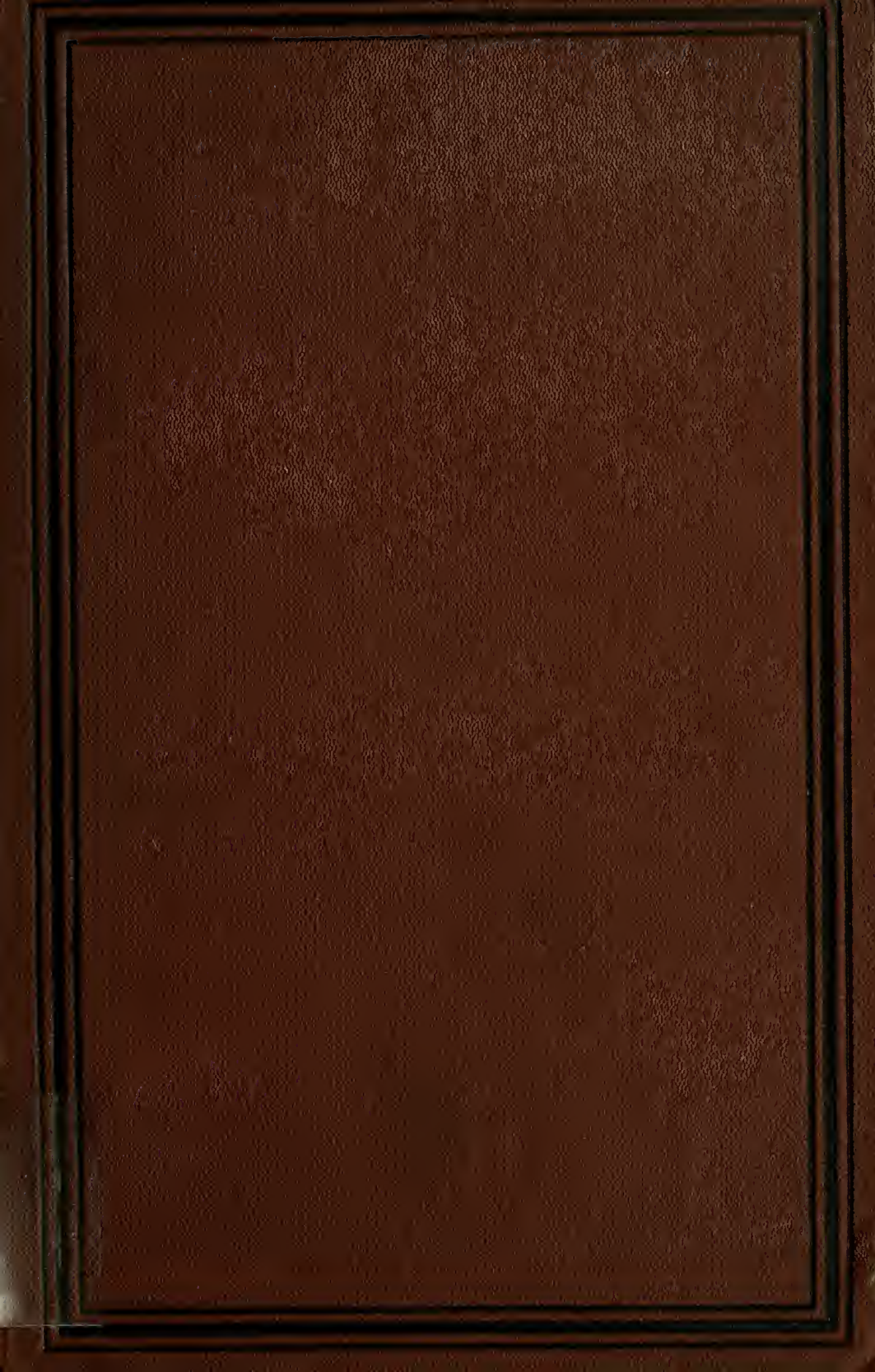




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THE  
WORKS OF THOMAS MANTON, D.D.

VOL. IX.



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THE COMPLETE WORKS  
OF  
THOMAS MANTON, D.D.

VOLUME IX.

CONTAINING

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM ;

ALSO

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER  
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SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE  
CXIX. PSALM.



# SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM.

## SERMON CLIX.

*Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.*—VER. 142.

IN this verse the word of God is set forth by a double notion, of righteousness and law; accordingly two things are predicated of it: as it is righteousness, it is said to be an everlasting righteousness; and as it is law, it is said to be the truth. Both imply our duty: as there are truths in the word, it is man's duty to believe them; as there are commands, it is man's duty to obey them. I shall treat first of the notions, secondly of the predications.

First, The notions; and there the word is first called righteousness, 'Thy righteousness.' God's righteousness is sometimes put for the righteousness which is in God himself; as ver. 137, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord;' Ps. cxlv. 17, 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways.' And sometimes for the righteousness which he requireth of us; as James i. 20, 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;' that is, the righteousness which God requireth of us; and here in the text. Once more, that righteousness which God requireth of us in his word is sometimes taken, in a limited sense, for the duties of the second table, and so usually when it is coupled with holiness, Luke i. 75; Eph. iv. 24, 'The new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness.' Holiness giveth God his due, and righteousness giveth man his due. Sometimes it is taken in a more general sense, as to imply the whole duty and perfection of man; thus righteousness when it is put alone.

In this general sense I take it here, and observe this point—

1. The word of God is righteousness. This is one of the notions by which it is expressed in this psalm; so it is called in the text.

The reasons.

[1.] Because it is the copy of that righteousness which is in God. God's natural perfections are represented in the creatures, his majesty and omnipresence in the sun, but his moral perfections in the word.

The heavens declare his excellent majesty and glory, but his law, his purity, righteousness, and holiness—Ps. xix., the sun and the law are compared together,—as the creatures in their kind set forth God, so doth the word in its kind. Well may it be called righteousness, because it is the fairest draught and representation of God in his moral perfections, the chief of which are called righteousness and holiness. The knowledge we get by the creatures tendeth to exalt God; the knowledge we get by the law to humble and abase man, because of our impurity; and therefore the prophet, when he saw God, cried out, Isa. vi. 3, ‘Woe is me! I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips;’ and David, when he contemplated the holiness of the law, cried out presently, Ps. xix. 12, ‘Lord, cleanse me from my secret sins.’

[2.] It is the rule and pattern of all righteousness and justice in man; for our righteousness is a conformity to God’s law. Indeed, habitual righteousness is a conformity to God’s nature; actual righteousness, to his law. His Spirit reneweth our nature according to the image of God, and telleth us what is pleasing to God: Isa. li. 7, ‘Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law.’ They that have the law of God in their hearts do only know righteousness, that is, know what belongs to it; the new nature is tried, and all our ways tried by it.

[3.] It is the great instrument to promote righteousness. It maketh the man that doth observe it just and righteous before God. There is a twofold righteousness before God—the righteousness of justification and the righteousness of sanctification. The righteousness of justification, that is the great truth revealed in the scriptures. Nature saw nothing of that; the heathen saw something of a breach, that there was need of appeasing God, but nothing of a righteousness before God: that secret was hid from the wise men of the world, and reserved for the scriptures; and therefore the apostle saith, Rom. iii. 21, 22, ‘But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, which is by Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all that believe.’ The law and the prophets set forth this mystery to teach men, that we are to be justified before God by faith in Christ. Nature could convince us of guilt, but not of a righteousness.

2. For the way of sanctification, or how a man that is justified should approve himself to God and men. The scripture crieth up another righteousness, that becometh justified persons; that is, the way to be righteous is to do righteousness: 1 John iii. 7, ‘Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous.’ So it is said of Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke i. 6, that ‘they were righteous before God, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.’ So Deut. vi. 25, ‘And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments, before the Lord our God, as he commanded us.’ This wisdom we learn from the word, where nothing but righteousness is recommended; for it cometh from the righteous God, who is essentially good and holy, and cannot be contrary to himself in commanding unjust things: and therefore his commandments are in all points right. There is no way right to prove principles but by arguing *ab absurdis*, and so prove

the goodness of them. What a miserable case would the world be in if there were not such a law and rule ! a place of villanies and wickedness. And therefore here is righteousness, and all righteousness ; we need not seek further for direction. Sure God can tell what will best please him, and our sense and experience inform us what things are good and honest in the sight of men.

*Use.* Let us live as becometh them that have such a righteous rule : ‘ Wisdom is justified of her children,’ Mat. xi. 19. Let us bear witness by our faith, profession, and godly life to the doctrine of God. This is to glorify the word, Acts xiii. 40, when we express the excellencies of it in our practice ; do not only approve it in our judgments, and commend it with our mouths, but express it in our lives. Practice glorifieth more than verbal praise. Let us show that the word is righteousness, that is to say, the copy of God’s righteousness, by being the rule and instrument of ours. Let us look after the righteousness of justification. We can never be truly righteous, unless we lay the foundation of the spiritual life in faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance from dead works, that maketh way for the spirit and power of godliness ; for Christ is made of God to us righteousness before he is made sanctification, 1 Cor. i. 30. There is no acceptance with God without it : Rom. v. 19, ‘ By the obedience of one, many were made righteous.’ Thereby our persons are accepted. In ourselves there is none righteous, no not one ; and it is dangerous to look after any other righteousness while this is neglected : Rom. x. 3, ‘ Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness,’ &c. Again, let me press you to look after the righteousness of sanctification, to see that we be renewed by the Spirit, and entered into a holy course ; and not only so, but we go on still in righteousness : Rev. xxii. 11, ‘ He that is righteous, let him be righteous still.’ We are renewed but in part : Prov. xv. 9, ‘ The Lord loveth him that followeth after righteousness ;’ that maketh it his business to grow more righteous every day, and increase the acts, to perfect the habit ; this earnest endeavour must never be left off.

Secondly, Now I come from the notion to the predication. This righteousness, it is an everlasting righteousness : it is so in two respects—in the constitution among men, and in the effects of it.

1. In the constitution of it. The covenant of grace is an everlasting covenant ; so it is called Heb. xiii. 20 ; and the gospel is called the ‘ everlasting gospel,’ Rev. xiv. 6 ; and ‘ I will make an everlasting covenant with you,’ Isa. lv. 3. The privileges of this covenant are eternal. Christ ‘ hath obtained an eternal redemption for us,’ Heb. ix. 12 ; Dan. ix. 24. There is an unchangeable righteousness which Christ hath established in the church ; he is the Lord our righteousness. His righteousness is still the same, and the plot was first laid in his everlasting decrees. The terms of life and salvation held forth in the new covenant are to continue for ever, no change to be expected. From the beginning of the world to the end thereof, the covenant of grace cannot cease ; the obligation still continueth ; men are for ever bound to love God and their neighbour. There shall no time come when the law of loving God and our neighbour shall be reversed and out of date. The covenant is essentially the same, under all the diver-



sity of administrations. And as the privileges, so the duties are of an eternal obligation. Among men, τὰ δίκαια κινούμενα, that is just at one time that is not just at another. Lawgivers cannot always live to see their laws executed, and men cannot foresee all occasions and inconveniences, and therefore often repeal their laws. But God is wise; he hath made an unchangeable law, and he forbiddeth things intrinsically evil, and commandeth things intrinsically good.

2. As to the effects of it, in case of obedience or disobedience. (1.) In case of disobedience, eternal wrath lighteth on them that reject this covenant, that walk contrary to it, they shall be eternally miserable: 2 Thes. i. 9, 'Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.' Not a temporal but an everlasting destruction; and Mark ix. 44, 'The worm shall never die, and the fire shall never be quenched.' An eternity of torments, because they despised everlasting mercy, and rejected the authority of an everlasting God. Having offended an infinite God, their punishment abideth on them for ever. If they will stand out their day, it is fit their recovery should be hopeless. (2.) The benefits are eternal in case of obedience. There is everlasting grace, everlasting comfort, and everlasting life: 1 John ii. 17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the word of God abideth for ever.' The Spirit is given as a comforter that shall abide for ever, John xiv. 16; and 2 Thes. ii. 16, 'God who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.' And it is fit it should be so, because it is built upon God's unchangeable love, and Christ's eternal merit and intercession. God's love is an everlasting love, Jer. xxxi. 3. The efficacy of Christ's merit never ceaseth, Heb. xiii. 8. His continual intercession ever lasteth, Heb. vii. 25, and Rom. viii. 39, 'Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ.' He liveth for ever, by which we continue for ever in the favour of God, and the covenant standeth firm between him and us; the fountain of comfort is never dried up.

*Use 1.* To inform us of the difference between the laws of God and the laws of men. There are many differences, some of which I shall touch by and by; this expression offereth two—it is righteousness, and everlasting righteousness.

1. It is righteousness. Men have and do often decree wickedness by a law, not only in the first table, where man is most blind, but also in the second; not only in their barbarous worship, their sacrificing of men, but also in their human constitutions. The Lacedemonians held it lawful to steal, if he were not taken ἐπ' αὐτῷ φέρειν, in the very act. In Cyprus they held it lawful for their virgins, if they were poor, to prostitute themselves to get a dowry or portion. By the law of the twelve tables a man might kill his wife if she smelt of wine or counterfeited his keys. And among the Romans, if a slave had killed his master, all his fellow-slaves were put to death with him, though never so innocent. By the same laws, a father might thrice sell his child; they might tear their debtors in pieces if they were not solvent. Thus blind were men in their own concerns and what made for human commerce; much more in the way of pleasing God and the interest of the world to come. Bless God for this righteous law. Again—

2. It is everlasting righteousness; not only righteous at the first giving out, but righteous in all ages and times; and should we slight this rule that will hold for ever? In the world, new lords new laws; men vary and change their designs and purposes; privileges granted to-day may be repealed to-morrow, but this word will hold true for ever; our justification by Christ is irrevocable, that part of righteousness is everlasting. Be sure you are justified now, upon terms of the gospel, and you shall be justified for ever; your forgiveness is an everlasting forgiveness, and your peace is an everlasting peace: Jer. xxxiii. 34, 'I will remember your sins no more.' So the other righteousness of sanctification, it is for ever. Approve yourselves to God now, and you will approve yourselves at the day of judgment.

*Use 2. Exhortation.*

1. Let this take us off from seeking things that have no continuance in them. The everlastingness of the word is opposed often to the transitory vanities of the world: 1 Peter i. 23-24, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.' Why should we hunt after that glory that soon fadeth? So 1 John ii. 17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' All these things change, and move up and down by divers circumrotations; we sit fast and loose in the world, but in the covenant of grace all is sure.

2. Let us choose this word to live by, that we may be partakers of that everlasting good which cometh by it. Oh, let us regard it! Eternity is concerned in it. If the righteousness of God be everlasting, let us begin betimes to get interested in it, and persevere in it to the end. Let us begin betimes, for we have but a few days to live here in the world, and so either to express our thankfulness or lay a foundation for our eternal hopes; therefore let us set about the work the sooner. And let us persevere; our care to keep this law must be perpetual, not like temporaries. Many will carry themselves well and godly for a while, but afterwards fall off; this doth not become an everlasting law; there is the same goodness in God's law that there was at first.

3. Let us comfort ourselves with the everlastingness of the privileges offered to us in God's word. The redeemed of the Lord should have an everlasting joy: Isa. xxxv. 10, 'And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.' Let other things end and change as they will, our right by the new covenant changeth not. Sometimes we are in request in the world, and sometimes in disgrace; but God's love is everlasting and sure. We are not in with him to-day and out to-morrow; he hath dealt with us upon sure and unchangeable terms; nay, when you die, you may comfort yourselves in this, Ps. ciii. 17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him, and his righteousness upon children's children.' Yea, not only in the changes of your outward condition is here an everlasting spring of comfort, but also in the ups and downs of your spiritual condition, and the clouds which now and then darken your comfort and hope in God. In a time of desertion we seem to be dead and cast off; yet remember God loves to be bound for ever: 2 Sam. xxiii. 5,

‘Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made an everlasting covenant.’ Though we are not so punctual, exact, and faithful, but are subject to many errors and failings, yet God will mind his eternal covenant: Ps. lxxxix. 33-34, ‘Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.’ Death doth not dissolve it, nor desertions break it off.

Now for the second notion by which the word of God is expressed, ‘thy law,’ from whence observe—

*Doct.* That the word of God hath the nature and force of a law.

It is often so called in scripture; not only the decalogue, which is the abridgment of all moral duties, but the whole scripture is God’s law: Isa. li. 4, ‘A law shall proceed from me;’ and Ps. i. 2, ‘His delight is in the law of God;’ and the gospel is called ‘the law of faith,’ Rom. iii. 28. Here I shall show you how necessary it was that God should give man a law, both as we are considered apart, and with respect to community; and then show that the word hath the force of a law.

1. Consider man apart. Surely the reasonable creature, as it is a creature, hath a superior to whose providence and ordering it is subject. So all the creatures have a law, by which the bounds of their motion are fixed and limited: Ps. clxviii. 6, ‘He hath established them for ever and ever; he hath made a decree which shall not pass;’ Prov. viii. 29, ‘He gave the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment.’ The sun, moon, and stars are under a law; all the creatures are balanced in a due proportion, and guided and fixed in their tract and course by an unerring hand, which is a kind of law to them. As a creature, man is subject to the direction of God’s providence, as other creatures are; but as a reasonable creature, he is capable of moral government; for so he hath a choice of his own, a power of refusing evil and choosing good. Other creatures are ruled by a rod of iron, necessitated to what they do by an act of God’s power and sovereignty; but man, being a voluntary agent, is governed by laws which may direct and oblige him to good, and warn and drive him from evil. This law was at first written upon man’s nature, and that was sufficient while he stood in his integrity to guide him and enable him to serve and please God in all things propounded to him. The law written on the heart of man was his rule and principle. But that being obliterated by the fall, it was needful that God should give a new law, to guide man to his own blessedness, and to keep him from erring. The internal principle of righteousness being lost, the laws of men could not be sufficient, for they have another end, which is the good of human society. They aim not at such a supernatural end as the enjoyment of God; their laws reach no further than the ordering of men’s outward conversations, and meddle not with the inward workings and motions of the heart, of which they can take no cognisance. These may be inordinate, do a great deal of mischief; therefore, as the wise God directed men to give laws to order men’s actions, so he would himself give laws to order the heart, which man cannot reach. Lay all these together, and there is a necessity that God should give a law to man.



2. But much more if you consider man in his community, as he is a part of that spiritual community called a church. All societies of men from the beginning of the world have found the establishing of laws the only means to preserve themselves from ruin. There is no other way against confusion; and would God leave that society which is of his own institution, that of which he is the head, and in which his honour is concerned, without a law? Deut. xxxii. 9, 'The Lord's portion is his people,' which was set apart to serve him, and to be to him for a name and a praise. Surely a people that have God so near them, and are in special relation to him, have their laws by which they may be governed and preserved as to their eternal good, unless we should say God took less care for his own people than for others. This necessity is the greater because this society is spiritual; though made up of visible men, yet combined for spiritual ends, commerce and communion with God, and that mostly in their spirits, which maketh this society the hardest to be governed, and this, the most scattered and dispersed of all societies throughout all parts of the earth, should therefore be knit together with the strongest bonds. Surely then there needeth a common law, whereby they may be united in their conjunction with Christ, the head, and one another, that it may not be broken in pieces; and this to be given by God, that he may preserve his own authority and interest among them.

This law is the scripture, those sacred digests in which God hath discovered not only his wisdom and justice, but his will and imperial power, what he will have us do. The one showeth the equity, the other the necessity of our obedience; surely this is his law or none. The church to whom the law was given, God hath constituted the keeper of its own records; never acknowledge another; nor can any other make any tolerable pretence.

Now, having brought the matter home, I shall show you wherein it hath the nature and force of a law, as we commonly take the word; and here I shall—

1. Show you wherein it agrees.
2. Wherein it differs from the ordinary laws of men.
1. Wherein it agreeth.

[1.] A law is an act of power and sovereignty by which a superior declareth his will to those that are subject to him. There are two branches of the supreme power—legislation and jurisdiction; giving the law, and governing according to the law so given. And so God's power over the reasonable creature is seen in legislation, and in the administration of his providence there is his jurisdiction. In the scripture he hath given the law, and he will take an account of the observance of it; in part here, at the petty sessions; hereafter, more fully and clearly at the day of general judgment. But for the present, here is God's power seen over the creature in appointing him such a law. God hath the greatest right and authority to command: Isa. xxxiii. 22, 'The Lord is our judge and our lawgiver.'

[2.] That there is not only direction given to us, but an obligation laid upon us. There is this difference between a law and a rule—a bare rule is for information, a law for obligation. So herein the word of God agrees with a law; it is not only the result of God's wisdom,

but the effect of his legislative will. He would not only help and instruct the creature in his duty, but oblige him by his authority. *Decretum necessitatem facit, exhortatio liberam voluntatem excitat*, saith the canonist. Exhortation and advice properly serveth to quicken one that is free, but a decree and a law imposeth a force, a necessity upon him. So Hierome, lib. ii. *contra Jovin—Ubi consilium datur operantis arbitrium est, ubi præceptum necessitas servitutis*. A counsel and a precept differ; a precept respects subjects, a counsel, friends. The scriptures are not only God's counsel, but his precept. There is a coactive power in his laws. God hath not left the creature at liberty to comply with his directions if he please, but hath left a strict charge upon him.

[3.] Every law hath a sanction, otherwise it were but an arbitrary direction; the authority might be contemned unless it hath a sanction, that is, confirmed by rewards and punishments; so hath God given his law under the highest penalties: Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned;' Gal. vi. 8, 'If ye sow to the flesh, of the flesh ye shall reap corruption;' Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.' God telleth them what will come of it, and commandeth them to abstain as they will answer to God at their utmost peril. The obligation of a law, first, inferreth a fault, that is, contempt of authority; so doth God's, as it is his law, and so it will infer a fault in us to break it; and as we reject his counsel, it inferreth punishment, and the greater punishment the more we know of God's law: Rom. ii. 9, 'Tribulation, wrath, and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil, upon the Jew first, and also upon the Gentile.' Why the Jew first? They knew God's mind more clearly.

[4.] A sanction supposeth a judge, who will take an account whether his law be broken or kept, otherwise all the promises and threatenings were in vain. The law, that is the rule of our obedience, is the rule of his process; so the word of God hath this in common with other laws; therefore God hath appointed a judge and a judgment-day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom he hath appointed; and 2 Thes. i. 8, 'He will come in flaming fire, to render vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel.' According to the law they have been under, Gentiles, Christians, they must all appear before the Lord, to give an account how they have observed God's law. Now in patience he beareth with men, yet sometimes interposeth by particular judgments, but then they shall receive their final doom.

2. Let us see wherein they differ from ordinary laws among men.

[1.] Man in his laws doth not debate matters with his subjects, but barely enjoineth and interposeth authority; but God condescendeth to the infirmities of man, and cometh down from the throne of his sovereignty, and reasoneth with and persuadeth and prayeth men that they will not forsake their own mercies, but yield obedience to his laws, which he convinceth them are for their good: Isa. xlv. 8, 'Remember this, show yourselves men; bring it to mind again, ye transgressors;' Isa. i. 18, 'Let us reason together, saith the Lord.' God is pleased to stoop to sorry creatures, to argue with them, and make them judges in their own cause: Micah vi. 2, 3, he will plead with Israel, 'O my

people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? 'Testify against we.' He will plead with Israel about the equity of his laws, whether they are not for their good. It is a lessening of authority for princes to court their subjects—they command them; but God will beseech and expostulate and argue with his people; 2 Cor. v. 20, he draws with the cords of a man, sweetly alluring their hearts to him.

[2.] The laws of God bind the conscience and the immortal souls of men; the laws of men only bind the behaviour of the outward man. they cannot order the heart. God takes notice of a wanton glance, of an unclean thought, a carnal motion, Mat. v. 28. Men's words and actions are liable to the laws of men; they cannot know the thoughts; but the law of God falls upon the counsels of the heart: Rom. vii. 14, 'For I know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal;' Heb. iv. 12, 'It is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.'

[3.] The law of God immutably and indispensably bindeth all men without distinction; no man beggeth exemption here because of their condition; there is no immunity and freedom from God's law. Men may grant immunity from their laws: 1 Sam. xvii. 25, 'He will make his father's house free in Israel.' Men's laws are compared to spiders' webs; the lesser flies are entangled, great ones break through. God doth not exempt any creature from duty to him, but speaketh impartially to all.

[4.] Men's laws do more propend to punishment than they do to reward. For robbers and manslayers death is appointed, but the innocent subject hath only this reward, that he doth his duty, and escapeth these punishments. In very few cases doth the law promise rewards; the inflicting of punishments is its proper work, because its use is to restrain evil; but God's law propoundeth punishments equal to the rewards; eternal life on the one hand, as well as eternal death on the other: Deut. xxx. 15, 'See I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil;' because the use of God's law is to guide men to their happiness. This should be much observed; it is *legis candor*, the equity and condescension of man's law to speak of a reward; it commands many things, forbids many things, but still under a penalty; that is the great design of man's power; in very few cases doth it invite men to their duty by a reward; only in such cases where every good man would not do his duty. It is more exact and vigilant in its proper and natural work of punishing the disobedient, that wickedness should not go unpunished; the common peace requireth that; but that good should be rewarded, there is no human necessity. Human laws were not invented to reward good, but prevent evil.

*Use.* Let us humble ourselves that we bear so little respect to God's word, that we so boldly break it, and are so little affected with our breaches of it. Do we indeed consider that this is God's law? The greatest part of mankind fear the prince more than God, and the gallows more than hell. If every vain thought or carnal motion in our hearts were as the cutting of a finger or burning in the hand, men would seem more afraid of that than they are of hell. Nay, I will tell you, men can dispense with God's law to comply with man's: Hosea



v. 11, 'Ephraim is oppressed, and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment.' A little danger will draw men into the snare, when hell will not keep them from it. Oh, let us rouse up ourselves! Is not man God's subject? Is he not a more powerful sovereign than all the potentates in the world? Doth he not in his word give judgment on the everlasting estate of men, and will his judgment be in vain? Hath not God appointed a day when all matters shall be taken into consideration? If you can deny these truths, go on in sin and spare not; but if conscience be sensible of God's authority, oh! break off your sins by repentance, and walk more cautiously for the time to come! Every sin is *ἀνομία*, 1 John iii. 4, a breach of God's eternal law; and will God always wink at your disloyalty to him?

Nothing remaineth to be spoken to but the last clause, 'Thy law is truth.'

*Doct.* God's law is truth.

1. I shall show in what sense it is said to be truth.

2. The reasons why it is truth.

3. The end of this truth.

First, In what sense it is said to be truth.

1. It is the chief truth; there is some truth in the laws of men and the writings of men, even of heathens; but they are but sorry fragments and scraps of truth, that have escaped since the fall; but the truth of the word is transcendent to that of bare reason. Here are truths of the greatest concernment, matters propounded that are very comfortable and profitable to lost sinners, 1 Tim. ii. 16. Here moral duties are advanced to the highest pitch: Deut. iv. 6, 'Keep therefore and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations.' The end of these is not only to regulate your commerce with men, but to guide you in your communion with God, and help you to the everlasting enjoyment of him.

2. It is the only truth, that is, the only revelation of the mind of God that you can build upon; it is the rule of truth. A thing may be true that is not the rule of truth. There is *veritas regulata*, and *veritas regulans*; the word is the measure and standard, and they are true or false as they agree or disagree with it. Every custom and tradition must be tried upon it; from the beginning it was not so; from the beginning, my Christianity is Jesus Christ. We must not attend to what others did, but what Christ did, who is before all; every dictate of reason must be tried by it, for here is the highest reason. It is written to make the man of God perfect, or else it cannot guide you to your happiness, 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16. Every revelation must be tried by it, Gal. i. 8. If an angel or man bring any doctrine which differs from or is besides the written word, it is a cursed doctrine: this is the rule.

3. It is the pure truth; in it there is nothing but the truth, without the mixture of falsehood; every part is true as truth itself. It is true in the promises, true in the threatenings, true in the doctrines, true in the histories, true in the precepts, true in the prohibitions. God will make it good to a tittle. True in moralities, true in the mysteries of faith; not only true in duties that concern man and man, but in the

sublimar truths that concern commerce with God, where nature is more blind: Ps. xix. 9, 'The testimonies of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' It is true where a carnal man would not have it true, in the curses and threatenings. If God's word be true, woe to them that remain in a sinful way, they shall find it true shortly, and feel what they will not believe. It is true where a godly man feareth it will not be true; no promises contradicted by sense but will prove true in their performance. Whatsoever, in the hour of temptation, carnal reason may judge to the contrary, within a while you will see your unbelieving fears confuted.

4. It is the whole truth; it containeth all things necessary for the salvation of those that yield up themselves to be instructed by it: John xiv. 26, 'He shall teach you all things,' and remember you of all things;' John xvi. 13, 'Lead you into all truth;' in all things that pertain to religion and our present conduct towards everlasting happiness. Therefore nothing is to be hearkened to contrary to what God hath revealed in his word; there is no room left for tradition, nor for extraordinary revelations; all that is necessary for the church is revealed there; it is a full perfect rule.

Secondly, The reasons.

1. From the author; God is a God of truth, and nothing but truth can come from him, for God cannot lie, Titus i. 2. The truth of the law dependeth upon the truth of God; therefore it must needs be without error; yea, it corrects all error; if God could deceive or be deceived, you might suspect his word.

2. The matter itself; it commends itself to our consciences by the manifestation of the truth: 2 Cor. iv. 2, 'Approving yourselves by the word of truth,' 2 Cor. vi. 7. If the heart be not strangely perverted, and become an incompetent judge by obstinate atheism and corrupt affections, it cannot but own these truths to be of God: 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,' 1 Cor. iv. 4.

3. The end of it, which is to regulate man and sanctify man. Now it were strange if he should be made better by a lie and a cheat: John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' Certainly it is the most convenient instrument to reduce man to his wits, and make him live like a man.

4. It pretends to be the law of God; it is so, or else it would be the greatest cheat in the world; for it speaketh to us from God all along, and by virtue of his authority. None can be so brutish as to think that the wisest course of doctrines that ever the world was acquainted with is a mere imposture.

*Use 1.* To commend the word of God to us; we cannot have true doctrine, nor true piety, nor true consolation without the scriptures. Not true doctrine: Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.' It is to be condemned of falsehood, if not according to the word. You cannot have true holiness, for holiness is but scripture digested and put in practice, James i. 18. The foundation of the spiritual life is laid in the word; scripture faith and scripture repentance are still fed by the word. It teacheth us how to believe, and how to repent, and how to pray, and how to live, especially the heavenly life; and there

can be no true comfort and peace without the word : Rom. xv. 4, 'That ye through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.'

Use 2. 1. We should consider the truth of the word, partly in the general, for the strengthening and settling of our faith, and to make it more clear and solid and certain : Eph. i. 13, 'In whom ye trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth.' When boisterous temptations would carry us to some evil, which God hath forbidden and severely threatened, that the point of the sword of the Spirit be put to the bosom of it, Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

2. When you are settling your souls as to the main point of acceptance with God : 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' The word will never deceive them that seek righteousness there.

3. When difficulties arise that oppose the promise or expectation of relief according to the promise, you should urge the truth of the word in the very face of difficulty : 'Thy law is truth.' Take Paul's instance, Acts xxvii. God by promise gave all that sailed with Paul in the ship their lives, yet how many difficulties came to pass ! At first, when they were in the Adriatic Sea for so many days and nights, and had neither seen sun nor stars, they knew not where they were, nor whither they should go ; here was little appearance of God's making good his word to Paul. Another difficulty fell out, they feared they were near some country ; they sounded and found they were near some land, but what land they could not conjecture, and were afraid of being split in pieces against the rocks ; but the shipmen, that knew the danger of these seas, they must go out of the ship, they would make use of their long boat, and so they were ready to miscarry in the sight of the land, but Paul prevented them. And after it was day, the men were so spent because of long fasting and conflicting with the waves, they could not ply the oar. Another difficulty, they were where two seas met ; they ran the ship aground and resolved to kill Paul and the rest of the prisoners, lest they should swim to land ; but the captain, willing to save Paul, prevented that purpose ; and so at length they came all to shore, though followed with difficulty upon difficulty. God made good his promise to a tittle, ver. 44. Pray observe how Paul urged God's promise against the greatest difficulties, as sufficient ground of encouragement to expect relief : ver. 25, 'For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.'

## SERMON CLX.

*Trouble and anguish have taken hold of me, yet thy commandments are my delights.*—VER. 143.

IN the words we have—

1. David's temptation, *trouble and anguish have taken hold of me.*
2. David's exercise under that temptation, *thy commandments are my delight.*



3. The benefit of that exercise, notwithstanding the greatness of the temptation, *yet*. It is propounded with a *non obstante*.

First, The temptation was very great, for he speaketh of trouble and anguish. The joining of synonymous words, or words of a like import and signification, increaseth the sense; and so it sheweth his affection was not ordinary; yea, both these words have their particular use and emphasis. Trouble may imply the outward trial, and the difficulties and straits he was in; anguish, inward afflictions: the one, the matter of the trial, and the other the sense of it. The other expression also is to be observed, 'Have taken hold of me;' in the Hebrew, 'have found me;' so the Septuagint renders it, *θλάψεις καὶ ἀνάγκαι εὗροσάν με*; and the vulgar Latin out of them, *tribulatio et angustie invenerunt me*, 'have found me,' that is, 'come upon me,' as the expression intimateth. Troubles are said to find us, because they are sent to seek us out, and in time will light upon us. We should not run into them, but if they find us in our duty, we should not be troubled at them. Sometimes in scripture we are said to find trouble, and sometimes trouble to find us. We are said to find trouble. David said, Ps. cxvi. 3, 'I found trouble.' And so now here in the text, trouble and anguish found him. There is no difference, or if any, the one noteth a surprise. Trouble findeth us when it cometh unlooked for; our finding it noteth our willingness to undergo it, when the will of God is so, especially for righteousness' sake.

Secondly, David's exercise under this great temptation, 'Thy commandments are my delights.' Where we have—

1. The object, 'thy commandments.' The commandment is put for the word in general, which includeth promises as well as precepts, the whole doctrine of life and salvation. However, the property of the form is not altogether to be overlooked; even in the commandments or the conscience of his duty, he took a great deal of comfort.

2. The affection, 'delight.' He had said before that he did not forget God's statutes when he was small and despised, ver. 141; now he delighted in them. This was his great love to the word, that he could find sweetness in it when it brought him trouble, such sweetness as did allay all his sorrows, and overcome the bitterness of them.

3. The degree, 'delights,' in the plural number; he did greatly delight in it. *Omnis oblectatio mea*, saith Junius—thy commandments to me are instead of all manner of delights and pleasure in the world.

Thirdly, The next is the opposition of this exercise to that temptation, 'yet.' It is not in the original, but necessarily implied, and therefore well inserted by our translators, to show that the greatness of his straits and troubles did not diminish his comfort, but increase it rather. The points are these:—

1. God seeth it necessary sometimes to exercise his people with a great deal of trouble.

2. This trouble may breed great vexation and anguish of spirit, even in a gracious heart.

3. Notwithstanding this trouble and anguish, gracious hearts will manifest their graciousness by delighting in the word.

4. They that delight in the word will find more comfort in their

afflictions than troubles can take from them, or such sweetness as will overcome the sense of all their sorrows. This was always David's help to delight in the word, and this brought him comfort though in deep troubles.

For the first point, that God seeth it necessary sometimes to exercise his people with a great deal of trouble. Though they are highly in favour with God, yet they have their share of troubles as well as others. This is true if you—

1. Consider the people of God in their collective body and community, which is called the church. It is the church's name: Isa. liv. 11, 12, 'Oh thou afflicted, and tossed with tempest!' Names are taken *a notionibus*; things are known and distinguished by their name; it is one of the way-marks to heaven: Acts xiv. 22, 'Through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God;' as the way to Canaan lay through a howling wilderness. If we were told before that we should meet with such and such marks in our journey to such a place, if we found them not, we should have cause to suspect we were out of our way. From the beginning of the world, the church hath always been bred up under troubles, and inured to the discipline of the cross: Ps. cxxxix. 1, 'Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say.' The spirit of enmity wrought betimes. The first family that ever was in the world yielded Abel the proto-martyr, and Cain the patriarch of unbelievers. While the church kept in families, the outward estate of God's people was worse than their neighbours. Abraham was a sojourner, though owned and blessed by God, when the Canaanites were possessors, and dwelt in walled towns. Jacob's family grew up by degrees into a nation, but Esau's presently multiplied into many dukes and princes. And as they grew up, they grew up in affliction. Egypt was a place of retreat for them for a while, but before they got out of it, it proved a house of bondage. Their deliverance brought them into a wilderness, where want made them murmur, but oftener wantonness. But then God sent fiery serpents, and broke them, and afflicted them with other judgments. After forty years' wandering in the wilderness, they are brought into Canaan, a land of rest; but it afforded them little rest, for they forfeited it almost as soon as they conquered it; it flowed with milk and honey, but mixed with gall and wormwood. Their story, as it is delivered in the book of God, acquaints you with several varieties and intermixtures of providence, till wrath came upon them to the utmost, till God saw fit to enlarge the pale and lines of communication by treating with other nations. Now, if the Old Testament church were thus afflicted, much more the New. God discovered his approbation and improbation then more by temporal mercies and temporal judgments. The promises run to us in another strain; and since life and immortality were brought to light in the gospel, we must not expect to be so delicately brought up as never to see an evil day. He hath told us, 2 Tim. iii. 12, 'We must be conformed to our head,' Rom. viii. 29; and expect to pledge Christ in his bitter cup, and our condition must inform us that our hopes were not in this world, 1 Cor. xv. 19. In the gospel dispensation God would deal forth temporal blessings more sparingly, and spiritual with a fuller hand; the ex-

perience of all ages verifieth this. When religion began first to fly abroad into all lands, the pagans first persecuted it, and then the pseudo-Christians; the holiest and best people were maligned, and bound, and butchered, and racked, and stoned, but still they multiplied. It were easy to tire you with various instances in every age. Those that went home to God were those that came out of tribulations, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, Rev. vii. 14. There is always something set afoot to try God's servants, and in the latter times the roaring lion is not grown more gentle and tame, rather more fierce and severe: Rev. xii. 12, 'For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.' Dying beasts struggle most. As his kingdom beginneth to shake, so he will be most fierce and cruel for the supporting of it.

2. As to particular persons: 'The whole creation groaneth,' Rom. viii. 22; and God's children bear a part in the concert; they have their share in the world's miseries, and domestical crosses are common to them with other men in the world; yea, their condition is worse than others: chaff and corn are threshed in the same floor, but the corn is grinded in the mill and baked in the oven. Jeremiah was in the dungeon when the city was besieged. The world hateth them more than others, and God loveth them more than others. The world hateth them because they are so good, and God correcteth them because they are no better. There is more care exercised about a vine than a bramble. God will not let them perish with the world. Great receipts call for great expenses first or last. God seeth it fitting, sometimes at first setting forth, as the old Germans were wont to dip their children in the Rhine to harden them, so to season them for their whole course; they must bear the yoke from their youth or first acquaintance with God, Heb. x. 32. Sometimes God lets them alone while they are young and raw, and of little experience, as we are tender of trees newly planted, as Jacob drove as the little ones were able to bear: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'He will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able.' They are let alone till middle age, till they are of some standing in religion: Heb. xi. 24, 'Moses when he was come to years,' μέγας γενόμενος. Sometimes let alone till their latter time, and their season of fighting cometh not till they are ready to go out of the world, that they may die fighting, and be crowned in the field. But first or last, the cross cometh, and there is a time to exercise our faith and patience before we inherit the promises. I will not enlarge in the common-place of afflictions, and tell you how necessary the cross is to subdue sin, which God will do in an accommodate way to weaken pride, to reclaim us from our wanderings, to increase grace, to make us mindful of heavenly things; these are discussed in other verses: to make us retreat to our great privileges, to stir us up to prayer, &c. *Tribulatio tam nobis necessaria, quam ipsa vita, immo magis necessaria, multoque utilior quam totius mundi opes, et dignitates*, saith Luther—we think wealth is necessary for us, dignity and esteem is necessary for us; no, affliction is necessary for us: 1 Peter i. 6, 'If need be, you are in heaviness,' &c.

Use 1. Let us look for troubles and provide for them. We shall



not always have a life of ease and peace; the times will not always be friendly to religion: 'Then had the churches rest,' Acts ix. 31; halcyon days. The enmity of wicked men will not always lie asleep; we would gather rust and grow dead, therefore look for them. If because you are Christians you promise yourselves a long lease of temporal happiness, free from troubles and afflictions, it is as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself peace and continual truce with the enemy; or as if a mariner committing himself to the sea for a long voyage, should promise himself nothing but fair and calm weather, without waves and storms; so irrational it is for a Christian to promise himself rest here upon earth. Well, then, let us learn beforehand how to be abased and how to abound, Phil. iv. 12. He that is in a journey to heaven must be provided for all weathers; though it be sunshine when he first sets forth, a storm will overtake him before he cometh to his journey's end. It is good to be fore-armed; afflictions will come, and we should prepare accordingly. We enter upon the profession of godliness upon these terms, to be willing to suffer afflictions if the Lord see fit; and therefore we should arm ourselves with a mind to endure them, whether they come or no. God never intended that Isaac should be sacrificed, yet he will have Abraham lay the knife to his throat. Sorrows foreseen leave not so sad an impression upon the spirit. *Tela promissa minus feriunt*. The evil is more familiarised before it come: Job iii. 25, 'The evil that I feared is come upon me.' When our fears prophesy, we smart less; it allayeth the offence; we meet with nothing but what we thought of before: John xvi. 1, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended.'

*Use 2.* If you are under afflictions, *μὴ ξενίζεσθε*, 1 Peter iv. 12, do not strange at it, more than at night and day, showers and sunshine; as these things fall out in the course of nature, so do troubles and afflictions in the course of God's providence; it were a wonder if otherwise. We do not wonder to see a shower of rain fall, or a cloudy day succeed a fair: 1 Peter v. 9, 'All these things are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' All the rest of God's people are fellow-soldiers in this conflict.

*Use 3.* When we are out of affliction, let us bless God that we are out of the affliction. The greatness of the trouble, danger, misery, straits whereinto God doth cast his own doth lay a greater obligation of thankfulness upon those that are free from those evils. If thou beest not thankful for thy health, go to the lazariahouses, look upon the afflicted state of God's people, and that may quicken you to thankfulness for being freed from them.

*Use 4.* Advice; do not draw sufferings upon yourselves by your own rashness and folly: James i. 2, 'Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.' We must not seek or desire trouble, but bear it when God layeth it on us. Christ hath taught us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.' It is a folly for us to cast ourselves upon it; if we draw hatred upon ourselves, and run headlong into dangers without necessity, we must make ourselves amends by repentance, otherwise God will not. If a man set his house on fire, he is liable to the law; if it be fired by others, or by an ill accident, he is pitied and

relieved. We are to take our own cross when made to our hands by God's providence, not make it for ourselves; not to fill our own cup, but drink it off if God put it into our hands. We must come honestly by our crosses as well as by our comforts, and must have a call for what we suffer as well as for what we do, if we would have comfort in our sufferings.

*Doct.* This trouble may breed much vexation and anguish of spirit even in a gracious soul. David speaketh of anguish as well as trouble.

1. Partly from nature. God's children have the feelings of nature as well as others. Christ Jesus, to show the truth of our nature, would express our affections; he had his fears and tears, Heb. v. 7, and so hath legitimated our fears and sorrows. It is an innocent affection to have a dislike of what is contrary to us, to our natural interest; to be without natural affection is among the vices. And—

2. Partly from grace. The children of God are more sensible than others, because they have a reverence for every providence, and look upon it as a good piece of religious manners to observe when God striketh, and to be humble when God is angry, Jer. v. 3; slight spirits are not so much affected. Ordinarily they see not God, nor own God in every stroke; but when the windows of heaven are opened, and the mouth of the great deep below, there must needs be a great sense.

3. Yet there is in it weakness and a mixture of corruption, which may come from an impatience of the flesh, which would fain be at ease: Gen. xlix. 15, 'Rest is good.' Therefore we are filled with anguish when troubled, either from distrust, or at least from inattentiveness to the promises. As there is a negative faith in the wicked, not contradicting the truth of the word, so a negative distrust in the godly, not regarding, not minding the promise, or not regarding the grounds of comfort which it offereth to us; as Hagar saw not the well that was nigh her till God opened her eyes, Gen. xxi. 19; so Mark vi. 52, 'They considered not the miracle of the loaves;' therefore are amazed in themselves beyond measure. 'Have ye forgotten the five loaves and two fishes?' Heb. xii. 5, 'And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as unto children.' Yea, sometimes there may be positive distrust, or actual refusing comfort: Ps. lxxvii. 2, 'My soul refused to be comforted.' As they may not mind comfort, so in great troubles refuse comfort in greater distempers.

4. Sorrow and trouble may revive inward trouble. Affliction in itself is a part of the law's curse, and may revive something of bondage in the hearts of God's children, which is good and useful so far as it quickeneth us to renew our reconciliation with God. Spirits entened by religion are more apprehensive of God's displeasure under afflictions: Num. xii. 14, 'If her father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed?' If it humble under the mighty hand of God, it is well; but when it filleth us with perplexities and amazement, like wild bulls in a net, or produceth uncomely sorrow, roaring like bears, or mourning as men without hope, it is naught.

*Use.* Let us take notice how affliction worketh. There is a double extreme, slighting the hand of God, or fainting under it, Heb. xii. 5; we must beware of both. There must be a sense, but it must be kept within bounds; without a sense there can be no improvement; to



despise them is to think them fortuitous. They come from God; their end is repentance, their cause is sin. Two things men cannot endure to have despised, their love and their anger. When David's love was slighted, he vowed to cut off all that pertained to Nabal; and Nebuchadnezzar, when his anger was despised, commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter. Nor fainting, for that excludeth God's comforts. God hath the whole guiding and ordering the affliction, and while the rod is in his hand there is no danger. He is a wise God, and cannot be overseen; a God of judgment, by whom all things are weighed, 1 Sam. ii. 3; every drachm and scruple of the cross; a just God, and will punish no more than is deserved: Job xxxiv. 23, 'He will not lay upon man more than is right.' As well no more than is meet, as no more than is right. He is a good God, does only what our need and profit requireth: 'For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,' Lam. iii. 33.

*Doct.* That it is the property of a gracious soul to delight in God's commandments.

It was David's practice, and it is the mark of a blessed man: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord;' and Rom. vii. 22, 'I delight in the law after the inward man;' and Ps. cxii. 1, 'Blessed is the man that delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Delight in moral things, saith Aquinas, is the rule by which we may judge of men's goodness or badness—*Delectatio est quies voluntatis in bono*; men are good and bad as the objects of their delight are; they are good who delight in good things, and they evil who delight in evil things.

We shall consider the nature of delight—

1. In the causes.

2. In the effects of it.

First, The causes are—

1. Proportion and suitableness. Sensitive creatures delight much in such food as is agreeable to their nature. Now the commandments are suitable to the renewed heart: 'The law is in their heart,' Ps. xl. 8; and Ps. xxxvii. 31, 'The law of his God is in his heart.' Divine qualities are planted there, which suit with the rule of holiness and righteousness, Eph. iv. 24. And this is the sum of the law or commandments of God.

2. A second cause is possession of it and communion with it. *Oritur*, saith Aquinas, *ex præsentiali connaturalis boni*. Now one may be said to possess the law or enjoy the law in regard of the knowledge of it or obedience to it: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' The knowledge of the law, so it be not superficial and fleshly, but full and thorough and savoury, is very comfortable, and goeth toward a good note; but obedience to the law is the cause of delight therein. God's servants rejoice when they can bring on their hearts with any life and power in the way of God's testimonies: Ps. cxix. 14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' Thence cometh their comfort and obedience.

3. A third cause of delight is a precedent love of the object. Love is a complacency in and propension towards that which is good,

absolutely considered both in the presence and absence of it. Desire noteth the absence of a good, delight the presence and fruition of it. Therefore a love of the object delighted in is essentially pre-supposed to delight. So that it is impossible for anything to be delighted in but it is first loved. We have experience that many things are delightful in themselves, and known to be such, which yet do not actually delight if they be hated. A man may taste of the sweetness of honey, yet if he hath an antipathy against it he may loathe it. David in this psalm pre-supposeth love as antecedent to delight: Ps. cxix. 47, 'I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.' Carnal men cannot say so; 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light,' John iii. 20. The renewed only love the commandments. Yea, it doth not only pre-suppose a love of simple complacency, but also a love of desire; for all things are first desired before delighted in. None can truly delight in obedience but such as desire it. Such as can say with David, ver. 40, 'Behold, I have longed after thy precepts;' and ver. 131, 'I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed after thy commandments.' Now all such are blessed, Mat. v. 5.

Secondly, Let us consider the effects.

1. The first is *dilatatio cordis*, the enlarging of the heart; it openeth and wideneth the heart towards the reception of the law, and maketh it more capacious and comprehensive thereof than otherwise it would be: Ps. cxix. 32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt have enlarged my heart.' The heart is at ease and in a commodious condition, as a body that is in a large and fit place, where it is not straitened; and this is as oil to the wheels.

2. *Delectatio causat sui sitim et desiderium*. Delight in an object causeth a thirst of itself, and more of itself. Even the angels and blessed spirits feel this effect of delight, that it never cloyeth, but they desire more of their own happiness. Much more doth it work so in us, who are in such an imperfect state of enjoyment, upon a twofold account:—

[1.] The objects of spiritual delight are perfect, but the acts whereby we enjoy and possess those objects are imperfect. God is an infinite and all-satisfying good, but the acts whereby we enjoy him here in this life, whereby we have union and communion with him, are imperfect. We know, believe, love, hope but in part, 1 Cor. xiii. 9. Hereupon that delight which ariseth from the imperfect fruition of God here in this life stirreth up to an eager desire after fuller fruition, and unto a further enlargement and intension of those acts whereby such fruition is attained, or wherein it consisteth; still thirsting after more when tasted, 1 Peter ii. 3, 4.

[2.] Spiritual delights may be said to create a desire, as desire importeth a denial or exclusion of loathing; for the objects of spiritual delight and the acts whereby they are enjoyed can never exceed the degree and measure required in them, unless by accident, by reason of some bodily act concurrent therewith, and subservient unto the spiritual operation. The desire can never be too great; the expression of it may be burdensome. We may easily exceed the bounds of moderation in carnal things, but not in spiritual; they can never be

too high and intense. Therefore fresh desires and earnest longings are still kindled and quickened in us ; it never dulls the appetite, but draweth out the soul further and further, and cannot be too eager and zealous after holiness.

3. Another effect of delight is *perficit operationem*, it makes the operation to its object more perfect than otherwise it would be. As a motive or means, it exciteth to a greater care and diligence in promoting the end which we pursue. The delight in the law helpeth to perfect our meditation therein and observation thereof ; by its sweetness it quickeneth, provoketh, and allureth to a greater zeal in both. Delight maketh all things easy : 1 John v. 3, ' All her ways are ways of pleasantness,' Prov. iii. 17 ; ' The Sabbath is a delight,' Isa. lviii. 13. It facilitates duties, and removes difficulties in working.

Now this delight must be sincere, otherwise they are but like the carnal Jews who did delight to know his ways, Isa. lviii. 2. It must not be on foreign reasons. And then it must be universal, otherwise it is but like Herod, who ' heard John gladly, and did many things,' &c., Mark vi. 20. It must be deeply rooted, otherwise it is but like the seed which fell on the stony ground, ' which received the word with joy, but dureth but for a while,' Mat. xiii. 20.

*Use 1.* To show how far they are from the temper of God's children whose delight is in sin or the pleasures of the flesh. These have dreggy, muddy souls ; their hearts are on sports, plays, merry-meetings. These desires are soon cloyed, leave a bitterness in the soul ; till we condemn them, we are never fit for a holy life. See Gregory de Valentia.

*Use 2.* Have we this delight ? The sincerity may be discerned—

1. By the extent. It is extended to all parts of the word, delight in the promises and precepts. To be partial in the law, hypocrites can well allow, Mal. ii. 9.

2. It will be discerned by the effects of it. You will often consult with it : Ps. cxix. 24, ' Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.'

3. It will be a perpetual delight : Job xxvii. 10, ' Will he delight himself in the Almighty ? will he always call upon God ? ' You will own it in affliction, as in the text. Many will delight in God's word when prosperity accompanieth it, but not in trouble and anguish. You will delight in obedience, and in the way of his testimonies ; not talk of it, but do it. The young man's delight in Dinah made him circumcise himself, Gen. xxxiv. 19.

Lastly, compare it with your delight in things sensible, temporal, and corporeal. If it be sincere and cordial, it will not only equal, but surmount these : ver. 72, ' The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver ; ' and ver. 162, ' I rejoice in thy word as one that findeth great spoil.' Spiritual good is greater than corporal, our conjunction with it is more intimate, greater and firmer. The part gratified is more noble, the soul than the body ; it will make these die that the other may live.

*Use 3.* Let us be exhorted to do what we can for the begetting, increasing, and cherishing this delight in our hearts. If you love God, you cannot but love his word, which is so perfect a representation of



him. If you love holiness, you must needs delight in the word; this is the rule of it. If you love life and happiness, you must needs delight in the word; this is the way that leadeth us to so blessed and glorious an estate. If you love Christ, you will love the word, which offereth him to you. If you love the new nature, you will delight in the word, which is the seed of it. If you would speed in prayer: ver. 77, 'Let thy tender mercies come unto me, for thy law is my delight.' If you would be supported in affliction: ver. 92, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction.'

*Doct.* In the days of our trouble and anguish God's word will be a great delight and comfort to us.

Such a comfort as will overcome the bitterness of our affliction. So saith David here. When all comforts have spent their virtue, then God's word will be a comfort to us.

Here I shall show—

1. What comfort the word holds out to us.

2. Why afflictions do not diminish it.

First, What comforts it holds forth.

1. The privileges of the afflicted: Rom. v. 1, 2, 'We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.' Such may rejoice in tribulations; miseries are unstinged, his rods are not signs of his anger. They are in the favour of God, and his heart is with them, however his hand be smart upon them. The habitude and nature of afflictions is altered in themselves; they are the punishments of sin, and so their natural tendency is to despair and bondage. God seemeth to put the old covenant in suit against unbelieving sinners; but now they are trials, preventions, medicines to believers, that proceed from love, and are designed for their good.

2. The word holdeth forth the blessedness of another world: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Hope is not affrighted by affliction, but worketh. Before corn be ripened it needeth all kinds of weather. The husbandman is glad of showers as well as sunshine; rainy weather is troublesome, but the season requireth it.

3. It assureth us of what is acceptable to God: Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?' So it yieldeth comfort through the conscience of our duty, and cheerful reflections on afflicted innocency. Are not these God's ways which we desire to walk in, and for which we are troubled?

4. The word hath notable precepts that ease the heart: Phil. iv. 6, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: 1 Peter v. 7, 'Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you;' Prov. xvi. 3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' It biddeth us cast all our cares upon God, and commit ourselves to the guidance of his providence.

5. It giveth us many promises of God's being with us, and strengthening and delivering us, and giving us a gracious issue out of all our troubles: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also

make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' Now it is a great ease to the soul to fly to these promises which are made to his afflicted servants.

6. It breedeth faith, which fixeth the heart: Ps. cxii. 7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' It breedeth fortitude, or cleaving to God under the greatest trials, 2 Sam. vi. 22; and Ps. xlv. 17, 18. Now this becometh a testimony and proof of our love to God, and so bringeth comfort. It breedeth obedience, and the doing of good leaveth a pleasure behind it. After sin a sting remaineth, Rom. ii. 14, 15. It breedeth waiting and patience when all hope is cut off: Micah vii. 7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation;' when such trouble is on us as no end appeareth of it. Most men's comfort holdeth out but whilst there is hope of turning the stream of things. They are not satisfied in their duty nor comforted with promises, but borne up with hopes of success.

Secondly, Why afflictions do rather increase than diminish this?

1. They drive us to these comforts. Man liveth by sense more than by faith when he hath anything about him, but his sorrows drive him to God. Indeed, men that wholly forget God in prosperity will not find his word a delight in adversity: Ps. xxx. 6-8, 'In my prosperity I said I shall never be moved: Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled: I cried unto thee, O Lord,' &c.

2. They prepare us for them; the sweetness of the word is best perceived under the bitterness of the cross. God and his word are never so sweet to the saints as in adversity: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul;' and 2 Cor. i. 5, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.'

*Use.* Let no calamity drive you from the commandments, for there you will find more delight than trouble can take from you, 1 John iii. 1, 2. Shall the reproach of men have more power to make us sad than the honour of being God's children hath power to make us joyful? Let us be ashamed that we can delight no more: James i. 2, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;' Mat. v. 12, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven;' for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you; and 1 Thes. i. 6, 'Ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.'

## SERMON CLXI.

*The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.—VER. 144.*

IN these words—

1. The excellency of the word is again acknowledged, *the righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.*



2. A prayer is thereupon grounded, *give me understanding.*

3. The fruit and benefit of being heard in that prayer, *and I shall live.*

Because the righteousness of the word is everlasting, therefore we should beg understanding, and this sound understanding maketh way for life.

*First*, He beginneth with the praise of the word, 'The righteousness of thy testimonies.' The word of God is contemned by none but such as know not the excellency of it, both in its own nature and the fruits of it. The sum of the whole octonary is here repeated.

*Doct.* That the righteousness and everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies should be deeply imprinted on our minds, and often thought of by us.

This stuck so in David's mind that he could hardly get off from the meditation. Here I shall show you—

1. Wherein the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies consisteth.

2. What it is to have them deeply imprinted upon our minds, and when they are so.

3. Why they should be deeply imprinted upon our minds.

*First*, Wherein the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies consisteth.

*Ans.* In two things—in the tenor of them, and in the effects.

1. In the tenor, and in that those terms which God dealeth with us are never repealed, but stand in force to all eternity. It is an everlasting truth that he that believeth in Christ shall be saved, and that without holiness no man shall see God. The moral part of the word is unchangeable, and shall never be altered; the same duties and the same privileges do always continue. Our Lord telleth us, Mat. v. 18, 'Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The truth of the doctrine of the law and prophets is more firm and stable than the frame of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth may be dissolved and made void, but his law shall never be made void; both in that part wherein he comforts us by his promises, and that part wherein he sets down our duty; we are eternally obliged to obedience, and God hath eternally obliged himself to reward and bless. There is an everlasting and unchangeable ordinance, by which we are bound to God, and he hath bound himself to us. We should not change, and God will not, having passed his word to us. The everlasting obligation on us dependeth on God's authority; the everlasting obligation on God's part dependeth on his own truth and veracity. And though we are poor changeable creatures, God hath interposed his authority: Mal. iii. 6, 'I am the Lord; I change not;' James i. 17, 'In him there is no change or shadow of turning.' God would change if his truth was changed, but that is everlasting. It is not in the power of men to annihilate and change the law; they may break the law, but they cannot annihilate and change the law. Though it be not fulfilled by them, yet it shall be fulfilled in them and upon them. And God will not annihilate the law, for God cannot change or deny himself; in those things wherein he hath engaged his truth to the creature, he is immutable and infallible. Another expression is, Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21,

‘If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there shall not be day and night in their seasons, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant.’ The one shall not fail any more than the other. God compareth the firmness of his covenant with those things that are most unalterable, the standing of heaven and earth, the constant course of night and day. The ceremonial law was not abrogated till fulfilled in Christ. This is God’s last will ; the terms of life and salvation are still the same, other conditions are not to be expected.

2. In regard of the effects. These testimonies endure for ever, both in a way of grace and glory. In a way of grace, the word worketh in the heart an eternal principle, and carries us beyond temporal things, 2 Cor. iv. 18 ; 1 Peter i. 23, ‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.’ The word worketh in us an eternal principle, which will abide with us as the root of everlasting blessedness. They that have served God faithfully shall not be deprived of eternal glory. Now, in glory the word abideth for ever, for though the souls of men are immortal, yet they have not in them a principle of blessed immortality. Sin is the root of eternal perdition, but grace of incorruption and eternal happiness. The wicked, though the substance of their soul and body shall not be annihilated, but upheld unto all eternity by the mighty power of God in the midst of eternal torments, yet all their glory and pleasure shall be consumed, and they themselves shall ever languish under the wrath of a highly provoked and then irreconcilable God : 1 John ii. 17, ‘He that doth the will of God abideth for ever.’ The wicked shall endure by the word of God ; it is a living death in regard of the execution of eternal wrath upon them that reject it, and the performance of everlasting blessings which are promised to them that receive and obey it ; this will abide when other things fade. The word of God keepeth the godly and wicked alive in some sense.

Secondly, When is the word deeply imprinted upon our minds ? That is discovered by two things—sound belief and serious consideration ; when it is strongly believed, and often duly considered.

1. When it is strongly believed, or else it worketh not : for all things work according to the faith we exercise about them : 1 Thes. ii. 13, ‘The word of God, which worketh effectually also in you that believe.’ Did we believe that our eternal condition depended upon the observance or non-observance of this rule, we would regard it more : Ps. cxix. 66, ‘Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.’ Lord, I believe I must stand or fall by this rule, and therefore let me know all my duty. So Heb. xi. 13, ‘Being persuaded of these things, they embraced them.’ We have not a thorough persuasion about these things ; our persuasions about eternal things are very weak, when God’s expressions about it are very clear and strong. Most men guess at a world to come, but are not thoroughly persuaded. They have a loose or general opinion that the scripture is the word of God, the rule by which they shall be tried ; but do not soundly assent to it, and receive it as the word by which they shall be judged at the last day, John xii. 48. Christ pronounceth as the word pronounceth. There is a non-contradiction, but

not an active and lively faith ; this and nothing but this bindeth the will and conscience to obedience.

2. Often considered. David still insists upon this, the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies. It is as if he had said, I have said it already, and I will repeat it again and again. It is constant thoughts are operative, and musing maketh the fire burn. Green wood is kindled not by a flash or spark, but by constant blowing. Deep, frequent, and ponderous thoughts leave some impression upon the heart ; the greatest matters in the world will not work much upon him that will not think upon them ; all the efficacy is lost for want of these ponderous thoughts. Why are all the offers and invitations of God's grace of so little effect? Mat. xxii. 5, *οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες*, they made light of it, they would not take it into their care and thoughts. Why do all the injunctions and precepts of God work no more? Men will not consider in their hearts, Deut. iv. 39, 40, all the commendations of God ; and therefore he calls upon them, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver,' Ps. l. 22. It is for want of this that all the promises of God, of heaven and happiness work so little upon us : 2 Tim. ii. 7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.' The truth lieth by, neglected, unimproved, till consideration take it up, and lay it in the view of conscience, and then it worketh. Till we take it into our thoughts, we have no use of any truth ; therefore set your hearts seriously to consider of these things.

Thirdly, Why the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies should be deeply imprinted in our minds.

1. It establisheth our judgments against vain fancies, and the humour of other gospelling. The apostle saith, Gal. i. 8, 'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed ;' 1 Tim. vi. 3, 'If any man teach otherwise,' &c. There are some that expect *speculum spiritus sancti*, a greater measure of light beyond what the Spirit now affordeth, new nuncios from heaven, to assail the doubts of the perplexed world. No ; the present rule leadeth a believer all along in his way to heaven ; other and better institution shall not be, cannot be. Christ promised to bless this doctrine to the world's end : Mat. xxviii. 20, 'I will be with you to the end of the world ;' to guide and succour them. Christ prayed for no others but those that believe through their word, John xvii. 20 ; this word which the apostles have consigned to the use of the church. An angel is accursed if he should bring any other doctrine, Gal. i. 8. There is no other way of salvation given or to be given, Acts. iv. 12. If an angel should hold out another way, believe it not. The apostle propounds an impossible case to show the certainty of this way ; it is good to be sure of our rule ; now this consideration helpeth that.

2. Because it bindeth and helpeth to obedience, partly as it sheweth the absolute necessity of obedience, because the terms of salvation are indispensably fixed, and will everlastingly stand in force ; therefore I must yield to God or perish. The soul cometh off most kindly to the ways of God when it is shut up unavoidably, without all hope of escape and evasion but by yielding to God's terms. The Lord will have the world



know that there is no hope of a dispensation : Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' The terms are peremptorily fixed ; there is no relaxation in the gospel covenant. Now this doth bind the heart exceedingly to consider, ver. 152 of this psalm, 'Concerning thy testimonies, I have known them of old ; thou hast founded them for ever.' And partly as it urgeth to speediness of obedience. You will not get better terms, for the righteousness of God's terms is everlasting ; as good yield at first as at last. The laws of Christianity are always the same, and your heart is not likely to be better by delay. Your standing out were more justifiable in the account of reason if you could get better terms. Partly as it engageth to seriousness whilst it carrieth the mind off from the vanities of the world into the midst of the world to come. I am not to mind what will content me for the present, but what will profit me for ever : holiness will abide when other things fade. My ways are to be scanned by an eternal rule. Some distinctions will not outlive time, as rich and poor, high and low ; but the distinction of holy or unholy, sanctified or unsanctified, these abide : 1 Peter i. 24, 'All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass ; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.' Nothing stirreth us up more to provide for a better life than to consider the uncertainty of the world's glory, and the everlastingness of God's approbation according to the rule of his word. When all things are dissolved, we are to be tried by a rule that will never fail. Our pomp, and honour, and credit, and all things that we hunt after in the world, are soon blasted, but the gospel tells us of things that are everlasting—everlasting torments and everlasting bliss ; and therefore our thoughts should be more about them : Isa. lv. 2, 'Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ?' and John vi. 27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life.' And partly as it engageth to constancy in obedience ; for it must last as long as our rule lasteth. You are eternally bound to love God, and fear him and obey him. We must not only begin well, or serve him now and then in a good mood, but so love God as to love him for ever, so cleave to him as never to depart from him. For his law is an eternal obligation ; you must never cease your work till you receive your wages, and that is when you enter into eternity. Yea, much of our work is wages, loving, praising God ; all duties that do not imply weakness are a part of our happiness. Thus it hath a greater influence upon our obedience than we were at first aware of.

3. Because it conduceth much to our comfort. The apostle telleth us that the comfort of believers is built upon two immutable grounds, therefore it is so strong, Heb. vi. 18. Now this everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies is a comfort to us—

[1.] In all the changes of men's affections towards us. Sometimes they smile and sometimes they frown, but the promises ever remain the same. There is Yea and Nay with men, but not with the promises ; they are all Yea and Amen in Christ, 2 Cor. i. 20. Times alter and change, but the tenor of the covenant is always the same.

[2.] It comforts us in the changes of God's dispensations to us.

God may change his dispensations, yet his purposes of grace stand firm, and are carried on unalterably, by various and contrary means. We must interpret providence by the covenant, not the covenant by providence. We know the meaning of his works best by going into his sanctuary. The world misconstrueth his work and dealing to his children many times. If it be rightly interpreted, you will find God's righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. Sometimes God's providence is dark, but always just: Ps. xcvii. 2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;' Hab. i. 12, 'Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God?' That was the prophet's support in those sad times, when a treacherous people were exalted, when he was embrangled and lost about God's dispensations; this was his comfort and support, God's eternal immutability in the covenant. He is always the same, loveth his people as much as ever, as faithful and mindful of his covenant as ever; only a veil of sense covereth our eyes that we cannot see it.

[3.] It comforts us against the difficulties of obedience, when it groweth irksome to us. The difficulty and trouble is but for a while, but we shall everlastingly have the comfort of it: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Then it will be no grief of heart to us to have watched, prayed, striven against sin, suffered, continued with him notwithstanding all temptations: Rom. ii. 7, 'To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life.'

[4.] It is a comfort in death. We change and are changed, but God is always the same, the righteousness of Christ will bear weight for ever: Dan. ix. 24, 'To bring in an everlasting righteousness.' The fruits of obedience last for ever: Ps. cxii. 7, 'His righteousness endureth for ever.' How comfortable is this to remember, that we may appear before God with this confidence, which he hath wrought in us, that the covenant of grace is an everlasting charter, that shall never be out of date nor wax old.

*Use.* Let it be thus with us; let it be so deeply imprinted upon our minds that it may leave an everlastingness there upon the frame of our spirits; for then we are transformed by the word, and cast into the mould of it. Now, who are they that have an everlasting righteous frame of heart?

1. Such as act out of an everlasting principle, or the new nature which worketh above the world. The word ingrafted is called an incorruptible seed, or the seed of God, 1 Peter i. 23, 'that abideth in us,' 1 John iii. 9; when there is a divine principle in us, such a principle as is the seed and beginning of eternal life; when the word hath rooted itself in our hearts.

2. Such as by their constant progress towards an everlasting estate are going from strength to strength, serving God, and cleaving to him in a uniform constant course of holiness, not by fits and starts, but unchangeably: Acts xxiv. 16, 'To have always a conscience void of offence.' Again, when you are in such an estate wherein you can bear the trial of those everlasting rules: Gal. vi. 8, 'He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to



the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting ;' Rom. viii. 13, ' If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' In short, if you have everlasting ends : 2 Cor. iv. 18, ' While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Not making things temporal our scope and aim ; that will not satisfy us : when we are deeply possessed with the thoughts of the other world : 1 Cor. ii. 12, ' We have not received the spirit of the world,' and look upon all other things by the by, and use the world as if we used it not, 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30.

*Secondly*, I come now to the prayer, ' Give me understanding, and I shall live.'

1. Here is the benefit asked, *understanding*.

2. The person asking, David, *give me*.

3. The person from whom it is asked, from God.

First, The benefit asked, ' Give me understanding ;' that is, the saving knowledge of God's testimonies.

*Doct.* One great request that we have to put up to God should be for the saving knowledge of his testimonies.

The reasons why this should be our great request to God.

1. The necessity of understanding ; that will appear—

[1.] Because of our ignorance and folly, which is the cause of all our sin : Titus iii. 3, ' We ourselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient ;' therefore disobedient because foolish. Every natural man is a fool, blind in spiritual things ; whatever understanding or quickness of judgment he hath in other things, in all things that relate to God and heaven, blind and foolish, and cannot see afar off : 2 Peter i. 9, ' He that lacketh these things is blind.' And you shall find that sinners are called fools : Prov. i. 22, ' How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity ? and scorners delight in scorning and fools hate knowledge ?' Ps. lxxv. 4, ' I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly ; and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn.' They follow their own wit and will, to the ruin of bodies and souls, and all that they have. Their mirth is the mirth of fools, Eccles. vii. 4, 5 ; their service the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. v. 1 ; 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, ' I have done very foolishly ;' therefore give me understanding.

[2.] Knowledge is our cure. The state of grace is called a state of light : Eph. v. 8, ' Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' So that the new estate is described by light, a directive and a persuasive light. It is very notable in Eph. v. 14, ' Arise from the dead, and God shall give thee light ;' and Acts xxvi. 18, ' To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' In our natural estate we are all over darkness, slaves to the prince of darkness, doing the works of darkness, and posting on apace into utter darkness ; and therefore it is light must cure us, and guide us into a better course : Col. i. 13, ' Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.'

2. Because of the excellency of understanding ; therefore we should make it our request to God. Here are four considerations :—

[1.] Knowledge in the general is man's excellency. It is our privi-

lege above the beasts ; many of them excel us in beauty of colour, in strength, and nimbleness, and vivacity, and long life, and acuteness of sense ; but we excel them in knowledge. And so God hath taught us more than the beasts of the field. Man is a rational creature, his life standeth in light : John i. 4, ‘ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.’ Other creatures have life, but not such a life as is light, are not endowed with a reasonable soul and a faculty of understanding. The more of knowledge there is increased in us, the more of man there is in us.

[2.] Divine knowledge is better than all other knowledge ; to know God’s nature and will, to know how God will be pleased, and how we may come to enjoy him ; all other knowledge doth but please the fancy, this doth us good to the heart : Jer. ix. 23, 24, ‘ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man glory in his might ; let not the rich man glory in his riches : but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me ;’ as not in strength, so not in natural wisdom. Here I may take the argument of the text. Men do not properly live if they want the light of heavenly wisdom ; without divine knowledge a man is little better than a beast. The endowment of reason was not given us merely to shift for ourselves, or provide for the animal life ; other creatures do that better by instinct and natural sagacity, and are contented with less. No ; man’s life was given him for some other end, to know and serve his Maker.

[3.] Of all the knowledge of God, practical knowledge is better than speculative ; not so much subtly to be able to discourse of his nature as to obey his will : Jer. xxii. 16, ‘ He judged the cause of the poor and needy ; was not this to know me ? saith the Lord.’ The knowledge of God is not measured by sharpness of wit, but by serious ready practice ; not strength of parts, but a good and honest heart ; so to understand as to keep them : Ps. xxi. 10, ‘ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.’ They understand best, not who can discourse most subtly, but who live most holily. When our faith is more strong, our reverence of God increased, our obedience more ready, then is our knowledge sound ; when we follow those courses which we know God delighteth in, Jer. ix. 24, and study to please him in all things : 1 John ii. 4, ‘ He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.’ He that doth not make conscience of his duty, he knoweth no such sovereign being as God is, that hath power to command, to save, and to destroy : Titus i. 16, ‘ They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.’ So 1 John iii. 6, ‘ Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him nor known him.’ Well, then, in giving his word, God’s end was not to make trial of their wits, who could most sharply conceive ; nor of their memories, who could most firmly retain ; nor of their eloquence, who could most neatly discourse ; but of their hearts, who would most obediently submit to him : that is knowledge indeed which tendeth to use and practice. Look, as *scire malum non est malum*—to know evil is not evil, for God knoweth evil, yet his knowledge is not evil ; so *scire bonum, non est bonum*, to know that which is good doth not make a man good. This is the distinction between understanding and will ; the under-

standing draweth the object to itself, but the will is drawn by the object to it. If I understand anything, I am not in a moral sense that which I understand; but if I will anything, or love anything, I am what I will and love. This is the difference between the two faculties.

[4.] Transforming, regenerating, saving knowledge is the best part of practical knowledge. I add this because general knowledge may produce good life, or some outward conformity in the unregenerate: 2 Peter ii. 20, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Those that are destitute of the saving knowledge of Christ, they may cleanse their external conversation by that rational conviction, though not spiritual illumination, though strangers to inward mortification, and unrenewed in heart; yea, avoid gross sins, perform external duties. Oh! but the lively saving light, such as subdueth the heart to God, such as maketh a thorough change in us, that is the best: 2 Cor. iii. 18, '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.' When we so know Christ as to be like him, this is like heaven's knowledge: 1 John iii. 2, 'And when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' Common truths have another efficacy, when they understand them by the lively light of the Spirit; when men know the torments of hell so as to flee from them: Mat. iii. 7, 'Flee from wrath to come;' as a man would out of a ship that is sinking or a house falling. So when we see heaven so as it maketh us seek after it, Heb. iv. 1, so to know Christ as to be made like him, this will do us good, and this is one of God's best gifts.

*Use.* Oh! then, beg this gift of God. Lord, give me understanding eyes. Do not beg riches, and honours, and great things in the world, but beg for understanding; it is pleasing to God, 2 Chron. i. 12. This will bring other things with it. Be importunate, take no nay; Prov. ii. 3, cry for knowledge, lift up thy voice for understanding. It will not come at the first call. Follow God as the blind man, Mark x. 5, 'Lord, that my eyes may be opened, that I may receive my sight.' So be earnest with God that the eyes of your understanding may be opened, that you may have such a sight of heaven as that your affections may be set upon things above; such a sight of hell as that ye may flee for refuge as if the avenger of blood were at your heels. Without this there can be no true piety: Ps. xiv. 3, 'There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.' Nay, there can be no salvation without this: Isa. xxvii. 11, 'It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will have no mercy upon them,' &c. Ignorant people have a saying, He that made them will save them; but it is said they have no understanding; therefore he that made them will not save them; and therefore beg of God that he would break in upon your minds with the lively light of his Spirit.

Secondly, Here is the person asking this request, David, one well acquainted with God and his ways.

*Doct.* None know so much of God and his ways but they still need to know more. Petitions for understanding do not only become beginners, but grown Christians.



Three reasons of this point :—

1. That we may escape the deceits of a subtle devil, who lieth in wait for us, and assaults us on every hand, and maketh great advantage of the relics of our ignorance. The devils are called, Eph. vi. 12, ‘Rulers of the darkness of this world.’ The dark part of the world is the devil’s territory ; and so much of ignorance as is in the children of God, so much advantage hath Satan against us : 2 Cor. ii. 11, ‘Lest Satan should get an advantage ; for we are not ignorant of his devices.’ The more we know, the less advantage the devil hath of us ; he layeth snares for us where we least suspect.

2. That we may serve a holy God with that exactness and diligence as will become his excellency. The fault of the heathen was that ‘when they knew God, they glorified him not as God,’ Rom. i. 21 ; because they knew so little, they did not improve the knowledge they had ; and this is true in some degree of every Christian. God would be more loved, feared, trusted, served, did we know more of him. The clearer our sight, the warmer our hearts will be in his service : 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, ‘Know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind.’ If we did know God, we would devote ourselves to his service.

3. That we may be prepared for our everlasting estate by degrees. Our everlasting estate is called the inheritance of the saints in light. Now we grow more meet for it by increasing in holiness : Prov. iv. 18, 19, ‘The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day ; the way of the wicked is darkness, they know not at what they stumble.’ The just man is like the light that increaseth as the day groweth ; the wicked are like the night that increaseth to thick darkness, till at last they fall into utter darkness.

*Use.* Well, then, let not only poor ignorant creatures, or young beginners, take up David’s prayer, but also grown Christians of longer standing. Go to God, and say, Give me understanding. Partly because practical knowledge is never at a stand ; knowing of things as we ought to know them, it is possible for a man to see round about the compass of revealed truths. Though extensively no more truths are to be known, yet intensively we may know them better. The best are defective in their knowledge. And partly, too, because it is a very satisfactory thing to be sure we are in God’s way ; in some nice debates it is hard to discern God’s interest, when all circumstances must be considered, and temptations hinder the sight of our duty. And partly that we may justify the ways of God against cavils, Mat. xxiv. 24. We have to do with men that would even puzzle the very elect, if it were possible.

Thirdly, To whom is this petition made ? To God.

*Doct.* If we would have the knowledge of divine things, we must seek to God.

I will give you some grounds of this. Partly because he is the fountain of knowledge, the first mind or intellect, called in scripture ‘the Father of lights,’ James i. 17. He is the sun that must not only shine on us, to make us see things, but shine through us to make us be enlightened ourselves. Ours is but a participation. Now, to show whence we receive all, God will be asked. And partly, too, because God gave the rule, and therefore he must interpret it, *ejus est*



*interpretari cujus est condere.* He can best show his own meaning ; and therefore in all doubtful cases repair to him, especially since he hath undertaken in necessary cases : Jer. xxxi. 34, 'For they shall all know me from the least to the greatest ;' and loveth to be employed by his people for that end and purpose. Once more, without his Spirit the clearest light we have hath no efficacy, Rom. i. 18. He will have it sought.

I come to the third and last thing, the fruit and benefit, 'And I shall live.' I shall explain the words in the prosecution of this point.

*Doct.* The saving knowledge of God's testimonies is the only way to live.

There is a threefold life :—

1. Life natural.
2. Life spiritual.
3. Life eternal.

In all these considerations may the point be made good.

First, Life is taken for the life of nature, or the life of the body, or life temporal, called 'this life' in scripture, 1 Cor. xv. 19 ; 1 Tim. iv. 8. Among outward things nothing is more precious than life ; it maketh us capable of enjoying what the world can afford to us. We give all that we have to preserve it, Job ii. 9. Indeed, in competition with worldly things, we do well to value it ; but not in competition with our duty and love to Christ ; so we must not count our life dear to us : Acts xx. 24, 'I count not my life dear to me ;' and Luke xiv. 26, 'Whosoever hateth not father and mother,' &c., 'and his own life.' Out of the conscience of our duty to Christ, we must be willing to expose it, for he can give us a better life, John xi. 24 ; but otherwise so far as we can preserve it with our duty, it must be precious to us, and we must seek the interests of it. Well, then, in this sense it is no unbecoming thing for a Christian to say, 'Give me understanding, that I may live.' My life present, which mine enemies seek to take from me, this life is from God, both originally and in a way of constant preservation. God gave it at first : Gen. ii. 7, 'God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul ;' and still this life is at God's disposing, and he will sooner continue it to us in a way of obedience than in a way of sin : Job x. 12, 'Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit ;' Acts xvii. 28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being.' The same power that giveth us being maintaineth it as long as he pleaseth. All is at the daily dispose of God.

2. Life is better preserved in a way of obedience than by evil-doing ; that provoketh God to cast us off, and exposes us to dangers. It is not in the power of the world to make us live or die a day sooner or longer than God pleaseth. If God will make us happy, they cannot make us miserable. Therefore 'Give me understanding, and I shall live ;' that is, lead a comfortable and happy life for the present. Prevent sin, and you prevent danger. Obedience is the best way to preserve life temporal. As great a paradox as it seems to the world, it is a scripture truth : Prov. iv. 4, 'Keep my commandments, and live ;' and ver. 13, 'Take hold of instruction ; let her not go, keep her, for she is thy life ;' and Prov. iii. 16, 'Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour ;' and ver. 18, 'She is a tree

of life.' The knowledge and practice of the word is the only means to live comfortably and happily here, as well as for ever hereafter.

Secondly, Life spiritual; that is twofold—the life of justification and the life of sanctification.

1. The life of justification: Rom. v. 18, 'The free gift came upon all men to justification of life.' He is dead not only on whom the hangman hath done his work, but also he on whom the judge hath passed sentence, and the law pronounceth him dead. In this sense we were all dead, and justification is called justification to life; there is no living in this sense without knowledge: Isa. liii. 11, 'By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.' We live by faith, and faith cometh by hearing, and hearing doth no good unless the Lord giveth understanding; as meats nourish not unless received and digested.

2. The life of sanctification: Eph. ii. 1, 'And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.' And men live not properly till they live the life of grace; they live a false counterfeit life, not a blessed, happy, certain, and true life. Now this life is begun and carried on by saving knowledge: Col. iii. 10, 'The new man is renewed in knowledge.' Again, men are said to be 'alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them,' Eph. iv. 18. They that are ignorant are dead in sin. Life spiritual cometh by knowledge. hence beginneth the change of the inward man, and thenceforth we live. Give me understanding, *ut vere in te vivam*, that the true life begun in me may grow and increase daily, but never be quenched by sin.

Thirdly, Life everlasting, or our blessed estate in heaven. So it is said of the saints departed, they all live to God, Luke xx. 38; and this is called water of life, the tree of life, the crown of life; properly this is life. What is the present life in comparison of everlasting life? The present life, it is *mors vitalis*, a living death, or *mortalis vita*, a dying life, a kind of death; it is always *in fluxu*, like a stream; it runneth from us as fast as it cometh to us: Job xiv. 2, 'He flieth as a shadow, and continueth not.' We die as fast as we live; it differeth but as the point from the line where it terminateth. It is not one and the same, no permanent thing; it is like the shadow of a star in a flowing stream; its contentments are base and low, Isa. lvii. 10, called 'the life of thy hands;' it is patched up, of several creatures, fain to ransack the storehouses of nature to support a ruinous fabric. And compare it with a life of grace here; it doth not exempt us from sin, nor miseries. Our capacities are narrow, we are full of fears and doubts and dangers; but in the life of glory we shall not sin or sorrow more. This is meant here, 'The righteousness of God's testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.' It is chiefly meant of the life of glory; this is the fruit of saving knowledge, John xvii. 3, when we so know God and Christ as to come to God by him.

Use. Let us seek the saving knowledge of God, that we may live, first spiritually here, and gloriously here. But few mind it; all desire sharpness of wit, and to be as knowing as others; no man would be a fool, but would own a wickedness in morals rather than a weakness in

intellectuals ; but who thinketh of being wiser for heaven, of being seasoned with the fear of God ? Most men choke all the motions and inclinations they have in that kind with worldly delights and worldly businesses, being alive to the world and dead to God, thronging their hearts with carnal vanities, but leaving no room for higher and serious thoughts.

But at length be persuaded ; what do men desire but life ? If you know God and Christ with a saving knowledge, you shall have it. (1.) We were made for this end, to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, 1 Tim. ii. 4. We do not live merely to live, but to make provision for a better life ; not to satisfy our bodies out of God's storehouse, but to furnish our souls with grace, and exercise ourselves in his law day and night, that we may know his will concerning us, and provide for a better life, and live according to the directions of his word. (2.) No creature is so bad as man when he degenerateth from his end for which he was created : it is not so much for the sea to break its bounds, or to have a defect in the course of nature, as the degeneration of man. (3.) You live not properly when destitute of the life of God and heavenly wisdom : he doth not live the life of a man, nor preserve the rectitude of his nature.

## SERMON CLXII.

*I cried with my whole heart ; hear me, O Lord : I will keep thy statutes.*—VER. 145.

In these words are—

1. An allegation, *I cried with my whole heart.*
2. A petition, *hear me.*
3. A promise of obedience, *I will keep thy statutes.*

1. In the allegation we have a description of prayer, by the two adjuncts of it :—

- [1.] Intension and fervency, ‘*I cried.*’
- [2.] The sincerity and integrity of it, ‘*With my whole heart.*’

2. The petition is for audience ; only, what we translate ‘*hear me,*’ is in the Hebrew ‘*answer me.*’ Now this being a general, it is uncertain what he prayed for : it may be for deliverance out of trouble ; for in the 146th verse it is ‘*save me,*’ but in the 149th verse it is ‘*quicken me,*’ which implieth the vigour of the spiritual life, or grace to keep God's statutes. Whether for the one or the other, David would be heard.

3. Here is a promise of obedience, ‘*I will keep thy statutes ;*’ which is mentioned either as the end and scope of his prayer, ‘*That I may keep thy statutes ;*’ or as a holy vow and promise which the saints are wont to mingle with their prayers, ‘*I will,*’ &c. He would diligently serve God if the Lord would hear him.

