place, a deep and lively impreffion of the truth I have endeavored to illuftrate and fupport, will be to thofe who preach the gofpel an excellent prefervation from many temptations. It will preferve them from trufting in themfelves, it will keep them ftill looking upward, and engage them to maintain a continual intercourfe with the Father of lights, and the author of every good and perfect gift. It will alfo, particularly be an excellent mean of preferving them from the dangerous extremes of oftentation and floth. Oh, how unbecoming a minifter, is a vain-glorious difplay of human art, burning incenfe to his own vanity, and preaching himfelf, when he is called to preach Chrift Jefus the Lord. It is no wonder that God fhould in his providence, pour difgrace and difappointment on that miniftry, that is carried on in fuch a manner, as to aim more at promoting the credit of the fervant, than the honor of the mafter. On the other hand, with what countenance can they look up to God for a bleffing, who have been at no pains to qualify themfelves for his fervice. As oftentation provokes the divine jealoufy, fo negligence, is difobedience, prefumption, and precisely what the fcripture calls tempting God. I would never defire to be confidered, as one who would encourage men, to rufh into a pulpit unprepared, and difgrace their honorable calling, by rude, undigefted, diforderly effufions, or fuch mean, flovenly, indecent language, as lays the hearers under the ftrongeft temptation, to treat it with an infolence of indignation and contempt. Let me commend this, to the attention of fuch young perfons, as may have an eye to the facred office. My dear fellow ftudents,

how happy they, who can unite together, the simplicity of the gospel, and the dignity of the pulpit. Who are on the one hand, not ashamed of the cross, and the ignominy that attends it; and on the other, as devoted servants, are resolved to comply with the counsel given by the apostle Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim. iv. 15, 16. "Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear unto all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

2. A deep impression of the truth, I have endeavored to illustrate, will be an excellent preservative to the hearers of the gospel, from many temptations, which often render their attendance on ordinances, as fruitless or pernicious. It will purify their views and motives, in attending on ordinances. It will deliver them from a sinful and unreasonable attachment to men, and carry them more immediately into the presence of the living God: it will save them from that giddy, unsettled disposition, of running with unbounded curiosity, from one to another, not that they may be built up in holiness and comfort, but that their imagination and fancy may be gratified. It will preserve them from hearing the gospel, merely as critics, in order to pass their judgment on the soundness or ability of their teachers, which, with whatever pride or self-sufficiency it may be done, is as empty and unprofitable a manner of hearing, as any that can be named. It will settle their esteem of, and attachment to their pastors, upon the best, and most immovable foundation. They will then love them for their work's sake, they will love them for their master's sake, they will love them for their own soul's sake, and for their subserviency to their daily edification. It will carry them to the throne of grace, and incline them to make continual and fervent supplication to God, for his assistance and countenance to his ministers, in his own work; and this will bring them to his house, in the best and happiest temper for hearing with profit: in one word, it will make them, in a great measure, lose view of the creature, and hear the gospel,

not "as the word of man, but as it is indeed, and in truth, "the word of God."

3. Let me intreat the prayers of this congregation, for the ministers of the gospel in general, and for us, who minister among you in holy things, that we may be abundantly qualified, for the discharge of our important trust in all its parts. The apostle Paul, though extraordinarily called, though singularly qualified, and eminently assisted, never fails to ask the prayers and intercession of the faithful, in his behalf, Eph. vi. 19. "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." After this approved example, I hope you will forgive me, if I put in a particular claim in my own behalf, for your interest at the throne of grace. I make no merit at all, of having left country, and kindred, and connections of the dearest kind, in order to serve the interest of the church of Christ, in this part of the globe: for I consider with pleasure, the oneness of his body, and the extent of the catholic church, that there shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and set down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their father. Could we but think as we ought, of the great removal, which we are making from time to time, into an eternal state; the removal of our bodies, and the change of our scene of service from Europe to America, would appear altogether unworthy of notice. But when I consider the respect and affection, so much above my desert, that have been shewn to me, since my arrival in this place, and the testimonies of joy and satisfaction, which have been given by all ranks, I am filled with the greatest concern: I say I am filled with the greatest concern, because it plainly implies an expectation of duty and service from me, which I fear I shall be ill able to perform. Let me therefore, on so just a foundation, not solicit only, but demand an interest in your prayers. Pray that an all-sufficient God, may give strength from above, and may pour down his blessing on the public institution in this place, which upon the best information, I think I may say has been founded in faith;

and therefore, why should not we continue to serve it in hope. Pray that success may attend the ministry of the gospel in this place; and that if it please God, the esteem and affection shewn to me, by all to whom I stand now related; may not be less than it is, for I have not the least reason to desire; nor indeed the courage to hope, that it can possibly be greater. Once more, pray that my beloved charge; whom I left in Scotland, and will never forget, may, by the special conduct of divine providence, be supplied with a faithful pastor, who may feed them with knowledge and understanding.

4. In the last place, suffer me to conclude, by addressing a few words to those in this assembly, who are, or who have reason to suspect themselves to be in a state of distance from God. I know that he himself only can change your hearts. Yet he hath given it in charge to his ministers, that you should receive warning. And be assured, that if you despise the message, if you trample upon the divine mercy, and resist the Spirit of God, when pleading with you in his word, or striving and bearing witness against you in your consciences; your everlasting perdition will lie entirely at your own door. God will be just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth. Consider, I beseech you, that there is certainly, to all of us here present, one thing that is needful. It signifies very little, whether you pass the little uncertain time that you shall yet be in the body, in abundance or in penury, in honor or in shame, compared to what shall become of you forever. Lay these things to heart, then, in this day of your merciful visitation. There is but one way to escape: "Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that believing you may have life, through his name."

THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

A

S E R M O N.

MATTHEW xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

A CLEAR view of divine truth is of the utmost moment, both to the holiness and comfort of the children of God. They are sanctified by the truth. It is no less necessary, by manifestation of the truth, to turn sinners from the error of their ways: for the word of God is quick and powerful. While we keep these things in view, we ought also to remember, that the truths of God are injured, not only by opposition, but perversion. We are assured that those who are unlearned and unstable, wrest this good word of God to their own destruction. If this is the case, it follows naturally, that as the bait is most dangerous, when the hook is most effectually concealed, so falshood will be most apt to insinuate itself, when it wears the habit, and has the greatest resemblance to real truth.

The reason of my using this introduction to what shall be offered on the text now read, is, that it is one of the passages most frequently, and most artfully perverted, or most unhappily misapplied. It contains

a most important and salutary truth, if taken in its proper meaning, and according to the analogy of faith. But as it is wrested and perverted by men of corrupt minds, it is often made to convey a stupifying and dangerous poison. What more important, than to destroy the unjust accusations of the father of lies, as if religion were a heavy and insupportable burden? But if, on the other hand, the same thing is made use of to sow pillows for all armholes, and sing the sinner asleep in security, it is equally destructive. Therefore, in discoursing of this subject, through the assistance of divine grace, I will endeavor,

I. To show you what you are not to suppose, implied in this declaration of our Lord, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light."

II. What is its true and proper meaning, and

III. In the last place, to apply the subject.

First, then, I am to show you what you are not to suppose implied in this declaration of our Lord, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light." On this, I beseech you to attend to the following observations.

I. When our Saviour says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light," you are not to suppose that he has narrowed the extent, or weakened the obligation of the law of God. There are some who speak in such terms, as if they thought that Christ had granted some license and indulgence to human corruption; that he had abated the severity of the law, and would not be so highly offended by the transgression of it. Because we are taught that he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, or the rigor of its sanction as a covenant of works, they speak as if they thought, or at least so as to lead others to think, that he hath made void the obligation of it, as a rule of duty. But the law of God is perfect, eternal, and unchangeable. It is a transcript of his own nature, which he will not, or which, I speak it with reverence, he cannot dispense with. The scripture expressly says, that he cannot deny himself.

Now our blessed Lord himself has told us upon this subject, Math. v. 17, 18. "Think not that I am come to de-

“ destroy the law or the prophets : I am not come to destroy ;
“ but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven
“ and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise
“ pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Agreeably to this,
he hath been so far from narrowing the extent of the law,
that he hath asserted its honor, vindicated it from the false
glosses and loose interpretation of the Scribes and Phari-
sees ; and pointed out its spirituality and influence upon
the conscience and heart. See several instances of this in
the above cited chapter, particularly verses 21, 22, and 27 ;
28. “ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,
“ Thou shalt not kill : and, whosoever shall kill, shall be
“ in danger of the judgment : But I say unto you, that
“ whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall
“ be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say
“ to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council :
“ but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of
“ hell-fire. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old
“ time, Thou shalt not commit adultery : but I say unto
“ you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her,
“ hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”
How distant is this from relaxation, or from modifying
and accommodating the law to the corruptions of men !
And as to the obligation of the law, nothing is more clear,
than that our Saviour has not taken from, but added to it
in many ways. He has added to it by the clearness of
the discovery which he hath made of the divine nature
and will ; by the most glorious display of divine mercy
through him ; and as a just and necessary consequence, by
the awful thunderings which he hath denounced against
those who shall continue to despise the grace of the gospel.
Heb. ii. 2, 3. “ For if the word spoken by angels was sted-
“ fast, and every transgression and disobedience received
“ a just recompence of reward ; how shall we escape if we
“ neglect so great salvation ; which at the first began to be
“ spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by
“ them that heard him.” And the same epistle, ch. x.
verses 26, 27, 28, 29, “ For if we sin wilfully after that
“ we have received the knowledge of the truth, there re-
“ maineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful

“ looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses : of how much forer 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 ?”

2. When our Saviour says, “ my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” you are not to suppose he means to say that real, and acceptable obedience to the law of God, is an easy thing to men, as they are in themselves, or in a sinful and unrenewed state. Oh say some the gospel is a humane and gentle dispensation, the same does not bear hard upon human weakness. If we should make him to say this my brethren, we should make him to speak in direct opposition, to many other passages of scripture, as well as to daily experience, and the nature and reason of the thing. Men may if they please, create to themselves an image of religion, that shall be quite gentle and pliant, that shall have nothing in it offensive to corrupt nature, or at any time opposed to the manners of fashionable life ; but nothing can be more distant from New Testament truth. There we are told that Rom. viii. 7, 8. “ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh, cannot please God.” There we are told, that men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, that their recovery is the work of omnipotence, even *the mighty power of God*, and that none can bring a clean thing, out of an unclean, but God alone. But why should we multiply passages of scripture, to this purpose, when it is manifest from the nature of the thing and daily experience. If it were easy in this sense to put on Christ’s yoke, it would also be common. Is not the prevalence of wickedness a proof to the contrary ? Can any thing be more opposite than sin and holiness ? None. Not even light and darkness. Can any man then serve two masters ? Is it an easy thing to love sin, and practice holiness. Do we see it is so in any in-

stance? Do we reckon it is easy for the drunkard to deny his appetite, when he sees the liquor giving its colour in the cup, and moving itself aright? Is it easy for the malicious person, to govern his tongue, or the covetous man to open his heart? The truth is, it is a direct contradiction, for the law of the Lord searches, and chiefly requires the obedience of the heart; and therefore to suppose, or imagine that the generality of men, who are under the dominion of sin, may notwithstanding keep the commandments of God, is an absurdity which we would not be guilty of, in any other subject. Either says our Saviour, "make the tree good and his fruit good;" &c. "Can a fountain send out at the same place, sweet water and bitter?"

3. When our Saviour says "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." You are not to suppose, that it is an easy or trifling thing, or what the sinner may do at any time, by his own strength to turn from sin to God. Nothing can be more pernicious or a more stupifying dose, to a poor careless sinner, than to make him suppose that he may easily at any time, repent when necessity shall urge him to it. The whole system of divine truth stands in direct opposition to this error. There our condition by nature is considered as not only miserable, but helpless. It is divine power alone that can affect the change, John vi. 44. "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Psal. cx. 3. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." The greatness of the change necessary to salvation demonstrates the same thing, John iii. 3. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The multitudes that perish is a further proof. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," &c. To this may be added the danger of delay, and the hardening power of habit as frequently mentioned in scripture, Eccles. xii. 1. "Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his

“spots; then may ye also, who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.” To crown the whole, there are instances in which the day of God’s patience, and forbearance is closed, and the sinners eyes shall not be opened on his danger, Luke xix. 41, 42. “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.” 2 Theff. ii. 11. “For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”

4. When Christ says “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” we are not to suppose that even the children of God shall meet with no difficulties in their way. It seems to be the mistake of some persons to think that so soon as they have truly embraced the gospel, and obtained peace with God, the conflict is over, they shall have an easy and slothful assurance, without opposition either from affliction or temptation. But this is quite contrary to what the scripture teaches to expect. It teaches us to lay our account with opposition, from every quarter injury from without and even treachery from within. The life of a christian must be a life of vigilance and prayer. Outward peace, ill founded peace, a secure unfaithful conscience, is what we have the greatest reason to dread. These are hard sayings in the gospel, which even the children of God find it difficult to receive. We are exposed to continual temptation from the world and from worldly men, and to frequent trials both as we are men and christians, 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:” In the christian warfare there is no truce. It is only he that shall endure to the end that shall be saved—The last enemy that shall be destroyed, is death.

Having thus rejected these false and mistaken apprehensions sometimes suggested by this passage of scripture, and greatly encouraged by smooth and mollifying teachers, it remains, that I should proceed to point out the true and pro-

per meaning of it, and what we are to understand when the Redeemer invites sinners to come to him, by saying "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." And because there are many things pertaining to this subject, that throw light upon each other, I shall endeavor to take in the whole compass of it, making however the illustration of each particular very short.

1. The yoke of Christ may be said to be easy and his burden light, because his right to command is undeniable, the authority with which he is invested, is complete and full. I have placed this first because it lies at the foundation of all religion, and is nothing else but the supreme authority and absolute dominion of Jehovah. We all naturally think it hard to submit to usurped authority, or unjust dominion, but when the title to command is clear, obedience immediately appears to be reasonable and necessary, and becomes our unfeigned choice, or the desire of the heart. Thus, nothing can be more clear than the right of our Maker to the obedience and submission of all his creatures. It is the sense of this carried home upon the conscience that gives the first rise to conviction of sin. A discovery of the power and majesty of the living God, lays the creature in the dust, and produces subjection. But when to this is added, that he is Lord and proprietor of all; that all things were made by him, and for him, then sin appears in the light of injustice and rebellion, and obedience, absolute and unconditional is felt to be his due. Believe it my brethren, when the revolted creature returns to his allegiance; when the convinced sinner sees the guilt of his rebellion, it at once reconciles him to the law, and makes him willing to put on the yoke.

The same thing is a constant and growing principle of obedience to the believer. He sees that he is not his own. He perceives and admits his Creator's and Redeemer's right. He is convinced, that as all things were made for, as all things shall finally tend to, so that every intelligent creature ought supremely to aim at the glory of God. It is this radiant principle that chiefly constitutes the difference between genuine obedience, and that constrained service which may be sometimes falsely so called.

Hence it is that true obedience is considered as a debt that is *due* to God, false obedience on the contrary is considered as a debt *charged* upon God. The real christian is happy in so far as he is able to obey, and sincerely grieves for any remaining backwardness and reluctance in his mind. The yoke may well be said to be easy, when he is brought to that temper and disposition, that it is not what he does, but what he omits, that fills him with grief, or covers him with shame.

2. The Redeemer's yoke is easy and his burden light, because all his commands are in themselves perfectly just and right. It is hard indeed, to be obliged to do what we cannot approve, and so long as the sinner has any objection against the law, obedience must be a burden. But every renewed mind obtains a discovery of the infinite amiableness of the divine nature, and the excellence and perfection of the divine law. The law is holy, says the Apostle, Romans 7. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good." The law of God, is a transcript of his own infinite excellence, and therefore must be perfect and faultless. We may take up this matter in a very simple, and at the same time clear and conspicuous point of view. The sum of the moral law is, "Thou shalt love," &c. The whole is contained under these heads, especially the first of them, from which the other is a corollary. Is there any thing more manifestly reasonable, than that we should love supremely, what is supremely excellent? or where is the rival, that can plead a better title to our affection. If he hath commanded us to love what was not amiable, or to do what was not reasonable, there would have been ground for complaint. If we take the sense of the second table, by itself, we shall see the same thing very plainly, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" or which is the same thing, "whatsoever ye would, that men do unto you, do ye the same unto them." Is this unreasonable? Is any man's reason so perverted, or his conscience so depraved, as to complain of this, as an unjust, or oppressive law. There are some who talk upon this subject, in such a manner, as we may truly say of them, with the

apostle, "They speak of the law, and know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" and they will say, our Saviour has made merciful abatements of the law. Pray has he made any abatement of the love of God, and of our neighbor? Would you be satisfied to hear any man trace out a system of moral duty, and make any alteration in these? Yet they are the whole in substance; wherever these are, every thing will follow of course. If you love God supremely, and your neighbor as yourselves, you will neglect no duty to the one or to the other.

When I am upon this branch of the subject, the reasonableness of God's commands, it will be proper to obviate an apparent, and at the same time, an important objection. You will perhaps say, to keep the commands of God, is above our power. Have not you yourself, often taught us, that no mere man in this life, is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God. Can that be reasonable then that is impossible? Now consider I pray you what sort of impossibility this is. It is not natural, but moral. It is not want of power, but want of inclination. Nothing is required of us that is unsuitable to our situation, or above our natural powers; so far from it, that even what was our duty before, if by any accident it becomes impossible in this sense, it ceases to be a duty. God no where commands you to be taller or stronger, than he has made you: and though he commands you to labor, working with your hands, if he confines you by sickness, this duty no longer binds. He has given you faculties, and natural powers for every thing that he requires. Are not all your powers, both of mind and body, as fit for your Maker's service, as any other purpose? Is not the tongue as fit to speak truth, as falsehood: and every member of the body as fit to do what is lawful or useful, as what is sinful or hurtful: The commands of God, then, are neither impossible nor difficult to those, who are willing to obey them. No man can say with truth, that he desired with all his heart, do his Maker's will, and could not. But perhaps some will say, this indisposition itself, is my nature, I cannot help it. If any think this excuse may be offered to God, let him first make trial of offering it to his fellow

creature; or suppose another to offer it to himself. Suppose you should complain of another, for stealing your substance, or blasting your name, or otherwise injuring you; and that he should answer, that he could not help it. What, you would say, you could not help it; what necessity obliged you? Why says he, it was my nature, because I hate you, and it grieves me to see you prosper. Would that be accepted as an excuse? I think not; for it is the very essence of the injury. On the whole, it plainly appears, that the commands of God, are all reasonable and just, neither can they suffer any abatement, without infringing upon the holiness of his own nature, and the wisdom and equity of his government itself.

3. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because all his commands have an immediate and direct tendency to promote our own comfort and happiness. They are not less reasonable as they express the right of the Creator, than they are gracious, as they are calculated to promote the interest of the creature. I do not mean here, only or chiefly, the great reward which he hath in mercy provided and promised to those, that keep them, but that in their own nature, they are fitted to promote our happiness.

I have before sufficiently taken notice, that we are not to understand, by keeping the commands of God, a constrained outward obedience, without the inclination of the heart. Constrained obedience, I confess, is neither acceptable to God, nor delightful to man. But when the service of God, is chosen from the heart, it is both delightful and profitable in all respects. If we examine the matter with care, we shall find, that true religion consists in the exercise of the most noble and grateful affections of mind, or rather the one leading disposition, which when rightly directed as to its object, makes the sum of religion, and is also the source of felicity. It is love, supreme love to God, and through him, and for him, to all his creatures, is the sum of religion, and must not every body be sensible, that this is a temper and frame of mind, much more desirable, than its opposite. Carry the one and the other, through all their branches and expressions, and see if they will bear

the comparifon. From love fpring thankfulnefs, contentment, fubmiffion, benevolence, beneficence, meeknefs, compaffion, forgivenefs; and from hatred fpring ambition, rage, impatience, malevolence, envy, revenge and cruelty. If there were no law of God at all, which of thofe tribes of affections is moft defirable of itfelf, or moft conducive to our inward comfort and peace?

If we try this matter by experience, let us ask the children of God, whether they have found his fervice burdensome; whether they would exchange a meek, thankful, and contented frame of fpirit, for the ftorms of rage, envy, or ambition. Do they look with a jealous or envious eye, on the liberty of wicked men? on the contrary, they would not exchange with any of them, a prifon for a palace, or a fcaffold for a throne. Perhaps, though there is great blindnefs in the underftanding itfelf of wicked men, we may learn the truth even from their experience and confessions. We many times hear them acknowledge their bondage; and when they do not explicitly acknowledge it, yet it is eafy to perceive it. You never hear a bad man taking comfort to himfelf, from the evil he has done, but fometimes comparatively from the greater evil that they have not done. Without going particularly through every minute circumftance, let us juft fay in general, that whether we confider the inward temper, or the outward practice, our relations, bufinefs, and enjoyments in life, or hope for futurity, we cannot in any inftance depart from the commandments of God, without at the fame time acting contrary to our own manifeft intereft: fo that Wifdom fays with great truth and juftice, Prov. viii. 36. "He that finneth againft me, wrongeth his own foul: all they that hate me love death."

4. The Redeemer's yoke is eafy, and his burden light, becaufe he has given the moft free and gracious invitation to finners to return to God. By his fufferings he purchafed their pardon, and is invested with full authority to negotiate peace. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved him to fuffer, that repentance and remiffion of fins," &c. What we are particularly to remember up-

on this subject, is that the invitation is without reserve or exception, to all of every character, however deep and aggravated their offences. *Is. 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." *1 Tim. i. 15.* "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The offer is also free as to the terms, without any costly or meriting condition. *Is. 55. 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." Can there be any thing more encouraging than these gracious invitations? Here it is that we ought to take in the wise and happy constitution of the Redeemer's person, as the son of man, as well as the son of God, and the meekness and gentleness of his disposition, this was prophesied of him of old. *Isaiah xlii. 1, 2, 3.* "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break; and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." This was beautifully and admirably fulfilled by his appearance in the flesh, by the meanness of his birth, though not of his parentage, by the poverty and self-denial of his life, by the meekness and lowliness of his carriage, not only through life, but in the last and suffering stage of it; for he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; when he was reviled, he reviled not again. So that he might with the greatest justice say as in the context take my yoke.

5. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because he hath made abundant provision of divine

strength, to enable us to keep his commandments. How gracious these laws, when the law-giver communicates strength for performance. This takes away all objection, and removes every difficulty. What is impossible with man, is possible with God. There is no heart so hard, but omnipotence is able to soften it; no temper so depraved, but the Creator is able to renew it. The conversion of a sinner is always considered in scripture as the work of God. "God who at first commended the light to shine out of darknets," &c. The promise of the new covenant is thus described by Ezekiel xxxvi. 25. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." And in the New Testament, faith which unites us to Christ, and every other good disposition is represented as the gift of God, Eph. ii. 8. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

And as the conversion of sinners to the daily growth of the spiritual life, in believers, is to be imputed entirely to the same cause, for this end it was, that it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell in Christ; and we have this testimony from the apostle John i. 16. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

Dear Mother
I received your kind letter of the 15th and was
glad to hear from you and to hear that you
were all well. I am well at present and
hope these few lines will find you all the same.
I have not much news to write at present.

Yours affectionately
John

I have not much news to write at present.
I have been thinking of writing to you for some
time but have not had time to do so. I
am well at present and hope these few lines
will find you all the same. I have not much
news to write at present.

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news to write at present.

THE GLORY OF THE REDEEMER IN THE
PERPETUITY OF HIS WORK.

A

S E R M O N.

PSALM lxxii. 17.

His name shall endure forever : his name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in him ; all nations shall call him blessed.

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THE whole system of Providence and grace was fixed on the eternal purpose of God, before the foundation of the world. Hence he is represented, Is. xlv. 10. as, “ declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, “ My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” The writings of the Old Testament give us the history of the several openings of this plan, during that dispensation, in which we may observe almost continual references to the appearance of an illustrious person, at a certain important period, called the fulness of time.

The appearance of the Saviour in our nature, including his obedience, his sufferings, and death, his triumphant resurrection and ascension, was an event so astonishing in itself, and so great in its effects, as being the means appointed of God for the redemption of a lost world, that we need not be surpris'd at the great care taken in the Old Testament church to keep it always in view. It was natural for holy and good men, who had so many intimations given them of it, to think on it with pleasure; and when they were led to speak of future times, to bring in this remarkable period, and mention it with rapture. And when God inspir'd his servants to prophecy of the prosperity and happiness of his church and kingdom, he could not fail to raise their descriptions, and lead them to give such views of things as were suitable to that great event, which was to be such a signal illustration of his glorious goodness, and so great a blessing to mankind.

Hence it is, that we find several prophecies begun, in appearance, to celebrate some public blessing, at or near the times in which they were delivered, gradually so heightened by several expressions, as we may perceive that in their full extent they could only relate to the times of the Messiah. Such, for instance, is that in my text: for if we lay together the accounts we have of Solomon, in scripture, and the felicity of his reign; if we remember the scandalous steps he made in the latter part of his life, the dreadful rent that happened in the reign of his son and immediate successor; and that after the course of a few ages, Judah was carried into captivity,—we must be sensible, that the expressions in my text, are by far too much exalted, if nothing else was intended by them. But if we consider them as relating to Messiah the Prince, then we see every thing literally fulfilled to the utmost import and extent of the prophetic language, “His name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed.”

It is below the majesty of the scriptures, to make use of strong and lofty expressions to denote a very common and ordinary event; to which they cannot be applied without

making great abatements. This is a fault men often fall into; but it would be very unjust to impute it to persons speaking under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God. We may therefore lay it down as one good rule for understanding the prophetic writings, that whenever they rise far above the subject they were treating of, into expressions literally applicable to the Messiah, and which, in their full extent, can belong to none but him, he is to be considered as chiefly in the view of the Spirit of God. Now, this being the case with my text, as I hope appears sufficiently from what has been already said, I shall consider it as a noble and animated prophecy of the glory of his reign; which will be the more proper introduction to this day's work, as what we are now to be employed about is an eminent part of its accomplishment.

In discoursing further on it at present, I shall circumscribe the subject, and only,

I. Endeavor to open the import of this magnificent declaration, as understood of Christ, "His name shall endure for ever," &c.

II. To make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and assistance in the present duty.

First, then, let us endeavor to open the import of this magnificent declaration as understood of Christ. His name shall endure for ever, &c. and in the first place it carries in it an assurance of the greatness of his power as a Saviour, and the perfect security of all those who put their trust in him. The word name often signifies the excellence or perfection of the person named or referred to. This is especially the case in scripture, with respect to God, where his name is just, his glory and all sufficiency is revealed. The name of the Lord is in many passages of equivalent meaning with the power of God: thus, Prov. xviii. 10. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth in to it, and is safe." Psal. xx. 1. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee." This may with the greater propriety be applied to Christ, that you may know the name of Jesus, was by the express appointment of the angel of the Lord, given

to him at his birth, to denote the great deliverance he was to work for sinners, in saving them from their sins. This is the great errand on which the Son of God came into the world, 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." The success he should have in this work is often celebrated, as Isaiah liii. 10, 11. "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. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." His power as a Saviour, to break the charms of Satan, and to deliver the captive soul, is frequently declared in the strongest terms, as Isaiah xlii. 6, 7, 8. "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Isaiah lxiii. 1. "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 that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." This power of Christ to save, seems to be plainly called his name, 1 John iii. 23. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Thus it is reasonable to think, that the power of Christ as a Saviour is celebrated in our text, as what would ever remain a sure and plentiful source of salvation to mankind, and be ever depended upon and acknowledged as such, by all the redeemed.

This glory of Christ's name as a Saviour, has a particular respect to the wretched and deplorable state of those, who are the objects of his mercy. That there are none

beyond the reach of his power. That there is none so loaded with guilt or so stained with pollution, but he is able to purchase their pardon, and to effect their deliverance. Persons you know afflicted with inveterate and dangerous diseases, are apt to hearken with eagerness to the name of an eminent physician, from whose skill they may entertain some hopes of recovery, and the greater and more illustrious his name is, they are apt to place the greater confidence in him. So when we hear that Christ's name shall endure for ever, it should encourage all sinners of whatever rank to fly to him, and to put their trust in him. God reasons thus in illustrating his own mercy, *Isaiah i. 18, 19.* "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. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:" and to the same purpose, *Is. lv. 7.* "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But he hath given us still greater encouragement, by committing the work of our salvation to so glorious a person, in whose hand it cannot fail, *Psal. lxxxix. 18, 19.* "For the Lord is our defence; and the holy One of Israel is our King. Then thou spakest in vision to the holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty: I have exalted one chosen out of the people." *Isaiah ix. 6.* "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace." Not to insist on the many passages of the New Testament, which point our attention to the power and dignity of Christ, I shall only mention, *Heb. vii. 25.* "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

I shall only further say, that the glory of Christ's name, as an almighty Saviour, may be considered in its superior

lustre to every thing that might be supposed to come in competition with him, or pretend to be put in this place. This is certainly the meaning of a great name, when applied to men. He is said to obtain the greatest name, who outstrips or eclipses others by the glory of his deeds; the same must be the meaning of this passage, as applied to our Redeemer; "his name shall endure for ever." The names of others shall soon be lost. Their inferior brightness will soon decay: but his shall continue for ever with unfading and increasing lustre.

This, my brethren, is a circumstance that ought never to be omitted. We cannot honor Christ as an almighty Saviour, unless we believe and remember, that he is the only Saviour. There are some passages in the prophetic writings, in which God asserts his own incommunicable glory, in opposition to the vanities of the Gentiles, and that in language inimitably strong, Isa. xl. 17, 18. "All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" Isa. xliii. 10, 11, 12, 13. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour. I have declared and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange God among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" Hof. xiii. 4. "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no God but me: for there is no saviour beside me." The same peculiar and exclusive honor belongs to Christ, as the hope of sinners, 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."