*First,* I begin with the allegation or description of David's carriage in prayer. David devoured not his grief, nor nourished his unbelief, but opened his heart unto God, and that in an affectionate manner :

he did not call, but cry. Crying noteth vehemency and earnestness, and is opposite to careless formality and deadness. The note from thence is—

*Doct.* That there is a holy vehemency and fervour required in prayer.

Here I shall show—

1. That we may cry.
2. That we must cry.
3. Wherein it consisteth.

First, We may cry in our afflictions. David doth so for help and relief, and it is not inconsistent with patience for us to do so; for our Lord Jesus had his cries, Heb. v. 7, in the extremity of his sufferings, without any impeachment of his courage and patience. So did Job, chap. xxx. 28, 'I went mourning without the sun; I stood up and I cried in the congregation.' It argues we have a sense of our condition, and are under a pinching necessity; and therefore may complain to God, though not of God. They are sullen and obstinate and senseless that have no feeling, and so no complaint to make, when God lasheth them.

Secondly, We must cry. For—

1. The spirit of grace was given for this end: Rom. viii. 15, 'Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father;' not to say, but cry. He assisteth us by groans: Rom. viii. 26, 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' And such a spirit of prayer should we all labour for, to come to God with affection and humble and sensible groans, if we cannot come with the pomp of gifts. There is good sense in brokenness of heart, though it be accompanied with brokenness of speech; for God knoweth what a groan meaneth, and will not refuse the work of his Spirit.

2. Because the saints have all done so. Their way of praying is crying: Ps. xviii. 6, 'In my distress I cried unto the Lord;' Ps. xxxiv. 6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord;' Ps. cxxx. 1, 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord;' and Ps. lv. 17, 'At noon will I pray, and cry aloud;' and in many other places. Others can say a prayer, but they cry it out.

3. These cries are heard and answered; as in all the former places, so Ps. xxii. 5, 'Our fathers cried unto thee, and were delivered;' Ps. xxxiv. 17, 'The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth;' *βοηθέω*, the word 'to help' is *εἰς βοήν θεῶν* to run to the cry. An arrow drawn with full strength will pierce deep.

4. Other prayers are not comely. It doth not become God to whom we pray; dead service doth not become the living God: Mal. i. 14, 'Cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.' Slight dealing in God's service argueth mean thoughts of God. It doth not become the Spirit by whom we pray, as in the first reason; nor doth it become the blessings for which we pray: God will not give a mercy till it be valued. If we be indifferent, and pray for things of course, without any esteem of them, we bespeak our



own denial. Then we undervalue the grace we seek if we seek it so as if we cared not whether we obtained our request or no, for form's sake we must say something. When things are prized we are earnest, and God will have us earnest, to ask, seek, and knock, Mat. vii. 7. If you have good things, you must do so, and will do so, before you have them. Nor doth it become the state of want wherein you pray. Where there is real indigence and felt necessity, it will sharpen your affections and put an accent upon your prayers. You will not tell a tale or a cold story of your own wants, but cry aloud for help : Jonah ii. 2, 'I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord.' And the saints cry day and night, Luke xviii. 18. A true sense of want will sharpen our sluggish desires ; the hunger-bitten beggar will not easily be put off.

Thirdly, Wherein this crying consisteth.

1. In the earnestness of the affection, not in the loudness of the voice : Gal. iv. 6, 'He hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father.' It is a cry, not of the mouth, but of the heart ; it lieth not in the lifting up of the external voice, or the agitation of the bodily spirits, but the serious bent and frame of the spirit, Rom. viii. 26, *στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις*, inward groans, and holy meltings and breathings of soul after God. Moses cried after God, Exod. xiv. 18 ; but we hear of no words which Moses spake. We hear of Israel's crying, and have an account of their words, hot and full of impatience, ver. 10 ; but not a word that Moses said, yet he cried unto the Lord. Israel was in straits, the Red Sea before, the Egyptians behind. *Clamabat populus, et non audiebatur : tacebat Moses, et audiebatur*, saith Ambrose. Moses' silence was sooner heard than their cry. Our groans and tears have a language which God understands. It is said, 1 Sam. i. 13, that 'Hannah spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.' That is the better crying, in sighs and groans, rather than words ; as the child that cannot speak will cry and make moan for the breast. God hath heard the cry of the heart without that of the tongue, but never the cry of the tongue without that of the heart. *Quibus arteriis opus est, si pro sonitu audiamur !*—what lungs and sides must we have, if the loudness of the voice did it ! A dumb beggar gets an alms at Christ's gate if he can but make signs, when his tongue cannot plead for him.

2. This spiritual crying is not the earnestness of carnal affections ; that is stirred up by the flesh, but this cry is stirred up by the Spirit, who maketh request, *κατὰ Θεόν*, Rom. viii. 27. God should have work enough to do if he did answer all men's prayers. Some would set him a task to provide meat for this, others for that lust. This man prayeth heartily for his pleasures, another for honour, another for preferment, another to satisfy his revenge. A carnal spring may send forth high tides of affection, James iv. 3 ; but few seek grace to serve God : they would make God serve with their sins. These are not the groans and breathings of the Spirit, but the eructations and belches of the flesh. Therefore the vehemency of the affection is not only to be regarded, but the regularity, that they be not stirred up by the flesh, but guided by the Spirit.

3. It is not a mere natural fervency ; that is the cry of nature after

ease, but not the cry of grace after God, and is but howling in God's account, Hosea vii. 14. The heart is not affected with that which is the true misery, sin and the wrath of God; nor sincerely engaged to God, from whom they expect help: and then how instant and earnest soever men be to be rid of their burden, their prayers are but like the moanings of the beasts under pain, and the howling of dogs, or the gaping of hungry ravens, Ps. cxlvii. It is lawful to ask ease, but we must ask in a spiritual manner. It is lawful to pray for temporal blessings, but not in the first place, or with the neglect of better things. Prayer properly is the vent of grace, and the desires of a renewed heart expressed to God, Zech. xii. 10.

Use 1. To reprove most men for their deadness and carelessness in prayer. Prayer is a part of natural worship. All that will acknowledge God and a providence will acknowledge a necessity of praying to God, especially in their straits. The pagan mariners cried every man to his god in a tempest, Jonah i. 6; but though all will pray in one sort or other, yet few pray in good earnest. Some say a prayer, but they do not pray in prayer, James v. 17. Elijah prayed earnestly. Their prayers are conceived in a cold and customary track of devotion. Others flow in words without spirit and life; their tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, but the heart is dead and carelessly affected, for they are indifferent whether they be heard or not. Prayer is indeed the work of their invention, but not the expression of their spiritual desire. The mind conceiveth a rational prayer, but the heart is not poured out before God; and so it is discoursing rather than crying. Words are the outside of prayer, sighs and groans lie nearer the heart, and do better discover the temper of it, and are more regarded by God than all the charms of speech: Ps. vi. 8, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' Tears have a language which our Father understandeth; a want of affection is more than a defect of words. Broken words with a spiritual affection do more than a well-set speech with unbrokenness of heart. Others have a natural fervency, but not renewed affections; pray from their own interest, or pray passionately for carnal things: Num. xi. 4, 'They fell a-lusting, and wept, saying, Who will give us flesh?' They may be importunate for their own ease and welfare: 'Give me children or else I die,' saith passionate Rachel. Natural desires are very passionate, yea, for spiritual things on their own terms. Would not a man desire pardon and heaven? Whose heart doth not engage him to look after them? Some that are renewed yet are too cold in prayer, do not cry. It is not enough to have the qualification of the person, but the prayer must be qualified also, James v. 16, *δέησις ἐνεργουμένη*; it must be a well-wrought prayer, otherwise it availeth not; yea, our earnestness must increase according to the weight and moment of what we pray for. When Peter was in prison the church made instant and earnest prayer, *δέησις ἐκτενής*, Acts xii. 5, as in the margin it is; and Christ had his *ἐκτενέστερον*, Luke xxii. 44. But now the children of God are conscious to themselves of much deadness and drowsiness, and are so low sometimes that they are not heard, scarce breathe in prayer, so far from crying. But what is the reason of this carelessness?

1. Want of sense. They have no feeling of their wants, and there-

fore pray perfunctorily. The poor in spirit, the mourner, and meek, are put before the desirer, Mat. v. Men must be affected with their wants before they be earnest after a supply. Jesus Christ was sensible of his burden, and therefore he 'offered up supplications with strong crying and tears,' Heb. v. 7. And if man were once sensible of his sins by which his Saviour suffered, he would be fervent in his prayers, and most earnestly deprecate the wrath of God, as his Saviour did. A smart sense of wants quickens prayers. If we were always alike affected, as we are in a deep distress, or fears of death, or some notable danger, we should not need many directions to teach us to pray fervently; but because such a sense is soon worn off, our prayers grow cold and careless.

2. As they are tongue-tied through sin, and carnal liberty hath brought an indisposition upon them, 1 John iii. 20, 21. He that hath wronged another will not easily repair to him, and crave his help in straits.

3. Want of spiritual desire. Prayer is but the acting of desire; as desire is more or less, so is our cry in prayer. He that asketh remission of his sins, but doth not thirst after it with an earnest and burning desire, doth but pray for it out of course, and not as it becometh a creature that hath a sense of God's anger against sin. He that asketh the mortification of sin, but doth not desire it out of true desire, flowing from the hatred of sin dwelling in him, doth but pray for form's sake. He that desireth the deliverance of the church, but doth not desire it out of a true love to the church, will never pray heartily and in good earnest for it: Isa. lxii. 1, 'For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace,' &c. A man whose soul truly loveth the interests of the church will be solicitous for it; as Eli trembled for the ark of God, 1 Sam. iv. 13. So when at ease we ask temporal supplies for fashion's sake. God must have the name, though we eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel.

4. Want of reverence to God, and therefore they babble over words without sense and feeling; they do not see him that is invisible: Eccles. v. 1, 2, 'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.' Keep thy heart and affections when thou goest into God's presence; a little outward lip-service is but the sacrifice of fools, an affront to the power and majesty of God: Mal. i. 8, 'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.'

5. Want of faith: Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' To the woman of Canaan, that would take no denial, Christ saith, 'O woman, great is thy faith.' The blind man cried after the Son of David, as we run to a rich man that is charitably disposed for an alms. If we were persuaded that we should be the better for coming to God, we should not be so slight and careless in our approaches to him.

*Use 2.* To press you to this crying or holy vehemency in prayer.



The apostle biddeth us to 'continue instant in prayer,' *προσκαρτεροῦντες*, continue with all your might in prayer: Col. iv. 12, *ἀγωνιζόμενος*, 'Labouring fervently in prayer for you.' The word signifieth to be striving in a battle, and in an agony for them: it hath life in it. But what is it?

1. When the heart worketh in prayer as before.

2. When you follow the suit, and will not give over praying: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' Luke xi. 8, *διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν*, 'Because of his importunity he will rise,' &c. The prophet telleth God plainly what he would do: Isa. lxii. 1, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,' &c. So Jacob: Gen. xxxii. 26, 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.' *Absque te non recedam.*

3. When deaf to disappointments and discouragements from without, from within, from himself, from God himself: 1 Sam. xii. 23, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,' &c.; notwithstanding the many objections in his heart, what God would do to a rebellious people. So Elijah when the heavens were as brass and the clouds as iron; and blind Bartimeus: Mark x. 48, 'Many charged him that he should hold his peace, but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' When God seemeth to cast out prayer, to give no answer, or a contrary one. So Daniel when forbidden to pray: Dan. vi. 10, 'When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house and prayed three times a day as afore-time; he doth not make one suit the less, or abate one jot of his zeal. To cleave to God when he seemeth to thrust us from him, Job xiii. 15, this is a holy obstinacy, very acceptable unto God. The woman of Canaan standeth fending and proving with Christ, till he giveth her satisfaction; then 'be it unto thee as thou wilt.' When we turn discouragements into arguments and motives of believing, and draw nearer to Christ the more he seemeth to drive us from him. However God wrestle with such for a while, it is with a purpose to give faith the victory, and to yield us himself to do for us what our souls desire of him. You pray and God keepeth silence: 'He answered her not a word,' Mat. xv. 23. It is not said he heard not a word, but he answered her not a word; these two differ. Christ often heareth when he doth not answer. His not answering is indeed an answer, and speaks this, Pray on, and continue your crying still; the door is kept bolted that you may knock again. Afterwards a rebuke. First, he answereth not a word, then giveth an answer to the disciples, not to the woman, 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' and then 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.' But she turned the discouragement into an argument, and she said, 'Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.'

4. Holy fervency and vehemency will be argumentative, and plead with God; as Abraham: Gen. xviii. 25, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' So Jacob: Gen. xxxii. 9, Jacob pleadeth God's promise; Return unto thy father's house; I will deal well with thee; Lord, I undertook not this journey but upon this encouragement. The



little honour God hath by the church's calamities, Ps. xlv. 12; Isa. lii. 4, 5. The praise God will have from his people, Ps. cxlii. 6. Do it, as David in the text, 'I will keep thy statutes.' The chief arguments are—God's covenant: Ps. lxxiv. 22, 'Arise, O God, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Have respect to thy covenant.' The merits of Christ: Lord, hear for the Lord's sake. Desire is witty to find out arguments and reasoning to enforce the things we sue for.

But how shall we get it?

[1.] Have a sincere desire to the things asked. We will cry for what we value and earnestly desire: Prov. ii. 3–5, 'If thou criest for knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seek for her as for silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.'

[2.] Be persuaded of the Lord's willingness to hear and power to help. A rich and bountiful person, a beggar will not let him go, if he see only a rich man: Mat. viii. 2, 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst;' it is in the power of your hand to help us. But is not God willing also? Suppose it be an uncertainty, yet cry mightily unto God, 'Who can tell that he will not repent?' Jonah iii. 8, 9. If there be but a possibility, yet try what importunity will do: Ps. lvii. 2, 'I will cry unto God most high, unto God who performeth all things for me.' He hath heard once, and will again.

[3.] Beg the assistance of the Spirit. Our necessities are not sharp enough to quicken our affections, they need the secret influence of grace; it is his work to set us a-groaning and crying to God. How well are we provided for, with an advocate and notary: Rom. viii. 26; Jude 20.

[4.] Let us rouse up ourselves: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee;' Psa. lvii. 8, 'Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp; I myself will awake early.' We must ἀναζωπυρεῖν 'stir up the gift of God, which is in us,' 2 Tim. i. 6.

[5.] Let us take heed we do not quench the Spirit, 1 Thes. v. 19, bring deadness on our hearts by carnal liberty. So much enlarged as we are to the flesh, so much straitened in the spirit. Where desires are after other things, there will be little delight in prayer.

[6.] The way to be fervent is to be frequent and often with God. A key seldom turned rusts in the lock. The fire of the sanctuary was never to go out. By great interruptions we lose what we have wrought: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright, but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity,' Prov. x. 29.

I come now to the second qualification, 'With my whole heart;' which importeth his integrity and sincerity in praying.

*Doct.* Our prayers to God must be sincere as well as fervent.

The heart must be in them, and the whole heart. This noteth—

1. Seriousness, that we heed what we say, otherwise we do not pour out our hearts before God. It is so far from being a spiritual act that it is not a rational act, but like the parrots speaking by rote, or as children say their prayers; and we must not be always children. Surely we do not speak to God as God, as an all-seeing Spirit, if we

do not mind what we say, John iv. 24; and Prov. xxviii. 23, 'Burning lips and a wicked heart are as a potsherd covered with silver dross.'

2. A hearty desire or affectionateness. Praying from memory and invention, and praying from affection, are two distinct things; yea, praying from conscience, and praying from the heart. Many times the mind is in prayer when the heart is not in it. The mind or conscience dictates what is fit to be asked, but the heart doth not consent, or not urge it to make any such suit to God; and so the prayer is repeated in the very making: Ps. lxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.' The understanding judgeth that a meet prayer, but the heart is biassed the contrary way to some known sin. Therefore as David calleth all that is within him to bless God, Ps. ciii. 1, so to pray to him—memory, understanding, conscience, will, affections, all that is within us must attend upon this work; that which God heareth is desire: Ps. x. 17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' So Ps. cxlv. 19, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.'

3. The prevalency of these affections. That God and his interest be uppermost in the soul, and the heart be effectually bent towards him; for prayer is not a work barely of our natural faculties, but of grace guiding, ordering, and inclining those faculties; not only a work of understanding and will, but of faith, love, fear, zeal, hatred of sin, temperance, patience, and other virtues, which do bend the heart towards God, and draw it off from other things: and without them the understanding will not be clear, and have any deep sense of the worth of spiritual things, 2 Peter i. 19. Without these, the will is remiss, and they never pursue them in good earnest. We may wish for them, but shall not will them: As Balaam, 'Oh that I might die the death of the righteous! But he loved the wages of iniquity,' 2 Peter ii. 15, and so spake words which his heart allowed not. The affections will be diverted to other things, and we cannot have those longings and strong desires after grace, Ps. cxix. 36; Col. iii. 2; or at best but a little passionate earnestness for the present.

4. A universal care to please God in all things, without harbouring any known sin in our hearts, Ps. lxvi. 18; Ps. xvii. 3, 'Thou has proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing;' nothing contrary to the new covenant, no guile; nothing in his heart contrary to what was in his mouth. So no insincerity found: Job xi. 13–14, 'If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thy hand towards him: if iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.' If you mean to call upon God with any confidence, all that is displeasing to him must be cast out of the heart. This is the best preparation; all filth must be swept out when you come to the holy God, for he will not do us good till we are fit to receive good. Therefore if you mean to stretch out your hand in prayer, thus you must do, then may you lift up your face without spot, have boldness and confidence in prayer; but when the heart is wedded to any vanity, God will not hear: Job xxxv. 13, 'Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.'

*Use.* To persuade us to pray with our whole hearts; for—

1. God will not be mocked, Gal. vi. 7; that is in vain. You may venture to mock God, put him off with vain pretences, but it will cost you dear. He knoweth the thoughts afar off, Ps. cxxxix. 2; and Heb. iv. 12–13, ‘The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart; neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.’ Though man cannot find you out, yet God can.

2. God hath expressly told you, ‘The prayer of the upright is his delight,’ Prov. xv. 8. He will pardon many defects, but he will not pardon want of sincerity, either in the person or prayer. Though you cannot bring the pomp of gifts, or exact righteousness, yet, if sincere, God will delight in you; he measureth your prayer by that.

3. Where there is a moral integrity you do not dissemble; God can find the defect of supernatural integrity: Deut. v. 29, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said in all that they have spoken: oh that there were such an heart in them,’ &c. Therefore be sure your lips do not feign, Ps. xvii. 1, and pretend more grace than you have; so that for the main your hearts be upright, seriously, readily bent to please him in all things. To this end—

[1.] The tongue must not only pray, but the heart. How dare you tell God to his face that you love him, and fear him, and trust in him, when there is no such matter? No such forgery as counterfeiting the voice of God’s Spirit. The heart should be first and chief in prayer, Ps. xli. 1; and Lam. iii. 4, ‘Lift up your hearts with your hands to God in the heavens.’ There is the chief voice; the hand without it is nothing.

[2.] You must make conscience of graces as well as gifts, yea, more than gifts: 1 Cor. xii. 31, ‘But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;’ with 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. And bewail unbrokenness of heart more than brokenness of expression; if you chatter like cranes, yet if there be a holy desire in it, God will hear.

[3.] You must pray earnestly in secret as well as in company: Mat. vi. 5, 6, ‘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: but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret,’ &c. We have more enlargement there, because we represent our own case to God. Mourn apart: Jer. xiii. 17, ‘My soul shall weep in secret places.’ We are flat, cold, loose, careless in private; strive to speak with the same power, life, holiness in private as you would in public.

[4.] What you would be in prayer, you must be out of prayer: Prov. xxvi. 7, ‘The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of a fool;’ as the legs of the lame, one doth not answer another. They are devout, all of a fire in their prayers, but neglectful of God in their conversations: Eph. vi. 18, ‘Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance;



Prov. xxviii. 9, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.' He doth not live his prayers. We must live in the same frame.

[5.] You must pray as affectionately for heavenly as you would for earthly things. A carnal man's mind and heart is upon worldly things, and spiritual things lie by ; contrary to Mat. vi. 33, where we are bid, 'First to seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof,' &c. ; and Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.' They have no savour for other requests, but can find tender affections for safety, ease, sloth : other petitions do but bear these company ; there is their business with God. If God will give these things, we will give a discharge for other things ; so that their prayers do not come from grace, but nature ; thanks to his natural necessities for all the affections he hath in prayer.

[6.] We must not only have our flashes and good moods. So Balaam : Num. xxiii. 10, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.' So those, John vi. 34, 'Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.' Strange strivings for the present, but it is only for privileges. It is vanishing : Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty ? will he always call upon God ?' They would have heaven without holiness ; pardon of sin, rather than power against it, or a new heart. He will pray when he seeth his time, as men take strong waters in a pang : he hath a praying fit upon him in adversity, not in prosperity : Hosea v. 15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.'

[7.] As you pray to God, so you must entirely trust him : James i. 6, 7, 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering ; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.' A carnal man wavereth ; he would fain have help from God, but his heart runneth upon other things : Hosea vii. 11, 'Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart ; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.' Their hearts are seeking to other refuges, however they call to God among the rest. Ahaz would not ask a sign that would engage him to depend upon God, and keep him from running to other shifts. Sometimes he thinketh prayer will do it, and by and by desponds, dareth not trust God upon his prayers ; he knoweth not what course to take, whether to shift for himself, or tarry God's leisure. But one that commits all to God is fixed : Ps. cxii. 7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He is freed from anxious cares.

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### SERMON CLXIII.

*I cried with my whole heart ; hear me, O Lord ; I will keep thy statutes.*—VER. 145.

SECONDLY, Here is the petition, 'Hear me ;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'answer me ;' not in words, but deeds.



*Doct.* God's children when they pray are earnest for an answer.

To give you some instances: Ps. lxxxv. 8, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak.' A gracious heart doth not make prayer a vain babbling or an empty prattle, but a gracious exercise that will in time get an answer, and obtain a good return or blessing from the Lord. Therefore they are listening and hearkening after news from heaven, if they can hear anything from God, how he receiveth their prayers, and what he will do for them: Micah vii. 7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' They are not only waiting, but observing and watching what cometh in upon prayer; for they are certain it is not breath poured out in the air, but a petition commended to their God, who hath promised to hear them. So Hab. ii. 1, 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say to me.' He compareth himself to a watchman that is spying abroad if he can get any intelligence of any approaching comfort. So Ps. v. 3, 'I will pray, and look up;' as Elijah, if he could spy a cloud, any preparation towards mercy.

*Reason 1.* Because they dare not take God's name in vain, as all do that pray cursorily and never regard what cometh of it; like foolish boys that knock at a door in wantonness, but have no business, and therefore will not stay till somebody cometh to open the door. It is a great sin to take God's name in vain in any act of worship, much more in prayer. Now all do so that go about this duty as a task, not as a means to do their souls good, or to obtain blessings from God; when I hear merely that I may hear, or receive the Lord's supper, and rest in the act of receiving. Every ordinance must be gone about in faith and obedience, expecting the ends of the duty, as well as being employed in the acts of it. If you do it in good earnest, and with respect to God's institution, you must do so. All the ordinances come under a fourfold notion—as duties, as privileges, as means, as talents. As duties enjoined, and a part of our homage and obedience to God; this will breed an awe upon our conscience, to keep us to a due and constant observance of them; it is not a matter arbitrary, but our necessary duty. As privileges; this keepeth us from weariness, that we may not consider them as a burdensome task. As means of our growth and improvement, that notion is necessary that we may not rest in the work wrought, but look after the grace dispensed thereby. As talents for which we must give an account, which will quicken us to more earnest diligence in the improvement. Some do not look upon them as duties, and so neglect them; others not as privileges, and so do not prize them, are not joyful in the house of prayer; others not as means, and so rest in the bare performance, without looking after the fruits to be had thereby; others not as talents, and so are more indifferent whether they get good by them, yea or no: but when all these are regarded, we act best in any service or ordinance. Now, as this is true of ordinances in general, so especially of prayer, which is a sweet means of communion with God, not to be done as a task; herein we make an immediate address to God and come to set him a-work, and to take proof of his power and goodness, to see what he will do for his people. We put it, I say, to the trial, as in that ex-

traordinary case Elijah puts his contest with Baal's priests upon this issue, 'that God that should answer by fire, he should be God,' 1 Kings xviii. 24; so ordinarily we put in prayer to trial whether God hath any respect to his people, and that with God's own leave and encouragement; for he hath said that none shall seek his face in vain, Isa. xlv. 19. We put it to proof whether he will keep touch with his people, and be able and willing to perform what he hath promised. Therefore we use this duty in vain, and in a cursory way, if we be not earnest for an answer; which the saints dare not do.

*Reason 2.* Not looking for an answer proceedeth from an ill cause.

1. Heedlessness, not considering what they do, and then their prayers are the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. v. 1, 2. Surely attention to holy duties, and that we should consider what we are about, it is the most serious and important part of our lives. Now men that do not consider why they pray are heedless and inattentive and rash.

2. Atheism, there is a touch of it in this sin: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' God's being and his bounty, that there is a God, and that he will be good to them that seek him; these they do not believe steadfastly, these primitive and supreme truths of God's being and bounty, essence, and providence, but only comply with the common custom and fashion; for were they persuaded that there is a God, and that he is good to mankind, and will reward those that worship him sincerely, they would see what cometh of their duties and prayers to him.

3. Distrust, which is next akin to atheism: Job xxi. 15, 'What profit have we if we pray unto him?' Mal. iii. 14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances?' &c. Now when you look for nothing, we do in effect say so; for you carry it as if nothing would come of your prayers and fasts. They that are persuaded that God heareth them, they will wait for the answer of their prayers: 1 John v. 14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' But low and slight thoughts of God and his service beget this carelessness; something they do, but never look after what they do.

4. It argues some disesteem of God's favour and acceptance, they care not whether he hath any respect for them, yea or no; for they do not so much as inquire of it. Oh! how contrary is this to the temper of God's people! If God hide his face they are troubled, Ps. xxx. 7; he is the life of their lives: 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us,' Ps. iv. 7. The seasoning of their comforts is God's accepting their works, Eccles. ix. 7. How passionately do they beg for a glimpse, for a token for good, Ps. lxxxvi. 17. Nothing goeth so near their hearts as when the Lord hideth himself from their prayers: Ps. xxii. 2, 'I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not; in the night season, and am not silent;' Job xxx. 20, 'I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not.' A dumb oracle is a great trouble. They make a business of prayer, therefore it is very grievous to have no answer, not to see

their signs, to have no token for good. The church taketh it bitterly to heart: Lam. iii. 14, 'Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through.' That cloud is his wrath, by reason of sin. Now, to have no affection this way argueth a stupid, sottish spirit. These are two reasons of the point.

*Reason 3.* If we do not look after God's answer, our loss is exceeding great.

1. We lose our labour in prayer, yea, return worse than we came, with more hardness of heart and neglect of God. Yea, that is not all, the loss of a prayer with a degree of spiritual judgment; but we lose confirmation of faith, for answers of prayer are notable props to the soul to support our faith in the truth of God's being: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' Every one shall own thee for God. So many answers of prayer, so many arguments against natural atheism. We have challenged him upon his word, and find there is a God. So of the truth of the promises, Ps. xviii. 30. Thy word is a tried word; I will build upon it another time. You have put them in suit, and ever found them good. Now all these experiences are lost if we do not look for an answer of our prayers.

2. You lose excitements to love and obedience. Nothing so much increaseth our love to God, as when we see that he is mindful of us upon all occasions, especially in our deep necessities, Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord because he hath heard the voice of my supplication.' Every experience in this kind is a new fuel laid on to increase the fire.

3. We lose encouragements to pray again: Ps. cxvi. 2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear to me, I will call upon him so long as I live.' The throne of grace shall not be neglected and unfrequented by me: I see there is mercy to be had, help to be had. One adventure succeeding encourageth another: Ps. xxxii. 6, 'For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee;' because David found such ready audience and despatch.

4. You lose the benefit of sensible communion with God. Taking communion for familiarity, it lieth in donatives and duties, prayers and blessings; and there is a commerce between the heavens and the earth, by vapours and showers: prayers go up, and blessings come down; as it was told Cornelius, Acts x. 4, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;' and down come the blessings upon us.

5. God loseth honour and praise and thanksgiving if we do not look for an answer. For the answer, as it is matter of comfort to us, so it should be matter of praise to God: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;' so Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' We are to gather up matter of praise to God. We should not be so barren in gratulation if we did observe more of these experiences. You would not only be glorifying God by way of invocation, but commemoration: you may commend him to others from your own experience: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.'

*Use 1.* To reprove them that throw away their prayers, and never look after them; that play with such a duty as this, as children that shoot away their arrows, and never look where they light. Surely this



argueth great contempt and low thoughts of God, formality in prayer, and stupidity of heart. It bespeaks low thoughts of God and of his providence; for if they did believe such a particular providence reacheth to all persons and things, they would study to produce some of these experiences, to be able to say, I was in such a strait, and God delivered me: Ps. xxxiv, 6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord, and he heard him.' Great formality in prayer; for if we pray not out of course, but in good earnest, we cannot but hearken after the speeding of our requests. Great stupidity of spirit; hearts that have any sense of life in them are observing God's dealings, and suit their carriage accordingly. Lively Christians are putting cases.

*Use 2.* To press us to hearken after the answer of our prayers. God's children do so, and get much comfort thereby, and evidence of his love: Ps. lxvi. 18, 19, 'But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my cry.' It is no small favour and respect we have from God's love to us; it is a great owning of our persons; our mercies are the sweeter. There is a double lustre and beauty put upon them when they come in the way of prayer, out of the hand of God; not by a common providence, but by covenant; and by virtue of the covenant put in suit by us, as well as granted by God, which is a pledge of God's respect to us. To this end—

1. Be persuaded that God will hear you, and answer you when you pray according to his will: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' This is absolutely necessary for all that will pray aright, and mind what they do; for none can come to God aright but those that are persuaded they shall be the better for coming to him: James i. 5, 'Pray in faith, nothing wavering.' There must be a relying upon God, if indeed we pray to him. He that expects little in prayer will neither be much in it nor serious about the answer of it.

2. This answer must be heedfully observed. Careless spirits will not easily discern it: Ps. cxxx. 5, 6, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning;' as those that watched in the temple for the dawning of the day. This earnest waiting is a happy token; when we make much of prayers, they are not lost. Therefore, as they watched for the word, brethren, so must you wait upon God for some discovery of his love by a gracious answer and return unto your prayers.

3. Sometimes God giveth an answer presently; sometimes it may be after some competent space of time. (1.) Sometimes presently; as Cornelius, in the time of prayer, and while the duty is a-doing. God giveth in some tokens of acceptance; as an angel was sent to Cornelius at the ninth hour, which was the hour of prayer, to assure him that his prayers were heard, and duties accepted: Acts x. 3, 'Peter and John went up to pray at the ninth hour,' Acts iii. 1. So Daniel: 'Whilst I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin; yea, whilst I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel was caused to fly swiftly.' The Lord is ready to answer the prayers of his servants in the very instant of their praying. So Acts iv. 3, 'While they prayed, they were filled with the Holy Ghost.' The cases brought are singular



and extraordinary as to the token and manner of assistance, but as to the substance of the blessing, it is the common practice of God's free grace: Isa. lviii. 10, 'When they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear;' Acts xii. 12, a company was met together in prayer when Peter in prison heard of the time of his deliverance. (2.) Sometimes a good while after: the prayers are in God's book, Mal. iii. 16. Now these must be waited for: 'My God will hear me,' Micah vii. 7. We cannot say, As soon as the prayer is made, for he saith, 'I will wait for the God of my salvation.' Paul prayed thrice for the removal of the messenger of Satan, 2 Cor. xii.; then God said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' We must knock again and again. God heareth as soon as the prayer is made, but he taketh his own time to despatch an answer. Abraham prayeth for a child, but many years pass over till he hath him in his arms.

4. When God giveth an answer, own it as an answer. Sometimes we will not take notice of what is before our eyes, out of deep distress of spirit. It is said, Job ix. 16, 'Though I had called and he had answered, yet would I not believe that he had hearkened to my voice.' Thus we misinterpret God's dealings in our troubles, that we will not own God's work as an answer.

5. Consider the several ways how God giveth answer to his people's prayers.

[1.] Extraordinarily, as in ancient time; so an angel was sent to Cornelius to tell him his prayers were heard; so to Daniel; so to Abel, Heb. xi. 4, probably by fire from heaven; by vision to Abraham; by voice or visible token to Moses, and the high priest in the tabernacle of the congregation from above the mercy-seat. But these returns were proper to those times.

[2.] Ordinary, and this several ways:—

(1.) Either by granting the mercy prayed for; as to Hannah: 1 Sam. i. 27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition I asked of him.' So to David: Ps. xxi. 2, 'Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.' So often to his people, when they have humbly sought to him. Sometimes instantaneous, at the very praying: 1 Sam. vii. 9, 10, 'And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him, and as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel, and the Lord discomfited the Philistines.' Or by degrees, when God is preparing instruments, before he giveth consummate deliverance: Acts vii. 34, 'I have heard their groanings, and I will send thee into Egypt.' Their escape was some while after.

(2.) By giving in spiritual manifestations to the soul, though he doth not give the particular mercy prayed for; as when upon the prayer he reviveth the soul of him that prayeth: Job xxxiii. 26, 'He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable to him, and he shall see his face with joy.' The Lord giveth them the light of his countenance, and special discoveries of his love or support till the mercy come: Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' Support is an answer; such an answer had Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Or when the heart is quieted; though we do not know what God will

do with our requests, yet satisfied in the discharge of our duty, and that we have commended the matter to God. So it is said of Hannah, 'When she had prayed, her countenance was no more sad,' 1 Sam. i. 18; and Phil. iv. 6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ.' Sometimes by a secret impression of confidence, or a strong inclination to hope well of the thing prayed for: Ps. vi. 8, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' Or experiences; as they that travelled to Jerusalem, passing through the valley Baca, they met with a well by the way, Ps. lxxxiv. 6; a sweet refreshing thought, or some help in the spiritual life, by serious dealing with God; some consideration to set you a-work, or some new engagement of the soul to God, as the recompense of the duty; some principles of faith drawn forth in the view of conscience, not showed before. Some truth or other presented with fresh life and vigour upon the heart.

(3.) Sometimes by way of commutation and exchange; and so God doth answer the prayer, though he doth not give the mercy prayed for, when he giveth another thing that is as good, or better for the party that prayeth; though not in kind the same, yet in worth and value as good. This commutation may be three ways—(1.) In regard of the person praying. David fasts, and humbleth and melteth his soul for his persecutors, Ps. xxxv. 13, 'And it returned into his own bosom,' was converted to his own benefit. His fasting had no effect upon them, but his charity did not lose its reward. David prayeth for his first child by Bathsheba, but that child dieth, and God giveth Solomon instead thereof, 2 Sam. xii. 15. Noah, Daniel, Job shall save their own souls, Ezek. xiv. 14. Your peace shall return to you again, Luke x. 5, 6; the comfort of discharging their duty. (2.) In regard of the matter, carnal things are begged, and spiritual things are given: Acts i. 6, 7, 'The apostles asked him, Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' They did not receive the kingdom to Israel, but received the promise of the Spirit. Moses would fain enter into Caanan with the people: Deut. iii. 23, 24, 'And God said, Let it suffice thee; speak no more of this matter;' but God gave him a Pisgah sight, and ease of the trouble of wars. We would have speedy riddance of trouble, but God thinketh not fit; as showers that come by drops soak into the earth better than those that come in a tempest and hurricane. We ask for ease in troubles, and God will give courage under troubles: Lam. iii. 55–57, 'I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon: thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing; at my cry: thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not.' His gracious and powerful presence in trouble was enough. Christ 'was heard in that he feared,' Heb. v. 7; not saved from that hour, but supported and strengthened in it. Job sacrificed, prayed for his children when they were feasting, Job i. 5; and though they were all destroyed, God gave him patience, ver. 22; for in all that befell him 'he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.' (3.) In regard of means. We pray such means may not miscarry; God will use others. As Abraham would

fain have Ishmael the child of the promise, but God intended Isaac : Gen. xvii. 18, ' O that Ishmael might live before thee ! ' Thus doth God often blast instruments we most expect good from, and make use of others to be instruments for our good which we did least expect it from. God may give us our will in anger, when the mercy turneth to our hurt. Therefore the kind of God's answer must be referred to his own will, in all things for which we are not to pray absolutely ; and when we have discharged our duty, endeavoured to approve our hearts to God, take what answer he will give.

*Doct.* From the manner of praying, with the whole heart, the saints have the more confidence of being heard in prayer. David allegeth his crying with the whole heart as a hopeful intimation of a gracious answer.

1. Because a prayer rightly made hath the assurance of a promise. The promise is, John xvi. 24, ' Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' Now this beareth no exception, but that we ask according to his will, 1 John v. 14. *Si bona petant, boni, bene, ad bonum.* Good men, asking good things, in the name of Christ, for a good end, thou canst not miss.

2. Where there is sincerity and fervency, we have two witnesses to establish our comfort and hope—the Spirit of God, that knoweth the deep things of God ; and the spirit of man, that knoweth the things of man. God's Spirit, who stirreth up these groans in us : Rom. viii. 26, 27, ' He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' And the testimony of our own spirits, that we have done our part and discharged our duty, and so have true joy and confidence : Job xvi. 19, 20, ' My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high : my friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.'

3. God doth not use to send them away comfortless that call upon him in spirit and in truth, because by one grace he maketh way for another ; by the grace of assistance for the grace of acceptance : Ps. x. 17, ' Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble ; thou hast prepared their heart ; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' Where God hath given a heart to speak, he will afford an ear to hear ; for God will not lose his own work : he cannot refuse those requests which are according to the direction of his word and the motions of his Holy Spirit, when they are brought to him.

*Use.* This exhorteth us to look more after the manner of praying. An earnest and sincere prayer cannot miscarry ; judge by this and you cannot want success. You cannot judge of your prayers by the wit, by the length, by the kind of words ; but by the faith, the sincerity, the obedience, the holy desires expressed in them. Cry with your whole hearts, and God will hear you. (1.) Look to the fervency of the prayer ; set yourselves in good earnest to seek God, and good will come of it : Dan. ix. 3, ' I set my face to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplications.' I seriously minded the work : 2 Sam. vii. 27, ' Thy servant hath found in his heart to make this prayer unto thee ;' he found his heart disposed to call upon God. There is many a prayer we force upon ourselves, we do not find it there. What encouragements from the word, what motions from the Spirit ?



Resolve to seek after it till you have found it : Ps. xxvii. 2, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Wrestle with God : Hosea xii. 3, 'He had power over the angel, and prevailed ; he wept and made supplication unto him.' Such as wrestle with God, and have their hearts broken and melted before the Lord, will prevail. (2.) Look to the sincerity of your prayers ; see that you do not feign and pretend to pray for a thing you desire not. Is your confidence wholly in the Lord ? When your heart is divided, and you hanker after carnal lusts, you cannot pray aright. (3.) Look that you ask more for his glory than for your own ease : James iv. 3, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, to consume it on your lust.' The less by-ends in prayer, the more hope of success.

Thirdly, The promise of duty, 'I will keep thy statutes.'

*Doct.* God's children, when they think of mercy, are at the same time thinking of duty and obedience.

1. Because they are ingenuous and thankful. Now obedience is the best expression of gratitude : and therefore, when they ask mercy, they mingle resolutions of duty with expectations of mercy : Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.'

2. They are supernaturally or spiritually sincere, and so propose this as their scope in all conditions, to live unto God : all their desires and resolutions are to this purpose. They have a sense of their own benefit, but still in subordination ; their purpose is to serve him diligently : Phil. i. 21, 'To me to live is Christ ;' Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself : for whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live or die, therefore, we are the Lord's.'

3. This is God's end in giving mercy, temporal or spiritual, to bring them to obedience : Luke i. 74, 75, 'That we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' Save me, quicken me, and I will keep thy statutes. God's end in giving, and the end of gracious souls in seeking mercies and blessings, is much the same—that God may have the glory, as well as they the benefit and comfort of what he bestows upon them.

*Use.* Mind your service more ; engage yourselves to God anew, in every prayer : upon every mercy and answer of prayer : Lord, I desire this only in order to obedience.

## SERMON CLXIV.

*I cried unto thee ; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.—*

VER. 146.

THIS verse is the same with the former, only these differences may be observed :—



1. There the qualification of the prayer is expressed, 'I cried with my whole heart.' Here the person to whom he prayed, 'I cried to thee, O Lord.' He had told us before how he cried, now to whom he cried; to thee have I sought, and to thee only.

2. The request was general, that God would hear him; now particular, that he would deliver him; there it was 'hear me,' now 'save me.'

3. The notion which implieth the word of God is diversified; there 'statutes,' here 'testimonies.'

4. Our translation expresseth another difference; there it is, 'I will keep thy statutes,' as making it his vow and purpose; here, 'I shall keep thy testimonies,' as making it the effect and fruit of his deliverance; or, as it is in the marginal reading, 'that I may keep thy testimonies,' as making it his scope and aim.

In the words observe—

1. An intimation of prayer, *I cried unto thee.*

2. The matter of his prayer, *save me*, or deliver me out of trouble.

3. The end and scope of his prayer, not for the satisfaction of his natural desire, but that he might have a heart and opportunity to serve God, and obey his word: *that I may*, or then I shall, *keep thy testimonies.*

Observations from the text.

*Doct.* 1. We should not lightly give over our suits to God.

Here is a repetition of the same prayer: I cried, yea, again I cried, and a third time: ver. 147, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.' *Si ter pulsanti nemo respondet, abito*; we use to knock at a door thrice, and then depart. Our Lord Jesus, Mat. xxvi. 44, 'prayed the third time the same words, saying, Father, if it be possible, let this cup depart from me.' So the apostle Paul: 2 Cor. ii. 8, 'For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.' So 1 Kings xvii. 21, 'And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again.' This it seemeth was the time in which they expected an answer in weighty cases, and yet I will not confine it to that number, for we are to reiterate our petitions for one and the same thing, so often as occasion requireth, till it be granted.

Now the reasons are:—

1. Because the force of importunity is very great: the two parables evidence that, Luke xi. and Luke xviii.; if to obtain the Spirit, or right upon our enemies or oppressors. In both these parables there is a condescension to the suppositions of our unbelief; if we suppose God tenacious and hard-hearted, or if we suppose him regardless and mindless of the affairs of the church; or, to put it in milder terms, if we think nothing due to us: Luke xi. 8, 'If he will not rise and give him because he is his friend;' or if our condition be so hard that we think it is past all relief; whatever be our secret and misgiving thoughts, we ought always to pray, *καὶ μὴ ἐκκακεῖν*, not to be overcome with evil: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' for importunity is of great prevalence with God and men.

2. A deliverance is never so sweet, nor so thankfully improved, if it come at the first call.

[1.] It is not so sweet, *nolo nimis facilem*. We disdain things that come too easily, but that which costs us much pains and long crying is more prized. The reason is because delay and difficulty sharpen our desires, and the sharper our desire in the absence of a blessing, the greater gust and sweetness we find in it when it cometh at last. A sack that is stretched out is more capacious, and holdeth the more; so is the soul more widened by enlarged desires, to entertain the blessing; for always our delight is according to the proportion of our desires; as a hungry man, or one long kept from meat, relisheth his food better than another that hath it always at hand: Isa. xxv. 9, 'And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation.' We that know blessings more by the want than the worth of them, in waiting we are acquainted with the difficulties and inconveniences that attend the want of things, and so are more fitted to prize them than ever we should have been if we had not so long waited.

[2.] It is more thankfully improved; this follows upon the former, and may be further made good, because when we know the difficulty of getting a blessing, we will not easily part with it; as they that get an estate are usually more careful how they spend it than they that are born to one: therefore God holdeth his people long at prayer, to prepare and season their hearts, that when they have it, they may know better how to employ it for his glory and his own good. Questionless Hannah would never have devoted her child to God had she not continued so long without him, and prayed for him with such bitterness of heart; but that wrought on her: 1 Sam. i. 11, 'And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child; then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.' Compare this with ver. 27, 28, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent unto the Lord.' The same effect you may observe in any spiritual comfort you obtain for your souls, or any temporal mercy or comfort of the present life, which you get by prayer. If God had answered you at first, it had been reckoned among the ordinary effects of his goodness, and so passed by; but what is won by prayer is usually worn with thankfulness. You would not have been so sensible of the hand of providence, the graciousness of the answer, or your obligation to God, or indeed that it had been an answer of prayer at all.

3. Things often and earnestly asked of God come with the greater fulness of blessing when they come; and so, as one saith, God payeth them use<sup>1</sup> for forbearance; the mercy is the more ample, and so every prayer hath its reward. Christ denied the woman of Canaan long, but at length yieldeth up himself to her importunity: Mat. xv. 26,

<sup>1</sup> That is, interest.—Ed.

‘O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.’ She lost nothing by the delay. Hannah was long without a child, but at length the child proved the more eminent; she gets both a child and a prophet too. Let God alone, and do you continue praying, and he will recompense you abundantly for all his delay. Peter was in prison, and the church made prayers without ceasing, Acts xii. 5, and God doth not only bring him out, but brings him out with a miracle, so that they were astonished, ver. 16. God delayed for a while, and seemed to refuse their prayers; but when Herod was just about to bring him forth to execution, God brought him forth to deliverance. Every prayer is upon the file, and contributeth to make the mercy the more complete; it remaineth day and night before the Lord: 1 Kings viii. 59, ‘And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, as a memorial;’ Acts x. 4, ‘Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.’

4. It argueth an ill spirit when we will not continue praying, though we have not presently that which we pray for. To be sure—

[1.] There is disobedience in it, for it is contrary to God’s injunctions: Luke xviii. 1, ‘Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.’ We ought not to surcease our suits so: Eph. vi. 18, ‘Praying always, and with all perseverance;’ *always* relateth to the constant exercise of this duty upon all occasions; *with all perseverance*, to particular suits we put up to God. Now our duty must not be omitted, whatever the discouragements be; as Moses was to hold up his hands till the going down of the sun, so are we to continue our suits, and press hard for an answer, till God give us the thing we pray for.

[2.] There is weakness of faith to yield to the temptation, and to go off upon every repulse; yea, sometimes too too plain unbelief and atheism, as if there were no mercy to be expected from God, or no good to be obtained by spiritual means. Faith is to believe what we see not. The woman of Canaan cometh to Christ; at first she gets not a word from him, and afterwards his speech is more discouraging than his silence; she is put out of the compass of his commission: ‘I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;’ but still she is importunate; afterwards a rough answer: ‘It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it unto dogs.’ She turneth his rebuke into an encouragement; then, ‘O woman, great is thy faith,’ Mat. xv. 26. Many times we pray for blessings, and the oracle is dumb and silent; though God love the supplicant, yet he will not seem to take notice of his desires: yea, the more they pray, the more they may go away with a sense of their unworthiness and revived guilt; yet the work of faith is to make an answer out of God’s silence, a gracious answer out of his rebukes, and to increase our importunity the more.

[3.] Want of love to God, or coldness of love. It is the property of love to adhere to God, though we be not feasted with felt comforts and present benefits; yea, though he appear an enemy; for so will God try the affection and deportment of his children: Isa. xxvi. 8, ‘Yea, in the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee; the desire of our souls is to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name;’ Job xiii. 15, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.’ Not only



when our affections are bribed: a child of God should love God for his judgments, as well as fear him for his mercies; as lime, the more water you sprinkle upon it, the more it burneth. It was a high expression of Bernard's affection to those that he took to be the people of God, *Adhaerebo vobis etiamsi velitis etiamsi nolitis*; so should we adhere to God now. When you can only wait on him in the way of his mercies, not in the way of his judgments, your waiting and praying is discouraged upon every difficulty and disappointment, you have little love to him.

[4.] Want of patience, or tarrying God's leisure till the promise bring forth. Some are hot and hasty; if God will appear presently they can be content to observe him; but to be crying and crying till their throat be hoarse and weary of crying, and no good come on it, they cannot away with this: 2 Kings vi. 33, 'This evil is of the Lord; why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' They are discontented that God maketh them stay so long. Though God wait long upon them, and had reason enough to take the discouragement and be gone, yet they cannot tarry a little for God, and think prayer a useless work, unless it yield them a quick return, and that it is better to shift for themselves.

*Use.* Reproof to two sorts:—

1. To those that cease praying or crying to God, if they have not a present answer, especially if they meet with a contrary rebuke in the course of his providence. You must cry, and cry again, not imagine that God will be at your beck; but foolish men suddenly conclude, Mal. iii. 14, 'It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' Oh no! Consider something is due to the sovereignty of God, that we should wait his leisure; for he is supreme, and will govern the world according to his own will, not ours. And therefore we must stay his time for the mercies we expect: Ps. cvi. 13, 14, 'They soon forgat his word, they waited not for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.' And something is due to the stated course of his providence. We cannot expect that God should turn all things upside-down for our sakes, and invert the beautiful order of his dispensations: Job xviii. 4, 'Shall the earth be forsaken for thee, and the rock removed out of his place?' shall God alter the course of nature, or change the order of governing the world for us, or to please our humour? Something is due to the present estate of mankind, who are not to live by sense, but by faith: Hab. ii. 3, 4, 'For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.' And that appointed time is for our trial, to see if we out of duty and principles of faith, can keep up our respects unto God, though his providence doth not presently gratify our desires or satisfy our necessities. Besides, it concerneth us to suspect ourselves rather than to blemish God's dispensations. Those always complain most of God's not hearing prayer who least deserve to be heard: Isa. lviii. 3-5, 'Wherefore



have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labour: behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness, ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?’

2. That though they do not cease praying, yet do they not pray with any life and hope, because of his delays and seeming denials. There are certain general blessings which we are always praying for, because though we have them, yet we ought daily to ask them of God; the continuance of them, the sense of them, the increase of them; here never cease praying. There are other particular blessings, that either concern ourselves, or the church of God, which we are to ask with earnestness, and yet submission: in these we put it to the most sensible trial whether God will hear us or no. Now for these things we must seek the face of God with hope and zeal.

[1.] Because it is not enough to keep up the duty, unless we keep up the affections that must accompany the duty: Rom. xii. 12, ‘Continuing instant in prayer,’ *προσκαρτεροῦντες*. In long afflictions men will pray, but they pray as men out of heart, for fashion’s sake, or with little and weak affection; rather satisfying their consciences than setting a-work the power of God.

[2.] A seeming repulse or denial should make us more vehement; as blind Bartimeus, ‘the more they rebuked him, he cried so much the more,’ Mark x. 48. God suffereth the faith of his servants to be tried with great discouragements; but the more it is opposed, the more should it grow, and the more powerfully and effectually should it work in our hearts; as the palm-tree shooteth up the faster the more weight is hung upon it; or as fire, the more it is pent up, the more it striveth to break out; therefore we should not only have fresh affections at first, but in every new prayer we should act over our faith again, and put forth spiritual desires anew.

[3.] God’s dearest children are not admitted at the first knock: Mat. vii. 7, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ It may be we have not at first asking; we need seek and knock. Mercy doth not come to us all in haste; we have not at first what we lack; delays are no denials; therefore we must not take the first or second answer, but continue with instance: ‘Give the Lord no rest,’ Isa. lxii. 7. Be importunate with him, to hasten the deliverance of his people.

[4.] We must not only continue praying when Christ seemeth to neglect us, or to give no answer, but when he giveth a contrary answer; when he, to appearance, rejecteth our persons and prayers, and seemeth to forbid us to pray. Sometimes he seemeth to neglect us, and pass us by as if he took no notice; but yet he heareth when he doth not answer; yea, his not answering is an answer. Pray, or continue your prayer. It is said, Mark vi. 48, ‘He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them; and about the fourth watch of the

night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.' But he came with an intent to appease the storm and help them. Christ taketh notice of the distresses of his people, but they shall not know so much, but delayeth to help till all their patience be spent, and yet then seemeth to pass by, for their thorough trial and exercise, and to move them more earnestly to pray. Sometimes he giveth them a seeming contrary answer and rebuke; instead of an expression of favour, he seemeth to pursue us in anger. God is the main party against us, we have to do with an offended God; but yet we should not quit him, but follow him when he seemeth to forsake us, and fly to him when he is pursuing us in hot displeasure. Such is the admirable power of faith that it dares call on an angry God, and follow him when he goeth away from us, and lay hold on him when he smiteth, and cast itself into his arms in the midst of his rebukes and frowns: Jonah ii. 4, 'Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again towards thy holy temple.' God seemeth to cast us off, as those he will not favour or care for, which is a great trouble to a child of God, who liveth by his favour, and valueth that above all things else: now for such a one to be rejected by God in his own sense and feeling, it goeth near his heart; yet in such a case we should not cast away our confidence, nor give over all addresses to God, but yet look to him and wait upon him.

[5.] Whether God answereth or no, it is the duty of faith to answer itself. The answer of his providence is not so sure as the answer of his word, and that faith hath to do with. See Ps. vi. 4, 'Return, O Lord; deliver my soul; save me, for thy mercies' sake.' Compare ver. 8, 9, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping: the Lord hath heard the voice of my supplications; the Lord will receive my prayer.' When trembling for fear of wrath, yet in prayer his heart groweth confident as if it had received news of an answer from heaven: Ps. lv. 2, 'Attend unto me, and hear me;' compared with ver. 19, 'My God shall hear, and afflict them.' He is confident of it that the prayer should not miscarry. So Ps. liii. 1, 2, 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; defend me from them that rise up against me; deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men;' ver. 10, 'The God of my mercy shall prevent me; God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies.' Faith sees its own deliverance in the promise and all-sufficiency of God. When we have prayed according to God's will, we should take our prayer for granted, and leave it lying at God's feet: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' God's delay is not always an argument of his hatred, but some more glorious purpose which is to be helped on by prayer: John xi. 5, 6, 'When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.'

I observe again, that he not only repeateth his prayer, but reneweth the promise of obedience, to show that it was no vanishing notion, but a settled conclusion; as Christ maketh Peter profess his love thrice to engage him the more, John xxi. So David, 'I will keep thy statutes;' and again, 'I will keep thy testimonies;' as if he had said, Indeed Lord, I will; it is the settled purpose of my heart

to return to thee in the sincere obedience of my whole life. The note is—

*Doct.* That purposes and promises of obedience should not be slightly made, but with the greatest advertency and seriousness of mind.

1. Because we are usually too slight in devoting ourselves to God : Deut. v. 27–29, ‘Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say ; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spake unto me, and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee ; they have well said, all that they have spoken. Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.’ The Israelites again, when Joshua puts them to the question whether they would serve the Lord or other gods, Joshua xxiv. 18, 19, ‘We will serve the Lord, for he is our God. Joshua said unto them. Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God.’ What is the reason men are so slight ? Partly because they measure their strength by the present pang of devotion that is upon them, not considering the latent principle of sin, and that proneness to transgress that is in their hearts. Partly they take up duty by the lump, and the general bulk and view of it, without sitting down and counting the charges, as Christ advises, Luke xiv. ; whether they can be content to bear difficulties, renounce lusts, crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof. A foolish builder doth not think of storms, Mat. vii. ; if his building stand for the present, he is satisfied. Partly because men will promise God fair to be rid of the present anguish and troubles, yield to anything to be out of the present danger ; but when they are out, they seldom regard the vows of their distress ; as those, Ps. lxxviii. 34–37, made great promises, ‘but their heart was not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.’ Partly too when they are out of a temptation, and lusts are not stirring, they are other men than when in temptation, and so think all will be easy.

2. Because the nature of the work calleth for advertency and seriousness, because it is a work of the greatest moment, and so must be done with the greatest deliberation. This devoting ourselves to God both entitleth us to all the comforts of Christianity, and engageth us to all the duties of it. It entitleth us to all the comforts ; you enter yourselves heirs to the covenant of grace when you enter into the bond of the holy oath, or give your hand to the Lord to be his people : 1 Cor. iii. 22, ‘All things are yours, because you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.’ If you have owned Christ as your dearest Saviour and sovereign Lord, with love, thankfulness, and subjection, and given him the supreme command of your souls, then you are Christ’s, and God is yours, and all things yours : glory and salvation shall be yours in the world to come ; grace, help, maintenance, ordinances, and providences shall be yours in the present world ; and death, as the connection between the two worlds, as the passage out of the one into the other, shall be yours also. It is also the beginning and foundation of all obedience, and if this were once seriously and heartily done, other things would succeed the more easily. He that is indeed God’s will



use himself for God's glory and service, and God shall have a share in all that he hath and doth : Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.' They came off so freely : 2 Cor. viii. 5, 'And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' This enliveneth our whole work. It is no hard matter to persuade them that have given up themselves to God to part with anything for God's use.

3. Because of the danger both in regard of sin and judgment, if we do it not aright.

[1.] In regard of sin, rash and sudden engagements are seldom sound : Mat. xiii. 20, 21, the stony ground received the word with joy, and forthwith the good seed sprang up, but the blade soon withered. Usually sudden undertakings are accompanied with faint and feeble prosecutions; and though men are warm and passionate for the present, within a while it cometh to nothing; all their promises are broken, as tow is burnt in the fire.

[2.] In regard of judgment, every consecration implieth an execration. If you break with God after you have engaged yourselves to him, your condition is worse; it aggravateth every deliberate sin, and hastens judgment, for God will avenge the quarrel of his covenant, Lev. xxvi. 25. Better never begin, or the word pass out of your mouths, or thought enter into your heart, unless you be sincere, mean as you say. It is dangerous to alienate things once consecrated; this is the worst kind of sacrilege, that shall not go unpunished.

*Use.* You see, then, what seriousness we should use in devoting ourselves to God, or promising obedience to him.

1. Remember the weakness of a creature, that you may resolve in God's strength.

2. Consider incident temptations, whether anything be like to shake you in your covenanted course, that you may arm yourselves against it.

3. Consider your more particular affections; where the business is like to stick most, there are tender parts.

4. Consider the weight and importance of subjection. He will not be content with a little religiousness by the by, but you must love him with all your heart and all your soul, and serve him with all your might.

5. Consider the strength of your resolution, that you be irrevocably, everlastingly put under the sovereignty and command of God. Thus do, and you will find success and comfort in your deed.

Now to the words themselves. There is first an intimation of a prayer; where—

1. The vehemency, *I cried.*

2. The object or person to whom, *to thee.*

'I cried.' David keepeth up his fervour. What crying in prayer is I have showed in the former verse. I shall observe now—

*Doct.* That great trouble and sense of danger puts an edge upon prayer, and kindleth our affection in it.

When Israel was under sore bondage, God saith, Exod. iii. 6 'I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and have heard their



cry.' Afflictions make us cry in prayer, not only speak. An ordinary affection is *vox orationis*; it speaketh to God in prayer; but a vehement affection is *clamor orationis*, the cry of prayer. Ordinary prayers speak to God, but earnest prayers cry to God; and though remiss and cold wishes vanish in the air, yet strong cries pierce the heavens. They have a shrill accent, and cannot be kept out from God: Judges iv. 3, 'The children of Israel cried unto the Lord; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron.' So Judges vi. 5-7, 'They cried to the Lord because of the Midianites, who came up as grasshoppers.' David: Ps. xviii. 6, 'In my distress I called to the Lord, and cried to my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.' He prayed not seldom, but often and frequently; not slackly, but with fervency and earnestness.

1. Affliction will teach men to pray that never prayed before. The rude mariners in a storm called every man upon his god: *Qui nescit orare, discat navigare*, Jonah i. 5. Those that neglect God at other times, as if they had no need of him, or pray faintly, are then glad to seek to him for succour and safety: Ps. lxxiii. 34, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and inquired early after God.' The natural principle of fear of death and love of self-preservation puts them upon it. So Jer. ii. 27, 'In their affliction they will say, Arise and save us;' Judges x. 10, 'And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee;' and ver. 14, 'Go, and cry unto the gods that ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.'

2. Good ones that prayed before will pray better and oftener, and with greater seriousness. Therefore God puts his own in straits to quicken their affections: Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer, when thy chastening was upon them.' So Hosea v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face, in their affliction they will seek me early.' When we are pressed hard on all sides, then the throne of grace is more frequented; we are driven to it. Joab would not come at Absalom's call till he set his barley-field on fire.

Use 1. Be content to be cast into such an estate that you may learn to pray; for, alas! we are but cursory at other times, but then our necessities whip us to the throne of grace, that was set up for a time of need; then is a time to put promises in suit, to make use of our interest in God. We mis-expound the voice of God's providence; we expound trouble to be his casting off, putting us from him; they are his voice calling, his hand pulling us to him: it is a time of drawing nigh we are allowed: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in a day of trouble.' The day of trouble is the fruit of sin, a part of the old curse. When we think him, feel him an enemy, he is drawing us nearer to him. Blessed season to bring God and you together, when our troubles chase us to the throne of grace. God is not wholly gone, he hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to himself.

Use 2. It reproveth them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. ix. 13, 'All this is come upon us, yet we have not made our prayer unto thee.' You defer the dispensation; now you should make up your former negligence. Unprofitableness under the rod is an ill

presage, when God sends a tempest after us. Oh, how frequent and earnest should we be in the practice of this duty!

1. This is a time proper for it. Prayer is a duty never out of season, though some seasons are proper and solemn to it. God is always to be prayed unto, Job xxvii. 11. When freed from trouble and inconvenience we are not freed from prayer; still we must profess dependence, subjection, and maintain our communion. But this is a special season: James v. 13, 'Is any one afflicted? let him pray.'

2. Though afflictions drive us to the throne of grace, yet if we come seriously and heartily, we are not unwelcome to him. Those very prayers which necessity doth extort from us are accepted by God, and valued by him as an acceptable piece of worship. Therefore such as look toward God ought not to be discouraged though afflictions drive them to it, though they sought him not before, or not in good earnest before; provided that always they find other errands, and be careful to maintain a constant communion with him. Most that are acquainted with God are taken in the briars. Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh had never heard of many, if their necessities had not brought them to him—their palsies, and possessions, and fevers, deafness, dumbness; thanks to these as their awakening occasions. A man will say, You come to me in your necessity. God is willing to receive us upon any terms.

3. How desperate in appearance soever our condition seem to be, yet crying will bring relief, or help may be found in God for them that cry to him: Judges iii. 9, 'When they cried, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz:' Judges iii. 15, 'And when the children of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera.' So Psalm cvii.; frequently.

From that *unto thee*.

*Doct.* In our troubles we must have recourse to God, and sue to him by prayer and supplication for help and deliverance in due time.

1. Because he is the author of our trouble. In miseries and afflictions our business lieth not with men, but God; by humble dealing with him we stop wrath at the fountain-head. He that bindeth us must loose us; he is at the upper end of causes, and whoever be the instruments of our trouble, and how malicious soever, God is the party with whom we are to make our peace; for he hath the absolute disposal of all creatures, and will have us to acknowledge the dominion of his providence, and our dependence upon him. In treaties of peace between two warring parties, the address is not made to private soldiers, but to their chief: 'The Lord hath taken away,' saith Job, chap. xxxiv. 29; 'when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?'

2. He challengeth this prerogative to be the God of salvation: Ps. iii. 8, 'Salvation belongeth unto the Lord;' and therefore, if we would be saved, we must seek it of him. Others cannot help if he help not, for he hath all means and creatures and second causes at his command. If we lean to means, they may fail, but if we rely upon God, he will never fail. Therefore, whatever means God offereth for our help, prayer to God is the best means, and first to be used.

3. There is comfort in dealing with God, whatever our case be. (1.) Because of his all-sufficient power. (2.) Because of his good-will and readiness to help.

[1.] Because of his power and all-sufficiency, so that he hath ways of deliverance more than we know of, and can save his own when men do count their case desperate: Dan. iii. 29, 'There is no other God that can deliver after this sort.' Let the strait be never so great, the burden heavy, and the creature weak, and at a desperate loss, yet God can find out ways and means to do his people good.

[2.] For his good-will and readiness to hear: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'Oh, thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' The readiness of God to hear prayer doth open a door of access to all people who are sensible of their burdens and necessities. He hath ever showed himself ready to hear the cries and groans of his people, and woe be to them against whom they cry: Ps. xxii. 5, 'They cried unto thee, and were delivered.' Their cries and groans are not hid from him, and cannot be shut out: Ps. cvi. 44, 'Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, and he heard their cry.'

*Use. 1.* To reprove divers sorts.

1. Some seek to help themselves by impatiency, fretting, unquiet behaviour in their troubles; this doth increase their misery. Go, pour out your hearts before the Lord, that giveth ease: Phil. iv. 6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.' Your wrestling with trouble within yourselves doth but embroil you the more.

2. Some trust in outward helps, seek to men and means; as Asa to the physicians, not to the Lord, 2 Chron. xvi. 12. It is not unlawful to use means, but we must depend upon the Lord for the blessing. Seek to him first, otherwise looking to man proveth a snare many ways, as it tempts us to comply with their lusts, to neglect God, maketh way for the greater sorrow in disappointment. The creature is vain in itself, made more vain by our confidence: Ps. lx. 11, 'Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man.' You will be brought to it at last. The more earnestly we seek God, the more confidence we may have of the creature.

*Use 2.* To inform us of the privilege and duty of the godly.

1. Their privilege; they have a God to go to. The worldly man sigheth and crieth he knoweth not to whom; but the godly man presenteth himself in his lamentations to God: 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God,' Job xvi. 20. He hath a Father in secret, a Friend in a corner; they need not go to men, nor to saints and angels; they have God himself, and can challenge him by his office, as the judge of the world, to help poor creatures: Ps. xciv. 2, 'Lift up thyself, thou judge of the world; render a reward to the proud.' Yea, by his peculiar relation to them: Ps. v. 2, 'Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my king and my God; for unto thee will I pray.' They do not cry unto him as a stranger, but one in covenant relation with them.

2. Their duty to make God their guardian and saviour in all their



distress, when in their own sense they are near perishing : Mark viii. 26, 'Arise, save us, we perish ;' 2 Kings xix. 19, 'Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save us out of his hand ; that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.' When they have a good cause and a good conscience, this they may do and this they ought to do, and they will have comfort in it.

The last thing which I shall observe is—

*Doct.* That prayer for deliverance should be accompanied with serious purposes of obedience. 'Then,' saith David, 'I will keep thy testimonies.'

1. Because this is the best expression of gratitude and thankfulness. I take it for granted that every mercy from God deserveth a thankful return on the creature's part ; as we expect a return of our prayers, so God expecteth a return of his mercies ; and therefore we should be as careful to give him what he requireth, as we are careful to seek of him that which we need ; for even in our commerce with God there is *ratio dati et accepti*. I presume, again, that there is no such expression of thankfulness as obedience. Verbal thanks are but a cold return ; thanks-doing is the best thanksgiving : Ps. l. 23, 'He that offereth praise glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.' Yea, once more, that we should think of this aforehand ; while we are asking the mercy in our distress, we should engage ourselves to glorify God both in word and deed. Again, the time that we have our mercies for ; in affliction we consider and are more serious, and afterwards we should keep the conscience of our obligation.

2. It is a sign the rod hath done its work, and then it will be gone, when it hath convinced you of former failings, and put you upon serious purposes : Job xxxiv. 31, 32, 'Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will offend no more. That which I see not, teach thou me : if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' Otherwise what we ask of temporal mercy is either denied us or we get it in wrath.

3. You have a true notion of deliverance ; you look upon it as an engaging mercy ; therefore if God alter your condition you are bound to serve him. The end of our great deliverance is service : Luke i. 74, 75, 'That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' All deliverances out of straits are branches and appendices of the great redemption of our souls unto eternal life, and have the same end and use : Ps. cv. 45, 'That they might observe his statutes and keep his laws.' That is the end of all deliverance out of trouble, to engage the hearts of his people to obedience, heart to serve him, opportunity to serve him.

4. A gracious heart desireth nothing to himself alone, and cannot be content to have the use of any benefit to himself only, but eyes God in all his enjoyments and all his requests ; therefore his great aim is that he may be in the better condition to keep God's commandments, for they 'live unto God ;' Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'For none of us liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself ; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we



live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.' In every state they would be unto God what they are when they seek to be delivered; it is that they may be in the better condition and capacity to serve God, and have more opportunities to glorify his name.

*Use.* To persuade us to seek deliverance with these aims.

1. This is the temper of the people of God; that which urgeth to prayer is his glory; that which is their scope is his service. It is seen partly by the secret workings and purposes of their souls, what they do with their mercies when they have them; what they please themselves with in the supposition of obtaining them. What is it with? The satisfying of their revenge, providing for their families, living in pomp and ease, or that they may serve God? Ps. lxxv. 2, 'When I shall receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly;' if ever God give an opportunity again. And partly by the preparations; they are afraid of a treacherous heart, therefore fitting themselves to enjoy the mercy before they have it, as the apostle learned to abound, Phil. iv. 11, 12. Partly by the arguments they urge in prayer: Ps. lxxxviii. 10-12, 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?' So Ps. cvi. 47, 'Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.' A true believer would have comfort, not for his own satisfaction, but to glorify God.

2. Then we are sure to speed when our end is right: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' We may speak it with confidence, our prayers miscarry for want of a right end.

3. The equity of this; God hears us that we should hear him.

## SERMON CLXV.

*I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.*—VER. 147.

DAVID still goeth on to give us an account of his fervour in prayer, 'I cried.' That which we have new in this verse is—

1. His vigilancy and diligence, *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.*

2. The reason and encouragement of this instant and assiduous praying, *I hoped in thy word.*

*First,* His vigilancy and diligence, 'I prevented,' &c. He rose betimes to meditate and pray; the Septuagint, *ἐν ἀωρίᾳ*. Hesychius defineth that time to be *ὥραν ἀπρακτον*, a time of no business; when others were sleeping David was praying. The word 'prevented' is emphatical. David lived as it were in a strife with time, being careful it should not overrun him; he pressed to get before it, by doing some good in it, and to get beforehand with the day.

*Doct.* Those that make a business of prayer will use great vigilancy and diligence therein.

I say, that make a business of prayer; others that use it as a compliment and customary formality will not be thus affected, or do it as a thing by the by, or a work that might well be spared, do not look upon it as a necessary duty; but if a man's heart be in it, he will be early at work, and follow it close morning and night. His business is to maintain communion with God; his desires will not let him sleep, and he gets up early to be calling upon God: Ps. lxxxviii. 13, 'But unto thee have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.' Thus will good men even break their sleep to give themselves to prayer and calling upon the name of God. So Isa. xxvi. 9, 'With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.' A man that hath an earnest desire after God, he will be at it night and day, when others are taking their rest. Their seeking of God is early and earnest; but where such strong desires are not, God is little minded and regarded; and of all businesses prayer seemeth that which may be best spared.

That I may fully commend David's practice to you, I shall observe in this his diligence:—

1. That it was a personal, closet, or secret prayer, 'I cried,' I alone, with thee in secret.

2. That it was an early morning prayer, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning.'

3. That it was a vehement and earnest prayer, for it is expressed by crying, which, as Chrysostom saith, noteth *οὐτόν τον τῆς φωνῆς ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας τὴν διάθεσιν*—Chrys. in Ps. v. He proveth it by that of God to Moses, 'Wherefore criest thou unto me?' Exod. xiv. 15. And when Moses was silent, yet he crieth; for crying noteth the affection of the mind, not extension of the voice. Where I shall note, that it was an earnest prayer, though private; and earnest, though as yet he could get no answer.

4. That it was the prayer of a public person, of a king, and a king entangled in wars, whose calling exposed him to a multitude of business and distractions; yet he had his times of converse with God. Take all this together, and the pattern will be more fit to be commended to your imitation.

First, It was a personal or secret prayer, 'I cried,' I alone, and without company. Our Saviour doth in Mat. xviii. 19, 20, encourage us to public prayer, by the blessed effect of such petitions, where two or three do agree to ask anything of God in the name of Christ. He doth suppose that his disciples will make conscience of personal and solitary prayer, and therefore giveth directions and encouragement about it: Mat. vi. 6, 'But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly.' He taketh it for granted that every one of his disciples is sufficiently convinced of being often with God in private, and pouring out his heart to God alone. It is not *if*, but *when*, as supposing they will be careful of this; it is not plurally and collectively, 'when ye pray,' but *ὅταν προσεύχη* 'when thou prayest.' Elsewhere the context speaketh

of public prayer, or the assemblies of saints and of family worship ; but here he speaketh of personal prayer. Church prayer hath a special blessing, when with a combined force we besiege heaven ; as the petition of a shire and county is more than a private man's supplication ; but yet this is not without its blessing. God is with you in private. Pray to thy Father in secret, and he that seeth in secret observeth the carriage and posture and frame of thy spirit ; all thy fervour and uprightness of heart is known to him. That which is the hypocrite's fear, that God seeth in secret, is the saint's comfort, that God seeth in secret : it bindeth condemnation upon the thoughts of wicked men, 1 John iii. 21, but is their support, John xxi. 17 ; Rom. viii. 17, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the spirit.' He knoweth the brokenness or unbrokenness of the heart ; he can pick out the very language of thy sighs and groans, know where thou art, and how thou art employed : Acts ix. 11, 'Arise and go into the street which is called Strait, and inquire in the house of Judas for one Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth.' In such a street, in such a house, in such a chamber of the house, there is one a-praying : a notable place to express God's seeing in secret, where we are, what we do, and how affected. And then his reward is another encouragement ; he will reward thee openly, grant thee what thou prayest for, or bless thee for the conscionable performance of this duty. Openly, either by a sensible answer of thy prayers, as Dan. ix. 20-22 ; or with an evident blessing, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the eyes of the world ; God highly favoured them. A secret prayer hath an open blessing ; or in convincing the consciences of men ; Pharaoh sendeth for Moses and Aaron when in distress. The consciences of wicked men are convinced that God's praying children have special audience with him ; no magicians sent for then, but Moses and Aaron. Thus God may reward them openly : 1 Sam. ii. 30, 'Those that honour me I will honour.' But chiefly at the day of judgment : Luke xiv. 14, 'He shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.' Then is the great reward of Christians, and most public : 'Then shall every man have praise of God,' 1 Cor. iv. 5. Thus you see how our Lord encourageth us to closet prayer. But let us see other arguments to engage us to this duty.

1. All the precepts of prayer do include closet prayer : 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving,' Col. iv. 2 ; 'Pray without ceasing,' 1 Thes. v. 17. First God's precepts fall upon single persons before it falleth upon families and churches ; for God considereth us first as persons apart, and then in our several combinations and societies in joining with others. The duty is rather imposed upon us than taken up by voluntary choice ; and that only at stated times, when they can conveniently meet. If we are to continue in prayer, and to pray without ceasing, we are to make conscience ourselves of being often with God. Every person that acknowledgeth a God, that hath a Father in heaven, must come and profess his dependence upon him.

2. The example of Christ, which beareth the force of a law in things moral. We read often of Christ's praying : Mark i. 35, 'He went out into a solitary place to pray ;' and Mat. xiv. 23, and Luke vi. 12, we



read he prayed a whole night to God. Now let us improve this instance. Christ had no such need of prayer as we have; the God-head dwelt in him bodily; nor such need of retirement; his affections were always in frame; yet he went out from the company of his disciples to pray alone to God. This pattern is very engaging, for if we have the spirit of Christ, we will do as Christ did; and very encouraging, for by submitting to this duty he sanctifieth it for all: his steps drop fatness, and leave a blessing and virtue behind him. And it assureth us of his sympathising with us; he is acquainted with the heart of an earnest supplicant; and it is some comfort against our imperfections; when we are with God, and our hearts are as heavy as a log, it is a comfort to think of this particular part of his righteousness by which our defects are covered.

3. I shall urge it from God's end in pouring out the Spirit, that we may pray apart, and mourn apart over our distempers and personal necessities, Zech. xii. 10-14. Many will say they have no gifts; certainly they that feel their necessities will speak of them in one fashion or another. But this cuts off the objection. The Spirit is given to help thee: I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall mourn apart. Such is God's condescension to the saints, that he hath provided for them not only an advocate but a notary; a notary to draw up their petitions, and an advocate to present them in court. And surely the gifts of the Spirit should not lie by idle and useless.

4. I might urge you too from the practice of the saints, who are called God's suppliants, Zeph. iii. 10; the generation that seek him, Ps. xxiv. 6. They delight in God's company, and cannot be content to stay away long from him. Daniel had his three times a day, Dan. vi. 10. So David: Ps. lv. 17, 'Evening and morning and noon will I pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice.' And 'Seven times a day will I praise thee,' Ps. cxix. 164. And Cornelius prayed to God always, Acts x. 2; not only with his family, but sometimes alone for his family. They that have a habit of prayer will be thus affected. Now, to be altogether unlike the people of God giveth just cause of suspicion.

5. Shall I add our own private necessities, which cannot be so feelingly spoken to by others, do challenge such a duty at our hands, or it may be are not so fit to be divulged and communicated to them: 1 Kings viii. 38, 'There is the plague of our own hearts.' Paul had his thorn in the flesh: 1 Cor. xii. 7, 'I sought the Lord thrice.' No nurse like the mother; none so fit feelingly to lay forth our case to God as ourselves. Private prayer it is a help to enlargement of heart, for the more earnest men are, the more they desire to be alone: Jer. xiii. 17, 'My soul shall weep sore in secret places.' Christ went from his disciples in his agony, when he would pray more earnestly, Luke xxii. 41, 42. Strong affections are loath to be disturbed, and seek retirement. Jacob sent away his company when he wrestled with God, Gen. xxiii. 24. Oh! then, let all this be considered by you. If you neglect closet addresses to God, you wrong God and yourselves. You wrong God, because it is a necessary part of the creature's homage to God; and you wrong yourselves, because such duties bring



in a great deal of comfort and peace to the soul, and many sweet and gracious experiences, which are not vouchsafed elsewhere. Bernard saith, The church's spouse is bashful, and Christ will not communicate his loves in company. You are to use acquaintance with God, and so peace shall come to us, Job xxii. 21. It argueth little friendship to God when we seldom come at him, and maintain no personal commerce with him. When we pray with others, we cannot so well tell who is heard as when we pray alone, and see what God will do for our souls: Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication.' You sought earnestly for such a thing, and the Lord heard you. To conclude all, a man will not pray with any savour and delight in public that doth not pray in secret. I observe in Ezekiel's vision the Lord removed from the temple by degrees; first from the holy place to the altar of burnt-offerings, then to the threshold of the house, then to the mountain on the east side of the city; there it stood hovering as loath to be gone. So first God is cast out of the closet, private intercourses are neglected, then out of the family, and then out of the congregation, and then public ordinances are laid aside as useless; then are men given up to a strange giddy and vertiginous spirit, and all manner of profaneness. As a tree dies by degrees, first bears no fruit, then no leaves, then no bark; so carnal Christians die by degrees.

Secondly, It was an early morning prayer, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.' I would not lay a burden upon any one's conscience; so God have his due at any time of the day, it is enough. In colder climates, those of a weaker constitution may not be able to rise so soon, and therefore if any other time of the day be fittest for commerce, all circumstances considered, it cometh to the same issue. Yet that the morning is our golden time, and should not be neglected out of sluggishness, whatever dispensation there be for weakness, these considerations may evince.

1. The example of Christ and his saints. We read of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mark i. 35, 'That in the morning, rising a great while before day, he went out and prayed.' This example bindeth those to receive it that can receive it. If you would take the opportunity of the morning, it deserves to be considered by us how willing Christ was to deny his natural rest to be with God in private. And have not we more need? And accordingly the saints have practised this: Ps. v. 3, 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct my prayer to thee, and look up.' Upon which Chrysostom saith, Before thou wastest thy hands, wash thy soul by prayer. So again, Ps. lix. 16, 'I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning.' So would David begin his day with praises of God and prayers to him. So 1 Sam. i. 19, 'And they rose up early, and worshipped before the Lord.' That was their first work, and they were betimes at it. So the primitive Christians had their *hymnos antelucanos*, they sung psalms to God and Christ in the morning early, as their persecutors informed against them. See Tertul. Apol. Euseb., &c. Now this is of some significance to Christians.

2. Because whenever we have strong affections to anything, we make it our morning work, be it good or bad. Good; so Mary and Mary

Magdalene came early to the sepulchre of Christ, Mat. xxviii. The disciples, when they came to wait for the promise of the Spirit, they met betimes, for the Holy Ghost fell upon them in the morning: Acts ii. 15, 'For these men are not drunk, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day,' which was about nine of the clock; and some good time had been spent before, as appears by this speech that was uttered. So Hosea v. 16, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early.' This is their first and chiefest work: that which urgeth the heart most, we shall think of in the morning. The objects that have made deepest impression upon our spirits will present themselves before any images be received from abroad: Prov. vi. 22, 'Bind my law upon thy heart; when thou walkest, it shall talk with thee,' &c. Abraham, when he went about the work of offering his son Isaac, he rose early in the morning, Gen. xxii. So, for bad things: if a man be worldly, his worldly desires and affections compel him to rise early for their satisfaction, Ps. cxxvii. 3, the drunkard is thinking early of his morning draught, to be filled with wine! Isa. xv. 11, 'Woe to them that rise up early to follow strong drink.' The people, when they were mad upon the calf, Exod. xxxvi. 6, 'They rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings to it.' Whatsoever hath secured its interest in the soul will first urge us. So if prayer be our chief pleasure, it will urge us to be up betimes with God: our delights and affections solicit us in the morning.

3. It is the choicest time of the day, and therefore should be allotted to the most serious and necessary employment. It is the choicest time, partly with respect to the body, because the body is then best refreshed, and our vigour repaired, which is lessened and spent with the business of the day; our memories quickest, senses readiest, natural faculties most acute. And partly with respect to the mind; our morning thoughts are our virgin thoughts, more pure, sublime, and defecate, usually free from worldly cares, which would distract us in prayer, and will more encroach upon us by our worldly business, and the baser objects which the necessity of our life engages us to converse with, and be employed about. Certainly the best time should be taken up about the best business; not in recreations to be sure, for this is to knit pleasure to pleasure, and to wear away the scythe in whetting, not in working. They are brutish epicures that rise up from sleep, not to service, but to their sensual delights and vanities; as the scripture brandeth them that eat in the morning, not for strength, but excess, Eccles. x. 16, 17. The morning is the fittest time for business. Now what business should we do but the most weighty, and that which requireth the greatest heedfulness of soul, which is our communion with God?

4. Consider, it is profitable to begin the day with God, and to season the heart with some gracious exercise; as David, Ps. cxxxix. 18, 'When I awake, I am still with thee.' It sanctifieth all our other business, as the offering the first-fruits did sanctify the whole lump. And to whom should the first-fruits of our reason and sense restored be consecrated, but to him that gave us all, and is the author and preserver of them? When the world gets the start of religion, it can hardly overtake it all the day: the first thoughts leave a powerful impression upon it: Micah ii. 1, 'They devise evil upon their beds,

and when the morning is come they practise it.' With carnal men sin beginneth in the morning, stayeth in the heart all day, playeth in the fancy all night. But if you begin with God in the morning, you take God along with you all the day to your business and employment.

5. This will be some recompense for the time lost in sleeping : half our lives are consumed in it ; our time is parted between work and sleep. It is the misery and necessity we are subject unto, whilst we are in the body, that so much of our time should be spent without doing anything for God, or showing any act of love and thankfulness to him. None of the other creatures ever stand still, but are always executing and accomplishing the end for which they were made. And in heaven the blessed spirits are always beholding the face of God, and lauding and blessing his name, and need not those intermissions which we bodily creatures do. Now, though this be our necessity, and so no sin to need the refreshings of sleep, yet because so much of our time is lost, by way of recompense, the least that we should do is to take the next season ; and if health and bodily constitution will permit, to prevent the dawning of the morning, and to be as early with God as we can. All the time we can well spare should be given to God. Do but consider, since thou wentest to bed the sun hath travelled many thousand miles to give thee light this morning, and therefore what a shame it is that the sun, being continually in so swift motion, should return and find him turning and tossing in his bed, like a door upon the hinges, Prov. xx. 14, after nature is satisfied with sleep ; and that we should not rise, and own God's mercy in the rest of the night, and sanctify the labours of the day by some serious address to him. This meditation is enforced by Augustine, *indecus est Christiano, si radius solis cum inveniatur in lecto, posset enim dicere sol, si potestatem loquendi haberet, Amplius laboravi heri, quam tu : et tamen cum jam surrexerim, tu adhuc dormis.* So Ambrose on this text, *grave est si te otiosum radius solis orientis in verecundo pudore conveniat, et lux clara inveniat oculos somnolento adhuc corpore depressos.*

Thirdly, It was a vehement and earnest prayer ; for saith David, 'I cried.' Observe—

*Doct.* It was earnest, though private ; and it was earnest, though he could get no satisfactory answer.

1. Earnest though private. In all our addresses to God we must be serious ; whether men see or hear or no, God seeth and heareth. A hypocrite hath a great flash of gifts in company, but is strait when alone ; but God's children are most earnest in private, when they do more particularly open their hearts to God, without taking in the necessities of others. Christ when he was withdrawn from his disciples, then he prayed *ἐκτενέστερον*, 'more earnestly,' Luke xxii. 44. Jacob sent away his company to deal with God in good earnest, and then wrestled with him : *ille dolet vere qui sine teste dolet.* Peter went out and wept bitterly. So a Christian trieth it out between God and him, when he hath a mind to plead for his own soul or for the church ; therefore hath no outward reason to move him but conscience and spiritual affection. The pharisees would pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets ; but Christ saith, 'Go into thy closet, and shut the door, and pray to thy Father in secret,' Mat. vi. 7. This is the



love and confidence we express to our Father in secret. A man may put forth himself with great warmth and vigour before others, that is slight and careless in secret addresses to God. In these secret intercourses we most taste our spirits, and discern the pure workings of affection towards God. A woman that only bemoaneth the loss of her husband in company, but banisheth all thoughts of him when alone, might justly be suspected to act a tragical part, and to pretend sorrow rather than feel it. Some will pray in secret, but customarily utter a few cold words; but David saith, 'I cried.' Remember there is one seeth in secret; as Christ saith, 'I am not alone,' John xvi. 32; and Mal. i. 14, he is a God of great majesty; he will not be put off with anything, with a short good-morrow or a hasty sigh. Consider, if you pray in good earnest, the prayer will not be lost; there is a register kept in heaven: Acts x. 4, 'Thy prayer is come up as a memorial before God.' Surely a man that believeth and consulteth these things dareth not be slight, though there be none present but God and his own soul.