I might illustrate this sense of the passage before us, by shewing you that all the rites and ceremonies of the an-

cient dispensation, derived their efficacy from their relation to Christ. But I shall only tell you, that all the dependance which you place upon any thing else for your acceptance with God, is an injury to the honor of your Redeemer; that all self-righteousness and self-dependance, to which there is in man by nature so strong a tendency, obscures the lustre of that name which shall endure forever. That as he is able to save sinners, to the uttermost, so they shall never obtain salvation, but by him. As it is he who laid the foundation of this great work, who carries it on through all the steps of its progress, and at last brings it to perfection, so he will have, and why should he not have, the undivided glory.

2. This leads me to observe, that the magnificent declaration in the text, concerning Christ, implies the immortal honor and renown which he would acquire by the work of man's redemption. Every one knows, that in scripture style, to get a name is to acquire renown and glory, by some illustrious achievement; as 2 Sam. viii. 13. "And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of Salt, being eighteen thousand men."

And surely, my brethren, the undertaking of Christ was the most glorious in itself, the most arduous in its accomplishment, the most blessed in its effects, and the most generous and disinterested in him, that can possibly be conceived. Think on this part of the subject, I beseech you, with attention; and weigh the intimations we have of it in scripture. And for this purpose observe, that he acquired glory with God, with angels, and with men.

As the salvation of sinners was a work in which the glory of God the Father, was eminently illustrated, so he is represented as looking with the highest complacency on Christ, in the undertaking and accomplishment of it. Thus Math. iii. 17. "And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And again, at his transfiguration, Math. xvii. 5. "And while he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

“pleased; hear ye him.” If. xlii. 1. “Behold my fervant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.” We see also, that God is represented as having put the highest honor on the Redeemer, in reward of his sufferings. Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11. “Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Heb. ii. 9. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the sufferings of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” See also Heb. xii. 2. “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.”

I am sensible, my brethren, that this delight and approbation, which the Father is represented as expressing in the undertaking of the Son, is a subject of the most elevated nature, on which we ought to think and speak with the utmost veneration, and with the greatest reserve. But since he hath revealed, it is our duty to improve it. Does it not carry your thoughts naturally to that expression we find used in scripture, at the finishing of the material creation, mentioned at the end of every day’s work, and repeated on a review of the whole, Gen. i. 31. “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

We must needs conceive, the omnipotent Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as possessed not only of absolute and unchangeable perfection, but of infinite and inconceivable felicity. And may we not, must we not conceive, that this felicity, both in the contemplation and exercise of all his glorious attributes, and in nothing more than in the redemption of sinners, in which his power, wisdom, holiness, justice and mercy, are severally and

jointly so conspicuously displayed. Nay, may we not venture, with reverence, further to say, that the three persons in the Trinity, by their distinct properties, and peculiar agency, receive and impart everlasting delight to one another, in their ineffable communion! The eternal word is represented as saying, Prov. viii. 30. "Then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

2. The Redeemer acquired immortal renown among the angels, and the whole celestial host. This we may speak of with abundance of certainty, and with yet clearer comprehension. Doubtless their happiness consists in the vision and contemplation of an infinite God. And therefore the manifestation and exercise of the divine perfections, both in Providence and grace, administer to them matter of continual and increasing delight. There is a beautiful representation of their employment, Is. vi. 1, 2, 3. "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, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain did he fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Now there is no reason to doubt that the work of redemption, in all its parts, in which they themselves have an inferior employment, as ministering spirits, under the dominion of the uncreated angel of the covenant, must be a source of the purest felicity, and a subject of the most elevated praise. In a particular manner, the assumption of our nature into a personal union with the divine. You see how they sing praises at the birth of the Saviour, Luke ii. 13, 14. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The humiliation, sufferings and death of God's eternal Son, his victory upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and triumph over principalities and powers, that is

to say, the revolted angels, must have often laid these servants of the living God, prostrate in adoration. This is not a matter of conjecture, but clearly revealed; the whole plan of redemption being called a mystery, which the angels desire to penetrate. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11, 12. "Of
 " which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched
 " diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come
 " unto you : searching what, or what manner of time the
 " Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it
 " testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glo-
 " ry that should follow : unto whom it was revealed, that
 " not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the
 " things which are now reported unto you by them that
 " have preached the gospel unto you, with the holy Ghost
 " sent down from heaven ; which things the angels desire
 " to look into."

Realize these great truths to yourselves, my brethren. What think you were the views of the innumerable hosts of cherubim and seraphim, when some of them conducted the ascending Saviour, and others received him, when he entered within the veil ! What think you were their views when they beheld the Mediator, God Man, exalted at the right hand of God, and had a new object of adoration; bearing the scars of his sufferings, and known by the print of the nails, and by his bleeding temples ? Heb. i. 6 :
 " And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into
 " the world, he saith, And let the angels of God worship
 " him." Or, when they saw the dominion and power with which he was invested as King of kings, and Lord of lords, 1 Pet. iii. 22. " Who is gone into heaven, and is on
 " the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and pow-
 " ers being made subject unto him."

This renown of the Saviour must have been much greater among them, if it is true what many intelligent divines have supposed, that by the same glorious undertaking by which he redeemed elect sinners, he established and confirmed the obedient angels in a state of holiness and happiness. I shall only further say, that we are expressly told, the administration of divine grace, or the government and preservation of the church of Christ, is a continued illustra-

tion to the spirits above of his Father's wisdom, 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." Agreeably to this we find that, in the book of Revelation, which opens the great scenes of providence in the Church militant, there are several visions in which the angels are represented as uniting their praises with redeemed sinners, and directing their worship to the same great object. This leads me to observe,

3. That the Saviour acquired immortal renown among sinners of mankind. If the angels who were either spectators only, or at most but partial sinners in redeeming grace, do yet hold him in the highest honor, what is, and must be the sense of gratitude which dwells in the heart of a pardoned sinner. Oh, my brethren, how many circumstances concur to bind the heart of the believer in eternal bonds of gratitude to Christ! Who can conceive or express the debt of the sinner to the Saviour. He is redeemed from everlasting destruction, he is saved from wrath through him. Whoever is humbled, through fear of the vengeance, of a holy and jealous God, what fervent love will he bear to him, who hath wrought his deliverance, who hath purchased his pardon. If he is filled with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, of his aggravated and inexcusable provocations, with what rapture must he look upon that Saviour, who forgave him graciously, and loved him freely. Who is not moved with that inimitable picture of penitent love, when Mary Magdalene came in as it is related, Luke vii. 37, 38. "And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisees house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." And how just and proper that reflection of our Saviour in the 47th verse, "Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

The believer's esteem and gratitude must be greatly increased by considering the unspeakable cost at which his deliverance was bought, the amazing, and affecting sufferings which the Redeemer endured in his room. When he follows the patient and immaculate Saviour, by the eye of faith, from his inward anguish in the garden, to his shameful sufferings, on the accursed tree. With what relenting of heart, will he view that blessed head crowned with thorns, that sacred body nailed to the cross.—And when he carries forward his views to the glory and happiness prepared for him, in the Redeemer's presence above, what is the sum of his obligations? What bounds can be set to this conqueror's renown? In what better way can we express this, than by repeating and adopting these animating songs of praise, which are now making a great part of the worship of Heaven, Rev. v. 11, 12, 13, 14.

“ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels
 “ round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders:
 “ and the number of them was ten thousand times ten
 “ thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a
 “ loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to re-
 “ ceive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength,
 “ and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every crea-
 “ ture which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under
 “ the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are
 “ in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glo-
 “ ry, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
 “ and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four
 “ beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders
 “ fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and
 “ ever.” And Rev. vii. 9, 10, 11.

3. In the last place the magnificent declaration concerning Christ, in the text implies the stability and perpetuity of his kingdom. The glorious Promises made to the house and family of David, have their chief and full accomplishment in Christ the son of David. The earthly kingdom erected in that family, has long ago been destroyed, but the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion shall have no end. This was the promise of the Father to the Messiah, Psal. lxxxix.

36, 37. "His seed shall endure for ever; and his throne
"as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever
"as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Se-
"lah."

It is one great end, of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, to perpetuate the Redeemer's name, "as often as ye
"eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the
"Lord's death till he come," and it is a noble and reviving
object of faith, that we know that his kingdom shall
stand fast forever. Hell itself may rage, and the princes
of this world may combine to shake his glorious throne,
but he that sits in heaven shall laugh, the king of Zion
shall hold their impotent attempts on derision. He shall
maintain his interest in spite of all the efforts of his nume-
rous and inveterate enemies. He hath often done so al-
ready, and shall continue to do so, till the end of time.
Rev. xvii. 14.

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

First, Let us adore the wisdom and the power of Christ.
My brethren, When we consider the simplicity of the
gospel, and the scandal of the cross; when we consider
the whole system of the doctrine according to godliness,
and salvation by grace, how directly contrary it is to the
pride of our nature, how many attempts have been, and
continue to be made in every age, to suppress it by vio-
lence, to blacken it by slander, and to adulterate it by
mixture; it is a standing miracle that it has been able
to hold its ground. Whoever will reflect either upon
the present state, or the past history of the church of Christ,
must be obliged to say, that our faith does not stand in the
wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I must not
omit to say that, we are perhaps as much indebted in this
nation, to the goodness of providence in this respect, as
any corner of the earth; and I cannot but be pleased with
the choice which our Fathers made, of an emblem and
motto for the church of Scotland, a bush burning, but
not consumed. Let us rejoice in the faith, that the prince
of the kings of the earth, who hath hitherto maintained his
truths and interest against all the powers and cunning of

earthly policy, will continue to preserve them, and that "his name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed."

2. You may learn from what hath been said, the guilt and danger of the enemies of Christ; of all those who set light by the glory of his person, and are unwilling to be indebted to the riches of his grace. I would willingly aspire to the character which the apostle Paul assumes to himself. 2 Cor. ii. 17. "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope, 1 Cor. iii. 11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There may be a form of godliness; nay, there may be an ostentatious parade of human virtue, but there can be nothing of the spirit and power of true religion, without a clear discovery and sincere confession of our lost and depraved state by nature, without a believing application to the mercy of God, through the blood of the atonement. Think not I beseech you, to frustrate the word of God. The following testimony, comes from the Amen, the true and faithful witness, John xiv. 6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." If so great honor is put upon the Redeemer by God the Father, and by his holy angels, how unspeakably dangerous must it be, for sinners to despise him. You can never despise this ordinance of God for salvation, but from the greatest ignorance of yourselves. My heart bleeds to think of the delusion of the despisers of the gospel. What views can you have of the immaculate nature and holy law of God, if you trust in yourselves that you are righteous? What experience have you of the stability of these resolutions that have been taken, as in your strength? How weak and defective is that virtue, which is founded only on human prudence, or motives of present conveniency? One believing view of a Saviour on the cross, will have a more powerful influence in mortifying corruptions, than all other arguments whatever. One fervent prayer, urged

in the name of Christ, will be more effectual for your preservation, than a thousand merely human resolutions. Obey this salutary counsel, John xv. 4. "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."

3. From what has been said, let me beseech you to try your title to set down at the Lord's table. This ordinance was expressly instituted for putting honor on the Redeemer's name. He is the sum and substance of it; his death and sufferings, are the immediate subject of it. Have you then, my brethren, a high and inward esteem of his person: a deep sense of gratitude for his mercy; an entire and unshaken reliance on his grace and power? Can you call the Searcher of hearts to witness, that you unfeignedly approve of this way of salvation, by which God is glorified, and the sinner abased? Are you not ashamed to profess it? And while others are ready to despise it, are you willing to glory in it? Does it please you to hear that the Saviour's name shall endure for ever? Is it with holy triumph, you reflect, that the glory of his kingdom shall be unchangeable, and his power to eternity itself? If this is your disposition, I hope you will come with acceptance to his table; and I would flatter myself with the pleasing expectation, that many of this day's worshippers, shall be everlasting monuments of their Redeemer's power; that they shall be happy subjects of his grace, and taste of the consolations of his gospel on earth, and be heirs and partakers of his glory in heaven.

4. I would improve this subject, by earnestly beseeching every sinner to embrace this salvation, and enlist himself under the banner of this renowned Saviour. There are no doubt, many within these walls, who are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. O that the Redeemer would glorify his own power on their conviction and their salvation. "Gird on thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty". Are there not some in this assembly, who are sensible they are lying under a load of unforgiven guilt; that they are still slaves to habitual sin? Does not the very sacred action we are going about,

fill you with fear, that you are far from the state and temper of God's children? Is not the old nature so strong in you, that you have good reason to suspect you have never yet put on the new? Let me beseech and exhort you, to believe in the name of the Son of God. His merit is of infinite value; his power is of infinite efficacy. Many notorious sinners have been from age to age, the happy witnesses of both. Nothing in your condition ought to be a discouragement to you from applying to this all-sufficient Saviour, he invites you by me, or rather I invite you by his commission, and in his own terms, Matth. xi. 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." 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." John vi. 37. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." How shall I urge your compliance; is not this name so powerfull that you may safely put your trust in it? Are you not desirous that your conversion to God should illustrate it and make it glorious? I shall leave the matter with you after making this remark, that in vain do his enemies oppose him; in vain do sinners despise him. He is getting him a name by the preaching of the gospel. It is still serving its purpose, for the calling and confirmation of the vessels of mercy, for aggravating the guilt, and increasing the condemnation of the obstinate and disobedient, Luke xx. 17, 18. "And he beheld them, and said, What is this then, that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

5. In the last place, you may learn from what hath been said, the wisdom of God, in the institution of the Lord's supper, and what ought to be your employment at his table. How wisely fitted is this ordinance to keep up the remembrance of Christ as a Saviour, as a suffering dying Saviour. Perhaps no one circumstance has contributed more to preserve the pure uncorrupted doctrine of the gos-

pel, than the sacrament of the Lord's supper. It sets the truth before our eyes, while the words of the institution repeats it in our ears, 1 Cor. xi. 24. "This is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." And verse 25th, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Professing Christians, but of worldly minds, may be ashamed of the cross, self-righteous persons may put something else in the room of the cross. Perverse disputers may oppose it, or keep it out of their writings, and erroneous teachers may keep it out of their sermons, but there is no keeping it out of the sacrament of his supper. Under this auspicious banner, the name of Christ has been spread to the most distant nation, and handed down from the most distant ages, and so it shall continue till he come again, "for as often as ye eat this bread," &c. How then ought ye to be employed, in a thankful and joyful acceptance of salvation through his blood, in the lively exercise of faith in his power, in deriving from his fulness every thing necessary for your support under temptation or trial; and in fervent prayer, that his name may be hallowed, his kingdom may come, and his will may be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.—Amen and Amen.

THE HISTORY OF THE
S E R M O N

By the Rev. Mr. [Name]

The first sermon, which was preached at the funeral of the late King Charles the Second, on the 27th of February, 1685, at White-Church, in the City of London, by the Rev. Mr. [Name], then Rector of the said Church, and now Bishop of [Diocese].

This sermon was published in the year 1685, and has since that time been frequently reprinted. It is now printed at the request of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in America, by [Name], in New-York, 1785.

THE PETITIONS OF THE INSINCERE
UNAVAILING.

A

S E R M O N.

PSALM LXVI. 18.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not bear me.

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is not, I think, a more striking light in which we can consider an assembly of professing christians, than as united in their common relation to God, and upon an equal footing, as to outward privileges, but very different, as to their inward character. This difference shall only be completely manifested in the final decision of their state at the last day. The mixture of faints and sinners must continue till that time, when there shall be an eternal separation of the precious from the vile, of the sheep from the goats. Must then, all things continue in suspense and uncertainty till the great day? Is there no way by which we can judge, at present, what will be the event at that interesting period?

What is now the inward temper, or the spiritual state, and what shall be the eternal condition of every person here present is perfectly known to God, the searcher of

all hearts. It cannot be known indeed, with any certainty, by his fellow sinners, but it may be known in a great measure, by every one with regard to himself. It may be known with such a degree of evidence as to deliver him from distressing anxiety, and even to fill him with the most joyful hope and expectation. Is not this sufficient? and ought it not to excite every one of us to a ferious and impartial trial of that great question, in which we have no less than an infinite concern. This ought to be our care, in a particular manner, when we have in view to make a near and solemn approach to God, in his sanctuary on earth, because his acceptance of our worship in the body, is an earnest, and pledge of his final approbation, as appears from the words of the text, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," and likewise from another passage, "John ix. 31. "Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

This Psalm was composed, in all probability by the Psalmist David, though some are of a contrary opinion, and attribute it to one of the prophets, after the captivity. The inspired author celebrates the goodness of God in some signal and national deliverance, and towards the close of the Psalm, takes particular notice of the distinguishing kindness of God to himself, as in Psalm lxxvi. 16. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." He then considers the countenance and acceptance he had met with from God, as an evidence of his own sincerity in the 18th and 19th verses, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; but verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." I cannot at this time take in the whole compass of this subject, or consider how the one of these assertions is related to the other, but as the first of them contains an interesting truth of itself, and very proper for the trial of our state,

I shall endeavor, through divine assistance, to illustrate it, in the following method.

I. I shall consider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart.

II. What is to be understood by God's not hearing such persons. And,

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

In the first place, then, let us consider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart. And I think it is plain, that these words do not directly point at open, scandalous and profane sinners, who have burst every bond, and look with disdain and defiance in the face of every reprove. There are too many of this character, my brethren, who fall under the description of the prophet Jeremiah, ch. xlv. ver. 16 and first clause of the 17th, and who practically say, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." To these I shall speak in the application of the subject, as there is no doubt that they regard iniquity in the heart, since they openly and obstinately practice it in the life. But certainly the words of the text do chiefly relate to those whose characters are more doubtful, both to others and to themselves. Many there have been in every age, and there are many amongst us, who maintain their characters before men; but when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, shall be found wanting; but, at the same time, by the power of self-deceit, they are ready to say, they shall have peace, though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. For undeceiving all such persons, and for the trial of others, that they that are approved, may be made manifest, let me beseech your attention to the following particulars.

i. They regard iniquity in their hearts, who practice it secretly, who are under restraint from the world, but are not possessed of an habitual fear of the omniscient God, the searcher of all hearts, and from whose eyes there is no covering of thick darkness where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. Jer. xxiii. 24. "Can any hide

“ himself in secret places, that I shall not see him ? faith
 “ the Lord : do not I fill heaven and earth ? faith the Lord.”
 If you remember in what manner I stated the general
 meaning of the words, you will be sensible that I do not
 here chiefly point at gross hypocrisy, or those who under
 the cloak of religion, practice all manner of wickedness in
 their secret retirement. There are many others on whose
 conduct the judgment of men has a strong, though at the
 same time an insensible effect ; who are perhaps regular
 and guarded in their visible deportment, but on whom a
 sense of the continual presence of the invisible God, with
 whom they have to do, hath not a commanding and ha-
 bitual influence. It is a dangerous symptom of this,
 when your repentance is very slight, and you easily forgive
 yourselves for those sins of which the world is ignorant,
 or in those that are known, when you remember the shame
 longer than the sin.

How many unhappy examples of this do we see every
 day ? How many can go very easily under their sins that
 are known only to God, but are filled with vexation when
 they have been betrayed into what exposes them to the
 censure of their fellow-creatures. There are some who
 seem to be much more affected with the censure of others
 for trifling errors, than the displeasure of God for heinous
 sins. Nay, there are to be found some who evidently
 suffer more uneasiness from the censure of others, even
 where it is wrong, than from frequent neglects or breaches
 of the law of God. Now, what signifies the opinion of
 others, when it is founded on mistake, or malice ? I do
 not mean, my brethren, to extinguish, or bid you endea-
 vor to extinguish, a sense of shame ; but let it be subordi-
 nate to the fear of God. The distress of a real penitent
 should arise from the dishonor he hath done to God. The
 reproach he hath brought on religion, should wound him
 more deeply than the shame or fear he hath brought upon
 himself. Let the shamefulnes of every bad action, bear a
 part in shewing you its abominable nature. But I am
 bold to affirm, that they are strangers to true penitence, in
 whom a sense of shame is stronger than a sense of sin,

This attachment to secret sin admits of various degrees. It is sometimes stronger, and sometimes weaker; sometimes general, and sometimes more confined. There are instances in which it appears chiefly by the continuance and influence of some one darling lust, which the sinner cannot give up. This holds its place after others are surrendered; and though it dare not appear openly in the conversation, retains its dominion in the heart, and is indulged under the covert of secrecy. The arguments adduced in its defence, the excuses offered for it by the sinner to his own mind, are very many; but that it is a regarding iniquity in the heart, appears from its being concealed. It would seek no hiding place, if it were not one of the works of darkness.

2. They regard iniquity in the heart, who entertain and indulge the desire of sin, although in the course of providence, they may be restrained from the actual commission of it. I am persuaded the instances are not rare, of men feeding upon sinful desires, even when through want of opportunity, through the fear of man, or through some partial restraint of conscience, they dare not carry them into execution. This will be best illustrated by particular examples; and therefore, I shall just mention the three following—impurity, sensuality, and malice.

Men may indulge themselves in unchaste and lascivious thoughts; they may allow their imaginations to run out upon such subjects, meditate and dwell upon them with delight, drink in with pleasure such discourses or such writings as present them with polluted images, although they are restrained from the commission of gross acts of uncleanness. All who voluntarily indulge themselves in such mental impurity, who think it enough to abstain from the criminal action, or perhaps maintain some prudent reserve and decency of conversation, but do not make conscience of watching over their inward desires; beyond all question, they regard iniquity in the heart. For this we have the express testimony of our blessed Saviour, *Math. v. 27, 28.* “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman

“to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Again,

Men may habitually indulge themselves in sensuality of heart, when they have little or no opportunity of giving the rein to sensuality in practice. They may please themselves with the imagination or expectation of worldly greatness, or worldly delights. Such things may be the theme of their meditation, and the objects of their sinful effects, although they shall never come into their possession. Their sensuality of heart may discover itself by impatient complaints of their own state, which has not given them the means of indulgence, or by envious repining at the outward prosperity of others, who are more liberally provided for. Nay, I would say the same thing of those who have the means of gratification, and yet are usually sober, if their restraint is owing to no better principle than the fear of sickness, or the fear of man.

Once more, men may indulge themselves in malice against others, although it be chiefly confined to the secret working of their hearts. Prudence or cowardice may hinder men from doing mischief, even when they are full of inward malice. Envy, that corroding, wasting worm, chiefly preys upon the heart. Men may rejoice at the calamities of others, or indulge resentment of supposed injuries, which is never carried into effect. All such, my brethren, regard iniquity in their heart, and are living in the wilful and deliberate breach of the law of God, which is pure and spiritual, and hath the heart as its principal object. Math. v. 21, 22. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and, whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the counsel: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.”

3. They regard iniquity in the heart, who reflect upon past sins with delight, or without sincere humiliation of mind. Perhaps our real disposition, both towards sin and duty, may be as certainly discovered by the state of our

minds after, as in the time of action. The strength and suddenness of temptation may betray even a good man into the commission of sin; the backwardness of heart and power of inward corruption, may make duty burdensome, and occasion many defects in the performance: but every real Christian remembers his past sins with unfeigned contrition of spirit, and a deep sense of unworthiness before God; and the discharge of his duty, however difficult it may have been at the time, affords him the utmost pleasure, on reflection. It is otherwise with many: they can remember their sins without sorrow, they can speak of them without shame, and sometimes even with a mixture of boasting and vain-glory. Did you never hear them recall their past follies, and speak of them with such relish, that it seems to be more to renew the pleasure, than to regret the sin. Even supposing such persons to have forsaken the practice of some sins, if they can thus look back upon them with inward complacency, their seeming reformation must be owing to a very different cause from renovation of heart. How opposite the sentiments of Job, who considers his afflictions as a visitation of God for his sins in early life, Job xiii. 26, "For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." See also the prayer of the psalmist, Ps. xxv. 7. "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord."

4. They regard iniquity in the heart, who look upon the sins of others with approbation, or indeed, who can behold them without grief. Sin is so abominable a thing, so dishonoring to God, and so destructive to the souls of men, that no real Christian can witness it without concern. Hence it is so frequently taken notice of in scripture, as the character of a servant of God, that he mourns for the sins of others, Psal. cxix. 136, 158, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes: because they keep not thy law."—"I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved: because they kept not thy word." See also the language of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xiii. 17. "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your

“ pride ; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down
 “ with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away
 “ captive.” 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8, “ And delivered just Lot,
 “ 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.)” Have we then among us
 any, my brethren, who can look upon the sins of others
 with complacency or approbation, who excuse or palliate,
 who justify or defend them, how different is their temper
 from that of the scripture saints just now referred to?—
 Whatever outward regularity they may possess or pretend
 to, it is plain they are of the number of those who regard
 iniquity in the heart. To some sins their own nature
 may not prompt them; from others, the fear of man may
 restrain them; but the holy spirit surely never has reformed
 them. It is an infallible maxim, that no man can
 think lightly of sin in others, who has an unfeigned hatred
 of it in himself.

This will hold with equal or with greater strength, as
 to those who make the sins of others the subject of their
 mirth and entertainment. The wise man tells us; Prov.
 xiv. 9, “ Fools make a mock of sin.” And the observa-
 tion will hold equally true, whether we consider the sin
 committed, or the danger of the sinner. Is there any
 thing we should hate more than what is so offensive
 to God; of which he hath expressed his detestation.
 And must he not regard iniquity in the heart, who
 can find pleasure in what should be viewed by every
 Christian with horror? And what name does he deserve,
 who can make himself merry with the everlasting perdition
 of his fellow-creatures? We have the greatest reason to
 lament the prevalence of sin amongst us, and the boldness
 of sinners; and little less, to lament the reception which
 both sin and sinners meet with among those, of whom bet-
 ter things might have been expected.

5. In the last place, I suspect that they regard sin in the
 heart, who are backward to bring themselves to the trial,
 and who are not truly willing, that God himself would
 search and try them. Sin often lurks secretly, and in dif-

guise. He is a stranger to religion, who does not know this from experience. Hear the language of the Psalmist, Pf. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." Pf. 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."

If any, therefore, are unwilling to be tried, if they are backward to self-examination, it is an evidence of a strong and powerful attachment to sin. It can proceed from nothing but from a secret dread of some disagreeable discovery of the detection of some lust, which they cannot consent to forsake. The force of conscience is such, that some deception is necessary to keep the sinner in peace with himself. Too much light would either debar him from his delights, or poison the enjoyment of them. This is strongly described by our Saviour, John iii. 20. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

We proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was to show what is to be understood by God's not hearing those who regard iniquity in their hearts. This expression of God's not hearing them, may be considered very generally, as signifying that they are not, nor while they continue in that temper can be, the objects of his favors; he will not remember them with the love which he beareth to his chosen. But as the expression is used in some particular and distinct significations in scripture, which will merit our attention, I shall briefly mention the chief of them, which seem to be the four following.

1. He will not hear them when they cry to him for deliverance from affliction. I take this to be at least one thing, if not the main thing, intended by the Psalmist in the passage where the text lies. After giving praise to God for a signal deliverance, he draws this comfortable conclusion from it, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me: he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." It is one of the characters, as well as one of the privileges of the

children of God, that they fly to him as their refuge in distress; and he hath given his gracious promise, that he will hear them in mercy, Pf. xci. 15. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honor him." Pf. l. 15. "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." But those who regard iniquity in their hearts, have no reason to expect that God will hear them in this sense. They are liable to the calamities of human life; they are liable to the strokes of God's righteous Providence: but they have no title to go to him for relief. Every affliction carries in it the severity of a judge, without any mixture of the mercy of a father. It is true, that wicked men do sometimes cry to God in distress, but not in the spirit of his children; and as we learn from this passage, their prayers do not find acceptance with him.

There are three different objects of desire to a good man, while in affliction: the divine presence to support him under it; the sanctified use of it, for the improvement of the spiritual life; and in due time, compleat deliverance from it. The two first, he that regards iniquity in his heart, will hardly ask; and the last he shall not be able to obtain. The prayer of one unacquainted with God, is little better than the howling of despair and terror, without any mixture of filial confidence. Hosea, vii. 14. "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." As to the sanctified use of their sufferings, they neither ask nor receive it; on the contrary, they are commonly made worse by their sufferings, as earthen vessels are but hardened in the fire. And as to deliverance from suffering, they shall never obtain more than perhaps a temporary suspension of outward strokes, till they fill up the measure of their iniquities, and be ripe for final destruction.

I cannot help, just hinting in this place, that when God visits his children's faults with rods, and their sins with chastisements, till they forsake their sins by true repentance, he will not hear them. If they have departed from the paths of truth and righteousness, if they have taken of

the accursed thing between him and them, there cannot be peace, Isaiah lix. 1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shorted, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." The very intention of affliction to the children of God, is to separate them from sin, and it must continue till it produces its effect. What he says of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in general, is but an emblem of the manner in which he will treat every particular person of the true Israel, "Isaiah i. 25. "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:"

2. He will not hear them, when they intercede for others. It is in this sense, that the word is used in the gospel according to John ix. 31. "Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth." We are expressly taught by the apostle James, that it is the prayer of faith, and the prayer of the righteous that hath peace with God, Jas. v. 15, 16. "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." I am sensible, my brethren, that this will seem of very little moment to many, or probably to the greatest part of those, who regard iniquity in their hearts. Not much accustomed to the exercise of prayer for themselves, it will make but a light impression on them, to be told that they will not be heard in their intercession for others. The truth is, many, if they would attend to it, carry their own condemnation in themselves, from this very circumstance. Conscious that they have little interest at the throne of grace, they seldom think of employing it at all. But considering that there is scarcely any person wholly unrelated to others, and that many have occasion, from time to time, to see those to whom they are united, by the most tender ties, lying under the pressure of affliction, it ought to cover them with confusion, that they know not what it is to look to God, as the hearer of prayer, and to lend that help, which they ma

shortly require. When we see one member of a family lying under the rod, and a profane husband or wife, parent or child, standing by in hopeless distress, and prayerless tears, it is hard to say which of the two is the greatest object of compassion.