2. It was earnest though the answer was delayed: I cried, I cried; I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried. The Lord cannot away with cold asking and a ceasing upon every repulse. You must continue to pray when God continueth to deny, otherwise you do not pray in faith; for when the word warrants you to pray, either by way of command or promise, you must not give over. David saith here, 'I cried, for I hoped in thy word.' When providence giveth no answer, you must take your answer out of the covenant or promise, and so answer yourself when God doth not answer you: 1 Sam. xii. 23, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.' You cannot dispense with your duty, whatever the success be. Sometimes duty keepeth up prayer, sometimes the promise, and so hope of the mercy prayed for; there is no way to bring the promise and the providence of God together but by prayer or putting the promise in suit. Your obedience will be assaulted by the ingratitude of those whom you pray for, and your confidence by God's seeming denials; therefore, as long as God commandeth, and he promiseth encouragement, you are not to give way, but hold up the suit still, whatever discouragements there be without. A good dog hunts by sight as long as he can see his game, but when that is lost, he hunts by scent. Visible probabilities be a good encouragement to give a lift to the mercy, when it seemeth to be coming on; but though it be out of sight, faith keepeth the scent of the promise, keeps crying still; he heareth though he doth not answer, and the prayer will not be lost: but of this before.

Fourthly, It is the prayer of a public person, who had his distractions, and more occasions than we can possibly pretend unto, yet he would not lose his praying hours. This consideration will yield us two notes:—

1. That David had his times of converse with God.
2. That rather than fail of them, he would take them from his sleep.
1. That he had his times of converse with God: Eccles. iii. 1, 'There is a time for all things,' much more for the best things;



therefore, if you have a time for other things, to eat and drink, and follow your worldly business, surely you should have a time for prayer. Shall we have a time for everything, and no time for God? Certainly we could not want time if we did not want a heart. Many complain they have no time, and many distractions; if you have no time to pray, you have no time to be saved, no time to maintain the life and comfort and peace of your souls. David had as many employments as thou hast or canst have, therefore it is but a vain excuse. He that will regard what his own sluggish heart will allege, will never pray, never retire or be alone with God: a willing mind will find time in the midst of the greatest distractions; whomsoever he compounds with and payeth short, he will not make bold with God, and serve him by halves. Look, as David speaks in 1 Chron. xxii. 14, 'Behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold and a thousand thousand talents of silver.' He was involved in wars, his exchequer impoverished and diminished, yet he kept vast sums for the temple. Surely the lean kine should not devour the fat, nor religion only be thrust out of doors. It is a more happy thing that Martha should complain of Mary than Mary neglect her duty. Holy privacy and closet work should not be neglected. It would be no loss to our other occasions if we did more prudently divide and allot out our time, and give God a good allowance rather than straiten him. Indeed, what part you should give to God is another question.

In the general, it is good to dedicate a certain part and portion of our time to the Lord of time. Idle servants must be tasked, and required to bring in their tale of bricks. A prudent allotment, such as is consistent with our occasions and course of life, would be no burden to you. I am sure it will make your duties more seasonable and orderly. It is an expression of love to give him somewhat that is our own. In the general, we are not tied to the seasons of eating and drinking, yet for conveniency we have our stated hours. The most necessary work should have a turn, and not be taken up by chance, and not left to a mere haphazard; it will make you more careful and watchful how you spend your other hours, that you may not be unfit for duty when your time of worship cometh, 1 Peter iii. 7.

Again, though we cannot bind you absolutely to a time, they that are most holy will be most frequent with God. Love will direct. They that love one another cannot be strange to each other: he that loveth God cannot be long out of his company. God trusts love; that grace is liberal and open-hearted. Christ resorted often to Bethany, because he loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, John xi. The Spirit of God will direct you by his motions, Ps. xxvii. 8. Sometimes he sendeth you into the closet; your own necessities will put you in mind; he hath left many wants upon us to bring us into his presence: James i. 5, 'If any man want wisdom,' &c.; Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in a time of need.' The interest of the spiritual life directs you; you cannot maintain it in any vigour but by some recourse to God; some time God must have.

2. Rather than fail, he would take it from his sleep. Other busi-

ness must give way to the great work and interest, especially the most inconsiderable interests of recreation. We are bidden to redeem time, Eph. v. 16, rescue it from meat, sleep, company, and recreation. Surely this is an equitable proposal, let God have as much time every day as thou spendest unprofitably. Do but observe the spending of thy time, and be ashamed that God should have such a little share.

*Use.* Now you see David's instance, let this persuade you to this assiduity and diligence, to be ardent and instant in prayer, taking hold of all opportunities to pursue after God, without whom you cannot live: Ps. lxxix. 32, 'Your hearts shall live, that seek God.' We cannot preserve any vitality without this. To press this—

1. Retire often from company to be alone with God. Public duties are of little profit with us because we neglect private. God complaineth of his people, Jer. ii. 32, 'That they have forgotten him days without number.' How many days have gone over your heads, and God never heard from you! You should no more forget him every day than a bride would forget her ornaments on the wedding-day.

2. Let me lay this before you; you should be betimes with God, that you may not encroach upon your other occasions; yea, that you may sanctify your other occasions, and be the fitter for it all the day after. Let not the soft enemy of sleep steal away your golden hours, and the flower and choicest part of time. A Christian that makes conscience of his time should not inure himself to a sluggish course, and turn in his bed like a door upon the hinges, if your constitution will bear it, otherwise we lay no blame upon you. The scriptures have many dissuasives from immoderate sleep, Prov. v. 9, xiii. 4, xxvi. 14, vi. 6. To be sure a Christian is to make conscience of time, and how he spendeth it; and we may sin and surfeit in sleeping as well as in eating and drinking; and therefore we must watch against the encroachments of ease and sloth, lest a sluggish humour grow natural to us, and a morbid custom that cannot be shaken off.

3. It presseth you to fervency, though in private. As much fervency, sense, and zeal as you would express before men, so much should we express when alone. The name of God must be sanctified in all that draw near to him, in private as well as in public, otherwise he is scorned rather than honoured; that it may appear you were sincere in prayer, and have not mean and low thoughts of God, otherwise you bring a suspicion upon all your public duties. There may be sometimes more assistance in public, more order and method for edification, but not more ardour and zeal. Pray with fervency, as to an all-seeing spirit. Though the Lord delayeth, yet he intendeth the enlargement of our desires: Lam. iii. 49, 50, 'Mine eye trickleth down and ceaseth not, without any intermission; till the Lord looks down from heaven and beholds.' If you are soon discouraged you will get nothing.

4. Be sure that God hath his share. If business take up more time than prayer, because of the urgency of bodily necessities, yet ordinarily a man should not spend more time in any pastime and recreations than in religious exercises. It is most equal we should first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, Mat. vi. 33. The most needful duty should have most time bestowed upon it.

It is an ill character to be 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,' 2 Tim. iv. 3. It is reasonable to give an equal time to God and religion as to sports and delights. Most men have no other thing to do than to eat, drink, and sleep; if they should compare their religion and their recreations, they would soon see what a large share of time one hath above the other.

*Secondly*, We come to the reason and encouragement of his diligence, *I hoped in thy word*; that is, because I have thy word for it, I do not doubt but in time I shall reap the fruit of my prayers.

*Doct.* A lively hope, grounded upon the word of God, will put us upon this vigilancy and diligence in prayer.

The reasons are taken—(1.) From the word of God, which is the ground of hope: Ps. cxxx. 5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.' And (2.) From the nature of hope, which is the fountain of prayer.

First, From the word of God, which serveth for two uses—invitation and assurance.

1. For invitation, to give us leave to come to the throne of grace. David did not come unbidden or uninvited into God's presence; he had his word for it; the promises of the gospel give us liberty, otherwise we should not assume the boldness to appear before him: Ps. l. 15. The word is our warrant, it is as it were the holding out of the golden sceptre: 2 Sam. vii. 27, 'Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.'

2. For assurance and firm confidence; before the thing promised be obtained, God pawneth his word with us, which we must hold till the performance come. Now they that can thus hold it, and believe the promise, will be often in prayer, that the word may be both established to them, 2 Sam. vii. 25, and fulfilled: Ps. cxvi. 10, 'I have believed, and therefore have I spoken.'

*Secondly*, From the nature of hope, which implieth two things, both which have an influence upon prayer—earnest expectation, and patient tarrying the Lord's leisure.

1. Earnest expectation: Phil. i. 20, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope.' This exciteth the soul by all means to pursue after the thing hoped for. When Daniel understood by books that the time was come, then was he vehement and earnest, Dan. ix. 2, 3. Elijah, when he saw a cloud but as big as a man's hand, he saith, 1 Kings xviii. 43, 'Go bid Ahab prepare his chariot; get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.' What we look for, we will pray for.

2. Patient tarrying. We read of 'the patience of hope,' 1 Thes. i. 3; and so, though they seem long delayed, yet hope in the promise will make us wait, and abide the performance of them; because they are assured they shall find the fruit of them at last.

*Use.* You see how we pray; the occasion of prayer is necessity, our necessities lead us to the promise; that inviteth us, and giveth us assurance, and yields matter for faith and hope; that puts us upon looking and waiting; these two make us pray. When we can join *patientiam spei cum ardore desiderii*; the earnestness of expectation, that keepeth us from sloth or negligence in the use of the means, or excites us to call upon God; and patience, that keeps us from fainting



or discouragement: hence cometh that earnest diligence and constant unceasing importunity, so as to give God no rest. The belief of God's promises do not make us neglect means, but to be more diligent in the use of them.

## SERMON CLXVI.

*Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*—VER. 148.

WE hear before of David's diligence in prayer, now in meditation. His prayer was encouraged by his hope, his hope was fed by the word, and the word improved by meditation; for he saith, 'I hope in thy word,' and then, 'Mine eyes prevent the night watches,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. An account of his vigilancy and diligence, *mine eyes prevent the night watches.*

2. 'The duty wherein he was exercised, *that I might meditate in thy word.*

The first branch needeth a little illustration—what is meant by 'night watches,' and what by preventing these night watches.

1. What is meant by 'night watches'? Drusius telleth us that the night among the Hebrews was divided into three watches. The first watch was called the head or beginning of the watches: Lam. iii. 19, 'Arise, cry out in the night, in the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart like water before the Lord.' The second was called the middle watch: Judges vii. 19, 'Gideon came to the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch.' The third and last was called the morning watch: Exod. xiv. 24, 'In the morning watch the Lord troubled the host of the Egyptians.' This was the first division of the night among the Hebrews into three watches; but it seemeth afterwards, when they were acquainted with the Romans, they had four watches; as Mat. xiv. 21, 'In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.' For every three hours they had a new watch, and according to this latter division they were called, the evening, and the midnight, and the cock-crowing, and the dawning, Mark xiii. 35. Now whether we reckon by the first or second division, it cannot be imagined that David should be wholly without sleep. Rabbi David Kimchi thinketh he gave the first watch to sleep, and the other two to the meditation of the word, and that he did this often when the nights were long. I think it is meant of the third and last watch, and so it agreeth with the dawning of the morning mentioned in the former verse; and this watch, which is called the morning watch, did David prevent, getting up early to entertain himself with delightful meditations on the word of God. The Septuagint reads it, 'Early in the morning.'

2. What is meant by preventing the night watches? Either that he was more careful to awake at several times of the night to meditate on God's word than they to keep their watches who were appointed



thereunto, or that he did not need to be called upon by them; for the watchmen were wont to tell them the seasons and watches of the night, but he needed not that help, his own desires and delights awakened him; so that in effect he saith, When others are so fast asleep that either they do not wake in the night, or if they do, it is because they are interrupted in their sleep by the noises of the watch or guard, I need no such excitation, 'for my eyes prevent the night watches;' sleep flieth from them of its own accord, that my mind may be delighted with the meditation of God's word. The points are:—

1. From the duty wherein David was exercised,

*Doct.* That meditation on the word of God is one duty that Christians should take care to perform.

2. From the season, his eyes prevented the night watches,

*Doct.* A gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself a-work on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

3. From the condition wherein he was; in some distress, for he saith, 'Save me;' and his prayers not yet heard, 'I cried, I cried, I cried,'

*Doct.* That it is needful to meditate on God's promises at such a time as our suit hangeth at the throne of grace without grant and effect.

The first will give us occasion to speak of the duty of meditation, and the necessity and profit of it. What the duty of meditation is, see sermon upon the 15th verse of this psalm.

Secondly, It is a necessary duty, because it is recommended to us by God, among other things enjoined in his word. He complaineth of the neglect of it: Isa. i. 3, 'Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;' they will not think upon God, nor consider what great things he hath done for them. It is recommended to us in the practice of the saints, they sometimes meditate upon God: Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate of thee in the night watches.' When David could not sleep, and had his night rest broken, his thoughts run upon God presently. Sometimes upon the works of God: Ps. cxliii. 5, 'I meditate on all thy works, I muse on the work of thine hands.' On his creation and providence. Sometimes on the word of God, that part which sets forth their duty: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' To make the Christian's life more orderly and comely; the apostle commands us: Phil. iv. 8, 'To think on these things.' Sometimes on the promises and grounds of faith, for the support of their souls in a fainting time, as in the text; especially that part of the word which is brought unto them by the providence of God, and so we meditate upon what we read and hear: Luke ii. 19, 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' We ponder things when we consider the weight and moment of them, that our hearts may be affected with them. So Moses: Deut. xxxii. 46, 'And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day;' Luke iv. 44, 'Let these sayings sink into your ears;' be seriously considered and thought of by you, not be lost or vanish into the air, or stay in the brain.

Thirdly, It is a profitable duty; it is a help—

1. To our natural faculties.

2. To our graces.

3. To our duties.

1. To our natural faculties. To our memories: we complain of weak memories, but we do not take a right course to cure them. Good things slip from us as water doth through a sieve; and why? Because we do not weigh them, and meditate upon them by deep and serious thought. Truths would stay with us longer if we did oftener think on them. So many a conviction is lost: James i. 23, 24, 'For if any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' Many a comfort is lost by neglect: Heb. xii. 5, 'And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as children?' A weak impression is soon defaced. Many a pressing motion is lost for want of a little diligence to fasten it upon the heart: Heb. ii. 1, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.' Meditation and serious consideration fasten a truth upon the mind and memory. Deliberate thoughts stick by us, as a lesson well conned is not easily forgotten. Civet long kept in a box, the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out. Sermons meditated upon are remembered long after they are delivered. So for understanding. We have weak understandings, slow to conceive of anything that is spiritual and heavenly; why? Because we are so little exercised in the study and contemplation of these things; whereas our judgments would ripen, and we would grow more skilful in the word of righteousness, if we did often meditate on it: Ps. cxix. 99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. We see things *in transitu*, and know them only by hearsay, without meditation. To move the will we had need deal seriously with our own hearts ere we can gain them to a consent. Thoughts are the spokesmen that make up the match between the soul and the temptation: they were given for the like office in good things; they are the first acts of the soul to set a-work all the rest. Things lie by till we take them into our thoughts and consideration at leisure, that we may know what is their tendency, and how they concern us. You cannot imagine the gospel should work as a charm, and convert us we know not how, before consent and choice. There is a propounding and debating of terms; the greatest matters will not work on him that doth not think of them. God and Christ, and heaven and salvation, are looked upon in a cold and remiss manner without this serious consideration. And to excite, and quicken, and stir our affections, meditation is useful. We complain of deadness, and we ourselves are the cause, because we do not rouse up ourselves, excite and compel ourselves, expostulate with ourselves: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'And there is none that calleth upon thy name, and stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' Man hath a power to whet truths upon his own heart, and if we will not make use of it, and reason for God with ourselves, we are justly left under the power of deadness and stupidity of spirit.

2. It is a great help to our graces. (1.) Faith takes root by meditation: Mat. xiii. 5, 'The seed forthwith sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth.' A careless slight heart is no fit soil for faith to

grow in. (2.) Hope is made lively by consideration of the thing hoped for. (3.) Charity is inflamed by the sight and frequent view of divine objects in their beauty and amiableness.

3. The duties of religion, reading and hearing, are effectual by meditation.

The use is for exhortation, to press you to meditation; it is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace, otherwise we take up things by hearsay; this digests them, and maketh them our own.

1. It preventeth vain thoughts, both as it stocketh the heart with truth, for good seed thick set and well rooted destroyeth the weeds, and as it seasoneth the heart with a gracious disposition, and inureth it more to holy thoughts; whereas those that do not use to meditate, how are their minds pestered with swarms of vain thoughts, which wholly divert it and turn it aside from God? Man is mindless of holy things, and if they turn into the heart by accident, their entertainment is cold and careless, as a man would be used that cometh into a house full of enemies.

2. How great an affront is it to God to omit this part of communion with him; it is irksome to think of him. Saints find it otherwise: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' Some, God is said to be near in their mouth, and far from their reins, Jer xii. 2; frequently spoken of, but seldom considered by them. That soul that hath a sincere and unfeigned love to him will take some time to solace itself with him alone; to be sure God taketh it kindly at our hand: Mal. iii. 16, 'A book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name;' that have frequent and high thoughts of God in their hearts, without which, love will presently languish and grow cold.

3. What a neglect it is of God's messages of love that you will not consider them: Mat. xxi. 5, 'And they made light of it;' and Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation.' He hath laid out all his eternal thoughts upon a way of salvation, and manifested it to you, and you entertain it with so much scorn that you will not set your minds to it, and think it worthy a few sad and sober thoughts. What? Is it so tedious to think a thought of your own greatest concerns? Surely man is strangely depraved to refuse this.

4. What a likely means meditation is to do you good. I know it is the Lord inclineth the heart, and our thoughts work no further than God is in them, yea, he giveth us to think, 2 Cor. iii. 5. But as it is our duty, so it is a very proper means to improve our graces and our comfort; for a constant, steady, continued view of truth surely will work more than a glance. A transient view cannot leave such an impression upon us as a steady view. We taste things better when they are chewed than when they are swallowed whole. Meditation goeth over things again and again, and prieth into every part. And as it is a constant light, so it is an argumentative consideration of things. When one scale is not heavy enough, we put in weight after weight till we gain our point; bring off the heart from such a vanity, engage it to such a pursuit by our own arguments with ourselves: Prov. xii. 14, 'A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his own



mouth ;' Acts xvii. 11, 12, 'And these were more noble than they of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' Therefore many believed, because they had searched with all readiness of mind.

5. This is an argument should prevail with God's children, that we may know our growth in grace, by the frequency, continuance, and efficacy of holy thoughts. At first good thoughts are few and rare, the heart is so crowded with vanity, that there is no room for God or his word ; for these things keep their interest in the heart and draw the mind after them, so that days pass over our heads and we forget God, Ps. x. 11 ; or if they arise in our minds, they find little entertainment there, but are gone as soon as they come. It is the policy of the enemy of our salvation to draw our minds from one thing to another, that good thoughts may pass over without fruit and benefit ; or if we force ourselves to continue, they do not warm the heart, only weary the brain. But now when truths are ever with us, they improve us : Ps. cxix. 98, 'Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me ;' Prov. vi. 22, 'When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, and when thou walkest it shall talk with thee.' We have them always ready and at hand. They that are sound at heart can pause with delight on heavenly things. It is a good note of some progress, it is a sign the heart is heavenly, carried out with a strong and prevailing love to heavenly things, that earthly profits and vain pleasures have not such a hand over us as they were wont to have. You have gotten the mastery over your thoughts, that the best and dearest of them you can employ for God, with great fervency and continuance : other matters do not find better welcome, nor so easily jostle them out of doors. By all this it appears it is a most profitable duty.

*Doct.* That a gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself a-work on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

David did frequently rouse up himself in the night to solace his soul with thoughts of God ; this was a frequent and cheerful exercise and employment to him.

1. I shall prove this argueth a gracious frame of spirit.

2. Show you some reasons why we should meditate sometimes in the night.

1. It argueth a gracious frame of heart to take all occasions to set our minds a-work on holy things ; for there are three things in it :—

[1.] Plenty of divine knowledge ; the heart is well stocked, and can entertain itself without help from abroad : Ps. xvi. 7, 'I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel ; my reins also instruct me in the night season.' He had laid up a great deal of truth in his reins or inward parts, and when sleep fled from his eyes, out it came. So Prov. vi. 21, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck ;' to be always ready and present with us. It is an excellent thing to have a good treasure in our hearts : Mat. xii. 35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Many a man's heart is stuffed with vanity, and then he is



vain in his thoughts, and vain in his discourses, and vain in his actions ; yea, ' the word of God doth not dwell in him richly,' Col. iii. 16 ; then your thoughts are very scant and barren ; as he that hath more brass farthings in his pocket than gold or silver, will more easily pull them out at every turn. Our leanness of soul and difficulty to meditate cometh from the want of a stock of knowledge.

[2.] It argueth spiritual delight and strong love : Ps. i. 2, ' But his delight is in the law of God, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' Did we find such comfort as David did, we would break our sleep for that end. He that delights in the word is much conversant in it, for *ubi amor ibi animus*. All the time his necessities can spare, he will spend it in these private and spiritual exercises. Many men's time hangs upon their hands ; they do not know how to spend the summer day nor the winter night ; but one that hath a strong affection to holy things, he rather wants time, such is his solace and delight in God. He beginneth his heaven upon earth, and all the time he can get he is spending this way. But if we find no such comfort and repose of soul in meditation, no wonder that we are so averse from it. Our thoughts follow our affections, delight will set the mind a-work ; when others are sleeping securely, he mindeth his salvation.

[3.] It argueth sincerity : Ps. xvii. 3, ' Thou hast proved mine heart ; thou hast visited me in the night ; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing.' In the night when darkness concealeth me from the eyes of men, then I exercise myself in spiritual thoughts. Many put on religion as a disguise in the day ; in public actions they personate a zeal, and act a devout part ; but that is to be sincere when God hath a great share in our closest privacies and retirement.

2. Sometimes take the night as a special occasion : Ps. lxxiii. 6, ' When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches ;' Ps. lxxvii. 6, ' I call to remembrance my song in the night.' There is a double help for meditation in the night—

[1.] Solitude, then we are alone, and therefore fittest to meditate, when nobody disturbs us.

[2.] The silence of the night is also a help, when nothing is heard or seen to distract attention.

*Use.* What use shall we make of this ? We cannot lay a burden upon your consciences, and by way of absolute necessity exact these nocturnal meditations from you ; only in the general—

1. As much as our strength and natural necessities will permit, we should be meditating night and day. It may be a shame to us that many tradesmen are up afore day to follow their callings, and that they should excel us. The Christians had their morning hymns to Christ in the times of persecution.

2. We may press you to the affection, though not to the season ; to be stored with good matter, and to have a strong delight in this work, and sincerity to make conscience of private duties.

3. If we wake in the night and our rest is broken off, then to exercise ourselves in holy thoughts. Many times it falleth out that we cannot sleep ; now we should spend the time in meditation and prayer, not in vain thoughts, or entertaining ourselves with carnal musings, or perplexing and anxious thoughts about the troubles that we are under.

4. If David waked in the night, how much are they to blame that snort and sleep in the day, even in the time of worship, when others are entertaining communion with God. Surely if they had earnest affections this could not always be. The example of Eutyclus should deter these; Acts xx. 9, 'And there sat in the window a young man named Eutyclus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead;' Mat. xxvi. 40, 'What! could not ye watch with me one hour?'

*Doct.* That meditation of the promises is very seasonable when the answer of our prayers is denied.

For this is very powerful to support our fainting hopes, and to cheer and revive our drooping spirits. There is support in the word, and comfort in the word; therefore we should much meditate on the promises at such a time. The best holdfast that we have of God is by his promise. Whatsoever his dispensations be, this will give satisfaction enough. Though you cannot find what you would, his word is certain; though no appearance of performance, his word is sure enough to fasten upon. The grounds of faith are more sweet and satisfactory the more they are examined and looked upon.

## SERMON CLXVII.

*Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.*—VER. 149.

In these words you have—(1.) David's prayer; (2.) The grounds of his support, or his encouragements in asking.

1. His prayer is double—(1.) General, for audience, 'Hear my voice;' (2.) Particular, for quickening, 'Quicken me.'

2. His encouragements and grounds of confidence in asking are also two—(1.) God's loving-kindness; (2.) His judgment. Both together imply the loving-kindness of God manifested in the word or expressed and engaged in the promises. The points are three:—

*Doct.* 1. One blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God is quickening. David ever and anon reneweth his request, and he is loath to be denied; and therefore, before he saith, 'Quicken me,' he saith, 'Hear my voice.'

*Doct.* 2. The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer is his own favour and loving-kindness. That is David's argument in the text, 'Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness.'

*Doct.* 3. The mercy and loving-kindness of God, manifested and implied in the promises of the gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him; for David doth not only say, 'According to thy loving-kindness,' but, 'According to thy judgment.'

*Doct.* 1. For the first point, one blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God is quickening. Here I shall inquire—

1. What is quickening.

2. Give you some reasons why the children of God do see a need so often and earnestly to ask it of God.

First, What is quickening?

1. By quickening some understand restitution to happiness; for a calamitous man is as one dead and buried under deep and heavy troubles, and his recovery is a life from the dead, or a reviving from the grave. So quickening seemeth to be taken, Ps. lxxi. 20, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and bring me up from the depths of the earth.'

2. Others understand by quickening the renewing and increasing in him the vigour of his spiritual life. That he beggeth that God would revive, increase, and preserve that life which he had already given, that it might be perfected and consummated in glory, that he might be ever ready to bring forth the habits of grace into acts.

The use which we should make of it is to press you—

1. To be sensible of the temper of your hearts, and see whether you want quickening, yea or no. The feeling of spiritual deadness argueth some life and sense yet left. You have attained to so much of life, and do retain it in such a measure, as to be able to bemoan yourselves to God. Most observe their bodies, but very few their souls: if their bodies be ill at ease or out of order, they complain. Men that go on in a track of customary duties see no need of quickening; therefore this humble sense is a good sign. Matins and vespers coldly run over never put us upon the feeling of indispositions, but only duties done with some spirit and life, as a smith blows not the bellows on cold iron or a dead coal. Who would seek quickening when not serious in the work? They that go on in the cold wont of duties never regard the frame of their hearts.

2. When you want quickening, ask it of God. He brought us into the state of life at first, and therefore every moment we must beg of him that he would quicken us, that he would continue it, and perfect his own work: Cant. i. 4, 'Draw me; we will run after thee.' There is no running, no preserving the vitality of grace, without his renewed influence: Ps. xxii. 29, 'None can keep alive his own soul.' Therefore, when we find this deadness or decay of life, to whom should we go but to the fountain of life to repair it? No creature doth subsist of itself, or act of itself.

3. Ask it earnestly. David prefaceth a general prayer before this request, and saith, 'Hear my voice,' as loath to be denied. Many ask it of course, rather use it as a mannerly form when they are entering upon holy duties, than a broken-hearted request. See you desire it heartily: Ps. cxix. 40, 'Behold, I have longed after thy precepts; quicken thou me in thy righteousness.' A man's heart is set upon it, and will not sit down with the distemper, as contented and satisfied with a dead frame of heart: quickening is for longing souls, that would fain do the work of God with a more perfect heart.

4. Expect this grace in and through Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven for this end: John x. 10, 'I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly.' That was his end in coming into the world, to procure life for his people, and not only bare life, but liveliness and comfort, yea, glory hereafter: he died to pur-



chase it for us: John vi. 51, 'This is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.' His incarnation and taking on him our nature is the channel and conduit through which the quickening virtue that is in the Godhead is conveyed to us; and his offering up himself in that nature by his eternal Spirit doth purchase and merit the application and annunciation of this his quickening virtue to our souls, and prepareth him to be fit meat for souls. That same flesh and human nature of Christ that is offered up a ransom to justice, is also the bread of life for souls to feed upon. Souls are fed with meditations upon his death and sufferings. The bread which he giveth by way of application is his flesh, which he gave by way of ransom; every renewed act of faith draweth an increase of life from him.

5. Consider how God worketh it in us. The Father of spirits loveth to work with his own tools. These three agree in one—the Spirit, the word, and the renewed heart. The one is the author, the other the instrument, and the last the object. There is the Spirit acting, and the habit of grace acted upon, and the word and sacraments are the instruments and means. For God will do it rationally, and by a lively light. God forceth not the nature of second causes against their own inclination. It is pleasing to him when we desire him to renew his work, and to bring forth the actings of grace out of his own seed, and to blow with the wind, the breath of his Spirit, on the gardens, that the spices may flow out, Cant. iv. 15. If one of these be wanting, there can be no quickening. Not the Spirit, for he applieth all and doth all in the hearts of believers. It is from him that we have the new life of grace and all the activity of it: Gal. v. 25, 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' Then there must be a renewed heart; for God doth first infuse the principles of the new life, and gracious habits and power into the soul, next he doth actuate those powers, or stir them up to do what is good; otherwise we do but blow to a dead coal. Then the word and sacraments come as God's means which are fitted to work upon the new creature. These are full of spiritual reason, and suited to the sanctified understandings of men and women.

6. Consider God's loving-kindness, how ready he is to grant this. He will not deny the gift of the Holy Ghost to them that ask him, Luke xi. 13. It is an argument not *a pari*, but *a minore ad majus*. God is more able and willing to give than earthly parents, who are but half fathers. This is a spiritual and necessary blessing, and God is too fatherly to deny it to his children. You may deny an apple to a wanton child, but you will not deny bread to a fainting child, the bowels of a father will not permit you to do that; you may deny them superfluities in wisdom, but your love will not permit you to deny them necessities. Meat is not so necessary to revive and refresh the body, as grace for the soul, and his holy inspirations to act and guide you. And will God deny these requests?

7. Know when you have received quickening. Many Christians look for rapt and ecstatic motions, and so do not own the work of God when it hath passed upon them; they underrate their own experiences, and so cannot take notice of God's faithfulness. Sense, appetite, and activity are the fruits of life and quickening.



[1.] We have the more sense of indwelling sin as a heavy burden, Rom. vii. 24. None groan so sorely as those that are made partakers of a new life. *Elementa non gravitant in suis locis*. A delicate constitution is more sensible of pain. Wicked men scarce feel deep wounds given to their conscience, nor have any remorse for gross sins; God's children, their hearts smite them for the smallest disorders and irregularities.

[2.] Appetite after Christ, his graces and comforts, 1 Peter ii. 2; the more life any have, the more craving of food to maintain it in being; they are always hungering and thirsting after God, Mat. v. 6; our appetite will be after the things that conduce to the maintaining and preserving that being which they have. If a man lose his appetite, the body pineth and languisheth, and strength decayeth: desire prepareth the soul to take in its supplies. Your life is in good plight when that is desired, τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, and it will be a means of spiritual growth, a kindly appetite after this milk. They are under a great decay who have lost their appetite after the gospel.

[3.] Activity in duties. That we may honour Christ: 1 Peter ii. 4, 5, 'To whom coming as a living stone, ye also as lively stones are built up into a spiritual house.' Christ liveth, and we live by him, as the stones in the building carry a proportion with the corner-stone; so Christians as the body with the head. It must needs be so, because of God's Spirit dwelling in us, Ezek. xxxvi. 27; John vii. 37; and because of the graces in a Christian—faith and love. Faith working by love is the great evidence of the new creature. If faith and love be strong, it will quicken us to do much for God; the apprehension of faith doth enliven our notions of God, Christ, heaven, and hell; faith puts life into our thoughts of him. Love is a notable pleader and urger: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us,' &c.

Secondly, The reasons why, &c.

1. They that have so much to do with God do see a need of it; for he is a living God, and will be served in a lively manner: Rom. xii. 11, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' They that serve the Lord; negatively, must not be slothful in business; affirmatively, fervent in spirit. God will not be served negligently, coldly, but with life and earnestness: 'The twelve tribes served God ἐν ἐκτενείᾳ, instantly,' Acts xxvi. 7; instantly serving God with the uttermost of their strength. He that hath a right to our all must have our best; surely he will not be put off with every slight thing. Now the children of God, that are sensible of this, are earnest for quickening, that they may serve God in such a way as becometh him, with life and power and zeal; for the manner in every duty is to be regarded as well as the matter. A man may do many things that are good, but there is no life in what he doth. He prayeth, but without any life in prayer, dead in prayer; heareth, but no life in hearing, dull of hearing. All things in a Christian may be counterfeited, but life cannot be counterfeited, that cannot be painted.

2. They are acquainted with themselves, and observe the frame and posture of their own spirits. Now they that know themselves will see a need of quickening—

[1.] Because of the instability and changeable frame of man's heart;

it hardly stayeth long in the same state ; now it is up, and anon it is down, as the constant experience of the saints witnesseth. Sometimes they have a forwardness and strong propension of heart to that which is good, at other times a loathness and dulness or unfitness to perform any spiritual service, when their will is more remiss and their affections unbent. It is not indeed the constant frame of their hearts, yet it is a disease incident to the saints ; even good men may feel a slowness of heart to comply with the will of God, and some hanging off from duty. *Spontaneæ lassitudines sunt signa imminētis morbi.* So is this laziness and backwardness of spirit a sign of some great spiritual distemper. Sometimes they are carried with great largeness of heart, and full sail of affections ; at other times they are in bonds and straits, that they cannot pour out their hearts before God : Ps. lxxvii. 4, ‘I am so troubled that I cannot speak.’ Sometimes they have great life and vigour, at other times no such lively stirrings, but are flat and cold and dead ; when, with Samson, they think to go forth and shake themselves as at other times, Judges xvi. 20, by sad experience they find that their locks are gone, that their understandings are lean, sapless, and their affections cold, and their delight and vigour lost. Man is a sinful, weak, inconstant creature ; his heart is as unstable as water : and much of this levity and instability remaineth with us after grace, as is seen in the various postures of spirit that we are under.

[2.] Because of the constant opposition of the flesh. There is an opposite principle in our hearts, Gal. v. 17 ; the body of death that dwelleth in us doth always resist the life of the spirit in us ; and therefore God must renew the influences of his grace to preserve life. There are desires against desires, and delights against delights ; this must needs abate our vigour. The spirit draweth one way, the flesh another. It is drawing : James i. 14, ‘Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.’ It is depressing : Heb. xii. 1, ‘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.’ Carnal affections hang as a weight, retarding us in our heavenly flight and motions. It is warring : Rom. vii. 23, ‘I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.’ And therefore the Lord had need to cherish the new creature and good seed, which cannot but be weakened with this opposition.

[3.] Because our outward condition doth work a great change in us. A Christian should, and in some measure doth, carry an equal mind in all conditions, and keep the same pace whether he goeth up-hill or down-hill, and have his heart fixed in God whatever falleth out : Ps. cxii. 7, ‘He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.’ But, alas ! we are much discomposed oftentimes, especially at the first onset, by our outward estate ; when under great afflictions, it puts a damp upon our spirits, and we cannot serve God so cheerfully : Lev. x. 19, ‘And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me ; and if I had eaten the sin-offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the

Lord.' So Hezekiah, it is said of him 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, when Hezekiah was sick unto death, and he prayed unto the Lord, and he gave him a sign, that Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up. We are too apt to be dejected and cast down with worldly troubles, or exalted and puffed up with worldly comforts, and both bring on deadness upon the heart, both worldly sorrow and carnal complacency. It is not requisite that a child of God should be without all sense of his condition, and it cannot be supposed that this sense should always be kept within bounds, and under the coercion and government of grace, considering our weakness; and therefore a Christian receiveth some taint from the changes he passes through, as the water doth from the soil through which it runneth. He is sometimes in credit, sometimes in disgrace; sometimes rich, sometimes poor; sometimes sick and in pain, at other times in health and firm constitution of body. Now, though it argueth small strength to faint in ordinary afflictions, Prov. xxiv. 10, and a light spirit to be puffed up like a bubble with every slight blast, yet when troubles are heavy and pressing, God's best servants have been ready to die and faint, and in a full estate it is hard to keep down carnal rejoicing. By both, the freedom of following God's service cheerfully may often be interrupted.

[4.] Because we sin away our life and strength, and by our careless walking contract deadness and hardness of heart. The mind, like the eye, is soon offended and out of temper: we forfeit the quickening influences of his Spirit, upon which the activity of grace dependeth. To correct our sinful rashness, and to teach us more watchfulness and caution, God withdraweth, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Be the sin a sin of commission, especially if grievous and heinous; as David found a shrewd abatement of life and vigour after his foul sin, Ps. li. 11, 12; or a sin of omission, when we neglect God or serve him slightly. If we give way to deadness, Isa. lxiv. 6, rest in the work wrought, and are more willing to get a duty over than to perform it with any life and vigour, God suspends his quickening. If you do not mind the work, why should God quicken you in it?

3. The third reason is taken from the nature of God's dispensations. They do often and earnestly ask quickening, because God giveth out by degrees, and would keep us in constant dependence: 'In him we live, move' (*κινούμεθα*), 'and have our being,' Acts xvii. 28, both as creatures and new creatures. There is a constant concurrence of his motions and influences by their beings and operations. God will endear his grace to us by bringing us daily under new debt; and therefore he doth not give us all our stock and portion in our hands, lest we neglect him, as the prodigal did his father. By multiplied and renewed acts of grace he doth more commend his love to us; every day he must quicken us, and in every duty. If so much rain fell in a day as would suffice the earth for seven years, the commerce between the air and the earth would cease; or if a man could eat so much at one meal as to go in the strength of it all his life, there would be no ground to pray for daily bread; therefore God doth dispense his assistances so as you must still wait upon him and be calling to him. He keepeth grace in his own hand that he may often hear from us.



*Doct. 2.* The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer is his own favour and loving-kindness. I shall show—

1. That this is a modest, humble, and pious argument.

2. This is a comfortable and encouraging argument.

First, It is a modest argument, and it were good if we could learn this modesty of David. He was one much in prayer, diligent in keeping God's statutes, abundant in all acts of devotion, spent nights in meditation, and yet after all this placeth all his hopes in the mercy and loving-kindness of God, and desireth only to be heard according to mercy. But in us there is a secret carnal notion of God as if he were our debtor. If we act for him, or suffer anything for him, we carry it as if God were obliged to us : Isa. lviii. 3, ' Wherefore have we fasted ? ' &c. We cannot be at a fast, give a little alms, or make a prayer, but we think we have merited much at God's hands. Oh ! this is against all reason. Alas ! what profit can we be to God ? Job xxxv. 6–8. God is above the injuries and benefits of the creature ; what miss had he of angels and men in those innumerable ages of duration that went before any created being ? And as it is against reason, so it is against all the declarations God hath made of himself to us : Ezek. xxxvi. 32, ' Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord of hosts : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways.' So Titus iii. 4–6, ' But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost ; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' In short, no worth in us, or righteousness of ours, is that merit and righteousness by virtue of which we are accepted with God. Our works and righteousness are not that condition by which we receive and apply this merit ; that is faith. No works or merit are a motive, or the first inducing cause to move God to give us that faith, but all is from his loving-kindness and readiness to do good to the creatures. Again, it is contrary to the practice of the saints and children of God, who, though never so holy and never so good, yet still they plead mercy, and this by direction from him who knoweth what plea is fittest for creatures to use to God, Luke xvii. 10. As it is not the merit of one part of the earth that it lieth nearer the sun than another, only the Creator would have it so, so still the scripture crieth down works and merits in the creature in all these gracious influences ; they all come from God's bowels of compassion to his creatures labouring under difficulties. He loveth to act as a free agent in giving, continuing, and actuating the life of his creatures, whether natural or spiritual. Yea, lastly, any other principle would be against our profit, as well as God's glory. Our profit, both as to duty and success, we should never carry it dutifully to God if we did not acknowledge that all came from grace. Whence cometh impatience, murmurings, contempt of things afforded, but from a secret opinion of our merit and deserving ? They that prescribe to God ascribe too much to themselves ; that prescribe to God for time, measure, and kind, are hasty, and murmur under delays and suspensions of grace. And as to success, without this modest and humble claim, God rejecteth the request : ' For he resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,' 1 Peter



v. 5. Spiritual pride is the worst of all pride. The humble suppliant may expect increase of grace which is denied to others: Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' Such as fear God, and serve him diligently, and yet put all their confidence in his mercy, these are those whom the Lord delights in, to keep communion with them, and pour out his blessings upon them. This is enough to show you it is a humble, modest plea.

Secondly, It is a comfortable, encouraging argument; which that it may appear to you, let us consider—

1. The nature of it.
2. The kinds of it.
3. The proofs and demonstrations of it.
4. The end of it.

1. The nature of it. The loving-kindness of God noteth his disposition to do good upon his own motives, or his self-inclination to do good to his creatures, especially to his people: 2 Sam. vii. 21, 'According to thine heart hast thou done this;' his native willingness to employ what goodness is in him for the good of his creatures. Now this doth much encourage poor sinners to draw nigh to God for such mercy as they stand in need of. Justice giveth what is due, but mercy what is needed; justice seeks a fit object, mercy and loving-kindness a fit occasion. His justice will not hinder his mercy to be bountiful.

2. The kinds of it. God's loving-kindness is twofold—general and special.

[1.] There is a general kindness and good-will from God as creator to all his creatures, especially to mankind. The effects and fruits of this general kindness flow in the channel of common providence. So it is said, Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' God is good to all things, to all persons; he bestoweth many common blessings upon the wicked, as natural life and being, health and wealth, &c. So Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beasts his food, to the young ravens which cry.' To wicked men, Mat. v. 45. Common blessings do not always argue a good people, but they always argue a good God. God giveth the beasts their food in due season, Ps. civ. 27, 28. Now this is some ground of hope, and so improved, Ps. cxlv. 15, 16. If he heareth the cries of the creatures, he will hear the prayers of the saints; if a kite, much more a child. You see the Lord doth not cast off the care of any living creature which he hath made, but hath a constant eye of providence upon them, that their hunger may be satisfied, and they may have that sort of good which is fitting for them, and that in time and season, before they are spent with wants; and will he not answer the longings and expectations and cries of his people, and pity their faintings, and give that grace which they so earnestly seek?

[2.] Over and above this common kindness, there is a more entire special love and kindness towards believers in Christ. This may be admired rather than expressed: Ps. xxxvi. 7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!' This is unto admiration, his common kindness, his preservation of man and beast. This is the fruit of his eternal love: Jer. xxxi. 3, 'With everlasting love have I loved thee, and

therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;’ and this is expressed in blessing them with special and saving benefits in Christ. The effects of his special kindness do all relate to life and godliness, and are conveyed to us through the conduit of Christ’s merit and intercession, in and by whom he doth fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, 2 Thes. i. 11, 12. Now this special kindness must needs be a mighty encouragement to the saints to come to him (since he loveth them with such a free and special love) for all that mercy they stand in need of. The former speaketh the goodness of God to all his creatures; this to themselves in particular; both together a notable support; yea, though we have not yet any experience of the goodness of God, yet since there is such a thing as self-inclination in God to do good to his people, and, besides this, a readiness to express his love to all his creatures, more especially to every one, without respect of persons, that cometh to him: Ps. lxxxvi. 5, ‘For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon thee.’ Take the cause, and you do not know what you may find. It may be your portion and lot.

### 3. The proofs and demonstrations of this loving-kindness.

[1.] He hath given evident proof and infallible demonstration of it in Christ: 1 John iv. 12, ‘In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.’ The cause or first motive was love; his means was the sending of Christ to be a propitiation; his end, life spiritual and eternal. This is such a glorious instance and manifestation of the love of God, that poor creatures are encouraged to draw nigh to God for such mercy as they stand in need of. It is a hidden love; here is a convincing proof and real demonstration by so glorious an effect and fruit of it. It was not a well-wishing love only, nor a love concealed, but manifested, and that by a signal proof.

[2.] The instances of God’s loving-kindness to others; so that ‘according to thy loving-kindness,’ will be according to that grace and mercy which thou art wont to show to others of thy servants. All that have had to do with God will assure you that he is a gracious God, full of kindness and mercy. There are examples of it, 1 Tim. i. 16; and Eph. ii. 7, ‘That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.’ Instances of God’s loving-kindness towards others have a peculiar fitness and efficacy to convince us how exceedingly gracious God is, and so to draw us to the same fountain of grace for pardon and life to ourselves. These examples do more than the doctrinal declaration, because they do not only show that mercy and grace may be had, but that it hath been attained unto by those who in all respects did judge themselves, and were really unworthy of it, as unable to lay hold of it, and to make good use of it afterwards, as we ourselves. The ice is broken, the ford ridden before us; therefore we may venture our salvation and acceptance with God upon the same grace.

[3.] His former love to ourselves. At first he took us with all our faults, and betrothed us unto himself, in loving-kindness and tender mercy, Hosea ii. 19; and therefore he will still do us good, freely

and bountifully, and so we may answer all objections from God's wonted goodness towards us. When he hath entered into covenant with us out of his love and bounty, we may well expect that upon the same terms he should keep covenant. The continuance is more easily believed and asked than the beginning and first grant: Ps. xxxvi. 10, 'O continue thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.' When by experience we have found what it can do for unworthy creatures, we may the better expect it should help us on all occasions.

4. The end why God exerciseth it; which is his glory, even the glory of his grace and loving-kindness; that that might be acknowledged and exemplified by those that are partakers of it even to be altogether glorious: Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath accepted us in the beloved;' that it may be owned and esteemed as free and liberal, and working of its own accord. We only cross God's end when we do not plead it, admire it, and esteem it highly, and improve it for our comfort; for this is God's end in the whole business of our salvation from first to last, that men and angels might be excited to set forth the praises of his rich mercy and free grace. And here is a new encouragement to ask gracious supplies of God, according to his loving-kindness, or upon the account of that attribute, even that his grace may be more esteemed and exalted in our hearts: Ps. cix. 21, 'But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake; because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me.' It concerneth him in point of his chief honour and glory to do good to his people; that he may be known, and owned to be a good and a gracious or loving God.

*Use.* Well, then, if this be the great plea of the saints—

1. Let us meditate often of the loving-kindness of God, of his pitying, and pardoning, and lovingly entreating poor sinful and broken-hearted creatures that come to him. This should be our daily meditation; *bonum est primum et potentissimum nomen Dei*, saith Damascene—it is the first-born and chiefest name of God. We cannot conceive of God by anything that concerneth us so much as his goodness; by that we know him, and for that we love him. We admire him with reverence for his other titles, but this doth first insinuate with us, and command our respect to him. The first temptation that ever was in the world was to weaken the conceit of his goodness in the heart of the creature; as if God were envious, harsh, and sour in his restraints; still it is a great temptation, yet 'God is good to Israel,' Ps. lxxiii. 1. Oh! let us fortify our hearts with frequent thoughts of his goodness and loving-kindness! As we should do this every day, so especially upon the sabbath-day: Ps. xcii. 2, 'I will show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.' We should do this with all the advantage we can use, more especially when we are in his presence, conversing with him and ministering before him: Ps. xlviii. 9, 'We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.' We should often and seriously think when we come to God: Surely now we have to do with a loving and gracious God, whether we wait upon him in prayer, or the word, or sacraments; if any prayer to make or comfort to expect.



2. Observe the fruits and effects of it, and value them. They that are students in providence, shall not seek long before they find God to be a God full of loving-kindness and tender mercy : Ps. cvii. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' Few regard it, or look after it ; but they that do pry into the course of his dealings shall not be without many instances of God's love and free favour to them. Now, when you have found it out, value it : Ps. lxiii. 3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.' You shall have rich experiences, such as will fill you with joy unspeakable and glorious, to be esteemed above all comforts whatsoever.

3. Praise God for it. This should be a lively motive to praise him : Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'I will worship towards thy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth.' These two are the cause of all we have ; it is without any deserving of ours, only because we have to do with a gracious and faithful God : Isa. lxiii. 7, 'I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindness.' The prophet speaketh as if he could never find words enough, or pregnant enough, to express his sense of God's gracious dealing, so bountifully had he dealt with his people.

4. Let us improve this loving-kindness and readiness of God's mercy to help penitent supplicants.

[1.] In a way of trust, the least degree of which is enough to keep the sinner from running away from him ; how grievous soever his offences and demerits be, yet come to him ; say, as David, Ps. li. 1, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness ; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.' Yea, make it a ground of confidence and support : Ps. lxi. 16, 'Hear me, O Lord, for thy loving-kindness is good ; turn unto me, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.'

[2.] In a way of fear, that we may not interrupt the sense of it, or stop the current of his good-will : Ps. xxvi. 3, 'Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth.' It is the ground of all our confidence ; lose not that : the Lord taketh notice of them that trust in his goodness : Nahum i. 7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him.'

There is one word yet undiscussed, 'According to thy judgment.' Some by *judgment* understand wisdom and prudence. The word will sometimes bear that sense : Micah iii. 8, 'But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord and of judgment,' &c. ; as we say a man of judgment, for an understanding person. In this sense, 'According to thy judgment,' will be, as thou thinkest fit ; but surely 'judgment' here is to be understood in the notion of his covenant, or the rule according to which he judgeth of men, for it is one of the terms by which the word is expressed. 'Judgment' is sometimes put for the covenant of works, or his strict remunerative justice. David declineth it under this notion : Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord.' And this is called by the apostle,



‘judgment without mercy,’ James ii. 13. Sometimes for the covenant of grace, and free promises of God, or that merciful right which he hath established between him and his people, wherein God acteth as an absolving and pardoning judge. Of this, see ver. 132. And of this the prophet speaketh, Isa. i. 27, ‘Zion shall be redeemed with judgment;’ that is, by his mercy promised according to his judgment. David desireth to be *quicken*ed. From thence observe—

*Doct.* 3. That God’s mercy and loving-kindness, manifested and impledged in the promises of the gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him.

You have heard what encouragement we have by the loving-kindness of God; now what we have over and above that by his judgment.

First, Quickening and enlivening grace is promised in the new covenant.

1. In general, from the general undertaking of the covenant. The covenant of grace differeth from all other covenants in the world, because everything that is required therein is also promised; and therefore it is called, ‘The promise,’ Gal. iii. 18, because God hath promised both the reward and the condition—faith and perseverance therein, as well as righteousness, pardon, and life; the new heart to bring us into the covenant, and the continual assistance of grace to keep us in that covenant. And so it differs from the usual covenants that pass between man and man. Among men, each party undertaketh for and looketh after his own part of the covenant; but leaveth the other to look to his duty and his part of the engagement. But here the duties required of us are undertaken for by him that requireth them. No man filleth his neighbour’s hand with anything to pay his rent to him, or enableth him to do what he hath covenanted to do; but God filleth our hand with a stock, yea more than a stock, of habitual grace, with actual influences, to draw forth habits into act; and doth with strength so far enable us to perform every commanded duty, that in the performance thereof we may be accepted. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27, God owneth there not only the principles of acting, but also the excitement of these principles; yea, the very act itself. He hath undertaken to infuse the principle, and stir up the acts and exercise of it: ‘I will cause you to walk in my statutes.’ So Jer. xxxiii. 39, 40, ‘And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.’ Besides converting grace, superadded influences. It differeth from the covenant of works, that had more of a law, and less of a promise: there was a promise of reward to the obeyer, but no promise of giving obedience. God indeed gave Adam a stock of habitual grace, but no promise of assisting grace. There man was to keep the covenant; here, in effect, the covenant keepeth us, Jer. xxxii. 40. And indeed therein lieth the exceeding graciousness of the covenant of grace, that God undertaketh for both parties, and worketh in his people all that is required for entering into and keeping this covenant with him.

2. In particular, this part of actual influence, which is more espe-

cially called quickening, is promised in the covenant of grace; for the covenant concerneth mainly the life of grace, the care of which he hath taken into his own hands, not to lay it down till it be perfected in the life of glory; and therefore alloweth his children to repair to him when their life is any way enfeebled or decayed: so that besides that the general undertaking of his covenant will warrant such a plea, his particular promises of preserving and restoring our life will embolden us to ask quickening; for with respect to his judgment or covenant engagement, God is called, 'The God of our life,' Ps. xlii. 8, and 'The strength of our life,' Ps. xxvii. 1. The care of life, bodily, spiritual, and everlasting, lieth upon him; by virtue of the covenant he hath undertaken to keep it, feed it, renew it in all the decays of it, till we be possessed of the life of glory.

Secondly, The advantage we have from this promise. We have a double argument, not only from God's mercy, but his truth; both which do assure us that God is not only easy to be entreated, but bound and tied by his own free condescension. His loving-kindness sheweth that he may do it for us; his judgment, that in some part he will do it. He is not only inclined, but obliged, which is a new ground of hope. His promise in the new covenant inferreth a debt of favour, though not of justice; when God hath bound himself by promise, both his mercy and fidelity are concerned to do us good. We have not only the freeness of God's love to encourage us, but the certainty of his help engaged in the promise. God inviteth men to him by his grace, and engageth his truth to do them good. The nature of God is one encouragement, he is wonderful ready to do good; but in his covenant he hath established a right to believers to seek his mercy, so that all is made more sure and comfortable to us.

*Use.* To encourage the people of God, when they miss his help in the spiritual life, to lay open their case to God. The thought of strict justice striketh us dumb, there is no claiming by that covenant; but the remembrance of this merciful right or judgment should open our mouths in prayer, and loosen our tongues in acquainting God with our case: Lord, I want that life and quickening which thy promises seem to speak of. You may do it with the more confidence for these reasons:—

1. Consider the tenor of this judgment, or the terms thereof, the mildness of the court in which you plead; it is not a covenant of justice, but of favour; in it grace taketh the throne, not justice; the judge is Christ; the law according to which judgment is given is the gospel; our plea is grace, not merit; the persons allowed to plead are penitent sinners; yea, they are not only allowed to plead for themselves, but they have an advocate to plead for them: the very judge is their advocate! Oh! let us hold God to this latter covenant, and judgment of grace, mercy, and goodness: Lord, upon these terms we dare come unto thee.

2. Consider the blessing offered in this covenant: Heb. iv. 16, 'Mercy and grace to help.' It offereth mercy for pardon of sins, a blessing which the law knew not; and grace to help, that is for our purpose. It is a covenant which alloweth you expenses to run the way of God's commandments, gives you straw to make your brick,

fillet your hand to pay the master's rent. It is not a hard master, to reap where it soweth not, but will cause you to walk and run whither it sends you.

3. Consider, there is nothing in God contrary to us, or standeth in our way, for it is all removed by this judgment or covenant. If anything, it is the justice of God; but that doth not stand in our way, being satisfied by Christ.

[1.] If you take justice, as it implieth his remunerative and vindictive justice, we have the merit of Christ to plead: there is a ransom paid by him, to whom the sinner is fled for refuge. So that God may do us good without any blemish or imputation of defect to his righteousness and justice against sin, Rom. iii. 24, 25; 1 John i. 9.

[2.] As righteousness implieth the rectitude of his nature: 'In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness,' Ps. cxliii. 1. These things, that terrify others, comfort the godly; the righteousness and truth of God are their support. His veracity is a part of his righteousness, as it becometh every just man to make good his promises.

### SERMON CLXVIII.

*They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.*—VER. 150.

HERE in this verse he giveth an account what was the cause of his frequent and earnest crying unto God, of his hope, meditation, begging for quickening; because he was ready to be destroyed by those who every day went off further and further from God's law; they were ready to accomplish their wicked and malicious purpose upon him, and prepared for it, and even now at his heels to do him harm and mischief: 'They draw nigh,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. An intimation of approaching danger, *they draw nigh that follow after mischief.*

2. A description of those from whom the danger was feared, *they are far from thy law.*

First, 'They draw nigh,' &c. The enemy is at hand, even at the doors; the prophet speaketh as if he did hear the sound of his feet, yet they are as far from thy law as near to destroy me.

*Doct.* Extreme danger may sometimes draw nigh unto, and even tread upon the heels of God's people.

Reasons.

1. From the implacable malice of their enemies.

[1.] They seek the destruction of the people of God, nothing less will content them; this is implied in the word *mischief* in the text: *τὸ μὴ εἶναι*, Ps. lxxxiii. 4, 'Come let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may no more be in remembrance.' That is their aim, that not one of that denomination be left: Ps. cxxxvii. 7, 'Rase, rase it, even to the foundation thereof,' Nothing will satisfy



them but utter ruin and extirpation : they that expect milder terms from the seed of the serpent, flatter themselves with a vain hope.

[2.] They follow this end with all industry and diligence ; this is implied in the phrase *that follow after mischief*. They watch all occasions, pursue every advantage to bring their purpose to pass. Some in scripture are said to follow after righteousness, Isa. li. 1. It noteth their constant trade and study. It may be rendered pursuers of righteousness, as in the text, pursuers of mischief. They that follow after righteousness are such as continue constant in the serious and sedulous practice of holiness ; and they that follow after mischief are such as are unwearied in the prosecution of their malicious designs. It implieth a metaphor taken from the vehemency of huntsmen in the pursuit of their foe or prey. So Prov. xxi. 21, 'He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life ;' and Heb. xii. 14, *διώκετε τὴν εἰρήνην*, 'Follow peace and holiness ;' as Asahel pursued Abner, 2 Sam. ii. 19, 'And turned not to the right hand or to the left from following after Abner.' The Septuagint renders here *καταδιώκοντές με ἀνομία*, 'They earnestly seek to undo me.'

2. From the providence of God, who permitteth malicious enemies to draw nigh to his people, and to have many advantages against his people for holy and righteous ends.

[1.] That this is the usual course of God's providence, to suffer his people to be reduced to great dangers and extremities, that there is not a hair-breadth between them and ruin. Paul was in the very mouth of the lion, 2 Tim. iv. 17, before God delivered him ; by the lion he meaneth Nero, a bitter enemy to the Christians, and the lamb was brought bound to him : the prey was in the lion's mouth before God delivered him, 2 Cor. i. 10, compared with 1 Cor. xv. 32, and both with Acts. xiv. 19 : I gave my self for dead ; it was a thousand to one he had not been sacrificed to the fury of the multitude. So was David often near taking dangers, which he did or could hardly escape : Ps. liv., the title, 'When the Ziphims discovered him to Saul.' So Ps. lvii., the title, 'When he fled from Saul in the cave ;' the army of Saul at the mouth of the cave, and Saul cometh into it, and yet God blinded him so that he escaped. So the church : Ps. cxxiv. 1-3, 'If it had not been the Lord that 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.' They were in the midst of their fears.

[2.] Why is this his usual course ?

(1.) To exercise their trust and dependence. Graces are seldom exercised to the life till we are near the point of death. Now rather than God will suffer his people to live by sense, without manifesting grace, and bringing honour to their profession and the truth of his promises, he will cast them into great dangers. The skill of a pilot is seen in a storm, so is faith put to it in great conflicts ; as it is in cares, so in fears : many are reduced to great straits in the family, no meal in the barrel, no oil in the cruse : John vi. 4-6, 'When Jesus then lift up his eyes and saw a great multitude come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat ?'



And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.' A poor believer is put to it: children increase, trading seemeth dead; what shall we do? When danger is danger indeed, then is a believer tried and exercised: 2 Cor. i. 9, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' We are much given to self-confidence; while our mountain standeth strong, and we are entrenched within the security of worldly advantages and props, we scarce know what faith and dependence upon God mean. Now, saith God, I will make you trust in me ere I have done, and to live alone upon my all-sufficiency: you may think your reputation will bear you out, but I will load you with censures that you may trust in me; you think friends shall help you, but friend and lover shall be afar off; you think to shelter yourselves under common refuges, but they shall all fail and cease, that I may see whether you trust in me; or that the common justice and equity of your cause shall bear you out, but I will send against you those that are maliciously resolved (contrary to all justice and gratitude), that shall approach and endeavour to mischief you. Who would think that Paul should be in danger of self-confidence, a man so exercised as he was, so tossed to and fro, so often whipped, scourged, exposed to danger? Alas! we can hardly see with other eyes than nature hath, or depend upon invisible help; we look at present things, and laugh at danger upon the confidence of outward probabilities. If we can get a carnal pillow and bolster under our heads, we sleep and dream many a golden dream of ease and safety. Now God, that is jealous of our trust, will not let us alone, and therefore will put us upon sharp trials. It is not faith but sense we live upon before: that is faith if we can depend upon God when they draw near that follow after mischief: Ps. iii. 6, 'I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that set themselves against me round about.' A danger at a distance is but imagined; it worketh otherwise when it is at hand: Christ himself had other thoughts of approaching danger than danger at a distance: John xii. 27, 'Now is my soul troubled;' this vessel of pure water was shaken, though he discovered no dregs.

(2.) To quicken to prayer. Jonah, that slept in the ship, falls a-praying in the whale's belly. A drowsy soul is awakened in case of extreme danger: Ps. cxxx. 1, 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee.' Now an ordinary prayer will not serve the turn; not to speak a prayer, but to cry a prayer: we do but act devotion before, and personate the part of the supplicant; then we exercise it. Now rather than God's children shall neglect prayer, he exposeth them to great hazards: Mat. viii. 25, 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' What careless, dead, and drowsy prayers do we perform when all things go on fairly, and we are well at ease! Moses cried when Israel was at a loss, Exod. xiv. 15, the sea before, the Egyptians behind ready to tread upon their heels, mountains on each side.

(3.) That the deliverance of his people may be more glorious; partly because there is more of his power and care discovered when our straits are great: 'Israel may now say, We had been swallowed up quick,' Ps. cxxiv. Rescues in extremity of dangers are more glorious:

Ps. cxviii. 13, 'Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me.' So Ps. xxvii. 2, 'When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.' In great dangers to be overtaken by his enemies. God doth some way suffer his people to be brought near destruction, but he doth always prove their friend and helper. David's strength and courage was seen in that he plucked a lamb out of the lion's mouth, 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35. And partly because these great straits and troubles are a means to open our eyes, and waken our stupid senses. Deliverance is all one to God, whether from great exigencies or in ordinary cases, but is more endeared by extremity of danger. It is as easy to save a hundred or a thousand, but it maketh a fuller sound: we are more sensible of our weakness to help ourselves, to be sure, without his assistance.

*Use 1.* Be not offended if God cast you into great dangers; it is no argument of God's hatred to destroy you, but of his love to try you, and to prepare you for the greater comfort, that we may have a more glorious sight of his salvation. Many, after confidence expressed, have been put to great trials. The three children were delivered, but put into the fire first, and the furnace made seven times hotter. Paul's company suffered shipwreck before the promise of their safety could be fulfilled. Moses and the Israelites were delivered, yet pursued and shut up, the Egyptians behind, and the seas before, and steep mountains on each side: Ps. cxviii. 18, 'The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over to death.' Things at the worst begin to change; though it come to such a desperate pass as it must be speedy help or speedy ruin, such exigencies do mightily conduce to the glory of God, and the bettering of his people. Whatever weakeneth our confidence, the greatness of danger should not, for in such cases God is there.

*Use 2.* Let us use the more prayer; it is a time to put promises in suit: 2 Chron. xx. 12, 'O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are unto thee.' The fittest season to treat with God about help; for when the creatures are at a loss, that is the time for God to help. When danger is near, call upon God for help, acquaint him with it, it is time for him to be near also. Ver. 151 of this psalm, 'Thou art near, O Lord.' The less help of man's mercy, the more hope of God's help.

*Use 3.* The greater the danger, the more thankfully should we acknowledge the deliverance. The woman of Sarepta, when her son was restored to life, 1 Kings from the 17th verse to the end, said, 'By this I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.' So 'Israel may now say, If the Lord had not been on our side, men had swallowed us quick.'

Secondly, A description of those from whom this danger was feared, 'They are far from thy law;' that is, they do not regard it. This clause may be added—

1. To amplify or aggravate the danger. As if he had said, Lord, having oppressed them, they condemn thy law, and all restraints of conscience and duty. The farther the enemies of the godly are from

God's law, the nearer to do mischief. So Ps. liv. 3, 'Oppressors seek after my soul; they have not set God before them.' So Ps. lxxxvi. 1, 'Violent men have sought after my soul, they have not set thee before them.' They are likely to be cruel, because profane. When the fear of God is laid aside, and all respect to his word, there is nothing to be expected but the worst of evils. They mind not thy law, therefore care not what mischief they do me.

2. To increase his confidence of help; for God will not favour a corrupt party: Ps. cxxxix. 19, 'Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God;' Ps. xciv. 10, 'The throne of wickedness hath no fellowship with thee.'

*Doct.* The iniquity of persecutors is some matter of confidence to the oppressed; as David, from those that drew near to mischief him, conceiveth some encouragement because they were far from God's law. There are several considerations:—

1. Usually the servants of God have been most hated and troubled by the worst of men; so it usually falls out that the worst and most virulent enemies of religion are those that are infamous for other crimes. They have the greatest pique against them because they cannot endure the righteousness of God's image on them: Ps. xxxviii. 20, 'They are my adversaries, because I follow the thing that good is.' So John vii. 7, 'The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.'

2. You may take notice of this wickedness, and represent it so to God; for he is the judge of the world, and it concerneth him to cut short their power to do mischief that have such a ready principle to act it, and are likely to have no other restraints than God layeth upon them by his providence and the interest of their affairs. But of this before, about aggravating the danger.

3. When we do so, be sure the thing be true, that they are not only injurious to us, but open enemies to God and godliness, before we speak thus of those that hate us, or work any trouble to us in the world. As long as the cause will admit of a favourable construction, we should take heed of such suggestions. I observe this the rather, because man is so partial to himself, that whosoever are enemies to him, he presently thinketh they are enemies to godliness; and therefore, when we pass our judgment on any person and cause, it had need be conformed to truth; for otherwise it argueth great irreverence towards God to make him conscious to our revenges and private passions, Ps. cxxxix. 21–24. We had need try our cause, when God's quarrel and our interest are joined, that there be not some dregs of private spleen and rash censurings mixed therewith, and that passion doth not rule us, but duty, in these complaints, and that it is not our own interest, but God's quarrel, they being open enemies to him. And therefore we must be confident that such as we pray against are in a wicked condition, and engaged in an evil course.

4. When this is clear, there is some comfort and confidence in the badness of our enemies.

[1.] Because God and we are engaged in a common cause, for our adversaries are against God as well as against us. Now it is better to be afflicted by them than to have fellowship with the unfruitful



works of darkness, or to cry up a confederacy with them that cry up a confederacy against God, Ps. cxxxix. 22.

[2.] It is a great satisfaction to us to be opposed by evil men, or common enemies of the power of godliness. Certainly it would be more grievous to us to be oppressed by them that have a show of godliness than the openly profane, Ps. lv. 12, 13. The worst that a professed enemy can do is more tolerable than the injury of a friend. It importeth a dishonour to be opposed by the good, as having an ill cause in hand, or unworthy to be assisted; but it helpeth to make the cause more clear when we see what kind of persons we have to do withal, such as we cannot but count wicked, because they have no regard to God's law. Our cause would not be so clear if it were with them that fear God.

[3.] The more wicked they are, the more ripe for judgment; especially if they be a corrupt party in the visible church; for where we perceive wickedness to reign, there we may be sure destruction will follow.

*Use.* Well, then, whenever this falleth out, mind God of it, and be not discouraged. An ill cause will not always prevail. Only let us be prepared for deliverance, as they are ripe for destruction, otherwise none so bad but good enough to make a rod to scourge God's children. And then have patience; such are our enemies as are God's also; they are far from obedience to God's law.

## SERMON CLXIX.

*Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.—*

VER. 151.

In the former verse, the enemies are represented as near, and near to do mischief, but far from the law of God. Here in the text there is somewhat put in opposition to both.

1. For their nearness to do mischief, God is near to help.

2. They are far off from the law. The man of God asserteth that God's commandments are truth. All their contempt of the law did not abate and lessen his esteem of it. So that the sum of the verse is, that the enemies cannot be so ready to hurt as God is to help and deliver; they cannot go about to defeat promises as God will go about to fulfil them. Mark, he compareth the readiness of wicked men to hurt with the readiness of God, their contempt of the word with the truth of the word, or God's justification of it. In short, in the verse we may observe two branches:—

1. Something spoken of God.

2. Something of his law.

1. That which is spoken of God is, that he is near, a present help to those that persist in the obedience of his will; for nearness doth not only import his favour, or inclination to help them, but that he will not delay his help too long; his help is at hand, therefore called 'A present help in trouble,' Ps. xli. 1, and 'The Lord is at my right hand,'



Ps. xvi. 8; ready as our second in all conflicts to stand by us, support, and comfort us in our troubles, yea, to deliver us; that is the notion of nearness in the text. Near as the enemies are near, only he is near to defend as they are near to destroy. When to appearance danger is nearest, at the same time help and salvation is nearest also, and this doth allay all our cares and fears: Phil. iv. 5, 6, 'The Lord is at hand, therefore be careful for nothing.' Still present by his providence, or hastening his second coming: Rev. xxii. 20, 'I come quickly.' I rather quote that place, for the Septuagint hath it here ἐγγὺς εἶ, κύριε, there ὁ κύριος ἐγγὺς, therefore he bids us be careful for nothing; certainly the belief of God's nearness should encourage us.

2. That which is said of his word and law is, 'Thy commandments are truth.' One would think it had been more proper to say, are just and righteous, than to say are truth. His commandments are just as the rule of our duty, they are just as the rule of God's process; but the word commandment is not taken strictly for the mandatory part of the word, but it is put for the whole covenant, his precepts invested with promises and threatenings. The commandments thus considered, with the promises and threatenings annexed, are true. Yea, mark the emphasis of the phrase, truth itself. The happiness promised to them that make conscience of their duty will be made good; and so the punishments on them that offend God will be inflicted. Now the joining of these two clauses seemeth to speak thus much: I know that thou art near me, because thy word is truth. God in his providence seemeth to be absent sometimes from his people, but upon the assurance of his word we must believe him near. I say, God seemeth to be far off from his people, for who would think that the God of peace and all comfort should dwell with them that are broken in spirit? Isa. lvii. 15, 'For thus saith the high and holy 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.' Or that the author of all felicity should be present with them that are harassed and exercised with such sharp afflictions, and hunted up and down in the world, but because God hath promised it: Isa. xlii. 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.' We should be satisfied with it; his word is truth: whatever sense and reason saith to the contrary, neither distance of place nor afflictedness of condition do hinder his nearness to us.

Quitting all other points, I shall only insist on this one.

*Doct.* That it is the privilege and happiness of God's children to have God near unto them upon all occasions.

My great business will be to explain what this nearness is, and then you will soon find it to be the great happiness and privilege of the saints.

1. What is this nearness?

2. How is it brought about?

First, What is this nearness?

1. God is not said to be nearer to them than others in regard of his essence, for so he is everywhere present, *nullibi inclusus, nullibi ex-*

*clusus*. So a heathen described God to be a great circle, whose centre is nowhere, and circumference everywhere; and in the prophet he telleth us, Jer. xxiii. 23, 24, 'Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? do not I fill heaven and earth? can any hide him in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.' He filleth all things with his essential presence; he is in earth, in heaven, and under the earth: Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8, 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? and whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there: if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' God is here, and there, and everywhere; the heavens do not confine and enclose his being, nor the tumults of the earth exclude it: in this sense God is alike near to all things. They that cannot endure the presence and thought of God, where will they go from him? They may run away from God as a friend, but they cannot escape him as an enemy. *Te non amittit nisi qui dimittit, et qui te dimittit, quo fugit, nisi a te placato ad te iratum?* Men may shut God out of their hearts, and yet he is there, do what they can, and will be found there one day in the dreadful effects of his anger.

2. Not in regard of his general providence and common sustentation; for so οὐ μακρὰν, 'He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being,' Acts xvii. 27, 28. 'This general presence and providential sustentation is vouchsafed to all his creatures, without which they could not subsist, nor move, nor act; so all things are enclosed under the hand of his power, and are still under his disposing.

3. It is meant of his friendly and gracious presence, and those eminent and gracious effects of his power and goodness which he is pleased to afford his people. So God is sometimes said to be nigh unto his people, and they are said to be a people near unto him. The Lord is said to be near unto them: Ps. xxxiv. 18, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart;' and again, Ps. cxlv. 18, 'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, and to all that call upon him in truth;' Deut. iv. 7, 'What nation is so great? who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?' The Lord is said to be nigh, because he is always ready to hear their prayers, and to direct them in their doubts, comfort them in their sorrows, defend and protect them in all their dangers, and deliver them in all their troubles. On the other side, they are said to be a people near unto God: Ps. cxlviii. 14, 'He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints, even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him.' Because they are the special objects of his mercy and favour. And as to the actual intercourse that passeth between God and them, God is said to draw nigh to them, as they are said to draw nigh to God: James iv. 8, 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you;' and so drawing nigh to us on God's part signifieth grace and blessing; and drawing nigh on our part, our duty, love, fear, delight, and reverence of God. Well, then, it is meant of his friendly gracious presence vouchsafed to his people.

4. This nearness may be understood of his visible presence in his

ordinances, or of that spiritual inwardness and saving union and communion that is between God and his converted people, or those that are brought home to him by Christ, and are the members of his mystical body. In some sense it is the privilege of the visible church to have God near them, because they have the signs of his presence among them; as in the former place, Deut. iv. 7, 'What nation hath God so nigh unto them?' It was the common privilege of the nation, in comparison of the pagans about them, who were a people afar off, and strangers to the covenants of promise. So Jer. xiv. 9, 'Thou, O Lord God, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.' Thus God is said to be nigh because he dwelleth in the churches and walketh in the midst of them; but those that are converted indeed are in a straiter union with God. All those that are members of the visible church, and are united to Christ by a visible and political union, they have great privileges, for they are a society under God's special care and government, and enjoy the means of grace and the offers of salvation, and great helps by the gifts bestowed upon the body, and so have God nearer to them than others, though they have not the saving fruits of union with Christ and communion with God. Once more, a people that are nigh unto God visibly and politically may be cast off; as Jer. xiii. 11, 'For as a girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory; but they would not hear;' 'yet I will cast them away as a rotten girdle that is good for nothing,' ver. 10. These words are the application of a charge given to Jeremiah, to get him a girdle, and hide it till it was rotten, and then to bring it forth and tell the people the meaning of this ceremony. He was to get a girdle, not leathern, nor woollen, such as were commonly worn by the ordinary sort; but a linen girdle, such as the better sort of persons were wont to wear. He was not to wet it, or put it in water, to imply that neither God nor aught from him had been the cause of the general corruption and destruction of this people; but to hide it in a dry place near Euphrates till it was corrupted. Thus God would lay visibly before their eyes their own state; they were as near about him, girded as close to him, as a girdle about a man's loins, yet then good for nothing. But for those to whom God is near by saving benefits they cannot be lost, for where the nearness is really begun, it will continue, and never be broken off. You may as well separate the leaven and the dough, *impossibile est massam a pasta separare*, &c.

5. In those that are living members of Christ's mystical body we must distinguish between a state of nearness and acts of nearness. By converting grace we are brought into a state of nearness unto God, and in worship we actually draw nigh unto him, and he to us. The state of nearness is the state of favour and reconciliation with God into which we are admitted who were before strangers and enemies: Col. i. 21, 'And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.' And also our participation of the divine nature: 2 Peter i. 4, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you



might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; or life of God, from which we were formerly alienated by sin: Eph. iv. 18, 'Having their understandings darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' For these three do always go together, the favour of God, the image of God, and fellowship with God. When Adam lost one, he lost all: when he lost the image of God, he also lost the favour of God, or fellowship with God, or nearness to him. So then our state of nearness lieth in the recovery of the favour of God, and the image or life of God, when we stand right in his grace, and live his life: they are both great mercies, and both the ground of our fellowship with God, or nearness to him. O Christians! think with yourselves. Is it not a great privilege for poor sinful creatures, that could not think of God without horror, or hear him named without trembling, or pray to him without great dejection of heart, to look upon God as reconciled, and willing to receive us and bless us! So for the life of God, to have a life begun in us by the Spirit of God, and maintained by the continual influences of his grace, till all be perfected in glory, what a privilege is this! None but they that live this life can have communion with God. Things cannot converse that do not live the same life; as Adam had no companion or help-meet, but was alone, though all the creatures came and subjected themselves to him, trees, beasts, men, &c.: Gen. ii. 18, 'And the Lord said, It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him an help-meet for him.' But besides this state of nearness, there are special acts of nearness, both on God's part and ours; he is nearer to us sometimes than at others, when we have more evidences of his favour inward or outward: inward evidences, when he quickens, comforts, supports the soul, filleth the heart with joy and peace in believing; at such a time God is near, we feel him sensibly exciting and stirring up his own work in us. The soul always dwelleth in the body, but it doth not always act alike; it is ever equal in point of habitation, but not in point of operation. So Christ doth always dwell in the heart by his Spirit, but he doth not always act alike, but *κατ' εὐδοκίαν*, 'according to his good pleasure,' Phil. ii. 13. God is not alike always present with his people, but never withdraweth that influence that is necessary to the being of grace: Ps. lxxiii. 23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.' So outwardly; sometimes God hideth himself, sometimes seemeth not to mind the affairs of his people, at other times all the world shall know that they are near and dear to him: he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye: those that will not see, shall see and be ashamed for their envy at his people, Isa. xxvi. 11. So on our part there is a standing relation between us and God, but our hearts are more or less towards him in worship; we especially then draw near unto him, though there be a communion in walking with God in our whole course. These things must be distinguished, for actual intercourse may be interrupted or suspended, when our state of nearness to God ceaseth not.

6. The grounds and reasons of all nearness, or the way how it cometh about, are these four:—



[1.] God's covenant with us.  
 [2.] Our incorporation into Christ.  
 [3.] The inhabitation of the Spirit in us.  
 [4.] Mutual love between God and us. These are the reasons why God is near us, and we a people near unto God.

[1.] His covenant with us, or confederation in the covenant. God promiseth to be our God, and we to be his people: Jer. xxxii. 38, 'And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.' As those two kings made a league offensive and defensive, 1 Kings xxii. 4, 'I am as thou art, and my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses;' so God will be ours as really as we are his; you shall have a propriety in God, as God has in you; not absolutely indeed the same, but enough for your comfort. You were his before the contract, and to be at his command; but he is not at your command: you may supplicate and humbly sue out the effects of your right in God, and may be sure of speeding, when it is for his glory and your good. We have a right to God, and all that is in God, but not a right over him, as he hath over us. We have propriety and interest in God, but not dominion, as we have over the creatures, or as God hath over us. He will let out his goodness, grace, and mercy to us and for us. God still keepeth the rank of a sovereign, and yet treateth us as friends: James ii. 23, 'Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.' Yea, children: John i. 12, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' When we give up ourselves to God to serve him, we enter ourselves heirs to all the privileges of the gospel, and may lay claim to them.

[2.] By union with Christ; such as are under the covenant of grace are made members of the mystical body of Christ. This union the scripture sets forth by the similitude of head and members: Rom. xii. 5, 'So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.' Vine and branches: John xv. 1, 2, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman; every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' Stock and graff, Rom. vi. 5; body and garment: Gal. iii. 27, 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.' The converting of meat and drink into our substance: John vi. 56, 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' House and indweller: Eph. iii. 17, 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' As the members receive sense and motion from the head, the branches sap from the root, and the graff liveth in the stock, so we receive all life and being from Christ. Christ first giveth himself to us, and with himself all things. We must have himself first, for it is he in us becometh the fountain of life: 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.' The hope of glory: Col. i. 27, 'Christ in you the hope of glory.' Now this endeareth us to God, and makes us near to him: John xvii. 21, 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that

they also may be one in us.' Christ is God-man in one person, and we are united to him mystically, though not hypostatically; and so God and we are brought near together. For we are in him as he is in the Father, not with an exact equality, but some answerable likeness; we are immediately united to Christ, and by Christ to God.

[3.] The inhabitation of the Spirit, that is the fruits of union, as union of confederation. The same spirit that dwelleth in Christ dwelleth in us: 1 Cor. vi. 17, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' It is by the same spirit that the union is brought about, the same spirit that dwelleth in head and members; this is the foundation laid on Christ's part for all our communion and commerce with God: 1 John iv. 13, 'Hereby we know that we dwell in God, and God in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.' We cannot know our communion with God as the author of grace by any other gift; he maketh his first entry this way, uniting us to himself by his Spirit.

[4.] The mutual love between God and them. God loveth them, and they love God; and so they are near and dear to one another: 1 Sam. xviii. 1, 'The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.' Such love is here between Christ and believers, and between them and God. God beginneth, he loveth first, and best, and most; no father or mother loveth their children so tenderly as God doth them: Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' No husband loves his spouse as Christ doth the church: Eph. v. 25, 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;' not only gave himself to the church, but for it. Alas! when we are at our best, we love God too little. There is a strong love which the saints have to God and Christ; they cannot live without him, are always crying, Abba, Father: Gal. iv. 6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' They cannot brook his absence, are dejected if they cannot hear from him at every turn.

7. There being such a ground laid for our nearness, all familiar intercourses do pass freely between God and us, through Christ, by whom and through whom are all things, and we by him, 1 Cor. viii. 5. Our commerce with God is in donatives and duties.

[1.] On God's part, it is seen in his readiness to hear our prayers: Isa. lviii. 9, 'Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.' God is at hand; when we knock at heaven's gates, he answereth presently, saying, And what would you have? If God should make an offer to us as Jonathan did to David, 1 Sam. xx. 14, 'Whatever thy soul desireth, I will do for thee,' we would think then we should never want more. What would the world give for such a promise from an earthly potentate? You have it from God, if you like the condition: Ps. xxxvii. 4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart.' Thou canst not desire anything regularly, and consisting with the condition of the covenant, with thy delight in God, but thou shalt have it. In a holy sense, you have God at command, to do for you

what you would have, as if you had his sovereignty at command : Job xxii. 27, 28, 'Thou shalt make thy prayers unto him, and he shall hear thee ; and thou shalt pay thy vows. Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee ; and the light shall shine upon thy ways.' Decree, and it shall be established ; speak the word, and it shall come to pass. Is it for us to enact decrees, to appoint what shall be ? Their prayer is a duplicate or counterpart of God's decrees. God guideth their hearts to ask such things as are pleasing to him ; God is ready to help us, to give supplies in all our necessities ; he is remembering us for good upon all occasions, especially in our low estate ; when we have none to help, he will help : Isa. lix. 16, 'And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor : therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness it sustained him.' It was when he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey ; he cannot be safe unless he be wicked ; and none will bestir himself in the behalf of truth and right, or own the good cause, by speaking a word for it ; therefore God himself would take the business in hand : Ps. cv. 14, 'He suffered no man to do them wrong.' They that are God's confederates, he hath a watchful eye over them ; they are under his defence and protection. An afflicted people are more sensible of God's presence, help, and assistance than others are ; for straits and troubles are means to open men's eyes and waken their senses. Now you will ever find God with you when he seemeth most to forget you. But especially in duties of worship, the visits of love there, and the entertainment at God's table : Ps. lxxv. 4, 'Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach to thee, that he may dwell in thy courts : we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.' They have many sweet experiences of God, which they find not elsewhere ; there he doth comfort, quicken, and revive them.' Ps. xxxvi. 8, 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house ; thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures.' God biddeth them welcome to this table, and will not send them away empty ; indeed, there they come to feel joys unspeakable and glorious. Not that we should build always on sensible experiences, or tie God to our time, or make an essay of curiosity ; but if they humbly, resolutely wait upon God according to the encouragements of his promise, first or last they shall have a full meal, and God will own them, and fill their hearts with goodness. Thus in answering their prayers, helping them in straits, visiting in duties.

[2.] On our part, it is delightful to converse with God—

(1.) In holy duties : Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee ; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them ;' Job xxii. 21, 'Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace ; thereby good shall come unto thee.' We have no reason to be strange to God, for if we were acquainted with ourselves, we should find daily and hourly some errand to the throne of grace. To forget him days without number sheweth we have little knowledge of God or of ourselves. Be sure to look after a desire to enjoy God in the duty : 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of my God ; my flesh and my heart crieth out for the living God,' Ps. lxxxiv. 2, 3.



To rest in an empty ordinance sheweth we do what we do rather to pacify conscience than satisfy spiritual desires. God is to be our end and object, whom we are to seek and serve; *abs te sine te non recedam*.

(2.) In a course of holiness: 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' Amos iii. 3. Loveth what he loveth, hateth what he hateth. Suitableness of disposition is the ground of intimacy: 1 John i. 7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' God saith, I will dwell in them, and walk in them. Walk as ever before God: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

Secondly, How we come to be brought into this nearness? The reason of doubting is because every man is born a stranger to God: Ps. lviii. 3, 'The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.' Sin causes a distance between God and us: Isa. lix. 2, 'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.' Man is averse from God, without God, Christ, covenant, or hope of any good from him. Christ represents our apostate nature by the prodigal's going into a far country; the breach groweth wider every day, and the distance is increased by actual sin. The wicked are far from God: Hosea vii. 13, 'Woe unto them, for they have fled from me; destruction unto them, for they have transgressed against me.' While matters stand thus between us and God, there is no hope; the rigour of divine justice and the terror of a guilty conscience will not give us leave to look for any communion with God.

*Ans.* In this hopeless and helpless estate the Lord Jesus had pity on us. The great end of the mediator is to bring us to God: 1 Peter iii. 18, 'For Christ hath once suffered for sins; the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' And therefore he is said to be the way to the Father: John xvii. 6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' He hath taken our case into his own hands, and doth, partly by his merit and partly by his Spirit, bring about this nearness and fellowship between God and us.

1. By his merit he bringeth us into a state of favour; he opened the door by his death: Eph. ii. 13, 'But now in Christ Jesus we who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' To go to God offended, and appeased by no satisfaction, is terrible to the guilty creature; but Christ hath made our peace, so that we have access into this grace wherein we stand: Rom. v. 1, 2, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand.' This door which he hath opened by his death, he keepeth open by his constant intercession: Heb. vii. 25, 'Wherefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all those that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us;' which our repeated provocations would otherwise daily and hourly shut and close again: 1 John ii. 1, 'These things I write unto you, that you sin not: and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;' and so all distance is removed, and poor creatures may comfortably come to God.