And what an incitement should it be to those, who are often called to the duty of intercession, either from their office or their character, to walk circumspectly, that they may not mar their confidence in God. Let them guard with double diligence against any thing that is provoking to God. Let them strive to keep clear their interest in his favor, lest they should at once wound their peace and destroy their usefulness, for if they regard iniquity in their heart, the Lord will not hear them.

3. He will not hear them when they draw near to him in worship. This also, is often the meaning of the expression in scripture, Isaiah i. 14, 15. "Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." There are many other passages to the same purpose, particularly that of Solomon, Prov. xv. 8. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight." The Psalmist was so sensible of this, that he says, Psalm v. 4, 5, 6, 7. "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

This ought to make a deep and serious impression on your minds. There are but too many who, though they live in the practice of sin and regard iniquity in their hearts, do yet continue their outward attendance on the ordinances of divine institution, and at stated times lay hold of the seals of God's covenant. Shall they find any

acceptance with him? No. He counts it a profane mockery; he counts it a sacrilegious usurpation, Psalm l. 16, 17. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." Shall they have any comfort in it. No, unless in so far as in righteous judgment, he suffers them to be deceived, and they are deceived, and most unhappy they, who lie longest under the delusion, Psalm l. 21. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." Shall they have any benefit by it. No, instead of appeasing his wrath, it provokes his vengeance. Instead of enlightening their minds, it blinds their eyes. Instead of sanctifying their nature, it hardens their hearts. See a description of those who had been long favored with outward privileges, and gloried in them, 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." So that nothing is more essential to an acceptable approach to God, in the duties of his worship in general, and particularly to receiving the seals of his covenant, than a thorough and universal separation from all known sin, Job xi. 13, 14. "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles."

4. He will not hear them when they cry for mercy at last. Sooner or later the sinner's eyes shall be opened. Sooner or later he shall be convinced of the folly of his miserable choice. Many of those who regard iniquity in their hearts, sleep in security, and flatter themselves with mistaken hopes; but, Gal. vi. 7, "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." From the account given by our Saviour, it would appear that the final sentence shall, in many in-

stances, be matter of surprize as well as terror to the sinner, Matt. vii, 22, 23, " Many will say to me in that day, " Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and " in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done " many wonderful works ? And then will I profess " unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that " work iniquity." Nay, perhaps we may say that to some, the day of God's mercy may be over before the close of life ; and they may find no place for repentance, though they may seek it carefully, and with tears. Not but that wherever there is true penitence, even at the eleventh hour, forgiveness will be the effect ; but we may justly suppose that there may be a despairing cry for mercy, from the apprehensions of impending judgment, without any thorough conviction of sin. The reception that such will meet with, and the reason upon which it is founded, is represented in the strongest language, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, " 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 de- " struction 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."

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject for your instruction and direction. And, 1. Suffer me to speak a little to those who live in the open habitual practice of gross sin. It grieves me to think, my brethren, that any such should be found or supposed in this worshipping assembly. It distresses me still more, to think that any such should have the presumption to ask, or the art to obtain permission, and the dreadful hardness to sit down at the Lord's table. I shall describe you not by your names, which are known to men, but your characters and hearts, which are open before God. Swearers and profaners of Jehovah's name,

despisers of his Sabbaths, scorers of sacred things, neglecters of prayer, sons of violence, midnight rioters, beastly drunkards, unclean fornicators, takers and holders of unjust gain, liars and slanderers, hard-hearted oppressors, and whosoever liveth under the dominion of known sin. Is the nature of God so holy, is his law so spiritual, is his judgment so severe, that those who but regard iniquity in their hearts, shall inevitably perish; then how shall you escape the damnation of hell? Is memory so unfaithful, as not now to bring your sins to remembrance? Is conscience so feared as not to charge you with the guilt? Can you doubt the being, do you not feel the presence, do you not fear the judgment of God? "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God; for Tophet is ordained of old," &c.

Oh, that it would please God, by his omnipotent grace, to reach your hearts, to shake your confidence, to humble you to the dust. I call God to record, that you have received warning. I know that you may despise it; I am afraid that many will do so. Away to your cups, away to the blessed stage, that dear friend to virtue; away to your merry, social life, drink confusion to your preachers, and pour forth every term of reproach that your little wit can suggest, against these poor priest-ridden creatures, who are afraid of their minister's reproof. Alas, alas! when the king of terrors, on his pale horse, shall make his approach, you will be of another mind, unless perhaps, as it often happens, you meet with a sudden call, and immediate translation from the fire of lust to the fire of hell.

2. Let me intreat you, my dear brethren, from what has been said, to search and try yourselves, whether you regard iniquity in your hearts, or not. This is the rather necessary, as you have in view an immediate and solemn appeal to God, that you are sincere in his covenant. Does the fear of the Lord possess you in secret, as well as in public? Are you willing that it should be so? Is it your daily study, and is it the subject of your daily prayer, to have a deeper and more lively impression of his presence upon your spirits? Is it truly matter of comfort to you, when you are delivered from the fear of human censure, or de-

fire of human approbation? Have you ever got above both in your experience, and do you not wish to maintain the superiority? If it is so, happy, happy are you indeed; and may the Lord himself lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Do you know what it is to mourn over secret sins, the vanity of your minds, the worldliness of your affections? And do you truly make conscience of keeping the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life? I will not ask, because I know you cannot deny, that you have had many sinful thoughts, in breach of every command of God. But are they approved, or abhorred? are they submitted to, or resisted? Are they now recollected with pleasure, with indifference, or with shame?

What are your thoughts with regard to the sins of others? Have you ever grieved for them in truth? Do not think that I am leading you to ostentation. I do not ask you whether you have openly testified against them, or honestly reproved them; because, though these are both important and binding duties, they may be more easily counterfeited; and I am not now pressing you to the discharge of your duty to others, but trying your sincerity before God. Have you therefore, mourned in secret for the sins of others? have they ever brought you to your knees? have they added fervor to your prayers? If it be so, I cannot think that you regard iniquity in your own hearts. This is no Pharisaical hypocrisy. It is known only to God. The profane cannot curse you for it, because they do not hear it: and if they were told it, it is probable they would not believe it.

But methinks I hear some serious person say, I have attended to the interrogatories; and though I would fain hope I know something of a sense of duty in all, yet, oh! how miserably defective have I been. Nothing like that deep sense of the presence of God, that humiliation of spirit for sin, that concern for the divine glory, that I ought to have had, that I have sometimes felt for a season, and that I wished to preserve.

Therefore, my brethren, I would once more ask you, can you now sincerely pray that God would search and

try your ways, discover every secret sin, convince you of it, humble you for it, and deliver you from it? Is there no reserve, no exception whatever, nothing that you are willing to cover, that you are backward to examine, and disposed to excuse? Is there no doubtful practice, but what you are willing to think of deliberately, to examine impartially, and if it either appears to be sinful, or but remaineth doubtful, to surrender freely? If you can say there is not, then after having pleaded your divorce from every sin, I have only further to rob you of every duty too, and leave you nothing whereof to glory; to call you to renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependance, and make you to say, "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me: surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

3. I shall only now shut up this discourse with giving you a very few directions for your future preservation.

I. Guard against the sin or sins that you may be most liable to, from your natural temper and constitution, which may be said to be your own iniquity, and the sin that most easily besets you. It is lamentable to think what disgraceful blemishes are sometimes to be seen in the conduct of the servants of God. I know this is permitted in Providence, and cannot be wholly prevented. But no watchful Christian will sit still easily under it. If such a sin gives him no rest, he should give it no quarter. Some very bad things are sometimes borne with, under the notion of unavoidable infirmities. Yet they are to the prejudice of your own peace; they are a reproach to your profession, and a dishonor to your master. If you cannot wholly destroy, I beseech you, wound and weaken them. If there is no probability that they will die wholly, but with the body, let it be seen that they are daily losing strength, and dying gradually.

2. Set a particular guard upon those sins that you may be opposed to, in your ordinary calling: in that way, where you go most frequently, the tempter knows he can most easily find you, and he will certainly be there to meet you. Besides interest often pleads so strongly in behalf

of some sins of this kind, and they are so much justified by example, that few can withstand the temptation. But consider, I beseech you, that no honor, profit, or convenience can possibly counterbalance the loss of God's favor? What a miserable excellency is it indeed, to add a little to our earthly store at the expence of his displeasure, while we ourselves are in his hand, and all that we have, is in the most absolute manner at his disposal.

In the last place, if you desire to be preserved from the dominion of sin, seat yourselves often in the presence of God. He seeth in secret, his eyes do see, his eye lids try the children of men. Ask of him, therefore, that he may not suffer you to deceive yourselves, but lead you in the paths of righteousness for his names sake.

CHRISTIAN MAGNANIMITY.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at Princeton, September, 1775, the Sabbath preceding the ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT; and again with Additions, September 23, 1787. To which is added, AN ADDRESS to the SENIOR CLASS, who were to receive the degree of BACHELOR of ARTS.

I THESS. ii. 12.

That you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you into his kingdom and glory.

THE present state was intended to be, and I think must, by every person of reflection, be admitted to be a continual trial of the faith and constancy of a Christian. It is therefore a duty we owe to others in general, but in a special manner, the elder to the younger, to give them faithful warning of the temptations and dangers, to which they must, of necessity, be exposed, if they mean to walk in the paths of piety and virtue. It hath often occurred to me, in meditating on this subject, that as false money is most dangerous, when it is likest to the true, so those principles, and that character, which approach the nearest to true religion, if notwithstanding they are essentially different from it, will be most ready to impose on an uncautious and unsuspecting mind. Therefore, if there

is such a thing as a *worldly virtue*, a system of principles and duty, dictated by the spirit of the world, and the standard of approbation or blame with the men of the world, and if this is at bottom, essentially different from, and sometimes directly opposed to the spirit of the gospel, it must be of all others, the most dangerous temptation, to persons of a liberal education and an ingenious turn of mind.

This, if I am not mistaken, is really the case. There are some branches of true religion which are universally approved, and which impiety itself cannot speak against; such as truth and integrity in speech, honesty in dealing, humanity and compassion to persons in distress. But there are other particulars, in which the worldly virtue, and the Christian virtue, seem to be different things. Of these I shall select one, as an example, viz. Spirit, dignity, or greatness of mind. This seems to be entirely of the worldly cast: It holds a very high place in the esteem of all worldly men: The boldest pretensions are often made to it, by those who treat religion with neglect, and religious persons with disdain or defiance. It is also a virtue of a very dazzling appearance; ready to captivate the mind, and particularly, to make a deep impression on young persons, when they first enter into life. At the same time, the gospel seems to stand directly opposed to it. The humility of the creature, the abasement and contrition of the sinner, the dependence and self-denial of the believer, and above all, the shame and reproach of the cross itself, seem to conspire in obliging us to renounce it.

What shall we say then, my brethren? Shall we say that magnanimity is no virtue at all, and that no such excellence belongs to human nature? Or shall we admit that there is beauty and excellence in it—confessing at the same time, that it does not belong to religion, and only say, that though we want this, we have many other and better qualities in its place? To this I can never agree; for every real excellence is consistent with every other; nay every real excellence is adorned and illustrated by every other. Vices may be inconsistent with each other, but virtues never can. And, therefore, as magnanimi-

ty is an amiable and noble quality—one of the greatest ornaments of our nature, so I affirm that it belongs only to true and undefiled religion, and that every appearance of the one, without the other, is not only defective, but false.

The Holy Scriptures, it is true, do chiefly insist upon what is proper to humble our pride, and to bring us to a just apprehension of our character and state. This was wise and just, because of that corruption and misery into which we are fallen, the contrary would have been unjust. It is evidently more necessary, in the present state of human nature, to restrain pride, than to kindle ambition. But as the scripture points out our original dignity, and the true glory of our nature, so every true penitent is there taught to aspire after the noblest character, and to entertain the most exalted hopes. In the passage which I have chosen as the subject of my discourse, you see the Apostle exhorts the Thessalonians to walk suitably to the dignity of their character, and the importance of their privileges, which is a short but just description of true and genuine greatness of mind.

My single purpose, from these words, at this time, is to explain and recommend magnanimity as a Christian virtue; and I wish to do it in such a manner, as neither to weaken its lustre, nor admit any degree of that corrupt mixture, by which it is often counterfeited, and greatly debased. Some infidels have in terms affirmed, that Christianity has banished magnanimity, and by its precepts of meekness, humility, and passive submission to injury, has destroyed that nobleness of sentiment, which rendered the ancients so illustrious, and gives so much majesty and dignity to the histories of Greece and Rome. In opposition to this, I hope to be able to shew that real greatness is inseparable from sincere piety; and that any defect in the one, must necessarily be a discernible blemish in the other. With this view; I will, first, give you the principles of magnanimity in general, as a natural quality; secondly, I will shew what is necessary to give it real value, as a moral virtue; and, thirdly, shew that it shines with the most perfect brightness as a Christian grace;

after, will improve the subject, by a practical application of what may be said, for your instruction and direction.

First, then, let me state the principles of magnanimity, in general, as a natural quality. I think it must be admitted, that as there is a real difference between bodies, as to size and bulk, as well as other sensible qualities, so there is a real character of greatness, or meanness, applicable to the mind, distinct from its other qualities or powers. It is, however, I apprehend, a simple impression, which cannot be explained, or further analyzed, but may easily be felt, and is best illustrated by its effects. These may be summed up in the following particulars: To magnanimity it belongeth to attempt, 1. Great and difficult things: 2. To aspire after great and valuable possessions; 3. To encounter dangers with resolution; 4. To struggle against difficulties with perseverance; and, 5. To bear sufferings with fortitude and patience.

1. It belongs to magnanimity to attempt great and difficult things. Those who, from a love of sloth and ease, neglect the exercise or improvement of their powers, and those who apply them with ever so great assiduity and attention, to things mean or of small consequence, are plainly destitute of this quality. We perceive a meanness and want of spirit in this respect, when particular persons fall below their rank in life; or when, as is too frequently the case in any rank, they fall below human nature itself. When a prince, or other person of the first order and importance in human life, busies himself in nothing but the most trifling amusements, or arts of little value, we call it mean; and when any man, endowed with rational powers, loses them through neglect, or destroys them by the most grovelling sensuality, we say he is acting below himself. The contrary of this, therefore, or the vigorous exertion of all our powers, and particularly the application of them to things of moment and difficulty, is real magnanimity.