2. There is a great averseness in our hearts, and we need not only leave to come to God, but a heart to come to God. We are fugitives as well as exiles; we hang off from God, and are loath to make use of the offered opportunity; therefore the imprecation of our liberty is not only to be considered, but also the application of this grace to our souls, which is done by the Spirit of Christ. Certainly, as to God, he considereth us as united to Christ before he will be near to us: Eph. ii. 13, 'But now in Christ Jesus ye, who were sometimes afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' It was purchased by the blood of Christ, but it is not actually bestowed and applied to the elect until they be united to Christ, and in him by saving faith, as branches in the root; not only through Christ, but in Christ: something for us, and something in us as to ourselves; overcome our averseness to set our hearts to seek the Lord. *Nemo te quærere potest nisi qui prius invenerit; vis igitur inveniri ut quæraris? quare, ut inveniaris; potes quidem inveniri, non tamen preveniri.* None can be aforehand with God; we cannot seek him till we have found him. He will be sought that he may be found; and found that he may be sought. He draweth nigh to us by his preventing grace, that he may draw nigh to us by further grace; and inclineth us to do what he requireth, that he may crown his own work.

*Use 1.* To persuade us to enter into this state of nearness by taking hold of God's covenant. It is an excellent thing in the general; all will grant that it is good to draw near to God; but it is not only good, but good for you, all things considered: Ps. lxxiii. 28, 'It is good for me to draw near to God;' it is our only blessedness. The practical judgment must be possessed with this truth, and then determine it so that it may have the authority of a principle; and then the heart must be engaged to draw nigh to God by a hearty resolution to come unto God. Till the heart be engaged, we are too easily enticed away from God. Now the engaging the heart is by covenant: 'Yield yourselves to the Lord,' 2 Chron. xxx. 8. All God's servants, they are his by covenant: Ezek. xx. 37, 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and bring you into the bond of the covenant;' as sheep, to pass one by one out of the fold. God doth not covenant with us in the lump and body, but every man for himself must engage himself to live according to the will of God. It is not enough that Christ engaged for us as our surety: Heb. vii. 22, 'Jesus was made the surety of a better testament;' something is to be done personally if we would have benefit by it. It is not enough that the church engage for us as a visible political body professing faith in Christ, Ezek. xvi. 7; but every man must engage his own heart. It is not enough our parents did engage for us, in behalf of little ones, avouch God to be their God: Deut. xxix. 10-12, 'Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of thy water; that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day.' We must ratify their dedication and covenant in our own persons, 2 Cor. ix. 13, by a professed subjection to the gospel of Christ; this cove-

nant and oath of allegiance. You eat at God's table to show that God and you are agreed, and entered into a strict union and fellowship one with another.

2. Let us live as in a state of nearness to God ; let us fear him, and love him, and walk with him, as Enoch did, Gen. v. 24 ; or set the Lord always before us, as David did, Ps. xvi. 8. How so ? In point of reverence, in point of dependence.

[1.] In point of reverence, that we may not displease God with whom we walk : Micah vi. 8, 'Walk humbly with thy God.' Thou shalt humble thyself to walk with God. It is not a fellow-like familiarity or the intimacy of equals, but the common subjection of inferiors, the obedience of children, diligently taking heed lest a breach fall out betwixt God and them : Deut. xxiii. 14, 'For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thee, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee ; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he may see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.' God threatens to leave them if he saw any filthiness among them. If we sin against God, we may find him near as a judge to punish, not as a father to protect us. Besides it is for the honour of God that a people near and dear to him should study to please him in all things, and that they should walk worthy of God, with whom they profess to be in covenant, and whose friendly presence they enjoy. The nearer you are to God the greater your sins. If you be the spouse of Christ, your sins are adultery ; if you be the children of God, your sins are rebellion and parricide ; if you be the friends of God, Christ hath the more cause to complain : Ps. lv. 12, 13, 'For it was not an enemy that reproached me ; then I could have borne it : neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me ; then I would have hid myself from him : but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.' Your sins are the injuries of a false friend, if you be of the household of God. After you had eaten his bread, will you lift up the heel against him ? Ps. xli. 9, 'Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me.' It is treachery of an unfaithful domestic and servant. Men will endure injuries from strangers better than from nearer relations. Those that do not belong to God, that are not so dear and near to him, their sins are not so grievous. In short, if you be the people of God, whom God will own in the world, you should take care to live to his honour.

[2.] In point of dependence, did we believe more firmly that God was so near and so ready at hand, to comfort, support, deliver, and bless us, this would stay our hearts in all our troubles. Is God near us ? What should we be afraid of ? Ps. xxiii. 1, 2, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters.' God admitteth you to his table to assure you of his bounty and liberality ; he gives you this support as a sign of reconciliation with you, that God and you are friends. Now τὰ τῶν φίλων πάντα κοινὰ. Especially let it check our fears ; when trouble is near, God is also near, to counterwork our enemies and support his people : Zech. iii. 1, 2, 'And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and

Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Where there is Satan to resist, there is an angel to rebuke; as extremities draw nigh, God draweth nigh. When Laban with great fury followed after Jacob, God followed after Laban, and stepped between, and commanded Laban not to hurt him. When Paul was like to be torn in pieces in an uproar, God runneth speedily to his help: 2 Cor. i. 9, 10, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' When danger cometh to be danger indeed, you will find him a present help.

*Use 2.* To quicken us and encourage us actually to draw nigh to God with the more confidence; that is, let us address ourselves to converse with him in his ordinances, for his favour, mercy, and blessing, that we may not stand afar off, but come boldly. To this end, consider whither we come, by whom we come, in what manner we must come or draw nigh to him.

1. To whom we draw near; to God, as reconciled in Christ. If God were inaccessible it were another matter; but divine justice being satisfied in Christ we come to a throne of grace: Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' God's throne is a throne of justice, grace, glory. To the throne of strict justice no sinful man can approach; to the throne of grace every penitent sinner may have access; to the throne of glory no mortal man can come in his whole person; his heart may be there: so it is said, Heb. x. 19, 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,' as petitioners are admitted to the prince in the presence chamber. The way to the throne of glory lieth by the throne of grace; we pass by one unto the other. In short, Christ stood before the throne of justice when he suffered for our sins; penitent sinners stand before the throne of grace when they worship him in faith. After the resurrection we shall ever stand before the throne of glory, and ever abide in his presence. Our business now is with the throne of grace, to give answer and despatch our suits. There is a threefold throne of grace—the typical, which was the mercy-seat: Ps. lxxx. 1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;' the real, which is Christ: 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;' the commemorative, which is the Lord's supper, where is a representation of wisdom and oblation of the grace of Christ in the New Testament. This throne of grace is set up everywhere in the church; it standeth in the midst of God's people, as the tabernacle did in the midst of Israel; for God is always in all places nigh unto such as call upon him in truth: John iv. 23, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.' Access to God may be had everywhere, therefore let us come.

2. By whom we come; by Jesus Christ: Eph. iii. 12, 'In whom we



have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him ;' upon account of his merit and intercession. We should come without fear or doubt to him, *de facto*, as if his blood were running afresh.

3. How we come ; with a true heart : Heb. x. 22, ' Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.'

## SERMON CLXX.

*Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*—VER. 152.

IN this verse is a further illustration of the last clause of the former. He had said there, ' Thy commandments are *ipsissima veritas* ;' now he amplifieth that saying from God's ordination and appointment, ' Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.' The prophet ends this octonary and paragraph with some triumph of faith ; and after all his conflicts and requests to God, goeth away with this assurance, that God's word should be infallibly accomplished, as being upon his own experience of unchangeable and unerring certainty. Two things you may observe in the words :—

1. The constant and eternal verity of God's testimonies, *thou hast founded them for ever*.

2. David's attestation to it, *I have known of old* that it is so. What the word of God is in itself ; and then what is the opinion of the believer concerning it.

First, What the scriptures are in themselves.

1. For their nature ; they are God's testimonies, or the significations of his will.

2. For their stability ; they are founded (there is a great emphasis in that word), and that by God, ' Thou hast founded them.'

3. For their duration, and everlasting use ; in that word ' for ever,' of an eternal use and comfort.

Secondly, David's attestation or persuasion of this, ' I have known of old.'

I here observe—

1. His persuasion.

2. The date and standing of his persuasion ; it was ancient, ' I have known of old.'

1. His persuasion, ' I have known.' There is a twofold knowledge—the knowledge of faith, and the knowledge of sense ; both agree with the words.

[1.] The knowledge of faith : ' I know that my Redeemer lives,' that is, I believe it ; what we read concerning thy testimonies. Other translations read, by thy testimonies : ' I have known by thy testimonies.' The Septuagint, *ἔγνων ἐκ τῶν μαρτυρίων σου*, have been persuaded of this by thy Spirit out of the word itself.



[2.] The knowledge of sense and experience : I myself have known by sundry experiences heretofore, which I shall never forget.

2. The date and ancientness of this persuasion, 'of old.' It was not a late persuasion, or a thing that he was now to learn. He always knew it since he knew anything of God, that God had owned his word as the constant rule of his proceedings with creatures, in that God had so often made good his word to him, not only by present and late, but old and ancient experiences. Well, then, David's persuasion of the truth and unchangeableness of the word was not a sudden humour, or a present fit, or a persuasion of a few days' standing, but he was confirmed in it by long experience. One or two experiences had been no trial of the truth of the word, they might seem but a good hit ; but his word ever proveth true, not once or twice, but always. What we say 'of old,' the Septuagint reads, *κατ' ἀρχάς*, 'from the beginnings,' that is, either—

[1.] From my tender years. Timothy knew the scriptures from a child, 2 Tim. iii. 15 ; so David very young was acquainted with God and his truth.

[2.] Or from the first time that he began to be serious, or to mind the word in good earnest, or to be a student either in God's word or works, by comparing providences and promises, he found, concerning his testimonies, that God had founded them for ever.

[3.] Lastly, 'of old,' may be what I have heard of all foregoing ages, their experience as well as mine : Ps. xxii. 4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee ; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them ; they cried unto thee, and were delivered ; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.'

The points are three :—

*Doct.* 1. There is an everlasting stability, and a constant unchangeable truth in God's testimonies.

*Doct.* 2. This must be known by us, or apprehended by us.

*Doct.* 3. Experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future.

*Doct.* 1. There is an everlasting stability and a constant unchangeable truth in God's testimonies.

*Proof.* Ps. cxi. 8, 'All his commandments are sure ; they stand fast for ever and ever.' The word of God is of perpetual use and comfort, not in one condition, but in all ; in every age of the world you have the effects of it : it shall be made good to us in the world to come : 2 Cor. i. 20, 'For all the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen ;' of one invariable tenor, and of a sure and certain accomplishment. They do not say Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen ; Yea to our hopes, and Amen to our desires.

*Reasons.* It must needs be so, if we consider—

1. Their author.

2. Their foundation.

3. Their use.

First, Their author is God, who is the self-same God, and needs not say and unsay ; for he has wisdom enough to foresee all events ; power enough to answer all difficulties that may stand in the way of his promises ; authority supreme, and so is above all controlment.

Sometimes men command, but without reason; sometimes they promise, but without performance; sometimes they threaten, but without effect: therefore the word of man dieth and may come to nothing; they forget their promises, or may be cast into such circumstances as to be unable to perform them: but these are God's testimonies, and therefore are pillars that cannot be shaken; they are laid by God himself, who hath ordained them to stand firm for ever. His people shall find more in his performance than they could perceive in his promise, and his enemies shall find more weight in his judgments than they could apprehend in his threatenings: 2 Tim. ii. 19, 'The foundation of God standeth sure;' *θημελία*, his obligation, not a foundation in the builder's sense, but in the lawyer's sense. His obligation or bill of contract, that is, his promise or covenant with us in Christ, remaineth unchangeable. A bill or bond is called *θημελία*. God will own his servants if they will be faithful to him. See Hammond.

Secondly, They are founded; the testimonies of God, if taken for the promises of the gospel, as they ought to be, are built on two foundations:—

1. One foundation is the unchangeableness of God's nature: Heb. vi. 18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' God cannot change, cannot lie. God can no more break his promise than cease to be God; his love, truth, power is all unchangeable.

2. The other foundation is the blood of Christ; in him they are Yea and Amen. The things promised are purchased with a great price; surely that blood was not shed in vain: 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,' 1 Cor. iii. 11.

Thirdly, Their use.

1. To be testimonies or declarations of God's mind and will to the creature; not only for the regulation of our actions, but the measure of God's dealings. God's covenant in respect of the commands is the rule of man's duty; in respect of the promises and threatenings, they are the rule of God's judgment or process with us. Now, it is for the honour of God and satisfaction of man that this should be stated and held good in all ages and cases; therefore God hath established a process and rule of dealing with his creatures that shall never be changed. If your cause will hold good according to God's testimonies, it will hold good before his tribunal. Otherwise we could not know certainly that we do please or maintain any commerce with him, or know what to expect from him.

2. To be props and pillars of our confidence; so the scriptures, as they are founded themselves, so they are a foundation for us to build upon: Eph. ii. 20, 'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone;' they support the weight of the building. Now, foundation-stones must not be movable, or laid loosely and carelessly, for then all the building will be weak and tottering; therefore there is a sure word and sure promises for poor creatures to build upon. The apostle calls it *βεβαίον-τερον λόγον*, 2 Peter i. 19, 'A more sure word of prophecy,' comparing it to the voice from heaven, whereof he spoke immediately before. We are upon more certain terms, now God guideth us by scripture,

than if he guided us by oracle: *quoad nos*, it is so, though every declaration of God be alike evident and certain in itself. A transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten than a standing authentic record. Consider it as subject to jealousies, forgetfulness, mistakes; it is so. The general voice of the gospel gives more encouragement to self-undoing sinners than a voice from heaven calling us by name.

Use 1. To humble us for our uncertainty and inconstancy, when the testimonies of God are so stable and unchangeable. The scriptures are as firm as a rock; but, alas! we are unstable as water, both as to faith and obedience. There should be a proportion *inter regulam et regulatum*, between the rule and the thing ruled, the measure and what is measured, the stamp and the impression. We carry it so as if the word spake one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; as if God would sometimes maintain the cause of his people, and at other times forsake them; as if he sometimes loved sin, and hated righteousness; would sometimes be good to penitent sinners, at other times turn away from them. We profess to walk by his rule, and yet live so disproportionable.

1. In faith, like waves of the sea rolled hither and thither, our dependence and trust now and anon changing with the posture of our affairs, not suited to the eternal verity of the promises. In crosses, confusions, and difficulties, we are at an utter loss: James i. 6, 'But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.' If we believe it to-day, why not to-morrow? Do difficulties abate anything of the certainty of God's word, and make it questionable? Then it would be in the power of man to disannul the promise, and God could never lay a sure ground of hope.

2. In obedience. The weakness of our faith and dependence necessarily inferreth that they that do not trust God cannot be long true to him: James i. 8, *διψυχος ἀκατάστατος*, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Sometimes when we are soul-sick, we mourn and complain of sin, and seem to have a passionate hatred of sin; at other times, when the fit is over, we give it harbour and entertainment, and embrace our Delilah again; whereas the same reasons that once made us hate sin should still make us hate it, for sin is sin still. The scripture doth not one while condemn it, and another while allow it; but we are not swayed by our rule, but act as we are inclined by our changeable affections, and therefore complain of sin to-day, and commit it to-morrow, and lick up our vomit again. So for duty: Hosea vi. 4, 'Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.' Nothing so fickle and changeable as man in anything that is good, so vain and inconstant are we in our motions and devotion; pangs that can no more endure a trial than the morning cloud and early dew can endure the heat of the rising sun; it cometh by fits.

3. In our opinions and professions, how do we say and unsay, and build again the things we have destroyed, and destroy the things we have builded; so that we know not where to have them, and are like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine! Eph. iv. 14, where are two metaphors; they are compared to children for inconstancy in their choice, and to ships destitute of



skilful masters, tossed this way and that way with contrary winds and tides. So they with divers doctrines and opinions. Sometimes taken with one opinion, sometimes with another; περιφερόμενοι, circled about by all the winds in the card. Is this becoming the constant unerring certainty of the scriptures? It will be necessary for us to quit this childish temper; God will not always bear with it in us, whatever he may do in babes; therefore let us not receive the truth of God lightly and uncertainly, but fix ourselves in the knowledge, the love, and practice of the truths that are there commended to us: Gal. i. 6, 'I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.' This lightness is a disease incident to our natures, soon off, soon on; that other gospelling, or pretence of a purer way.

*Use 2.* Is comfort to the people of God—

1. In all the particular changes that pass over our heads. Our estate and condition is many times changed, but God's word is no more changed than himself is changed; all things shall come to ruin sooner than these foundations be overturned: Mat. v. 18, 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The promises are still the same, even as God is: Mal. iii. 6, 'For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' And these mercies we should take comfort in: Heb. xii. 28, 'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' So also 1 John ii. 17, 'And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

2. In times of general confusion, when that which they apprehended to be right and a duty proveth a sin, when wickedness is established by a law: Ps. xciv. 20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?' and all that is just and right seemeth to be perverted. There is a God in heaven, who will judge not according to the opinions of the times, but according to the reality of things revealed in his holy word. These ordinances of men shall be forced to give way to those eternal testimonies; a duty in former times, a sin now.

3. Comfort against the encounters of violence, when we seem to be borne down with force, and have no hope. The testimonies of God are firm and steadfast, that none shall overthrow and frustrate them. They are but as the dashing of waves against a rock: Isa. xxviii. 15, 'When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us.'

4. It is a comfort in prayer; so David useth it here. Yea and Amen, that relateth to our desires, as before.

*Use 3.* To persuade us to behave ourselves to the word of God as an unchangeable unerring rule.

1. To the directions and precepts of it. There are no other terms to be expected, but what God hath set down in the word; therefore frame yourselves to observe them, and be constant in this practice, then will you have the everlasting comfort of it. Bind them upon your hearts: you must take up Christ's yoke one time or other;



do not think that he will alter the ordinances of his wisdom and justice for your sakes: Ps. cxix. 66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.'

2. To the promises of it. They are founded for ever, whatever carnal reason suggests to the contrary in the hour of temptation. To this end consider what promises are. They are declarations of the purposes of God. Both confirm you. As they are purposes of God, they imply immutability: Heb. vi. 17, 'Wherein God, willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath.' God's counsel is immutable, for God being an intelligent agent, of most perfect knowledge and profound wisdom, can will and determine nothing but according to the best and most exact understanding. There can be no cause of revocation, either for want of wisdom or justice, for he is absolutely both wise and just; nor from inconstancy of will, for 'the strength of Israel is not as man that he should repent;' nor can his will be frustrated for want of power, for he is almighty. But now when this purpose is declared, that draweth on a further obligation: Ps. lxxxix. 34, 'I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' There is a debt ariseth, and a right established of the creatures. To change counsel would imply weakness; to alter a promise, wickedness and unfaithfulness, which were the highest blasphemy to imagine in God, especially when this declaration is made with such emphatic averment, confirmed by an oath: Heb. vi. 18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation;' which is such a sacred assurance, yea, by seals and signs. Yet, again, your very believing bindeth it the faster: Ps. cxix. 49, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' Would God invite a trust, and then decline it? The more you believe, the sooner you see the effects of the promise. This is the difference between promises and threatenings. Christ saith, 'Be it unto thee according to thy faith.' God's threatenings are fulfilled whether man will or no; let him believe or not believe, God will throw the ungodly into hell. But in promises it is otherwise; then they do good to us when by faith we embrace them; believe, and thou shalt be established. Besides God's two immutable things, faith is an anchor sure and steadfast, Heb. vi. 19; therefore let us not entertain the promises of the gospel with a loose heart; you may know it by your slowness and carelessness about them, if you do not esteem them as great: 2 Peter i. 4, 'To you are given exceeding great and precious promises;' they contain spiritual and eternal riches, and deserve to be greatly esteemed. By your addictedness to sense and to present things you seem to declare that you think a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, happiness to come but conjectural and uncertain. It is a fancy to live by faith, if it doth not support us in difficulties and afflictions: Ps. cxix. 40, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me;' when you look on all the promises as a dry stick, or as words and wind; if they do not engage us to the earnest pursuit of heavenly happiness, and the blessedness which they contain and offer: Heb. xi. 13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and

were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'

*Doct. 2.* That this unchangeable certainty and everlasting verity of God's testimonies should be known by us, that so a sure word should be entertained by a pure faith. David acknowledgeth here his own certainty.

1. What it is to know this. To know signifieth three things—to understand, to consider, to believe; all have place in this point. There must be a clear apprehension, a deep and serious consideration, and a firm assent and sound belief of this truth.

[1.] It is needful we should understand the unchangeable and everlasting verity of the scriptures; for how shall we believe what we do not know, and venture our souls upon what we are ignorant of? 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed;' John ix. 36, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And he said, Who is he, that I might believe on him?' True faith is not content to go on implicit grounds, but seeks for clear knowledge of the ground it goeth upon. Nor can there be solid faith without knowledge of that which we do believe. Who will venture his soul on the bottom of the scriptures till he knoweth they are of God, and unchangeably fixed as the rule of life and charter of his happiness, especially since they require us to crucify our lusts, and sacrifice our interests, and perform those duties which are displeasing to nature, upon the hopes which they offer, and bid us with confidence and joyfulness to wait upon God for his salvation in the midst of all pressures and afflictions. If we build hand-over-head we build on the sand, not on the rock.

[2.] To know signifieth to consider. This is also necessary, because all knowledge is improved by consideration, without which it is but as ignorance or oblivion at the best, till consideration doth awaken it. Certainly it can have no efficacy upon us, breed no delight and hope in us. A transient view doth not acquaint us with things as serious meditation; the truth lieth by unimproved; as a man that passeth us by occasionally knoweth us not so much as he that doth intimately converse with us. Therefore, if we would improve our knowledge, excite the soul to its act of faith and choice, there must be consideration. We are bid to consider the Lord Jesus, Heb. iii. 1; to give heed to the gospel, Heb. ii. 1, to consider its worth and certainty. The schoolmen have a distinction, *certitudo cognitionis seu speculationis*, and *certitudo adhesionis*; the former lieth only in a clearness of the mind, the last in its power upon the affections and the will. The object rightly propounded produceth the former from the understanding, not expecting the consent of the will; the latter followeth *imperium et consensum voluntatis*, the command and consent of the will. The former ariseth from the evidence of the thing; the latter from the worth, weight, and greatness of the thing, the gospel truth. Of this latter sort we read, 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;' and therefore must not only be apprehended, but seriously considered by us, that we may adhere to it with all our hearts. Though illumination is helped by contemplation, yet much more the latter, where firm adherence is expected. Men may apprehend the truth of things, when corrupt

affections and a perverse will keep them from closing with them ; but when a man so knows a thing as to consider it both his duty and interest to close with the goodness and truth of it, then doth he rightly know it.

[3.] To know signifieth assent and firm believing ; as John xvii. 8, ‘ They have known surely, ἀληθῶς, that I came out from thee.’ So Acts ii. 36, ‘ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, ἀσφαλῶς, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ ;’ to know it so as they might safely build upon it. This is mainly necessary, considering the many temptations and assaults that we shall meet with to shake us ; this assent must be very strong, well rooted and built upon sure ground. And because it doth not consist *in puncto*, it must be always growing, Mark ix. 24, ‘ Lord, I believe ; help thou my unbelief ;’ till it grow up to the certainty of the thing on which it is built. There is an objective certainty in things that is beyond that subjective certainty in persons about them ; but because it is built on divine revelation, or God’s testimonies, we should still increase in it.

2. Whence we know it, there is the difficulty. The doubt will not lie here, whether God’s testimonies be of everlasting verity, but how we shall know them to be God’s testimonies. For it is *per se notum*, that God is true, that he cannot lie, or give a false testimony : 1 John v. 9, ‘ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.’ But how doth it appear this is God’s testimony ? for that word that is propounded to be believed as such, cannot be perceived easily, neither is it known of itself to the understanding, neither is it demonstrable by evident reasons as to make infallible conclusions. The word’s giving testimony of itself doth not solve it ; indeed one part may give testimony to another, and one revelation be confirmed by another, as the New Testament giveth witness to the Old, and confirmeth its authority ; but how shall we know that to be God’s testimony ? I answer, we have it—

[1.] Partly from the self-evidencing light of the scriptures themselves ; they have passed God’s hand, and have his signature upon them, as all his works make out their author. There are characters of his wisdom, power, goodness, and holiness impressed upon them : 2 Cor. iv. 2–4, ‘ By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God : but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost : in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.’ The gospel being the result of God’s wisdom, and suited to the heart of man, for whose use it was calculated, it hath something in itself to commend it to our consciences. It cannot be imagined that the hand of God should pass upon anything, and there should be nothing of his character left on it to show it came from God. Look upon any fly or gnat, any flower of the field or pile of grass, and you may see some impressions to discover the author of them. So certainly if God shall set himself to write a book, or set forth a frame of doctrine to do man good, surely he hath discovered his wisdom and holiness and grace therein, and that in plain and legible characters, that, if



man were not prepossessed and leavened with prejudice and corrupt affections, he could not choose but see it. That there is such an objective evidence or aptitude in the doctrine itself to beget faith in those that consider it, is plain from that of the apostle: 2 Cor. iv. 2-4, 'By the manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;' without miracle, or other confirmation, if they had a clear eye: it is light which discovereth itself, and all things else. The reason why it is not seen is not in the object, because of any defect there, but the faculty, the visive faculty; their eyes are blinded with worldly lusts. Well, then, when things are spoken so becoming the nature of God, and so agreeable to the necessities of man, and with such an evidence of reason, not to the law only, but also to the gospel, as to establishing of a way of commerce between God and us, and exempting us from the grand scruples that haunt us, though these things could not be found out by human wit, yet now they are revealed, they carry a great suitableness thereunto.

[2.] And partly by the testimony of the Spirit, this is one way of confirming the truth of the gospel: Acts v. 32, 'We are his witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him;' where the apostles are mentioned as one sort of witnesses, and the Holy Ghost as another. The great office of the Spirit is to testify of Christ Jesus: John xv. 26, 'Even the spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.' The doctrine of the gospel concerning Christ's coming and power is so great a mystery that it is not believed and received in the world without the Spirit. Upon the beginning of Christ's ministry, in his baptism, the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. Now the Holy Ghost doth two ways bear witness of Christ—*ἐν τεχνῶς, ἀτεχνῶς*, artificially, and inartificially. Artificially, *per modum argumenti*; and inartificially, *per modum testis*; partly as he doth afford sufficient matter of confirmation and conviction in those miraculous operations in the primitive times, and also as he doth persuade the heart, and convince us of the truth of the gospel.

[3.] There is experience of the truth of the word in God's hearing prayers: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' Fulfilling promises: Ps. xviii. 30, 'Thy word is a tried word; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.' Punishing the wicked: Hosea vii. 12, 'I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.' Rewarding according to the rules set down in the word, Rom. i. 18, and Heb. ii. 3; but of this by and by.

3. Why we must understand, consider, and believe?

*Ans.* Both in order to our comfort and duty.

[1.] Comfort. If the certainty of the scriptures were more understood, believed, and thought of, we should be more fortified against fears and sorrows, and cares and discouragements, whencesoever they do arise; for as fire well kindled doth easily break forth into a flame, so assent freely laid doth fortify the heart against trouble. It is very notable when the apostles would raise the joy of faith, they plead the certainty of the doctrine they delivered; for it was comfortable in itself, suitable to the necessities of man; all that needed was to assure



others of the truth of it—see 1 John i. 1-4—that their joy might be complete and full, upon this certainty of evidence, and complete demonstration. We could not be so comfortless and dejected, if we were persuaded of the reality of these things. So 2 Peter i. 8, ‘Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious.’ We should love Christ, and rejoice in the believing confident expectation of enjoying of him. And where this is firmly believed, afflictions cannot damp or hinder this joy. A firm trust in the promises of the word will fill a man with comfort, and strengthen him against all difficulties, Ps. lvi. 4-10.

[2.] Our obedience would be better promoted, it would be a remedy against boldness in sinning; and coldness in duty: Heb. iii. 12, ‘Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.’ You cannot drive a dull ass into the fire: Prov. i. 17, ‘Surely in vain is the net laid in the sight of any bird.’ Men do not believe the everlasting verity of the scriptures, and therefore are so bold and venturous; they think they shall do well enough after all God’s threatenings: Zeph. i. 12, ‘And it shall come to pass that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled upon their lees, that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.’ Secondly, coldness in duty. How do the scriptures reason against neglect? Heb. ii. 1-3, ‘Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ The word spoken by angels was λόγος βέβαιος. Was only worth questioned? No; but the truth also, because so little believed, therefore so little thought of, less desired, least of all pursued and sought after: 2 Peter i. 16, ‘We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.’

*Use.* Oh! study to be informed more and more of this great truth. Let us think of and often consider the unerring certainty of the scriptures. It is a truth not to be supposed and taken for granted, but known, that you may build sure. Man is apt to suspect evangelical truths, as being cross to his lusts and interests. You will find it of use, not only in great temptations, when we are apt to question all, Ps. lxxiii. 13, but in ordinary practice, in every prayer: Heb. x. 22, ‘Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.’ It is not an assurance of our particular estate, or our title to eternal life, but a full assurance of the word and promise of God, that is necessarily required in every one that will draw nigh to God: ‘Let us ask in faith, nothing doubting,’ James i. 7, 8.

2. Do not content yourselves with a light credulity, but grow up to a full persuasion: 2 Tim. iii. 14, ‘But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;’ and Col. ii. 2, ‘That their hearts being comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding;’ not a fluctuating doubting knowledge,

but a full persuasion of the truth of the gospel : Luke i. 4, 'That thou mayest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed ;' Col. i. 23, 'If thou continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel ;' a rooted persuasion that it is the undoubted truth of God : the firmness of faith should answer the firmness of God's word. There are several degrees of assent, conjecture, opinion, weak faith, and receiving the word in much assurance, 1 Thes. i. 6. There is belief, confidence, assurance, and full assurance. Belief is grounded on God's word in general, and all the truths and propositions therein contained. Confidence, on the promise ; the one goeth before the other : fidelity is before dependence and belief ; for the promise is first a truth, and so to be considered, before it can be conceived under the formal notion of a promise. Full assurance is grounded on the fidelity and immutability of God ; no man believeth so far but he may believe more.

*Doct. 2.* That experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future. 'Thy testimonies I have known of old,' saith David.

So the children of God make use of them. See David's instance, 1 Sam. xvii. 36, 'Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them. Moreover David said, The Lord hath delivered me from the paw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, and he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.' Thus he argueth from former experience to future deliverance : I trust in the same God, who is able to give the same strength, and why should I not look for the same success ? So Jacob : Gen. xxxii. 10, 11, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of the truth thou hast showed to thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands : deliver me, I pray thee, from the hands of my brother Esau.' So Ps. xxiii. 5, 6, 'Thou hast prepared a table for me in the presence of mine enemies : surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' He hath been good to me, and if it be for his glory, he will be still good to me ; he hath been my God, and will be my God, and shall be my God for ever : 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who hath delivered from so great a death, and doth deliver ; in whom we trust he will yet deliver us.' In all respects of time we stand in need of deliverance ; when one is past, another cometh ; there have been dangers, there are dangers, and there will be dangers ; but God hath, doth, and will deliver. It is a trade God hath used, an art he is versed in, and never at a loss about. Our God is a God of salvation, and is excellent in working of it.

Reasons of the point.

1. God's constancy and unchangeableness. God is the same, always like himself, for mercy, power, and truth ; he is never at a loss : what he hath done, he can do, and will do. I am, is God's name, not I have been, or shall be. His providence is new and fresh every morning, Lam. iii. 23. God is but one God, Gal. iii. 20 ; always like himself. As he hath delivered, so he doth, and will : Isa. lix. 1. 'Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot save, neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear.' No decay in him. When we give

to another, we give from ourselves ; we waste by giving. The creatures are at a stint, and soon spend their allowance ; but God cannot be exhausted ; there is no decrease of love and power, no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity.

2. Experience begets confidence : Rom. v. 3, ‘And patience experience, and experience begets hope.’ The heart is much confirmed when it hath faith and experience of his side. If we were as we should be, the promise should be beyond all experiences, for it is the word of him that cannot lie. Experience addeth nothing to the certainty of the promise, nor any authority to it ; only in regard of our weakness, it is a help and sensible confirmation against our distrustful cares and fears. Sense and experience is not the ground of faith. We must believe God upon his bare word ; yet it is an encouragement : John xx. 29, ‘Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.’ Then more encouraged when Christ felt. We have a double proof and experience :—

[1.] What God is able to do for us.

[2.] What God will do again, when his own glory and our need requireth it.

[1.] We know what God can do ; former deliverances are as so many monuments and significations of his power : Isa. li. 9, ‘Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord ; art not thou he that cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon ? awake, and put on strength, as in the ancient days.’ Rahab is Egypt, Ps. lxxxvii. 4 ; the dragon, Pharaoh, Ezek. xxix. 3, the dragon or crocodile of Egypt. Can he do this, and not do that ? Upon every experience, we that learn by sense should be more strongly persuaded of God’s power. It is a complaint they will not learn after all these signs and wonders : Mat. xvi. 9, ‘Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up ?’ Upon every experience we should have high thoughts of God’s power and all-sufficiency. The great controversy between Christ and his disciples was their not profiting in faith.

[2.] We see and know what God is willing to do for poor sinners. He is not sparing of necessary supplies and comforts ; he hath been a present help. We have no cause to believe the contrary ; it is only distrust saith he will not ; it is a suspicion and jealousy without cause. It may be, for it hath been : 1 Sam. xvii. 36, ‘The Lord hath delivered me,’ &c. Particular and special confidence is not so usual now, but we have no reason to be discouraged in the ways of God ; though we cannot be absolutely confident, yet we should not balk duty out of distrust and jealousy. In such faintings take the cordial of experience : Ps. lxxxvii. 10, ‘And I said, This is my infirmity ; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.’

3. Former mercies are pledges of future ; by giving, God becometh our debtor : Mat. vi. 25, ‘Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment ?’ If he gives life, he will give food ; if he gives a body, he will give raiment : one mercy is an earnest of another. Rom. viii. 32, if he give us Christ, he will give us all things ; if he give grace, he will give glory ; if we have the first-fruits, Rom. viii. 23, we shall have the harvest ; if we have the beginning, Phil. i. 6, we shall have the ending. There are some dispensations that are but



as a tendency to other mercies, given out in such a way as to invite hope.

4. We are the more endeared to God by his own mercy and tender care of us : Zech. iii. 2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?' The danger heightens the mercy.

*Use 1.* To reprove the people of God for their diffidence and distrust, when, after many experiences of God, they can no more quiet their hearts concerning future events; upon every new trouble as much tormented and perplexed as if never known nor heard anything of God before. David : 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' When God hath abundantly done enough to evidence his power and love unto his : Ps. lxxviii. 19-21, 'They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' &c. When we are to credit God in another work, as the disciples after the miracle of the loaves. When new temptations assault us, we should not be disheartened. What were God's motives before to help? Because you were in misery; the same you may expect again.

*Use 2.* To press you—

1. To observe your experiences, and compare them with the word. All that God doth is full of truth and faithfulness : Ps. cxi. 7, 'The works of his hands are verity and judgment, all his commandments are sure;' exactly according to what he hath promised; they certainly come to pass. Especially observe your experiences in your troubles and temptations, what hath been your greatest comfort and support then.

2. Begin to do so betimes; long experience is a great advantage. Most Christians are to be blamed that they begin so late to know God, or to observe the truth of his word, or that adjourn and put it off. Fruits planted late are seldom ripe and come to anything. When we have a long journey to go, we set forth early. Begin with the Lord betimes, if you would thrive in faith. The longer experience you have had of God, the more you will believe in him : Ps. xxii. 9, 10, 'Thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast: I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly.'

3. Remember and improve experiences. 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' Let not new troubles startle us, after we have found the power and goodness of God so ready for our help.

## SERMON CLXXI.

*Consider mine affliction, and deliver me; for I do not forget thy law.*—VER. 153.

In this verse observe—

1. David's petition, *consider mine affliction, and deliver me.*

2. His argument, *for I do not forget thy law.*

First, His petition is double—for pity and deliverance; the one is preparative to the other.

1. That God would consider his case.

2. Deliver him from the danger into which he was cast by his enemies.

Secondly, His reason is taken from his constant obedience, 'For I do not forget thy law.' The phrase is a *meiosis*, and noteth—

1. His diligence; he did carefully observe.

2. His constancy; he never departed from the obedience of God's word, whatever temptations he had to the contrary.

I shall give you some brief notes.

*Doct.* 1. That God's choicest servants in this world have their afflictions.

David saith, 'Mine affliction;' and others of God's children have their share of the sorrows and vexations of this world. This will be so whether you consider them as men or as Christians.

1. As men: Job xiv. 1, 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.' So Job v. 7, 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;' and Gen. xlvii. 9, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' It is well they are so few, since so evil. As our relations and comforts are multiplied, so are the occasions of our sorrow. God never intended the world to be a place of our rest, but our exercise; it is a middle place between heaven and hell, and hath somewhat of either. In our passage to the other world we must look for it, it is that we are born to. Many are born to great honour and estate, but they have another portion goeth along with it; they are born to trouble. Ever since sin entered into the world, punishment entered with it. *Vitam aspiciatur a supplicio*. In heaven full of days, full of comforts; but here it is otherwise, few, and full of trouble. *Unusquisque nostrum, cum nascitur, ex hospitio hujus mundi excipitur, initium sumit ex lacrymis*—Cyprian de Pat. Austin, *infans nondum loquitur, et jam prophetat*—Serm. 24, de Verbis Apost.

2. As Christians. A man is no sooner brought home to God but he must expect to be hated by the world: John xv. 19, '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.' Assaulted by Satan: Luke xxii. 31, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat.' Chastened by the Lord himself for their trial and humiliation: Heb. xii. 8, 'But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.' Our own corrupt hearts will be vexing us, thwarting all the motions of the new nature: Gal. v. 17, 'For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other; so that ye cannot do the thing that ye would.' The lusts of the flesh are as pricks and thorns in our sides. In short, wicked men will hate us because we are so good: 2 Tim. iii. 12, 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' God will afflict us because we are no better: Isa. xxii. 9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' A Christian is too strict and pure for the world, and is not strict and pure enough for God; and therefore must look for afflictions to mortify sin from God's hand, and great enmity from the world, if he meaneth to keep up the majesty of his profession.

*Use.* It presseth us—

1. To look for crosses.

2. To prepare for them.

3. When they come, bear them with more patience.

1. Look for them. The first day that we begin to be Christians we must reckon of the cross. Christ hath drawn up the form of our indenture, to which every one must yield and consent before he can call him Master: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' In Luke it is, 'take up his cross daily,' Luke ix. 23. Though there be fair days as well as foul in Christianity, yet we must every day be ready. As porters stand in the street waiting for a burden for them to carry if they be hired to it, so must a Christian every day be prepared to take up his burden if God shall call him to it; yea, 'daily' noteth not only continual readiness, but the frequency of our conflicts; as if every day there were some exercise of our faith and patience. If God keep us to the cross all the days of our lives, we must be content. Once more, taking up the cross daily sheweth that private and personal calamities are a part of the cross as well as the afflictions of the gospel. Afflictions from God as well as afflictions for God; such as sickness, death of friends, loss of estate, by an ordinary providence; though not enduring persecution for the name of Christ, yet enduring affliction at the will of Christ. Ordinary crosses do not exclude the comforts of Christianity. These occasion experience of God and trial of grace, and are a part of God's discipline for the mortifying of sin, happy opportunities to discover more of God to us; yea, there is more reason of submission to God in these, because God taketh us into his own hands. A man that stormeth when a bucket of water is cast upon him is patient when wet to the skin with the rain that cometh from heaven. Well, then, we must be daily ready for all these things; if we take up the profession of stricter Christianity with other thoughts, we should soon see our mistake. It is a vain thing to flatter ourselves with the hopes of a total exemption; many think they may be good Christians, and yet live a life of ease and peace, free from troubles and afflictions. This is all one as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself peace and continual truce with the enemy; or as if a mariner committing himself to the sea for a long voyage should promise himself nothing but fair weather and a calm sea without waves and storms; so irrational is it for a Christian to promise himself a life of ease and rest here upon earth.

2. Be prepared for them, otherwise our looking for them is in vain; and to this end would Christ have us reckon upon the cross, that we may be forewarned. He that buildeth a house doth not take care that the rain should not descend upon it, or the storm should not beat upon it, or the wind blow upon it; there is no fencing against these things, they cannot be prevented by any care of ours; but that the house may be able to endure all this without prejudice. And he that buildeth a ship doth not make this his work, that it should never meet with waves and billows, that is impossible; but that it may be tight and stanch, and able to endure all weathers. A man that taketh care for his body doth not cark for this, that he meet with no change of weather, hot



and cold, but how his body may bear all this. Thus should Christians do; not so much take care how to shift and avoid afflictions, but how to bear them with an even and quiet mind. See Chrysostom, Hom. 35, in 1 Cor. As we cannot hinder the rain from falling upon the house, nor the waves from beating upon the ship, nor change of weather and seasons from affecting the body, so it is not in our power to hinder the falling out of afflictions and tribulations; all that lieth upon us is to make provision for such an hour that we be not overwhelmed by it. We need get a stock of spiritual comforts, that all may be peace within when trouble without; and as afflictions abound, so may comforts. We had need get a sound back, be much mortified, and weaned from the vanities of the world: Heb. xii. 13, 'And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but rather let it be healed.' If we have any weak part in our souls, there the assault will be most strong and fierce. A garrison that looketh to be besieged taketh care to fortify the weak places; so should a Christian mortify every corrupt inclination, those that are most pleasing. We need much resolution. A Christian had need be a resolved man, well shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, Eph. vi. 15, or else in a hard way he will soon founder and halt. That *ἐτοιμασία*, that preparation, is a resolved mind, to go through thick and thin, and to follow Christ in all conditions: Acts xxi. 13, *ἐτοιμὸς ἔχω*, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' A well-shielded established mind in the comfort and hope of the gospel; unless we be thus prepared and armed with a mortified heart, and a thorough persuasion of the truth and worth of gospel privileges, and thereupon a resolution to encounter all difficulties and hardships, we shall not long be faithful to Christ; but after we have launched out into the deep with him we shall be ready to run ashore again. Now most Christians are not mortified, and so they trip up their own heels. Most Christians are not resolved, and so take to religion as a walk for recreation, not a journey, so as to be prepared for all weathers.

3. When they come, bear them with more patience. A resolution which we thought strong out of a trial, is often found weak in a trial; for we have other apprehensions of things when we know them by experience, of what we have when we know them only by guess and imagination. Therefore, notwithstanding expectation and preparation, there must be a care of patience in troubles and afflictions, that we bear them with an equal and Christian mind; not suffering as perforce, by compulsion and constraint, but willingly: it is not enough to bear the cross, but according to Christ's law we must take it up. It is said of the three children, Dan. iii. 28, that they yielded their bodies willingly, cheerfully suffered themselves to be cast into the furnace, rather than worship any but the true God. Many suffer, but it is unwillingly, and with repining and impatience, under the hand of God, like refractory oxen that draw back, and are loath to submit their necks to the yoke. Patience perforce, is no true patience, little better than the suffering of the devils and damned in hell, who suffer misery and torment against their wills. Rebellion, murmuring, and want of subjection is the very curse of crosses: the sacrifice that went strug-

gling to the altar among the heathen was counted unlucky. Two things feed this impatience:—

[1.] Men think none suffer as they do: ‘Is any sorrow like unto my sorrow?’ Lam. i. 21. Every one hath the greatest sense of his own burden, therefore they think none hath so heavy and grievous an one as they have. It were well if they did this in feeling of sin. Paul felt his burden greatest in that respect: 1 Tim. i. 15, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.’ But alas! in afflictions, all God’s children have their trials; many fare more grievous. When you lament the feared loss of an only child, what think you of the Virgin Mary? Luke ii. 35, ‘A sword shall pierce through thy soul.’ Generally, 1 Peter v. 9, ‘The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.’ Every Christian hath his measure of hardship and suffering; you are not singular and alone; your lot is no harder than the rest of the saints of God through the world; others are poor, and carry it well, and are cheerful; such an one under a painful disease, very patient in an acute fever, racked with stone, &c. If they, why not thou?

[2.] They could bear any other cross but this that is now upon them. Christ biddeth us to take up the cross indefinitely, whatever God is pleased to lay upon us; we must not be our own carvers, but stand to God’s allowance. The wise physician knoweth in what vein to strike. God knoweth us best, and what is fit for us. Many in their troubles wish God would afflict them in any other kind, lay any trouble upon them but that which is laid, and think they could bear it better. The poor man wisheth any other cross but poverty; the sick man he could bear poverty better than pain or sickness; he that hath a long and lingering sickness wisheth for a sharp fit, so it might be short; *e contra*, another that hath a sharp and violent sickness had rather have a lingering distemper. Thus apt are we to dislike our cross which God layeth on us for the present. This is disobedience and folly too; for if God should leave us to ourselves to choose our own crosses, we should choose that affliction which is hurtful and dangerous for us.

*Doct. 2.* That in our afflictions we should run to God by prayer. So doth David here, so should we.

1. We may do so.

2. We must do so.

1. We may do so; we have leave to come to God. Affliction is a fruit of sin, a part of the curse, introduced into the world upon the breach of the old covenant; yet then the throne of grace standeth open for us: when God seemeth most angry, we have liberty to come to him. In afflictions we are apt to think God an enemy, and that he beginneth to put the old covenant in suit against us; but our trouble should not be our discouragement, but our excitement; the throne of grace was for such an hour: Heb. iv. 16, ‘Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;’ and it is God’s allowance: James v. 13, ‘Is any among you afflicted? let him pray: is any merry? let him sing psalms.’

2. We must come; it is a duty God hath required at our hands:

Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble;' and Job xxii. 27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.' God will have us come and speak to him in our most serious frame, and act faith by putting promises in suit, and take new vows and resolutions to part with sin, when we feel the bitter effects of it. He knoweth it preventeth distracting fears and cares, when we can commend our condition to his pity and powerful providence: Phil. iv. 7, in every thing we are to make our requests known to God; and he knoweth this maketh us sensible of his providence and dominion over us in all conditions. Prayer is an acknowledgment of his sovereignty over all causes and events; the affliction could not come without his appointment, nor go away without his leave: it is a kind of breaking prison, to hope to get through without supplication to God: Job xxxiv. 28, 29, 'So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted: when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be against a nation, or against a person only.'

*Use 1.* It informeth us of the goodness of God, that he is willing to receive us upon any terms. When afflictions drive us to him, he doth not turn away his face from us. Those very prayers that are extorted from us by necessity, he accepts as a piece of worship done to him, provided we do not neglect him upon other occasions, for that is hypocrisy: Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? let him always call upon God.' We ought not therefore to be discouraged if our acquaintance with God begin in the time of our afflictions, and these set us a-work to think of him. Man will say, You come to me in your necessity; but then God is willing to receive us. Christ had never heard of many, if their necessities had not brought them to him—palsy, possession, deaf, dumb, fevers. Long would God sit upon the throne of grace unemployed if he did not send trouble and secret rack with it to bring us into his presence; so that that which in appearance doth drive us off from him, doth in effect make us draw near to him.

*2.* It informeth us of the folly of them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. ix. 13, 'All this is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God.' You defeat the dispensation; now you should make up your former negligence. When we are pressed hard on all hands it should put an edge upon our prayers, otherwise our afflictions will turn to a sad account; when God sendeth a tempest after us, and this will not bring us back to him; we are summoned to make our appearance, and will not come. Joab would not come till Absalom set his barley-field on fire.

*Use 2.* To encourage us to come to God in our afflictions. Now is a time to put the promises in suit, to begin an interest if we have none, to make use of it if we have any; then our weakness and nothingness is discovered, that we may more apply ourselves to God; and a time of need will be a time of help: Ps. xli. 1, 'God is a refuge for us, a very present help in trouble;' that is, when trouble is trouble indeed, then therefore we should call for it most earnestly; a necessitous creature is a fit object for mercy. You expound providences amiss if you



think afflictions are a casting off. No; they are God's voice calling you, nay, his hand pulling you to him. Blessed seasons to bring God and us together; then God's aim is accomplished: Hosea v. 15, 'I will go, and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early;' Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' Afflictions do not work thus simply, for then they would work upon all, but as accompanied with some drawings of the Spirit. Every condition is blessed when it bringeth you nearer unto God; though crosses be great trials to any, yet if they chase us to the throne of grace, God is not wholly gone, but hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to him. It is desertion in point of felicity, but not in point of grace.

*Doct.* 3. One great request of the children of God in prayer is that he would consider their affliction.

This David promiseth in the first place. So elsewhere: Ps. cxxxii. 1, 'Remember David, O Lord, and all his afflictions.' He beggeth God to take notice of his person and condition. So also Ps. xxv. 18, 'Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.' He beggeth that his groans might not be passed over. So Hezekiah, Isa. xxxvii. 17, where many words are used to this effect: 'Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, and see, and hear all the words that Sennacherib hath sent to reproach the living God.' If God would but take notice, hear, and see, all would be well. And as for personal calamities, so in public and church cases: Ps. lxxx. 14, 'Return, we beseech thee, O Lord God of hosts; look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine.' If God will but come and see, it is enough. So in the Lamentations, chap. i. 9, 'O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.' So again, ver. 11, 'See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile.' Yet again, ver. 20, 'Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress.' Thus do the children of God lay open their miseries before him, in confidence of his pity.

But why do the children of God press this point so earnestly, as if they did doubt of his providence and omniscieny? God knoweth all things, and can forget nothing. I answer—

1. Though God be not ignorant and unmindful of our condition, yet we are to put him in remembrance: Isa. lxii. 6, 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' Christ is the advocate, we are solicitors and remembrancers for others, and humble supplicants for ourselves. Indeed, in so doing, we do not put God in mind, but put ourselves in mind of the providence of God, which is most graciously conversant about us in our afflicted condition, which is a great comfort and support to us. The moving of God to consider begets faith in us that he will consider; and so we wrestle with God, that we may catch a heat ourselves.

2. The sight of misery is a real argument. It is clear that we are to use arguments in prayer; for God dealeth with us as rational creatures, and as such we are to deal too with him. Now, among arguments, our afflictions and miseries are real ones; they have a voice

to work upon his pity, and to move him to have mercy upon us. He being inclined to compassion, his eye doth affect his heart, as a beggar, to move pity, will not only plead with his tongue, but uncover his sores; so do the saints lay open their misery, and unfold their estate before the Lord; for God so loveth his people, that the very show of their miseries moveth him to help them. Thus God saith that he would show mercy to his people, 'for I have seen with mine eyes,' Zech. ix. 8. God seeth our case, and every degree of our trouble is marked by him, which bringeth it the nearer to his heart; yea, God's people themselves are comforted under their saddest sufferings by the Lord's seeing and marking thereof: Ps. x. 14, 'Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand.' It is enough to them thou hast seen it. So Ps. xxxi. 7, 'I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble, and known my soul in adversities.' It is a mighty comfort that God hath an eye upon them in particular, and hath friendly affections towards them.

3. The Lord is said to consider when he doth in effect declare his not forgetting, or remembering us for good; and therefore, though God cannot but see and consider our trouble, yet we cannot rest satisfied with it, till by real effects he maketh it evident, that we may know, and all the world may know, that he doth consider us, and regard our condition; and this is that which saints beg so earnestly, that he would, by some act or work, experiment the truth, or make it appear that he hath heard and seen and taken notice of our sorrows. Though the saints believe his omniscieney and particular providence, yet they cannot rest satisfied till they feel it by some effect, by giving real support or help in need, according to covenant; and so must all the places before mentioned be interpreted.

*Use.* When we, or the church of God, or any of the people of God, are in any distress—

1. Let us go to God and beg that we may see, and the world may see, that he hath regard to us in our sorrows, and doth not wholly pass us over. To this end, impress upon your hearts the belief of these two things—the eye of his pity, and the arm of his power.

[1.] The eye of his pity, which is more than bare omniscieney; it imports his knowledge accompanied with a tender love. This is often spoken of in scripture: Exod. ii. 28, 'God looked on the children of Israel, and had respect to them.' So Exod. iii. 7, 'And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, and have known their sorrows;' Acts vii. 34, *ἰδὼν εἶδον*, 'I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people;' or seeing, I have seen. The very sight of God is a comfort and support to a sinking soul; it is some comfort to us to have our crosses known to such as we are assured do love us, if they condole with us, though they be not able to help us; so that the Lord looketh upon us with a merciful, pitiful eye.

[2.] As God will cast the eye of his pity on us, so he will put forth the arm of his power; as he hath a merciful eye, so he hath a powerful hand, ready to help; though sometimes we see nothing of this: 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 'For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout

the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.' There is his care and effective providence.

2. Be sure you keep up your qualification: 'I do not forget thy law.' Many times when men in their prosperity do not regard God and his commandments, he regardeth them in their straits; for though we forget the duty of children, he doth not forget the mercies of a father. But surely he will not forget them that do not forget his law; therefore it is not credible that God should forget us and our condition, that we should be more mindful of his law than he of our affliction. He that puts us in mind of his law will also put himself in mind of the troubles we endure for the keeping of it; for certainly God is more mindful of his part of the covenant than we can be of ours. See Christ's argument, John xvii. 10, 'And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.'

*Doct. 4.* We may ask deliverance from temporal troubles; not only support, but deliverance. So doth David.

1. God hath promised: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

2. Much of God is discovered in it. His wisdom: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.' We are at a loss many times, but God is never at a loss. His power: Dan. iii. 17, 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king;' when the wrath of the king was great, and the fiery furnace burning before them. His goodness: God is sufficiently inclined to it by his own grace, and delights to do it: Ps. cxlix. 4, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation.' He loveth the person of believers, and loveth their prosperity and happiness, and delighteth to see them do well in the world. He hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, Ps. xxxv. 27, which is a good encouragement to pray for it: 2 Sam. xiv. 1, 'Joab perceived that the king's heart was towards Absalom.' Yea, not only his love, but the constancy and unweariedness of his love: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who delivereth us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' There are all respects of time. Solomon saith, Prov. xxv. 17, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' Men waste by giving, but I Am is God's name; we still need, and he is still a-giving: 2 Tim. iii. 11, 'Thou hast fully known my persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, &c.; but out of them all the Lord delivered me.' So many troubles, so many gracious experiences of God: Ps. xxxiv. 19, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all;' Job v. 19, 'He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven shall no evil touch thee.' Seven is the number of perfection. God can and doth deliver us as often as we need deliverance; when clouds return after the rain, or one evil treadeth on the heels of another; he hath a succession of mercies, for our succession of sorrows. We are dismayed when we see one trouble is over and another cometh. We have the same God still, the same certainty of his mercy in delivering. Many times God so delivereth that the troublers of his people shall come in their room: Prov. xi. 8,



'The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead;' as the leprosy of Naaman went to Gehazi. His faithfulness, which he hath laid at pledge with us, that he will make a way to escape: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' His dominion and sovereignty: Ps. xlv. 4, 'Thou art my king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob.' He hath all things at his command, all second causes, the hearts of his enemies.

3. We have greater opportunities to serve God: Ps. cxix. 134, 'Deliver me from the oppression of man, so will I keep thy precepts;' Luke i. 74, 75, 'That he would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.'

*Use.* They are too nice that think we may not ask of God temporal mercies. It is lawful to ask them if we ask them lawfully, with a submission to God, and for his glory, that we may serve him more cheerfully; so you may ask a deliverance out of your troubles.

*Doct.* 5. Those that would have God to deliver them out of their afflictions should be sure they do not forsake their duty.

All the evil that David suffered could not weaken his love to the law of God, nor draw him from the obedience of it. And what was the issue? He pleadeth this in prayer to God.

*Reason* 1. Because if we do so, the nature of our sufferings is altered, both as to God and man. As to man, we do not suffer as evil-doers: 1 Peter iv. 15, 'But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters;' which will much darken our comfort and glory in suffering; though for the main you have an interest in God, if by your miscarriage you have deserved the stroke of human justice. As to God, your sufferings are not castigatory, but probatory: Rev. ii. 10, 'The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried;' not punished, but tried.

*Reason* 2. Because uprightness giveth boldness with God in prayer: 1 John iii. 21, 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' So Paul sheweth he was capable of their prayers, or a fit object of them: Heb. xiii. 18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.' It is an error to think that justification giveth us only comfortable access to God, and sanctification hath no influence at all upon it. We lie in some secret sin, then our plea is spoiled. If God give thee a heart to adhere close to him in a constant course of obedience, the more you may be assured to be delivered. The joy of our faith is mightily confirmed by the conscience of our constant respect and observance of the word of God, and firm adherence to him.

*Use.* If we would boldly come to God in our straits, let us not forget or forsake our duty, nor throw off the profession of godliness, whatever we suffer from men: Ps. xlv. 17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.' Yea, from God; though he seem to cast us off, taketh no care of us: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.' Diogenes

Laertius telleth us of a cynic that went to Athens to Antisthenes to be taught by him; when often met with a repulse, yet still insisted on his request.

## SERMON CLXXII.

*Plead my cause, and deliver me : quicken me according to thy word.*—VER. 154.

In this verse are three requests, and all backed with one and the same argument.

1. The three requests are—

[1.] That God would own his cause.

[2.] Deliver him out of his troubles.

[3.] And in the meantime, before the deliverance came, quicken him.

In the first he intimateth the right of his cause, and that he was unjustly vexed by wicked men; therefore, as burdened with their calumnies, he desireth God to undertake his defence, ‘plead my cause.’

In the second he representeth the misery and helplessness of his condition; therefore, as oppressed by violence, he saith, ‘deliver me;’ or, as the words will bear, ‘redeem me.’

In the third; his own weakness and readiness to faint under this burden; therefore, ‘quicken me.’

Or, in short, with respect to the injustice of his adversaries, ‘plead my cause;’ with respect to the misery of his condition, ‘deliver me;’ with respect to the weakness and imbecility of his own heart, ‘quicken me.’ God is his people’s patron, to defend their cause; his people’s redeemer, to rescue them out of their troubles; the author and fountain of their life, to quicken them and support them: accordingly we may beg of him, as the Psalmist doth here, defence of our cause, the deliverance of our persons, and the support of our hearts.

2. The reason and ground of asking, ‘According to thy word.’ This last clause must be applied to all the branches of the prayer: plead my cause, according to thy word; deliver me, according to thy word; quicken me, according to thy word: for God in his word engageth for all, to be advocate, redeemer, and fountain of life. This word that David buildeth upon was either the general promises, made to them that keep the law, or some particular promise made to himself by the prophets of that time. The sum of all is this: If we believe the word of God to be true, we may in a righteous cause with comfort and confidence ask defence, deliverance, and support.

I begin with the first request, *plead my cause.*

*Doct.* When we have to do with unjust and wicked adversaries, we should desire God to plead our cause; or, as the original will bear, to judge our judgment, or contend our contention—*κρίνων τὴν κρίσιν μου*, Septuagint—*litiga litem meam*. So others.

There is a threefold cause that cometh usually into debate:—

1. *Inter hominem et hominem*, between man and man ; as between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent : Gen. iii. 15, ‘ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel ; ’ those that are born after the flesh, and those that are born after the spirit : Gal. iv. 29, ‘ He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit ; ’ the children of God and men of this world : John xv. 19, ‘ If ye were of the world, the world would love its own ; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.’ As between wolf and lamb, raven and dove. This is an old controversy, that will never be reconciled. It is often set afoot in kingdoms, in cities, in townships, in villages, and families, and will continue till the world’s end. For while there are two seeds, there will be strifes and enmities. Now, in this quarrel and strife, sometimes success is cast on this side, sometimes on that, as God seeth fit either to favour, or to try and correct his servants. Usually the world prevaieth, being more numerous ; only let me tell you, this controversy doth not always appear to the world unveiled or bare-faced. Enmity to godliness is such an odious thing in itself, and hath so often miscarried, that it is not for its interest to appear openly and in its own colours, but under the mask and disguise of other pretences, which are the more plausibly taken on when the holy seed have scandalised their profession, and made the way of truth to be evil-spoken of ; and yet it is the old enmity and antipathy still, as appeareth by the parties contesting, their aims and designs, and the means and ways they use to compass them, with scorning of faith and piety.

2. *Inter hominem et diabolum*, between man and the devil : he is called *ἀντίδικος*, the adversary, 1 Peter v. 8, ‘ Your adversary the devil like a roaring lion walketh about continually seeking whom he may devour ; ’ and such an adversary as hath law of his side, and by law would carry it against all the children of fallen Adam, if there were not a new court erected, where grace taketh the throne. So Rev. xii. 10, he is called ‘ the accuser of the brethren ; ’ but it is our comfort that as there is an accuser, so there is an advocate : 1 John ii. 1, ‘ If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who also is the propitiation for our sins.’ We shall do well to put our cause into his hands, and then it cannot miscarry. Satan will not be more ready to accuse than Christ to plead for us ; and he hath a greater interest in the court of heaven than our adversary hath, stronger arguments to plead, merits to represent ; therefore make him your attorney, to appear in court for you.

3. *Inter hominem et Deum*. God hath a controversy with us about the breach of his law, and our undutiful carriage to him. Now you can never reason it out with God. It was Job’s presumption to think that he could order his cause before him : Job xxiii. 3–5, ‘ Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat ! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments : I would know the words which he would answer me ; and understand what he would say unto me.’ No ; there is no trusting to the equity of our cause, or hope to clear ourselves before God’s judgment-seat.



We have no way left but submitting and humbling ourselves, and suing out our pardon in a broken-hearted manner; no way but yielding to the justice of the first covenant, and putting in the plea of favour and grace according to the second: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who can stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' If you deny or excuse sin, you stick to the first covenant, and plead innocency, and then God will deal with you according to the tenor of strict justice; but if you humbly confess sin, and acknowledge your guiltiness and shame, then you may plead mercy. Justice dealeth with the innocent, mercy with the guilty.

We speak now of the first, of the strife between men and men, or the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, who do not only oppress them by violence, but seem to have a plea against them in law, because of the seeming justice of their quarrel, and the calumnies and slanders wherewith they burden their cause. Therefore David beggeth God to plead his cause for him; and elsewhere, that God would stand by him, not only as a champion and second, but as a patron and advocate: Ps. xxxv. 1, 'Plead my cause against them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me;' as they allege false things against him, and condemn him as being in an evil cause and evil way; so plead my cause against them that strive with me; as they opposed him with violence, so fight against them that fight against me.

In this point—

1. The nature of God's pleading our cause.

2. The necessity of it.

3. What hopes there are that he will plead the cause of his people.

First, The nature of this pleading would first be explained; and here—

1. In what quality God pleadeth for us. In all judicial proceedings there are the principal contending persons, and those are called *actor et reus*, the plaintiff and defendant; and the manner of proceeding in judgment is, that the plaintiff bringeth forth his bill, and the defendant his answer. But besides these principal contending persons, there are the witnesses, the advocate, the judge. Now, in some sense God might be all these, *testis, advocatus, et judex*, without any wrong and injustice. Our witness to attest for us, as he knoweth all things, and knoweth our hearts; for as such do the saints often appeal to him. Our advocate to plead for us, for he is tender of the credit of his people, and hath undertaken to preserve them from the strife of tongues: Ps. xxxi. 20, 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of men, thou shalt keep them secretly in thy pavilion from the strife of tongues.' As a judge to give sentence in our behalf, or such a decree whereby the adversary may be convinced of our righteous cause, and our innocency cleared; and all this may be called God's pleading, either as *testis, advocatus, or judex*. But I rather confine it to the last. God's pleading is rather as a judge; not as *advocatus*, but as *patronus*; that is a more proper and honourable name. Zonaras tells us that the Romans called their patrons *τοὺς κηδεμονικοὺς*; and it was enacted in the law of the twelve tables, *si patronus clienti fraudem fecerit, sacer esto*. If any man had deceived

his client, he was accursed, devoted to slaughter, and any man might kill him. *Cientes quasi colentes, patroni quasi patres*, saith Servius. So that to deceive a client was as to deceive a son. This was begun by Romulus, who commended the common people and worser sort to the nobles, leaving every man his liberty to choose whom he would for his patron; and that defence of them was called patronage; and the *jus patronatus* during this constitution consisted in these duties and offices; they were to defend the poor in judgment, to answer for them in all points of law; they were to take care of them that none might wrong them present or absent; they were *omnem accusatoris impetum sustinere*; and this *jus patronatus* was of such authority among the ancients, that Marcus Cato telleth us that first the name of father was most sacred, next that of patron. It were long to say all that might be said of them; this is enough, that their principal work was to be present at all causes wherein their poor client was concerned, and to appear for him and defend him, as they would their own cause. Advocates were taken in afterwards, when laws were multiplied, to suggest what was law; they were men skilful in the law. See Hall's lexicon. Now thus it is God pleads the cause of his people as their patron, who hath taken them into his tutelage and clientship; not as interceder, but defender. They have betaken themselves to his tuition, and desire to honour and serve him; God will therefore take part with them against their enemies. He doth not only hear pleas and debates on either side, but interposeth as the patron and chief party concerned in the strife, and having withal the power of a judge, will pass sentence on their behalf, and see it executed.

2. The manner of God's pleading. It is not a verbal or vocal, but a real and active plea. God pleadeth not by words, but by deeds, by his judgments, and powerful providence, righting the wrongs done to them. For since, as I said, there concur in God the relations of *judex* and *patronus*, he maketh the one serviceable to the other. As their *patronus* he owneth the cause, taketh it upon himself, as the answerable party, and then useth his judicial power in defence of his people. Now the property of a judge is to pronounce sentence, and then to put his sentence in execution. God hath pronounced sentence in his word, and he puts the sentence in execution in his providence; and that is God's pleading. Many times there is *sententia lata*, but *dilata*; long ago was sentence passed, but it is not speedily executed, Eccles. viii. 11. Because sentence is not speedily executed upon an evil-doer, therefore do they vaunt and insult over his people, as if God had forsaken and disclaimed them, and would never more own their cause and quarrel; but when God seeth fit to appear, and to show himself in this mixed relation of judge and patron, the world will have other thoughts of their cause; and therefore, Isa. iii. 13, 'The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge his people.' He will bring matters under a review, and will powerfully show himself against their oppressors. To this pleading Job alludeth when he saith, Job xxiii. 6, 'Will he plead against me with his great power?' if he should use his almighty and invincible power against me, he would easily ruin me. So Ezek. xxxviii. 22, 'I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood;' against Gog and Magog, that is, the Scythians, Turks, and Tartars.

So that you see that God's pleading is not by speaking, or by word of mouth, but by the vengeance of his providence against those that wrong his people. So against Babylon: Jer. li. 36, 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee.' But that this is a mixed act of patron and judge, see Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' When God's people provoke him to anger by their sins, he casteth them into troubles; and then their adversaries are chief, and their cause is much darkened and obscured: all this while God is pleading against them, but it is not the enemies' quarrel, but his own vindication of abused mercy and goodness. But when once the controversy is taken up between God and them, by their submission, and clearing his justice, and imploring his mercy, then God will plead their cause, and take their part against the instruments of his vengeance (and clear their righteous cause), who only sought their own ends in afflicting them. When God hath exercised their humility and patience, he will thus do. And how, I pray you, will he plead for them? The text saith there, by executing judgment for them; that is, by putting his sentence in execution, and then will restore to them their wonted privileges, and own them in the public view of all, and make manifest they are his: he will bring them forth to the light, and they shall see his righteousness.

3. The effect of God's pleading, which is the clearing of God's people, and the convincing of their adversaries; which God doth partly by the eminency and notableness of the providences whereby he delivereth his people, and the marks of his favour put upon them: Neh. vi. 16, 'And it came to pass that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.' Their own judgments were convinced of their folly in opposing the Jews; the extraordinary success showed the hand of God was in it: by such incredible and remarkable occurrences doth God bring about their deliverance. So Micah vii. 10, when God shall plead her cause, 'Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.' Those who mocked her faith should be confounded at the sight of her deliverance. Thus God delights to make the happiness of his people conspicuous. So Rev. iii. 9, 'Behold I will make them which are of the synagogue of Satan (which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie), behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.' He will make their enemies to know that he hath loved them, and ask them forgiveness for the wrongs and outrages done to them. Partly by the convictions of his Spirit, undeceiving the world, and reproving them for the hatred and malice against his people: John xvi. 8, 'The Comforter, when he is come, shall reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' The word is ἐλέγξει, not comfort, but convince or reprove; put them to silence, so as they shall



not in reason gainsay. The object, the world, the unconverted, if not the reprobate. The things whereof convinced, of sin and righteousness and judgment, of the truth of Christ's person and doctrine. This was spoken for the comfort of the disciples, who were to go abroad and beat the devil out of his territories, by the doctrine of the cross, that were weak men destitute of all worldly sufficiencies and props and aids. Their master suffered as a seducer, their doctrine cross to men's carnal interests, for them in this manner to venture upon the raging world was a heavy discouraging thing. Now the Spirit should come and convince the opposing world, so far that some, terrified before, brought to evangelical repentance: Acts ii. 37, 'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart;' soon desire to share in their great privilege: Acts viii. 18, 19, 'And when Simon saw that through laying on the apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost;' but he was yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Some almost persuaded: Acts xxvi. 28, 'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Some forced to magnify them, who did not join with them: Acts v. 13, 'And of the rest, durst no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them.' Some would have worshipped them, being yet pagans: Acts xiv. 11-13, 'And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lift up their voices, saying, in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. Then the priests of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.' Others bridled that were afraid to meddle with them: Acts v. 34, 35, 'Then stood there up one in the council, a pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space, and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men.' That Christ, that Messiah, that righteous person, one able to vanquish the devil, thus without any visible force, and with mere spiritual weapons, by this conviction of the Spirit, did the Lord subdue the world to the owning and receiving Christ's kingdom; at least, not go on in a high hand to oppose it. God cleared Christ as righteous, and Lord.

Secondly, The necessity of this pleading.

1. Because the people of God are often in such a condition that none will plead their cause unless the Lord plead it; and therefore we are driven to him as our judge and patron. God's design is not to gain the world by pomp and force, but by spiritual evidence and power; and therefore, as to externals, it is often worse with his people than with others; for the world is upon their trial, and therefore though God will give sufficient means of conviction, yet not always such evident marks of his favour to the best cause in temporal things as that mere sense shall lead them to embrace it. No; he will only set a good cause a-foot, and then suffer it to be exposed to the hatred of the world, and sometimes to be overcome as to any temporal interest it can get, that the mere evidence and love of truth may gain

men, and not any secular motives. All the countenance and owning God will give to it is by infusing courage and constancy to his servants to suffer for it, and so they overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and not loving their lives to the death, Rev. xii. 11. He speaketh of such a time when the church seemeth weakest, like a poor woman travailing; and her enemies seem strongest, like a great red dragon ready to devour the child as soon as born. Now, though at such a time the church is overcoming, and the devil and his instruments are but pulling down their own throne, and establishing Christ's while they are shedding the blood of his saints, yet none of this appeareth and is visibly to be seen. Though suffering be a feeling and ratifying of the truth, yet to the world's eye it seemeth a suppressing and overbearing of it. Therefore few will own such a despised, hated, persecuted way; and the difficulty is the greater when there is much of God's truth owned by the persecuting side, and the contest is not about the main of Christianity, but some lesser truths, and so the opposition is more disguised; then certainly it may be said, Isa. lix. 4, 'None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth;' all half friends are discouraged, therefore nothing is left the people of God, but their prayers, 'Lord plead my cause.' David in the text appealeth to God's judgment when he was deserted by men, burdened by prejudices, oppressed by man's wrong judgment. So often God's people are not able to defend themselves, and few in the world will own them, or be advocates for them, then God will take their cause in hand. In the civil law, if a man could not get an advocate, *metu adversarii*, the judge was to appoint him one to plead for him; so God taketh notice of his people's condition: Jer. xxx. 13, 'There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up.' Often among men none can or dareth undertake the defence and patronage of oppressed right.

2. Though we have a good cause and hopeful instruments, yet we cannot plead it with any effect till God show himself from heaven. Nay, though the cause be never so right and just, and instruments and means hopeful, yet it requireth God's power to keep it afoot; for the justice of the cause must not be relied on, nor probable means rested in; but God must have the trust of the cause, and the glory of maintaining it; otherwise by our own ill managing, or by some secret and unseen opposition, it will miscarry: Ps. ix. 4, 'Thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.' This is a work wherein God will be seen, while it is in agitation, or under decision. God will have the trust, and when it is over, he will have all the glory.

Thirdly, What hopes or grounds there are to expect that God will plead the cause of his people.

1. He can.

2. He will. Infinite power and infinite justice can do it.

1. He can. The Lord is able; he that pleadeth our cause hath infinite power: Prov. xxiii. 11, 'Their redeemer is mighty, he shall plead their cause with thee.' It is easy to bear down a few afflicted creatures, that have no strength or heart to oppose, being in bonds, and under oppression; but there is a mighty God, who when he pleadeth any one's cause, he will do it to the purpose, really and

effectually delivering them for whom he pleadeth : Jer. l. 34, ' Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name ; he will thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.'

2. He will, considering—

[1.] Their relation to God.

[2.] God's relation to them and to the whole world.

[1.] Because of their relation to him. The *dominus*, the lord whom they had chosen, was to be their *patronus*. They that have put themselves under God's protection, and are faithful to him, keeping close to his word, he will plead their cause, and manage it as his own : Isa. li. 22, ' Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God, that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury ; thou shalt no more drink it again.' He being their sovereign Lord, had undertaken to protect his servants ; he counteth the wrongs done to them done to himself : Acts ix. 4, ' Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?' especially since molested for his truth.

[2.] Because of his relation to them. He is the supreme potentate and the righteous judge of the world, and so bound by his office to defend the weak and innocent when oppressed : Ps. cxlvi. 7, ' He executeth judgment for the oppressed. Those that should maintain right upon earth, and punish wrongs, are often prevaricators ; but the judge of all the earth will do right ; he is an impartial judge, and will maintain the cause of his people : Prov. xxii. 22, 23, ' Rob not the poor, because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate ; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.' Though no relation to him, yet, if poor, if afflicted, if destitute of human help, the Lord taketh himself to be the patron of all such, much more his people.

Use 1. To rebuke our fears and misgiving of heart. When we see the best men go to the wall, and to be made objects of scorn and spite, we are apt to say, as the church doth in the prophet Isaiah, chap. xl. 27, ' My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God ;' that is, in effect, that God doth wholly neglect them, and will not plead their cause. Oh no ! He knoweth what strife there is between us and our adversaries, and how good our cause is, and how much he is concerned in it ; only we must wait his leisure, and bear his indignation until he plead. True submission to God ought to prescribe no day to him, but refer all to his will.

Use 2. Let us commit our cause to the Lord, as the expression is, Job v. 8, ' I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause ;' who is the friend and advocate of the afflicted, and hath promised to be so, and to keep us from the hand of the wicked and the mouth of the wicked ; from their hand and violence so far as it shall be for his glory : Isa. xlix. 25, ' I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children ;' and from the mouth of the wicked : Ps. v. 15, ' He saveth the poor from the sword, and from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty ;' from slanders that may endanger their life and credit. So ver. 21, ' Thou shalt be hid from



the scourge of the tongue;' from their bitter reproaches. Therefore commit your cause to God. But then—

1. Be sure that your cause be good, for God will not be the patron of sin. Unless he hath passed sentence for us in his word, it is boldness to appeal to him; as Baalam, that would hire God by sacrifices to curse his people. Hasty appeals to God in our passion and revengeful humours are a great dishonour to him. Sarah appealed: Gen. xv. 3, 'The Lord judge between me and thee;' and David appealed: 1 Sam. xxiv. 15, 'The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between thee and me, and see and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thy hand.' But there was more of justice in David's appeal in the case between him and Saul than in Sarah's appeal in the case between her and Abraham; it would have been ill for her if God had taken her at her word; it sheweth that even God's children are too apt to intitle him to their private passions.

2. Let us be sure that there be no controversy between God and our persons, when yet our cause is good. The Israelites had a good cause, Judges xx., but there was once and again a great slaughter made of them, before they had reconciled themselves to God. There must be a good conscience as well as a good cause, otherwise God will plead his controversy against us before he will plead our controversy against our enemies: Jer. ii. 35, 'Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger will turn from me: behold I will plead with thee, because thou sayest I have not sinned.' Because we have a good cause, we think God hath no cause to be angry with us; therefore he will first plead in judgment against us. So Hosea xii. 2, 'The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, according to his doings will he recompense him.' Though God may approve what is right in worship and profession, yet he will punish our shameful disorders and unanswerable walking in his people.

3. Let us pray in a right manner, with confidence, with earnestness.

[1.] Confidence that God will plead our cause when he seeth it good and for his own glory, whether there be any likelihood of it, yea or no; for he hath promised to support the weak and humble, and protect the innocent against their oppressors: Ps. cxl. 12, 'I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' God is party with you, not against you, and leave him to his own ways and means. Faith should support us when sense yieldeth little comfort and hope. He knoweth how to justify your cause, and deliver your persons; and you should know that he will do it, and can do it, though the way be not evident to you, and God seem to sit still for a while.

[2.] Earnestly. Oh! be not cold in the church's suit. If you be Sion's friends, and are willing to take share and lot with God's people, awaken him by your incessant cries. Nay, it is God's cause: Ps. lxxiv. 22, 'Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily.' The godly are not maligned for their sins, but their righteousness. So Ps. xxxv. 23, 'Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord.' There is a long suit depending between the church of God and her

enemies; desire that God would determine it, and declare what is right and what is wrong.

Secondly, He begged God in the text to redeem or deliver him; the word in the text, גֹּאֵל, the usual word for *goël*, redeemer; the Septuagint, λύτρωσαί με, 'ransom me.' Here he craveth that as his cause might be in safety, so his person.

*Doct.* We may beg a deliverance or a release from our troubles, provided we do not beg it out of an impatiency of the flesh, but a desire of God's glory.

God delights to be employed in this work. What hath he been doing all along in all ages of the world, but delivering his people from those that oppressed them? He delivered Jacob from the fury of Esau; Joseph from the malice of his brethren: Gen. xxxvii. 21, 'And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, saying, Let us not kill him.' Daniel from the lions' den: Dan. vi. 22, 'My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me, and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.' Peter from prison: Acts xii. 11, 'And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' And will not he do the like for his suffering servants? How came his hand to be out? he delivered Israel out of Egypt, out of Babylon; he can do it again, it doth not cost him much labour: Ps. lxxviii. 2, 'As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.' Therefore refer your deliverance to God, and when you are in a way of duty, be not thoughtful about it: there is a price paid for it; Christ redeemed us from temporal adversity so far as it may be a snare to us. God hath his times; we may see it, unless he hath a mind to sweep away the unthankful and froward generation that provoked him to so much anger: Num. xiv. 22, 23, 'Because all those men that have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice: surely they shall not see the land, which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it;' Jer. xxix. 31, 32, 'Thus saith the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite, Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie; therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the Lord; because he hath taught rebellion against the Lord.' It may be, we may be more broken and afflicted first: Deut. xxxii. 36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.' Oh! let us desire to see the good of his chosen: Ps. cvi. 5, 'That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.' It is a favour: Ps. l. 23, 'Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me; to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.'

Thirdly, For quickening, 'Quicken me;' in which he prayeth either to be kept alive till the promises be fulfilled, or rather to be comforted and encouraged in waiting.

*Doct.* We need continual influence from God, and lively encouragement, especially in our troubles.

1. We are apt to faint before God showeth himself: Isa. lvii. 16, 'I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.' The devil's design is to tire and weary us out. Some are of a poor spirit, that they will tire before their strength faileth them: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in a day of adversity, thy strength is but small.' Yea, there is a readiness to faint in the best through many troubles, delayed hopes. Those that have upheld others by their good counsel are apt to sink themselves.

2. At least we are clogged, cannot so cheerfully wait upon God, and walk with him: Heb. xii. 12, 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' We grow weak, slothful, remiss in God's service. Fear and sorrow weakeneth the hands, indisposeth us for duty.

*Use.* Let us encourage ourselves, rouse up our heavy hearts, and wait for God's quickening; let us not give God cause by our negligence to deny support to us.

### SERMON CLXXIII.

*Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.*

—VER. 155.

DAVID had begged his own deliverance, as one of God's servants or clients, in the former verse; now he illustrateth his petition by showing the opposite state of the wicked. They could not with such confidence go to God, or put in such a plea for deliverance: 'Salvation is far from the wicked.' Some read it prayer-wise, Let salvation be far from the wicked; for in the original the verb is understood, and it is only there, Salvation far from the wicked; but most translations read it better proposition-wise; for as the man of God comforts himself in his own interest and hopes, so also in this, that God would not take part with the wicked enemies against him, who had no interest at all in his salvation and protecting providence, and therefore would keep him from their rage.

In the words—

1. An assertion.

2. The reason of it.

1. In the assertion we have the miserable condition of wicked men, salvation is far from them.

2. In the reason we have the evil disposition of wicked men, 'They seek not thy law;' which will give us the true notion and description of them, who are wicked men; such as seek not God's statutes, busy not themselves about religion, study not to please God.



In the words two propositions:—

*Doct.* 1. That salvation is far from the wicked.

*Doct.* 2. They are wicked who keep not God's statutes.

*Doct.* 1. That salvation is far from the wicked. Salvation is of two sorts—temporal and eternal. The proposition is true in both senses; they are far from salvation, and salvation is far from them. To be far from salvation is to be in a dangerous case, as to be far from light is to be in extreme darkness. To be far from God's law, ver. 150, is to be extremely wicked; to be far from oppression, Ps. liv. 14, is to be in a most safe condition. So that the point is—

That the wicked are in a very dangerous case, both as to their temporal and eternal estate.

First, Temporal salvation is far from them, and they are in a dangerous condition as to their outward happiness. This seemeth to be the harder part, and to have most of paradox in it; but this will appear to you if you consider—

1. That all these outward things are at God's disposal, to give and take according to his own pleasure: Job. i. 21, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;' not the Sabeans and the Chaldeans: 1 Sam. ii. 7, 'The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.' He that cast the world into hills and valleys disposeth of the several conditions of men, that some shall be high and some low, some exalted, some dejected. All things that fall out in the world are not left to the dominion of fortune or blind chance, but governed by the wise providence of God: 'Their good is not in their hands,' Job xxi. 16.

2. That it belongeth to God, as the judge of the world, to see *ut malis male sit, et bonis bene*. Gen. xviii. 25, 'That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' Rom. iii. 5, 'But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous that taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?' Job xxxiv. 17, 'Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just?' Job xxxiv. 11, 'For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.' He is not indifferent to good and evil, and alike affected to the godly and the wicked; but hateth the one, and loveth the other. He hateth the wicked: Ps. v. 5, 'Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity;' and, on the other part, he loveth the good and the holy: Ps. xxxv. 27, 'He hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants;' it is his delight to see them happy and flourishing. This different respect is often spoken of in scripture: Ps. xxxi. 23, 'The Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.' That he will uphold and maintain those that are faithful to him, and avenge himself upon the pride and oppression of the wicked; though all the world be against the godly, God will preserve them and ruin the wicked, though all the world should let them alone. So 1 Peter iii. 12, 'For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.' There is a

watchful eye of God over the righteous, to supply their wants, to direct them in their ways, to uphold them against dangers, to comfort them in their griefs, to deliver them out of all their troubles. God hath an eye to take notice of their condition, and an ear to hear their prayers; but his face is set to pursue the wicked to their ruin: so that this is enough to assure us that holiness is the way to live blessedly, even in this life, where misery most aboundeth, because this is a part of the care that belongeth to the judge of the world

3. Besides his general justice as the ruler and judge of the world, and the condecency that is in such a dispensation to the rectitude of God's nature, there is his covenant declared in his word, wherein he promiseth temporal happiness to the godly, and threateneth misery and punishment to the wicked. And God ever stood upon the truth of his word, to make it good in the eyes of the world; therefore it will be with men as their condition is set forth in the word of God. A promise there is as good as accomplishment, and a threatening as sure as performance; and therefore, accordingly as the word saith of them, so is salvation far or near from them. Now search all the word of God, and see if it speak anything of hope and comfort to the wicked, or them that make a trade of provoking God. Nay, they are well enough aware of that, and therefore will not come to the light, care not to busy themselves in the scriptures; for they say of them as Ahab of Micaiah, 'He prophesieth nothing but evil to me;' and justly enough, for they can see nothing there but their own doom. If they are evil, it can speak nothing but evil: Isa. iii. 10, 11, 'Say ye unto the righteous, It shall be well with them; for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked: it shall be ill with them; for the reward of his hands shall be given to him.' This is the tenor of the whole word of God: so Eccles. viii. 12, 13, 'Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.' It is a certain truth; it is a certain evident truth, for it is *judicium certi axiomatis*. I do know and confidently affirm that it shall be well with them that fear God; but it shall not be well with the wicked, that is, it shall be very ill with them.

But here cometh in the great objection of sense, How can these things be so? We see the contrary, that all things come alike to all: Eccles. ix. 1, 2, 'The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.' That those outward things are given indifferently to good and bad, and the wicked are as free from temporal punishment as others, and enjoy all prosperity in this world, even sometimes to the envy and offence of God's children, and the hardening of their own hearts; and, which is more, that often it happeneth to the just according to the work of the wicked, Eccles. viii. 14, and to the wicked

according to the work of the righteous ; that is, evil to good men, and good to evil men. As to outward things, the advantage is usually on the side of the worst.

*Ans.* 1. By concession ; we must grant what is to be granted, that temporal things not being absolutely good or evil, the Lord taketh a liberty in the dispensation of them. The eternal promises and threatenings, being of things absolutely good and ill, are therefore absolute and peremptory. None that live godly can fail of the eternal promises ; none that goeth on still in his trespasses can escape the eternal threatenings. But the temporal promises and threatenings, being of things not simply good and evil, are not so absolutely fixed, but God will take a liberty sometimes to cross his hands, out of his general indulgence to give prosperity to the wicked, and out of his fatherly wisdom to chasten the godly ; and so all things come alike to all. Is Abraham rich ? So is Nabal ; yea, so the godly may be afflicted when the wicked triumph ; as Lazarus pined with want when Dives fared deliciously every day, and Jerusalem was in a heap of ashes when Babylon flourished.

2. By correction. The wicked have no right by promise or covenant, and so salvation is far from them ; for this promise or covenant-right inferreth two things—(1.) A sanctified enjoyment ; (2.) A more sure tenure.

[1.] A sanctified enjoyment ; they that have salvation by promise, they have it as an effect of God's special love, and so have it as a mercy, not as a judgment ; but without this they have it only by God's general indulgence, and so it may be a snare : Ps. lxxix. 22, ' Let their table become a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap,' and promote their ruin, not only eternal, but temporal. If they be not by these common mercies brought to repentance, the greater shall their condemnation be, and their downfall the more speedy. For while they let loose the reins, and run headlong into all sin, God is the more provoked against them, and his anger, that was a little delayed and put off, is the more severely executed. It is a blessed thing to have salvation by covenant : Rom. viii. 28, ' All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.' When we are sanctified to God, saith Baxter, all things are sanctified to us ; to serve us for God, and to help us to him.

[2.] Our tenure is more sure, and we can with more confidence wait upon God for it. In this sense salvation is far from the wicked, because they cannot lay claim to God's favourable providence, or look for the continuance of it with any confidence, because they have no right, no promise to build upon. The word of God speaketh no good to them, whatever God may do out of his general indulgence : James i. 7, ' Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.' Now the misery of this appeareth by considering wicked men either as in prosperity or adversity.

(1.) If they be still at ease for the present, yet they are not upon sure terms, because they know not how soon God may break in upon them and theirs : Job v. 3, 4, ' I have seen the foolish taking root ; but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety'



(the notion of the text), 'and are crushed in the gate, and there is none to deliver them.' In the eye of the godly they are far from salvation. I judged him unhappy for all his wealth, foretold his sudden destruction, which God would speedily bring on him and his; I read his doom. So Job viii. 11-13, 'Can the rush grow without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in its greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb: so are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hopes shall perish.' A wicked man cannot lift up his head above others for want of God's favour to uphold him, as the rush or flag cannot grow without mire or water. The prosperity of wicked men, when it is most green and flourishing, yet wants its sustenance, which is God's blessing. This is the condition of wicked men in the opinion of the good. But what is it in his own opinion? Take him in his serious and sober moods, he always liveth miserably and expecting a change, as knowing that God oweth him an ill turn: Job xv. 21, 'A dreadful sound is in his ears: in his prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.' He trembleth secretly, as if danger were always near; therefore cruel and mischievous against whom they fear, that shut the door against their own danger, for everything that is fearful will be cruel.

(2.) If he fall into adversity. In their troubles they have not a God to go unto, nor promises to build upon; therefore it is said, Prov. xv. 29, 'The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.' God's children have ready access to a sure friend, and are assured of welcome and audience when they come; but they are at their wits' end, know not which way to turn: Job xv. 22, 'He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword;' that is, full of terrors of conscience and distracting disturbing fears, hath no hope to be delivered, but lives as if he had a sword hanging over his head.

*Use 1.* To show us the reason why the people of God, when they grow wicked, are often disappointed in that salvation which they expect: Isa. lix. 11, 'We look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.' Why? Because they had exceedingly sinned against God, and scandalised their profession. There was a horrible depravation of the people of God in those times, and therefore all their prayers and fasts and seekings of God could not prevail for a deliverance.

*Use 2.* Comfort in a good cause, wherein the godly are opposed by the wicked. There is a double comfort:—

1. Because the prosperity, power, and pride of the wicked is not to be regarded; for though they flourish for a while, and all things flow in upon them according to their heart's desire, yet salvation is far from them. God is engaged both for the rectitude of his nature, the quality of his office, as judge of the world, and the tenor of his covenant, to employ his power and terror for their ruin; and though he may for a while spare them, and they take occasion from this indulgence to do more and more wickedly, yet you should not be dismayed if you see them engaged in ways or courses that are naught and wicked; you may say, I know they cannot prosper in them. When they are lifted up in the prosperity of their affairs, you should lift up

your hearts by faith, see a worm at the root of their happiness: *ἐνδον τὸ κακόν*, &c.

2. Because by the rule of contraries, if salvation be far from the wicked that seek not God's statutes, then deliverance is near to the godly that fear God and desire to be faithful with him, how hard soever their condition seemeth to be for the present: Ps. lxxxv. 9, 'Surely his salvation is nigh unto them that fear him.' You should be confident of it. They that please God cannot be always miserable; it is nearer than we think of, or can see for the present. There is a *surely*, or a note of averment put upon it. It is better be with the godly in adversity, than with the wicked in prosperity; when they are men appointed as sheep for the slaughter, yet there is a way of ransom and escape; but the wicked, at their best, are in the appointment of God as the stalled ox, or as swine fatted for destruction; when fattest, then nearest to destruction and slaughter.

Secondly, As to eternal salvation, so they are in a dangerous case.

1. The phrase here used by the Psalmist seemeth to be used to obviate their vain conceit. They think they shall do well enough, and have as much to show for heaven as the best; it is near in their conceit, but far indeed: 1 Cor. vi. 9, 'Be not deceived; know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?' Thoughts of impunity are natural to us; those that are in the ready way to hell are apt to think they shall get heaven at last, as if God would turn day into night; but alas! it is an eternal truth, 'salvation is far from the wicked.'

2. There is somewhat of a *meiosis* in the expression, less being said than is intended. The man of God saith that salvation is far, but he implieth that damnation is near; certainly the one it doth imply the other: Heb. vi. 8, 'The ground that beareth briers and thorns, is *ἐγγὺς κατάρας*, nigh unto cursing.' They are upon the borders of hell, and ready to drop into those eternal flames which shall consume God's adversaries.

3. Once again, the longer they continue wicked, the farther off is their salvation every day; farther off from heaven, and nearer to hell. A godly man, the more progress he maketh in virtue, the nearer he is to his salvation: Rom. xiii. 11, 'Now is your salvation nearer than when ye first believed.' Not only nearer in point of time, but nearer in the preparation of their hearts; not because older, but because better: and so by consequence, wicked men go farther and farther off, and therefore they are said to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, Rom. ii. 5. Every sin they commit puts them a degree farther off from salvation, as every degree of grace is a step nearer heaven.

*Reason* 1. The inseparable connection that is between privileges and duties. The gospel offereth salvation conditionally; if we forsake the condition, we fall short of the privilege; and therefore if we be wicked, salvation is far from us. When God took Abraham into covenant with him, he doth not tell him only what privilege he should enjoy, but also bindeth him to walk suitably: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect.' God will take care of our safety, if we will take care of our duty. The covenant is called a bond: Ezek. xx. 37, 'I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;' because it hath a tie upon us, as well as upon God. We are not at

our own liberty, to walk as we list; there are bonds upon us; not *vincula carceris*, the bonds of a prison, gins and fetters, but *vincula nuptiarum*, the bonds of wedlock. Now, they that cast away these bonds from them, as the wicked do—(Ps. ii. 3, ‘Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us’)—and will be their own men, and walk by their own will, have no title to the privileges that accrue by the marriage; such licentious spirits are at liberty, but to their own woe; they have a liberty to go to hell, and undo their own souls. It was the wisdom of God to bind us to displeasing duties by the proposal of comfortable privileges. Every man would desire to be saved, and to be happy for evermore, but corrupt nature is against holiness. Now without holiness there is no happiness. The conditional promise doth more bind and draw the heart to it, when we lay hold of it, by yielding to perform the condition required; then may we groundedly expect the privilege promised. We would have salvation, but we cannot unless we submit to God’s terms; for Christ came not to gratify our selfish desires, but to subdue us to God. We would have sin pardoned, we would be freed from the curse of the law and the flames of hell, but this can never be while we walk in our own ways, and are averse to holiness of heart and life, for God would even sweeten duties by felicities.

*Reason 2.* Because of the perfect contrariety between the temper of wicked men and this salvation, so that they are wholly incapable of it.

1. They care not for God, who is the author of this salvation; he is not in all their thoughts, words, and ways: Ps. x. 1, ‘The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.’ They are far from him, though he be not far from every one of them; he is within them, and round about them, in the effects of his power and goodness; but they never think of him, nor take care to serve and please him; that is the reason in the text, ‘They seek not thy statutes.’ If they seem to draw nigh to him at any time in some cold and customary duties, they do but draw nigh to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him: Isa. xxix. 13, ‘This people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me; and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men.’ Or as it is in another prophet, Jer. xii. 2, ‘Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins.’ They profess to honour God with a little outward and bodily service, but have no love and affection at all to him.

2. They slight Christ who is the procurer of this salvation; however they could like him as their Saviour, they like him not as their guide and governor. So he complaineth, Ps. lxxxi. 11, ‘My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me;’ and Luke xix. 14, *οὐ θέλομεν τοῦτον βασιλεῦσαι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς*, ‘His citizens hated him, and sent a messenger after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.’ Men cannot endure his bonds and yokes: Ps. ii. 3, ‘Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us;’ that they should deny themselves their own wisdom and will, and wholly give up themselves to the conduct and will of Christ. It is his spiritual kingdom that is most contrary to our carnal affections, for if there were no king in Israel, then every man might do what is



best in his own eyes. They would not be crossed in their licentiousness of life, and therefore when Christ bringeth his bonds and cords with him, they set him at nought.

3. They despise the word, in which we have the offer of this salvation, and counsel and direction given us how to obtain it. There God calleth upon us to be saved: 1 Tim. ii. 4, 'He will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.' But most slight his voice, and thereby put all hope far away from themselves. See Acts xvi. 26, compared with the 48th verse; in the 26th verse, 'To you is the word of this salvation sent.' Mark first, he calleth the gospel the word of salvation, because there we have the way and means set forth how it was procured for us; there we have counsel given us what we must do on our parts that we may be interested in it; there also we have the promise and assurance on God's part, that, so doing, we shall obtain it. Mark again, he saith this word of salvation was sent to them; he doth not say brought, but sent. The preaching of the gospel is governed by God's special providence. When salvation is offered according to his mind and in his name, we must look upon it as a message from heaven, directed to us for our good; not by the charity or good-will of men, but by the grace of God. Now if you despise this, what will be the issue? See ver. 46, 'Since ye put away the word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life' (that is, by this obstinacy and perverseness), you become incapable of receiving benefit of it. That phrase, 'ye judge yourselves,' is very notable. There is a judging ourselves unworthy that maketh way for the applying of the gospel unto us, rather than taking it from us, as the publican judged himself, and went home justified; but a humble self-judging is not meant here, but an obstinate, contemptuous refusal of eternal life. All unconverted men are unworthy of eternal life, but they that refuse grace offered judge themselves unworthy of eternal life; put it out of all question, clear God, if he thus judge them by their fact, declare their condemnation just.

4. They refuse the beginnings of this salvation and foregoing pledges, which God vouchsafeth in this world by way of taste and earnest. Grace is the beginning and pledge of glory; to be turned from sin is a great part of our salvation: Mark i. 21, 'He shall save his people from their sins.' It is not only salvation when freed from misery, but salvation when freed from sin; not only from evil after sin, hell, and punishment, but from the evil of sin; from a proud, lazy, self-loving heart: 'He hath saved us by the washing of water,' Titus iii. 5. When the power of sin is broken, and the life of grace is begun in the soul, then do we begin to be saved. The spirit of holiness is the earnest of our inheritance, and an earnest is part of the sum: Eph. i. 13, 14, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise; which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory.' Therefore holiness is a part of eternal salvation. Now without this we cannot have the other part; they that slight holiness shall never see God.

5. They despise the salvation itself, rightly understood, partly be-

cause they only value it under a fleshly notion, as a state of happiness and ease, not as a state of immaculate and sinless purity ; for so it is wholly unsuitable to them. What should a carnal sensual heart do with heaven ? or how should they desire it that hate the company of God, the communion of saints, the image of God ? God maketh meet : Col. i. 12, ' Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' There is *jus hæreditarium, et jus aptitudinale* ; though they do not desire to be saved for it, they would love holiness more. Partly because those conceits that they have of the adjuncts of salvation, and that happiness and personal contentment which results to them, they do not practically esteem it as to value it above the delights of the flesh and the vanities of the world, and they do not think it worthy the pursuit, but for the interests of the bodily life, cast off all care of it : Heb. xii. 16, ' As Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright ;' Mark xxii. 5, ' They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.'

Use 1. It informeth us of two things :—

1. That wicked men are the authors of their own ruin. Salvation doth not fly from them, but they fly from it ; they are far from the law, and therefore is salvation far from them. They will not take the course to be saved, for they care not for God and his statutes ; it is but just, *ut qui male vivit, male pereat*, that they which despise salvation should never see it.

2. That the wicked buy the pleasures of sin at a dear rate, since they defraud their own souls of salvation thereby. Their loss you have in the text, ' Salvation is far from them ;' and their gain is nothing but a little temporal satisfaction ; and are these things worthy to be compared ? What is it maketh you wicked, but the ease and sloth of the flesh, and the love of some carnal delight ? And are you contented to perish for this whoredom from God ?

Use 2. Let it exhort us to believe and improve this truth ; for if men did surely believe it, there would not be so many wicked men as there are, neither would they dare to lie in sin as long as they do. Oh ! consider, if the wicked have no part nor portion in the salvation offered, nor any jot of God's favour belonging to them, the wicked should not flatter themselves with presumptuous hopes, but break off their sins by repentance.

1. God's mercy will not help you ; though he be a God of salvation, yet he will not save the impenitent and such as go on still in their trespasses : Ps. lxxviii. 19–21, ' Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.' You must not fancy a God all honey and sweetness, and that his mercy should be exercised to the wrong of his justice ; the Lord will not spare the abusers of grace whoever he spareth : Deut. xxix. 19, 20, ' And it shall come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that if he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst ;

the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.'

2. No doctrine preached in the church will bear you out; not law, for that discovereth both sin and the curse. Convinced of sin: Rom. iii. 20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin,' what is sin, and who is the sinner; that bindeth you over to the curse: Gal. iii. 10, 'For as many as are 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.' The gospel, that sheweth a remedy against sin, but upon God's terms, that first with broken hearts we sue out our pardon: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Sin must be condemned, confessed, before pardoned. And then, that in the way of holiness we should seek salvation and eternal life. The way and end must not be separated: Rom. vi. 22, 'We must have our fruit into holiness, if we would have our end to be eternal life.' The pure and undefiled have only part in this salvation, but it is far from the wicked. Christ disclaims the unholy and unsanctified: Mat. vii. 23, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' You may as well expect the way to the west should bring you eastward, as to walk in the ways of sin and hope to come to heaven at last; to think God will save us, and suffer us to walk in our own ways; or that this undefiled inheritance shall be bestowed on dirty sinners. This had been pleasing to flesh and blood, but it is the devil's covenant, not God's. That article, you shall be saved, and yet live in your sins, is foisted in by Satan, that false deceiver, to flatter men with vain conceits.

3. Do you hope of repentance hereafter, but in the meantime ye run a desperate hazard to leave the soul at pawn in Satan's hands? It is not easy work to get it out again. Who would poison himself upon a presumption that before it cometh to his heart he shall meet with an antidote? Judicial hardness is laid on them that withstand seasons of grace: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;' Prov. i. 24-26, '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 counsels, and would none of my reproofs; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh;' Luke xiv. 24, 'None of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.'

4. The heart is more hardened the longer you continue in this course: 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.' Inveterate diseases are seldom cured; a tree that hath long stood, and begun to wither, is unfit to be transplanted: 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.'

5. There is a stint and measure as to nations: Gen. xv. 16, 'The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' Persons, vessels of mercy, vessels of dishonour: Rom. ix. 22, 23, 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-



suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory?' Meet for heaven, ripe for hell. Saints like a shock of corn in season; so when sinned enough, then away to hell.

But this exhortation is like to be lost, because nobody will apply it; let us see, then, the character of wicked men.

*Secondly*, 'They seek not thy statutes.'

*Doct.* They are wicked men who seek not God's statutes.

Here I must inquire—

1. What it is to seek God's statutes.

2. Show why they are wicked that do not seek them.

First, What it is to seek God's statutes? There—

1. The object or thing sought is God's statutes, those rules and counsels which he hath given us to guide us in our service of himself, and pursuit of true happiness. These are all enforced by his authority, and enacted as laws and statutes, which we cannot transgress without violation and contempt of his authority. Now, he saith 'statutes' indefinitely, because they must all be regarded without exception, for they all stand upon the same authority. It is said of Ezra, that good scribe, Ezra x. 7, 'That he prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it;' that is, to be thoroughly informed of, and to practise whatsoever was enjoined in the law of God; so must we prepare our hearts to do all. And because our Christian law is broader, and compriseth gospel too, which is the law of faith, we must take care of all which God hath given us in charge, and all that is adopted into our rule of faith and repentance, as well as moral duties, and because there are *minutula legis*, and *βαρύτερα νόμον*, therefore our chief care must be about the weighty things; and those of greater moment must be sought most earnestly. Therefore it is said, Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof;' these concern the change of our estate.

2. The act of seeking. The word implieth earnest and constant endeavour: I seek for that which I mind and pursue with all my heart, and use all means that I may obtain it, till I do obtain or find it. Thus we are bidden to seek that which is good: Amos v. 14, 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live;' and Zeph. ii. 2, 'Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments: seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' So Christ: John v. 30, 'I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father, which hath sent me.' And here the Psalmist speaketh of seeking God's statutes.

[1.] It implieth earnest endeavour (for a man's heart is upon what he seeketh), that it be the business of our lives, not a thing done by the by, but our *ἔργον*, our work to please God, and to this all other things must give way. Many think it is a foolish thing for them to trouble their heads with matters of religion, and to lay bands of strictness upon themselves; but it must not only have its turn and respect among other affairs, but be indeed as the great affair of our lives. There is no business of such weight and necessity, because the saving of our souls lieth on it; and therefore it must be followed in good

earnest ; as a man, when he is seeking a thing, quitteth all other cares, and mindeth that only.

[2.] Constant endeavour, seeking till we find ; as the woman for her lost groat : Luke xv. 8, ‘What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?’ So we must not content ourselves with our first and cold essay, as many, if they find not success upon some fair attempt, give over all care of religion, as if it were a tedious thing, not to be endured. Now seeking implies a resolute diligence, and persevering endeavours till we find.

3. The end of seeking after God’s statutes is to have them and keep them ; as Christ saith, John xiv. 21, ‘He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.’ First hath, then keepeth. To have the commandments is to know them, to understand our duty and prove what is the revealed, holy, and acceptable will of God concerning us, Rom. xii. 2, that it may have the authority of a principle in our consciences. To keep them is to endeavour actual obedience thereunto, and to regulate our practice thereby : for both these ends do we seek, and in both these respects do men show their wickedness.

[1.] We must make it our business to know the tenor and compass of our duty, and we are said to seek after this, because it will cost us pains ere we can obtain it. All knowledge will cost us industry, especially divine and practical knowledge, as he that applieth his heart to the understanding of his duty will soon find : Prov. ii. 4, ‘If thou wilt seek for it as for silver, and search for it as for hid treasures.’ Now this the wicked cannot endure ; they indulge the laziness of the flesh ; they know they that increase knowledge increase sorrow. If they did know more of their duty, they should be troubled for not observing it ; for knowledge will be urging duty upon the conscience, it bringeth a great obligation along with it : and as an obligation, so an irritation or provocation ; it will call upon them to do that which they have no mind to do ; yea, and further, a self-condemnation and accusation, or sting for not doing it, or breaking any of God’s statutes : therefore to prevent their own trouble, they are so far from seeking light, that they would shut it out, and quench those convictions that break in upon them ; therefore the language of wicked men is, Job xxi. 14, ‘Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways ;’ the language of their hearts, and lives, if not of their tongues. They do not only err in their minds, but err in their hearts ; they have no will to know, would not trouble themselves about religion, or acquainting themselves with God, neglect the means of grace.

[2.] We must make it our business to observe them, or our serious study to keep at a distance both in heart and practice from every known sin, eschewing what the Lord forbiddeth, and endeavouring every good duty which the Lord commandeth. This will cost us pains indeed, and requireth much seeking to get such a frame of heart, and whoever trieth it will find it long ere he can attain to it : Rom. vii. 18, ‘To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.’ He sought for ; his words imply that ; but he could not do as he would ; there was not a total omission, but

a coming short of his aims. We must seriously give up ourselves to the observation of God's will, and attend upon this work. This wicked men do not seek, it is the least of their cares : Ps. lxxiii. 27, 'Lo, all they that are far from thee shall perish.' The whole stream and course of their affections, lives, and actions do run from God to the creature ; they care not whether they please God, yea or no : Prov. xix. 16, 'He that keepeth the commandments, keepeth his own soul ; but he that despiseth his ways, shall die.' He slights his way that goeth on as his own heart leadeth him ; as a traveller that regardeth not to choose his way, but goeth through thick and thin, he despiseth his way, so he that careth not whether his way be pure or filthy. Well, then, the sum is, wicked men care not to know and obey God's word.

Secondly, Reasons why they are wicked that do not seek God's statutes.

1. Because omissions, where they are of duties absolutely necessary and total and universal, do necessarily draw sins of commission along with them, do argue a state of wickedness. But such is the case here ; to live in a known sin, whether of omission or commission, is damnable : James iv. 17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin ;' but especially when total, &c. The wicked are thus described, them 'that forget God ;' Ps. ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God ;' Job viii. 13, 'So are the paths of all that forget God ;' Ps. l. 22, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' This layeth a man open to all sin, and maketh way for his destruction. So Zeph. i. 6, 'They have not sought the Lord, nor inquired after him ;' that is enough to damn them, if they do not break out into excess.

2. Because they are guilty of great wrong to God and to their own souls.

[1.] To God ; it is a contempt of his authority when men will not study to know and do his declared will ; that is, make it their business to do so ; for it is a great slighting of him, looking upon his direction as of little importance : Hosea viii. 12, 'I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing,' and therefore were strangers to it, as if there were no danger in walking contrary to it.

[2.] To themselves ; God's statutes concern our salvation as well as his own glory : Luke vii. 30, 'The pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves.' Thus a wicked man is *felo de se* : Prov. viii. 35, 36, 'Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord ; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul ; all they that hate me, love death.'

Use 1. You see now who are far from salvation, they that do not study the word of God to conform themselves thereunto.

Use 2. Let us be sure to be far from the disposition of the wicked ; let us with all our hearts seek to comply with the precepts of God, and be more diligent and earnest in bringing our hearts to a true scriptural holiness, that we may not be in this danger.



Motives:—

1. From the excellency of these statutes. To be employed in the service of God is the greatest honour and the most blessed life upon earth. If it be irksome, it is a sign of a disease, and some great distemper or inclination to some base dreggy delights of the flesh. If the soul were rightly constituted, it would be our greatest pleasure, honour, and content; other work spendeth our strength, this increaseth it: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.'

2. From salvation; it is great, sure, near. Great, both as to body and soul; sure, God's word passed is unalterable; near, should we faint in the sight of our country, and be sluggish and negligent, when heaven is at hand?

3. There is present content in the sight of our qualification and clear distinction from the wicked.

### SERMON CLXXIV.

*Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments.*—VER. 156.

IN the former verse we presented you with the judgment of God against the wicked; we shall now present you with a more comfortable argument, his mercies to his people. Whenever we think or speak of the damnable condition of the wicked, we should remember the grace of God, that hath made the difference between us and them. We were by nature no better than they, only mercy interposed for our rescue, and snatched us as brands out of the burning. So here David flieth to God's mercy, as the original cause of all that he had or hoped for from him: 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord,' &c.

In the words there is—

1. An eulogy, or an ascription of praise to God, 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord.'

2. A prayer, 'Quicken me according to thy judgments.'

The one maketh way for the other; for because God's mercies are so great, therefore he is encouraged to come unto him for help. In the eulogy we have the thing praised, God's mercy. It is set forth by a double adjunct, one taken from the quality, the other from the quantity. From the quality, it is tender and bowel-mercy; from the quantity, it is great. Or the word may be rendered 'many;' the mercies of God, as one saith, are many and mother-like. Having laid this foundation for his hope, the man of God proceedeth to his prayer, which is our second branch, where you have the request, 'Quicken me;' the argument, 'According to thy judgments;' that is, thy promises in the new covenant, as we before explained the word. Those promises are called judgments, because they are rules of proceeding in the new court which God hath set up.

Many things might be observed from these words.

1. That the primary cause of all that we have and expect from God is his mercy. The man of God beginneth here, when he expected dif-

ferent usage from the wicked, or that God should deal with him in another manner than with them.

2. That this mercy is so great and large, that it is every way sufficient for our help.

3. The terms and rules according to which we are to expect this mercy are set forth in the new covenant, where God hath bound himself to show mercy to his people, upon such conditions as are there specified. So that this covenant doth inform us and assure us both of God's mercy and God's quickening.

4. One special new-covenant blessing is the preservation of the life of grace in our souls. There is a great necessity of it, because in the spiritual life we are subject to fainting; and the children of God have a great value and esteem for it, for they are more sensible of soul-distempers than other men; and when they see others stark dead in trespasses and sins, they are the more displeased with their own remaining deadness, and therefore would have the distinction between them and wicked men made more clear and sensible, by the activity and vigour of grace, and their diligence and care of salvation (which the wicked neglect), awakened by new influences from God; and therefore do they so often pray for quickening. Accordingly, God in the new covenant, as the God of their life and salvation, hath undertaken to keep them fresh and lively; and therefore, whenever we are under deadness, we should not be satisfied with it, or think it a light evil, but present our condition to God, looking to the promise of the new covenant, wherein God hath promised to put his Spirit into our hearts, to cause us to walk in his ways.

But because all these points have been often discussed, I shall only handle this one point.

*Doct.* That in the Lord Jehovah there are great and tender mercies.

1. I shall open the mercy of God.

2. The adjuncts, the greatness and tenderness of them.

First, I shall open the mercy of God. That mercy is one of God's attributes, the scripture is plain and clear: Ps. lxii. 12, 'Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.' He had said before, 'Once hath God spoken, and twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.' This is an evident and certain truth, that God is almighty, and hath all power to avenge his enemies and reward his friends; but because this is not a sufficient foundation for our trust, there wanteth more to invite the creature to depend upon God than his bare power and ability to help us, there must be also an assurance of his readiness to do what he is able; and that we have in this other attribute, which is as proper, and as much belonging to God as power, and that is mercy; yea, it is an attribute in the exercise of which God delights most of all: Micah vii. 18, 'Because he delighteth in mercy.' God delighteth himself in all his attributes, yea, in the manifestation of them to the world, but chiefly in acts of mercy; these come readily from him, and unextorted. Though God willeth the punishment of a sinner, for the manifestation of his justice, yet these acts of his vengeance are not so pleasing to God as the acts of his mercy; for he never doth them of his own accord, but is provoked. Acts of mercy flow from him like life-honey, but acts of vengeance are his strange work, Isa. xxviii. 21. Bees give

honey naturally, sting when provoked. Therefore God is nowhere called *pater ultionum*, whereas he is called *pater miserationum*, 2 Cor. i. 3, 'The father of mercies.' It is the original and fountain cause of all our comfort; get an interest in his mercy, and all his other attributes shall be for our good. Mercy will set a-work his wisdom to contrive, his power to accomplish, what is for our comfort and salvation; his justice and wrath to avenge your quarrel. All other attributes are serviceable to mercy. Among the things that are ascribed to God there is this order, that one is given as a reason of the other. As in the business of our salvation. Why doth God discover himself with so much wisdom and power? Because of his mercy. Of his mercy hath he saved us, Titus iii. 4, 5; of his mercy quickened us, Eph. ii. 4, 5; of his mercy begotten us to a lively hope, 2 Peter i. 3. But what moved him to show mercy to us? You can go no higher, unless you assign a cause like itself; God, who is rich in mercy, out of his great love wherewith he hath loved us; indeed, so he showed mercy because he would.

1. The goodness of the divine nature, as it doth discover itself to the creature, is called benignity or bounty, sometimes grace, and sometimes mercy. The first issue or effect of the divine goodness is his benignity or bounty, by which God, by giving something to the creatures, sheweth himself liberal or bountiful; this is his goodness to the creature as a creature. Thus he hath given being to all things, bare life to some, sense to others, and to man and angels reason and grace. The next term by which the goodness of God is expressed is grace, by which he freely giveth to the creature all that good which they have, beyond all possibility of requital. The third term is mercy, which implieth the ready inclination that is in God to relieve our misery notwithstanding sin. These three terms agree in this, that they all express the goodness of God, or his communication of himself to the creature. God knoweth himself, loveth himself, but he cannot be said to be bountiful, or gracious, or merciful to himself; these things respect us. And again, that none of these can be reciprocated, or turned back from the creature to God. We may love God, who hath loved us first, 1 John iv. 19, but mercy or grace never results from the creature to God. We know God, and love him, but cannot be said to be merciful to him. He giveth out mercy and grace, but receiveth none. Thus they agree; but they differ in that bounty or goodness respects the creature as a creature, grace respects the creature as being able to make no recompense to God, or to merit anything at his hands; but mercy addeth these two things to the former, as supposing us in misery. The object of it is *persona miserabilis*, or as finding us under demerit or ill-deserving, and appoints a remedy for us. God doth good to the angels, that never sinned, out of grace; but to man fallen, out of mercy; so that his mercy is nothing else but his proneness to help a man in misery notwithstanding sin.

2. We must distinguish between mercy as it is an attribute in God, and the acts and effects of it as they are terminated upon the creature. As it is an attribute in God: Ps. ciii. 8, 'The Lord is merciful and gracious.' So it is infinite, as his nature is; but in the effects as to us there is a great difference. Mercy is one in the fountain, many in



the streams, because there are divers effects, divers ways of showing mercy. Mercy in the effect may cease, as when the angels turned devils, and when God threateneth to take away his mercies from us; but God doth not cease to be merciful in himself: the effects of God's mercy are more or less, but the attribute in God is not so. Mercy as an attribute doth not oppose justice; but the effects of God's mercy may be, and are, contrary to the effects of his justice, as punishment is contrary to blessing.

3. God's mercy is either general, or special, or peculiar. First, God's general mercy hath for the object of it not only men, even them that are strangers to the faith, but also all the creatures; for it is said, Ps. cxlv. 5, 'His tender mercies are over all his works.' God helpeth the poor brute creatures in their needs, and doth supply them with provision convenient for them. Then there is his special mercy to man, helping and succouring him in his misery, notwithstanding sin; and so the giving of Christ to be the Saviour of the world: Titus iii. 4, 'But after the loving-kindness of God our Saviour to mankind appeared;' his man-kindness, this was pity to us above the angels: no remedy was plotted for them. And then his peculiar mercy is to his elect in Christ. So the Lord saith, Rom. ix. 15, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' This is again seen either in the first grace, or bestowing that upon us, or in all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of.

[1.] The first grace is pardoning all our past sin, or receiving us into a state of favour upon our repentance. So it is made the motive, Joel ii. 13, 'Turn unto the Lord, for he is merciful;' penitent sinners will find him so to be. The apostle saith, 1 Tim. i. 13, 'But I obtained mercy, ἡλεήθην; I was overwhelmed in mercy.' So also in giving us a heart to repent and turn unto him, 1 Peter i. 3. We were unworthy and miserable sinners, could not help ourselves, and then his eye pitied us and his hand saved us; by his preventing grace he brought us home to himself.

[2.] In all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of. So the objects of his mercy must have a qualification; such as fear God, Ps. ciii. 13; such as love him, and keep his commandments, Exod. xx. 6; that walk according to the rule of his word exactly, Gal. vi. 16. To the merciful, Mat. v. 7; for to the unmerciful God will not show himself merciful, James ii. 13; but to those that are thus qualified he reneweth his pardoning mercy, in taking away the guilt of our daily failings, Ps. xxv. 7. His sanctifying mercy, by freeing them more and more from the dominion of sin, Rom. vi. 14. His preserving mercy, by delivering them from afflictions, so far as it is convenient: Ps. cxix. 41, 'Let thy mercies come unto me, O Lord; even thy salvation according to thy word;' Lam. iii. 22, 'It is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' His rewarding mercy: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life.' So Ps. lxii. 12, 'Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work.' He will graciously accept, reward, and crown every sincere and faithful servant of his when they have done their work. Sincerity and faith-

fulness shall be accepted and rewarded, when infirmities and weaknesses shall be pardoned and covered.

Secondly, Let me now open the two adjuncts of his mercy.

1. It is tender mercy: Luke i. 78, 'Through the tender mercy of our God.' The word signifieth bowels; as when you see a poor miserable creature, your bowels work within you, especially if you be related to him. *Misericordia complectitur affectum et effectum.* Let us take the nearest relation. If you be a father, we need not much entreat a father to pity a poor helpless child; his own bowels will persuade him to it: Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' Or if you think passions in females more vehement, take the relation of a mother; as Hagar was affected to Ishmael when the water was spent in the bottle; she sat over against the child, and lift up her voice and wept, Gen. xxi. 16. God will take the affections of a mother; as Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' It is passionately set out by the prophet. If all the compassions of all fathers and mothers were joined together, it were nothing to God; he is the father of mercies, he is pitiful and merciful, James v. 11. It is true there is in God no sickness, or trouble of mind, no commotion; but there is pity and tender love, though no perturbation, which will not stand with the perfection of his nature; that is, he layeth to heart, and taketh notice of our misery. The tenderness of God may be known by the compassion which Christ had in the days of his flesh, for he was the express image of his Father's person. Now we read, Mat. ix. 36, 'When he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were as sheep scattered abroad that had no shepherd.' Their teachers did not do their duty to them in any profitable way; this wrought upon Christ's heart, when he saw the multitude. So when he saw many sick and under noisome diseases, Mat. xiv. 14, when they followed him, he pitied them, and helped them. So Mat. xv. 32, Jesus had compassion on the multitude, when they continued with him three days, and had nothing to eat. The care of man's welfare lieth near unto Christ's heart. Before the disciples took notice of it, he taketh notice of the people's necessities, and is affected with it; he would not send them away fasting. The two blind men, when they feelingly laid out their miseries, Mat. xx. 34, 'Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes.' So Luke vii. 13; the widow of Nain lamented her only son, the Lord saw her, and had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. This for a taste what a tender heart Christ had. And in heaven he is still a merciful high priest; he came down on purpose to acquaint himself with our griefs and sorrows. Surely he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and God's pity, though it hath no trouble with it, is real, operative, and efficacious.

2. His tender mercy is seen in his readiness to hear and help, and come in to the cry of his people, if they be but anything humble and profitable in their afflictions: Isa. lviii. 10, 'And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day;' Luke

xv. 20, 'And he arose and came to his father; but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' When the son was coming, the father ran to meet him: Isa. lxv. 24, 'Before they call, I will answer;' as if God could not tarry to hear the prayer made: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I would confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;' Jer. xxxi. 19, 20, 'Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.' The first relentings of the creature work upon the bowels of God's mercy; when we do but conceive a purpose, the Lord is easy to be entreated.

3. By the motives that do induce God to show mercy, the bare sight of our misery, and therefore the saints do so often represent their condition: Ps. lxxix. 20, 'I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O Lord, set me on high.' You see he bringeth no other argument but his grief and misery. Justice seeketh a fit object, mercy a fit occasion: Deut. xxxii. 36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.'

Thirdly, The next adjunct is 'great.' The mercies of God are seldom spoken of in scripture but there is some additional word to show their plenty and excellency; as Ps. cxxx. 7, 'For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption;' 1 Peter i. 3, 'Which according to his abundant mercy;' and Eph. ii. 4, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us.' So Eph. ii. 7, 'The exceeding riches of his grace,' *ὑπερβάλλοντα πλοῦτον*. Paul thinketh he can never word it enough: when he speaketh of mercy, he saith it over over-abounded; all to show the multitude and greatness of God's mercies. So Ps. li. 1, we read of the multitude of his tender mercy. It must needs be so if we consider—

1. How many there are to whom God hath done good, even as many as there have been, are, and shall be creatures in the world. None that ever had a being, but tasted of God's goodness. Nay, for his special mercies, the same persons that are pardoned, all the elect from the beginning of time, till the day of judgment. What hath God been doing these thousands of years that the world hath continued, but multiplying pardons and passing acts of grace in favour of his people? Time would be no more, but only that there are some more whom God meaneth to pardon: 2 Peter iii. 9, 'Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' When we come to heaven, how many monuments of grace shall we see there! A man would think that the unthankful world had given discouragement, and God should wait no longer; but yet there are some vacant places to be filled: 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' John xiv. 2. We waste by giving, give from ourselves what we give to another; but this fountain is never dry: Rom. v. 10, 'The free gift is of many offences.'



2. How many benefits he bestoweth on every one, many repeated acts of grace of the same kind, divers kinds of benefits, bodily mercies, soul mercies: Ps. xl. 5, 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done; and thy thoughts, which are to usward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' Private mercies and public mercies, mercies in hand and mercies in hope: Ps. xxxi. 19, 'Oh! how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men.' We have not one sin, but many sins; not one misery, but many miseries; therefore we have many mercies. The creatures are always in some necessity, and so are always an object of mercy. How many supports this life continually needeth! all which the providence of God supplieth to us.

3. The greatness of these effects, the sending of his Son: 1 John iv. 9, 10, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.' The gift of the Spirit himself to be everlastingly with us, John xiv. 16, and by present troubles to prepare us for future glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17, and Rom. viii. 18. Surely nothing but mercy, and great mercy, could do all this for us.

*Use 1.* To exhort us to consider of this, and to meditate much upon this attribute. To this end I shall lay down a few considerations:—

1. All that come to God should consider of his mercy; it is the great motive to repentance, and beginning our acquaintance with God: Joel ii. 13, 'And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.' Our distrustful and unbelieving thoughts draw an ill picture of God in our minds. We think him a hard and austere one, that is more ready to condemn us than to receive us to mercy. Thus we look upon him in the glass of our guilty fears. Oh no! he is merciful, if we will but stoop to him. Besides, it is a great check to our pursuit of carnal vanities: Jonah ii. 8, 'They that seek after lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' Thus to the secure and careless, when they consider all this grace and tender mercy, it is the great means to overcome them with kindness. A serious consideration of what God hath done and is ready to do for us: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God.' Saul wept when David had spared him, 1 Sam. xxiv. 16. If we had not let all ingenuity: 'I am not worthy of all the mercy and truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant,' Gen. xxxii. 10. Then when we come to a reckoning and audit with God, how great is the sum of them! There are more effects of his mercies, and of more diverse kinds: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great are the sum of them!'

2. It is not enough to know that God is merciful, but we must also consider how great and tender his mercy is; for God's children are wont to have great and large thoughts of it. We must think of it as becometh the infiniteness of his nature whose mercy it is: Isa. lv. 8,

9, 'For my thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts;' Hosea xi. 9, 'For I am God, and not man.' We must not straiten God to our scantling; our drop is soon spent. Peter, a good man: What! forgive seven times a-day? How tender it is! It is so natural to God. Acts of punitive justice are exercised with some reluctance, but he rejoiceth over them to do them good; he is strongly inclined to let out his goodness to unworthy and miserable sinners who deserve the contrary from him. The sea doth not more naturally flow, nor the sun more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, than God doth naturally show mercy. These thoughts will answer all the doubts and fears of a penitent. Thou canst never have too large thoughts of God.

3. We shall never have such great and large thoughts of God's tender mercy as when they arise from our own experience and particular observation. To know God by hearsay will not work upon you as when we have seen him ourselves; as they said unto the woman, John iv. 42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the saviour of the world.' We do not think or speak of God with any sense and life, affection and admiration, till we have studied his nature and observed his ways; otherwise we speak by rote when we praise him for his mercies, and it is but an empty compliment: Ps. ciii. 1-3, '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 thy iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases,' &c.

4. Then will our own experience inform us of the greatness and tenderness of mercy, when we are sensible of our sins and miseries. When a man seeth his sins great, his dangers great, then he will see God's mercies towards him great also: Ps. lxxxvi. 13, 'For great is thy mercy towards me, for thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.' We do not know the greatness of the pardon but by the greatness of the debt, nor the greatness of our protection and deliverance but by the greatness of the danger. God continueth trouble upon his people, that they may be sensible of the sweetness of the mercy, and his help in their deliverance: Rom. v. 8, 'But herein God commendeth his love to us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'

5. When our sense of sins and miseries hath most recommended mercy to us, we should magnify it, both with respect to supplication and gratulation.

[1.] With respect to supplication. When we are under fears and discouragements, we should oppose and set these great and tender mercies in the balance against our doubts and fears. Our sins are many, our troubles great, yet let us not be discouraged from praying, and making our supplication to God; for God will pardon a penitent people, and help a sensible supplicant. The more sensible of our misery, the fitter objects for mercy. What is it that troubleth us? fear of not speeding with God in prayer? You hear how soon he

relenteth when you relent and lie at his feet; for to what use doth pardoning mercy serve but to encourage broken-hearted sinners? 'We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings.' Ben-hadad having lost the day, and in great fear of losing his life with his kingdom, his friends comforted him with the fame they had heard of Israel's kings, 1 Kings xx. 31. We know most certainly it is hard to raise up truly poor, downcast sinners, how presumptuous soever they have been before. God would have these by all means to be encouraged; so that though you have many objections from your unworthiness, the multitude and greatness of your sins. Or is it the power of men, and difficulty of our deliverance? God's mercy is beyond the proportion of their cruelty. The more violent and ungodly our oppressors are, the more hope of God's pity towards us: Ps. lxxxvi. 14, 15, 'O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before them: but thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.'

[2.] Let us magnify it as to gratulation: Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of all the mercy,' &c. Less than the least of all thy mercies. Let us consider our unworthiness; that God may have all the glory.

*Use 2.* To press us to be merciful: we should be like God, let us put on bowels of mercy: Col. iii. 12, 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering;' Luke vi. 36, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your heavenly Father also is merciful.'

## SERMON CLXXV.

*Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*—VER. 161.

IN this verse we have—

First, David's temptation.

Secondly, The godly frame of his spirit.

First, In David's temptation, take notice of—

1. The nature of it, it was a persecution.
2. The instruments of it, Saul, and the chief men about him, *princes*.
3. The malice and groundlessness of it, *without a cause*.

Secondly, The godly frame of his heart, *but my heart, &c.* And there we have—

1. The seat of his affection, *my heart*.
2. The kind of the affection, *standeth in awe*.
3. The object of it, the *word* of God.

First, With David's temptation I will not meddle any further than an introduction, or the necessity of an exposition enforceth me a little to reflect upon. And—

1. From the nature of it. Persecution is one of the ordinary trials of God's children. As God chasteneth them because they are no better,



Isa. xxvii. 9, so the world persecuteth them because they are so good, John xv. 19. This ever hath been and ever will be the lot of God's children while there are two seeds in the world: Gen. iii. 15, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.' And the apostle saith, Gal. iv. 29, 'But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, so it is now.' The first place speaketh of the antipathy between the church and its open opposites; the second was in Abraham's family, and it is brought to comfort the true members of the Christian church against those persecutions which they sustained from the false apostles and such as adhered to the Jewish synagogue. Isaac was begotten by the power of God's Spirit, according to the tenor of the promise; Ishmael by the ordinary strength of nature, a figure of the regenerate and unregenerate, John i. 13. Persecution is a thing common to the church in all ages, then and now; therefore, as they grow worse, let us grow better; and let us be content to take the ordinary way, by the cross, to come to the crown.

2. The instruments of his trouble were Saul and his chief men about him. The man of God had said, 'Many are my persecutors,' ver. 157; now he showeth they were not mean ones, and of the inferior sort, but such as by their power were able to crush him, such as by their place should be a refuge to him. I observe, the trial is the sorer when our trouble cometh not only from the basest of the people, but from the rulers themselves. No doubt a great part of the people followed Saul in his persecuting of David, yet the nobles most troubled him. In the primitive times, *lapidibus nos invadit inimicum vulgus*—the base riff-raff were most ready to stone the Christians; but this was mere brutish rage: a multitude, though they have power, yet they have no authority. But when the rulers were set against them, and persecuted them with edicts and punishments, then the greatest havoc was made of them. To see God's ordinance abused maketh the trial the more grievous. The godly should be defended by their governors, for therefore they are called the shields of the earth, Ps. xlix. 9. But now when they persecute them for righteousness' sake, it is a sore but no strange temptation. They may do so partly out of ignorance: 1 Cor. ii. 8, 'Which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;' and partly out of prejudice and blind zeal; so the corner-stone is refused by the builders, Ps. cxviii. 22, applied to Christ's persecutors: Acts iv. 11, 'The stone that was set at nought by you builders is become the head of the corner;' and partly by the instigation of evil men. Wicked men labour to engage those who are in power against the people of God, and make them odious to them: Prov. xxix. 10, 'The bloodthirsty hate the upright.' Flattery giveth the first onset to the work of impiety, Acts xxiv. 1-3. And partly because riches and power efferate men, swell them with pride, fill them with enmity against the ways of God: Ps. cxxiii. 4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and the contempt of the proud.' Well, then, let us not be dismayed though great men be prejudiced against us, and we have powerful enemies in church and state: Mat. x. 17, 18, 'But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and

they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.' Though we be persecuted with censures, civil and ecclesiastical, and both judicatures thunder against us: John xvi. 1, 2, 'These things have I told you, that you should not be offended; they shall put you out of the synagogue; yea, the time cometh when they that kill you will think they do God good service.' It is a stumbling-block to see power, which is of God, bent against God and his interest; the beast in the Revelations pushed with the horns of the lamb. But Christ hath told us of these things beforehand, that we should be fore-armed against them. Christ's followers must not only look for injuries from wicked men in a tumultuous way, but ordinarily carried by fixed judicatures; thrown out of the church by excommunication, and out of the world by death. Let us bless God that our rulers deal more Christianly by us; and let us not irritate them, but show all love and meekness and obedience; and let the mild government of our gracious sovereign move us to pray to God for the continuance of his life, and the prosperity of his affairs: it is but a necessary gratitude that we should pay him for the rest and peace we enjoy under him.

3. The malice and groundlessness of this persecution, 'without cause.' David did not suffer for his deserts as an evil-doer; he had done nothing disobediently against Saul's authority; when he had spared him in the cave, he giveth him an ample testimony: 1 Sam. xxiv. 17, 'Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good, but I have rewarded thee evil.' Again, he had another testimony when he surprised his camp sleeping: 1 Sam. xxvi. 21, 'Return, my son David; I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes: behold I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.' Theodoret expoundeth this of the next verse, with application to these passages. When David found Saul asleep he would not kill him, and this was more comfort to him than if he had slain and obtained all their spoils. Observe, we may the better represent our case to God when we suffer without a cause; then our sufferings are clean sufferings, more comfortable to us, and honourable to God. It was Daniel's glory that they could find no occasion or fault against him, but only in the matter of his God, Dan. vi. 4, 5. Blameless carriage disappoints the malice of wicked men, or shameth them. *Cajus Sejus vir bonus nisi quod Christianus*. Now a pretended crime doth not take away the glory from us. Saul pretended that David was an enemy to his life and crown, but David declared the contrary by word and deed; he might have slain him twice. 'Put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,' 1 Peter ii. 15. There may be in man's court a cause which before God is no just cause, as when we are punished for the breach of law which is contrary to our duty to God: Ps. xciv. 20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?'

Well, then, whatever we suffer, let it be without a cause. There is cause enough on God's part to afflict and strike us for our sins; but on man's part, let us not procure sufferings to ourselves by our provocations. We shall hereby have more peace in sufferings, and bring more honour to religion: 1 Peter iii. 17, 'For it is better, if the will

of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing ;' 1 Peter iv. 15, 16, ' But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer. Yet if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God in that behalf.' Surely Christ's cross is more comfortable than the cross of Barabbas.

Secondly, Let us come to his gracious frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word, *but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

*Doct.* It is a gracious frame of heart to stand in awe of the word of God.

God's people are often described by it : Prov. xiii. 13, ' Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed ; but whoso feareth a commandment shall be rewarded.' There are many fear a judgment, when, to visible appearance, it is like to tread upon the heels of sin ; yea, and some fear a threatening, at least when it is like to be accomplished ; but who fears a commandment but a gracious heart ? This is reason enough to draw back if a commandment stand in the way ; it is more than if there was a lion in the way, or a band of armed enemies, or an angel with a drawn sword, such as stood in the way to stop Balaam. They have a deep reverence of God's authority, and dare not break through, when God by his law hath fenced up their way. So Isa. lxvi. 2, ' To him will I look that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word ;' a man that is affected according to his doom and sentence passed in the word ; if the word speaketh bitter things, or the word speaketh peace, accordingly the man is affected ; this is the man that God will look at : Ezra ix. 4, ' Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel.' None so careful to redress disorders, to use all the means they can to prevent judgment, as those that tremble at God's word ; and therefore they above others did assemble to Ezra. A man hath gained a great point when he doth not value his condition by external probabilities, but by the sentence of the word. It is hopeful if the word speaketh good unto it, sad when the word speaketh bitter things. This man will be otherwise affected than the most are, and more careful to please God. Once more : Ezra x. 3, ' Those that tremble at the commandment of our God.' Shechaniah referreth the reformation to them. ' These are persons exactly conscientious ; they make God's commandments their rule, and tremble at the apprehension of having anything done against God's will. None so fit as they to judge of cases of conscience and to regulate affairs ; men that enlarge themselves, and do not stand so nicely on the will of God, will be more lax and complying with their own lusts and the humours of men.

1. I will show you what it is to stand in awe of the word.

2. Then give you the reasons why they that are godly will do so.

First, What it is to stand in awe of the word. We will determine it by opening the circumstances of the text. And—

1. Let us take notice of the seat of this affection, the heart, ' My heart standeth in awe of thy word.' A true reverence of the word of God must be planted in the heart, or else all outward profession of respect is but hypocrisy : Ps. l. 16, 17, ' Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth ? seeing thou hatest instruction, and



castest my words behind thy back.' Many may solemnly pretend to piety, and talk of it, and perhaps preach of it, to others, but do not exactly reform their carnal practices; they do but abuse themselves and deceive others. So strangely are many bewitched with their own deceitfulness of heart and power of Satan, that they can without remorse of conscience profess the true religion, pretend to a covenant with God, yet affront that religion by being loose and scandalous, and can break the covenant without any scruple; such are contemners of God's word, however they seem reverencers of it. That psalm speaketh of the collection of the gospel church: 'Gather my saints together, who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;' not that of bulls and goats, but by Christ Jesus. But many profane this covenant, and are carried away by every temptation, some as greedy thieves and extortioners, some as filthy adulterers, some as haters of godliness, some as injurious slanderers and whisperers and backbiters. In the Christian world, this prediction is too plainly verified; the carnal Christian and the serious Christian profess respect to the same Bible, to believe the same creed, to enter by the same baptism, to claim privilege by the same covenant, yet hate one another, and are as contrary one to another as perfectly as infidels and pagans. On the one side, there is mouth-respect to the word, on the other, heart-respect; the one in outward covenant with God, the other brought into the inner court. God beareth long with the former sort, but will not bear always: so Jer. xii. 2, 'Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins.' They profess thee in word, but deny thee in heart and in deed; draw near thee in show and pretence as a people in league with thee, but their hearts, love, and affection are wholly estranged from thee; and would take it ill to have their religion disproved or questioned, yet are not brought under the power of it. So Isa. xxix. 13, 'This people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips honour me, but have removed their heart from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men;' because of tradition, teaching by authority, maintaining or enjoining the worship of God. A worship and respect to God they will have, but such as doth not proceed from an impression upon their hearts, but only in compliance with their customs.

2. The kind of the affection, 'standeth in awe.' There is a twofold awe of the word—(1.) One that driveth us from it; (2.) Another that draweth us to it.

[1.] Fear and awe of the word which driveth us from it is spoken of John iii. 20, 21, 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.' Carnal men, who live contrary to the light of nature and scripture, that they cannot endure anything which should put them into serious remembrance of God. This is an effect of legalism and slavish fear, which as it bewrayeth itself in its carriage towards God himself, so also in its carriage towards his saints and word. Towards God himself: a slavish fear of God is always accompanied with an aversion or turning away from him; as guilty Adam was afraid of God, and hid himself in the bushes, Gen. iii.

10; and still an unsound conscience is shy of God, and hangeth off from him. So towards the saints, who have God's image printed upon them; they fear the saints and hate them; as Herod feared John, and put him to death, Mark vi. 20. Still men malign what they will not imitate. Natural conscience in them doth homage to the image of God, shining forth in the lives of his people; they see an excellency in them which they have not; and because all those who keep up the majesty of their profession are objects reviving guilt, they hate them; and if their hatred be more than their fear, they destroy them when it is in their power. So for the word; they are afraid of the word, so as to stand at a distance from it, and cannot endure it, no more than sore eyes can the light of the sun. They have a mind to cherish their lusts and carnal practices, and therefore hate the light which disproveth them; as they that would sleep draw the curtain to keep out the light; whereas, on the contrary, the godly delight to have their ways tried and made manifest by this light; it is a refreshing light to them, but a reproving and discovering light to others; it convinceth them to be what they are. Now they shun all means of searching and knowing themselves, by wishing such things were not sin, or not desiring to know them so, and that there were not a God to punish them. But a sincere man is otherwise affected; he is jealous and suspicious of himself, he bringeth his work to God's balance, and cannot quiet his conscience without God's acceptance.

[2.] There is an awe of the word, not that maketh us shy of it, but tender of violating it, or doing anything contrary to it. This is not the fruit of slavish fear, but holy love; it is not afraid of the word, but delighteth in it, as it discovereth the mind of God to us, as in the next verse. This is called by a proper name, reverence, or godly fear; when we consider whose word it is, God's; who is our God, and hath right to command what he pleaseth; to whose will and word we have already yielded obedience, and devoted ourselves to walk worthy of him in all well-pleasing; who can find us out in all our failings, as knowing our very thoughts afar off, Ps. cxxxix. 2; and having all our ways before him, and being one who will not forgive our wilful transgressions: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'He is a holy and jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions and your sins,' that would impenitently continue in them; and so we receive the word with that trembling of heart which God so much respects.

3. The object, 'thy word;' that is, the whole word of God—the precept with its double sanction, the threatening and the promise; the precept is the rule of our duty; the sanction, of God's proceeding. We are to stand in awe not only of the threatening, but the precept itself; for love to God hath a great influence in producing this awe of the word. It is in angels and heavenly creatures, whose happiness is absolutely secured to them, Jude 4. The great ground of it is God's authority; and that is seen in the precept as much as in the sanction. God's will is the reason of our duty, and his will declared in his word is the rule of it; and the saints obey *intuitu voluntatis*—a bare sight of his, though no inconvenience should follow of it: 1 Thes. iv. 3, 'For this is the will of God;' 1 Thes. v. 18, 'For this is the will of God concerning you in Jesus Christ;' 1 Peter ii. 15, 'For so is the will of

God,' &c. But yet I would not exclude the sanction ; no, not the sad part of it ; neither the threatening, nor the promise ; because I dare not contradict any of the Holy Ghost's methods ; nor exclude his argument from having an influence upon our obedience, as he telleth us of Moses, who had an eye to the recompense of reward, Heb. xi. 26. So of Job, who was tender of doing anything contrary to the will of God, because destruction from God was a terror to him, Job. xxxi. 23. To be afraid of God's judgments in a holy manner is not sin, but a grace, a great point of our duty ; yea, a matter of faith to apprehend that destruction which God in his word threateneth to sinners. Unbelief of the threatening had a great predominancy in the first sin : ' Ye shall not surely die,' Gen. iii. 4 ; and still it is a main ingredient. Men embolden themselves to rebellion because they look upon God's wrath as a vain scarecrow, and that he doth only frighten us with a deceitful terror and a flash of false fire. But yet reflection upon the threatening must not be alone, that breedeth legalism ; nor yet upon the promises alone ; but a deep awe and reverence of God's authority must be the main thing that swayeth the conscience. A Christian should have no more to move or stop him, than to know what God will have him do or not do. That terror that doth arise from a mere slavish fear of God as a judge and avenger is not right ; but such an awe as doth at once arise from looking upon God at once as a wise lawgiver, a gracious father, and righteous judge. A son, a child, if he take liberty to break the bonds of duty, shall smart for it : though a believer obeyeth and keepeth off from sin upon higher and nobler terms than wrath, yet he maketh a good improvement of these terrors also ; for godly fear is influenced by God's being a consuming fire : Heb. xii. 29, 30, ' Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear ; for our God is a consuming fire.'

Secondly, We come to the reasons why we should stand in awe of the word of God.

1. From the author of it ; it is God's word, not the word of a weak man, but of the great and mighty God. His authority is supreme, his power infinite, his knowledge exact, his truth unquestionable, his holiness immaculate, his justice impartial. The same reasons which move us to fear God do move us also to reverence his word ; and add this above all the rest, that therein his truth is impawned to us, and by it he obligeth himself to make good both his threatenings and his promises. Three things I shall take notice of, which sheweth God's stamp and impress upon the word :—

[1.] Its authority in searching the heart : Heb. iv. 12, 13, ' The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow ; and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart ;' that is, as a sharp sword doth pierce asunder between joints and marrow, so doth the word divide soul and spirit ; and is a discernor, that is, of the convictions of the mind, and the disposition and inclination of the soul, or sensual appetite. The soul cleaveth to the sin when the mind or spirit disliketh it ; or plotteth pretences to hide it from himself or others, even in those sins which lie as hidden in the



mind as the marrow in the bones. Secret purposes fall under its judging power as well as practices accomplished. And what use must we make of this, but that we stand in awe of the word, avoiding what it forbiddeth, and following what it commandeth. Now, to evidence this property of the word, he urgeth the omniscience of God, whose word it is: ver. 13, 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; for all things are naked and open to him with whom we have to do.' As the sinner's secret thoughts are under the sight of the all-seeing God, so they are under the piercing power of his word; for God joineth with his word, and giveth it that discovering and piercing virtue. So the apostle of the word preached or explained it: 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25, 'He is convinced of all, and judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' The word is the rule, God is the judge; and the word being assisted by God, God is there where the word is; and so doth ransack the conscience, and discover men to themselves in order to judgment.

[2.] It hath a mighty power and force, because of the spirit that goeth along with it: Rom. i. 16, 'It is the power of God to salvation;' 1 Cor. i. 22, 'The gospel is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' It is powerful to convince, even there where it converts not; as Felix trembled, Acts xxiv. It is powerful to convert from one religion to another, from one state to another. (1.) From one religion to another: 'Have any of the nations changed their gods?' Jer. ii. 11. There needs much ado to bring men from a false religion wherein they have been brought up, how vain and foolish soever it be; yet this power the word hath. Though the doctrine of a crucified Christ were so distasteful, partly as now drawing men from their old temples, and altars, and ceremonies, wherein they were educated, especially as incredible, offering life by one that died; and partly as contrary to the carnal gust, as requiring duties distasteful to flesh and blood, and engaging in troubles and persecutions, yet it prevailed. (2.) Converting men from a state of nature to a state of grace, so that they are as it were born. To bring men to hate what they naturally love, and love what they naturally hate; it is hard to alter the nature of things, Isa. xi. 6; to quicken the dead, to purify the unclean, confirm the weak, to meek the proud and passionate: Oh! who would not reverence such a word, such a law and doctrine, as can do all this? Yet this and much more hath the word done.

[3.] Its authority: Eccles. viii. 3, 4, 'Where the word of a king is, there is power,' or authority to back it. How is it where God is? We reckon not of the words of a private person, though never so wise: Eccles. ix. 16, 'The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.' Where the command of a king cometh, it cometh with authority; for he hath power to back it, and to avenge himself on whosoever shall contradict it; but wise counsel, where there is no authority to enforce it, is little regarded. But now with God is sovereign majesty, and in his word, wherein sentence is pronounced concerning every person and action, according to which judgment doth proceed and will be executed.

2. The second reason is taken from the matter of the word; it is

direction about our everlasting concernments: Deut. xxxii. 46, 47, 'Set your hearts unto all the things which I command you this day; for it is not a vain thing, it is your life.' In a matter of life and death a man cannot be too exact and nice; yea, in the obedience or disobedience of the word, life or death eternal is concerned; yea, in every action morally considered, the word telleth you what is the merit of it, and what will be the event, or an evil or a good estate. Man would fain know his destiny, whether happy or miserable; here you may know whether you shall live for ever with God. Man in his laws doth not threaten or promise beyond his power; his power reacheth to men's outward estate, and no further, and is only limited to the bounds of the present life; therefore the sanction of their laws are never extended beyond the promises or threats of present and outward good, to give or take away men's liberty, wealth, estate, life at most. But God threateneth everlasting fire, Mat. xxv. 41; promiseth an inheritance immortal, 1 Peter i. 4. As God commandeth inward holiness, righteousness, love, so eternal rewards, and eternal penalties, things that concern us more nearly than estates, liberties, peace, yea, our lives themselves.

3. The third reason, because of the profit of standing in awe of the word.

[1.] It fortifieth us, and preserveth us in such temptations as arise from the fear of man. Where there is a reverence and awefulness of God's word, the greater awe overcometh the less. In such a temptation a man may miscarry two ways—by distrust of God, and disobedience to him. The one is the cause of the other. Now that we may not distrust him, it is good to set fear against fear, God against the creature: Jer. i. 8, 'Be not afraid of their face, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. His powerful protection should encourage us against their wrathful disposition: Isa. li. 12, 13, 'Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man, that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy maker?' The immortal and almighty God is able to bear us out. A due sense of the power of the Almighty checketh the fear of men. Or by disobedience we dishonour him: certainly a gracious heart feareth more to offend God than to fall into any temporal inconvenience: Isa. viii. 12, 13, 'Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and dread;' 1 Peter iii. 14, 15, 'But if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.' But let him be your fear and your dread. Be afraid to offend so holy a majesty. The countenance of princes is very awful unto men, but the fear of God's wrath should overcome the fear of man's displeasure, even of the greatest: Heb. xi. 27, 'He feared not the wrath of the king, because he saw him that was invisible.'

[2.] It maketh a man sincere. When a man standeth in awe of the word, he obeyeth in presence and absence, Phil. ii. 12, and avoideth secret as well as open sins, Gen. xxxix. 9, sins of thought as well as in deed—heart-sins, which the laws of men cannot take hold of; but the fear of God is instead of all laws, 2 Cor. i. 12. Conscience is to them more than shame of men. Something without keepeth back wicked

men; but something within, the godly. Abner's question was not good, 'How shall I hold up my face to thy brother Joab?' 2 Sam. ii. 22. He should have said, How shall I hold up my face to the Lord thy God? Though an upright man might do wickedly, uncontrolled of man, and nobody seeth him or punisheth him, yet reverence of God and his word restraineth him.

[3.] It maketh a man punctual and exact when afraid to do anything contrary to God's revealed will. It is universal, and it is powerful. It is universal; the soul that maketh conscience of the word is more thorough in obedience: there will be failings, but, for the main, his heart is sound with God; and lesser failings are retracted by repentance, Ps. cxli. 1, 2. And powerful: 'Stand in awe, and sin not,' Ps. iv. 4; this will cause us to stop in an evil course, on the remembrance of our duty; as David's heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment. Some think the text then verified, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word;' a commandment was in his way.

*Use 1.* To show us what frame of spirit they are under who despise the word.

1. All do so who deliberately and voluntarily prefer their own will before the will of God: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 'Wherefore hast thou sinned in despising the commandment?' They obey their own inclination, whatever the word saith to the contrary. Despising the commandment is the root of all sin, as formality of wilful sin. Oh! that men did regard this as they ought! considering that to despise commandments is to despise the Lord himself, and what it is for poor worms to despise the God of heaven and earth. Nay, that God that is our judge, he hath power to cast both body and soul into hell-fire—the God whom we are bound by so many ties to obey.

2. When swayed by delight and profit against the course of our duty. Esau sold his birthright to keep him alive, yet despised it, Gen. xxix. 31, and Heb. xii. 16.

3. The case is more aggravated when we cast a precept behind our backs for a light pleasure or small profit; the greater is our contempt to break with God for a little trifle; sell the righteous for a pair of shoes.

*Use 2.* To press us to get this blessed frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word.

1. It is a great curb in actual temptations: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'

2. It is a great help in reading and hearing: Acts x. 33, 'Now therefore we are all present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.'

3. A great help in humiliation and suing out our pardon: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou shouldest mark iniquity, who could stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.'

For means to get this awful frame of heart.

1. Faith is necessary. Sundry articles of religion have influence upon it. God's power: Mat. x. 28, 'Fear not them that can kill the body, but fear him that can cast both body and soul into hell-fire.' God's providence, that he observeth human affairs, and accordingly doth reward and punish: Hosea vii. 2, 'And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness, now their doings have



beset them about, before my face ;' and Heb. ii. 2, ' And every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' A day of judgment : Rom. ii. 5, ' But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God ;' eternal recompenses of heaven and hell, or the state of the world to come. Those who believe not these things are bold and venturous, and out of a daring confidence will put it to the trial whose word shall stand, God's or theirs : Jer. xlv. 28, ' And all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs ;' which shall be fulfilled or made good : Heb. xi. 8, ' By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, being moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.'

2. Love is necessary, for reverence ariseth from love. David was afraid to displease so good a God, to whom bound by so many ties. Surely love breedeth a greater tenderness than a bare sense of danger : Hosea iii. 5, ' Fear the Lord and his goodness.' That which maketh a wicked man presumptuous maketh a child of God awful ; he hath to do with a good God, and therefore would not offend him, nor cross his will.

3. A humble penitent spirit is necessary for this frame of heart. Josiah, when he heard the words of the law, he rent his clothes : 2 Kings xxii. 19, ' Because thy heart was tender, and thou humbledst thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, I have heard thee, saith the Lord ;' and 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, ' Because thy heart was tender,' &c. ; troubled at God's anger. To some, nothing is of less consideration with them.

4. A good stock of knowledge, or frame of divine truths : Ps. cxix. 11, ' Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee ;' Prov. vi. 21, 22, ' Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck ; when thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee ; and when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee.' A treasure of knowledge not only got by heart, but impressed on us by his Spirit. The great new-covenant blessing, Heb. viii. 10, is God's law written upon the heart by the finger of the Spirit, as before on tables of stone, on the directive and imperative powers, the heart and mind ; and this maketh us conformable to it in heart and life. God's law is said to be in the heart of the godly, that maketh them willing to obey : Ps. xl. 8, ' His law is in my heart ;' tender to offend : Ps. xxxvii. 31, ' The law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' He loveth what is commanded, and hateth what is forbidden ; he hath a sense of it, to keep from usual guilt.

5. Advised consideration and watchfulness : ' Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee ; ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.' When you are about to do anything, examine and consider it, whether God alloweth it, yea or no. Will it please or displease, honour or dishonour God ? If he disallow, forbear, how safe, profitable, or comfortable soever it be ; if he allow it, then engage : this holy fear must never be laid aside : Phil. ii. 12, ' Work out your salvation with fear and trembling ;' 1 Peter i. 17, ' Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'

## SERMON CLXXVI.

*I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*—VER. 162.

IN the text—

1. An assertion or declaration of his delight in the word, ‘I rejoice at thy word.’

2. An illustration of it by a similitude, taken from those who have gotten some notable prey and booty, ‘As one that findeth great spoil.’

First, The similitude is very expressive, taken from the joy which a conqueror in battle doth find in the spoil of his defeated enemies. The same similitude is used Isa. ix. 3, ‘They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.’ He speaketh there of the highest joy; in a time of peace, joy of the harvest is the greatest joy; in a time of war, victory obtained after a hazardous fight, and rich spoil and booty gotten. To heighten that joy, several circumstances concur:—

1. Deliverance after a doubtful conflict. No man goeth to war but carrieth his life in his hands, and the event is very uncertain. Now when it is unexpectedly determined on our side, there is great rejoicing.

2. The joy of victory, especially to be victorious in a battle.

3. There is booty and spoil, whereby men are enriched, and so profit as well as pleasure.

4. The joy of honour and triumph over fallen enemies.

5. Peace and ease from toil. All these make the joy of victorious men in a battle to be a great joy.

Secondly, It was a fit similitude for David to use, who was a great warrior, and so a man not unacquainted with the joy of victory. A gracious heart spiritualiseth every occasion that falleth out in their ordinary callings: here is great joy, but this is nothing to the knowledge of God’s will.

Thirdly, Every Christian is a warrior against Satan, the world, and the flesh; so it is a fit similitude for them. Victory over sin and Satan is above all the conquests in the world; this is a part of the good news the word bringeth to us, Col. ii. 14, 15; John xvi. 33.

Now observe, in the former verse David had expressed his reverence to the word, now his delight.

First, Our trembling at the word doth not hinder our delight in it; none more cheery than the awful soul: Acts ix. 31, ‘They walked in the fear of God and comfort of the Holy Ghost;’ and Ps. cxii. 1, ‘Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.’ Those who are most observant of God’s will, and careful to follow it, have the greatest contentment in their souls.

Secondly, Joy should be mingled with reverence, lest it degenerate into slavery and a scrupulous fear.

*Doct.* That God’s people do greatly rejoice in his word.

1. It is not an ordinary delight which is here set forth, but such as is high and intense, such joy as the richest and most gainful victory

can raise in any worldly man. It is incredible, and cannot be expressed, how much joy and comfort the word of God yieldeth to good men; therefore so many similitudes used: 'More than in all riches,' Ps. cxix. 14; 'Sweeter than honey and the honeycomb,' ver. 103; 'I love it above gold, and above fine gold,' ver. 127. A joy greater than the joy of worldly men.

2. It is not a light flash, or a fantastical impression, but a solid consolation, such as is affliction-proof and death-proof, when the strength of this joy cometh to be tried and assaulted by deep afflictions. Therefore the heirs of promise are said to have strong consolation, Heb. vi. 18. So ver. 50 of this psalm, 'This is my comfort in mine affliction, thy word hath quickened me.'

3. This joy, which is the mark of a sound believer, is delighting to know, believe, and obey God's word. For it is in the way of his testimonies, Ps. cxix. 14. It is in his commandments they delight greatly. Study and contemplation breedeth a pleasure, but nothing like practice. The pleasures and delights of the mind do certainly exceed those of the body, for the more noble the faculty is, the more capable of delight. A man in study hath a truer pleasure than the greatest epicure in the most exquisite enjoyments of sense. Now moral delights exceed those which are the mere result of contemplation, as they give us a more intimate feeling of the worth of things. Again those delights which are supernatural, and come from the Spirit, as the pleasures of faith and obedience do, exceed those of the natural mind as much as those do bodily pleasures, as being exercised about nobler objects, which are the sense of the favour of God, and reconciliation with him, and the hopes of eternal life; and as coming from a higher cause, the Spirit of God. Therefore, upon the whole, there is no true delight and contentment but what proceedeth from a careful performance of God's commands, strictly abstaining from what may displease him, and cheerfully practising all that he requireth of us. Truly the present gratefulness of such an employment, and the succeeding comforts of such practices, are a continual feast; all other pleasures to this are nothing worth. The obedience of faith to a believer is more than any worldly advantage. It is a sweet thing to be exercised in the word of God, in reading and hearing it with serious meditation, but much more to be brought under the power and practice of it.

*Reason 1.* The godly find glad tidings in the word, suitable to their soul's necessities, and therefore rejoice in it. For the object of delight is *bonum conveniens et sufficiens*; here is enough to content them, and it is very suitable. There is pardon of sins, and that is ground of joy: Mat. ix. 2, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee;' there we hear of a Saviour: 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' When the gospel was preached at Samaria, Acts viii. 8, 'There was great joy in that city.' Zaccheus received Christ joyfully, for he brought salvation to his house, Luke xix. 6. There is the true way of mortifying sin and sanctifying the heart: Ps. xix. 8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' There we are



told of the joys of the world to come: 1 Cor. ii. 9, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.' We should exult for joy to hear of those things. Thus you see the word of God affordeth such comforts, such matter of rejoicing, as cannot be paralleled. A poor man, when he findeth a treasure, receiveth it with a joyful heart. Oh! what inestimable treasure do we find in the word of God! the way of eternal salvation is there made manifest.

*Reason 2.* The saints have felt benefit by it; they have been renewed and sanctified by it, therefore they prize it: James i. 18, 19, 'Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. Therefore be swift to hear.' There they have found powerful heavenly truths, by which their souls are made new; they have tasted God's love in the doctrines and promises thereof, and against a taste there is no disputing, 1 Peter ii. 2, 3. Experimented sweetness is beyond all arguments; they have been revived and comforted by it in their troubles, as at the 93d verse of this psalm more largely, 'I will never forget thy word, for by them thou hast quickened me.' God hath done their souls good by it. It is the charter of their hopes, ver. 111 of this psalm. Whatever calamities they meet with in the world, there they see ground of peace, and composedness in their soul.

*Reason 3.* They love God, and they hear more of him in the word than they can elsewhere. The soul that loveth God heareth and seeth his blessed name in every leaf; they find the effects of his goodness in creation, some fruits and pledges of his love in daily providence, but there they find his great eternal and wonderful love in Christ; there they know God's will, and it is their desire to be subject to it, and therefore value it, not only as the charter of their hopes, but as the rule of their duty.

*Use 1.* To condemn them—

1. That find no sweetness in the word of God; they do not mind the business of salvation, and then no wonder if they have a slight and mean esteem of the word.

Two reasons of this contempt:—

[1.] Their scope is not fixed. All means are regarded with respect to the end. Now, if they do not make the everlasting enjoyment of God their end, the scriptures are of little use to them, a trouble rather than a comfort, because they disturb them in pursuing their lusts; but a man that would enjoy God, get to his holy hill, is apprehensive of the benefit.

[2.] They are not affected with their wants, and therefore esteem not the word; for the great benefit of the word is to teach us a remedy for sin and misery. Now they that mind not the misery and danger in which they stand go on carelessly and despise the word of God: Prov. xxii. 3, 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself, but the simple pass on, and are punished.' They little think of the evil which is near them, and so slight the counsel of God.

2. Those that will not believe them that find sweetness in it, as if all were fantastical and imaginary. Are the wisest and most serious part of mankind deceived? and hath the carnal fool only the wit to discern

the mistake? Surely in all reason it should be otherwise. These tell us of those delights and transports of soul in meditating on the promises, in purifying their hearts by the precepts; and though a stranger intermeddleth not with their joys, yet surely these find them. All that is spiritual and supernatural is suspected by those who are drowned in matters of sense, John xii. 29; a voice from heaven is thunder; the motions of the Spirit, fumes of wine, Acts iii. 13; joy in the Holy Ghost but a fancy, &c.

3. Them that count it an alphabetary knowledge fit for beginners. David was no novice, yet he rejoiced in the word as one that found great spoil; the more conversant he was in these holy writings, the more he delighted in them. No; it is not only children's meat; there is not only milk there, but strong meat also, Heb. v. 14. It is our rule to walk by, till our blessedness be perfected. The continual storehouse of our comforts, Rom. xv. 4. It is the continual means of growing into communion with God in Christ.

*Use 2.* To exhort us to delight in the word of God. It is the work and mark of a blessed man: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' As far as the necessities of the present life will bear it, they are still getting more knowledge of true blessedness, and the way that leadeth to the enjoyment of it. This is their business and pleasing study. His work is to form his heart to a sincere, uniform, impartial obedience. And as he doth increase in godliness by the help of the word, his soul is more satisfied; all the joys of the world to this are nothing to him. Are your hearts thus set to know the Lord and his revealed will, and the way of life?

## SERMON CLXXVII.

*I hate and abhor lying; but thy law do I love.*—VER. 163.

IN this verse the man of God showeth his affection to the word by the hatred of those things which are contrary to the word. Observe here—

1. Affection set against affection.
2. Object against object.

First, Affection against affection, hatred against love. Love and hatred are natural affections, which are good or evil according to the objects to which they are applied. Place love on the world, sin, and vanity, and nothing worse; place hatred on God, religion, holiness, and it soon proveth a hellish thing. But now, set them upon their proper objects, and they express a gracious constitution of soul; let us hate evil, and love good, Amos v. 15, and all is well. Man needeth affections of aversion as well as choice and pursuit. Hatred hath its use as well as love. Love was made for God, and things that belong to God, and hatred for sin. It was put into us that, at the first appearance, sense, or imagination of evil, we might retire ourselves and fly from it; and is anything so evil as sin, so contrary to God, so bane-

ful to the soul? The office of love is to adhere and cleave to God, and whatever will bring us to the enjoyment of him; and the office of hatred is that we may truly and sincerely turn from all evil with detestation, according to the nature and degree of evil that is in it. The emphasis of the text is notable, 'I hate and abhor;' it must be a thorough hatred, which David, Ps. cxxxix. 22, calleth a 'perfect hatred.'

Secondly, Here is object set against object. As love is opposed to hatred, so the law to lying; for the word of God is truth, and requireth truth of all that submit to it; pure sincerity and simplicity. Some render the word more generally. The Septuagint ἀδικίαν ἐμίσησα καὶ ἐβδελύξάμεν, 'I hate and abominate iniquity.' Other translations render it not so; they expound it so that one kind is put for all the rest, and fitly; for every sin is a falsehood, and often called in this psalm, 'A false way, and a lie,' and will fail and beguile all them who are delighted with it. And the purport and drift is, that we should admit, omit, commit nothing which is contrary to the word of God, which is the great object of a holy man's love.

The points are three:—

*Doct. 1.* They that love the word of God must hate sin.

*Doct. 2.* That a slight hatred of a sinful course is not enough, but we must hate and abhor it.

*Doct. 3.* That among other sins, we must hate falsehood and lying, and all kind of frauds and deceits.

For the first point.

*Doct. 1.* They that love the word of God must hate sin.

This implieth four things:—

1. That our love must be demonstrated by such effects, otherwise it is but pretended, if we do not avoid what it forbiddeth; for our love to God and his word is mostly seen in obedience and dutiful subjection to him and it; for God's love is a love of bounty, our love is a love of duty. He is said to love us when he blesseth us, and bestoweth on us the effects of his special grace and favour; we are said to love him when we obey him. These propositions are clear in scripture, that our love to God is tried by our love to the word, and our love to the word by our hatred of sin: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me;' and ver. 23, 'If any man love me he will keep my words.' On the contrary, our enmity to God and his word is determined by our love to sin. Enmity to God: Col. i. 21, 'Enemies in your minds by evil works.' To his word: Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be.' Habitual sin argueth a malice or hatred of God and his holy law; and actual sin, an actual hatred. It is *finis operis*, if not *operantis*; whether a man thinketh so or no, it is the intent of the action; a rebellion or an act of disloyalty against God. Yea, there is not only a virtual hatred in sin, but a formal hatred; not only implied, but expressed: they wish there were not a God to punish them and call them to an account, such a law to forbid such practices as they affect, or that such things were not sin. Well, then, it is not some kind of pleasure in the study of the word will show our love to the word, but an impartial, entire, and uniform obedience, strictly abstaining from



such things as it forbiddeth, and carefully practising what it requireth at our hands.

2. That our hatred of sin must flow from such a principle. A man may hate sin upon foreign and accidental reasons, and so that abstaining from sin is not a true hatred, but a casual dislike; as when we forbear some sins, but retain others that suit better with our condition, callings, employment, temper, or because of some difficulty in compassing, shame in practising, or repugnant to our natural temper. No; it must be out of a principle of love to God: Ps. xcvii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord hate evil.' So Ps. cxix. 113, 'I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.' A hatred of sin arising from love to God and his word is the only true hatred; that is hatred of sin as sin, as it is *ἀνομία*, 1 John iii. 4, 'A transgression of the law;' as it is ingratitude to God, contrary to our obligations to him, not only as destructive to ourselves; not principally *timore pœnæ*, but *amore virtutis*. The word of God furnisheth us with divers reasons and arguments to move us to hate sin. They all have their place, but some are more noble and excellent than others; as when a man hateth sin because God hath forbidden it. True hatred cometh from a love of the contrary; therefore he that hath a vehement love to the law hateth all things which are contrary to it: Mat. vi. 20, 'He will hate the one, and love the other.' There is no serving two masters; love to the one enforceth hatred of the other. To love the good and hate the evil are inseparable.

3. The more we hate sin the more prepared we are to love the law. A carnal heart hateth the law: John iii. 20, 'He that doeth evil hateth the light;' and Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law.' He that doth not hate sin hateth the word of God. We cannot delight in it till our affections be purified and sanctified. Men's evil practices and dispositions cause them to hate the light; it is a reprov- ing light. Can sore eyes delight to look upon the sun? or an unsound heart delight in that which will so ransack and search the conscience?

4. According to the degree of love, so will the degree of our hatred be. They that have the highest love of the law will have most hatred of sin; they hate every lesser contrariety, a vain thought, Ps. cxix. 113. They do not only hate open and scandalous sins, but sin carried on in a more close and cleanly manner; yea, they groan under the relics of corruption, and feel it a heavy burden: Rom. vii. 22-24, 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members;' and then, 'O wretched man that I am!' Next to the object of our affection, the principle or spring of it must be regarded; and next to the spring and rise of it, the degree must be looked after, that we love the good and hate the evil proportionably; that is to say, that our hatred must be proportionable to the evil of the thing hated, and our love to the good of the thing loved. And indeed, where the one is the other will be; where a great love, a great hatred; where a little love, a little hatred: Ps. cxix. 127, 128, 'I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold; therefore I esteem thy precepts in all things to be right, and hate every false way.'

*Use.* Well, then, if we would show our love to the word, we must

truly, sincerely, and constantly turn from all known sin with detestation and abhorrence; for hatred of sin is an infallible evidence of love to the word. Now hatred of sin, if it be right—

1. It is universal, *εἰς τὰ γένη*, to the whole kind; as Haman thought scorn to lay hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought to destroy the whole race of the Jews, Esther iii. 6. One sin is as inconsistent with the love of God as another. There may be as much contempt of God's authority in a sin of thought as in a sin of practice, in a small sin as in a greater. There may be much crookedness in a small line, and in some cases the dye is more than the stuff: 'I hate every false way.' It is twice repeated in this psalm, in ver. 104, and ver. 128. 'To hate what God hateth: Prov. viii. 13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.'

2. It is implacable; it aimeth at the utter extirpation and expulsion of sin. They seek to remove the guilt, to weaken the inclination; they groan sorely under the very being of sin, that anything of sin is left: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Rom. vii. 24.

3. It is still growing. At first it is a dubious case. Men that are convinced have some mind to let sin go, or a wish that Christ would save them from it; but it is with such reserves, that they have rather a mind to keep it than let it go; as Pharaoh had no mind to dismiss Israel, and therefore stood hucking with God; or as David, when he sent out forces against Absalom, yet 'be tender of the young man.' Pleasing lusts, we have but a remiss will against them; our love to it is greater than our dislike of it; therefore so unstable, James i. 8. But when the soul is converted, the soul is armed with a resolution, 1 Peter iv. 1. Then the love of sin is weakened in their hearts, and the strength and vigor of it abated; the soul is armed with a serious purpose to give it up, and shake off this servitude, in the confidence of that grace which is purchased for them by Christ's death; there is a godly inclination and bent of soul to live unto God. Again, as our communion with God and sense of his love is increased in us, so our hatred of sin groweth more keen and fierce. When God had told what he would do for Ephraim, 'What have I any more to do with idols?' Hosea xiv. 8. I have had too much to do already. What! any more? In what proportion there is a sense of God's love, in the same proportion a hatred of evil. Moses, when he had talked with God in the mount, at his return he is full of indignation, and broke the tables. So those that have had sweet communion with God have a more severe displicency against their corruptions, and there is a more lively principle at work in their hearts, for the expulsion of them. Every act of kindness on God's part layeth a new obligation, and their hatred is awakened by the holy use of the ordinances.

4. The constant discoveries of hatred against sin are watching and striving against it; they are ever careful that they may not offend God: Acts xxiv. 16, 'And herein do I exercise myself, to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and men;' and keep striving, and a serious resistance, even when they are foiled: Rom. vii. 15, 'The evil that I hate, that do I.' A Christian always hateth sin, though he doth not always prevail against it. In sins of daily infirmity,

striving is conquering ; but in other sins, they prevail against them by degrees ; sin doth not carry it freely, nor reign in them : ' For sin shall not have dominion over you ; for ye are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. vi. 14.

*Doct. 2.* That a slight hatred of a sinful course is not enough, but we must hate it and abhor it: Rom. xii. 9, ' Abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good.' Hate it as hell, as the word signifieth. We do too coldly speak against evil, too slackly follow after that which is good. If our pursuit after God were more earnest, and our hatred of evil more serious and severe, we should be other manner of Christians than we are. There is a twofold hatred—(1.) The hatred of offence and abomination ; (2.) The hatred of enmity and opposition. By the one our hearts are turned from sin, by the other turned against it. Now both these are necessary for a Christian that would be safe. Hating and abhorring implieth not only a naked abstinence, or a simple refusal, but an enmity ; not a forbearing the act, but a mortifying the affection. We must not only leave off evil, but abhor it ; and not only abhor it, but pursue it with a hostile hatred, purposing, watching, striving, praying against it, thwarting the flesh, and contradicting the motions thereof.

*Reason 1.* It is not else a hatred becoming sin, which is so great an evil, so opposite to God's law, and derogatory to God's glory, so mischievous to us. There is a great deal of evil in sin, a great deal of evil after sin, that we can never hate it enough. It is the evil of evils, that brought all other evils into the world ; it is the violation of a righteous law, 1 John iii. 4 ; a contempt of God's authority : Exod. v. 2, ' Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice ?' Ps. xii. 4, ' Our tongues are our own ; who is lord over us ?' It is a defacing of his image, and a casting off the glory and honour of our creation : Rom. iii. 23, ' We have sinned, and are come short of the glory of God.' Ps. xlix. 12, ' Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not ; he is like the beasts that perish.' A despising of his power by a silly worm, as if we could make good our party against him : 1 Cor. x. 22, ' Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy ? are we stronger than he ?' It separateth from communion with God : Isa. lix. 2, ' Your iniquities have separated between me and you.' It preferreth base satisfactions before the enjoyment of him : 2 Tim. iii. 4, ' Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God ;' as if the base and brutish pleasures of the flesh were to be preferred before the love of God.' This and much more may be said of sin ; and is any hatred too great for it ? Ps. ci. 3, ' I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes : I hate the work of them that turn aside ; it shall not cleave to me.'