2. It belongs to magnanimity to aspire after great and valuable possessions. It is more difficult properly to illustrate this as a branch of magnanimity, because of its fre-

quent perversion, which will be afterwards explained. It seems however, to be necessarily included in the general character. A great mind has great capacities of enjoyment as well as action. And as there is a difference between the blessings in our view, both in point of dignity and extent, such a man will not be easily satisfied, or put up with what is either mean or scanty, while he can acquire and possess a better and more extensive portion. The large and increasing desires of the human mind, have often been made an argument for the dignity of our nature, and our having been made for something that is great and excellent.

3. It belongs to magnanimity to encounter dangers with resolution. This is inseparable from, and constitutes a leading part of the character. Even the most excellent and valuable services to mankind, if they are attended with no difficulty at all, or meet with no opposition, though they retain the character of utility, yet, for want of this circumstance, they lose that of greatness.—Courage is always considered as a great quality; it has had the admiration, or rather adoration, of mankind in every age. Many when they speak of magnanimity, mean nothing else but courage, and when they speak of meanness, have little other idea but that of timidity.—Neither is there, I think, any human weakness that is more the object of contempt and disdain, than cowardice, which when applied to life in general, is commonly called pusillanimity.

4. It belongs to greatness, to struggle against difficulties with steadiness and perseverance. Perseverance is nothing else but continued and inflexible courage. We see some persons, who shew the greatest activity and boldness for a season, but time and opposition weakens their force, and seems, if I may speak so, to exhaust their courage, as if they wasted the power by the exertion. Perseverance, therefore, is necessary to greatness. Few things are more contrary to this character, than fickleness and unsteadiness. We commonly join together the characters of weak and changeable.

5. In the last place, it belongs to greatness to bear sufferings with fortitude and patience. This is a kindred quality to the former, and is necessary to complete the character of magnanimity. Such is the state of human things, that suffering is in one way or another, wholly unavoidable. It often happens, that difficulties cannot be removed, or enemies cannot be conquered; and then it is the last effort of greatness of mind, to bear the weight of the one, or the cruelty of the other, with firmness and patience. This virtue has always been of the greatest reputation. It is a well known saying of a heathen philosopher, that a great man, suffering with invincible patience, under a weight of misfortunes, is a sight, which even the gods must behold with admiration.

Having thus pointed out the principles, or rather enumerated the chief effects of magnanimity, as a natural quality, let us now, in the second place, consider what is necessary to give it real value, as a moral virtue. This is of the utmost importance, and must appear so to all who will consider the subject with attention. That I may set the matter in as clear a light as possible, observe, that to render magnanimity a valuable quality, it must further have the following characters.

1. The object of our desires must be just as well as great. Some of the noblest powers of the human mind, have often been exerted in invading the rights, instead of promoting the interest and happiness of mankind. As the history of the world is little else than the history of human guilt; so, many of the most illustrious names, transmitted down to us, have been those of the most active and successful destroyers of their fellow-creatures. There may be, and there have been in such persons, many or most of the ingredients of natural greatness of mind; but these have only served to make the characters, in the eye of reason, more hideous and detestable.

2. Our desires ought to be governed by wisdom and prudence, as well as justice. If any person either forms difficult prospects, or aspires after great possessions, and in prosecution of his purposes, exerts ever so much courage, fortitude and patience; yet, if these designs are less

useful, or these possessions less valuable, than others to which he might have applied the same talents, it cannot deserve the name of true magnanimity. If any person, for example, forms a resolution of exerting his skill, in such feats or performances as have nothing or very little valuable in them, but that they are difficult and uncommon, I think no man will pretend that he has any title to the character of greatness of mind, otherwise a ropedancer might be a hero: Or, if any person should spend a whole life, in the most unwearied application to the single purpose of accumulating wealth, however vast his desires, or however astonishing his success, his merit would be very small. Nay, we must be sensible that he has lost many opportunities of doing signal service to mankind, and of acquiring more valuable and durable enjoyments, while in pursuit of this, which after all, will disappoint his hopes.

3. The principle of action must be honorable, as well as the achievements illustrious. If a person does things ever so extraordinary in their nature, overcomes the greatest difficulties, or braves the most formidable dangers, merely to make his name famous, we must at once perceive how much it detracts even from his name itself. This is not the language of religion only, it is the language of reason, and the dictate of the human heart. An insatiable thirst for praise, is so far from being amiable, that it is hateful or contemptible. I am sensible that a thirst for fame, is not only apparent in, but seems to have been confessed by many of the most distinguished heroes of antiquity; but as it certainly does abate in a good degree, the lustre of their good actions, so the indulgence that is given them, upon this head, is wholly owing to the disadvantages they lay under, in a state of heathenism, and their ignorance of a better and nobler principle.—“Nothing,” says an eminent author, “can be great, the contempt of which is great;” and therefore, if a contempt of riches, a neglect of fame, and a readiness to sacrifice both to duty and usefulness, is one of the most glorious characters we can conceive, it is plain, that not the deeds, but the principle is the evidence, and not the

head nor the hands of man, but the heart is the seat of genuine greatness.

4. In the last place, in order to real greatness, every attempt must be possible and rational, perhaps probable. Nothing is more common than to find persons, under the pretence of great and illustrious designs, prosecuting what is not of any value when obtained, and at the same time scarcely possible, and no way probable to be obtained at all. This is declining altogether from the line of greatness, and going into the path of extravagance. Again, should any man undertake what he was altogether unable to perform, however excellent the design were in itself, we would not dignify it even with the name of ambition; he would acquire and deserve the character, not of greatness, but of folly or madness.

On the whole, it is plain that these moral principles, must enter into the composition of true greatness, and that, when they are wanting, the natural characters mentioned before, degenerate into vice, and assume the names of pride, ambition, temerity, ferocity and obstinacy.

This leads me, in the third place, to shew, not only that there is nothing in real religion, contrary to magnanimity, but that there, and there only, it appears in its beauty and perfection. Let me briefly run over, and apply to religion, the above-mentioned ingredients of magnanimity.

1. It is to attempt great and difficult things. Religion calls us to the greatest and most noble attempts, whether in a private or a public view. In a private view, it calls us to resist and subdue every corrupt and sinful passion, however strongly the indulgence is solicited by the tempting object, or recommended by the artful seducer. The importance and difficulty of this struggle, appears not only from the holy scriptures, but from the experience and testimony of mankind in every age. What cautions are given by Solomon upon this subject? "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." The wisest Heathens have inculcated the necessity of self-government, and the danger of surrounding temptation, by many

instructive images. But why should I extend this part of the subject? How few are successful in this attempt? This alone is a sufficient proof, that it is great and difficult, and every person exercised to godliness, will be abundantly sensible of it, from the state of his own heart.

In a public view, every good man is called to live and act for the glory of God, and the good of others. Here he has as extensive a scene of activity, as he can possibly desire. He is not indeed permitted to glory or to build an altar to his own vanity; but he is both permitted and obliged to exert his talents, to improve his time, to employ his substance, and to hazard his life in his Maker's service, or his country's cause. Nor am I able to conceive any character more truly great than that of one, whatever be his station or profession, who is devoted to the public good under the immediate order of Providence. He does not seek the bubble reputation in the deadly breach, but he complains of no difficulty, and refuses no service, if he thinks he carries the commission of the King of kings.

2. The truly pious man aspires after the greatest and most valuable possessions. He despises, indeed, the uncertain and the unsatisfying enjoyments of time. His desires after present enjoyments, are subjected to the will of God. He has given them up without reserve, yet his heavenly Father knoweth that he hath need of these things, and therefore he both asks and hopes to receive what is suitable and necessary, and believes that a little that a just man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked. But the glorious object of the Christian's ambition, is the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The honorable relation he stands in to God, as his adopted child in Christ Jesus, inclines and authorises him to hope for this purchased possession, and enables him to look down with becoming indifference, on all the glory of this transitory world. Let the rich man glory in his riches, and the wise man glory in his wisdom; he only glories in this, that he knoweth the Lord, and shall be with him for ever.

3. True piety encounters the greatest dangers with resolution. The fear of God is the only effectual mean to deliver us from the fear of man. Experience has abundantly shewn, that the servants of Christ have adhered to his cause, and made profession of his name, in opposition to all the terrors which infernal policy could present to them, and all the sufferings, with which the most savage inhumanity could afflict them. But as this belongs to the case of persecution for conscience sake, which, by the peculiar kindness of Providence is exceedingly rare among us, it is proper to observe, that every Christian has frequent opportunities of manifesting a holy resolution in encountering the reproach and derision of worldly men, for adhering to his duty. And when we consider how hard it is to bear reproach and scorn, called, in scripture, *the trial of cruel mockings*, there will appear to be no small measure of dignity and heroism in him, who can calmly submit to it from every quarter, rather than depart from his duty. There are not a few, who are apt to boast of their spirit and resolution, who are yet unable to bear reproach, and meanly make the sentiments of others, and the caprice of fashion, the rule of duty, in place of the clear dictates of conscience and the word of God. How contemptible is this, compared to the conduct of that man, who seeks no fame, but by honest means, and fears no reproach for honest actions, but contents himself with a silent and believing regard to him who seeth in secret, and who shall at last bring every work into judgment.

4. True piety perseveres with constancy in opposition to continual trial. This is indeed what distinguishes the Christian warfare from that of every other. It continues through life, and the last enemy to be overcome is death. In all the conflicts between men on earth, the issue may be speedily expected, and the reward immediately bestowed; but in religion, it is only he who shall endure to the end that shall be saved. This adds greatly to the difficulty, and seems to shew, not only the excellence and beauty, but the real dignity and magnanimity of the Christian character.

5. In the last place, true piety endures suffering with patience and fortitude. If we reflect upon the number of suffering martyrs, whose testimonies are upon record, we shall see with what calmness and composure, with what undaunted firmness, and sometimes with what exultation and triumph they have gone to a scaffold, or been tied to a stake. Can any person, think you, who hath gone to the field of battle, in quest of glory, or who hath braved the danger of the seas, in quest of wealth or power, be once compared with those who have cheerfully given up the precious life, or submitted their bodies to the torture, to keep their consciences undefiled? But, my brethren, Christian patience is much more frequently tried in another manner. The believer has made an unreserved surrender of himself and his all, to the disposal of Providence: His faithfulness to this promise, is brought almost every day to the trial. For the Christian then to suffer reproach, without rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, to be submissive under the loss of substance, and say with Job, Job i. 21. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."—To yield up relations, and to say with David, 2 Sam. xii. 23. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." To look forward to approaching death, and say with the apostle Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 6. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." This is magnanimity indeed; this is the most solid glory to which any child of Adam can possibly attain. I proceed in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said.

1. You may learn, from what hath been said, that whenever honor differs from conscience, it is a treacherous guide; wherever spirit and dignity of mind, as a worldly virtue, differs from true religion, and even from the simplicity of the gospel, it is false and spurious. The gospel, it is true, will not suffer men to seek revenge, or to delight in it. It will humble them in the sight of God, and make them self-denied in the presence of men, yet it will constrain them not to refuse any duty to the one, or any

useful service to the other. It will not suffer them to be ambitious of higher places of honor and trust, but it will make them active and zealous in the duties of that place, in which they already are. It will not suffer them to resent injuries and gratify revenge; but it will make them withstand a king upon his throne, if he presume to interfere in the matters of their God. What is there here that is not noble?

After all, the testimony in favor of true piety, is universal, if carefully attended to. Every one must acknowledge, that ostentation, and love of praise, and whatever is contrary to the self-denial of the gospel, tarnishes the beauty of the greatest actions. Courage and modesty, merit and humility, majesty and condescension, appear with tenfold glory, when they are united; it is impossible to separate them; to divide, is to destroy them. They are like light and shade in a picture, which are necessary to each other, and which, by their union, constitute the beauty and augment the lustre of the piece. So true is this, that the highest polish that any person can receive in commerce with the world, is to have an apparent disposition to prefer the interest of others to his own, to guard against every degree of offence, and to be always ready to oblige. I have often been pleased with that observation of a foreigner of high rank,* that worldly politeness is only an imperfect imitation of Christian charity; it is nothing else but a studied appearance of that deference to the judgment, and attention to the interest of others, which a true Christian hath, as the rule of his duty, and the disposition of his heart.

2. Suffer me to observe, that as Christian magnanimity is more excellent than that of the world, it is also more practicable, and, in fact, more universal. Worldly magnanimity is what always requires such talents, as do not fall to the lot of many, and such opportunities for its exercise, as seldom occur. The road to heroism is not open to every man. But that magnanimity, which is the fruit of true religion, being indeed the product of divine grace, is a virtue of the heart, and may be attained by persons of

* The Prince of Conti.

mean talents and narrow possessions, and in the very lowest stations of human life. In fact, there have been, and are daily examples of it in every rank. We see the heroic fortitude of the martyrs, as manifest in those of early years, and the weakest sex, as in any other; and whoever will visit the solitary walks of life, may find, in the lowest stations, humility, thankfulness, patience under affliction, and submission to Providence, such as would do honor to the most approved virtue, and the most enlightened mind. To despise riches, and restrain the motions of envy and impatience, in a needy state, is perhaps as truly noble as to improve them wisely in a higher.

Thus the honor, which is chiefly desirable, is equally open to the rich and to the poor, to the learned and to the unlearned, to the wise and to the unwise, as it cometh from God, who is no respecter of persons. One of the best and happiest effects of serious reflection is, to bring us, in a great measure, all upon a level; as, indeed, in one most important respect, the magistrate with his robes, the scholar with his learning, and the day-laborer that stands unnoticed, are all upon the same footing—for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.

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A N
A D D R E S S

T O T H E

STUDENTS OF THE SENIOR CLASS,

On the Lord's Day preceding Commencement,

September 23, 1775.

GENTLEMEN,

AS you have now finished the usual course of study in this place, and are to enter upon public life in a variety of ways, as each shall be determined by inclination or other circumstances, I willingly embrace the opportunity of addressing an exhortation to you, at this important and interesting period of your lives. I do not mean to say much, if any thing, that you have never heard before, but to lay hold of your present situation, with some hope, that what may be said now, will remain upon your memory, and have an influence upon your future conduct. That I may speak with the greater clearness and precision, I will divide what I have to say, into three branches. 1. Your duty to God, and the interest of your souls. 2. The prosecution of your studies, or the improvement of your talents, as members of society. 3. Prudence in your commerce with the world in general, your outward provision, and other circumstances in life.