*Reason 2.* No other hatred will serve the purposes of grace. A love that is cold will soon fail ; so also will a hatred. Where our zeal is not set against sin we soon fall into a liking of it ; therefore the soul is not sufficiently guarded by a slight hatred. If sin be not detestable, it will soon seem tolerable. There is a brabble between many and their lusts, and in all haste sin must be gone ; but the quarrel is soon taken up, and sin stayeth for all that. Where the enmity is not great, a man's agreement with sin may be soon made. Therefore not only an offence, but a hostile hatred is required, such hating and abhorring as



will not admit of reconciliation. Like the hatred of Amnon to Tamar, 'The hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he loved her,' 2 Sam. xiii. 15 ; he hated her with hatred greatly. Did we more strongly dissent from sin, it would not so easily prevail over us. Sin dieth when it dieth in our affections, when our hearts are set against it : 'Get you hence,' Isa. xxx. 22. Get you gone ; be there from henceforth an utter divorce between me and you. This is to hate and abhor.

*Use 1.* To show us the reason why so many are entangled again in the sins they seemed to renounce and forsake. They have frequently resolved to forsake their sins, but these resolutions have come to nothing ; they have striven against them, but as a great stone that hath been rolled up hill, it hath returned upon them with the more violence ; or as in rowing against the stream, when the tide hath been strong against them, and they have been driven the more back, and therefore are discouraged. Yea, they have prayed, and found little success, and therefore think it is vain to make any further trial. What shall we say then to these ? If the premises were clear, yet the inference and conclusion is wrong and false ; for we are not to measure our duty by the success, but God's injunction. God may do what he pleaseth, but we must do what he hath commanded. Abraham obeyed God, not knowing whither he went, Heb. xi. 8. Peter said unto Christ, 'We have toiled all night, and have caught nothing ; nevertheless at thy command we will cast forth the net.' Though the first attempt succeed not, yet afterwards sin may be subdued and broken. In natural things we do not sit down with one trial or one endeavour, but after many disappointments pursue our designs till we complete them. A merchant will not leave off for one bad voyage, nor an ambitious man because his first essays were fruitless ; and shall we give over our conflicts with worldly and fleshly lusts ? That sheweth our will is not fixedly bent against them, because we cannot presently subdue them. 'He that will be rich,' 1 Tim. vi. 10. If you had such a will to be holy and heavenly.

2. There is a fault in these purposes, in these strivings and prayers ; they do not come from a heart thoroughly set against sin.

[1.] These purposes are not hearty and real, and then no wonder they do not prevail. There may be a slight purpose, and there is a full purpose, Acts xi. 23. If thy purposes were more full and strong, and thoroughly bent against sin, they would sooner succeed. Is it the fixed decree and determination of thy will ? When you are firmly resolved, your affections will be sincere and steadfast, you will pursue this work close ; not be off and on, hot and cold, unstable in all your ways ; your full purpose, or the habitual bent of your hearts, are known by your drift and scope. Or it may be this purpose may be extorted, not the effect of thy judgment and will, but only thy conscience awakened by some present fear. Many are by some pangs and qualms of conscience frightened into some religiousness ; but this humour lasts not long : Ps. lxxviii. 35-37, 'And they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High their redeemer ; nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues ; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' In their

dangers they remembered God, but their hearts were not right with him. Ahab, in his fears, had some relentings; so had Pharaoh. The Israelites turned to the Lord in their distress, but they turned as fast from him afterwards; resolves not of love, but fear. So are these resolutions wrested from you by some present terrors, which, when they cease, no wonder that they are where they were before. Violent things never hold long; they will hold as long as the principle of their violence lasteth. Or it may be you rest in the strength of your own resolutions. Now God will be owned as the author of all grace, who reneweth and quickeneth every affection in us; still we must have a sense of our own insufficiency, and resolve more in the strength and power of God, and rely upon the grace of Jesus Christ, by his Spirit mortifying the deeds of the body, as knowing that without him you can do nothing, neither continue nor perform our resolutions. Men fall again as often as they think to stand by their own power. There is much guile and falsehood in our own hearts; we cannot trust them. The saints still resolve, God assisting: Ps. cxix. 8, 'I will keep thy precepts; oh, forsake me not utterly;' ver. 32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' They beg God to keep up their inclination and bent against sin: ver. 36, 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.'

[2.] As to striving. Let us examine that a little; if it be so serious, so diligent, so circumspect as it should be. Certainly that is no effectual striving when you are disheartened with every difficulty; for difficulties do but influence a resolved spirit, as stirring doth the fire. No question but it will be hard to enter in at the strait gate, or walk in the narrow way. God hath made the way to heaven so narrow and strait, that we may the more strive to enter in thereat, Luke xiii. 24. Now shall we sit down and complain when we succeed not upon every faint attempt? Who then can be saved? This is to cry out with the sluggard, 'There is a lion in the way.' Should a mariner, as soon as the waves arise, and strong gusts of wind blow, give over all guiding of the ship? No; he is resolved upon his voyage. To give out upon every difficulty is against all the experience and wont of mankind. Again, this striving and opposing is but slight, not accompanied with that watchfulness and resolution which is necessary. Many pretend to watch against sin, yet abstain not from all occasions of sin. If we play about the cockatrice's hole, no wonder we are bitten. Never think to turn from thy sins, if thou dost not turn from the occasion of them: Prov. iv. 15, 'Go not in the way of evil men, avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.' This is a practice becoming the hatred of sin. Evil company is a snare. If thou hast not strength to avoid the occasion, which is less, how canst thou avoid the sin, which is greater? He that resolveth not to be burnt in the fire must not come near the flames. Job made a covenant with his eyes, Job xxxi. 1. Our Saviour taught us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.' He doth not say, into sin. Temptation openeth the gate to it. Certainly it argueth a hankering of mind when we dally with temptations; as the raven, when he is driven from the carrion, loveth to abide within the scent of it, so they have an inclination to sin when they forbear the practice of it.

[3.] For praying. We oftener pray from our memories than from our consciences, and from our consciences enlightened than hearts renewed by grace. Prayer, as it is the fruit of memory and invention, is but a few slight and formal words said of course, a body without a soul; as dictated by conscience, it may be retracted by the will, *at noli modo*. Austin, when he prayed against his youthful lusts, *timebam ne me excluderet Deus*, was afraid lest he should be heard too soon; at best but half desires, faint wishes, like Balaam's wish to die the death of the righteous. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing. God never made promise that lazy wishes should be satisfied. If you pray against sin with your whole heart, he will hear you. The great fault is the want of this thorough hatred of sin.

Use 2. Take heed of two things:—

1. A secret love to your sins.
2. A remiss hatred against them.

1. A secret love to sin. Job speaketh of some that hid sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues, Job xx. 12, loath to let a lust go; and David of regarding iniquity in our heart, Ps. lxi. 18. First there is a secret liking of sin, which in time will prove baneful to the soul; some lust is spared, and continueth unmortified. It doth not remain so much, as it is reserved, and there keepeth possession for Satan. This will in time eat out all our other virtues, and bring a stain upon those good properties wherewith God hath endowed us. Sin was never heartily cast out, therefore they are in time ensnared again, and drawn away by some sensitive lure.

2. A remiss hatred of sin. No; there must be a total and full aversion. Hatred and indignation is the soul's expulsive faculty; it cannot be kept in good plight without it. It is the lively and active principle which sets the soul a-work, in avoiding what is hurtful to the spiritual life: it concerneth us to keep it up in strength and vigour. The reason why even believers do so often sin through weakness is because the will doth not so strongly dissent as it should. Though we do not deliberately give our assent, it should more potently awaken our displeasure. But certainly the reason of wilful sin is want of a strong hatred. Though convinced of evil, yet we go on like a fool to the correction of the stocks, Prov. vii. 22.

Doct. 3. That among other sins, we must hate falsehood and lying, and all kind of frauds and deceits.

1. I shall open the particular notion of lying in the text.

2. Show you the reasons against it.

First, To open the particular notion of lying.

1. In the vulgar acception and sense of it, we take it to be speaking an untruth, or that which is false, with an intention to deceive. Now this is a sin contrary to the new nature: Col. iii. 9, 'Lie not one to another, since ye have put off the old man with his deeds.' It is not only contrary to that natural order which God hath appointed between the mind and the tongue, but to that sincerity and true holiness which is our great qualification and the fruit of regeneration. Therefore God saith, Isa. lxiii. 8, 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' God presumeth that his people will not deal falsely,



but speak as they think, and think of what they speak as it really is; and that Christians will not deceive and circumvent others, since they are members of the same mystical body, and should seek one another's welfare, as much as they do their own: Eph. iv. 25, 'Wherefore put away lying; speak every one truth with his neighbour; seeing ye are members one of another.' No; it is more unseemly in a Christian, more inconsistent with grace. In short, no sin maketh a man more like the devil: John viii. 44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.'

2. Concealing the truth which should be confessed. God would not have his people hide themselves in necessary truths; he would have them believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, Rom. x. 9, 10. And Christianity is called a confession, Heb. iii. 1; and all Christians are saved either as martyrs or as confessors.

But how far we are to confess lesser truth is a great case of conscience. Certainly we must do nothing against a truth, not appear in the garb of a contrary party, nor must we lie hid when God in his providence crieth out, Who is of my side, who? We read of some, John xii. 42, who 'believed in Christ, yet they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' Faith is in a very weak condition when confession is not joined with it, when men will not own Christ in troublous times, and appear in their own shape. Men that have much to lose have many worldly considerations; they think these lose more than they can gain, and lose by the praise of God rather than the praise of men. Now the sincere Christian saith in these cases, 'I hate and abhor lying.'

3. It is contrary to that obedience to God which we do profess. There is a practical lie as well as a virtual lie, when our practices do not correspond with our profession; there is a lie acted, as well as a lie told. So Ephraim is said to compass God about with lies, Hosea xi. 12. To say we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, is a lie, 1 John i. 6, a lie that tendeth to the disgrace of religion, *in opprobrium Christi*: 1 John ii. 4, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' So he that speaketh much of the Spirit, and walketh after the flesh.

*Reason 1.* God is a God of truth. God cannot, nor will not lie, and his people must be like him.

*Reason 2.* His word is the word of truth, his law requireth truth; and all falsehoods and deceits are contrary to that justice and charity which it establisheth. His gospel is a gospel of truth: Eph. i. 13, 'After ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.'

*Reason 3.* He requireth and worketh truth in the reins and inward parts: Ps. li. 7, 'Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts.'

*Use.* Oh! then, hate and abhor lying. You cannot be accepted of God else: Jer. v. 3, 'O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?' You cannot have grace in your own hearts: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our con-

versations in the world ;' nor long continue undiscovered before men : Prov. xxvi. 26, ' His wickedness shall be showed before the congregation.' Let us not lie to God in our promises we make to him : Ps. lxxviii. 34-36, ' 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 Most High their redeemer : nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.' In your worship, do not compass him about with lies, complain of burdens which you feel not, express desires which you have not. In your profession, do not make it a veil and cover for your lusts. A wicked or carnal design is inconsistent with uprightness of heart. As to men, abhor all false and deceitful practices and speeches. When the apostle biddeth us abhor that which is evil, he first saith, Let love be without dissimulation, Rom. xii. 9. You are not to live by interest, but by conscience. Therefore abhor all hypocrisy, falsehood, treachery, which are unworthy any ingenuous man, much more a Christian.

### SERMON CLXXVIII.

*Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments.—*  
VER. 164.

IN these words the man of God giveth further proof of his love and delight in the word, by praising God for that benefit.

His praise is illustrated—

1. By the frequent repetition of that duty, *seven times a day do I praise thee.*

2. The subject-matter, *because of thy righteous judgments, i.e.,* God's dispensations agreeing with his word.

First, The frequency of the duty, 'seven times a day ;' that is, very often ; *numerus definitus pro indefinito*, a number certain put for an uncertain. Seven is often used for many, as Lev. xxvi. 18, ' I will punish you seven times more for your sins ;' that is, not exactly seven, but many and divers times : Prov. xxiv. 16, ' A just man falleth seven times a day, and riseth up again : Prov. xxvi. 25, ' There are seven abominations in his heart ;' 1 Sam. ii. 5, ' She that is barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.' So here, I give thanks to thee as often as I meditate of them. Some of the Jewish rabbis stick in the very literal number, seven—twice in the morning, before the reading of the law, and once after it, and at noon, and so in the evening as in the morning ; so Rabbi Solomon. Indeed elsewhere, Ps. lv. 17, ' Evening and morning and at noon will I praise the Lord ;' but whether with such scrupulous observation of hours is not certain.

Secondly, The subject-matter, 'Thy righteous judgments,' whereby is meant—

1. God's most righteous laws and precepts, called the ordinances of judgment and justice, Isa. lvi. We cannot sufficiently bless God for the benefit of his word.

2. The dispensations of his providence suiting therewith, whether they concern us or others. The word is fulfilled in the punishment of the wicked, and in giving the promised reward to the righteous. All God's dealings are righteous judgments, and matter of praise is still offered to us from the comforts and blessings of his providence. There is no question of that; the smallest of his mercies should not be overlooked, though notable mercies should be continually remembered, Ps. lxxviii. 19. Not only daily benefits, but great deliverances are a standing ground of thanksgiving: Ps. lxxvi. 2, 'Sing forth the honour of his name, make his praise glorious, show forth his salvation from day to day;' especially now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the great salvation is more clearly revealed, we should never think of it, nor read it, nor hear of it, without some considerable act of joy and thankfulness. Again, so for the dispensations of God to others, in protecting his people, in punishing his enemies. It is a great confirmation of faith to see promises and threatenings fulfilled on others, how punctually God maketh good his word to all that trust in him, Ps. lxxviii. 30; on all those that reject it and despise it: 'As we have heard, so have we seen,' Ps. lxxviii. 8. They that believe the word of God, and do mark what is foretold in the word, shall find the event and work of providence suitable to the prediction.

3. God's righteous judgments afflicting of us doth also yield matter of praise, as they work together for good to such as love him, Rom. viii. 28; and the saddest corrections afford necessary and profitable instructions: Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law;' Ps. cxix. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;' though not barely for the afflictions themselves, yet for their fruit and issue, that our souls are bettered and humbled by them, and as we see the faithfulness of God in them.

*Doct.* That the people of God should never cease lauding and magnifying the name of God because of his righteous judgments.

David was never weary of praising God; every day he praised God, and often every day: love sweetened it to him. We shall praise him evermore in the world to come, there it will be our sole employment; but even in this world we should not count it a burden, but praise him yet more: Ps. lxxi. 14, 'I will yet praise him more and more,' still magnifying his greatness.

Here I shall speak—

1. Of the duty, that we should praise God.

2. Of the continuance, that we should not cease praising God.

3. The grounds of it in the text, because of thy righteous judgments.

First, The duty.

Secondly, The motives to it.

First, The duty, and there we have—(1.) The nature of it; (2.) The grounds of it; (3.) The formality; (4.) The fruit of it.

1. The nature of it. There are three words used in this matter—blessing, praising, giving thanks. Sometimes they are used promiscuously, at other times there is a distinctness of notion to be observed. Blessing is used: Ps. ciii. 1, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.' Blessing



relateth to his benefits ; it respects the works of God as beneficial to us ; his mercy, love, and kindness to us. We bless him who hath blessed us, Eph. i. 7. Praise relateth to his excellences, as we may praise a stranger for his excellent endowments, though we are not benefited by them : Ps. cxi. 1, 2, 'Praise ye the Lord ; I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation : the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' It is a great part of our work to praise the Lord ; not that he at all needeth it, for he is infinitely perfect, but he deserveth it, and by this means we testify our love and reverence of him, and strengthen our own dependence on him, and gain others to him, when we speak good of his name. The other word is thanksgiving : Ps. cvii. 1, 'Oh ! give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good.' This differeth from the two former, because praise may be expressed in words, gratitude and thankfulness in deed ; also it hath respect to benefits as well as blessings ; but we show our gratitude by obedience. But these are often coincident ; indeed, there is a mixture of all in the true praising of God ; excellences and benefits are to be acknowledged with heart, mouth, and life.

2. The grounds of it. Faith and love must be at the bottom of our praise, if we would not have it slight and formal ; for the more lively apprehensions we have of God's perfections, which is the work of faith, and the more sensible of his goodness and mercy, which is the work of love, the better is this service performed. Therefore, unless these praises flow from a believing, loving soul, they are but an empty prattle and a vain sound. Faith is necessary, that is the eye of the soul to see the invisible one, Heb. xi. 27. It giveth us an apprehension of the Lord's excellences in order to love and trust. So also, in order to praise, faith sets us before the throne, and doth withdraw the veil, and showeth us the eternal God, who liveth and reigneth for ever, dispensing all things powerfully, according to his own will : that is all the sight we have of God in this life—a nearer vision is referred to our future glory ; here we see him by faith. Again, love, or a deep sense of the goodness of God, which enlargeth the heart towards him, and forceth open our lips, that our mouths may show forth his praise, Ps. li. 15. There he meaneth God's giving a sweet and renewed sense of pardoning mercy : Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.' An intimate sense of the Lord's love sets the tongue a-work to speak of it. Praise, then, is the result of faith and love. None else do it seriously, delightfully, but where these graces reign and prevail in the heart.

3. The formality of it is an acknowledgment of the divine virtues, benefits, and perfections, manifested to us in his word or works, or both. These must be acknowledged by some outward expression : words, whereby we express our inward thoughts and apprehensions. Our tongues are called our glory : Ps. lvii. 8, 'Awake up, my glory ;' Ps. xvi. 9, 'My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.' When that scripture is quoted, Acts ii. 26, it is said, 'My tongue is glad,' ἡ γλῶσσά μου. So the Septuagint. So called, not only as speech is our excellency above the beasts, but because God is thereby glorified and praised ; given us to this end and purpose, to bless God,

James iii. 9. As our understanding was given us to know God, and think on him, so our speech to speak of God, to declare his excellent perfections, and to stir up others to praise him with us.

4. Holiness, the fruit of it; for as Job said, the sides of the poor blessed him, Job xxxi. 20, so must our lives praise God, 1 Peter ii. 9, show forth his virtues, not in word only, but in works. Our lives must be a constant hymn to God, though we should be silent. We remember the Lord's excellences, that we may imitate them, and express them to the life. The children of God serve only for this use, to represent God to the world, as the image in the glass representeth the person that looketh in it. So Isa. xl. 21, 'This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.' The impression of all the divine attributes and perfections must be left upon us, and copied out by us, plainly represented in our wisdom, purity, faithfulness, and godliness.

Secondly, The motives, because there is no part of God's worship to which we are more indisposed. Self-love will put us upon prayers and supplications, but love of God upon praises. We are inclined to the one by our own necessities, but we need to be stirred up to the other by pressing arguments. I will only mention those which are heaped up together in one place: Ps. cxlvii. 1, 'Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.'

1. It is good and profitable, a piece of service acceptable in God's sight: Ps. l. 23, 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.' It is a part of that spiritual worship required under the gospel, beyond all the sacrifices of the law. In other duties we expect something from God, but in this we bestow something on him.

All God's praises are a believer's advantage; every attribute is his storehouse: 'This is my beloved and my friend,' Cant. v. 16; Ps. cxxxv. 5, 'For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.' Yea, it is profitable as it is acceptable: Ps. lxxvii. 5-7, 'Let all the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee; then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our God, shall bless us; God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.' Pliny telleth us of a fountain that would rise, and swell, and overflow, at the playing of a pipe or flute, and when that ceased, would stop again. The fountain of mercy riseth, and swelleth, and overfloweth with new supplies of mercy when we praise and acknowledge the old.

2. It is pleasant and delightful, full of sweet refreshment. He that knoweth not this work is pleasant is unacquainted with it; for this ravishing, transporting joy is matter of experience. When is the gracious heart more delighted than when it feasts with God? All acts of obedience have a pleasure accompanying them, especially acts of worship, being the nobler part of the spiritual life; and among them praise: Ps. cxxxv. 3, 'Sing praises unto his name, for it is good and pleasant.' It is our duty in heaven to praise God, when we are in our highest felicity; therefore this is a work wherein we should rejoice to be employed. It is our reward rather than our work, the heaven that we have upon earth; and nothing so fit to cheer up the spirit as to

remember what a God we have in Christ. The very nature of it hath allurements enough to a gracious heart: Ps. xcii. 4, 'For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy works;' when God blesseth our meditations of his works with gladness.

3. It is comely and honourable to be about the employment of angels, to be heralds to proclaim the Lord's glory; nothing so comely for us as creatures, who have our whole being from him. As new creatures, we are set apart to be to the praise of his glorious grace in Christ, Eph. i. 12. It beareth all men as a debt, which they owe to God, though the wicked have no power to perform it. Indeed the new song doth ill become the old heart; but when there is an obligation and a capacity, then it is comely indeed. It becometh them to pay, and God to receive it from them: Ps. xxxiii. 1, 'Praise is comely for the upright.' All are bound to praise God, yet none will do it cheerfully and acceptably save the godly: they have obligations above all people in the world; they have a capacity and a heart to do it, and from them God most expecteth it.

*Secondly*, The continuance, that we should never cease praising God. David saith here, 'Seven times a day,' which is the number of perfection; and elsewhere you shall find equivalent expressions: Ps. xxxiv. 1, 'I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be continually in my mouth.' So Heb. xiii. 15, 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, giving thanks unto his name.' So Eph. v. 20, 'Giving thanks always unto God for all things.' What is the meaning of these extensive particles, 'continually,' 'always,' 'and at all times'? I answer—It is not to be understood as if we were without intermission to be employed in the actual exercise of formal and distinct thanksgiving. No; there are other necessary duties, which sometimes must divert us from it; but the meaning is—

1. That there is continual occasion of praising God. God is continually beneficial to us, blessing and delivering his people every day, and by new mercies giveth new matter of praise and thanksgiving. And there are some standing mercies which should never be forgotten, but be remembered before God every day, as redemption by Christ, with all the abundant benefits; and therefore the gospel church is represented by four beasts, or four living wights, together with four-and-twenty elders, who 'rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,' Rev. iv. 8. This is spoken to show that matter doth still continue of lauding and blessing God; and David saith, Ps. lxxi. 8, 'Let my mouth be filled with thy praise, and with thine honour all the day.' There is no moment of time wherein we are not obliged to praise and glorify God.

2. This must be understood of the preparation of the heart without intermission. We must cherish that disposition of heart which is necessary for it. A habit of thankfulness, a heart deeply affected with the Lord's excellences and mercies, should ever be found in us, and never laid aside; the instrument must be kept in tune, though it be not always played upon. David saith, Ps. lvi. 7, 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing, and give praise.' There must be a prepared heart, or a fixed purpose to praise the Lord. A renewed sense of God's favour, and fresh experience of his goodness to us, do



draw forth this preparation into act; yet the preparation must still remain with us, and we are to watch against dulness and indisposedness for this holy work. This preparation is more or less at times, for special mercies do raise, enliven, and inspirit the heart; but some measure of a thankful disposition, or bent and inclination to praise God, must never be wanting. As the Vestal fire among the Romans was ever kept in, on special occasions it was blown up; so there should be a habitual frame of heart to praise God at all times, but upon some special occasions it must more especially be excited and stirred up to it.

3. We must keep a constant course, and certain order of worshipping and praising God, both in public and private. In scripture they are said to do a thing always who do it upon stated occasions; as Mephibosheth did eat continually at David's table, 2 Sam. ix. 13; not as if always eating, but at the eating times; and the disciples are said to be continually in the temple, praising and blessing God, Luke xxiv. 53; that is, at the appointed times of worship. So we are to set forth certain times to bless and praise the Lord, who is continually good to us; especially on the sabbath. See the 92d psalm, the title, with the first verse, 'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High!' We are not to omit any occasion of formal and direct thanksgiving; acknowledge mercy and faithfulness, the two pillars of our confidence; as it is to be done constantly, which the former head called for, so frequently, that is, we must take every just occasion to perform it, let no special opportunity pass. The Lord's mercies are new every moment, Lam. iii. 21, and he loadeth us with his benefits daily, Ps. lxxviii. 19. Therefore as God's hand is ever open to bless, so should our mouths be ever open to praise; and we should never go from this exercise *nisi cum animo revertendi*, but with a purpose to return to it again. We have poor temporary affections towards God, and are very rare and infrequent in these duties; though we are daily receiving more and more benefits, yet we are slow and backward to this work. Every hour, every minute, every moment, God is obliging us to it anew; therefore we should say, 'I will praise him more and more.'

*Thirdly*, The ground of praising mentioned in the text, 'Because of thy righteous judgments.' Here observe—

1. The term is one of the notions by which the word of God is expressed. Surely all kind of mercies are the matter of praise, especially spiritual mercies; and among these, his word, for this is a great favour in itself; the church can as ill be without it as the world without the sun. Ps. xix., he compareth the sun and the law together. This is a peculiar favour: Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20, 'He hath given his word to Jacob; he hath not dealt so with every nation; praise ye the Lord.' The benefit of the scriptures is a precious gift of God to the church, and so it should be valued and esteemed; not counted a burden, as it is to them who are wholly earthly, and mind not heavenly things. Alas! what should we do without this help to ease our burdened minds, to understand God's providences, and learn the way to happiness, without these pure precepts and heavenly promises? What is it that raiseth in us the joy of faith, the patience of hope, that directeth us to a

straight and certain way to glory, but the word of God? This is the book of books, the food and comfort of our souls: Ps. lvi. 10, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word.' The best hold that faith can have of God is by his word. Let us own his word, and then, whatever his dispensations be, we have cause to praise him; here is a sure hope to fix upon, and a sure rule to walk by. It cannot be told in a breath what benefit we have by it: here is matter of glorying, and firm confidence; we need not fear men or devils as long as we have such a firm bulwark to secure us: here we have God's will made known, to give us notice of a blessed estate, and God's promise to give us an interest in it.

2. It noteth the dispensation of his providence, fulfilling his promises unto the faithful, and executing his threatenings on the wicked. He is the same in his works that he is in his word. His judgments are declared in his holy word, and executed in his righteous providence; and therefore it is said of them that have not his word, Ps. cxlvii. 20, 'As for his judgments, they have not known them; praise ye the Lord.' Where they have not his word, the Lord's dealing with men in justice and mercy, and the course which he observeth in ruling the world, is not understood; it lieth much in the dark, so that his providence is complicated with his word; and as it is the sentence of his word executed, is matter of praise. Well, then, we must praise God for his righteous government of the world, according to his word; whether it concern the church in general, or us in particular: Rev. xvi. 7, 'True and righteous are thy judgments.' But because particular providences come nearest home, and do most affect us, I shall instance in them:—

[1.] Let me show you how we should praise God for his favours, and fulfilling of promises to us, and hearing our prayers, and remembering us for good in our low estate. Joshua leaveth this note when dying, Josh. xxiii. 14, 'I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord hath spoken to you; all are come to pass, not one thing hath failed thereof.' Trust God, and try him, and you will return the same account with this, which was the result of all his experience. And Solomon taketh notice of God's fulfilling promises, 1 Kings viii. 20, 24, 'And the Lord hath performed his word that he spake; who hath kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him; thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand.' There is none of any acquaintance with God but find much of this. Now they should therefore praise the Lord, and love him; so David, Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, who hath heard the voice of my supplication.' When we have put promises in suit, and challenged God upon his word, he hath stood to it, justified our confidence; every fresh experience in this kind should excite new love and praise.

[2.] In time of affliction, when divine dispensations go cross to our affections, and it may be to our prayers, yet even then should we praise the Lord. Job when the Lord had taken away, he blesseth the name of the Lord, Job i. 21. The Lord is worthy of praise and honour when he giveth and when he taketh away, when he emptieth and when he

fillet us with blessings. A child of God is of a strange temper ; he can fear him for his mercies, Hosea iii. 5, and praise him for his judgments, as in the text. It argueth a great measure of grace to give thanks to God at all times and for all things : 1 Thes. v. 17, 18, ' Rejoice ever more ; pray without ceasing ; in everything give thanks.' Simply we cannot give thanks for afflictions as afflictions, as we cannot pray for them, nor joy in them, but as they are a means of good to us. A thankful frame of heart bringeth meat out of the eater, encouragement out of the saddest providences, and taketh occasion to lift up itself in the praises of God even from those things which are matter of greatest discouragement and heartless dejection to others. It seeth the hand of God working for good to him. And then, on the other side, an unthankful, repining, murmuring spirit soureth all our comforts, is ever querulous, whether crossed or pleased ; it entertaineth crosses with anger, and blessings with disdain. It is hard to be in any condition on this side hell wherein we have not cause to praise God ; even in great calamities, either for their fruit and issue, as our souls are bettered and humbled by them : Ps. cxix. 65, ' Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word.' Wherein ? In giving him faith, and sensible and seasonable correction, ver. 67 ; and presently, ' Thou art good, and doest good,' ver. 68. Or else for their mitigation, as to deem them not insupportable, 1 Cor. x. 13 ; that we are not consumed, Lam. iii. 22 ; that not to the full merit of our sins : Ezra ix. 13, ' Thou hast punished us less than we have deserved ;' that comforts come along with them ; that our afflictions do not exceed the measure of our comforts, 2 Cor. i. 5 ; that we have a good God still, who knoweth how to turn all to our advantage. Let us be persuaded he is well affected to us in Christ, and we will take anything kindly at his hand. All this is spoken that poor murmuring souls may not set out from so blessed a work ; yea, when other arguments fail, we may see the wisdom, justice, and faithfulness of God in his sharpest corrections : Ps. cxix. 75, ' I know that thy judgments are right, and in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' It is a great honour to God to speak good of his name when his hand is smart upon us.

*Use.* Let me press you now to three things :—

1. To the work.
2. Frequency and constancy herein.
3. To suit often God's word and works together.

First, To the work of praising God. Many are often complaining or begging, but seldom praising or giving thanks. Oh ! surely this should be more regarded, not always taken up with complaints against ourselves, and supplications for mercies ; but should some time give thanks, and praise the Lord ; it is the noblest part of our work, it is nearest the work of heaven. As love is the grace of heaven, so praise is the duty then in season. It is good to be preparing, setting our hearts in order for our eternal estate ; it is the work of angels ; when we praise God, we do the work of angels. The angels, according to the opinion of the ancient Hebrews, do every day sing praises to God, and that in the morning ; which they gather because the angel said to Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 26, ' Let me go, for the day breaketh ;' which place the Targum of Jerusalem thus explaineth, Let me go, for the pillar



of the morning ascendeth, and behold the hour approacheth that the angels are to sing. However that opinion be, sure we are that the angels ever bless God, and laud his holy name: Isa. vi. 1-3, the angels cried one to another, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' They were blessing God for creation; then the morning stars sang for joy, Job xxxviii. 4-6, for the nativity of Christ, Luke ii. 13, 14. They apprehend more of God's excellency and perfection in himself and in his works than we do, and are more sensible of his benefits than we are. Now if this be the work of angels, the highest and greatest of them, surely this work should be more prized by us. It is nobler than other duties; we serve God in our callings, but this work is a part of our misery, this burden was laid upon Adam after his fall, that in the sweat of his brow he should eat his bread, Gen. iii. 19. Though honest labour be a part of our obedience, yet it is also a part of our trouble and exercise. There are works of righteousness; as to give every man his due, these are good works; but they concern the benefit of man, the good of human society; whereas praise is more immediately directed to the honour of God. There are works of mercy, to relieve the poor, to help the distressed, to support the weak, to comfort the afflicted; these are good works indeed, and a very noble part of our service, to be reckoned to our thank-offerings as praise: Heb. xiii. 15, 16, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name: but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' It is godlike to do good, and a more blessed thing to give than to receive, Acts xx. 35; as God giveth to all, and receiveth of none; but still this redoundeth to men. There are *opera cultus*, the fourth sort of works, works of worship; internal, as humbling our soul, repenting of our sins, and asking pardon; these are good works indeed, but such as imply our misery and imperfection. External, as prayer, hearing, and reading, and other acts of communion with God; but when we give thanks, this is more noble. In other duties, God is bestowing something on us; but here, in our way, we bestow something upon God. In prayer, as beggars; in hearing, as scholars and disciples, we come to expect something from him. Here we come to put honour upon God; in our way it is a kind of recompense, or paying our debts to him, by word or deed.

Now the reasons why men are so backward to this work are—

1. Because we have so little of the love of God. Self-love puts us upon supplication, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving. It is a token of great love to praise God without ceasing. We are eager to have blessings, and then forget to return and give God the glory.

2. And partly neglect of observation. We do not gather up matter of thanksgiving: Col. ii. 4, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving.' We should continually observe God's answers and visits of love, manifestations of himself to the world. The reason, then, why we have no more pleasure in praising God is, because we observe not so heedfully as we should his mercy and truth fulfilled.

Secondly, To frequency and constancy therein. Frequency in this

duty doth not beget a satiety and loathing, but rather a greater delight to continue in it. But here arise two questions:—

*Quest.* 1. What time must be necessarily spent in acts of worship and adoration, prayer, praise, and immediate converse with God?

*Ans.* 1. It is a truth that our whole time must be given to God, for a Christian is a dedicated thing, a living sacrifice, Rom. xii. 1. Now the beast offered in sacrifice with all the appurtenances was God's; a Christian, by the consent of his own vows, is not master of anything. After a vow of all, we must not keep back part, as did Ananias and Sapphira. A Christian hath given his whole self, time, and strength to God.

2. Though our whole time be given to God, yet for several uses and purposes. God's service is not of one sort, and he is served in our callings as well as in our worship. Man in paradise was to dress the garden, Gen. ii. 15, as well as to contemplate God. Common actions may become sacred by their end and use: Isa. xxiii. 18, 'And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord.'

3. These several duties must not interfere and clash one with another, for God's commands are not contrary, but subordinate. We must not so attend upon religion as to neglect the service of our generation, as instruments of God's providence; nor suffer the lean kine to devour the fat, the world to encroach upon religion.

4. The particular seasons for each duty are not determined and set down in scripture.

[1.] Partly because God trusteth love, and will see whether we have a mind to cavil and wrangle and dispute away duties, rather than practise them.

[2.] And partly because he would leave something to the conduct of his Spirit, and the choice of spiritual wisdom: Ps. cxii. 5, 'A good man will guide his affairs with discretion.'

[3.] And partly because men's occasions and conditions are different, and he would not have his law to be a snare.

[4.] And partly because there are so many occasions to praise God, that if we do not want a heart, we will be much and frequent in this duty.

5. Though there be no express rules, there is enough to prevent carelessness and looseness. God calleth to us in very large and comprehensive terms, 'always,' 'continually,' 'and in everything.' The example of the saints who night and day were praising God: 'Paul and Silas at midnight sang praises to God,' Acts xvi. 29. So Ps. cxix. 62, 'At midnight will I rise to give thanks to thee, because of thy righteous judgments.' And in the text, 'Seven times a day.' Besides, there are daily solemn services, personal and domestic, to be performed, Mat. vi. 11; 'Watching daily at my gates,' Prov. viii. 34. Morning and evening they were to offer a lamb, Num. xxviii. 4.

6. There are general hints and limits enough to become<sup>1</sup> love: Ps. lxxi. 14, 'But I will hope continually, and will praise thee yet more and more.' Enough to keep the heart in good plight, and maintain faith and hope in God, and keep up a spiritual intercourse of communion with God by daily offering up prayers and praises to him.

<sup>1</sup> So in original.—ED.

*Quest. 2.* Whether it be convenient to state and fix a time?

David had his set times, so had Daniel; and surely, all occasions, opportunities, and abilities considered, it may be a help to us, and make the spiritual life more orderly, to have set, stated, fixed times for the performance of this duty.

Thirdly, To suit God's word and works together, laws and judgments: Rom. i. 18, 'God hath revealed his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness;' Heb. ii. 2, 'Every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' Deliverances and promises fetch all out of the covenant: Ps. cxxviii. 5, 'The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion;' that relateth to the covenant made to the church; this checketh atheism, sweeteneth our duties, allayeth our fears, and resolveth our doubts, and helpeth us in the delightful exercise of praising God.

### SERMON CLXXIX.

*Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.*—VER. 165.

ALL that live in this world find this life a warfare, Job vii. 1; much more must the godly expect difficulties and conflicts: Ps. xxxiv. 19, 'Many are the troubles of the righteous.' To the eye of flesh, no condition seemeth worse and more obnoxious to misery than the condition of those that serve God; yet in reality none are in a better estate; whatever happeneth, they are at peace, built on the cornerstone which God hath laid in Zion, and therefore in all the commotions and troubles of the world they are safe. This is that which David here observeth.

In the former verse he had told us that it was his custom to praise God seven times a day for his righteous judgments, and now he sheweth the reason, namely, from the ordinary course and tenor of these judgments, or dispensation of his providence, which was to give peace to them that keep his law, 'Great peace,' &c.

In these words you have—

1. A privilege, *great peace have they.*
2. The qualification, *that love thy law.*
3. The effect, *nothing shall offend them.*

Let me open these branches.

First, The privilege is peace, and that is threefold—(1.) External;

(2.) Internal; (3.) Eternal.

1. External, in the house, the city, or country, and societies where we live. In this sense it is taken, Ps. cxxii. 6, 7, 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee; peace be within thy walls.' Now this is not all that is meant here, for this is a common benefit, though often vouchsafed for the sake of them that love God; as music cannot be heard alone, though intended but to one person, yet others share with him in the benefit of it. Or if you understand it of his own personal peace, or being at amity with men, they do not always enjoy that. God's best children are often forced to be



men of contention, that is, passively; they are contended with and troubled in the world, Jer. xv. 10. And therefore the apostle saith, Rom. xii. 18, 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' It is not always to be had, but we should endeavour to live in peace with all men.

2. There is internal peace, arising either from justification, Rom. v. 1; or sanctification: Isa. xxxii. 17, 'The fruit of righteousness is peace;' or from contentment with our condition, Phil. iv. 7. By justification we have peace, when God is reconciled and made a friend; by sanctification we have peace, when we walk evenly with God; and by contentment we have peace, when our affections are calmed and rightly ordered, or set upon more worthy and noble objects, so that we are not troubled at the loss of outward things. These are the ingredients necessary to eternal peace, which is, I suppose, principally intended here—inward comfort and contentment of mind.

3. There is eternal peace, that happy and quiet estate which we shall enjoy in heaven, when we are above all desertions, temptations, and the trouble of hostile incursions, when we shall never have frown more from God's face, when our sun shall always shine without cloud or night, when our strife is over, and our enemies that do infest us now are all overcome. There is no Satan to tempt us, no serpent in the upper paradise, no world to trouble or divert us; for all the wicked are bound hand and foot, and cast into unquenchable fire; there is no flesh to clog us, for all is perfect. This glorious estate is called peace in scripture; as Rom. ii. 10, 'God will give glory, honour, peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile;' and Rom. viii. 6, 'To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.' By death is meant the torments of hell, and by life and peace the joys of heaven. And, speaking of the blessedness of those that die in the Lord, he saith, Isa. lvii. 2, 'They shall enter into peace.' Now this cannot principally be intended here, for the man of God speaketh of what we have, not of what we hope for; and he speaks of God's righteous dispensations here in the world, for which he praised him; and therefore it is meant of our peace here; but yet it is the sense of peace and happiness we shall have in heaven that bath an influence upon the tranquillity of our hearts and minds here.

Secondly, Let me a little explain the qualification, 'that love thy law.' The word 'law' is sometimes taken in a limited sense for the decalogue or moral law; or else, more generally, for the whole doctrine of the covenant, the whole tenor of religion, law, and gospel. So here and elsewhere; as 'The isles shall wait for thy law,' Isa. xlii. 4; that is, shall readily receive and embrace his doctrine. So Dan. vi. 5, 'We shall not find occasion against this Daniel, unless we find it in the law of his God;' that is, in his religion. So Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is the law of the Lord.' By the law of the Lord is meant the whole word of God. Well, now, it is said they love his law; not only keep it, but love it. A child of God is sometimes described by his faith, sometimes by his hope or by his fear, but more often by his love, that commanding and swaying affection that sets the whole soul a-work. They love thy law; there is emphasis in that.

Thirdly, Here is the consequent, 'Nothing shall offend them.' The Septuagint renders it *οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς σκάνδαλον*, they have not scandals, they have their troubles, but no stumbling-blocks: 1 John ii. 10, 'There is no occasion of stumbling in them.' There is the same word used there which the Septuagint useth here. Scandal is either active or passive, given or taken; that which is taken out of weakness, as young professors, or out of pride and malice; they interpreted many things in a worse sense when they knew it might be interpreted in a better. Now, nothing shall scandalise them. Peace with God prevents the scandals of weakness, and love to the law prevents scandals out of pride and malice. Nothing shall scandalise them. Many things are apt to scandalise men, as God's judgments, for which David did so often every day and so solemnly praise God. But they that love his law, and thereby obtain great peace, they will not stumble at God's dispensations, let them be never so cross to their desires and expectations, because they have a sure covenant, that is, a sure rule, and sure promises. They are not scandalised by the miscarriages of men; they can distinguish between the art and the artificer; if the artist fail, the art is not to be blamed. The reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, it doth not offend them, for they have found God in that way others speak evil of. Gold is gold though cast into the dirt; dogs will bark at the moon when it shineth brightest. Would any man be troubled if a cripple mock him for going uprightly? Shall we leave the ways of God, wherein we have found comfort and peace, because others speak against them? He is not offended at this. But that which is meant here is such an offence as turneth them from God, otherwise a good man may fall and stumble, but not into final apostasy, and he is usually kept from lesser offences. A child of God may be offended in lesser cases, but not so offended as to fall and break his neck.

But why is it called great peace? It noteth the excellency of this kind of peace; it is not only peace, but great peace, such as is rich and glorious: Phil. iv. 7, 'A peace that passeth all understanding;' or it may note the degree and quantity of it, abundance of peace, as it is, Ps. xxix. 11, and Ps. lxxii. 3; I speak peace to them that are afar off; or peace like a river, Isa. xlvi. 18, or pure peace.

Three points I shall handle—

*Doct. 1.* That it is the property of God's children to love his law.

*Doct. 2.* Those that love the law shall have great peace.

*Doct. 3.* This blessed peace maketh a man hold on in the way of obedience, whatever impediments, stumbling-blocks, or discouragements he meets withal.

First point, That it is the property of God's children, not only to keep his law, but to love his law.

This is often spoken of in this psalm; now I prove it thus:—

*Reason 1.* They love God, and therefore they love his law: how doth that follow? The love that passeth between God and us is not an arbitrary love of equals, but the necessary dutiful respect that inferiors owe to their superiors, such as children owe to their father, servants to their master, subjects to their prince and governor. Therefore it is not a fellow-like familiarity, but a dutiful submission

and subjection to God's authority ; and therefore, if we love God, we will love his law. It is God's condescension that he will use us like friends in regard of communion, and converse with us, as Abraham was called God's friend, James ii. 23 ; yet we are but servants, though we are used like friends, and there is a debt and bond of duty lying upon us ; and so if we bear any respect to God, it must be determined by our respect to his laws, and demonstrated by our obedience to them, not by acts of ordinary courtesy and kindness. 'This is often spoken of : John xiv. 15, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments ;' and ver. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ;' John xv. 14, 'Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.' Though none condescendeth to such acts of kindness and friendship as God in Christ hath done, yet still he standeth upon his sovereignty : 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' God's love to us is indeed a love of bounty, but our love is a love of duty and service. I have not yet done with this reason. It necessarily follows from the love of God, though you abstract him from the notion of a sovereign and lawgiver, and should love him only because of the excellency of his nature. Now thus I argue : The same reasons that carry us to love God, do carry us also to love his law ; for he that loveth God, will love anything of God, wherever he finds it. He will love his word, he will love his saints ; but chiefly his word, for that is most to be loved, because that hath most of God in it. The law is a copy of his holiness ; the tract of God is in the creatures, there is his *vestigium*. His image is in his saints, they resemble his divine qualities, but his most lively print and character is upon his word. The image of God in his saints is obscured by their infirmities, but the law of God is perfect, there is no blemish there ; this is the fairest copy and draught of his holiness. Nay, once more, in this argument abstract the consideration of his authority and the perfection of his being, yet our obligations to God as our benefactor will enforce this love to his word, and make it sweet to us, because it is the letter of our friend and benefactor, and the signification of his will to whom we owe life and breath and all things ; and therefore, though the law did not deserve to be loved for its own sake, yet it should be sweet for his sake from whom it cometh. He hath evidenced much love to us, as we are creatures ; but much more love in Christ, as we are sinners ; and it should be acceptable to us upon his account. Love and gratitude will constrain us to do his will and regard his commands, 2 Cor. v. 14. If we have any sense of our great obligations to him, it must needs be so.

*Reason 2.* God's children find such an excellency in his law that they must needs love it. As it is—

1. A plain clear word, that doth fully discover the will of God, and not leave duty to our own uncertain guesses. It puts duty into a plain stated course, how we may come to be blessed for ever more ; Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.' Light is pleasant, but darkness is uncomfortable. When Aristotle was asked why all men do love the light, his answer was, That was the question of a blind man ; sense discovereth sufficiently why we should love the light. Certainly if you ask why men do not love the word of God, it is because the god of this world hath blinded their eyes, 2 Cor. iv. 4.



2. It is a good word, because it is suited to our necessities ; so we read, Heb. vi. 5, ' If so be ye have tasted the good word.' Is food good when a man is hungry ? Is drink good when a man is thirsty ? Then the word of God is good, for it suiteth with the necessities of our souls, as these things do with our bodies: 1 Tim. i. 15, ' This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' The gospel is a doctrine fitted for hungry consciences. If our inward senses were not benumbed, and we were not so Christ-glutted and gospel-glutted as we are, oh ! how precious would these tenders of grace be to our souls !

3. It is a pure word ; so David gives the reason in the 140th verse of this psalm, ' Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' Hypocrites will now and then relish the comforts of the gospel, be affected with the word, because it speaketh such good things to poor sinners ; but God's children love the word for its purity and holiness. It meeteth with every sin, and directeth them to every duty necessary for the enjoyment of the blessed God. It is not comfort only must draw our love, but holiness. This argueth the life and power of grace, when we would not have the law of God less strict and holy than it is, but love it for this very reason, because it is pure, strict, and holy. You would not think a beggar loves you because he liketh your alms, but he is loath to stay with you for your service, and live under the orderly government of your family. Most men's love to the word is such, they delight in the comforts of it as an alms, but they hate the duty of it as a task ; they had rather let the duties of it alone, if it could be without danger, and forbear them if they durst. Oh ! but when your hearts consent to the purity of the law, and you would choose that life which it points out unto you rather than any life in the world, or the most absolute freedom that the heart of man can imagine, so that you love your master the more because he hath appointed you such work, this is true affection to God and his word : you had rather live in holiness than sin, if you had your freest choice ; it is a sign then you love holiness for holiness' sake, and admire that in the word which is most worthy, its strictness.

4. It is a sublime word : ver. 129, ' Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them.' Here are excellent truths, glorious mysteries, fit to exercise the sharpest wits in the world, a study fitter for angels than men, 1 Peter i. 12. I do not speak this to stir up curiosity, which is a moral itch, a lust of the mind, and nothing more opposite to true love than lust, but to raise men to a due esteem of the scriptures, which they are wont to condemn for their simplicity and plainness ; it is full of high mysteries, though it may be read with profit by simple people, or any who desire knowledge. Sensual men, that are drowned in worldly delights, only look to the comfort of the animal life, and value all things as that is gratified ; but those that look to the spiritual life, and the ennobling of their souls, they will find the only sublime wisdom in the word of God : Deut. iv. 6, ' Keep these statutes and do them ; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What pitiful notions had the philosophers, and the wisest of the heathen, concern-

ing God, and angels, and providence, and the creation of the world, and the souls of men, and the happiness of the other world, and the way to attain it! When the heathen came to be first acquainted with the Jews, they wondered at their wisdom and skill. These things would beget admiration in us if we did meditate on them, and contented not ourselves with a slight and customary rehearsal of them. Here are deep mysteries to exercise the greatest wits, and therefore consider them more.

5. It is a sure word: Ps. xix. 7, 'The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.' These directions may be safely relied upon, and will not disappoint us; for they are not the guesses of deceived men, nor the collections only of the most observing and wisest men, or the result of their infallible experiences, but inspiration of the infallible God; and therefore a sensible heart, that knoweth what it is to live in a troublesome world, and hath been exercised with doubts, knoweth the comfort of a sure rule and sure promises. Oh! what a comfort is this in the midst of the uncertainties of the present life!

*Reason* 3. There is no keeping the law without loving the law. There is a keeping the commandments by way of defence, and by way of obedience; a keeping of them by way of preservation, when we will not suffer them to be violated or wrested from us by others; and a keeping of them by way of observation, when we are mindful of them, are careful to observe them ourselves. This latter is the meaning of the scripture notion of keeping the law. Now this cannot be without love; nothing can hold the heart to it but love. What bonds will you cast upon yourselves! But if a temptation come, you will break them all, as Sampson did the cords wherewith he was bound. It is not your promises, vows, covenants, resolutions; not your former experiences of comfort, when put to no trial; all is nothing to love. To evidence this to you, three things are needful—labour, valour, and self-denial.

1. To keep the commandments is a laborious thing, and requireth great diligence. Now love is that disposition that maketh us laborious and diligent. If anything keep a man to his work, it is love. Labour and love are often put together: Heb. vi. 10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love;' 1 Thes. i. 3, 'Your work of faith, and labour of love.' It is not a slothful and idle affection, but will make a man take any pains, and endure any toil, *nescit amor molimina*—love never findeth difficulties. The reason why they object difficulties is because they love not. The church of Ephesus, when she lost her first love, she left her first works, Rev. ii. 4. Our Lord Jesus, when he had work for Peter to do, gageth his heart upon this point: John xxi. 15, 'Simon Peter, lovest thou me? feed my sheep, feed my lambs.' No man can endure the toil of the ministry, and the many troubles and difficulties he meeteth with in the discharge of it, without love to Christ. It is love sets all the wheels in the soul a-going.

2. To keep the commandments requireth spirit and courage, not only the labour of an ox, but the animosity and courage of a lion; for we are not only to work, but fight and contend for our duty against the enemies of our salvation. Now the most valorous and courageous

affection is love. A cowardly lover is a monster, one that hath all liver and no heart. The poets in their fictions ascribe the valour of the person whom they would represent as noble and heroic to the strength of their love. Certainly the heroic acts of the martyrs came all from love. Others will not be at the charge of keeping the commandments of God that lie cross to their profits and pleasures; but love will cause us to do the will of God, whatever it cost us. Yea, it is loath to serve God with that which cost nothing: Cant. viii. 6, 7, 'Love is strong as death, many waters cannot quench love.' Death conquereth the stoutest, but cannot conquer love: 'They loved not their lives to the death,' Rev. xii. 11. The waters of affliction cannot quench it, no threatenings, no promises can quench it. Love will not be bribed from Christ, nor frightened from Christ. You will be assaulted on both sides, with hopes and fears, but nothing shall fright or allure the soul from Christ.

3. To keep the commandments there needeth much self-denial and submission, that he may have a heart to stoop to the least intimation of the will of God, though it be against your own will, and against your own carnal sense and inclination and interest. A man can never keep the commandments till he thus deny himself; therefore the world wondereth what is the reason that men do so submit against their humour and interest. And say, If this be to be vile, I will be more vile; as holy David said: nothing can do this but love. When a man loveth you, you have the keys of his heart, you can open and shut it when you please. Sampson like a child submitted to Delilah, because of his love to her. So Gen. xxxiv., Hamor and Shechem submitted to any terms, to be circumcised, because of the delight the young man had to Dinah; the father loved the son, and the son loved Dinah, and therefore both submitted to that hateful, painful ceremony. Jacob's service for Rachel seemed but a few years because of his love to her, Gen. xxix. 20. So if we love the law of God, we will submit to the duties of it, against the hair and bent of our hearts.

#### *Use 1. Examination.*

1. Do we receive the truth of God in the love thereof? Do we embrace the offers of Jesus Christ heartily? Acts ii. 41, 'They received the word gladly.' Do you keep up your relish of the gospel, delight to hear of Christ, to read of Christ, to meditate of Christ, and the doctrine of salvation? not one part, but all? Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of God;' the whole law. Ungodly men will catch at promises, seem to show a love to these, but grudge at the mandatory part of the word. Do you delight when it is pressed upon you, when you are warned of your danger? know most of your duty, and the way how to attain your blessedness? Do you love it most when you feel the tragical effects of it? As the apostle saith, 'The commandment came, and sin revived, and I died.'

2. Do you heartily take Christ's yoke upon you, and frame yourselves to practise what he hath required of you? They that love the law cannot rest in mere speculations, and be careless in the duties required of them. Love cannot be hidden, but it will break forth into action. If it be in your hearts, it will break out in your lives: Ps. xl. 8, 'The law of God is in my heart.' You will make conscience



of duty, 1 John ii. 4. Love is found to be solid and real when we are tender of Christ's laws; in vain else do we talk of the new birth, of the work of grace, or having an interest in Christ, and the like, unless we keep his law.

3. Do you practise it willingly, and without grudging? 1 John v. 3, 'His commandments are not grievous.' They that love the law will not count the work tedious. God doth not look to the work, praying, hearing, strict observing his ordinances, or Lord's day; but minds the will for the deed, not the deed for the will, whether willingly or unwillingly. God dealeth with us as rational creatures. If your ox draw your plough, and your ass carry his burden, you care not much whether it be done willingly or unwillingly; but God dealeth with us as obliged, and looketh that love should constrain us, and influence our actions; and God dealeth with us as renewed creatures, that have a suitableness to their work, Heb. viii. 10; Ps. xl. 2, when rather from him than with him he delights greatly in God's commandments; Ps. cxii. 1, delights to know, believe, and obey God's word; and God expects it from us, because of the pleasures that do accompany well-doing, Prov. iii. 17. The speculation of a worthy truth affects the mind, but practice doth more, as more intimately acquainted with it.

Use 2. It shows—

1. How far they are from the temper of God's people that dispute away duties rather than practise them, cavil at their work rather than readily accept it.

2. They do not love the law that are always full of excuses, and pretend occasions to neglect the service of God; excuses are always a sign of a naughty heart. The sinner's *non vacat* is indeed *non placet*: Luke xiv. 18, 'They all began to make excuses.' If we did not want a heart, we should not want an occasion to manifest our respects to God.

3. It shows how far they are from the temper of God's people that are easily discouraged with difficulties; love will make us break through all, 2 Cor. v. 14. Love hath a constraining force, counts nothing too dear to be parted with for God's sake; they that are weary of well-doing, they are out of their element; as they in Malachi<sup>1</sup> inquired, When will the sabbath be over? They that brought but a sorry lamb, cried out, Oh, what a weariness! Again, they that love the law are not troubled about the strictness of the law, but the unsuitableness of their own hearts. God's children are grieved for that weariness and uncomfortableness they find in God's service, glad of any enlargement of heart. Lust is grievous, but not the commandment: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me (not from the law, but) from the body of this death?' But others, when the truth shineth round about them, they receive it not in the love thereof.

Doct. 2. Those that love the law shall have great peace. Let me prove this.

1. They shall have peace.

2. Great peace.

First, They shall have peace.

1. Because the God of peace is their God; they are assured of his love and favourable acceptance. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia*—if God be with us, who can be against us? If he smileth on us, it is enough, though all the world should be against us; for it is God's wrath that maketh us miserable, and God's love that maketh us happy.

2. Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of peace, is their Saviour, Isa. ix. 9. He hath made articles of peace between God the Father and us, and drawn them into a covenant of grace, called the covenant of his peace, Isa. liv. 10; and this founded upon his blood, which is the price given to purchase our peace, and to set all things at rights between God and us, Col. i. 20; Isa. liii. 5. Having made peace between God and us. No less would serve the turn completely to satisfy the justice of God for our wrong, and to purchase his favour for us.

3. The Spirit, who is a Spirit of peace, Gal. v. 22; it is one of his fruits; he worketh it in us as a sanctifier and as a comforter.

[1.] As a spirit of sanctification he doth dispossess Satan, and subdueth that rebellious disposition that is naturally in us against God, and maketh us accept the offer of friendship and reconciliation with God, and to yield up ourselves servants to righteousness, unto holiness, and then accordingly to walk as people that are at amity with God.

(1.) Your first resignation in faith and repentance is a ground of peace, and wrought in us by the Spirit: Rom. xv. 13, 'Now the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' Together with our faith, and in and by our faith, the Holy Ghost worketh this joy and peace! When we come to sue out our pardon in his name, to receive the atonement, and to resign up ourselves to God's use, then is the foundation laid: 'Give the hand to the Lord,' 2 Chron. xxx. 8.

(2.) This peace is confirmed by holy walking in the Spirit, or perfecting holiness through the power of the Holy Ghost: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them;' Jer. vi. 16, 'Ask for the good old way, and walk therein, and you shall find peace to your souls.' Keep close to God and you will have peace, otherwise not. Peace with God and thine own conscience is a very tender thing; you had need be chary of it. If you grieve the Spirit, you will find it to your bitter cost. When sinful dispositions are indulged and nourished, our peace is beclouded, and hangeth on uncertain terms.

[2.] As a comforter, whose office it is to give us a sense of God's love, and to help conscience to judge of our state and actions. The Spirit representeth God as a Father, and sheweth us what things are given us of God, and dissipateth and scattereth all the black thoughts that are in the soul: Isa. lvii. 19, 'I create the fruit of the lips to be peace.' Peace is a sovereign plaister, God maketh it stick, and then all the world cannot deprive them of this peace. Creation and annihilation belong to the same power; the world can never give, nor take; it is God's work, and he will maintain it.

Secondly, It shall be great peace, as to the nature and degree of it, as was before explained.

1. For the nature of it ; it is not an ordinary peace, but of a higher nature : John xiv. 27, ' My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ; not as the world giveth, give I unto you : " let not your hearts be troubled." Wherein doth it differ from the world's peace ? The world's peace is oftentimes in sin, a concord in evil, a lethargy portending sadder troubles ; but this is a holy peace, Prov. iii. 17. That is a crazy peace that is soon broken and distorted, depending on the uncertainty of present affairs and the mutable affections of men ; the more secure they are, the sadder trouble at hand : but this is an everlasting peace, which we have now in the way, and shall have in death, and then for ever. The world's peace is outward ; it is but at best a freedom from outward troubles, when they are at enmity with God ; but this is a peace with God himself, Prov. xvi. 7. The world's peace pleaseth the outward man, but this is a solid soul-satisfying peace, a peace that guardeth heart and mind, Phil. iv. 7.

2. For the degree, it is many times in a great measure enjoyed ; it may be more or less, as an interest in God's favour is more or less in us. And it is not perfect in this life ; there may be clouds and interruptions, but as our holiness increaseth, so doth our peace ; a little holiness, a little peace ; but they that love thy law, have great peace.

*Object.* How have God's children great peace ? None seem more troubled and harassed with outward afflictions, nor walk more mournfully than they do.

*Ans.* It is true this peace doth not exclude trouble from carnal men in the world ; they may have little outward peace, yet they shall have as much of that as God seeth good for them, Job v. 23, 24 ; but inward peace, which is peculiar to them. They have God for their friend, are quieted with a true sense and apprehension of his love and favour to them. It is true, as to this inward peace, God's children may sometimes be without it ; they that love the law have a greater sense of sin than others. Wicked men swallow sins without remorse ; but they are very apprehensive of displeasing God. But we must distinguish between the time of settling this peace, and when it is settled. For a time they may walk sadly ; their peace is not grown up ; light is sown for the righteous. Many times they sow in tears, but reap in joy. Sometimes their love to the law is intermitted, so their peace may be interrupted : But their worst condition is better than a carnal man's best, as the darkest cloudy day is brighter than the brightest night ; there is some comfort and staying upon God in the worst condition.

*Use 1.* Let us from hence see the sad condition of carnal men. This clause, ' love thy law,' is exclusive, and confineth it to one sort of men. The unjustified, the unsanctified want this peace. God saith of them, they should not enter into my rest, Ps. xcv. 11. The rest is begun in this life in reconciliation with God and peace of conscience, and perfected in an everlasting refreshment in that to come. Their sins are not pardoned, and therefore continually fear ; they have often refused God's peace, and therefore cannot enjoy comfort with any security, nor bear troubles with any patience and quiet of mind, nor come into God's presence with any cheerfulness, nor wait for eternal rest with any certain hope : ' There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' Isa.



xlvi. 22; Ps. lvii. 20, 21. It is not allowed to wicked men, nor vouchsafed to them. It is true they may have a peace, but it is either in sin or from sin; they do not mind the condition of their souls, a blind presumption that merely cometh from God's forbearance, or worldly happiness in prosperity. Carnal men seem to be in as great quietness as the children of God; as the deep sea in a calm, which seemeth to be as quiet as other waters, until a storm and tempest doth arise, then troubled, and cannot rest.

*Use 2.* To persuade us to love the law of God by this argument, because we shall have great peace; for the promise is made to this love.

But you will say, How must we show love to the law of God, that we may obtain this effect?

I answer—Practise the duties it calleth for in order to peace.

1. Accept the articles of peace, that are proclaimed between God and mankind in and through Christ. Eph. ii. 17, there is peace preached, not only to them that are afar off, but to them that are nigh; there is not only a price paid, but an offer made. Embrace it, lay hold upon it by faith; God is in good earnest with you, 2 Cor. v. 20. Oh! love this good word; it is the gladdest tidings that ever sounded in the ears of lost sinners. Now is your time, agree with your adversary while he is in the way, before you be cast into prison, Luke xii. 58. If you lose this opportunity, and do not embrace the offered friendship, God will be exceeding angry: Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' 2 Chron. xxx. 8, 'Therefore give the hand to the Lord.'

2. Perform the duty of thankfulness which God requires, Mat. xi. 29. Peace is the fruit of sanctification, as well as justification; it is not to be found elsewhere, Isa. xxxii. 17.

3. Be much in communion with God and trading with heaven: 'Acquaint thyself with God,' Job xxii. 21.

4. Be tender of your peace, when it is once settled, of doing anything that may cause war between God and the soul, Ps. lvi. 8. Take heed of venturing your peace for the vanities of the world, those sinful and foolish courses which will lay you open to God's wrath and displeasure: Ps. xxxvii. 11, 'The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.'

## SERMON CLXXX.

*Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.*—VER. 165.

I now come to the effect, 'Nothing shall offend them.' The Septuagint, οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς σκάνδαλον, there is no scandal in them. The apostle John applieth the same phrase or form of speech to him that loveth his brother, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ σκάνδαλον, there is no occasion of stumbling in him. The meaning is, they shall not be in danger of

those snares and temptations which the world is full of, and which frequently bring other men to sin and ruin; or nothing shall wound or hurt them, or cause them to fall in their journey to heaven.

*Doct.* That the love of God's law is a great means to carry a believer straight on his way to heaven, whatever temptations he hath to the contrary.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What scandals and offences are.

2. How a believer is preserved.

*First,* What scandals and offences are? I answer—Scandals literally signifieth temptations, or inducements to sin, any stumbling-block or hindrance laid in a man's way, by which the passenger is detained or diverted, or at which, if he be not careful, he is apt to stumble or fall. Spiritually it signifieth anything that may discourage or divert us from our duty to God, or may occasion us to fall, to the great loss or ruin of our souls.

Now, concerning these scandals or offences, I shall give you these distinctions. With respect to the subject, there are three sorts of scandals:—(1.) Taken, but not given; (2.) Given, but not taken; (3.) Both given and taken.

1. There is offence taken where none is given. Thus Christ himself, in his person, sufferings, doctrine, may be an offence to the carnal and unbelieving world. In his person, as he is said to be, 1 Peter ii. 8, 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them that stumbled at the word, being disobedient, whereunto they were also appointed.' He that is to the believer a corner-stone elect and precious, is to the obstinate prejudiced unbeliever, with allusion to those that travel by land, a stone of stumbling, to those that travel by sea, a rock of offence; his slender appearance was an offence to them. As to his sufferings, it is said, 1 Cor. i. 23, that 'Christ crucified is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.' They had not a Messiah to their mind, though such an one as the scriptures had before described. His doctrine: Mat. xv. 12, 'His disciples said to him, Knowest thou not that the pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?' Again, John vi. 61, when they murmured at his saying, Except ye eat my flesh, 'Doth this offend you?' Flesh and blood are apt to stumble in God's plainest ways: at the doctrine of God, which is strict and spiritual; the worship of God, that is simple and without pomp; the dispensations of God, in chastising and afflicting his people; they are all an offence to carnal and worldly men, and so through their sin prove an impediment to the success of the gospel. But this offence is causeless, and without any just ground; and without special grace, when it prevaieth with men, will prove their eternal ruin and destruction. God never intended to satisfy men's lusts and humours; truth must be taught, whoever be displeased; therefore all our care must be to avoid this kind of offence: Mat. xii. 6, 'Blessed is he that is not offended in me,' that doth not stumble at Christ because of the cross, nor the holiness of his doctrine, nor the simplicity of his worship, nor the despicableness of his followers, nor the troubles that attend his service.

2. Offence may be given where none is taken, as when men counsel others to evil, or reproach the holy ways of God; as when Peter dissuaded Christ from suffering: Mat. xvi. 23, 'Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art *σκάδαλον*, an offence to me.' It was *scandalum in se*, though not *ratione eventus*,—not that Christ was offended by it; when the heart is guarded against evil counsel, or the infection of evil example. So for reproaches, they are a means of betraying the soul into sin, and prejudicing it against godliness; but the godly are well fortified, they can see loveliness in such ways as are hated and discountenanced in the world. As David: Ps. cxix. 127, 'They have made void thy law, therefore I love thy commandments above gold, above fine gold;' and Moses, Heb. xi. 26, 'Esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' They are no more moved at the world's scorn than a man that is straight and upright would be at the mocks of cripples because he doth not limp and walk after their fashion; they can see honour in disgrace, and beauty in God's despised ways.

3. Offences also may be both given and taken; as when one provoketh, and another is provoked to evil, enticed by false doctrine, corrupt counsel, or evil example. False doctrine: Mat. xv. 14, 'The blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch;' not one, but both, the blind follower as well as the blind guide. Or by corrupt counsel, as Ahab was seduced by the false prophets, 1 Kings xxii., and Amnon by his friend Jonadab was drawn to incest, 2 Sam. xiii. 6; he as readily obeyeth the other's wicked counsel, as he was to give it. So for evil example; it secretly tainteth us. The prophet complaineth, Isa. vi. 5, 'I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among people of polluted lips.' It is hard to avoid the contagion of iniquities with which we do daily and familiarly converse, as to live in an infected air without taint, or to walk in the sun and not be insensibly tanned. We leaven one another by our coldness and deadness in religion. It is hard to be fresh in salt waters, to live among offences and not be offended.

Secondly, With respect to the object or matter of it. A scandal may be given, *dicto aut facto*—(1.) In word; (2.) In deed.

1. In word, by evil counsel or carnal suggestion: Ps. i. 1, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.' As carnal friends and parents that relish not the word of life themselves, out of prejudice against godliness and holy zeal, dissuade their children and servants from attending on the exercises of religion, as praying, hearing, meditation, lest they grow mopish and melancholy, and lest a zealous minding God's interest should hinder their preferment, had rather see them lewd than holy; but, Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not father and mother,' &c. Or by atheistical, or obscene and carnal discourse: 1 Cor. xv. 53, 'Evil communications corrupt good manners;' Eph. v. 4, 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient.'

2. In deed, and so three ways:—

[1.] When they do things that are simply unlawful, and so propagate their sin to others by their example: Prov. xx. 24, 'Make no



friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man shalt thou not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.' The violences and furious passions of anger are so uncomely, that a man would think they should rather affright then allure to imitation; but these things insensibly overcome us, and ere a man is aware, he is tainted.

[2.] By the abuse of Christian liberty to the wrong and hindrance of others in a way of godliness; as Rom. xiv. 13-15, 'Let no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way: I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean: but if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably: destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died;' 1 Cor. viii. 10, 'But take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.' We must not commit a sin, or omit a duty to avoid offence; yet in indifferent things we may expect from others what is lawful to do, and forbear it, as conduceth to edification; for we must have a care of offending little ones, and therefore must drive according to their pace, using our liberty as they are able to bear.

[3.] By persecution enforce others against their duty: Mat. xviii. 6, 'But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe on me, it were better a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the sea;' better he did suffer all extremity. Offending is persecuting, as receiving is countenancing, cherishing, treating them kindly and tenderly. So Mat. xiii. 21, 'When persecution ariseth by reason of the word, by and by they are offended;' Mat. xxiv. 9, 10. This opposing, hating, vexing the people of God is one way of offence, and very dangerous to those that practise it, however it succeedeth; for though they be little ones, little in their own eyes, little in the esteem of the world, little in regard of outward interest, and so lie open and liable to offences, little in regard of their spiritual growth, and so apt to take offence, yet they are dear to the great God, who is their patron, and will take their quarrel into his own hands; and it will be a thousand times better they had been the persecuted ones than to be the persecutors.

Thirdly, With respect to the double faculty the devil seeketh to work upon, which is our irascible or concupiscible faculty, our eschewing or pursuing power; the flesh with its *πάθη καὶ ἐπιθυμίαι*, Gal. v. 24, it is passions and lusts, what we render affections; and these are suited to the temptations that most men are usually overcome by. Such are the terrors and allurements of the world: the terrors of the world, that works upon our passions; the allurements of the world, that works upon our lusts.

1. The terrors of the world are apt to draw men to dislike God, and distaste the way of godliness. Certainly by these the devil seeketh to get us into his power and reach. Therefore it is said, 1 Peter v. 9, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' Satan's temptations are conveyed to the godly through afflictions, hoping by these to prevail with them to make them quit the truth and their duty

to Christ, and grow weary of the ways of God ; and it doth the more prevail when they think they are the only sufferers. This should not be, for the drift of Christianity is to take us off from the hopes and fears of the world, and a full third part of the scriptures serveth to comfort us in tribulations and afflictions for the gospel's sake ; and if we were not exposed to troubles, these would be as unsuitable and needless as bladders and arts of swimming were to a man that standeth on dry land, and never meaneth to go into the deep waters ; but yet they are a usual stumbling-block to those that have not overcome the sensual inclination, and are not dead to a worldly interest.

2. The allurements of the world, or the baits of sense. Present things have a strange infatuation upon us : 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'And Demas hath forsaken us, having loved the present world.' The troubles of the world are not so dangerous as the snares of the world. Though many be discouraged by troubles, yet many times others are gained by the patience, courage, and constancy of God's servants in persecutions. The offence may be more easily disproved as not justifiable ; for men may have a secret liking of the truth, and a purpose to own it in better times ; but by the baits of sense men are inveigled and tempted to dislike religion itself, as contradicting their lusts, and nourish a base opinion of it in their hearts. In troubles and persecutions there is not a dislike of religion itself, but of the hard terms upon which it must be received and cherished. And besides, the mischief is greater. They that cast off the profession and practice of godliness upon some great earthly hopes, involve themselves in a more heinous sin than they that shrink from it out of some great fear ; for those things we fear, as afflictions, torments, and death, they are in themselves destructive of our felicity, and therefore it cannot be said how much nature abhorreth them. But those things which we hope for and desire are such that nature may easily and without great inconveniency be without them, as great riches, splendour of life, noble affinities and marriages ; for these things are not absolutely necessary to the worldly life, but only conduce to the greater conveniency and felicity thereof. Not our worldly being, but our well-being is concerned in them. Our being may be kept up and supported in a far meaner condition. Thence it is that great dangers, when they are at hand, and difficulties sustained, and the fear of them, doth often sway us against the conscience of our duty ; but if we lose our great worldly hopes, or be cut short in our condition and worldly expectations, it is no great matter. Wise and gracious men may easily bear it with a quiet and well-composed mind. The sin of those that stumble at great and worldly hopes is questionless the greater transgression, for they are only enticed and drawn away by their pleasures and lusts, which all good Christians are obliged to deaden and mortify. But though to fall out of fear be not so heinous a sin, yet a great and heinous sin it is, for grace should govern fear as well as hope. If the coercion and bridling of it be difficult, it doth not excuse *a toto*, but *a tanto* only ; and it is hard to set a Christian in joint again that is fallen by fear. Witness those terrors that do haunt men when once they are gotten into the snare. As 'Peter went out and wept bitterly ;' it cost him much sorrow at

heart. Christ is fain to direct a special message to him by name, Mark xvi. 7. Though it doth not exclude all hopes of repentance and pardon, yet it needeth great mercy on God's part, and repentance on ours. Indeed, the church is bound to consider men's weaknesses, and to judge of the fault according to the violent shock and incursion of the temptation; because we know not our own strength, and how soon we may be surprised in like kind, and need indulgence ourselves, Gal. vi. 1. But God is not in our condition, nor obliged to recover all that lapse in this kind, and therefore useth his mercy according to his own pleasure. Sometimes he recovereth them and sometimes not; but for the other temptations, what excuse is it capable of? Heb. xii. 16, 17.

*Secondly,* Let us consider how a believer is preserved. Unsound professors are turned by scandal from the ways of godliness, which they seemed to walk in; but for the sincere believer, there may be many stumbling-blocks laid in his way, but he falleth not at them, escapeth those heinous sins into which others fall, through his love to God's commandments. Observe here three things:—

1. It is not light, but love that keepeth them from stumbling. The light of saving knowledge is a great matter, for it showeth us a sure rule to walk by, and sure promises to build upon; but love must join with it, to assist us, that we may escape those snares, for many fail because they receive not the truth in the love of it, 2 Thes. ii. 10. Till light be turned into love, it hath not such a powerful influence upon us. Certainly a man is better held by the heart than by the head: Rom. viii. 39, 'Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' The love of God is not principally taken there in a passive sense, for the love wherewith we are beloved of God; but in an active sense, for the love wherewith we love God. For affliction and persecution do expugn or assault God's love to us, but not our love to God; for this maketh us cleave to him, whatever temptations we have to the contrary. Do but consider what you are to love.

[1.] We are to love God; there it beginneth. Love God once, and then you will take nothing ill at his hands; how smart soever his chastenings be, they come from a God that loveth you, and whom your souls love: Rev. iii. 19, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' Now they will not stumble at God's dispensations, be they never so cross to their expectations and desires. But then—

[2.] We must love the law of God, be satisfied with our duty whatever cometh of it. Next to a sincere love to God, there must be a sincere love to his holy law, as the right way to eternal blessedness, and then temptations will have but little force upon us, for they do not love their duty for foreign reasons, but for its own sake; so that whether it be befriended and countenanced in the world, or hated and despised, it is all one; they love the law upon its own evidence, as it is recommended by God, and is a sure direction to true happiness: Job xvii. 9, 'The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.' He meaneth notwithstanding all the troubles and assaults which he endureth; they are not scandalised at God's dealings, or permitting them to be thus dealt with, but



do persevere in a course of godliness; this is the way wherein he delighteth.

[3.] He loves the brethren: 1 John ii. 10, 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.' They, together with us, uphold Christ's interest in the world. The coals, by lying together, inkindle one another, and so are the better kept from having their zeal quenched, or being ensnared by the manifold temptations in the world.

[4.] By this love the love of the world and its prosperity is much abated: 1 John ii. 15, 'Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' This man cannot part with all when his duty calleth for it. Till we despise worldly things we are still liable to take offence. All our disquiet cometh from too great love of the world, and too little love of the word of God. All this is spoken to show you that it is want of love wherefore men are so easily taken off; and this love beginneth with the love of God, then goeth on to his word, and the obedience it calleth for, and is strengthened by our love to the saints, and is a higher love than that it can be controlled by the love of the world.

2. This blessed peace hath an influence upon it upon a twofold account:—

[1.] This is an experience of the good of that way which the world speaketh evil of. You cannot persuade a man against his experience, that honey is bitter, when he has tasted the sweetness of it, 1 Peter ii. 3. They know the grace of God in truth, they have found much comfort and peace in these ways. Most men know religion and godliness but by hearsay or looking on; the testimony of Christ was never confirmed in them. But these have tried it, and know the good of religion by experience, therefore they cannot be so easily offended as others are, who have only licked the glass, but never tasted the honey. The pleasure they find in the duties and exercises of godliness will with them infinitely outweigh all the transient delights and advantages that are propounded, or offer themselves as the bait to any unlawful practice.

[2.] The particular nature of this experience; it is peace, which doth guard heart and mind, Phil. iv. 7, that they are not disturbed or distracted by anything that befalleth them, but enjoy a calm in their souls, whatever storms overtake or befall them in the way of their duty: Eph. vi. 15, 'Having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.' This is the gospel-shoe; there is no going to heaven without it; and this is peace, that is, peace with God. When all is quiet within, and the quarrel is taken up between God and us, we can the better bear the frowns of the world. And he calleth it the gospel of peace, because it mainly dependeth on the terms of grace revealed to us in the gospel. The law discovereth the enmity and the breach, but the gospel discovereth how peace may be had. He calleth it also the preparation, *ἐτοιμασία*, because this peace breedeth a firm and ready resolution to go through all difficulties, crosses, and hardships: Acts xxi. 13, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem.' Well, then, this is the fruit of peace and friendship between God and sinners. It breedeth a resolution to hold on our way to

heaven, notwithstanding crosses and continual hardships, and allayeth the bitterness of all worldly trouble.

3. There is God's providence and care over them, who is concerned in the protection of all that love his law, and take care to love and please him. On the one side, God sometimes threateneth the wicked, that he will lay stumbling-blocks before them, Jer. vi. 21, that is, bring those things upon them that shall be a means of ruin to them. On the other side, Jer. xxxi. 9, that he will lead the penitent believer in a straight way, that they shall not stumble. We must not omit God's concurrence, for it is his promise that nothing shall offend them. His people are very near and dear to him. Our Lord telleth us in his discourse against offending them, that 'their angels do always behold the face of his Father which is in heaven,' Mat. xviii. 10; that is, though the angels be appointed to be their guardians on earth, yet they have their continual returns and recourse to God's glorious presence, to make requests or complaints in their behalf, or to receive commands concerning them; for as God seeth fit they are employed in service for the benefit of those little ones. I remember Solomon saith, Prov. xii. 21, 'There shall no evil happen to the just, but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.' We can easily understand that the wicked shall be overwhelmed with God's judgments; but how shall no evil happen to the righteous, since their troubles are many? The meaning of the place is, as Augustine well glosseth, *non ut non eveniant, sed ut non noceant*—they do not stumble at afflictions, nor are they deserted by God, as others are. God moderateth the evil, 1 Cor. x. 13, or removeth it, Ps. cxxv. 3, or turneth it to good, Rom. viii. 28. Now, by this gracious dealing of God, it cometh to pass that nothing doth offend them. Those that depend on the favour of men, and the uncertainties of a worldly condition, how many troubles are they exposed unto! Therefore we should look to our confidence, whether it be faith or security, whether we rest upon a carnal pillow, or the corner-stone which God hath laid in Zion.

*Use.* It concerneth us all to look to this, whether we love the law so as to have gotten peace of conscience and assurance of God's protection, because of the multitude of scandals, and the trials and exercises we are put upon by God's correcting hand; the prosperity of the wicked; the disgrace that is cast on the stricter ways of God; the world being so full of snares and temptations, that bring men to sin and ruin. *Omnia timeo*, saith Bernard, *et quæ placeant, et quæ tristentur*—I am afraid of everything, of those things that please us, and those that make us sad. What shall a poor Christian do that he may not miscarry?

1. Be sure that your resolutions for God and the world to come be thoroughly fixed and settled; for you will be distracted with everything if you be not at a point, and have not chosen the better part, and fully fixed your purpose. The apostle telleth us, James i. 8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' A wavering and inconstant Christian will not know which way to turn himself, being disquieted upon all occasions.

2. They never rightly begin with God that do not sit down and count what it may cost them to be holy Christians: Luke xiv. 26, 'If

any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' If you have not a preparation of mind to suffer anything rather than part with Christ, you are not fit for his turn; like a man that sets on building, and hath not a stock to hold out; or designeth a war, and is not provideth with all necessities to go through with it. You must expect temptations and troubles, because they serve to try whether you will hold your integrity; and if God be not sufficient enough to be your portion, never serve him. Never pretend to religion if you do not resolve to renounce all that is precious to you in the world rather than forsake it.

3. Consider the necessity of standing to God's law, whatever persecutions and sufferings you meet with. There is no other way to be saved: John vi. 68, 'Lord, whither shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.' Such as have a mind to quit Christ have need to consider where they shall find a better master. Change where they will, they change for the worse. Obedience to the word of God is the only way to eternal life; and whatever law you make to yourselves, God will judge you by his own law.

4. Be established in the peace of God, and never break this peace to obtain your outward peace. What a wound will it be to thy soul! and how shiftless and helpless wilt thou be when, to make thy peace with the world, thou hast broken thy peace with God! Therefore rise up against temptations, as the trees refused in Jotham's parable to be ruler over the rest. Shall I lose my fatness; another, my sweetness, to rule over the trees? Shall I, to please men, put my conscience to a continual torment and anguish? sell the birthright for one morsel of meat? The remembrance will come into your minds, when you had joyful communion with God and his people, whose company you have abandoned; every day of solemn assembly will be a new torment to you.

5. When troubles surprise you, consider how unbecoming it is to take offence at God's providence. It is an ill sign to be so apt to pick quarrels with God and godliness; it argueth little love either to God or his law; for love thinketh no ill of those whom we love. They are murmurers that said the ways of the Lord are not equal, or what profit is there if we serve the Lord? Mal. iii. 14.

6. Consider, the greatest hurt Satan intendeth you is not to hurt your bodies but your souls, to bring you to be offended at the holy and righteous ways of the Lord. He would let you enjoy the pleasures of sin, to rob you of your delight in God and celestial pleasures; let you have all the world, if it were in his power, Mat. iv. 9.

7. Consider how short is the prosperity of the wicked, and those that turn aside to the ways of sin, Ps. xvii. 14. They shall be cut off, they are soon withered and dried up, and all their outward glory perishes with them. It is a more prudent course to adhere closely to God: Job v. 3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation.' It is a prediction; he foretold that there was a curse at the root of all his prosperity.



## SERMON CLXXXI.

*Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.—*  
VER. 166.

THE man of God had said, ver. 165, ‘Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them;’ now he particularly applieth to himself what he had generally spoken before. It is sweet when we can thus comfortably apply promises, and make out our own title and interest. This is David’s work in this and the following verses. Here he maketh profession of two things—his hope and obedience; which indeed are the two great things that belong to a Christian; graces much praised and little practised. *Quarum nulla sunt elogia, pauca exempla.* They are fitly coupled together in his plea, ‘I have hoped, I have done;’ for our confidence in God’s mercy is no greater than our fidelity in his precepts; and they are both professed before God, who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins: ‘Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.’

*Doct.* Sound hope of salvation is and must be joined with a care of keeping God’s commandments.

1. I shall speak of the several branches of this profession apart.
2. Then of their conjunction.

*First,* Separately; and there—

First, Of the profession of his hope, ‘Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation.’

1. The object and thing hoped for is salvation. Salvation is temporal or eternal, of the body or of the soul. Rabbi David Kimchi understandeth it of the latter, but it seemeth rather to imply help and deliverance out of dangers and distresses. Indeed, neither can be well excluded; not eternal salvation, for without that, temporal deliverance is but a reprieve for a time, not a total exemption from evil: not temporal salvation, because before we come to look for our full and final deliverance, God will try us by the way, and train us up in the expectation of other things; as men learn to swim in the rivers and shallow waters, that afterwards they may swim in the ocean and deep waters. So by expecting lesser things we learn to wait for greater. Both must be hoped for, but with a difference; eternal salvation absolutely, but temporal with submission to God’s will. We have not temporal things always *in specie*, in kind, but sometimes in value, for these things may be recompensed and made up another way; but no recompense can be given us for eternal life. The apostle speaketh with submission as to his temporal case, but is peremptory as to his eternal state: 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18, ‘Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.’ Again, though we are not to neglect the meanest promise, yet our hearts should run more upon the things of another world. A Christian honoureth God by his faith about temporal things, when he will not

cast away his hope in the deepest calamities ; but much more when the concerns of the world to come are of the greatest force with him, and his heart is wholly taken up about them : ‘ Looking for the blessed hope,’ Titus ii. 13 ; there is the character of a Christian. Peace and freedom from trouble in the world is not the main thing that we should look after, but perfect conformity to God, and full fruition of him. God is the chief good, and the fruition of him as promised is the utmost happiness of the creature. A true Christian hath a greater indifferency to the things of this life ; all his business is to get an assurance of a better : he can look through the troubles of the world, and see sunshine behind the back of the storm : Ps. xlii. 11, ‘ Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.’ But chiefly his hope is laid up for him in heaven, Col. i. 5 ; his portion is laid up for him, and kept safe for his use in a sure place. Here he knoweth he must be exercised with temptations and crosses. In short, temporal things are desired for the sake of spiritual and eternal, but eternal for themselves ; a traveller desireth a horse not for himself, as for the conveniency of his journey ; so he expecteth temporal things as helps in his way and passage to heaven. Well, then, salvation is the object of this hope, temporal salvation in order to eternal, that we may have opportunities to glorify God here, and may not faint and be overwhelmed with incident crosses. This sentence is borrowed from good old Jacob : Gen. xlix. 18, ‘ I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.’ It is notable Jacob speaketh this when prophetically blessing his children ; and when he cometh to Dan, the good old man seemed to be carried beside his purpose, breaking out thus of a sudden, but in spirit foreseeing the miseries and calamities with his posterity should fall into for their idolatry ; for Dan was the first tribe that made defection, therefore he opposeth his hopes to his fears. We are told in the general, Lam. iii. 26, ‘ It is good that a man should hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of God ;’ that is, for deliverance out of troubles. It will be of great use to us in our troubles to look to the issue of them. The Lord doth not wholly cast off his people ; when he seemeth to break down the hedge and fence of his providence, and leave them in their enemies’ hands, he hath salvation for a hoping people. But mark, it is *thy* salvation ; it is good to come out of trouble upon God’s terms, in God’s way, and in God’s time ; others break prison : Ps. lxii. 1, ‘ My soul hopeth in God, from him cometh my salvation.’ Expect it from God, and him alone.

2. The act of grace, ‘ I have hoped.’ Hope, in the general, is the expectation of some future good ; as it is a grace, it is some good thing promised by God : Ps. cxxx. 5, ‘ I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in thy word do I hope.’ ‘ I am judged for the hope of the promise,’ saith Paul, Acts xxvi. 6. So that hope is the expectation of good things promised. Faith and hope do both work upon the promise, but yet they are distinct graces ; they differ in their object. The object of faith is larger ; the whole word of God is the object of faith. We believe things past, present, and to come, but hope for things to come only. Among things to come, we believe both promises

and threatenings, but the object of hope is only things desirable. We believe the torments of hell, but do not hope for them. In the promises, faith believeth the promise, and hope looketh for the thing promised. Faith looketh to the authority of the promiser, and hope to the goodness of the thing promised. Faith begets hope, and then hope strengthens faith. Faith holdeth the candle to the soul, whereby we see things invisible and to come, and hope maketh this light comfortable and ravishing to us. We have comfort in believing, because hopes of enjoying. To believe eternal life, if we had not hopes to attain it, were a comfortless thing. Faith is before hope, and leadeth us to the object, and hope followeth as faith leadeth. Faith assents to and applieth the promise, and hope waiteth for the accomplishment. There are several sorts of hope.

[1.] There is a vain and groundless hope, the dream of a waking man; as if a beggar should hope for the succession of a crown. So there are some that dream of peace and safety, 'and sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child,' 1 Thes. v. 3. This is an irrational thing.

[2.] There is rational and probable hope, but yet not so firm and certain; it is likely it will be so, but we have no absolute certainty: 2 Cor. ix. 10, 'He that plougheth, plougheth in hope; and he that thresheth, is partaker of his hope.' This is necessary for the carrying on of all human actions, that a man should have probable hope of success, for without it there is no labour or rational attempt.

[3.] There is a firm and certain hope, when we have assurance of the things hoped for. So in the commerce between us and God, he giveth us assurance in his promises by his word and oath, that our consolation might be the more strong, when we fly for refuge to the hope that is set before us, Heb. vi. 17, 18. There is a blessed and glorious estate reserved to be enjoyed in the heavens; this is set before us, propounded as a prize in the view of the world. Now when we take hold of this, gain a right and title to it, God would have our consolation the more strong, by the assurance he hath given us in the covenant made with us in Christ. Well, then, Christian hope is not a conjecture or probability, but an assurance. Many times all kind of probability is contrary to God's assurance: Rom. iv. 18, 'Abraham believed in hope, against hope.' *Credidit in spe gratiæ, contra spem naturæ*. God's assurance prevailed above natural difficulties; there rational and human hope and divine hope are opposed.

[4.] This assurance admits of degrees, for it may be full or not full: Heb. vi. 11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope to the end.' The full assurance is that which removeth all doubts and fears; and this it may do at some time, and not at another; it may be interrupted, or continue to the end. Now we must give all diligence that it may do so. By slothfulness and negligence it will be lost. Presumption and carnal hope costs a man nothing to keep it, it groweth upon us we know not how; but this certain hope is not kept lively and upon the wing without great zeal and diligence in the spiritual life. Oh! but it concerneth us much so to do. This hope is necessary for us—

(1.) To quicken and enliven our duties. Hope of reward is one of



the bands of a man, the weight that inclineth us to all actions ; much more doth this great reward which the Christian faith propounds : Acts xxvi. 6, 7, ‘ And now I stand, and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers : unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come ; for which hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews ;’ and Acts xxiv. 15, 16, ‘ And have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.’ I run not as one that is uncertain, 1 Cor. ix. 26, not by guess, but sure grounds : Phil. iii. 14, ‘ I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.’ It is great and sure ; here is excellency and certainty. A man that hopeth for anything will be engaged in the thorough pursuit of it.

(2.) It sharpeneth our affections after heavenly things ; when we look for them, we will also long for them : Rom. viii. 23, ‘ And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.’ Hope stirreth up serious thoughts of heaven and blessedness to come, and hearty groans after it, and so sets both mind and heart a-work. It sets the mind a-work. A man cannot hope for a thing, but he will be thinking of it ; as the scripture speaketh of the labourer, that he lifts up his soul to the hire which he expects. Thoughts will be sent as spies into the land of promise, to bring us tidings thence. And it sets the heart a-longing and groaning that we were at home : Rom. viii. 19, ‘ For the earnest expectation of the creature,’ ἀποκαταδοκία κτίσεως, stretcheth out the head, to see if it can spy it a-coming ; as when Sisera’s mother expected him, she looked through the lattice. There will be strong desires as well as serious thoughts ; not glances and hasty wishes, such as worldly persons may have in their serious moods and sober fits ; these vanish and leave the heart never the better ; but earnest longings, such as settle into a heavenly frame ; that taste which they have already maketh them groan for what is behind.

(3.) It sets the heart at rest, and allayeth our disquiets, and fears, and cares, and sorrows, that so we may go on cheerfully in God’s service. It is the pleasure of God that the heirs of promise should for a while shine as lights in a corrupt world, and be exercised with all kind of temptations, that his power may be manifested in their weakness. Now, that we may ride out the storm, he gave us hope ; not only *veniam sperandi*, leave to hope for his mercy, but *virtutem sperandi*, the grace of hope, strength so to do. And what is the use of it, but to calm the heart under all distempers ? Therefore it is compared to a helmet and an anchor. To a helmet : 1 Thes. v. 8, ‘ Take to you the helmet of salvation, which is hope.’ A helmet is to cover the head ; this maketh a believer hold up head in all his straits and troubles. The policy of the devil is to weaken or darken the hopes of eternal life, and then he knoweth he shall the sooner overcome us ; therefore the life of a Christian should be to keep on his helmet, to keep his hopes of heaven lively and fresh, and then he will not be de-

jected. Again, it is compared to an anchor : Heb. vi. 19, ' Which hope we have, as an anchor, both sure and steadfast, which entereth into that which is within the veil.' As the anchor holdeth the ship in a tempest, so doth hope keep the mind in a constant temper in the midst of the stormy gusts of temptation, that we dash not against the rocks that would break our confidence and profession : it strengthens and quiets the floating heart of man. Things will end well at last, how blustering and stormy soever the weather be at the present. The floods of temptation and the tribulations of this present life are permitted to invade us, but that God hath given us an anchor, that they shall not drive us from the haven of eternal happiness. Whatever our cross be, immoderate grief for the death of near and dear relations : 1 Thes. iv. 13, ' Mourn not as those without hope.' *Cur enim doleas, si periisse non credis ? Cur impatienter ferres subductum, quem iterum credis reversurum esse ? pro festo est quam putas mortem,* saith Tertullian De Patientia. If for loss of goods and estate : Heb. x. 34, ' And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and enduring substance.' If a poor man that had all his wealth about him should fall into the hands of thieves and robbers, and be rifled by them, he must needs cry and take on pitifully ; for alas ! he is altogether undone, and hath nothing left him wherewithal to succour himself and his family. But a rich man, that hath store of money at home, and sure locked up in his chest, will never complain and be much disquieted when he hath twenty or forty shillings taken from him. For worldlings to rage and take on when they must lose their estates, it is no marvel ; those whose portion is in this life, and know no better ; alas ! for when these things are gone, they have nothing left, and are quite undone. But those that are heirs according to the hope of eternal life, they know they have a better and a more enduring substance ; they consider what they are born to, what they shall enjoy when they come home to God, therefore their hearts are calmed and quieted. So if it be the oppression of wicked men, and hard sufferings and persecutions for the gospel : 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18, ' For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' He that hopeth for nothing from God will soon fall off from him, and yield to fainting discouragements ; their hearts are turned off and perverted ; but when we hope, we do with patience submit to the cross. What troubles will not they undergo that expect undoubtedly their speedy ending in everlasting and endless bliss and happiness ? If God hideth his face, that raiseth a storm : Ps. xliii. 5, ' Why art thou so disquieted, O my soul ? still hope in God.' Casting anchor upon the rock, as the crying child falls asleep with the teat in his mouth ; or when God delayeth the performance of what is promised : Prov. xiii. 12, ' Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' Expectation is a tedious thing, as smoke to the eyes, and vinegar to the teeth, an ordinary messenger sent on a trifling errand. Now, Rom. viii. 15, ' If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it ;' 1 Thes. i. 3, ' And patience of hope

in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Is a title nothing before possession? It is not a matter of debt. Or is it the fear of approaching death, which is the king of terrors? Prov. xiv. 32, 'The wicked shall be driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death.' The wicked, being arrested by death, is hurried away into hell; but the righteous dismisseth his soul into his Redeemer's hands. Never more cheerful than when our confidence in God's mercy is most put to trial.

Secondly, Here is the profession of his obedience, 'I have done thy commandments.' Here is—

1. The object, *thy commandments*.

2. The act of duty, *done*.

1. The object, 'Thy commandments,' *quia tua*; therefore kept them, because they are thine; things thou hast given in charge. Men were ready to persuade or threaten him out of his duty.

2. The act of duty, 'Done thy commandments:' the act of duty, to do, noteth the substance of the act or omission; the doing things commanded by eschewing things forbidden.

3. The manner of doing, out of knowledge of God's command, and conscience of obeying it, to his glory and our salvation. Now, saith David, 'I have done it;' implying, I have not only care and conscience, but strength and ability, in some measure to do thy will.

But is not this plea a proud word for a creature to say, 'I have done thy commandments'? Who can thus say, and aver it to the face of God?

*Ans.* There is a twofold keeping or doing of the commandments—legal and evangelical.

1. Legal, when we do them so exactly as is answerable to the rigour of the law, and the rule of strict justice doth require, which exactness is when our obedience is universal in every point, when everything commanded by God is done by us without failing in one point: Gal. iii. 10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.'

[1.] In all things; and that—

[2.] Continually, in respect of time; from the first minute of our birth till our dissolution; one failing in thought at any time casteth off our plea.

[3.] Full and complete in respect of the degrees and measure of obedience, with the utmost intension and affection of the heart, which the scripture expresseth by all the heart and all the soul. In this sense, never man was able to keep the law, save only the first Adam in innocency, and the second Adam Jesus Christ; and therefore, according to this rigour, there is no hope for us; one sin once committed would undo us for ever, as it did the apostate angels.

2. Evangelical, according to the *ἐπιείκεια* and moderation of the gospel, that is, when we do the commandments according to those terms of grace which God offereth to us in Christ; that doth, as to obedience, mitigate the rigour of the law in two things:—

[1.] It granteth a pardon of course to some kind of sins.

[2.] Accepteth of repentance after any the most heinous sin committed.



[1.] It granteth a pardon of course to some kind of sins, as sins of infirmity, either of ignorance, which if we had known we would not have committed, or sins of sudden surreption, which escape without our observing of them; or sins of violent temptation, which by sudden assault sway against the right rule before we have time to weigh both it and ourselves, or in cool blood to think what we are a-doing; such as do not arise out of any evil purpose of the mind, but out of human frailty, and from which we shall never be free as long as we live in this body of corruption, Rom. vii. 24,—Paul groaneth under these relics; when what we have done is not out of deliberate consent, giving way to the growth and reign of sin: Rom. vi. 14, ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you.’ *Non dixit, non sit, sed non regnet; inest peccatum cum perpetras, regnat cum consenseris*, saith Austin. When we give obedience to it, freely, willingly yield up ourselves to be servants of it, then sin reigns. Therefore he doth not say, Let not sin be in you, or tempt you, or please you; but, Let it not reign in you. It is a misery to be tempted, a snare to be delighted, and a forfeiture or renouncing the grace of the covenant to give up ourselves to the full sway of it.

[2.] The gospel doth herein moderate the rigour of the law, because it leaveth a sinner a way and means of recovery, namely, by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and upon repentance giveth him a pardon, Mat. ix. 13. Remission or forgiveness is a privilege of the new covenant; the law knoweth no such matter: Ezek. xviii. 21, 22, ‘But if the wicked shall turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, and not die: all his transgressions that he hath committed they shall not be mentioned unto him.’ Well, then, this is to be understood in the gospel sense; it is the plea of a man justified freely by God’s grace, and one that is sincere and upright for the main; one that had received grace to be faithful, though not without his infirmities, and did not make a practice to live in any known sin against conscience.

*Secondly,* We now come to show the connection between these two.

1. None can and do rightly hope for salvation but they that keep the commandments.

2. None do and can keep the commandments but they that hope for salvation.

1. None can and do rightly hope for salvation but they that keep the commandments. That will appear to you—

[1.] Partly because God hath by a wise ordination conjoined means and end, and offered the promises with a qualification: Rom. ii. 7, ‘To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life.’ God hath not simply promised blessedness, but the promise requireth a qualification and a performance of duty in the person to whom the promise is made; and therefore, before we can have a certainty of hope, we must not only look upon the assurance on God’s part, but make out our qualification. So Ps. i. 1, 2, ‘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; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law

doth he meditate day and night.' So Ps. cxix. 1, 2, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord: blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and seek him with the whole heart;' and many such places, which intimate that blessedness belongeth to such as are of a holy heart, and entirely give up themselves to a holy course; that doing the commandments uprightly, and in a gospel sense, is a necessary condition to qualify those persons which shall be saved. And therefore they that live in any sin against conscience may take notice how fearful their estate is for the present, and how needful it is to begin a good course before they can have any hope toward God.

[2.] And partly because true hope is operative, and hath an influence this way. There are two parts in sanctification—mortification and vivification, and true hope hath an influence upon both. Mortification: 1 John iii. 3, 'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, as he is pure;' that when we see God, we shall be like him. He that hopeth for such a pure and sinless estate, either to see God, will he appear before him in his filthy rags? Joseph washed himself when he was to come before Pharaoh; so when to appear before God. What! with this wanton, vain, nuclean heart? We are to be like him; is this to be like Christ, where there is such a disproportion between head and members? And if this hope be fixed in our hearts, it will set us a-purifying more and more. So for vivification, it urgeth and encourageth to obedience: Titus ii. 12, 13, 'For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world.' Look backward or forward, it urgeth the heart to obedience. Why backward to the duties of holiness? Shall we be lazy in his work when we expect such a great reward?

[3.] Because there is no such thing to damp hope and weaken our confidence as sin. We cannot trust him whom we have offended freely and without restraint; and therefore, while we please the flesh, we break our confidence. Sin will breed shame and fear, and it is impossible to hope in God unless we serve him in love, and seek to please him. If we feel it not presently, we shall feel it. Sin, that now weakeneth the faith which we have in the commandments, will in time weaken the faith that we have in the promises. Every part of God's revealed will cometh to be tried one time or another. Our confidence in God's mercy is not earnestly and directly assaulted till the hour of death, or the time of extraordinary trial. When the evil day cometh, then the consciousness of my own sin, whereunto we have been indulgent, will be of like force to withdraw our assent from God's mercies, as the delight and pleasure we took was to cause us to transgress his commandments: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.'

[4.] Because our hope is increased by our diligence in the holy life. This fostereth and augments it: Heb. vi. 11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' It must needs be so, for since there is a qualification, the more clear our qualification is, the more full is our assurance of

hope ; and so far as a man neglects his duty, and abateth in his qualification, so far doth his assurance abate. To look on one side of the covenant is a groundless presumption.

2. None do and can keep the commandments but they that hope for salvation. This is plain from the order of the words in the text. First I hoped for thy salvation, therefore done thy commandments ; implying that thereby he kept the commandments. Without this none can have a heart or hand to do anything for God. *Peccator*, saith Bernard, *nihil expectat, indeque peccator est ; quod bonis presentibus non modo delectus, sed etiam contentus, nihil in futurum expectat*—he that looketh for nothing from God can never be diligent in his service, nor faithful and true to him. Hope, it is our strength : Lam. iii. 18, ‘And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord.’ We first begin, continue, and go on with God upon the hope he offereth to us.

*Use 1.* It reproveth those that hope well, but take no care to do anything for God. Every one will say they must hope in God, but none looketh after this lively and operative hope ; their hope is barren and unfruitful. Who are they that can make application of the promises ? 2 Tim. iv. 8.

*Use 2.* To persuade us to the coupling of these two. When this conjunction is founded, then are we in a right frame. If we would keep the commandments, we must hope for the salvation of God ; if we would hope for the salvation of God, we must keep the commandments. This is most acceptable to the Lord : Ps. cxlvii. 11, ‘The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and hope in his mercy.’ Such as believe, and fear to offend him, they have acceptable communion with him. It is for your comfort, Acts ix. 31. It is for the honour of religion on the one side to avoid the carnal confidence of Papists, on the other the cold profession of Protestants, if you hope for temporal deliverance. They that make no conscience of obeying God cannot hope for deliverance from him, for his salvation must be expected in the way of his precepts : Ps. xxxvii. 3, ‘Trust in the Lord, and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land.’ So wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land : when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it ; then we may commend ourselves and all our affairs to God’s care and trust. It becometh them that look for salvation, and to be helped out of their troubles, to be more earnest than others in keeping his law. If you would enjoy the comfortable assurance that you shall be saved at length, live so as you may never mar your confidence : 1 Peter i. 13, ‘Be sober, and hope to the end.’ Live answerable to your hope, 1 Thes. ii. 12. On the other side hope, study promises : Rom. xv. 4, ‘The God of hope fill you with joy in believing.’ He is not only the object, but the author of it.



## SERMON CLXXXII.

*My soul hath kept thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly.—*  
VER. 167.

THE man of God goeth on in his plea. In the former verse he had spoken of the influence of his hope upon obedience; now of the influence of his love, and so more expressly and directly maketh out this qualification or title to the promise mentioned ver. 165.

Before we go on, let me answer a question or two.

First, How can a gracious heart speak so much of itself, and insist so much upon the plea of obedience? Is not this contrary to our Saviour's doctrine, who, in the parable of the pharisee and publican that went up to pray, Luke xviii., taught us to make use of the plea of mercy, not of works?

*Ans.* 1. As to that part of the scruple which concerneth περιαντολογία, that cannot be imagined to be faulty in David, who was a prophet, and therefore, to instruct the world, propoundeth his own instance, and setteth forth himself as a pattern of obtaining comfort in the way of godliness.

2. As to the plea of works, they may be produced by way of evidence, not by way of merit, as they prove our interest in the promises, not as the ground of self-confidence. The pharisee, he came not to beg an alms, but to receive a debt, and therefore went away without any mark and testimony of the divine favour and approbation. But holy men plead this to God as expecting mercy and favour at his hands; not in regard of any merit in themselves, or of reward deservedly for the same done to them, for they acknowledge all that they do or can do to be but duty, and due debt; but in regard of his gracious promise freely made unto them; in a humble and modest manner they dare appeal to God himself for the sincerity and integrity of their hearts, for serious care and sedulous endeavours to please him, and approve themselves to him.

Secondly, But why is this plea reiterated for three verses together?

*Ans.* 2. Too much care cannot be used in making out an interest in so sweet a promise; and teacheth us this lesson, that we had need examine again and again before we can put in our claim. Jesus Christ puts Peter to the question thrice: John xxi. 15–17, 'Peter, lovest thou me?' So here, it was David's plea thrice repeated, for the more assurance: 'I have done thy commandments, my soul hath kept thy testimonies;' and again, 'I have kept thy commandments and thy precepts.' After a believer hath found marks of saving grace in himself, it is wisdom for him to examine them over and over again, that he may be sure they are in him in deed and in truth. The heart is deceitful, our self-love is great, our infirmities many, and our graces so weak, that we should not easily trust the search. Truly such a holy jealousy doth well become the best of God's children, and doth only weaken the security of the flesh, not their rejoicing in the Lord.

In the words you have the testimony of David's conscience concerning the sincerity of his heart, evidenced by two notes:—

1. The sincerity of his obedience, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies.'

2. His exceeding love to the word, 'I love them exceedingly;' or, if you will, by the manner of his obedience, and the principle of it.

*First*, The spirituality of his obedience, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies.' Mark, the notion by which the act of duty is expressed is varied in the former verse. It is 'I have done thy commandments;' here it is, 'I have kept thy testimonies.' *Done* more expressly noteth his sedulity and diligence; *kept* his constancy and diligence, perseverance notwithstanding temptations to the contrary. And how kept them? Saith he, 'My soul hath kept them;' not with outward observance only, but with inward and hearty respect. 'My soul,' that is, myself; a part for the whole, and the better part, 'I, with my soul,' and so it sheweth his sincerity. It is a usual expression among the Hebrews, when they would express their vehement affection to anything, to say they do it with their souls; as Ps. ciii. 1, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul;' and Luke i. 45, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord;' as, on the contrary, vehemency of hatred: Isa. i. 14, 'Your new moons and appointed feasts my soul hateth;' that is, I hate them with my heart.

The note is—

*Doct.* God must be served with our souls as well as our bodies. David saith, 'My soul hath kept thy testimonies.'

1. Because he hath a right to both, as he made both, and therefore hath required that both should serve him. He that organised the body, and framed it out of the dust of the ground, did also breathe into us the breath of life, and framed the spirit of man within him; therefore since God may challenge all, it is fit he should have the best: 'My son, give me thy heart,' Prov. xxiii. 26. Look upon it; whose image and superscription doth it bear? 'Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' He hath redeemed both: 1 Cor. vi. 20, 'Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God both in your body and spirits, which are God's.' Shall we rob God of his purchase so dearly bought? We would not rob a man of his goods, and will you rob God? He challengeth a peculiar right in souls: 'All souls are mine;' and therefore they should be used and exercised for his glory. If we use them for ourselves only, and not according to his direction, we do as Reuben did, that went up into his father's bed. To withhold the heart from God is robbery, nay, sacrilege, which is the worst kind of robbery; for God's right in redemption is confirmed and owned by our personal dedication in baptism. Once more, God hath right to the service of both body and soul, because he offereth to glorify both, and reward both in the heavenly inheritance. The body and the soul are sisters and co-heirs, as Tertullian speaketh. If we expect wages for both, we must do work with both. If God should make such a division at death as men do all their life to him, can they be happy if any part of them be excluded heaven? If the body and lifeless trunk were taken into heaven, and the soul left in torments, what were you the better? But that cannot be; God will have all or no part; therefore 'your whole spirit and soul and body must be kept blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus

Christ,' 1 Thes. v. 23. Otherwise your souls cannot be joined to God in heaven, if they be divided from him on earth.

2. Because this is service suitable to his nature, when we serve him and obey him with our souls. God is an all-seeing spirit, and therefore will be worshipped in spirit and in truth, John iv. 23, 24. It is agreeable to his spiritual nature, therefore shows and fashions have little respect with him, but reality and substance; for he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins; it is not the bowing the body, so much as the humble affectionate reverence and submission of the soul. God hath appointed service for the body, and so far as God hath appointed it we must submit to it; but chiefly for the soul, our worship must be chiefly inward, flowing from grace engaging the heart in God's service. Bodily exercise is of little profit; that worship which is most agreeable to God's nature is most pleasing to him: he 'hath not eyes of flesh, and seeth not as man seeth,' Job x. 4. Therefore external duties, without the inward exercise of the Spirit, is scarce worthy the name of worship to God. He is not taken with the pomp of ceremonies and external observances: 1 Sam. xvi. 7, 'For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' Men are taken with external pomp and formalities; they suit with their fleshly natures; but the more spiritual the more suitable to God. That which you do, be it in worship, it is not done unto God, but unto men, when the heart is not in it: Col. iii. 23, 'And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' Without the heart, all that we do is but a mocking of God, giving him the shell without the kernel.

3. Because the soul is the principal thing that swayeth the body, and stirreth it up to all that it doth. It being of itself a senseless block, it followeth the disposition and inclination of the heart. I shall make it good in two considerations:—(1.) It is *fons actionum ad extra*; (2.) It is *terminus actionum ad intra*. It is the fountain of all actions that go outward, from man towards God; and the subduing the heart to God's will is the end of all operations inward, from God towards man.

[1.] *Fons actionum ad extra*, the fountain of all actions that go outward from man towards God. All natural actions proceed from the soul or heart. It is not the eye that seeth, nor the ear that heareth, nor the hand that toucheth, nor the feet that walketh; it is the soul seeth by the eye, and heareth by the ears, and toucheth by the hands, and walketh by the feet. So in all moral actions the heart is all: Prov. iv. 23, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' All our actions proceed thence; all the evil that we do cometh from the heart: Mat. xv. 19, 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.' All that we speak, and think, and do followeth the frame of the heart. This is the burning furnace from whence the sparks fly. The occasion of sin may be without, but the cause of it is ever from the heart. It is the heart that filleth the eyes with wantonness, pride, and fury, and the tongue with blasphemy, slander, and detraction, the hands with blood. So for good actions, thoughts; they come out of the good treasury of the heart: Mat. xii. 35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.' The tap run-



neth according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled ; that a man hath laid up in his heart, that he layeth out in his thoughts, and speeches, and actions. It is the heart that enliveneth all our duties, and we act ever according to the constitution of our souls.

[2.] It is *terminus actionum ad intra* ; all actions inward, the aim of it is to come to the heart. The senses report things to the phantasy, the phantasy represents them to the mind, that counsels the heart ; so in God's operations upon us, his business is to come at the soul. Wherefore doth he speak, and reason, and plead, but that we may hear ? And wherefore do we hear, but that truth may be lodged in the heart or soul ? Prov. iv. 4, ' Let thy heart keep my precepts ; let thy heart receive my words.' Ay ! then God's word hath its effect upon us. We are never subdued to God till the heart be subdued. The word for a while may stay in the memory, and it is good when the memory is planted with the seeds of knowledge, as children receive the principles of religion in catechisms ; but the end is not there ; at length they exercise their understandings about them, when they begin to conceive of what they learned by rote, and afterwards they begin to have a judgment and a conscience. These truths begin to stir and awaken them, but it must not rest there neither ; it soaketh further, and wisdom entereth upon the heart, Prov. ii. 10. Ay ! that was God's aim, to bring the work thither, and then the cure is wrought with man : Rom. vi. 17, ' Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you.' So this is the end of all the operations of grace, that the soul and heart may keep God's testimonies. So where is it that Christ would dwell when he taketh up his abode and residence in us ? The apostle will tell you : Eph. iii. 17, ' That he may dwell in your hearts by faith.' Till he get possession of the heart, all is as nothing. He will not dwell in the body only ; that is the temple of the Holy Ghost at large ; there is a holy of holies, a more inward place where he will dwell. He will not dwell in the tongue, or in the brain, memories, or understandings, unless by common gifts. But the heart, the will, and affections of man are the chief place of his residence ; there he dwelleth as in his strong citadel, and from thence commandeth other faculties and members. So that the heart is the beginning and ending of the whole work of religion, from thence come all holy actions, and thither tend all holy gracious operations.

4. It is thy hearty soul-service that will only bear weight in the balance of the gospel. There may be many defects in the action, yet if the heart be right, God will accept the will for the deed, and you will find comfort in that another day, when you most need : Isa. xxxviii. 3, ' Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart.' Hezekiah had his infirmities and failings, but his heart was upright : Heb. xiii. 18, ' Willing in all things to live honestly ;' that is a gospel good conscience, and will yield comfort to you. God accepts the will without the deed, but never the deed without the will. Infirmities may overtake the action, but when the heart is unfeignedly set to serve God, we shall be accepted. We allow grains to true, but not to counterfeit gold. The church pleadeth, Isa. xxvi. 8, ' The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remem-

brance of thee. When we follow in rugged ways, though we oftentimes stumble, yet if our soul be with him, we may have comfort.

*Use 1.* This is for the conviction of divers persons, that they do not more serve God in their souls, do not keep his testimonies.

1. There are some that neither serve God with body nor soul, as all loose persons, who do not so much as make a show of his service; they are all for their brutish pleasures, their souls to hunt them out, and their bodies to pursue and follow them. Their soul is a cage of unclean birds, and a sty of all filthiness, and their bodies only a strainer for meats and drinks to pass through, or a channel for lust to run in, so that they have nothing at all to spare for God: the soul is an ill guide, suggesting all manner of evil, and the body a ready instrument to accomplish it. These are those that yield up their members to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity, Rom. vi. 19. Oh! time will come when God will tear them in pieces, and rend the guilty soul from the embraces of the unwilling body. A sad time it will be for these; the soul will curse the body as an ill instrument, the body the soul as a corrupt guide; and curse the day of their first union, when they cannot expect but to meet again in flames.

2. Some that give their bodies to God, but withhold their souls from him. How may this be done?

*Ans. 1.* Generally, when men content themselves with a naked profession of Christianity, and some external conformity thereunto. It is a stupid religion that consists in outward actions. Judas was externally a disciple, but Satan entered into his heart, Luke xxii. 3. Ananias joined himself to the people of God, but Satan filled his heart, Acts v. 3. Simon Magus was baptized, but his heart was not right with God, Acts viii. 22. Many men may not only make profession, but perform many good actions, be as to external conformity blameless; yet till their hearts are subdued to God, they should not be satisfied with their condition. Though you pray with the pharisee, Luke xviii., pay thy vows with the harlot, Prov. vii., offer sacrifice with Cain, fast with Jezebel, sell thine inheritance to give to the poor with Ananias and Sapphira, it is all in vain without the heart. Many hypocrites are all ear to hear, all tongue to talk, all face to appear, but not a heart to obey. Something must be done for religion for fashion sake and shame of the world. Yea, though thou dost not dissemble, do many things, yet if your hearts be not renewed and changed, all is nothing; you do not keep the testimonies of the Lord with your souls.

2. And more particularly when men make conscience of ceremonies and outsides rather than sincere obedience. As the pharisees, Mat. xxiii. 25, 26, 'They make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within are full of extortion and excess.' Pretend great purity in eating their meat, but care not with how great iniquity they purchase it. Papists think they have done enough if they mutter over a few idle words, without spirit and life; the most part of their service is but that of the body without the soul; they worship in a strange language, not knowing what they do or say. And, nearer home, draw nigh with their lips when their hearts are far from him, Mat. xv. 8. These leave their hearts at home; the devil findeth them other work that suffer their hearts to straggle and to be like the fool's eyes in the

corners of the earth, when with their bodies they are engaged in the serious and solemn duties of God's worship.

*Use 2.* To press you to serve God with your hearts and souls as well as your bodies.

1. This is the character of true worshippers: Rom. i. 9, 'My God, whom I serve in the spirit;' and 2 Tim. i. 3, 'God whom I serve with a pure conscience.' This was not peculiar to Paul alone; it is the description of the spiritual circumcision: Phil. iii. 3, 'For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.' These are such as are true worshippers.

2. God will accept of no other, for he looketh for the heart, and knoweth whether we give it him, yea or no. Men care not for fawning and the obsequiousness of empty courtships, but look for reality, if they could discern it: 2 Kings x. 15, 'Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?' It was Jehu's question to Jonadab, the son of Rechab. Dost thou as really affect me, as I do thee? And men do not look to the matter of the gift, but the mind of the giver; and will God, think you, who can infallibly judge, and will one day bring the hidden thoughts of the heart to light, 1 Cor. iv. 5, will he be put off with shows and empty formalities? Well, then, see that your souls be in it, otherwise he will not accept of rivers of oil and thousands of rains. All your pomp and cost upon outside services is lost. But it is not every soul that will keep God's testimonies. When the people said, 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do it,' Deut. v. 29, 'Oh, that they had such an heart!' It must be such an heart, for man is naturally averse from God; sin sets up its throne in the heart, and thence diffuseth its venom into his actions, Gen. vi. 5. It must be—(1.) A broken heart; (2.) A renewed heart; (3.) A heart purified by faith; (4.) And acted by love.

[1.] A broken heart it must be, Ps. li. 11, for before that, all that we do is forced and superficial. We are never serious till acquainted with brokenness of heart, but serve God in a slight careless fashion. That bruising is to cast into a new mould; it is a preparative to the new heart. Wheat is not bread till it be grinded, and a cracked vessel cannot be renewed till it be melted in the furnace, nor we formed anew till we be first melted, humbled, and broken for sin.

[2.] The heart must be renewed by grace, for it is a renewed soul only that keepeth the commandments: Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 'A new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put into you; and then I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments to do them.' The hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil, till God change them, and renew a right spirit within them: Prov. x. 20, 'The heart of the wicked is nothing worth.' A vain, sottish, sensual, careless heart will never do God any service; there must be life before there can be action, a supernatural principle before there can be supernatural operation, for all things act according to their form; all that we do else is but like adulterating coin, gilding over copper or brass.

[3.] A heart purified by faith, Acts xv. 9. There are fleshly lusts in us which must be mortified more and more, and deadened to the



pleasures and profits and honours of this world, by remembering our great obligations and expectations from Christ's death and eternal life; for while any fleshly or worldly lust prevaileth with us, and is the chief principle in our hearts, we cannot heartily serve God.

[4.] A heart acted by love: 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.' This is the active principle which sets us a-work with cheerfulness. Christ often intimateth that keeping the commandments is the fruit of love, John xiv. 15. All the expression of our love to him is turned into that channel.

*Secondly*, I come now to the second evidence and testimony of his sincerity, his love to the word, 'I have loved them exceedingly.' Mark—

1. His affection, *I love thy testimonies*.

2. The degree, in the word *exceedingly*.

First, From his affection. Note—

*Doct.* That it is not enough to keep the commandments, but we must love them, and that obedience they require from us.

This love to the law is often spoken of in this psalm; therefore there needeth the less to be said now. Paul speaketh of this love as well as David: Rom. vii. 22, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man.'

The reasons of the point.

1. We can never thoroughly and constantly keep the law without love to it. It is no easy thing to keep the law of God; there needeth much labour and striving. Now where there is a sincere love of the law of God planted in the heart, there will be this striving and endeavouring to perform it. None so sensible of the weight of sin, none so active for God's glory: there is nothing so difficult, but love maketh easy: *nihil amarum*. In a word, labour and toil prove a pleasure, and pain a matter of delight, where we love. The careful mother bringeth forth the child with pain, and nurseth it up with toil and trouble, is well enough pleased with her work, and cheerful in it, because of the love she hath to the fruit of her womb, and her child is dear to her. Jacob's seven years' labour seemed to be a few days for the love he had to Rachel, Gen. xxix. 29. So God will have us serve him out of love, because nothing is grievous to love, 1 John v. 3. It beareth all things, suffereth all things, poverty, nakedness, bonds, injuries, labours, never tireth or groweth weary, 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

2. Except we obey because we love, our obedience is not sincere and acceptable: 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2, 'Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal: and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing,' οὐδέν εἰμι. Many are frightened into a course of religion, and go on from duty to duty, out of fear of being damned; this is not true obedience, that is done servilely and by constraint, these

unwilling services which we perform to Christ, out of urging of conscience and fear of wrath: Jer. ii. 27, 'Which have turned the back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise and save us.' They come to God, not out of delight and choice, but out of necessity, and only then, Hosea. v. 6. They that did not care for God at other times will then come with their flocks and their herds. The spirit of bondage is clamorous for duty, as the spirit of adoption sweetly inclineth to it. Many obey God no further than they are forced, as slaves, whom nothing but fear induceth to perform their master's commands; and so do not love the work, nor do it for the work's sake.

3. The next object to God, fit for our love, is God's law. It is clear that God is *primum amabile*, the first thing that is to be loved; but what is the second? Surely that which hath most of God in it; next after God, his word. There is *vestigium* in the creature, there is *imago* in his testimonies: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'For we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.' The fairest draught and print of God that can be taken. His people have his image, but it is overshadowed with weakness; it is but the *ἀποφαίνουσα*, the off-set of his word. It is the word that maketh saints, there is the liveliest stamp and print of God. His testimonies lead not only to the knowledge of God, but also the fruition of him. Whatsoever leadeth us to the fruition of God is incomparably better than any other thing; therefore, if we love God, we must love his precepts, love them so as to keep them; it is the greatest testification of that love we can show to God.

*Use 1.* To show us the reason why so many miscarry in the profession of godliness. Many walk in the ways of God for a while, but have no sound love to them; either by-ends, or slavish fears forced them into some profession; but they did not love godliness as godliness, and therefore cannot hold out with God. When a man is biassed and poised by his heart to a thing, you cannot easily divert and break his inclination, that is a rooted thing; others were but forced, and forced subjection will not always hold. Men are hoping they shall shake off an displeasing task, and where they obey from constraint, and the iron yoke of terror, they will not long obey.

*Use 2.* To press us not only to keep God's testimonies, but to love them.

Let me use some arguments.

1. From its excellency. To love is more than to do, as to love sin is a greater evil than to commit it. *Gravius est peccatum diligere, quam facere*. A man may commit sin out of infirmity, but he that loves it, sin reigneth in him. Practice may be overruled; a man may do evil that hateth it, being overborne by the violence of a temptation; as Paul saith of himself, 'The evil that I hate, that I do.' So a man may do good that hateth it, being influenced by by-ends; but our love is our own, the genuine offspring of the soul.

2. The necessity of it. Unless we love our work, we shall never be the more earnest in the performance of it. Nature of itself is unwilling, the heart hangeth off till it be poised by love: reasons and motives will not do it: Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is enmity

against God, for it is not subject to the law.' The commandments of God cross our will, profit, and pleasure; therefore we need not only reasons with us, but a strong inclination of heart to hold us to it, else we shall be off and on with God: Neh. iv. 6, 'The building went on, because the people had a mind to the work.' Nothing else will do it but this.

3. The utility. We shall have more comfort in the sincerity of our affections than we can ever have in the perfection of our actions. The people of God, that cannot plead the perfection of what they do, plead the reality of their love: John xxi. 17, 'Lord, thou knowest all things, and knowest that I love thee.'

4. *Ex debito*. We owe so much love to God, that everything that he requireth should be welcome to us for God's sake: they are his testimonies, therefore your souls should love them, and bind them upon your hearts, and the rather because we are to do our duty not as servants but as friends: John xv. 14, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' Not, Ye are my servants. Between friends there is a perfect harmony and agreement in mind and will. To do a thing for love's sake to his friend, this is an act of friendship. Not by servile constraint, but to keep them as they are his. We are to do what Christ commandeth because he commandeth it; and that is to do it in love; otherwise we break the commands when we keep them. Besides the outward act, there must be a ready inclination and delight in our work. Carnal men, the good they do they would not do. That obedience is not worthy the name of obedience that is extorted from us. Men had rather live ungodly if they durst for fear of punishment. It is but a slight kind of religion when fear prevaileth more than love; they do somewhat God willeth, but they had rather leave it undone. A man is never firmly gained to God, till he prefer service before liberty, and loveth holiness as holiness.

But how must we show this love? By two things. By being awful and cheerful; grieved when we offend him, glad when we please him; awful in avoiding what he forbiddeth, and cheerful in performing what he requireth.

[1.] Awful; you dare not break with God in any one point, but are very chary and tender of the commandments; keep them as the apple of the eye, Prov. vii. 2, that is offended with the least dust; or keeping of jewels: Prov. vi. 21, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart, tie them upon thy neck' as jewels; choice of them.

[2.] By being cheerful, ready, and forward to every good work: Ps. cx. 3, 'A willing people.' You need not stand urging and pressing; the inclination of their hearts swayeth them. A man is hardly kept from that he loveth: 1 John ii. 5, 'He that keepeth my word, in him is the love of God perfected.'

Secondly, The degree, 'I love them exceedingly.'

*Doct.* Our love to the law must be an exceeding love.

1. In the general, it noteth the height and intensiveness of our love; not a cold love, as children love things, but are soon put out of the humour; but a high strong love, that will not easily be broken or diverted, such as doth deeply affect the heart: Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' We that are



so coldly affected to spiritual things do not understand the force of these expressions. A high and strong love will break forth into meditation, operation; make us sedulous and serious in obeying God: Ps. cxix. 48, 'My hands will I lift up to thy commandments, which I have loved;' 1 John ii. 5, 'He that keepeth my word, in him is the love of God perfected.' Lift up our eyes to the receiving, our ears to the hearing, our hands to the doing of thy commandments; this argueth love.

2. The prevalency; not only high and strong, but to a prevailing degree.

[1.] Such as prevaileth over things without us. This is such a love as is greater than our love to all other things, wealth, honour, credit, estate; yea, life itself: for if anything be loved above our duty to God, it will soon prove a snare to us: Mat. xiii. 44, 'Sold all to buy the field wherein the treasure was hid.' All for the pearl of price. A believer seeth such a treasure in the word of God; that he maketh no reckoning of any worldly thing in comparison of it, but will part with whatever is pleasant and profitable to him to enjoy it, rather than be deprived of his grace. If any fleshly sensitive good or interest lieth closer to the heart than the word of God, it will in time prevail so as to make God's will and glory stoop to it, rather than this interest shall be renounced or contradicted. There is no talking of serving God till you have this prevailing love, and hate all things in comparison of your duty to God: Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man hate not father and mother.'

[2.] Such as doth prevail over carnal desires and evil affections within us; if it be not a love that doth eat up and devour our lusts within us, if the bent of your hearts be not more for God than for sin. See Baxter, pp. 273-279, in his directions about conversion. There will be evil in the best, and some good in the worst. The critical difference lieth in the prevalent bent of the heart. When your dislike of sin is greater than your love, then you may say, Rom. vii. 20, 'It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.' There must be a renewed self that prevaileth above corrupt self.

Well, then, rest not in some general approbation of the ways of God, or inclination to good, but this prevailing affection that jostleth sin out of the soul.

### SERMON CLXXXIII.

*I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee.*—VER. 168.

DAVID still goeth on in his plea. He had spoken of his faith and love, and now of his fear. We must—

1. Labour for faith to believe the promises. The man of God beginneth there, 'I have hoped for thy salvation.'

2. This faith must work by love; that is his next step, 'My soul loveth thy testimonies exceedingly.' And—

3. Love must breed in us a reverent fear of God's majesty, and a care to please him in all things. This is the third part of the plea mentioned in the text, 'I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies,' &c. In which words—

1. His integrity is again asserted.
2. The reason and encouragement of it.

1. His integrity is asserted, 'I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies.' Where it is notable the object of his duty is expressed by two words, *precepts* and *testimonies*. *Mandatis adjungit testimonia*, saith Calvin, *ut ostendat se non tantum agere de regula bene vivendi, sed complecti totum salutis fœdus*. He addeth the word 'testimonies' to that of 'precepts,' to comprise the whole covenant of salvation. Precepts signifieth the moral law, and testimonies doctrines of grace.

2. The moving cause or proper reason of this obedience, 'For all my ways are before thee.' Whereby he understandeth either the providence of God apprehended by faith as always watching over him and all his affairs for good, or a sense of God's omniscieny and omnipresence. The interpretations are subordinate one to the other; and in both respects, all our ways may be said to be before the Lord, namely, as he doth govern and dispose of them according to his will. So it is said, Prov. iii. 6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Or that he doth know and see all: Job xxxiv. 21, 'His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.' And in this double sense may a parallel place be expounded: Ps. xvi. 8, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' In point of reverence and dependence, as inspector, helper, observer, second. But why is it mentioned here? Three reasons interpreters give for it—either by way of appeal, or as the reason of his obedience, or as evidence of his sincerity.

[1.] By way of appeal, as calling God to witness for the truth of what he had said. Lord, thou art conscious to all my ways, knowest the truth of what I spake. 'Lord, thou knowest all things;' thus Peter useth it, John xxi. 17.

[2.] As a reason why he was so careful to keep all God's precepts. All my thoughts, words, and deeds are known to thee; and so I desire to approve myself to thee in every part and point of my duty.

[3.] Or it is produced as an evidence of his sincerity, that he did all things as in God's sight, and set him before his eyes as the judge of his doings, and so would not offend God to please men; for in this octonary he speaketh as a man in trouble, and ready to miscarry by carnal fear.

*Doct.* That walking as in the sight of God is a note of sincerity, and a good means to make us keep his precepts.

1. In those few words which God spake to Abraham all godliness is comprehended: Gen. xvii. 1, 'Walk before me, and be thou upright;' walk before me as in the sense of my eye and the confidence of my all-sufficiency, behave thyself as in my sight and presence. Let me give you a note or two concerning this walking as in the sight of God.

[1.] All men are in God's sight, but few think of it; they forget God's eye that is upon them; as Jacob saith in another case, Gen.

xxvi. 16, 'Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not.' God is in them, though they do not see God, and therefore act as if God did not see them. The apostle telleth us plainly, Acts xvii. 27, 'He is not far from every one of us.' Though God be not far from us, yet we may be far from him, at a great distance in our minds and affections. God is near us in the effects of his power and providence, but the elongation and distance is on our parts. We do not consider his eye that is upon us; for many dare do that in the sight of God and angels which they dare not do in the sight of a little child.

[2.] This walking as in the sight of God implieth a looking upon God as witness and judge, as one that seeth for the present, and will hereafter call you to an account; and so it works upon those two great articles of present providence and last judgment; the one consideration puts an edge upon the other, and maketh it more operative. God is to be looked on as one sitting upon his throne; and Solomon telleth us, 'A king sitting upon the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes,' Prov. xx. 8. Would a subject break the laws in his sovereign's sight? So when God looketh on, shall we affront him to his face, the great judge of all the earth? Job xi. 11, 'He seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?' As Ahasuerus said, Esther vii. 8, 'Will he force the queen also before me?' The greatest malefactors will carry it demurely in the presence of their judge: Ps. x. 14, 'Thou hast seen it, thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thine hand.'

[3.] We are not only to remember God's eye in the duties of piety which we perform directly to God, but also in the duties of righteousness which we owe to men: Luke i. 75, 'In holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.' Holiness hath relation to God, and righteousness to men; in both we must act as before him, as in his eye and presence; not only in praying and hearing; then we are before him, immediately speaking to him; but before him as to men; all our respects there must be done as in and to the Lord, performing duties we owe to men as in the sight and presence of the Lord, as it is often said, so as to approve ourselves to God, who seeth the heart; do it unto the Lord heartily: Ps. xxv. 15, 'Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord.'

[4.] God doth not only behold our actions, but our principles and aims, and the secret motions of our hearts. He is neither ignorant of man, nor anything in man. Men may judge of actions, but not of principles, no further than they are discovered; but God judges of principles when the action is fair: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'And thou Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagination of the thoughts;' words that imply an accurate search. God looketh to the bottom and spring of actions, not only the matter, but the principle. A man that standeth by a river in a low place can only see that part of the stream that passeth by, but he that is aloof in the air in a higher place may see the whole course, where it riseth and how it runneth; so God at one view seeth the beginning, rise, and ending of actions; whatever we think, speak, or do, he seeth it altogether. He knoweth our thoughts



before we can think them: Ps. cxxxix. 2, 'Thou knowest my down-sitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off; before we can conclude anything. A gardener knoweth what roots are in the ground long before they appear, and what fruits they will produce.

2. This is a good means to make us keep his precepts.

[1.] It maketh for the restraint of evil; the sight of God is a bridle to us: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Shall we break God's laws before his face? We take heed what we say and do before informers, and should we not much more before the judge himself? If we be not thus affected, it is a sign we never had a sight and sense of God's eye: 3 John 11, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God.' God taught his people this by the type of covering their excrements: Deut. xxiii. 13, 14, 'For the Lord walketh in the midst of the camp, therefore let thy camp be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.' The flesh will soon seduce us were it not for the awe of God's eye. Inferiors, when they are in the sight and presence of their superiors, are very careful of their behaviour. He were an unhappy son or a lewd servant that would misdemean himself in the sight and presence of his father or master. Children at school, all is whisht when the master cometh. She were a lewd and impudent wife that in the sight and presence of her husband would prostitute herself to another man. This is our case; God is father and lord, and we are always in his sight; if we believe it, and can remember it, would we be so shameless as to sin, he looking upon us? The wise heathens were sensible that such a thought would be a curb to us, therefore admonished their disciples that they should always set before them some Cato or Cælius, some grave and reverend person, that they might behave themselves as in their presence; for saith Seneca, *Magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccatoris testis adfuit*—a great part of sin would be prevented if, when we are about to sin, some witness were present with us. They thought this fiction would be a restraint, and the fiction of grave men. But we speak now of the eyes of God, and that not as a fiction and supposition, but as a certain and undoubted truth; no less certain than that there is a God, which, of all truths, is most certain. Therefore, should not the eye of God restrain, who is with us always and in all places?

[2.] For the encouragement to every good work, and so it is a spur to us. God looketh on; he that is thy judge and rewarder, he knoweth how faithfully we keep his law. All the labours, miseries, slanders which thou endurest for his sake are known to him: Rev. ii. 3, 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience.' He taketh notice of thy faithfulness. Do not think only that God doth spy out our failings: Prov. xv. 3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' He taketh notice of both, both as rewarder and avenger. Now cowards will adventure much in the presence of their general, and idle servants will work while their master looketh on; and shall not we do the Lord's work, since he taketh notice? He knoweth our work and our discouragements, and will help accordingly: Rev. ii. 13, 'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name.' See Basil, *Regulis Brevioribus*, quæst. 34.

More particularly.

1. It is a great means to make us serious in all our addresses to God, that we may behave ourselves with that reverence and awefulness that will become the divine majesty. What is the reason men are so slight and customary in their prayers and other acts of religion? They do not see the invisible God, and think of him to whom they speak. From practical atheism and unbelief we have little sense of things unseen. In speaking to a man we behave ourselves with that gravity and reverence that his quality deserveth; but in speaking to God, our thoughts wander, our hearts are dead and vain, because we see not him with whom we have to do: 'Make us gods to go before us,' Exod. xxxii. 1. Ay! that we would have a visible God, whom we may see and hear; but the true God being a spirit and an invisible power, all the service we do him is a task performed more out of custom than affection, in a slight perfunctory manner. Now, when we believe God's eye, and are sensible of his presence, that maketh us more serious. He telleth man his thought. Thoughts speak louder in his ears than our words. Oh! with what reverence should we creep into his presence, before whom all things are naked and open! It was a direction Seneca gave to his friend Lucilius, Epist. x.—*Sic vive cum hominibus, tanquam Deus videat; sic loquere cum Deo, tanquam homines videant*—so live with men as if God saw; so speak with God as if men saw. Shall such a speech come out of the mouth of a heathen, and shall not Christians remember God, and set themselves as in his sight when they come before him? We would be ashamed if our hearts were turned in and out in any duty, and men did know all our light, foolish, sinful thoughts that take up our minds; and doth not God see and hate these things more than men. So that it is a powerful consideration to make us come with humility and reverence into God's presence.

2. It maketh us sincere in our whole course; for this is sincerity, to do all things in order to God: sincerity lieth in the universality of obedience, and purity of intention.

[1.] For universality of obedience, we have an instance here in the text. David, by keeping himself as in God's all-seeing presence, performed a uniform acceptable obedience to him. So will all do that habituate this thought, and make it familiar to them; this is that that maketh them obey in presence and absence, to perform secret duties, Mat. vi. 6. Therefore a Christian is as religious, if not more, alone and in secret as before others. The hypocrite walketh before men, who see the outward man only, seeketh chiefly to approve himself to men, and therefore is more religious before others than alone; but it is otherwise with a heart deeply possessed with a sense of God's omniscience and omnipresence. So to avoid secret sins, which are only liable to God's cognisance; he that knoweth all the workings of his heart lie open before God, maketh it his business to abstain from fleshly lusts as from sinful practices, which would betray him to shame before the world, and dareth not allow himself to sin anywhere, but there where God cannot see, that is, nowhere. Yea, when God's children forget themselves to be in their Father's presence, and corruption gets the start of grace, they afterwards come to be ashamed, and

grieved for those sins for which the world cannot tax them : Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse me, Lord, from secret sins.' All our actions are seen by the Lord ; some of them may be known to men, but others may escape their eye ; therefore, if we look to men only, we are partial ; but if to God, universal in our obedience. If this be all our aim, that men may not impeach us of any crime ; but if this be our aim, to approve ourselves to God, it is a sign we are sincere.

[2.] As to purity of intention, the proper reason of that is, because God seeth our aims as well as our actions, and knoweth all the deceits and tricks of a false heart. Our business is not with men, but with God, the searcher of hearts, who can distinguish between the motions of the flesh, and those inspired by his Spirit. Certainly, if we make him paymaster, we must intend his work : Rom. ii. 29, 'For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly ; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God.' He that maketh God his witness, approver, and judge, must chiefly mind what God looketh after : Prov. xvi. 2, 'All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weigheth the spirit.' That which he chiefly regardeth are men's principles and ends.

[3.] It maketh us faithful in our relations, by considering he appoints them to us, and seeth how we improve them for his glory. Magistrates, there is a special presence of God, not only to direct and protect, but also to note and observe them : 2 Chron. xix. 6, 'The Lord is with you in the judgment ;' Ps. lxxxii. 1, 'God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, and judgeth among the gods.' When they are for the execution of his office, God is there, and therefore they above all must be men fearing God, have a reverent regard to his eye and presence. Diodorus Siculus telleth us of some heathens that had several empty chairs advanced aloof<sup>1</sup> near the tribunals, as for their gods, to show they were present, and had an inspection over all acts of judicature. So for ministers, they must not only give an account at last, but are observed for the present. God hath a watchful eye over them, as they have and should have over the flock. He observeth how we discharge our trust, and what are our aims, whether to promote our own interest or his : 2 Cor. ii. 17, 'But as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ.' Our doctrines must not only be sound, but our aims and principles. It is not enough to speak of God, in his name, his truth, but sincerely approve our hearts to him in the faithful discharge of our duty. So 1 Thes. ii. 4, 'We speak not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts ;' in all singleness and sincerity of heart discharging our trust. So masters of families are to walk in their houses with a perfect heart, Ps. ci. 2 ; though they are shut up in their families from the observation of others, yet at home as well as abroad they must be careful to walk with God in their domestical converse, where men are wont most to discover themselves, and should behave themselves prudently, and holily, and faithfully there. The apostle mindeth masters of their Master in heaven, Eph. vi. 9 ; one who noteth and observeth your dealings, and will call you to an account for all your carriage : your sins and graces are not hid from him. So for servants : Col. iii. 21-23, 'Servants, obey in all things

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'aloft' ?—Ed.



your masters according to the flesh ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers ; but in singleness of heart, fearing God : and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' Still the consideration of God's eye is suggested to them ; they must be careful of their master's concerns, whether their master be present or absent, or whether the things they do will come to his knowledge, yea or no ; for though the eye of man will not find them out, yet the eye of God must be regarded ; therefore, with respect to God, they must be careful and faithful. So again, Eph. vi. 5, 6, 'Servants, be obedient to them which are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ ; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.' They should be cheerful, laborious, painful, showing all faithfulness in things committed to their trust, even to a pin or the smallest matter, not saucy, stubborn, and malapert ; because the Lord looketh upon them, and if they so do, will own them and bless them. Thus you see we should have better magistrates, better ministers, better masters, better servants, better fathers, better children, if this principle were once deeply imprinted upon their hearts, that all their ways are before the Lord, and he still observeth what they do in all their actions.

*Use.* To press us to walk as in the sight of God, and to foresee him before you in all your ways. To press you hereunto, consider these things:—

1. You are in the sight of God, whether you think so or no. We can no more be removed from the presence of God than from our own beings, for he is in everything that subsists, and it subsists by him. The apostle telleth us, Eph. iv. 6, 'There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.' The sun is some representation of God's eye ; nothing is hid from its sight : if the sun were an eye, it would see all things that it shineth upon. So doth God ; only with this difference, the sun cannot pierce through dark and thick bodies, but God is over all, and through all, and in all, upholding and overruling all by his powerful providence. Therefore you cannot lie hid from God ; only this sight is not comfortable and profitable to you, unless you see him as he seeth you. They say of the panther, when it hideth the head it thinketh it is not seen because it seeth not, and so is taken by the hunters. This an emblem of wretched sinners ; they see not God, and therefore think they are not seen by him, and so go on doing evil till their iniquities find them out.

2. What a noble thing it is always to live in the sight of God ; for by this exercise, in some measure, and as this mortal state will permit, you enjoy the happiness of the blessed angels, for this is the privilege of the blessed angels : Mat. xviii. 10, 'That they always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.' So when you live in the thought of God in some measure, you are doing their work, and your minds become as it were another heaven ; for heaven is where God is, and there God is in that heart that thinketh of him ; not only there by the powerful effects of his providence, and the impressions of his grace, but there by the workings of our hearts.

3. The profit is exceeding great. By conversing with God often ye become like him. As musing of vanity maketh us vain, heavenly and

holy thoughts produce a heavenly mind, and frequent remembrance is one means to introduce the divine nature. Moses, in that extraordinary converse with God, his face shone, he carried away some strictures and rays of the divine majesty in his countenance. We cannot look for that effect upon our bodies, but serious and ponderous thoughts leave some change upon the soul; there is the lustre of grace, and the beauty of the divine nature, which is a greater thing left upon us. The apostle saith, 2 Cor. iii. 19, 'For 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, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' By seeing him in the word, considering him as always present with us; the heart is coloured and dyed by the object it often thinketh upon. Oh! therefore be persuaded to set the Lord before you.

For means.

1. To see God aright we need faith, for God is invisible, and invisible things are only seen by faith, Heb. xi. 1; and the instance is in Moses, ver. 27, 'By faith he saw him that was invisible.' Many have an opinion that God knoweth all things, but they have not a sound belief of it; it is what is owned by the tongue rather than the heart. Cold and dead opinions are easily taken up, but a lively faith is God's gift; this is a sight not easily gotten.

2. We must often revive this thought, for the oftener we think of it, the more deeply it is impressed upon the soul: Ps. ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.' It is not said, that deny him, but forget him. On the other side, there is a book of remembrance for those that thought upon his name, Mal. iii. 16. God takes it kindly when our minds are set a-work upon him and upon his attributes. We have every moment life and breath, and all things from him; he thinketh of us, and therefore out of a necessary gratitude we should oftener think of God. Nazianzen saith twice, Naz. Orat. de Cura Pauperum, Orat. 10, and Orat. de Theol., Orat. 11: We should as often think of God as breathe, for we cannot breathe without him, and without his continual providential influence we fall into nothing, as sunbeams vanish when the sun is gone. Therefore the apostle telleth the Ephesians they were in their natural estate, *ἄθεοι*, Eph. ii. 12. There are two sorts of atheists—they that deny God, and they that wholly forget God. The latter are more common, and they are described, Ps. x. 4, 'God is not in all their thoughts.' Oh! what misery is this, that we have thoughts more than we can tell what to do withal, and yet we will not afford God the least share in them! He were a cruel man that would cast his provisions and superfluities into the street, and deny them to the poor, that should let his drink run into the kennel rather than that they should taste a drop of it. Such are we to God. We know not what to employ our thoughts upon, and yet we will not think of his name. We go musing of vanity all the day long, and be grinding of chaff, rather than take in good corn into the mill.

3. There are certain seasons when we are bound not only habitually but actually to think of God.

[1.] In a time of temptation, when the flesh, being enticed by profit or pleasure, or scared by fears, tempts us to do anything contrary to the

will of God. Thus did Joseph, when he might have sinned securely and with advantage, Gen. xxxix. 9 ; the thoughts of God's eye and presence dashed the temptation. We forget him that seeth in secret, and therefore take the liberty to indulge our lusts. Can I consider that God looketh on, and do thus unworthily? It is a daring him to his face to go on with these thoughts; therefore God seeth what I will now do; it is a seasonable relief to the soul.

[2.] We should actually revive this thought in solemn duties, when we come to act the part of angels, and to look God in the face. Surely God is greatly to be had in fear of all that are round about him. It would prevent a great deal of carelessness in worship to remember who is the party with whom we have to do, who is speaking to us in the word, and to whom we speak in prayer: Heb. iv. 13, 'All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' He knoweth how we hear, what thoughts and affections are stirring in our hearts: 'We are all here present before the Lord, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' We come not hither to see and be seen of men, but to see God; we are here before God, as if God himself were speaking to us. God is everywhere with us, but we are not always everywhere with God, but when we lift up our hearts and set him before our eyes. So in prayer, when we speak to God, we should think of him who is an eternal being, to whom belongeth kingdom, power, and glory. Prayer is called a coming to God. We beg his eyes be open, Neh. i. 6, to behold us as well as hear us. Now what an awing thought is this in prayer, that our preparations, motions, affections, dispositions, aims are all naked and open to his eyes!

[3.] When God findeth us out in our secret sins by his word, Spirit, and providence, or the wrings and pinches of our own consciences. By his word: 1 Cor. xiv. 25, 'And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down upon his face, will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' And Heb. iv. 12, 13, 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, for all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' So by his Spirit setting conscience a-work: Job xiii. 26, 'Thou makest me possess the sins of my youth.' Old forgotten sins come to remembrance. Own God and his omniscience in the dispensation when God sets our sins in order before us as if anew committed. So providence: Gen. xlii. 21, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother,' &c. Affliction openeth the eyes; it is his rack to extort confessions from us.

[4.] Consider upon what good reason God's knowing all things is built; his creation and providence. If he made all things, and sustaineth all things, surely he knoweth all things in particular, for every wise man knoweth what he doth. A father cannot forget how many children he hath. He that leadeth us by the hand wherever we go, knoweth where and how we go. Christ knew when virtue passed from him in a crowd; he said, 'Somebody toucheth me, for I perceive that virtue is passed out from me,' Luke viii. 45, 46. Certainly God



knoweth there is such a creature as thou art, such a man or woman of the world, knoweth thy uprising and down-lying : Ps. cxxxix. 2, 'Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.' He knoweth whether we are laughing, mourning, or praying. He that will judge thee knoweth thee, or else he were an incompetent judge.

[5.] Humble thyself for walking so unanswerably. It would trouble us to have our thoughts, counsels, actions, all we think and speak, divulged and published. All is naked and open to God. If we did not think God's eye a fancy and fond conceit, we would at least walk more humbly. It would trouble us exceedingly if men had a window into our hearts in a time of prayer. Why not because God seeth ? How watchful are we not to incur the penalty of man's law, but offences against God are lightly passed over. With what copiousness and flowings of language will men enlarge themselves in prayer when in company, and how slight and overly in closet duties, if not wholly neglective of them ; which is in effect to say, Our heavenly father seeth not in secret.

### SERMON CLXXXIV.

*My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.—*  
VER. 171.

In the two former verses he had prayed—(1.) For an increase of saving knowledge, ver. 169. (2.) For deliverance out of his troubles, ver. 170. He reinforceth his request by a promise of thankfulness, if he could get a gracious answer to that, 'My lips shall utter praise,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. A resolution of praise, *my lips shall utter praise.*

2. The reason and occasion of it, *when thou hast taught me thy statutes.*

First, A resolution of praise.

The word for 'uttereth praise,' signifieth that praise should break from him as water boileth and bubbleth up out of a fountain. Indeed words cometh from the abundance of the heart, Mat. xii. 34 ; either from the plenty of spiritual knowledge, John iv. 38—as a fountain yieldeth water, so his knowledge breaketh out into praises—or from the plenty of spiritual affection ; rather from the great esteem of the benefit, or fulness of joy at the thought of it. It is a great privilege to be delivered from blindness and ignorance : 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mat. xiii. 11. Now they that have a spiritual gust and taste are so affected with it that they cannot be enough thankful for it ; and it is notable that this thankfulness is promised upon granting the first request.

*Doct.* Divine illumination is so great a gift, that all who are made partakers of it are especially obliged to praise and thanksgiving.

This will appear by these considerations :—

1. That upon the receipt of every mercy we should praise God. There is an equity in it, for this is God's pact and agreement with us :

Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' We are forward in supplications, but backward in gratulations; all the lepers could beg health, but one returned to give glory to God, Luke xvii. 18. Self-love puts us upon prayers, but the love of God upon praises. Now we should be as much affected, or rather more, in the receiving mercies, as we were in asking mercies; because before we knew it only by guess and imagination, but then by actual feeling and experience of the comfort of it. Therefore to seek, and not to praise, is to be loving to ourselves.

2. Those that have received most from God are most bound to honour him and praise him, for the return must carry some proportion with the receipt: 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 'Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him;' not according to the kind, only good, and not evil for good, but according to the degree. Great mercies require great acknowledgments: she loved much to whom much was forgiven, and she<sup>1</sup> loved little to whom little, Luke vii. 47. More sins pardoned, more mercies received, God expecteth more love, more praise, more thanksgiving. And Luke xii. 48, 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men commit much, of him will they ask the more.' Christ pleadeth the equity from the practice of men. The more helps, the more work and service we expect. He should come sooner who rideth on horseback than he that cometh on foot; so the more light and knowledge God vouchsafeth, the more honour and glory he expecteth from us.

3. That we should praise God especially for spiritual benefits. Usually those are overlooked, but they deserve the greatest acknowledgment; these are discriminating, and come from special love. Corn, wine, and oil are bestowed upon the world, but knowledge and grace upon his saints; these are the favour of his peculiar people: Ps. cvi. 4, 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest to thy people; O visit me with thy salvation.' To have the favourite's mercy is more than to have a common mercy. Protection is the benefit of every subject, but intimate and near admission is the privilege of special favourites. Love and hatred cannot be known by the things before us, Eccles. ix. 1-3. Christ gave his Spirit to the good disciples, the keeping of the purse to Judas.

[1.] Partly because these concern the better part, the inward man, 2 Cor. iv. 16. He doth us more favour that healeth a wound in the body than he that seweth up a rent in the garment. Is not the body more than raiment, the soul more than the body? and the soul as furnished with grace more than the soul only as furnished with natural gifts and endowments?

[2.] Partly because these are brought about with more ado than temporal favours. God, as a creator and merciful upholder of all his creatures, doth bestow temporal blessings upon the ungodly world, even upon heathens, who never heard of Christ; yet saving grace he bestoweth only as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. i. 3, with respect to the merit of Christ, who was to purchase these blessings before he could obtain them.

[3.] Partly because they are pledges of eternal blessings, and the

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'he'?—ED.

beginning of our eternal well-being, John vi. 27. These and eternal blessedness are so linked together than they cannot be separated: Rom. viii. 29, 30, 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformable to the image of his Son: that he might be the first-fruits among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified;' and Phil. i. 6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.'

[4.] Partly because these incline and fit the heart for praise and thanksgiving; the one giveth occasion to praise God, the other a heart to praise God. Outward mercies give the occasion to praise God, these the disposition; other mercies the motives, these the preparations; these dispose the heart to it: Ps. cxix. 7, 'I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I have learned thy righteous judgments.' Here they dispose the lip and open the mouth: Ps. li. 15, 'O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' The work of grace doth set our lips wide open in the magnifying and praising of God. Grace is the matter of God's praise, and also giveth a ready will to praise God, yea, the very deed of praising him.

[5.] Partly because temporal favours may be given in anger, but the graces of the Spirit are never given in anger. God may give an estate in judgment, and indulge large pastures to beasts fitted for destruction; but he giveth not an enlightened mind and a renewed heart in anger; it is a token of his special love: 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mat. xiii. 11. Well, then, for all these things should we praise God. We have a quick sense in bodily mercies, but in soul concernments we are not alike affected.

4. That among spiritual blessings divine illumination is a very great gift, and accordingly should be acknowledged by us. To make this evident, I shall—

[1.] Open the nature of this divine illumination.

[2.] Show you the worth of it, and how much it should be valued by us.

[1.] For the nature of it. There is a twofold wisdom and knowledge of divine mysteries:—

(1.) One which is only a gift: 1 Cor. viii. 1, 'We know that we all have knowledge: knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.' This is an excellent gift, but yet it floweth from the common influence of the Spirit, and puffeth up the party, because it is apprehended only by such an excellency as conduceth to the interests of the flesh, and to attain esteem in the world; and because he hath not thereby a deep and piercing knowledge of his misery, but is cold and weak, and doth not warm the heart with love to the thing known. Therefore we should see to it what kind of knowledge we have, whether it be a gift or a grace, whether we use it to exalt God or ourselves. The bare gift puffeth us up with a lofty conceit of ourselves and a disdain of others, but grace keepeth us humble; for the more we know that way, the more we see our defects, and what little reason we have to glory



in our knowledge, or any other grace; and besides, by it we are suitably affected to what we know.

(2.) There is a special knowledge of divine mysteries wrought in us by the special and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost; this is 'the wisdom which cometh from above,' which 'is first pure, and then peaceable,' James iii. 17, which humbleth the man that hath it, for the more he knoweth of God, the more his own opinion and estimation of himself is lessened: Job xlii. 5, 6, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.' I have spoken unadvisedly of God. This knowledge also maketh him serious, and is operative upon the heart, and worketh love to the thing known: John iv. 10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c.; and maketh us to know God in Christ, so as to acknowledge him, and give him due honour, respect, and reverence. It is a knowledge joined with oblectation and affection. This knowledge is considerable as to its beginning and increase.

(1st.) Its beginning, the first removing of the natural blindness and darkness of our understandings, so that we have a clear discerning of the things of God when the scales fall from our eyes. Naturally we were ignorant of God and the way to heaven, but now, brought to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, we are acquainted with both. The first creature which God made was light; so in the new creation, the new creature is illuminated with a heavenly light, and cured of its former blindness, that we see things in another manner than ever we saw them before: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'Called out of darkness into his marvellous light;' as a man brought out of a dark dungeon into an open light. And Acts xxvi. 18, 'To open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' So Eph. v. 8, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now light in the Lord.' To be seeing is better than to be blind, to be in light than to be in darkness. This is God's first work, and it is marvellous in our eyes; it is double, when we first begin to have a clear knowledge of our own misery, Rev. iii. 18. Whereas before we lived in gross ignorance of our own condition; so when we begin to see the remedy, as well as our misery; 2 Cor. iv. 6, 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' The first thing that God convinceth us of is our own sin, guilt, and misery. So that those things that either we knew not, or did swim loose in the brain, we begin now to be affected with them. We talked before of sin as a thing of course, and were wont to marvel why men kept such a deal ado about sin; but now the case is altered. God hath opened his eyes, and therefore he complaineth of it as the greatest burden, and fain would be rid of it at any rate. He beginneth to seek after Christ as his only remedy, and nothing will satisfy him but Christ; and all things are but dung and dross in comparison of the excellency of Christ, and that he may be found in him. He lamenteth his case, and can trust himself nowhere but in Christ's hands. A natural man slippeth into a heedless credulity, and either doth not look upon the gospel as a real truth, or else is not affected with it so as to venture his salvation in that bottom.

(2d.) As to the increase and progress, and so those that are taught of God need to be taught of God again, and to seek a further increase of spiritual wisdom, or a further degree of the saving knowledge of divine mysteries; as the apostle prayeth for the Ephesians, towards whom he acknowledgeth God had abounded in all wisdom and prudence, yet prayeth that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of their understandings might be opened, Eph. i. 17, 18, with the 8th verse. We are yet ignorant in many things, for we know but in part, not fully rooted in the knowledge of these things which we know. They need to be refreshed with new illumination from God, that our knowledge may be active and lively, and stand out against new and daily temptations, and that oblivion and forgetfulness, which is a kind of ignorance, and is apt ever and anon to creep upon us, may be prevented, and truths may be ready at hand for our use, James i. 5. And this is that which David beggeth an increase of knowledge for; he, being a holy man and a prophet, needed not the first illumination: and every degree is a great favour, to be acknowledged with praise.

[2.] Let me speak of the worth of this divine illumination in itself. The worth of it appeareth in four things:—

(1.) Its author. God, by his efficacious teaching, doth cure the blindness of our minds, and doth open and incline our hearts towards spiritual and heavenly things: John vi. 45, 'They shall all be taught of God;' 1 Thes. iv. 10, 'Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another;' 1 John ii. 27, 'The anointing teacheth you all things.' As the heathen Cato would have none to teach his son but himself, for he said that instruction was such a benefit, that he would not have his son beholden to any for it but himself. Oh! it is a blessed privilege to be taught of God, to be made wise to salvation, and not only to get an ear to hear, but a heart to understand, and learn by hearing, not only the power to believe, but the very act of faith itself. God's teaching is always effectual, not only directive, but persuasive, enlightening the mind to know, and inclining the will and affections to embrace what we know. He writeth the truth upon the heart, and puts it into the mind, Heb. viii. 10. He sufficiently propoundeth the object, and rectifieth the faculty, imprints the truth upon the very soul. But how doth God teach? In the very place where Christ speaketh of our being taught of God, he presently addeth, John vi. 46, 'Not that any man hath seen the Father.' God's teaching doth not import that any man must see God, and immediately converse with him, and talk with God, and so be taught by him. No; God teacheth externally by his word, and internally by the Spirit, but yet so powerfully and effectually that the lesson is learned and deeply imprinted upon our souls. This teaching is often expressed by seeing. Now, to a clear sight three things concur—an object conspicuous, a perspicuous medium, and a well-disposed organ or clear eye. In God's teaching there is all these. The object, to be seen plainly in the scriptures, are the things of God, not fancies, but realities, and by the light of the Spirit represented to us, and the eye of the mind opened. A blind man cannot see at midday, nor the most clear-sighted at midnight, when objects lie hidden under a veil of darkness.

The object must be revealed and brought nigh to us in a due light ; and God secretly openeth the eye of the soul, that we see heavenly things with life and affection. The author then showeth the mercy, when God will not only teach us by men, but by his Spirit.

(2.) The objects known, the highest and most important matters in the world, the gracious soul is savingly acquainted with. It is more to have the knowledge of the profoundest sciences than of some poor and low employment ; as Themistocles said, To know a little of true philosophy is more than to know how to play upon a fiddle. But now, to have the saving knowledge of God and of the life to come is more than to have the most admired wisdom of the flesh, than all the common learning in the world. And therefore how much are we bound to praise God if he will teach us his statutes ! More than if we knew how to govern kingdoms and commonwealths, and do the greatest business upon earth. Two things do commend the object of this knowledge :—

(1st.) It is conversant about the most high and excellent things.

(2d.) The most necessary and useful things.

(1st.) Things of so high a nature as to know God, who is the cause of all things ; and Jesus Christ, who is the restorer of all things ; and the Spirit, who cherisheth and preserveth all things ; especially to know his heavenly operations, and the nature and acting of his several graces : Jer. ix. 24, ‘ Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he knoweth me, saith the Lord.’ There is the excellency of a man to know God, to conceive aright of his nature, attributes, and works ; so as to love, trust, reverence, and serve him. Alas ! all other knowledge is a poor low thing to this. God hath written a book to us of himself, as Cæsar wrote his own Commentaries, and by histories and prophecies hath set forth himself to us to be the creature’s creator, preserver, deliverer, and glorifier. This is the knowledge we should seek after ; common crafts teach us how to get bread, but this book teacheth us how to get the kingdom of heaven, to get the bread of life, the meat that perisheth not. Law preserveth the estates and testaments of men, but this the testament of God, the charter of our eternal inheritance. Physic cureth the diseases of the body ; this, afflicted minds and distempered hearts. Natural philosophy raiseth up men to the contemplation of nature ; this, of the maker of all things and author of nature. History, the rise and ruin of kingdoms, states, and cities ; this, the creation and consummation of the world. Rhetoric, to stir the affection ; this, to enkindle divine love. Poetry moveth natural delight ; here psalms, that we may delight in God. These are the only true and sublime things. As light is pleasant to the eye, so is knowledge to the mind. But where have you the knowledge of such high things ? What are the mysteries of nature to the mysteries of godliness ! To know the almighty living God, and to behold his wisdom, goodness, and power, in all his works, surely this is a sweet and pleasant thing to a gracious soul ; but especially to know him in Christ, to know the mystery of the incarnation, person, natures, and mediation of Christ : 1 Tim. iii. 16, ‘ Great is the mystery of godliness.’ This is a mystery without controversy great, to know the law and covenant of God : Deut. iv. 6, ‘ This is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations who shall hear these statutes.’



And the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, by which we are wrought and prepared for everlasting life.

(2d.) So necessary and useful to know the way of salvation, the disease and remedy of our souls, our danger and the cure, our work and our wages, the business of life and our end, what is to be believed and practised, what we are to enjoy and do ; these are the things which concern us, all other knowledge is but curious and speculative, and hath more of pleasure than of profit. To know our own affairs, our greatest and most necessary affairs, these are the things we should busy ourselves about. *Ἐνός χρεία*, 'One thing is necessary,' Luke x. 42. Other things we may well spare. Now what is necessary but to know our misery that we may prevent it ; our remedy, that we may look after it in time ; our work and business, that we may perform it ; our end, that we intend it, and be encouraged by it ; what course we must take that we may be everlastingly happy ? Well, then, if God will show us what is good, Micah vi. 8, and teach us what is good, that we may know whither we are a-going, and which way we must go ; if he will give us counsel in our reins, to choose him for our portion, Ps. xvi. 5, we ought to bless his name. So the 11th verse, 'Thou wilt show me the path of life.' Though ignorant of other things, we are highly obliged for this discovery. It is the work of God to give us counsel, and should be matter of perpetual thanksgiving to us.

(3.) The use for which this knowledge serveth.

(1st.) To entertain communion with God for the present, for by knowing him, we come to enjoy him : Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness ;' that is more than to have a portion in this world. And 1 John i. 3, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ.' By communion or fellowship is not meant a society of equals, but the dutiful yet cheerful attendance of an inferior on his superior, the creature on his creator ; but yet so as that there is a holy intimacy and familiarity in it, because we both love and are beloved of God. In every ordinance they draw nearer to God than others do ; for 1 John i. 7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' All our duties are the converse of a sanctified creature with a holy God, and a humble creature dealing with the blessed God for a supply of all their wants. They pour out their souls to him, and he openeth his ear and bosom unto them ; he teacheth them his way, and they walk in his paths, Isa. ii. 3. They walk in the fear of his name and the comforts of his Spirit, Acts ix. 31. They seek his glory as their great end, and live in the sense of his dearest love.

(2d.) To enjoy him for ever : 'This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent,' John xvii. 3. Alas ! what is the knowing how to get riches and pleasures, and the vain glory of the world to this ? Surely you that are taught of God, your business is above other men's. While they drive on no greater trade than providing for the flesh, or feathering a nest that will quickly be pulled down, they are providing for everlasting glory and happiness. They aim at nothing beyond this life ; all

their cares are confined within the narrow bounds of time and the compass of this world; but these look higher, and begin a life which shall be perfected in heaven; they are laying up treasure in heaven.

(4.) The manner of knowing things, when taught of God. They see things with greater clearness, certainty, efficacy, and power.

(1st.) With greater clearness. Others know words, but they know things, and therefore know as they ought to know them. They know the grace of God in truth, Col. i. 6. They have the spiritual discerning, and that is a quite different thing from a literal discerning, 1 Cor. ii. 14. He hath an experimental and sweeter knowledge than learned men that are ungodly. He hath tasted that the Lord is gracious, the sweetness of his love, and the riches of his grace in Christ. The theory of divine knowledge, though never so exact, giveth us not this. They have more of the words and notions, but less of the thing itself, they have the sign, the other the thing signified; they break the shell, and the other eats the kernel; they dress the meat, but the others feed upon and digest it; dig in the mines of knowledge as negroes, but others have the gold. A rotten post may support a living tree.

(2d.) With more certainty. There is a great deal of difference between taking up religion out of inspiration, and out of opinion or tradition. Faith is the gift of God, but credulity is received by the report of men. Men may guess at the truth by their own wit, they may talk of it by rote, and according to what they read and hear from others; but divine knowledge is the fruit of the Spirit: Mat. xvi. 17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven;' John iv. 42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but we have heard him ourselves, and know indeed that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world;' and 1 Thes. i. 5, 'For our gospel came to you, not in word only, but in power and the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' We never apprehend the truth with any certainty, nor can we discern God's impress on the word, but in the light of the Spirit. God's illumination maketh our knowledge of things certain and infallible: 'Know ἀσφαλῶς, assuredly,' Acts ii. 36; John xvii. 8, ἀληθῶς. It is not a may be, a bare possibility, or likely to be, a probability; but it is sure to be, and will be so, a certainty that belongeth to faith.

(3d.) For efficacy and power: 1 Thes. i. 5, 'For our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost;' 'Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,' Acts vi. 5. We are affected with the truths we know, yea, transformed and changed by them, 2 Cor. iii. 18; changed into a divine nature, 1 Peter i. 4. Our hearts are moulded and fitted for God, and for every good work; so that this is a benefit should be much acknowledged.

Use 1. To inform us how the saints do and should esteem this benefit of divine illumination. In this psalm they esteem it more than if God should bestow a great deal of wealth upon them. See Ps. cxix. 14, 'I rejoice in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches;' and ver. 72, 'More than thousands of gold and silver.' Once more, they think themselves well paid if they get it by sharp afflictions, though by loss of health or wealth: ver. 71, 'It is good

for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' The reason is, because they value it as a mercy, for which they can never enough be thankful: Phil. iii. 8, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things to be 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.' The people of God have no reason to envy others that live in the pomp of the world and the splendour of outward accommodations, if he give them the saving knowledge of himself: Prov. iii. 31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.' If God will teach us his statutes, though he keepeth us low, it is more to be one of God's disciples, to be owned by him in an ordinance, than to live a life of pomp and ease.

Secondly, None are fit to praise God but those whom God hath taught: Ps. l. 16, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?' The new song and the old heart do ill agree together; but when God hath framed our hearts to obedience, then is praise comely in our mouths.

*Use 2.* To direct us—

1. How to pray for spiritual grace if we would obtain it. The glory of God is the end of all grace vouchsafed to us; with this end, we must pray to God for it. The end of our petitions and requests to God should be, that we may be enabled to praise God; then we seek God for God, much more when we ask spiritual grace. To ask temporal benefits to consume upon our lusts is very bad, and the ready way to bespeak ourselves a denial: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.' Much more to ask spiritual gifts for our lusts' sake; to beg God to open our mouths, to show forth our own praises rather than his; or knowledge to advance ourselves: as it is a greater indignity to void our excrements in a cup of gold for a prince's own drinking, than in a common utensil. Besides, it sheweth our value of the benefit to think of praise before we have obtained it: Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.'

2. It must be used and improved to that end; when we have obtained, we must not be proud of any spiritual gift, but lay our crown at God's feet: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'Who made thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?' We pervert the end of the end when we are puffed up, and give shrewd suspicion that it is a common gift, not saving grace, when we are puffed up with it.

*Use 3.* Exhortation to press you to glorify God and praise him, if he hath given you any knowledge of himself and of the way of salvation.

1. This is God's end in bestowing his grace, that in word and deed we should be to the praise of his glorious grace: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'That ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

2. You were as indocile and unteachable as others, only God made the difference: Job ii. 12, 'For vain man would be wise, though man be born like the wild ass's colt;' Jer. xxxi. 18, 'Like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;' and therefore the glory must entirely redound to him. You might have perished as a witless fool, and gone to hell as others do, but that God gave you counsel.



3. It is the way to increase it: Col. ii. 7, 'Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.' Thanksgiving for what we have received is an effectual means to make us constant, grow and abound in every grace: 'Let the people praise thee, O God, yea, let all the people praise thee,' Ps. lxxvii. 3. Look, as the vapours go up, so the showers come down. Experiences of former mercies thankfully acknowledged draweth down more mercy.

4. Prayer necessarily inferreth praise: Phil. iv. 6, 'In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' Blessing God for favours already received is necessary to be joined with prayer; it is disingenuous to be always craving, and never give thanks. Be thankful and depend for more; not always pore upon wants, but take a survey of your mercies, and that will not only enlarge your hearts in thankfulness, but even invite God to bestow further mercies.

### SERMON CLXXXV.

*My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.*—VER. 172.

THE man of God had spoken in the former verse how his lips should praise God; here is his second promise that he maketh, of holy conference with others.

In the words we have:—

1. David's resolution, *my tongue shall speak of thy word.*

2. The reason; because it contained matter that deserved to be spoken of, *for all thy commandments are righteousness.*

[1.] He speaketh of the whole word of God, *all thy commandments.*

[2.] In the abstract, *are righteousness*; altogether righteous and faithful.

First, From the first branch, David's resolution, 'My tongue shall speak of thy word,' observe—

*Doct.* The subject of a believer's ordinary discourse should be the word, and those spiritual and heavenly matters contained therein.

1. Not that they are always talking of these things; there is a time for all things; the business of our calling will sometimes take us up, and sometimes our recreations; but yet there should be generally a difference between us and others. The people of God should be observantly different as to their words and discourse from other people: Cant. iv. 11, 'Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb.' The lips of Christ's spouse should flow with matter savoury and useful. So Prov. x. 20, 21, 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is little worth; the lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for want of wisdom;' where the speech of the righteous is compared to silver; of the wicked, to dross; for because their heart is little worth, their discourse will be accordingly: and then the good man is compared to one that keepeth open house, that feedeth all those that resort to him; but fools do not only not

feed others, but perish themselves by their own folly. So Prov. xv. 7, 'The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the foolish doth not so.' Men usually discourse as their hearts are. A man of a frothy spirit will bring forth nothing but vain and frothy discourse, but a gracious man will utter holy and gracious things; for the tap runneth according to the liquor with which the vessel is filled. One place more: Ps. xxxvii. 30, 31, 'The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment; the law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' All men's discourses are vented according as their hearts are busied and affected. A man that hath the word of God rooted in his heart, and maketh it his work to suit his actions thereunto, will also suit his words thereunto, and will edify those that he speaketh unto. Thoughts, words, and actions are the genuine products and issue of the heart. Grace in the heart discovereth itself uniformly in all holy thoughts, holy words, and holy actions; otherwise their conversation is not all of a piece. All these places show that a Christian's discourse will differ from other men's; but, alas! our conference is little different from ordinary men's.

2. More particularly I shall show you that we are not left to run at random in our ordinary discourse, as if our tongues were our own, to speak what we please. This I shall show—(1.) Negatively; (2.) Positively.

First, Negatively; no profane, no idle discourse.

1. No profane discourse: Eph. iv. 29, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.' Christians are accountable for their words as well as actions.

*Quest.* But what is corrupt communication?

*Ans.* (1.) Obscene scurrilous discourse. When the heart is filled with such corrupt stuff, the mouth will be apt to vent it. So Col. iii. 8, 'Put away filthy communication out of your mouth.' Sins of the tongue and outward man must be abstained from, as well as sins out of the heart. That *αἰσχρολογία*, that filthy speaking, rotten speech, is one of the great sins of the tongue. When we speak of those things which belong to uncleanness, this is quite unbecoming the purity and cleanness of Christians; the heart of man being as powder to the fire, easily taken with such temptations.