I. As to the first of these, it is to all men of the greatest moment. Some of you, I know, and more, I hope, are intended for the service of Christ in the ministry. To this we have the universal suffrage, that true religion is absolutely necessary, with which I heartily agree. But I wish those who are destined for other employments, may not sometimes make a comparison here, unjust in itself, and dangerous, perhaps even ruinous, to their own souls. Because true religion is necessary to a minister, and they are conscious to themselves, or at least suspect, that they are without religion; instead of laying to heart the things that belong to their peace, they only determine that they will follow some other calling. But alas! though the difference to the public is very great, the difference to the persons themselves, seems to me but very small. A clergyman without religion, to be sure is a dreadful character, and, when visible, a detestable one; but truly, one would think, at the close of life, it will be but little comfort to a man, that he must go to the place of torment, not as a minister, but as a lawyer, physician, soldier, or merchant. Therefore suffer me to say to you, and to all who now hear me, that the care of your souls is the one thing needful. All mankind, of every rank, denomination and profession, are sinners by nature. The ministers of the New Testament have received a commission to preach the gospel to every creature: "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

While I say this, I beg of you to consider that the advantages which you have enjoyed, will be an aggravation of your guilt, if they are unimproved. There is an equity as well as wisdom often to be observed in the providence of God. Unless reasons of sovereignty, that is, reasons unknown to us, prevent it, judgment will be inflicted, when a person or people is ripe for the stroke. Therefore, as some plants and seeds, both from their own nature, and from the soil and situation in which they are placed, ripen sooner than others, so some persons, by the early pains taken upon them, and the privileges they have enjoyed, fill up the measure of their iniquities sooner than others, and are more speedily overtaken with deserv-

ed vengeance. There are many common sayings that are the effects of error and prejudice; for example, that which you will be told by many, that the children of good men are as bad as any. If this is intended to insinuate that a regular and pious education affords no ground to hope for good behaviour in after life, it is at once contrary to reason and experience. But if we should say that when young persons piously educated, burst restraining bonds asunder, and are seduced into vicious courses, they commonly run faster and farther than others, it is a certain fact, which may be easily accounted for, and affords an important instruction to all.

After intreating you to lay religion to heart, I must beseech you to guard against being too easily satisfied in a matter of infinite moment. Do not think it enough to be prudent, cautious, or decent in your conduct, or to attain a character formed upon worldly principles, and governed by worldly motives. I am not against (as you all know) introducing every argument against sin, and shewing you that loose practices are ruinous to name, body and estate. Neither is it wrong that you should fortify every pious resolution by the addition of these motives. But alas! the evil lies deeper. "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." True religion must arise from a clear and deep conviction of your lost state by nature and practice, and an unfeigned reliance on the pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace of God.

Suffer me, upon this subject, earnestly to recommend to all that fear God, to apply themselves from their earliest youth, to the exercises of piety, a life of prayer and communion with God. This is the source from which a real Christian must derive the secret comfort of his heart, and which alone will give beauty, consistency, and uniformity, to an exemplary life. The reason why I have mentioned it on this occasion is, that youth, when the spirits are lively, and the affections vigorous and strong, is the season when this habit must be formed. There are advantages and disadvantages attending every stage of life. An aged Christian will naturally grow in prudence, vigilance, use-

fulness, attention to the course of providence, and subjection to the divine will, but will seldom attain to greater fervor of affection, and life in divine worship, than he had been accustomed to from his early years. On the contrary, he will generally see it necessary instead of trusting to occasional impulses, to guard and strengthen the habit by order and form.

Be companions of them that fear God. Esteem them always most highly, and shun, as a contagious pestilence, the society not only of loose persons, but of those especially whom you perceive to be infected with the principles of infidelity, or enemies to the power of religion.—Many of these are much more dangerous to pious persons than open profligates. As for these last, decency is against them; the world itself condemns them; reason despises them, and prudence shuns them. He must have a very mean taste indeed, who is capable of finding pleasure in disorder and riot. If I had no higher pleasure on earth than in eating and drinking, I would not choose to eat and drink with the drunken. Order, neatness, elegance, and even moderation itself, are necessary to exalt and refine the pleasures of a sensual life. Therefore I will not allow myself to suppose, that I shall afterwards hear of any of you roaring and swearing in taverns, or wasting your bodies and estates by lewdness and debauchery, or that you take pleasure in those who do so. But be especially careful to avoid those who are enemies to vital piety, who do not pretend to speak directly against religion, but give every vile name they can think of, to all who seem to be in earnest on that subject, and vilify the exercises of religion, under the names of whining, cant, grimace, and hypocrisy. These are often unhappily successful in making some uncautious persons ashamed of their Redeemer's name, his truths, his laws, his people, and his cross.

I need hardly observe, that this is not to be understood as recommending pharisaical pride and superciliousness; far less, a rash and presumptuous judging of the state of others. It is not only lawful, but our duty, to have a free communication with our fellow-citizens, for the purposes of social life: it is not only lawful, but our duty to be

courteous, and to give every proper evidence of respect and attention to others, according to their rank and place in society. What I mean to caution you against is, an unnecessary, voluntary intercourse, such as has inclination for its motive, and pleasure for its object. With respect to this, we need not hesitate to say, with the inspired prophet, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but " a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

II. I come now to speak a little upon the prosecution of your studies, and the improvement of your talents. Your education in a seminary of learning, is only intended to give you the elements and first principles of science, which should whet your appetite for more, and which will enable you to proceed with an assured hope of success. It hath been generally a favorite point with me, to recommend the union of piety and literature, and to guard young persons against the opposite extremes. We see sometimes the pride of un sanctified knowledge, do great injury to religion; and on the other hand, we find some persons of real piety, despising human learning, and disgracing the most glorious truths, by a meanness and indecency hardly sufferable in their manner of handling them. On this account, industry and application to study, is of the utmost importance to those who are intended for the office of the ministry.

But I have it further in view, to recommend to you all, without exception, a life of diligence and application. Avoid sloth, as a dangerous enemy. Fear it, hate it, and despise it. It is a common saying, that men do not know their own weakness; but it is as true, and a truth more important, that they do not know their own strength. I desire that you will receive the following information from me, which I dare say, every person of judgment and experience will confirm, that multitudes of moderate capacity have been useful in their generation, respected by the public, and successful in life, while those of superior talents from nature, by mere slothfulness and idle habits, or self-indulgence, have lived useless, and died contemptible. There is also a disposition in young people, which you

know I have often set myself to oppose, to think that loose, irregular fallies, and sometimes even vicious liberties, are a sign of spirit and capacity. The very contrary is the truth. It requires no genius at all to do mischief. Persons of the greatest ability have generally been lovers of order. Neither is there any instance to be found, of a man's arriving at great reputation or usefulness, be his capacity what it might, without industry and application.

Suffer me here, in a particular manner, to recommend to you a firmness of mind, and steady perseverance, as of the utmost moment to your progress and success. Whatever a man's talents from nature may be, if he apply himself to what is not altogether unsuitable to them, and hold on with steadiness and uniformity, he will be useful and happy; but if he be loose and volatile, impatient of the slowness of things in their usual course, and shifting from project to project, he will probably be neither the one nor the other.

I am somewhat at a loss what to say, as to character and reputation; yet it is so important a point, that it must not be omitted. True religion should furnish you with a higher and nobler principle to govern your conduct, than the desire of applause from men. Yet, in subordination to what ought to be the great purpose of life, the approbation of the supreme Judge, there is a just and laudable ambition to do what is praise-worthy among men. This ought not to be extinguished in the minds of youth; being a powerful spur and incitement to virtuous or illustrious actions. A truly good man will seek no praise but by honest means, and will be superior even to disgrace itself, if brought upon him by adherence to his duty. Yet he will also be tender and careful, not to give just cause to any to impeach his conduct. If I might be permitted to direct your views upon this subject, I would say, consider that your character is already beginning to form. Every step you take further in life, will both ascertain and spread it. You ought also to be informed, that notwithstanding all the hackneyed complaints of the partiality and censoriousness of the world, a man's real character, in point of ability, is *never* mistaken, and but *seldom* in point of morals. That there are many malicious and censorious persons, I

agree; but lies are not half so durable as truth. There is an impartiality in a diffusive public, which will shew itself where means of information are afforded to it. Therefore reverence the judgment of mankind without idolizing it. Be as cautious as possible to do nothing that deserves censure, and as little concerned as possible what reproaches may fall upon you undeserved. It is not a contradiction, but perfectly consistent to say, a man should be tender and even jealous of his character, and yet not greedy of praise. There is an amiableness and dignity in the first, but a meanness and littleness in the last.

Another advice, near a-kin to the last, is, do as much as you can to deserve praise, and yet avoid as much as possible the hearing of it. This is but another view of the same subject; and that it may be the more useful, and my intention in it the more manifest, I will extend it both to praise and dispraise. When you come into public life, and become the objects of general attention, not only guard against fishing for applause, and being inquisitive after what people think or say of you, but avoid knowing it as much as you decently can. My reason for this is, that whether you will or not, you will hear as much of the slanders of your enemies as you will bear with patience, and as much of the flattery of your friends, or interested persons, as you will bear with humility. Therefore, prepare yourself for both, but seek for neither. Several eminent authors, as you doubtless know, have given it as an advice to young clergymen, and other public speakers, to get a friend who is a good judge, and intreat him to make remarks upon their composition, carriage, delivery, &c. with fidelity. I have nothing to say against the goodness of the advice in itself, but at the same time, I have no great conviction of the necessity or even the utility of it. It is very seldom that advice is asked in this manner, but with a view to obtain a compliment; and still seldomer that it is given with sufficient freedom and impartiality. If any man has humility and self-denial enough to wish to know his own faults, there will be little difficulty in discovering them. Or if we could suppose, there were difficulty to himself, his enemies or rivals, or talkative peo-

ple, though they be neither the one nor the other, will supply the defect. Perhaps you will think, that in the strictures of malice and envy, there is generally an acrimony that has no great tendency to reform; like a rusty knife, which makes a very painful wound, though not very deep. I agree to this fully, and yet affirm, that there is so much the more virtue, so much the more wisdom, and perhaps I may add, so much the more pleasure in making this use of them.

I conclude this part of my subject, with advising you to maintain a friendship with one another, and to carry the intimacies of early life, through the whole of it. To this I add, that you ought to desire and cultivate the correspondence of men of piety and learning. Man made for society, derives his chief advantages of every kind, from the united efforts of many conspiring to the same end.—As to piety, nothing is more essential to it, than social communication. It properly consists in the supreme love of God, and fervent charity to all men. The Christian also hath need of the assistance of others in his passage through this world, where he has so much opposition to encounter. Those who deserve this character, are said to be pilgrims and strangers in the earth. Therefore they ought to keep together, lest they lose their way. They comfort each other in distress, they assist each other in doubts and difficulty, they embolden each other by their example, and they assist each other by their prayers.

This is no less the case in respect to literature. It has been observed, that great and eminent men have generally, in every nation, appeared in clusters. The reason of this probably is, that their society and mutual intercourse greatly adds to their improvement, and gives force and vigor to the talents which they may severally possess. Nothing is so powerful an incitement to diligence, or so kindles the best sort of ambition, as the friendship, advice, and assistance of men of learning and worth. The approbation of one such, is of more value to a noble mind, than peals of applause from an undiscerning multitude. Besides, the assistance which men of letters give to each other, is really necessary in the execution of particular works of

great compass and utility. If it is by the labors of preceding ages, that it is now possible in one life to attain to such a degree of knowledge as we have sometimes seen, so it is by the concurrence of many friends lending their assistance, that one man has been sometimes able to present to the public, a system of science, which, without that aid, he alone would have in vain attempted to bring to perfection. There is no circumstance which throws this new country so far back in point of science, as the want of public libraries, where thorough researches might be made, and the small number of learned men to assist in making researches practicable, easy or complete.

III. The last head on which I promised to give you my advice, was prudence in your communication with the world in general, your outward provision and other circumstances that conduce to the happiness and comfort of life. On this subject, I begin with what I have often recommended to you, frugality in the management of your affairs, order and exactness in your dress, furniture, books, and keeping of accounts. Nothing could be further from my mind than to recommend the temper or conduct of avaricious men, whose sordid souls have no higher ambition, and indeed, hardly any other desire than that of getting pelf. This is not only unbecoming a gentleman and a scholar, but, in my opinion, wholly inconsistent with the character. I never knew an instance of a person in whom this disposition took place in early life, that could apply to study, or that became eminent in any thing that was good. The opposite vice is the common fault of youth, and it is against this I would caution you. The frugality I would recommend, is that of an independent mind, that fears and scorns subjection to others, and remembers the just saying of Solomon, that *the borrower is servant to the lender*. That frugality which arises from order and economy, is not only consistent with, but it is the parent of liberality of sentiment and generosity of conduct. It is indeed the source of beneficence, for no man can bestow out of an empty purse. On the other hand, covetousness

and profusion, are by no means repugnant to each other ; and indeed they are more frequently joined than many apprehend. The stricture of Sallust in the character of Cataline, *alieni appetens sui profusus*, has been often cited, and may generally be applied to loose and profligate livers. I hope therefore you will learn betimes to distinguish between the virtue and the vice, and to adhere to the one as much as you despise the other.

I will make an observation here, which may be applied not only to the distinction of character in this instance, but in almost every other that has been, or shall be mentioned. It will be much your interest, if you learn betimes to make not a hasty but a deliberate and candid judgment, when you infer character from appearances. The habits of life which men contract, give a bias to their opinions and even a tincture to their conversation and phraseology. Persons inclined to levity and dissipation, will often ascribe to covetousness, what arises from very different causes. I have known, even in youth, a person declining to engage in a party of pleasure, accused by his companions as mean and sneaking, and afraid of his purse, when, in reality, it was not that he loved money more, but pleasure less. It may sometimes happen, that a person of principle, will see it proper to decline meetings of festivity, though not directly sinful, as an unnecessary waste of time, or from some other circumstance to him dangerous and ensnaring. I have also seen persons more advanced in years, who from a habit, perhaps a necessary habit of strict temperance, and retired manner of life, were very sparing of personal expence, and even not much disposed to social intercourse, and therefore called close or covetous, and yet when applied to, for pious or charitable purposes, would be much more liberal than others of an opposite turn of mind. Observations perfectly similar might be made upon the opposite character of liberality. It is not every kind of openness of heart that indicates profusion. We are told by Solomon, Prov. xi. 25. "That the liberal soul shall be made fat," and by the prophet Isaiah, Isa. xxxii. 8. "That the liberal desireth liberal things, and by liberal things he shall be established." From these

contrasted remarks, I infer, that as it is seldom necessary to judge peremptorily of others, so forbearance and the most charitable allowance, is both our duty and interest.

In the next place, I recommend to you, humility of heart and meekness of carriage. I consider in this place, the grace of humility as a virtue especially serviceable to your earthly comfort. I consider and mean to treat it as a maxim of worldly prudence. The scripture seems to point it out as peculiarly necessary for this purpose, and to annex the promise of earthly happiness to the practice of it: Matth. v. 5. "Blessed are the meek," says our Saviour, "for they shall inherit the earth." I would understand him as saying, every good man shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, but those who excel in meekness, shall of all others have comfort on earth. In many different views, we may see the propriety of this connection. Nothing is more offensive to others, than a proud, assuming manner. It not only magnifies every fault, but vitiates even good conduct. It is not only odious to virtuous persons, but it is equally, if not more so, to those who are without principle. Some vices recommend a man to the vicious in the same line, as one drunkard is pleased with the sight of another; but nothing is so hateful to a proud man, as another of the same character, nor is offence sooner given or taken than between those, who, in this respect, perfectly resemble one another. This vice is not only odious to persons of understanding and reflection, but to the most ignorant, being as easily perceived as it is universally hated.

The moral virtue of meekness and condescension, is the best ground work even of worldly politeness, and prepares a man to receive that polish, which makes his behavior generally agreeable, and fits him for intercourse with persons in the higher ranks of life. The same virtue, by the composure and self-command that accompanies it, enables a man to manage his affairs to advantage, in whatever calling he may be engaged, or in whatever station he may be placed. A good shopkeeper is commonly remarkable for this quality. People love to go where they meet with good words and gentle treatment;

whereas the peevish and petulant may be said to have a repelling quality about them, that will not suffer any body to approach them.

To complete the whole, meekness of spirit is as useful to a man's self, as meekness of carriage is acceptable to others. The meek suffer much less from the unavoidable evils of life, than those of a contrary disposition. Many cross accidents of the less important kind, are in a manner annihilated when they are borne with calmness. The injury they do us, is not owing half so much to their weight or severity, as to the irritability of their own minds. It is evident that the same disposition must greatly alleviate calamities of a heavier kind; and from analogy you may perceive, that as it mitigates the sorrows, it multiplies and adds to the sweetness of the comforts of life. A moderate portion, gives greater satisfaction to the humble and thankful, than the most ample possessions to the proud and impatient.

Nearly allied to the above virtue, is the government of your passions, and therefore of this I shall say but little. Every one must be sensible how important is, both for the success of your worldly callings, and your usefulness in public life, to have your passions in due subjection. Men of furious and ungoverned tempers, prone to excess in attachment and resentment, either as to persons or things, are seldom successful in their pursuits, or respected and useful in their stations. Persons of ungoverned passions, are almost always fickle and changeable in their measures, which is of all things the most fatal to important undertakings. These generally require time and patience to bring them to perfection. As to public and political life in particular, the necessity of self government is so great, and so universally acknowledged, that it is usual to impute it in eminent men, not to principle, but to address and policy. It is commonly said, that politicians have no passions. Without inquiring into this, I shall only say, that whatever truth may be in it, is still in favor of my argument. The hypocrisy does honor to the virtue. If the appearance be so necessary or so useful, what must be the value of the reality?

I will here take an opportunity of confuting, or at least correcting a common saying or proverbial sentiment, many of which indeed that obtain belief in a blinded world, are nothing but false colouring and deception. It is usual to say, in defence of sudden and violent passion, that it is better to speak freely and openly, than to harbor and cover secret heart malice. Perhaps I might admit that this would be true, if the inward rage were to be as violent, and continue as long, and return as often, as indulged passion. Every person must agree, that wherever there is a deep and lasting hatred, that never forgets nor forgives, but waits for the opportunity of vengeance, it deserves to be considered as a temper truly infernal. But in most instances of offence between man and man, to restrain the tongue is the way to govern the heart. If you do not make mention of an injury, you will truly and speedily forgive it, and perhaps literally forget it. Rage is in this respect like a fire, if a vent is given to it, it will increase and spread, while there is fuel to consume, but if you can confine and stifle it, you will completely extinguish it.

To the government of the passions succeeds the government of the tongue. This indeed will in a great measure, be the effect of the former, and therefore is recommended by all the same arguments, yet it deserves very particular attention, separately as a maxim of prudence. There are great indiscretions in speech, that do not arise from passion, but from inattention and want of judgment as to the propriety of time and place, and indeed many other sources. I would therefore earnestly recommend to you, to habituate yourselves to restraint in this respect, especially in the early part of life. "Be swift to hear," says Solomon, "and slow to speak." Forwardness in speech is always thought an assuming thing in youth, and in promiscuous companies, is often considered as an insult, as well as an indiscretion. It is very common for the world in general, and still more so for men of judgment and penetration, to form an opinion of a character on the whole, from some one circumstance, and I think there are few things more unfavorable in this way than a talka-

tive disposition. If the first time I am in company, especially with a young man, he talks incessantly and takes the whole conversation to himself, I shall hardly be brought to have a good opinion of him, whether what he says be good or evil, sense or nonsense. There are some persons, who, one might say, give away so much wisdom in their speech, that they leave none behind to govern their actions.

But the chief danger of an ungoverned tongue, is, that it kindles the fire of contention among others, and makes enemies to a man's self. Solomon says, "Where no tale-bearer is, the strife ceaseth." A little experience will shew you, how unsafe it is to use much freedom in speech with absent persons. In that case you put yourself wholly in the power of those that hear you, and are in danger, not only from their treachery or malice, but from their mistakes, ignorance and imprudence. Perhaps it would be too rigid to say, that you ought never to speak to a man's prejudice in his absence, what you would be unwilling to say in his presence. Some exceptions to this rule, might easily be conceived. But both prudence and candor require that you should be very reserved in this respect, and either adhere strictly to the rule, or be sure that good reasons will justify a departure from it.

This will be a very proper place to give you some directions, as the most proper conduct, when you suffer from the tongues of others. Many and grievous are the complaints of what men suffer from the envenomed shafts of envy and malice. And there certainly is a strong disposition in some to invent, and in many to believe slanderous falsehoods. The prevalence of party, in religion or politics, never fails to produce a plentiful crop of this poisonous weed. One of the most important rules upon this subject is, that when an accusation is in any degree well-founded, or suspicious appearances have given any occasion for it, the first duty is to reform what is really wrong, and keep at a distance from the disputed limit.

This will bring good out of evil, and turn an injury into a benefit. But in cases, as it may often happen, when the slander is perfectly groundless, I hold it to be

in general the best way wholly to despise it. Time and the power of truth, will of themselves do justice in almost every case of this kind; but if you shew an impatience under it, a disposition to resent it, or a solicitude to refute it, the far greatest part of mankind will believe it not the less, but the more. If slander were a plant or an animal, I would say it was of a very strange nature, for that it would very easily die, but could not easily be killed. It discovers a greatness of mind, and a conscious dignity, to despise slanders, which of itself commands respect; whereas to be either offended or distressed by them, shews a weakness not amiable, whether the accusation be true or false.

This rule I do not say is wholly without exception. There may be cases where vindications may be necessary and effectual, but they are not many. And I think I have seen in the course of my life, reason to make the following distinction. If the accusation or slander be special, and relate to a particular fact, fixed by time, place and other circumstances, and if it be either wholly false, or essentially mistaken in its nature and tendency, the matter may be explained, and justice may be done. But if it be a general character, that happens to be imputed to a man, he ought to attempt no refutation of it, but by conduct: the more he complains of it, the more he speaks of it, the more he denies it, it will be the more believed. For example, if it be affirmed that a man spoke profanely in a certain company, at a certain place and time, when he was not present at all, it may be easily and completely refuted; but if he is accused of being proud, contentious, covetous, or deceitful, although these accusations are pretended to be supported by a train of facts, it is better to let them wholly alone, and suffer his conduct to speak for itself. There are instances in history, of accusations brought with much plausibility, and urged with great vehemence, which yet have been either from the beginning disbelieved, or by time confuted; which occasioned the Latin proverb, *Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*

All the above-mentioned particulars may be said to be the happy effects of wisdom and benevolence united; or rather, perhaps, in the light in which they have been sta-

ted to you, they are chiefly the proper fruits of that wisdom which is "profitable to direct." But I must add another advice, which is the immediate effect of benevolence and good-will; that is, be ready to assist others, and do good as you have opportunity. As every thing is liable to be abused, sometimes the maxims of prudence take a wrong direction, and close the heart against impressions of sympathy and tenderness towards others in distress. Sometimes indeed, the coolness and composure of spirit, and that self-command, which is the effect of reflection and experience, is mistaken for a callous and unfeeling heart, though it is a very different thing. To give way to the agitation of passion, even under the finest feelings, is the way to prevent, instead of promoting usefulness. A parent, overwhelmed with surprise and anxiety, at a calamitous accident that has befallen a child, shall be incapable either of reflection or activity, and shall sometimes even need the assistance which he ought to give. But independently of this, there are certainly some persons who contract a habit of indifference as to the wants or desires of others, and are not willing to put themselves to any inconvenience, unless their own particular concerns may be promoted at the same time.

In opposition to this, I mean to recommend to you a disposition to oblige, not merely by civil expressions, and an affable deportment, but by taking a real interest in the affairs of others. Be not unwilling to lend your advice, your assistance, your interest, to those that need them. Those who cannot spare pecuniary assistance, may do many acts of valuable friendship. Let every neighbor perceive that you are not ready to quarrel needlessly, nor insist pertinaciously on trifles; and if you live to obtain credit and influence, let them be employed to assist the deserving of every class. If you undertake to do the business of others, attend to it with the same fidelity, and if possible, with greater punctuality than you would to your own. Some are ready to excuse or justify a contrary conduct, by complaining of the ingratitude or injustice of mankind. But, in my opinion, these complaints are contrary to truth and experience. There may be many particular

persons both ungrateful and unjust; but in the world in general, there will be found a clearness of discernment, and an exactness of retribution. Our Saviour tells us, with respect to one fault, that of rash judging, what is equally true as to injuries of every kind, "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." Luke vi. 38.

This, in my opinion, may and ought to be understood both ways. As the churlish Nabal generally meets with his match, so persons of a humane and friendly disposition shall reap the fruits of it to them or theirs. The truth is, the disposition itself is not in its perfection, but when there is no regard to an immediate return. If you give, looking for a speedy recompense, it is not giving, but selling. You may, however, safely trust to the promise of God: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." Eccl. xi. 1.

I have known many instances of kindnesses that were both remembered and requited, after they had been long forgotten by him who bestowed them. Nay, sometimes they may be repaid in another generation. It is no inconsiderable legacy for a man to leave to his children, that he had always been a friend to others, and never refused his assistance to those who stood in need of it.

It will not be an improper place here to introduce a few words upon a subject, which has been often handled by writers of the first class: I mean private friendship. Some writers against religion, have actually made it an objection against Christianity, that it does not recommend private friendship, or the love of our country. If this were true, it would be no fault, because the universal benevolence recommended by the gospel, includes all private affections, when they are consistent with it, and is far superior to them when they are contrary to it. But in fact, the instances of private friendship mentioned and alluded to in scripture, are a sufficient recommendation of it; and even our blessed Saviour himself is said to have distinguished the youngest of his disciples with particular

affection. I will therefore observe, with most authors, that there is no true friendship, but what is founded upon virtuous principles, and directed to virtuous purposes. To love a person who is not worthy of love, is not a virtue, but an error. Neither is there any dependance to be placed, in trying cases, upon persons unprincipled at bottom. There never was a true friend, who was not an honest man. But besides this important truth, it is further to be observed, that there is a species of friendship which is neither founded on virtue nor vice, but mere weakness of mind. Some persons, having no resources in themselves; are obliged to have recourse to some other, upon whom they may lean, and without whom they seem as if they could neither think, act, nor even exist. This sort of friendship is to be seen particularly in princes and persons of high rank, and is generally called favoritism; but the same thing may be observed in all ranks, though, in the lower, it is not so conspicuous. We may say of it, that it is like some of those plants that are false and spurious in their kind, which have some of the appearances, but want the most valuable and essential qualities of those that are genuine. Such friendships are commonly contracted by caprice or accident, and uncertain in their duration, being liable to be dissolved by the same means. Valuable friendship is the result of judgment as well as affection; it is one of the greatest comforts of life as well as one of the greatest ornaments to human nature, and its genuineness may be discerned by the following mark: that though it is particular, it is not exclusive. When there is a great, but virtuous attachment to a person who deserves it, it will make a man not less, but more friendly to all others, as opportunity or circumstances shall call him to serve them.

You will perhaps be surpris'd that as I have so often expressed a desire of your being accomplished in every respect, that I have heretofore said nothing or but little on that politeness and grace in behaviour, which is so much talk'd of, and which, in some late writings, has been so highly extoll'd. What has been already explained to you, I hope will lay the foundation for the most solid,

valuable and durable politeness. Think of others as reason and religion require you, and treat them as it is your duty to do, and will you not be far from a well-polished behaviour. As to any thing further, that is external in mode and propriety of carriage, it can never be learned but by intercourse with the best company. As to the writings above referred to, the chief of which are Rochefoucault's Maxims, and Chesterfield's Letters. I think of them as of many other free writings, that when viewed properly, they may be as useful, as by being viewed otherwise, they are generally pernicious. They contain a digested system of hypocrisy, and betray such pride and self-sufficiency, and such hatred or contempt of mankind, as may well be an antidote against the poison which they mean to convey. Nay, one would think the publication of such sentiments is ridiculous, because it is telling you that they desire to be polite, and at the same time that this politeness consists in taking you by the weak side, and displaying their own address by over-reaching yours.

I must also observe, that such writers give in general, a very unjust as well as dishonorable view of nature and mankind. I remember, indeed, Dean Swift says,

“As Rochefoucault his maxims drew

“From nature, I believe them true.”

What must I say to this? Shall I say that he did not draw his maxims from nature? I will not, because I think he did. Am I obliged then to admit them to be true? By no means. It is nature, but it is just such a view of nature, as a man without principle must take. It is in himself, that all the error and exaggeration is to be found.

Those who discover an universal jealousy, and indiscriminate contempt for mankind in general, give very little reason to think well of themselves. Probably men are neither so good as they pretend, nor so bad as they are often thought to be. At any rate, candour in sentiment as well as conduct, as it is an important duty of religion, so it is a wise maxim for the conduct of life; and I believe these two things are very seldom if ever found either separate from, or opposed to each other.

The last advice that I shall offer you, is to preserve a sacred and inviolable regard to sincerity and truth. Those who have received their education, here, or at least who have completed it, must know how much pains have been taken to establish the universal and unalterable obligation of truth. This is not however mentioned now to introduce the general subject, or to shew the guilt, folly and danger of deliberate interested falshood, but to warn you against the smaller breaches of truth now so very common, such as want of punctuality in appointments, breach of promise in small matters, officious falshoods, that is, deceiving children, sick persons or others for their good; jocular deceptions, which are not intended to continue long, or be materially hurtful to others. Not one of these is without sin before God, and they are much more hurtful than is commonly supposed. So very sacred a thing indeed is truth, that the very shadow of departure from it is to be avoided. Suppose a man only to express his present purpose as to futurity, for example, to say he will go to such a place to-morrow, though there is no proper obligation given, nor any right to require performance, yet if he does so soften, he will acquire the character of levity and unsteadiness, which will operate much to his disadvantage. Let me therefore recommend to you a strict, universal and scrupulous regard to truth—It will give dignity to your character—it will put order into your affairs; it will excite the most unbounded confidence, so that whether your view be your own interest, or the service of others, it promises you the most assured success. I am also persuaded, that there is no virtue that has a more powerful influence upon every other, and certainly, there is none by which you can draw nearer to God himself, whose distinguishing character is, that he will not, and he cannot lie.