(2.) Calumnious and censorious discourses, when we cannot meet together but we must be speaking of others, suggesting evil against them, blemishing their graces, or carping at their weaknesses, or aggravating their sins, or divulging their secret miscarriages beyond what Christianity requireth. This sin the scripture brandeth as mischievous to ourselves and others. Ourselves: James i. 26, 'If any man seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is in vain.' Censuring is a pleasing sin, very suitable with corrupt nature, but yet it is a bad sign. It is made to be the hypocrites' sin, who, being acquainted with the guile of their own spirits, are apt to suspect others, and deprave their best actions, and upon the ruin of other men's credit build their own reputation for religion. And it is mischievous to others, and against that justice and charity which we owe to them: Prov. xx. 22, 'The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.' They wound men's reputation unperceivably, and secretly strike

them a blow that smarts not for the present, but destroyeth their service, at least to such as receive these privy defamations and whisperings; and it is more craftily carried when they wound while they pretend to kiss, and make their praise but a preface to their reproach, as an archer draweth back his hand that the arrow may fly with the more force. They say, He is this and that; but, &c.

(3.) Proud and arrogant speaking, when all our discourse is a self-boasting. The pride of the heart sometimes shooteth out by the eyes, and therefore we read of haughty eyes and a proud look; but usually it is displayed in our speech, in a proud ostentation of our own worth and excellency: 1 Sam. ii. 3, 'Talk no more so exceeding proudly: let not arrogancy come out of your mouth.' When *I* cometh in at every sentence, *περιαντολογία*, wanteth not its vanity: Prov. xxv. 27, 'For men to search their own glory is not glory.' All their discourses is to set off themselves, and to usher in something of themselves; and if religion be talked of, it is to commend their own knowledge, and their own notions, or their own endeavours for Christ, or to blemish others, that they may shine alone.

(4.) When anger sets us a-discoursing; therefore the apostle saith, Eph. iv. 31, 'Let bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice.' Where there is bitterness, or a secret smothered displeasure, or alienation of affection, it soon breaketh out into rage; which if an impetuous rage, or passionate commotion, that produceth anger, or a desire of revenge. Anger produceth clamour, or boisterous words, loud menaces, and brawlings, or inordinate speeches, which are the black smoke whereby anger and wrath within doth first manifest itself; then clamour produceth evil-speaking, which are disgraceful and contumelious speeches; therewith the party incensed doth stain the reputation of him with whom he is angry; and then malice is rooted anger and continued wrath. Now all these should be put away. Christians should have nothing to do with them. But that we have in hand is disgraceful and contumelious speaking, as it is the result of anger, wrath, and malice, either by open railing, or derision, and jeering at their sins and infirmities to shame them, or by imprecation and cursing, and wishing evil to them; all which is contrary to that meekness and love which should prevail in the hearts of Christians. As Saul in his anger called Jonathan, 1 Sam. xx. 3, 'Thou son of the perverse and rebellious woman;' in his raging fit he blemisheth his own wife, of whom we hear elsewhere no such imputation. Thou art more likely to be a bastard than my own son. Frantic words, all interpreters think them to be.

This is a taste of that profane discourse which is forbidden to Christians. Now the reasons of it are these:—

(1.) Because this allowed and habituated, argueth a rotten and unrenewed heart: Mat. xii. 34, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' Words much discover the temper of the heart, there being a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue.

(2.) Because it is noisome and offensive to honest ears; it is not a speech that hath any grace or comeliness in it: Col. iv. 6, 'Let your speech be always with grace.'

3. It is contagious and infectious to ordinary hearers; especially to



children and weak ones: 1 Cor. xv. 33, 'Evil words corrupt good manners.' We convey our taint.

(4.) Sinful, vain, and frothy discourse doth make the heart more vain, perverse, and wicked, while the corruption that is in it doth strengthen itself by getting vent. When the sparks fly abroad of the fire kindled in our bosoms, a man waxeth worse and worse; his reverence of God is lessened and weakened as he hath dared to give vent to his sin and folly, and is more emboldened to sin again: Mat. xv. 19, 20, 'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile the man.' Evil-speaking is one thing mentioned, and it layeth men open to Satan. Therefore, as the heart should be kept from framing such conceptions, so the tongue from uttering them; for so they prove more dishonourable to God, hurtful to ourselves, and offensive to others.

(5.) I will venture at one reason more against profane discourse; it grieveth the Spirit, Eph. v. 29, 30. Many by their obscene, putrid, and carnal discourse intend no further than to make themselves merry, jovial, and glad: Hosea vii. 3, 'They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies,' saith the prophet; yet, alas! it is but a poor sport, and will prove so in the end, for it draweth God to be against them; the Holy Ghost is displeased and grieved with it, these things being against his light, motions, and directions, and so an offence to him, which a tender conscience is soon sensible of.

2. Not idle discourse, which tendeth not to the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour. We should have an eye to the good of those with whom we speak, so as to edify them with our speech; for Christ telleth us that we must give an account to God, not only for words, but even for idle words: Mat. xii. 36, 'I say unto you, that for every idle word that men speak, they shall give an account thereof in the judgment.' Men esteem little of their words, yet when they are put into God's balance they may weigh heavy; not only wicked words, but even idle words, such as serve for no good purpose, or for no lawful end; and in your account they will come in as so many sins, and sit heavy upon you; if you have not received pardon before, it is a strict sentence. But what is this idle discourse? Such as wanteth the solidity and substance of truth; such as tend to no use and benefit. *De jure* God may condemn you for these, though *de facto* upon repentance he pardoneth greater sins. Or possibly such are idle words as come from a vain idle frame of heart; for he had spoken before in the 35th verse that a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man evil things. Now such idle words are a note of the wickedness of the man, of the evil treasure that is in his heart; for these he is responsible at the day of judgment, as for a vain conversation and the unfruitful works of darkness. However, we must not open a gap to licentiousness; as when the apostle forbiddeth profane discourse, he enjoineth profitable discourse as the only remedy: Eph. iv. 29, 'Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.' As much as may be, holy conference should be mixed with all our discourses and converses, other-

wise they are accountable to God. And it is very notable the apostle forbiddeth *μωρολογία ἢ εὐτραπεία*, foolish jesting: Eph. v. 4, 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which is not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' As he condemneth filthiness, or words contrary to Christian gravity, decency, or modesty, so he condemneth foolish talking, which is impertinent, superfluous, and vain discourse. And then jesting; not all honest mirth or use of wit, but an intemperate use; when men give up themselves to a frothy vanity, that they cannot be serious; or to tart reflections upon the personal imperfections of others; or to impious jests, by wresting the scripture, to express the conceptions of a vain and wanton wit. In the general, there must be a great guard on all jesting, lest it degenerate; and that we entertain one another with thanksgiving, and discourses of the love of God, and his manifold mercies to us; for it is not an easy matter to keep within bounds of cheerful and allowed mirth. Hearts that are kept sensible of God's goodness are desirous to express it to others whenever occasion offereth, and vain and idle communication is nothing so pleasing to them.

Secondly, Positively; we are to edify one another, as David professeth here that his tongue should speak of God's word; his conferences and discourses should be filled up of no other matter.

1. Because our tongue is our glory: Ps. x. 9, 'My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.' Compare Acts ii. 26, 'My heart rejoiceth, and my tongue was glad.' Now, why is our tongue our glory? Not only as it was given us for the use of tasting meat and drink (so the tongues of the brute beasts serve them), but because thereby we must express the conceptions of our minds. So speech is the excellency of man above the beasts; but Christianity giveth us a higher reason, because thereby we may express the conceptions of our minds to the glory of God, and the good of others: James iii. 9, 'Therewith we bless God, even the Father.' That is our glory, that we cannot only think of God, but speak of God, his word and works.

2. Because conference and edifying discourse is one means of spiritual growth and spiritual improvement to ourselves and others. (1.) To ourselves: Prov. xvi. 21, 'The wise in heart shall be called prudent, and the sweetness of his lips increaseth learning.' The more he venteth what he knoweth, the wiser himself groweth, and learneth by teaching others; for the more he draweth forth his knowledge, the more it is impressed upon his own heart. It is a truth, he that watereth shall be watered, and our gifts, as the loaves, are increased in the breaking, or as the widow's giving oil to the prophet was enriched by it; not only as we occasion others to draw forth their knowledge, but as our own is confirmed and strengthened by using it, as to him that hath shall be given, Mat. xxv. 29. As venting of sin and folly increaseth sin and folly, so doth venting spiritual knowledge still increase it. (2.) Others: it is a great benefit to them when we communicate our experiences to them: Luke xxii. 32, 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' When he was converted by repentance, he should be more careful to convert and strengthen others, that they fall not in like manner, or help them to recover out of the mire of sin. And the apostle saith, 2 Cor. i. 4, 'That God

comforteth us, that we may be able to comfort others in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.' The Lord comforts one that another may be comforted; as in the celestial bodies, whatever light and influence the moon and stars receive, they bestow it on these inferior bodies: they have their light from the sun, and they reflect it again on the creatures below. Or as the official part in the body; as the heart and liver receive, and convey, and derive the blood and spirits to all the other parts, so a Christian, when he is strengthened in himself, ought to convey his comfort and strength to others. It is mighty edifying, when we have found the usefulness of the word, to speak of it to God's praise; if we have gotten direction in doubtful cases, or benefit by it in the mastery of our lusts, and the promises have afforded any support and deliverance in our distresses, we are debtors of the comfort and experiences we have, and are stewards to dispense it to others. Many take a glory that they have cordials, strong waters, and medicines in their closets and repositories, that may be a relief to the bodies of others; so should we delight to refresh their souls with what has done us good. The humiliation and brokenness of heart which thou hast found may be powerful to persuade others of the bitterness of sin. David, when he had smarted for sin, saith, Ps. li. 13, 'I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.' He had found how bitter a thing it was to provoke God by sin, and he could tell them such stories of it as would make their hearts to wake, and cause them to hate it. The faith and knowledge which God hath given thee may direct and preserve others; thy temptations may conduce to the succouring of others who are tempted.

3. It is a mighty comfortable duty, that hath much sweetness in it, to confer together of holy things: Rom. i. 12, 'That I may be comforted by the mutual faith of you and me.' Holy discourse doth refresh more than vain and foolish jesting; it is a far sweeter thing to talk of the word of God, and those spiritual and heavenly things which are contained therein, than to spend the time in vain and foolish jesting, or discoursing about mere worldly matters. Should anything be more delightful to a Christian than Christ and heaven, and the promises of the world to come, and the way that leadeth thither? and should it be burdensome to talk of these things, which we profess to be our only hope and joy? Certainly our relish and appetite is mightily depraved if we think so, judge ourselves in a prison when we are in good company who remember God; and when they invite you to remember him with them, will you frown upon the motion, because it is some check and interruption to your carnal vanity?

4. The well ordering of our words is a great point of Christianity, and argueth a good degree of grace: 'He that bridleth his tongue is a perfect man,' James iii. 2. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, saith Solomon, Prov. xviii. 21; upon the good or ill use of it a man's safety doth depend. Not only temporal safety, but eternal: Mat. xii. 37, 'By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned.' These evidences are brought into judgment; therefore it concerneth us to see what our discourses are, as



well as our actions. Solomon often describeth the righteous by his good tongue: Prov. x. 13, 'The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom;' and Prov. xii. 18, 'The tongue of the wise is health.'

*Use 1. Reproof.* It reproveth us for being so dumb and tongued in holy things. We can speak liberally of any subject, only we are dumb in spiritual matters which concern our edification. We show so little grace in our conferences, because we have so little grace in our hearts. Alas! many that profess religion, their talk is little different from other men's, as if they were ashamed to speak of God, or had nothing to say of him and for him. I do not always bind you to talk of religious things, but sometimes it bindeth. Now, when is it your tongues speak of the word in a serious and affectionate manner? Can you love God and never put in a word for him? Can you see or hear God dishonoured, and suffer your mouths to be sealed up with a sinful silence, that you should not have a word to speak in the cause of God?

*Use 2.* To exhort us to be frequent and serious in our discourses of God, and spiritual heavenly things.

For means to help us.

1. Divine illumination; to teach others the way of God requireth that we ourselves should be taught of God; then it cometh the warmer and fresher when we speak not by hearsay only, but experience; as heart answereth to heart, so the renewed heart in him that heareth to the renewed heart in him that speaketh, and we show others what God by his illuminating grace hath first showed us; it savoureth of that Spirit that worketh in both. He will easily kindle others who is once on fire himself. The word passeth through others as water through an empty trunk, without feeling; they may speak very good things, but they do but personate and act a part. But when we have been in the deep waters, and God hath bound up our wounds, we can more feelingly speak to others.

2. A sight of the excellency of the word, and a value and esteem thereof. The reason in the text, 'For all thy commandments are righteousness.' We are apt to speak oftenest of those things which we most affect. Did not your souls grow out of relish with these holy, spiritual, and excellent things, your speeches about them would be more frequent, lively, serious, and savoury; for we cannot conceal our affections. Our coldness in speaking to others of these spiritual and heavenly things cometh from want of this persuasion, that 'all his commandments are righteousness;' for they who are persuaded of the excellency of the word will be talking of the sweetness of its promises continually.

3. A stock of spiritual knowledge: Mat. xii. 35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Every man entertaineth his guests with such provisions as he hath. It is the word which enableth us to edify ourselves and others with holy conference. The more store, the more we have to bring forth upon all occasions: Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.' A plentiful measure of gospel knowledge enableth us to direct and

instruct others; there all wisdom is made plain, things revealed which cannot be found elsewhere; that which may by long search be found elsewhere is made ready to our hands, and brought down to the meanest capacity. The heart is the fountain from whence the tongue doth run and flow; and when the heart is well furnished, the tongue will be employed and exercised.

4. Zeal for the glory of God, and love to others' souls. We should communicate to others what we have learned ourselves. David would not reserve his knowledge to himself: 'Teach me, and my tongue shall speak of thy word.' Fire turneth all about it into fire: mules and all creatures of a bastard race do not procreate. David's Maschil, Ps. xxxii. title, is to instruct others. True good is diffusive in itself; our candle enlightened, should enlighten others. When Philip was called, he inviteth Nathanael to come to Christ, John i. 45; Andrew calleth Simon. True grace sheweth itself in zeal to promote the kingdom of Christ and the good of our neighbours' souls; and the new nature seeketh to multiply the kind, and such as are brought to Christ will be careful to invite others.

5. Wisdom is necessary: Col. iv. 6, 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer every man;' that is, seasoned with the salt of holy and divine wisdom, that it may be savoury and acceptable to the hearers; and both delight and edify. Without this holy skill and wisdom, how often is conference turned into jangling or mere babbling!

6. Watchfulness and heed, otherwise corruption will break out in pride, in a vain ostentation of parts, passion in some heat of words, worldliness and sensuality in diverting from holy conference to that which is carnal and worldly, discontent in some, unseemly expressions of God's dealings with us, indiscretion and folly in a multitude of impertinent talk: Ps. cxli. 3, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.' The tongue must be watched as well as the heart. All watching will be to little purpose unless God bridle and direct our tongue, that nothing break out to his dishonour. There must be a constant guard that nothing break from us that is unseemly.

Secondly, We come to the reason, 'For all thy commandments are righteousnessness.'

*Doct.* There is righteousness, nothing but righteousness, all righteousness to be found in the word of God.

1. There is a perfect uprightness in all God's promises. They are sure principles of trust and dependence upon God: Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' He is most just and faithful, and his promises without all deceit or possibility of failing, and will certainly protect all those that rely and depend upon him.

2. As to his precepts, nothing is approved in them, or recommended to us, but what is holy, just, and good. There is no virtue which it commendeth not, no duty which it commandeth not, no vice which is not condemned therein, nor sin which is not forbidden.

I shall prove the doctrine by three things:—

1. By the sufficient provision that is made for man's duty. In a moral

consideration there are but three beings—God, neighbours, and self. Paul's three adverbs are suited to these, Titus ii. 12, 'soberly, righteously, godly.'

[1.] For self-government, or living soberly in the present world, nothing conduceth to that more than God's precepts. The whole drift of his word is to check self-pleasing and sense-pleasing, and to condemn all excess of meat, drink, or apparel, lest our hearts be besotted and overcharged, and, by indulging sensuality, diverted from spiritual and heavenly things.

[2.] For carriage to our neighbour. What religion provideth so amply as the word of God doth against all fraud and violence, requireth us in all things to do as we would be done by? Yea, it not only enforceth justice, but charity, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to account his welfare our own, and rejoice in his good, and mourn for his evil, as for our own.

[3.] For the third, godliness. God is nowhere represented and discovered so much as in his word; nor a way of commerce between him and us anywhere else so clearly established; nor what kind of worship we should give unto him, both for matter and manner. In short, the scripture is written to teach us how to love him, and entertain communion with him, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days; and maketh our daily converse with God in holiness our great work and business.

2. It appeareth by the connaturality and suitableness which they have to the best and holiest: Ps. cxix. 140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' It is written in our hearts as well as in God's book; and there is something in the one akin to the other: Heb. viii. 10, 'I will write my law in their hearts and minds.' On the contrary, so far as a man is depraved, so far he hateth it, Rom. viii. 7; yea, the more he feareth it: John iii. 20, 21, 'He that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.'

3. The event sheweth it; for the more the word of God is preached, the more is righteousness spread in the world, and men grow wiser and better. Banish the word of God, or discourage the preachers of it, and there followeth nothing but confusion of manners and corruption in religion. The word, then, is the only means of reforming the world, and curing the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Where either the word hath not been received, as among the pagans, or where it hath been restrained, as in Popery, scriptures locked up in an unknown tongue, or where neglected or sleepily urged, as in churches that have left their first love, there is a greater overflow of wickedness; their ignorance hath caused a great part of them to degenerate into a more sensual, sottish sort of people.

*Quest.* But are not people very bad that have the scriptures? Do not we ourselves complain of a flood of wickedness?

*Ans.* 1. Christianity must not be judged by the rabble of nominal, literal Christians, no more than we will judge of the cleanness of a street by the foulness of a sink or kennel, or of the sound grapes in a bunch by the rotten ones, or of the fidelity of subjects by the rebellion of traitors, or the honesty and justice of a nation by a crew of



thieves and robbers, nor of the civility of a nation by the rusticity of ploughmen or carters. Those who are serious in their religion are the best men, and of the choicest and most excellent spirits in the world; the scandals and wickedness of others do not impeach their rule.

2. The strictly religious must not be judged by the revellings of the carnal, who are their enemies; ignorant and ungodly men will blast them: 1 Peter iv. 4, 5, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.'

3. Neither is the state of religion to be judged by the complaints of friends, hating the least evil, ashamed of men's unthankfulness. Light maketh it odious; as bad as we are, it is worse where the word is not preached in a lively manner.

*Use 1.* Let us approve of those things which God hath bound us to believe and practise; they being all suitable to the nature of God and man. The first ground of obedience is consent and approbation: 'I consent to the law that it is good,' Rom. vii. 16. So to the gospel: 'It is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation,' 1 Tim. i. 15.

2. Let us answer this word, let the fruit of the Spirit be in us all, righteousness, goodness, and truth. The stamp is answerable to the seal; this is the genuine result of the doctrine we profess.

## SERMON CLXXXVI.

*Let thine hand help me : for I have chosen thy precepts.*—VER. 173.

THE two first verses show the drift of this portion. He begs two benefits—instruction and deliverance. His first request, for instruction, is enforced by a promise of praise, ver. 171, 'My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.' In ver. 172, of conference or holy discourse, whereby others may be edified, 'My mouth shall speak of thy word.' Now he comes to enforce the second request for deliverance by an argument of his ready obedience, 'Let thine hand help me : for I have chosen thy precepts.'

Observe here—

1. The petition, *let thine hand help me.*

2. The argument or reason to enforce it, *for I have chosen thy precepts.*

First, For the petition, 'Let thine hand help me.' Hand is put for power: Let thy power preserve me and defend me; and help is sometimes put for assistance and sometimes for deliverance. God may be said to help us when he doth assist us and support us in troubles, or when he doth deliver us from troubles. This latter acceptation suits with this place, and it is equivalent with what he said before, ver. 170, 'Let my supplication come before thee; deliver me;' so, 'Let thine hand help me,' 'deliver me according to thy word.' A good man may be brought into great straits when his own hand cannot help and stead him, but then he may fly to God, and say, 'Lord, let thine hand help me.' His argument and motive which he urgeth is, that 'I

have chosen thy precepts;’ and from thence he infers his hope of deliverance.

The points will be two :—

*Doct. 1.* That this is the character and description of a good man, that he is good, and doth good out of choice. So David pleads it here, ‘I have chosen thy precepts.’

*Doct. 2.* That a man which makes conscience of God’s commands is encouraged to seek help from him in all his straits; for he prays, ‘I have chosen thy precepts,’ therefore, ‘Lord, let thine hand help me.’

*Doct. 1.* It is the plain character of a good man to be good and do good out of choice.

It was not out of rashness and ignorance and inconsiderate zeal that David with so much hazard betook himself to God’s service, and was so exactly faithful with God; but upon due choice, trial, and examination: ‘I have chosen thy precepts.’

The point may easily be proved out of scripture, Isa. lvi. 4. God’s people are described to be those that choose the things that please him, and take hold of his covenant. Taking hold of his covenant relates there to the privilege part of the covenant. As they seek their happiness in the privileges of God’s covenant, so as to the duty part, they choose the things which please him. After serious and mature deliberation, and judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, they embrace the ways of God by a free election and choice. And so you shall see it is the charge against wicked men, this is the disproof of their confidence, Prov. i. 29, that they did not choose the fear of the Lord. Mark the expression, that is, prefer it before the baits of sin. So Deut. xxx. 19, ‘I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live.’ We shall never have life unless we have it by choice. He sets both before them; choose life, not as if it were indifferent in point of duty for to do the one or the other, but to set an edge upon their affections; I have set both before you. God will have his service entered upon by choice: Josh. xxiv. 15, ‘Now if it seem evil for you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods whom your fathers served, on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me,’ &c. He leaves it not arbitrarily to the Israelites whether they should serve God or no, but this he saith that they might freely and without compulsion declare what they were minded to do, and that they might be the more firmly tied to serve the Lord, because they had voluntarily taken upon themselves to do it. ‘Now choose you whom you will serve;’ that is, compare that which is best with that which is worst, life and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell together; and resolve accordingly; because no man in his right wits would make any doubt after such a representation which to choose. Joshua’s speech is just such another speech as that of Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 21, ‘If God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, follow him.’ Not as if he made it any doubt, or would have them make it any doubt, or as if it were uncertain, but that they might choose more freely, and delight and persevere in their choice. These places show we never rightly enter into God’s service until we enter upon it by choice.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What it is to choose God's precepts.

2. Give some reasons why they must be chosen, else they can never be rightly kept, or why this is so necessary.

First, What is choosing God's precepts? It implies five things—(1.) Deliberation; (2.) Esteem or preference; (3.) A voluntary inclination; (4.) A firm and steadfast resolution, by which we are bound all our days; (5.) A complacency and contentment in what we have chosen.

1. Deliberation, or a due consideration of what is chosen, its nature, worth, and excellency; for until we compare and weigh things, how can we make a choice, but take them hand-over-head; and therefore there is a weighing the reasons on both sides. God's children are not ignorant what it is to flow in worldly wealth, pleasures, and earthly comforts, and to enjoy the favour of the world, and to sail here with a full stream; and on the other side, they are not ignorant what it will cost them to be through with Christ, to be religious indeed. They do not run hand-over-head to resolve upon such a course. No; they sit down, they count the charges, Luke xiv. 27. The business sticks with many in this first work; we cannot bring them to any serious consideration; they will not weigh things, but act as their brutish lusts incline them. It is said, Isa. xlv. 8, 'Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it to mind, O ye transgressors.' It is a disgrace to our reason, when we will not consider well of things, and bring them not back to our hearts, as the word signifies; but we run on as chance offereth objects or occasions. Consider what this and that will tend to, weigh things in your souls. Even good itself, if we stumble upon it, it is but a lucky hit or a happy mistake; therefore the apostle adviseth us to resolve upon trial: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.' Men will not hold fast that which is good unless they first prove and try. Indeed those things which usually oppose themselves against the spiritual life are such poor paltry inconsiderable vanities, that they are not worthy to be brought into competition, or into any serious debate with them; for it is no hard question to resolve whether God or the flesh shall be pleased? whether the transitory pleasures of sin should be preferred before eternal glory or the happiness of the saints? But yet serious consideration will discover this to us, and shame us out of our perverse and preposterous choice; whereas otherwise we should go on like men asleep, or like men out of their wits, choose poor base things, delight in inconsiderable trifles, before the things whereof we are so deeply concerned; therefore it requires deliberation in weighing.

2. Choice notes esteem or preference; for election and choice is a preferring of one thing before another. Though God and Christ be good, and grace and heaven be good, yet there are other things that come in competition with them, and when we set ourselves to seek after God and Christ, these competitors are suing for our hearts, and rival Christ in the soul. And therefore this choice implies a renunciation of all other things, a trampling upon them, and a high esteem and value of Christ and his ways. The scripture speaks of selling all for the pearl of great price, Mat. xiii. 45, 46, of accounting things but dung



and dross in comparison of Christ, Phil. iii. 8, 9. In choosing the ways of God many things will be offered to us that may hale us this way and that way, many pleasures and contentments of this life. Now we must trample upon them all, and renounce them as they are temptations, that we may actually exalt, prefer, and esteem Christ and his grace. There are two things which assault our resolution for God—the terrors of sense, and the allurements of the flesh or the vanities of the world. Now a soul resolved to serve God, must actually and positively prefer obedience before both of these, before temptations on the right hand and on the left.

[1.] For the terrors of sense, we must be resolved rather to suffer than to sin. In choosing the ways of God, the heart must come to a firm resolution rather to suffer the greatest inconvenience than to commit the least sin. This was Moses' choice, Heb. xi. 25. When once it came to a case of sin, then he renounceth pleasures, treasures, honours. Whatever it costs us, we must resolve to be faithful with God, and to run the greatest hazard rather than to do the least thing that is contrary to his will.

[2.] We must prefer obedience before all the allurements of the flesh and vanities of the world. David chose God's precepts, that is, valued them more than all other things. See ver. 14 of this psalm, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' He explains the choice here mentioned. If we have grace to serve God, and to keep the way of his testimonies, we count ourselves more happy than if we had all the world. It is not enough to approve God's ways simply, but we must approve them comparatively; not only as good in themselves, but as better than all other things; and it should be more to us to be taught our duty, and to know how to serve God, than if we did enjoy the fulness of all earthly comforts.

3. Choosing the ways of God implies a voluntary inclination, that we should of our own accord follow them; for choice is free, and it is opposed to force and constraint, and a man is said to choose those things which he likes, which he loves, which his soul inclines to, when he is carried to them not by the compulsion of an external principle, but by his own propension and inclination. Look, as the wicked they are described to be those 'who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,' Prov. ii. 13, that is, have an inclination to one rather than another; for what is expressed that the wicked leave the paths of uprightness, it is explained, John iii. 9, by 'loving darkness rather than the light.' And so it is said of Mary, she hath chosen that good part; of her own voluntary accord and free inclination she was moved to sit at Christ's feet, to attend upon the improvement of her soul. The business of salvation is offered to our choice, it is left to our own free inclination, though God gives the inclination beforehand (as by and by). If you choose death, you willingly and freely forsake your own mercies.

4. Choice implies a firm and immutable purpose, a resolved adhesion to those things we choose. The mind is not anxious and doubtful, and hanging between two contraries, when we choose, but fixed and determined: 'I have chosen thy precepts;' that is, firmly resolved to observe them. We never choose till we come to a full purpose, Acts xi.

33. He exhorteth them with full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. A wavering inclination infers no choice. There may be good thoughts and meanings in the soul, but till we are resolved for God we do not choose his precepts. Many are convinced of a better way, but their hearts are not engaged to walk in it. We are fixedly determined by our choice: Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.' He hath sincerely obliged and bound himself to live in a close way of communion with God. The soul begins to pause and consider the vanity of earthly things; there is the first. Yea, and after this, they are brought on that they say, Certainly it is much better to be a servant of the Lord than to be a servant of sin; and they see that the greatest inconvenience is a more tolerable thing than sin, and all the pleasures and profits of the world will not countervail our duty to God. There is an inclination to the way of God. Ay! but this inclination, while it is wavering, it may be taken off, till it come to a resolution. Here I will stick; I will seek my happiness and comfort in seeking God: 'It is good for me to draw nigh unto God,' Ps. lxxiii. 28; and therefore I am resolved to seek my happiness and contentment, whatever I do.

5. Choice implies a contentment and complacency in that which we have chosen; and the act of the will is quickened by a suitable affection that accompanieth it. Mark, election is properly an act of the will. Ay! but the affections they are but the vigorous motions of the will. Where there is a remiss will, that is without affection; but where there is a strong bent in the will, that is always accompanied with some suitable affection. As if I have a strong bent and nilling of sin, there is an affection of hatred accompanying it; if I have but a remiss will for holiness, that will never save me; that is made to be one of the seven deadly sins which the schoolmen call listlessness; but where there is a serious will, such a willing as a choosing, certainly there is an affection that accompanieth it. Look, as David, when he had chosen God for his portion, presently he professed his complacency and delight in his choice: Ps. xvi. 6, 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.' Where there is a choosing God for our portion and all-sufficient happiness, there is presently a delight and satisfaction which results from this choice, and the soul is affected with its own felicity in God, and finds a joy and pleasure in choosing him. So it is in choosing the precepts of God: 'I have chosen thy precepts.' See the next verse, 'Thy law is my delight.' Where there is choice there is delight. A man loves what he chooseth, and is ready and forward to do it; and it is a pleasing thing to serve the Lord, for election in such a weighty case is accompanied with love. It is not an act of a remiss, but strong will; and where there is love, nothing will be grievous, 1 John v. 3.

Secondly, To give reasons why we must thus choose the precepts of God. I shall reason—(1.) From the necessity; (2.) From the congruity and convenience; (3.) From the utility and profit of it.

1. The necessity of it. It must needs be so that God's ways must be taken up upon choice, because there are several competitors that bid for the heart of man; where there is but one thing, there is no choice.

There is the devil, by the world, through the flesh, seeks to get in, and reign in your hearts; and there is God, Christ, and the Spirit. Now there must be a casting out of one, and putting in the other. Look, as in Prov. ix., the whole chapter; there wisdom and the foolish woman are brought in pleading to draw in the heart of unwary man to themselves. Wisdom is pleading, and the foolish woman is pleading. In the beginning of the chapter, wisdom tells what comfort, what peace they shall have, if they will take her institutions; wisdom offers solid benefits, but folly offers stolen waters and bread eaten in secret, some carnal mirth when conscience is asleep. Ay! and the dead are there too. The intoxicating pleasures of this world bring death along with them, when they can choke the sentiments of God that are in his heart. 'Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither,' saith wisdom; and 'who is simple, let him turn in hither,' saith folly. As the poets feign of their Hercules, that virtue and vice appeared to him, and the one showed him a rough, the other a pleasant way. Certainly as soon as we come to years of discretion, we come to make our choice, either to go on in the ways of death, or to choose the ways of God; either to give up ourselves to the pleasures of sin, or else to seek after the comforts of the Spirit. Now, since there are two competitors for the heart of man, and his love cannot lie idle, it must be given to one or another; love and oblectation cannot remain idle in the soul, either it must leak out to the world, or run out to God. There is a necessity of a choice, of renouncing the bewitching vanities of the world, that we may seriously betake ourselves to the service of God.

2. Consider the congruity and conveniency of it, both to the honour of God and nature of man, that no man should ever be happy or miserable but by his own choice.

[1.] It is not for the honour of God that a man should be happy or have such great privileges settled upon him without his own choice; such great benefits as justification, sanctification, and eternal glory. On the other side, that a man should be miserable without his knowledge, or against his will, or besides his purpose and consent, that God should give eternal life whether men will or no. It is not agreeable to the honour of God to inflict eternal death upon them without their consent, unless they choose the ways of death; man's heart else would have a plea against God. Certainly the wise God will never make any happy without their own consent, and never make any miserable but their destruction is of themselves, Hosea xiii. 9.

[2.] Neither will it agree with the nature of man, who is a reasonable rational creature, or any agent capable of election or choice. The brutes are ruled with a rod of iron. God guides all things by his providence; inanimate creatures by mere providence, brutes by their own instinct, and man as a free agent, capable of knowing and prosecuting his chief end. Now every creature of God is governed according to the nature which is put into it; and therefore, since man is a free agent, God expects, in submitting to his service, the creature's consent and choice; and before we can submit to his service, before he will admit us to the benefits, there must be a choice, and an actual will on our parts: Rev. xxii. 17, 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' The business is brought home to us, and left with our



will. If we miss of happiness, it is because we would not choose it, and the way that leads to it. The Lord chargeth it still upon man's will, John v. 40; Luke xix. 14; Mat. xxiii. 37; Ps. lxxxii. 11. Our misery is from our own wilfulness; but in all that are brought into grace, there is a will it is true, but God prevents them and inclines their will: Ps. cx. 3, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of grace and power.' You have a grant, and an offer of mercy from God, and then he inclines and moves you to make a right choice. So that of the good and bad it may be said they have their choice. If you neglect and refuse holiness, you choose your own destruction, and neglect life. Your hearts must tell you this: Thou wast the fault of it; as Plutarch brings in one Apollodorus, that dreamed one night that he was boiling in a kettle of scalding lead, and that his heart cried out to him, I have been the cause of all this. This heathen improves it to show there is a vengeance that attends sinners. I mention it only allusively. Now it was your own perverse choice and will that made your hell; thou hast but the fruit of thine own choice. Indeed, as to what is good, if you have chosen the precepts of God, there God must have the glory. You must say, Not I, but Christ; as the apostle. Ay! but there you come in; there is an act of your will, but as disposed and rightly inclined by God. You come both to the duties and privileges of religion by a choice also, though not of yourselves, but of God.

3. Let me reason from the utility and benefit. A man that takes up the ways of God upon choice—

[1.] He is able to justify the ways of God, for he seeth a reason for what he chooseth. When temptations come strong, there will be many misgiving thoughts. Ay! but then wisdom should be justified of all her children, Mat. xi. 19. A blind accidental love is the fruit of chance, but a love that is grounded upon knowledge and judgment, that is choice. This is so grounded, therefore he seeth reason for what he doth: Phil. i. 9, 10, 'I pray God that your love may abound in all wisdom and understanding, that ye may approve things that are excellent.' They see a reason, for they took it upon choice. The Lord hath showed them the worth and excellency of his ways, therefore they can better justify God against all their prejudices.

[2.] Such will be more firm and steadfast. The cause of all halting in religion is the want of a choice, of a purpose resolutely set. A wavering double-minded man, that is half off and half on, will be unstable in all his ways, James i. 8, *διψυχος ἀκατάστατος*, a two-soul man, a man that seems to have a soul for God and a soul for earthly things, and the heart hangs sometimes for one, and sometimes for another. A scoff or scorn, or a little inconvenience, a little fear, a little enticement or stirring of the rebelling flesh within, will make him turn out of the way; and how can such a one hold out with God, when his way to heaven is a continual warfare? But on the other side, a man that is a Christian, and a servant of God by choice, his course is likely according to his choice, because he is fixed upon evidence, he knows he is upon sure ground; and depending upon God, he will not miscarry. And therefore Joshua, when he would engage the Israelites to continue faithful with God, he draws them on

to a choice, and then saith, Josh. xxiv. 22, 'Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him, and they said, We are witnesses.' It much strengthens the bond when a man binds himself freely and willingly, and he makes himself the more culpable and the more inexcusable if he do not observe it.

[3.] They will carry on the work of their heavenly calling with the more ease and delight, because a choice is nothing else but the inclination of the soul guided by reason, strengthened by a purpose, and quickened and actuated by our love. This reason justifies our choice. Purpose binds it, makes it firm; but now here comes love, which makes it easy and sweet to do what we have resolved upon. A resolute traveller will go through his journey, and overcome the tediousness of it; his mind is set to finish it, let him have what way or weather he will. So a Christian will overcome his difficulties when his heart is inclined to this course; it is his own choice, and he will hold to it. It is a hard heart that makes the work hard, but when the will is engaged, a firm resolution of the will is the life of our affections, and to affection all is easy.

Use 1. To show that they act upon a wrong principle who are not good, and yet do good out of chance. To this end I shall show you—(1.) That a man may do good by chance, and not be good. (2.) A man may do good by force, and yet not be good. (3.) That some do good out of craft and design; but to do good out of choice doth only discover the truth and sincerity of religion.

1. Some do good by chance. As—

[1.] The man that taketh up religion by example barely, and tradition; not out of any sound conviction of the truth and worth of it. Thus many are Christians by the chance of their birth in those countries where the name of Christ is professed and had in honour; and the main reason into which their religion is resolved is not any excellence in itself, but the custom and tradition of their forefathers: John iv. 20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;' and 1 Peter i. 18, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.' It was hard to reclaim them from their inveterate customs; this is the religion in which they have been born and bred. It is true that tradition from father to son is a duty, and a means to bring us to the knowledge of the truth, and that Christianity is such an institution as doth so clearly evidence itself to be of God, and speaketh to us of such necessary and weighty matters, that it cannot but a little rouse and affect the mind of him that receiveth it, however he receiveth it. But most men do but blindly and pertinaciously adhere to it as that religion wherein they have been born and bred, without any distinct knowledge of the worth of it; so that if there be any goodness in their Christianity (as their profession is good in itself), they are but good by chance; for upon the same reasons they are Christians, if they had been born elsewhere, they would have been Mahometans or idolaters.

[2.] Not only these, but also those who stumble upon the profession of religion they know not how, and those who in a pang and sudden motion are all for God and for heavenly things, but this vanisheth into

nothing; as fire in straw, which is soon kindled and soon out. This is a free-will pang, not a choice; the heart is not habitually inclined and devoted unto God: John vi. 34, 'Oh! that I might die the death of the righteous,' Num. xxiii. 10. Such kind of wishing of holiness, as a necessary means, there may be, as well as happiness. These are accidentally stirred up in us.

2. Some men do good by force. These also are of two sorts—such as are forced by the fear of men, or of God.

[1.] Forced by the fear of men, because they dare not be bad with credit and security; as fear of parents, tutors, and governors: 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 'Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.' He did that which was right as to external acts, but after Jehoiada's death he revolted from the Lord, 2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18. So fear of magistrates, as Josiah compelled them to stand to the covenant: therefore, Jer. iii. 10, 'Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly.' Fear of the times when set for religion: Esther viii. 12, 'Many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.'

[2.] Forced by the fear of God. A little unwilling service may be extorted from them by the force of a convinced conscience. There is a slavish kind of religiousness, arising from a fear of punishment, without any love and delight in God. Men may be against God and his ways, when fear only driveth them to them. They do something good, but had rather leave it undone; they avoid some sins, but had rather practise them. By the spirit of bondage they are brought to tender some unwilling service to Christ; and their only motives are fear of wrath, and hell, and a sight of the curse due to sin. The falseness of this principle appeareth—

(1.) Because it is most stirring in a time of eminent judgments, when they are sick and like to die: Isa. xxvi. 9, 'When thy judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness;' Jer. ii. 26, 'In their affliction they will cry, Arise, and save us.' Metal in the furnace is very soft, but take it out and it returneth to its old hardness. See Ps. lxxviii. 34-37. The sense of present devouring wrath, and the terrors of an angry God, may drive men to some temporary acts of devotion. These proceed only from the natural fear of death and love of self-preservation. This may put a stand for a while to their former ways of provocation, and incline them to seek God with some diligence in the outward forms of religion; but it produceth no steadfastness in the covenant. As if there had been some weak effect upon them; as if it brought them for awhile to some temper of piety; but it was not hearty and durable, but only formal and temporary.

(2.) Because they take all occasions to enlarge themselves out of the stocks of conscience, and as soon as their fear is worn off, away go all their religious pangs, and thoughts of the other world, and care about it. How often is this verified by daily experience! Many that were frightened into a course of religion went on from duty to duty out of a fear of being damned, but their hearts were another way; but afterwards they cast off all, when they have sinned away these fears; as



Herod feared John, and afterwards put him to death, Mark vi. 19, 20. Yea, all the while they did good they had rather do otherwise if they durst, and therefore did but watch the occasion to fly out.

(3.) Because men of this frame dispute away duties rather than practise them, and are quarrelling at those things which the new nature would sufficiently incline them unto, if they had it. In the New Testament, God much trusts love; and the number and length of duties is not stated so exactly, because where the love of God prevaileth in the heart, men will take all occasions of glorifying God and edifying themselves. But when men quarrel, How do you prove it to be my duty to do so much and to give so much? When the duty itself is instituted, love will make God a reasonable allowance, and not stand questioning, How do you prove it to be my duty to pray so often in my family, or in secret, or hear so many sermons, which our constant necessities do loudly call for? Men that have a love to a thing will take all occasions to enjoy it, or be conversant about it; and a willing heart is liberal and open to God, and is rather disputing the restraint than the command: How do you prove it is *not* my duty? and is loath to be kept back from its delight.

3. Some do good out of craft and design, there is some by-end in the cause; as Jehu was not so much zealous for God as his own interests, 2 Kings x. 16; and our Lord telleth us of some that make long prayers to devour widows' houses, Mat. xxiii. 14; made piety a colour and pretext to oppression, and, that they might be trusted, took a show of great devotion; and of this strain were those that followed Christ for the loaves, John vi. 20, to be fed with a miracle and to live a life of sloth and ease. God never set any good thing afoot but some temporal interest grew upon it, with which men were swayed more than with what belongeth to God.

*Use 2.* To persuade you to choose God's precepts: 'I have chosen thy precepts,' said the man of God. To this end I shall give you both motives and directions; motives why you should choose them, and then directions in what manner things are to be attended upon in your choice.

First, For the motives.

1. Choose them because they are God's, to whom you are indebted for life, being, and all things. Shall we not obey him that made us, and in whom still we live, move, and have our being? We are debtors to him for all that we have, and truly we cannot have a better master. He was angry with his people, that when the beasts would own their benefactors, that his people would not own him from whom they had all things, Isa. i. 3. The brute beasts, the dullest of them, the ox and the ass, are willing to serve those that feed them, and pay a kind of gratitude; and shall not we own God? Every day your health, strength, and comforts come out of his hands, so every night's rest and ease; and after this can you sin against God that keeps you by night and by day?

2. These precepts are all holy, just, and good. What is it the Lord requires of you, but to love him, and serve him, and fear him, and forbear those things which hurt the soul? Thus he speaks to Israel, Deut. x. 12. Surely these commands are not unreasonable nor grievous.

You dare not say sin is better, that it is more profitable to please the flesh, and to wallow in and seek after worldly things. Why then do you not choose God's precepts before the work which Satan puts you upon? for these precepts commend themselves by their own evidence.

3. In keeping them there is a great deal of benefit.

[1.] For the present, there is a deal of comfort and peace to be found in the ways of God. If there were no reward of heaven, yet there is such comfort and peace that attends holy living, even as heat from the fire, that certainly this should draw our choice: 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness,' Prov. iii. 17. And again, the prophet tells you, 'The fruit of righteousness is peace.' A man that doth evil hath a sting in his conscience and a wound in his own soul. But every good action is followed with a serenity of mind, and an approbation from the heart of him that doeth it. Nay, you shall not only have peace, but joy in the Holy Ghost; for if you walk in the fear of God, you walk in the comforts of his Spirit, Acts ix. 31; and the kingdom of God stands in righteousness and peace. Ay! and a distinct privilege, joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 17. What is the difference between peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? Peace is a tranquillity of mind resulting from the rectitude of our actions, but this joy is an impression of the comforting Spirit. This joy hath God for its author, he puts it into our hearts; therefore it will more affect us than the bare act of our natural faculties. Peace is an acquittance from conscience, but joy in the Holy Ghost is an acquittance from God, who is our supreme judge, and is the beginning of that endless joy which he hath prepared for them that love him in heaven.

[2.] For the future and final reward, that is great and glorious indeed. Surely the glory of the everlasting kingdom should invite us to choose God's precepts, whatever it may cost us to keep them; for in choosing holiness you choose life, and in choosing the ways of God you choose the heavenly inheritance, which is the certain end and issue of them. So Prov. viii. 35, 36, 'Whose findeth me, findeth life, and obtaineth favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me, love death.' Christians, when you are about choosing, these are the terms propounded to you, and they should be seriously weighed by us—evil and death, good and life. Will you choose sin and death, or holiness and life? Is the pleasures of the flesh for a few hours better than the endless joy of the saints? If you believe heaven and hell, as you profess to do, why should you stand demurring? Are you content to be thrust out from the presence of the Lord, with the devil and his angels, into unquenchable flames, for a little contentment here in the world, for a little ease and delight here given to your carnal nature? Is an earthly life, that you cannot long hold, more valuable than an eternal heaven you shall enjoy forever? No; let us go to heaven, though we get thither with many pains and sufferings. If you forsake all, not only in vow and purpose, but actually and in deed, yet still you have something better; you shall be no loser in the end; you shall so choose the blessed God, and live with him for evermore, and be filled with his love as full as you can hold, and be employed in his service; and all this in an eternal perfection and glorified estate.

4. Motive. Choose, for you will never have cause to repent of your choice. The Lord stands upon his justification, is very tender of giving his people any cause to repent of his service: Micah vi. 3, 'O my people! what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' Pray what hurt hath holiness done you? Who was ever the better for sinning, or who was the worse for holiness? There was none that ever made a carnal choice but first or last they had cause to repent of it. Either they repent of it in a kindly manner, while they may mend the matter, or else they shall repent for ever in misery. But who ever repented of his repentance, or cursed the day of his new birth? To whom ever was it any grief of heart that they were acquainted with God and Christ, or the way that leadeth unto life? Who dieth the sweeter death? or who repents of their choice then, the serious or the carnal? Oh! they that have chosen the world, they cry out how the world hath deceived them; but never any repented of choosing God and the ways of God. Let these things persuade you to choose his precepts.

Secondly, For directions.

1. In choosing, the object is to be regarded. God's precepts indefinitely, all of them, not one excepted, the smallest as well as the greatest, the troublesome as well as the easy, the most neglected as well as the most observed. We must choose all God's precepts, not abate anything, but especially the main or the essential precepts of Christianity, or the fundamental points of the covenant. Now the question is, what is the fundamental point of the covenant? Truly that is known by the form of baptism. Baptism is the solemn seal of entering into covenant with God; it is the seal of our initiation or first entrance into covenant with God, Mat. xxviii. 19. Now what is to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? When you first choose the ways of God, here you must begin; you must close with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, heartily take them to be your God; that is, you must close with God the Father, as your all-sufficient portion, or chiefest happiness, to be loved above all; and also as your highest Lord, that he may be served, pleased, and obeyed above all. Well, and in the name of the Son, that is, Jesus Christ, he must be taken as your saviour and redeemer, to bring you to God, and to reconcile you to him. And to be baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost is this, to take him as your sanctifier, guide, and comforter, to make you a holy people to God, to cleanse your hearts from sin, to write all God's laws upon your hearts, and put them into your minds, and to guide you by the word and ordinances to everlasting life. This is the main thing that is first to be minded, because it contains all, and doth necessarily infer the rest; for otherwise, to be resolute in some by-point of religion, though it be right, this is but the obstinacy of a faction, not the constancy of a Christian zeal.

2. As you must look to the object of this choice, so to the causes of it; and what are they? An enlightened mind, a renewed heart, a love to God, and then the Spirit of God enlightening and inclining our hearts.

[1.] An enlightened mind is a cause of choosing the ways of God, when the Lord hath taught us his precepts. An enlightened mind discovers a beauty and amiableness in the ways of God: Ps. cxix. 128,



‘I esteem all thy precepts to be right, and they are the rejoicing of my soul.’

[2.] A renewed heart, wherein all the precepts of God are written over again. They were written upon our hearts in innocency, but that is a blurred manuscript, therefore in regeneration they are written over again. God writes his law in our hearts, and puts them in our inward parts, Heb. viii. 10; and then the law within suits with the law without, for the new creature is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. In true holiness, which relates to the first table of the law, and righteousness, which relates to the second table of the law; the renewed heart that hath this inclination and propension is carried out to them.

[3.] Love to God, for that is implied in the choice: John xiv. 21, ‘He that hath my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me;’ and he that loves me hath my commandments and keeps them. It follows the other way; where there is love to God, there will be choosing of his ways.

[4.] God’s Spirit, the Lord enlightening and inclining our hearts to this choice. God enlightens, for he teacheth us the way that we shall choose; and when we see these things in the light of the Spirit, then we see the beauty of them, Ps. xxv. 12. It holds good as to the path of life, and in particular cases; but chiefly in the main case God teacheth him the way that he shall choose. And the Spirit of God inclines the heart too, as well as enlightens the mind: 1 Peter i. 22, ‘Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.’

3. There are the effects of this choice. What are they? Delight, diligence, and patience.

[1.] Delight: Ps. xl. 8, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.’ When the law is not only written in the book but written in the heart, then there is a delight, a ready and willing obedience. It is spoken first of Christ; of David it was said in type. It is true also of all believers, for they have the Spirit of Christ; and the same also is expressed of the people of God: Ps. cxii. 1, ‘Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.’ When a man hath chosen the precepts of God, and bound himself in this way, then his heart is taken with a delight.

[2.] Diligence. God’s precepts are the great business and employment of our lives, and then there is a constant study to please him: Col. i. 9, 10, ‘Filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.’ We must do God’s will and precepts, that we may order our practice accordingly. There must be a habitual aim and purpose to please God.

[3.] Patience; a resolute continuance till our service be over. This is the way I have chosen, and here will I stick until the great reward come in hand: Rom. ii. 7, ‘To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for honour, and glory, and immortality, eternal life.’ And Luke viii. 15, ‘The good ground brought forth fruit with patience.’ That distinguished the good ground from all other grounds; they had some little liking of it, but never came to a serious choice.

But the good ground, though there be several weathers between sowing and reaping, it cherisheth the seed that it is ready at harvest time ; so we pass through many weathers before we come to our harvest of happiness and rest.

*Doct. 2.* That man which makes conscience of God's commands is encouraged to seek help from him in straits.

Such a one may be in great straits ; as David, his own hand could not help him, therefore he flies to God. The Lord permits it that he may be trusted alone in his own hands ; he will break our carnal dependences ; and that his ways may be chosen for their own sakes, and not for temporal reward, and that his love to his own people may not be shown too sensibly, that the mysteriousness of providence may leave a room and place for faith ; therefore doth God darken the glory of the godly with afflictions, and put them into straits that their own hand cannot help them.

Now in these straits, those that make conscience of God's precepts they are encouraged to seek help from God's hand. Why ? Partly because integrity breeds a confidence, so that a man which hath been faithful with God can look him in the face. It breeds a confidence in life, 2 Cor. i. 12, and in death, Isa. xxxviii. 3 ; when they are sick, weak, and know not what to do, they can fly to God. And then integrity also ; it entitles to God's protection all that heartily and sincerely depend upon God : Prov. x. 9, ' He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.' An upright, plain-hearted man, that trusts himself under the shadow and protection of God's providence, he hath no shifts and tricks ; this man shall walk safely, God is engaged to defend him. But the perverse, that fly to their shifts, God will disappoint them and show them their folly : Gen. xvii. 1, ' I am God all-sufficient ; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Do you uprightly serve God, and study to please him, and you need not seek elsewhere for a patron, or for one to defend you and plead your cause. And partly, too, because they are exposed to the greater difficulties, because they are faithful with God, and trust themselves alone with his protection ; for so the apostle, 1 Tim. iv. 10, ' For therefore we labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.' Faith begets faithfulness ; their dependence is upon God, and their faithfulness costs them dear, and so they suffer reproach because they did trust themselves in God's ways by God's providence. As you stand in need of God's protection, you shall have it. God will not forsake us in our greatest needs, as the world will ; but in our greatest extremities, when all carnal dependences fail us, he will not ; then is the time for God to show himself. He hath still a providence and a fatherly care over thee, but his power is especially engaged at such a time. If you will take care of your duty, he will take care of your safety, for he will either keep you out of troubles, or sustain you under troubles.

## SERMON CLXXXVII.

*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*  
—VER. 174.

IN this verse you have a twofold assertion or protestation—

1. Of a vehement desire of the salvation promised, *I have longed for thy salvation.*

2. A great love and complacency in the word of God, *and thy law is my delight.*

This verse may be understood either of temporal salvation or eternal salvation; the words may be accommodated to either sense. The context would seem to limit it to the former, and so an enforcing of the second request of this portion: ver. 170, 'Deliver me according to thy word.' Many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, carry it for the other. Jewish; Rabbi David Kimchi expoundeth it thus, 'thy salvation,' *seculo futuro*; and the last clause, 'thy law,' *quia medium est ad salutem*. Christian; Chrysostom, Theodoret, Calvin. And because these senses are not contrary, but subordinate, I shall insist upon both.

1. Let me handle the words as they may be understood of temporal salvation; and so the sense will be, 'I have long expected thy deliverance, and yet do desire and wait for it.' The preterperfect tense, as Vatablus noteth, includeth also the present: 'For a long time I have expected thy deliverance, and do expect help from thee.' And the other clause, 'Thy law is my delight;' though this help seemeth to be delayed, yet thy counsel is my consolation and perpetual delight. The words thus understood yield us two points:—

*Doct.* 1. That God's people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect the accomplishment of it.

*Doct.* 2. We should delight in the promise before the salvation cometh.

For the first point, that God's people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect it, the point shall be discussed in these considerations:—

1. What longing for God's salvation implieth.
2. The encouragements and reasons of it.
3. What singular thing there is in this longing expectation, since it is natural to all to seek deliverance out of trouble.

First, What it implieth?

1. A sense of our impotency, or insufficiency to save ourselves, and help ourselves out of trouble, by any ways and means that we can find out and use: Ps. iii. 8, 'Salvation belongeth to the Lord;' Jonah ii. 9, 'Salvation is of the Lord.' Salvation and deliverance of all kinds is God's prerogative royal, and God's proper work; none can save and give peace when he commandeth trouble; and when he will save his people, none can let. It is an evidence of men's neglecting a deity when they would help and save themselves in all conditions, without depending or employing a God; Job xl. 9, 14, 'Hast thou an arm like God? then I will confess unto thee, that thine own right hand



can save thee. Alas! if we look elsewhere, how soon are we disappointed! Man is a mutable creature, his affections change, or his power may be blasted; an arm of flesh is soon dried up. Besides the distraction and uncertainty that we have while we depend upon man and look to man, we involve ourselves in greater miseries, and meet with a shameful disappointment at last. Sometimes man will not if he can, sometimes cannot if he would. If he will and can, yet he shall not help us without God; for what can the instrument do without the principal agent, the sword without the man that wieldeth it? That is one lesson God hath been teaching his people in all ages, that salvation belongeth unto the Lord; they must take their deliverance out of his hands. He sits at the upper end of causes, and saveth his people when he will, and how he will, and by what means he will; and till he take their cause in hand, how sadly do the most hopeful attempts and expectations miscarry; for to give salvation is a divine property, given to no creature, and must not be usurped by them: looking to man is the readiest way to miscarry.

2. It implieth a dependence upon his fatherly care and powerful providence, and a persuasion that he will guide us unto heaven in a way that is most convenient for us. The great cause of God's anger against his people in the wilderness was because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation, Ps. lxxviii. 22. He had undertaken to bring them into Canaan, but they mistrusted his conduct, either that he had not power enough, or enough fatherly love and care to do it; and therefore his wrath was kindled against Jacob, and his anger was hot against Israel; and so do they greatly dishonour and provoke God by their distrust who do not believe that God will bring them out of every strait, in a way most conducing to his own glory and their welfare. Now God's children are so satisfied in his conduct, that in their worst condition they can cheerfully depend upon God, and look and long for salvation from him: Hab. iii. 18, 'I will joy in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation;' Luke i. 47, 'My spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour.' They are satisfied in his love and power: Ps. xiii. 5, 'But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.'

3. Holy desires vented in prayer; there we express and act our longings. Words are but the body of prayer, but desires are the life and soul of it. The children of God are described once and again to be such as love his salvation, Ps. xl. 16. Now there are but two acts of love—desire and delight; the one concerneth the object as future, the other as present, either to faith or to sense. They rejoice in it as present to faith in the promise, as well as when they enjoy it. But the desire we are now upon, this is vented in prayer, there they express their vehement longings for his salvation: Ps. xxxv. 3, 'Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.' God's saying is doing. He speaketh by his providence; and this is that the saints long for, they plead with him, Ps. cxix. 94, 'I am thine, save me, for I have sought thy precepts.'

4. It expresseth waiting God's leisure and submission for the kind, time, and means of deliverance: Lam. iii. 26, 'It is good to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.' They continue looking and

waiting: Isa. xxx. 18, 'Blessed are all they that wait for him.' We must wait in the midst of manifold disappointments. When means miscarry, it is in his power to rescue his people from the greatest dangers; and hath a prerogative to save and deliver those whom reason and probability have condemned and given over for lost; as the Israelites, Exod. xiv. 13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God.' They were enclosed, the mountains on each side, the Egyptians behind, the sea before; yet what cannot the salvation of God do? There is a holy obstinacy in faith, trusting him in all dangers. Nay, when God himself appeareth as an enemy, cutting off our hope, and hewing and hacking at us, yet we must wait upon him. All strokes come from the hand of God, and no wound given by himself is above his own cure. Jacob when he fainted was forced to interrupt his speech, and utter this ejaculation, Gen. xlix. 18, 'I have waited for thy salvation, O God.' In short, God hath ways of deliverance more than his people know of, and can save his own when they count their case desperate: Ps. lxxviii. 20, 'He that is our God, is the God of salvation, and the issues from death belong unto him;' the escapes from death and imminent destruction.

Secondly, The reasons and encouragements of looking and longing for God's salvation.

1. God hath bound himself by covenant as our God; it is his covenant style to be the God of our salvation, Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. In the one verse he is called 'the God of our salvation;' in the other, it is said, 'He that is our God is the God of salvation.' If he be the God of salvation, he will be the God of our salvation; for whatever God is in himself, that in the covenant he will be to his people; you shall see the blessing of his people is inferred out of his title: Ps. iii. 8, 'Salvation belongeth to the Lord; thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.' If God can save, and the salvation be a blessing to his people, he will save them, and deliver them. It is true this title doth mainly concern our eternal salvation, but the conduct of his providence by the way is aimed at in the covenant, as well as our entrance into heaven at the end of the journey. Promises relating to temporal things are put into the believer's charter; but the dispensing thereof is left in the hands of their wise and tender Father. Now temporal deliverance being a part of our charter, if it be not always performed, it is not for want of power or truth, but out of wisdom and love. God doth what is most convenient for us; it is in a wise hand: if it be good for me, I shall have it. Now this is a mighty encouragement to look and long for God's salvation. He shall have the stating of it, for time, means, and kind of deliverance, but we must look for it.

2. We must look to God for deliverance, because he is every way able, and fitted and furnished to make good his covenant undertaking. He hath power enough, wisdom enough, and love enough.

[1.] Power enough: 1 Sam. xiv. 6, 'There is no restraint in the Lord, to save by many, or by few.' The same supported Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 11. The same supported the three children, Dan. iii. 17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of the fiery furnace.' Now a desire is mightily quickened by this confidence. God hath promised to do what is good, and it is in the power of his hands to do this for us.

[2.] He hath wisdom enough to bring it about in such a way as may be most for his glory: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.' It is an art he is versed in, how to distinguish between his people and their enemies; to bring it about so as may be most for his glory. What is the usual work of providence, but to give salvation according to his covenant, in such a way as the beauty of his providence may be seen, the patience and faith of his people may be tried, and yet his enemies reckoned with.

[3.] He hath love enough. God doth concern himself in all our affairs: 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'We trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' A protector and deliverer; yea, it is said he saveth man and beast, Ps. xxxvi. 6. The object of his providence is very large. All creatures have their being and preservation from him, much more man, much more his children. They are allowed to believe a special providence, and the more they depend upon him, the more is his care assured to them: 1 Peter v. 7, 'Cast all your care upon the Lord, for he careth for you.' The Lord is free from all passions of care and sorrow, but we shall find no less proof of his keeping off danger, or delivering us from danger, than if we were solicitous for ourselves. Surely our Father is not unmindful of us.

3. Because there is no difficulty that can fall out to check this confidence, which is built upon God's undertaking, and sufficiency to make it good.

[1.] Not any danger from men, though of never so dreadful an appearance: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' The danger was trouble in Asia, a great danger, pressed above measure and above strength. Great trouble was at Ephesus, where the people in an uproar were ready to tear him in pieces, so that he received the sentence of death in himself; yet God found a way and means to save, and he came off safe and sound.

[2.] Not any appearance of anger from God himself: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will put my trust in him.' Sometimes trouble may represent God as the party dealing with us; yet faith can take him for a friend when he seemeth to deal like an enemy; and we must resolve to adhere to God and his ways, and trust his power, with submission to his good-will and pleasure, and believe that he hath more respect and care over us than is seen in the present dispensation.

Thirdly, It is natural to all to seek deliverance out of troubles: Isa. li. 14, 'The captive exile hasteth that he may be delivered, and that he should not die in the pit.' How then is it any part of grace to long for God's salvation?

I answer—It is proper to the godly to love no deliverance but what God sendeth by his own means, in his own time, and to wait for it in God's way.

1. There is somewhat of grace in it, that they look for salvation from God alone, as the author, and are resolved to take it out of his hands, whencesoever it cometh. Men naturally would be *αὐτάρκος*, live upon himself, be sufficient to his own happiness; and so they



are vexed when they are left upon God, and put upon dependence and submission and waiting upon him; for they think it little worth to wait upon God as long as any other shift will serve the turn. As Ahaz, when troubled with the fear of Rezin and Pekah, and the prophet assureth him of God's salvation, and biddeth him ask a sign: Isa. vii. 11-13, 'I will not tempt the Lord.' I will not trust the Lord, he meaneth, though he useth that pretence; his expectation was fixed on the friendship of his confederates. If he had asked a sign of God, he must wait for the issue in God's way. Now Ahaz could not endure to trust God alone; he depended on the Assyrian, and not on God's salvation; he believed nothing the prophet spake, but counted it vain and frivolous, and was resolved to go another way to work.

2. God's salvation as to the means; not by our shifts, that maketh a breach upon our sincerity: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou upright.' A man that doth not trust God cannot be long true to him. You go off from God to the creature by distrust and unbelief, Heb. iii. 12. This is making more haste than good speed, Isa. xxviii. 16. It plungeth us in sin; it is the greatest hypocrisy that can be, to pretend respect to God, and shift for ourselves; it is to break prison, to get out of trouble before God letteth us out.

3. In his own time, 'Thy salvation.' They resolve to wait till he sendeth it. Carnal men, when other means and expectations fail, will seek to God; they are beaten to him. But if their expectation in waiting upon God be delayed, they wax weary and faint; as that king put on sackcloth for a while, 2 Kings vi. 30, afterwards said, 'This evil is from the Lord; why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' They give it over as a hopeless service.

4. That in the height of trouble they still go to God, and will not cast away their confidence and dependence, come what will come: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'In the way of thy judgments we have waited for thee; our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.' They still look to him, and though often disappointed, will seek salvation from no other: they still cleave to God's way: Ps. xlv. 17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forsaken thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant.' They persevere in prayer: Ps. lxxxviii. 13, 14, 'Unto thee have I cried in the morning; my prayer shall prevent thee, Lord! Why castest thou me off? why hidest thou thy face from me?' They will not give over, but show their vehement longings after God; whereas wicked and carnal men, when great troubles continue, are driven to despair, and give over all hope.

*Use.* In times of trouble let us look to God, and continue looking all the time that God will exercise our faith and patience, and express our longings and desires of God's salvation in humble and earnest prayer.

1. It is no time to look elsewhere; for God will show us that vain is the help of man by many disappointments: Isa. xlviii. 11, 'I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour.' He will break all confidences till we come to this. He shall be my salvation, as Job resolved when God brake him with his tempests, and pursued him with his waves, and was ready to slay him, as he thought. In all

extremities this should be our fixed ground of faith, that salvation and deliverance is to be expected from God only: Jer. iii. 23, 'Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and the mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.' God will teach us this lesson ere he hath done with us. Usually there is no serious dealing with God till we find the vanity and inability of all other dependences: looking to the hills and mountains, strength of situation, forces, all these will fail us.

2. It is no time to dally with God and his service any longer; for when troubles come close and near, the spirit of prayer should be revived, and what was cursorily sought at other times should now be sought with some vehemency and longings in prayer: Jer. xxix. 13, 14, 'When they shall seek me with their whole heart, they shall find me, and I will give them an expected end.' We do not stir up ourselves to take hold of him: Ps. xiv. 7, 'Oh! that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!' There should be a longing, we should not content ourselves with a few dead and drowsy prayers.

3. Salvation may be comfortably expected from God; for as necessity enforceth these longings, so hope quickeneth them. Now it may be expected, for he is mighty to save, Isa. lxiii. 1; he is willing to save a distressed people: ver. 5, 'I looked, and there was none to help, therefore mine own arm brought salvation to me.' God struck in for the deliverance and help of his people when all human help failed; he did the work alone himself. Once more, when he meaneth to save, he covereth himself with frowns and anger, as if he meant to destroy: Isa. xlv. 15, 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God, the saviour.' He seemeth to hide and stand aloof from his people in their afflictions, and carrieth himself so closely and covertly in the passages of his providence, that his people know not what he meaneth to do. What is our work, then, but to keep longing and waiting and looking to God's hands, till he have mercy upon us?

*Doct.* 2. That we should delight in the promise before the salvation cometh.

So doth David say here, 'Thy law is my delight;' that is, whilst he was longing for God's salvation; and by law is meant God's word in the general; the promise is included in it, as well as the precept.

1. A believer should not be comfortless in his troubles: John xiv. 1, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' Immoderate sorrow for temporal evils will not become one that hath an interest in God and Christ. Whatever falls out in the world, God is the same still, and the covenant is the same; and our better part, and our happiness is above the reach of trouble; there is a long-suffering with joyfulness, Col. i. 4.

2. All our delight and solace must not arise from the delights of sense, but out of the word of God. It is good to see what is our solace and support in troubles, for the man is as his solace is: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' How do we ease ourselves in our perplexities and griefs? Is it with God's comforts? Now God's comforts are gospel comforts; the comforts we have from the word they will make us

more love the word, and trust more upon God's word, and the more confidently expect the performance of it.

3. The promises should support us upon a twofold account—partly because they are good, and partly because they are sure.

[1.] They are good; there is a fulness in God's allowance that suiteth with all our cases: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that live uprightly.' So 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness hath the promises of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.' Heaven and earth are laid at the feet of it. A man cannot desire a greater cordial than necessary provisions for this and the future life: Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies I have taken for an heritage for ever; they are the rejoicing of my heart.' The promises of the world to come should swallow up all our present grief, for there is more in heaven than can be taken from us in the creature: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' Heb. x. 34, 'And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods; knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and more enduring substance.' We have a treasure and a happiness elsewhere, which cannot be infringed by the afflictions we endure in this world. We do not lose much if we get eternal salvation in the issue, and so we get to heaven, no matter how dark soever our passage be. Then for the promises of this life, they suit with all our troubles, wants, dangers, breaches, and distresses. But what confidence can we have of these temporal deliverances or mercies? *Ans.* Either we shall have the mercies themselves, or God will order providences so as it may be good for us to want them, and have something better given in lieu of them, Rom. viii. 28. We know he will not leave us wholly destitute, Heb. xiii. 5, nor bring upon us insupportable difficulties, 1 Cor. x. 13; and this should be enough for us to maintain us in life and comfort.

[2.] They are sure as well as good.

(1.) As promises. A promise is more than a purpose, for it is a purpose not as conceived in the mind of a man, but declared to another to invite hope. It is more than a doctrine. A doctrine giveth notice of privileges, but a promise giveth us an interest in them. It is more than a revelation or prophecy. Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled because of God's veracity; but scripture promises not only because of God's veracity, but also his fidelity and justice. There is a kind of righteousness in making good promises, because we give another a right and claim to the things promised by the promises we make to him. A promissory lie is worse than an assertory lie. A promise gives us a holdfast upon God, *promittendo se fecit debitorem*.

(2.) As the promises of God, who cannot lie and deceive the creatures: Heb. vi. 18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' And therefore by acting faith on these declarations of his will, we may have the accomplishment of them. None that ever depended on God's word were disappointed: Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' God was never yet found worse than his word; he hath been tender of the credit of his word: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast



magnified thy word above all thy name.' Heathens have acknowledged that God hath never so much showed himself in the world, as in these two things ἀληθεύειν καὶ ἐνεργεῖν, in doing good and keeping promise. Above all that is named and famed of God, this is most conspicuous.

*Use.* To exhort us in all our straits, dangers, and troubles, to be contented with his word, and to delight in the promise, as if it were performed. I shall here show you how we are to carry ourselves towards the promises.

1. You must rest confident of the truth of what God hath promised, and be assured that in time the performance will come to pass, as if you saw it with your eyes : Heb. xi. 13, ' They were persuaded of these things.' This is the assurance of faith spoken of, Heb. x. 22. I know I shall find this to be a truth. Men are conscionable and faithful in keeping their word ; much more God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

2. You are to delight in the promise, though the performance be not yet, nor like to be for a good while ; neither performed, nor likely to be performed. Heb. xi. 13, they saw them afar off, and yet being persuaded of these things, they embraced them ; and John viii. 56, ' Abraham saw my day, and was glad.' You hold the blessing by the root, where you have the promise, Heb. vi. 18.

3. You are to take the naked promise for a ground of your hope, however it seem to be contradicted in the course of his providence. It is his word you are to go by, and stand by, and according to which you must interpret all his dispensations. It is said, Rom. iv. 18, that ' Abraham believed in hope against hope.' When faith dependeth upon God's naked word, then it standeth upon its own basis and proper legs. Everything is strongest in its props and pillars which God and nature hath appointed for it. He hangeth the earth upon nothing, in the midst of the air, but there is its place. So faith standeth fast upon his word, who is able to perform what he saith.

4. This faith must conquer our fears, and cares, and troubles : Ps. cxii. 7, ' He shall not be afraid of evil tidings ; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord ;' and Ps. lvi. 3, 4, ' In God I will praise his word, in God have I put my trust ; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' The force of faith is seen in calming our passions and sinful fears ; or else it is but a notion, and our reverence and respect to God will be weakened by it.

5. When faith hath done its work in the quieting of our own hearts, you must glorify God in your carriage before others : John iii. 33, ' Put to his seal that God is true ;' that is, when we confirm others in the faith and belief of the promises, by our joyfulness in all conditions, patience and contentedness under the cross, diligence in holiness, hope and comfort in great straits. You shall see, Num. xx. 12, that God was angry with Moses and Aaron because ' they believed not, to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel.' We are not only to believe in God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others ; as the Thessalonians by receiving the word in much affliction, much assurance, and joy in the Holy Ghost, were examples to all that believed in Achaia, 1 Thes. i. 5-7. Thus we should do, but how few do thus

believe! Some count these vain words, and the comforts thence deduced fanatical illusions or fantastical impressions; nothing so ridiculous in the world's eye as trust and dependence on unseen comforts: Ps. xxii. 8, 'He trusted on the Lord, that he should deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Ungodly wits make the life of faith a sport or matter of laughter. Some have more modesty, but as little faith; they are all for the present world, 2 Tim. iv. 9. Present delights please them, but present temptations altogether unsettle them, Heb. xii. 11; cannot bear present smart, nor despise the present world, Rom. viii. 19. Anything in hand is more than the greatest promise, of better things to come. They do not deal equally with God and man. If man promise, they reckon much of that; but cannot tarry upon God's security, count his promise little worth. They can trade with a factor beyond sea, and trust all their estate in a man's hand whom they have never seen; and yet the word of the infallible God is of little respect with them. The best build too weakly upon the promise, as appeareth by the prevalency of our cares and fears, Heb. xii. 4-6. If you did take God at his word, you would not be so soon mated with every difficulty; there would be more resolution in trials, more hardiness against troubles. A man may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' If we had faith to believe it, it would more effectually quiet our hearts and minds in all our straits, necessities, and perplexities, it would calm our desires and fears: we would not desire the best things of the world, nor fear the worst.

### SERMON CLXXXVIII.

*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*

—VER. 174.

WE now come to the second acceptation of the word *salvation*, as it implieth eternal salvation; and so the points are two:—

*Doct. 1.* That we should vehemently long and earnestly wait for eternal life.

*Doct. 2.* That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth us to it.

For the first point, that longing for salvation is the duty and property of God's children—

The reasons are taken from—(1.) The object of these desires; (2.) The subject of these desires; (3.) The use of these desires; (4.) The state and condition of the present world.

1. The object. The object of desire is good, considered as absent and not yet obtained good. All desire that it should be well with themselves. This desire is confused and general; not the hundredth part longeth after the true good: Ps. iv. 6, 'Who will show us any good?' Some are carried by ambition, others by covetousness, others by sensuality: 1 John ii. 16, 'All that is in the world is either the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or pride of life;' and Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have every one turned to his

own way.' As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature finds a vent. But now God's salvation is the true good, and ought to be desired, and will be desired by all his children. It importeth a freedom from all misery, and an enjoyment of all good. A freedom from all misery : There sin and sorrow shall be no more, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, Rev. xxi. 4. The blessed spirits above have none of our cares, and fears, and sorrows. Here we are sighing, and they are praising ; we sinning, and they pleasing God ; we full of infirmities, and they are perfect and without blemish, and in the full enjoyment of all good : Ps. xvi. 11, 'At thy right hand is fulness of joy, and in thy presence pleasures for evermore ;' Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Alas ! the preparations to this estate in the world are far above the vain delights of the flesh ; much more the pleasures there ; these the soul longeth for ; though they are thankful for a refreshment by the way, yet they long to be at home.

2. The second reason is taken from the subject of these desires ; and there we have—(1.) The suitableness ; (2.) The experience ; (3.) Our pressures.

[1.] The suitableness ; they are suited to this happiness, wrought for this very thing, 2 Cor. v. 5. Everything hath a prepension to the place for which God framed it ; it is the wisdom of God to put all things in their proper places, as every creature is placed in that element which is suitable and answerable to its composition and frame, as fishes in water, fowls in the air. God's children are framed for this very thing, therefore have an inclination and a tendency thither. As heaven is prepared for them, so in some measure they for it, Rom. ix. 24 ; aforehand prepared unto glory ; and Col. i. 12, 'Made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' They grow more dead every day to the interests and concerns of the animal life, and have a greater agreeableness to this happiness.

[2.] Experience : Rom. viii. 23, 'We that have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' A Christian here is unsatisfied, and longeth for a better and purer state of bliss and immortality, light, life, peace, joy. One drachm of grace is more precious than all the world, but yet it setteth them a-longing for more. The first-fruits sheweth us what the harvest will be, and a taste what the feast will prove. Here we get a little knowledge of God, a sight of him in the ordinances, a twilight discovery of Christ, a look through the lattice, Cant. ii. 9, a little glance of his face, when neither doth he let the believers in to him, nor doth he come out to them. This glance maketh them long for more, so that in effect they send up the same message to Christ which his mother and brethren did because of the press, 'Thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to see thee.' Tell him thou standest here without, but desirest to see him. So for the communion we have with Christ, it is but a taste : 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted the Lord is gracious ;' but that taste is very ravishing and delightful. Here we get a little from him in an ordinance, but that little is as much as we can hold ; but there he is all in all. Here our holiness is not perfect, the seed of God remaineth



in us ; but there it groweth up to perfection, as every spark of fire tendeth to the element of fire.

[3.] Our pressures and the miseries of the present life : 2 Cor. v. 4, ' Being burdened, we groan.' We are pressed under a heavy weight, burdened both with sin and misery, and both set us a-groaning and a-longing, as men in a tempest would fain be set ashore as soon as they can.

(1.) Sin, to a waking conscience and a tender gracious heart, is one of the greatest burdens than can be felt : Rom. vii. 24, ' O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death ?' If any had cause to complain of afflictions, Paul much more ; he was whipped, imprisoned, stoned, in perils by land and sea ; but afflictions did not sit so close to him as sins : the body of death was his greatest burden, and therefore did he long for deliverance. If others go away silently under their load, the children of God cannot. As light and love increaseth, so sin groweth a greater burden to us. They cannot get rid of this cursed inmate, and therefore are longing for their final estate, when sin shall gasp its last : they long for the parting day, when by putting off the flesh, they shall put off sin, and dwell with God.

(2.) Miseries : the children of God have not divested themselves of the feelings of nature, are not grown senseless, as stocks and stones. The apostle telleth us, Rom. viii. 20-22, that the whole creation groaneth, because it is under misery and vanity. It is a groaning world, and God's children bear a part of the concert : they groan and desire earnestly their full deliverance. ' Few and evil are the days of the years of my pilgrimage,' said holy Jacob, Gen. xlvii. 9. Our days are evil, therefore it is well they are but few ; that in this shipwreck of man's felicity, we can see banks and shores and a landing-place where we may be safe ; here is our travail, but there is our repose. We would sleep too much here, and take up our rest, if sometimes we did not meet with thorns in our bed.

3. The end and use of this longing and desiring.

[1.] It is an earnest desire, it maketh us industrious, and stirreth up and keepeth up our endeavours after another world : Phil. iii. 20, 21, ' But our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for a 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 to subdue all things unto himself.' Where there is a lively expectation, there men drive on a trade for another country. Desire is the vigorous bent of the soul, and so beareth us out under all the difficulties of obedience. If we do not desire, we will not labour, nor seek it in the first place ; and if our desires be weak and feeble, they are controlled by every lust, abated upon every difficulty : whatever gets your hearts, that will command your endeavours ; for as a man's desire is, so is he.

[2.] To make us constant, notwithstanding troubles, reproaches, persecutions : Mat. xi. 12, ' The violent take it by force.' They will have no nay ; they must have it, whatever it cost ; though sore troubles and persecutions, yet if we may get heaven and glory at last, it is enough. But where a thing is coldly and carelessly desired, everything puts us out of the humour.

4. The state and condition of the present world ; it is called, Gal. i. 4, 'The present world.' The pleasures of it are mere dreams and shadows, and the evils of it are many and real. God's children are pilgrims here, and hardly get leave to pass through ; as Israel could not get leave to pass through Edom. Sometimes they meet with such bitter and grievous persecutions, which make them weary of their lives ; as Elijah requested for himself that he might die, 1 Kings ix. 4, or as the spirits of the Israelites were filled with anguish because of their hard taskmasters. God will give his people rest hereafter, but before the rest cometh they are sorely troubled : 1 Thes. i. 6, 7, 'And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.' Nay, the company that we go with to heaven are apt to fall out by the way, and to deal perversely one with another, unministering, unchurching, unchristianing one another, impaling, enclosing the common salvation, and jostling one another out of the way to heaven ; so that the church, which should be terrible like an army with banners, marching to heaven in order in one whole body, is like an army in rout, and most are forced to get home in straggling parties. Now every tender soul should long for God's salvation, to get up to that council of souls who with perfect harmony are lauding and praising God for evermore, Heb. xii. 23.

*Use 1.* To reprove them that are loath to leave this woful life, and do not long and prepare for a better. God driveth us out of the world, as he did Lot out of Sodom, yet we are loath to depart ; as if it were better to be miserable, apart from God and Christ, than happy with them. Surely they are far from the spirit of true Christians who would live always here, at home in the world, and cannot endure to think of a remove. There are two causes of this—(1.) An unmortified heart ; (2.) An unsettled conscience.

1. An unmortified heart ; they are not yet weaned from the world, their hearts are set upon satisfying the vile lusts of the body ; carry it as if their portion lay in this world, Ps. xvii. 14 ; sucking yet upon the world's dug ; they have no longing nor desire for that happiness and glory which God hath provided for them that love him ; they desire no other portion than what they have in hand.

2. And the other cause is an unsettled conscience. Some fear the state of the other world rather than desire it and long for it. There are two degrees—not knowing for certain it shall go well with us, and not knowing for certain but that it shall go ill with us ; both suppress this desire, especially the latter.

*Use 2.* To rouse up our languid and cold affections, that they may more earnestly be carried out after heavenly things ; that we may seek after them with more fervency, and constancy, and self-denial.

The motives to press us are these :—

1. God giveth heaven to none but to those that look and long for it. Men may go to hell against their wills, but none go to heaven against their wills. In a punishment there is a force offered to us, but not in a reward. We suffer what we would not, as Christ saith to Peter, 'Another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not,'

John xxi. 18. But happiness must be embraced, pursued, and sought after. Well, then, let the concerns of the other world more take up our hearts and minds, and stand as at heaven's gate, expecting when God will open the door and call you in : Christ will appear to them that look for him, Heb. ix. 28.

2. The children of God long to see God in his ordinances: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple;' and Ps. xlii. 2, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?' Ps. 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.' Now if there be so great and longing a desire to see the glory of the Lord in a glass, wherein so little of his glory is seen, with any comfort and satisfaction, how much more to see him immediately face to face! If a glimpse be so comfortable, what will the immediate vision of God then be? Surely if this be salvation, every one of us should long for this salvation.

3. If it be not worth our desire, it is little worth; the estate being so excellent, such a complete redemption from all our troubles, so perfect, and so full a happiness in body and soul, will not you send a groan, or a hearty act of volition after it? It is great ingratitude, that when Christ hath procured a great state of blessedness for us at a very dear rate, we should value it no more. He procured it by a life of labour and sorrow, and the pangs of a bitter cursed death; and when all is done, we little regard it. Surely if we choose it for our happiness, there will be longing and looking for it. No man will fly from his own happiness: a man's heart will be where his treasure is, Mat. vi. 21. If you prize it, you will sigh and groan after it. The apostle saith, Phil. i. 23, 'I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, which is far better,' *πολλῶ μαλλόν*. If you count it better to be there than elsewhere, you will be desiring to be there, and longing to be there; for we are always longing for that which is better, chiefly for that which is best of all. There is the best estate, the best work, the best company, all is better; if you count it so, it will be no difficult thing to bring you earnestly to desire it.

4. All the ordinances serve to stir up this longing after heaven, and to awaken these desires in us. The word is our charter for heaven, or God's testament wherein this rich legacy is bequeathed to us, that every time we read it, or hear it, or meditate upon it, we may get a step higher, and our hearts more drawn out after heavenly things. In prayer, whether in company or alone, it is but to raise and act these heavenly desires; there we groan, and long for God's salvation. In the Lord's supper, we come solemnly to put ourselves in mind of the new wine we shall drink in our Father's kingdom, Mat. xxvi. 29, to put a new heavenly relish upon our hearts.

5. The imperfection of our present estate. We are now imperfect, and straitened like a fish in a pail or small vessel of water, which cannot keep it alive; it would fain be in the ocean, or swimming in



the broad and large rivers. So we are pent up, cannot do what we would; there is a larger estate, when filled up with all the fulness of God. That holiness we have now maketh us look for it and long for it; and surely holiness was never designed for our torment.

6. We are hastening into the other world apace, and therefore we more desire it. Natural motion is *in principio tardior, in fine velocior*—the nearer to fruition, the more impatient of the want of it. When a man is drawing home after a long journey, every mile is as tedious as two. We are drawing nigh to the other world, let us leave this willingly, not by force; let not trouble chase us out of it, but love and desire draw us out of it. God doth loosen our roots by little and little, that we may now be fit for a remove; the pins of our tabernacle are taken down insensibly, and by leisurely degrees. Now as fast as we are going out of this world, we should be going into another; the inner man renewed day by day, that is, as it groweth more holy and heavenly. From our first renovation we should be dying to this world, and setting our affections on a better; much more when God beginneth to call us home, then draw home as fast as you can.

For means to this desire and longing, there is necessary—

1. A sound belief of this blessed estate, or a certain confidence of the truth of it: 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.' Not a bare conjecture, but a certain knowledge. Surely heaven is amiable, and the object of our desires, if we be persuaded of the truth of it, we will long after it.

2. A serious preparation for it: 2 Cor. v. 3, 'If so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked.' They have made up their account between God and their souls, sued out their pardon, stand with their loins girt and lamps burning; then they long and wait when God will draw aside the veil of flesh, and show them his glory. A seafaring man desireth his port, especially if laden with rich commodities. Where there hath been diligent preparing, there will be serious waiting and desirous expectation. While we make provision for our fleshly appetites and wills, we dream of dwelling here; we take it for granted they have no thought of removing to another place who make no provision before their coming thither. When a tenant hath warning to be turned out of his old house, he will be providing of another, and be preparing and making it ready before he enter upon it.

We now come to the second clause, 'Thy law is my delight.'

*Doct.* 2. That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth to it.

Here I shall speak to two things:—

1. That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

2. That we must delight in the way.

First, That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

1. Partly because of the nature of God's covenant, which is conditional. There is in it *ratio dati et accepti*, something required and something promised: Isa. lvi. 4, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the

eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant ;' Heb. x. 22, ' Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water ;' Exod. xxiv. 4, ' And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel : and he took the book of the covenant and read it in the audience of the people, and they said, All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient.' Surely in the covenant of grace God requireth conditions ; it is not made up all of promises. Now a condition is this, when one promiseth any good, or threateneth any ill, not simply, but upon covenant ; if the thing required be performed, or the thing forbidden be committed ; the performance of the thing required is the condition of the promise, the doing a thing forbidden the condition of the threatening : 1 Sam. xi. 1, 2, ' And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee : and Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel ;' and Luke xiv. 32, ' While the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace.' Now these conditions are twofold—making covenant and keeping covenant.

[1.] The conditions as to making the covenant arise from the law of grace, or the *lex remediandi*, faith and repentance. Faith performed or omitted : John iii. 36, ' He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.' So repentance performed : Ezek. xviii. 30, ' Repent ye, and turn from your transgressions ; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.' Omitted : Luke xiii. 5, ' Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'

[2.] Then conditions of keeping covenant, which is conformity to the law of God, or new obedience performed : Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ' No good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Omitted : Heb. xii. 14, ' Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Well, then, upon the whole we thus judge, that it is not enough to desire God's salvation, but we must also delight in his law ; that is to say, we must repent and believe, and so begin our acquaintance with God in Christ ; and we must also walk in the ways of God's precepts, if we mean at length to be saved, and to enjoy the vision of the blessed God. That which is propounded conditionally we must not presume of absolutely, and so make reckoning to go to heaven as in some whirlwind, or as passengers at sea are brought into the harbour sleeping, or to be crowned without striving.

2. From the nature of this longing and desire, which must be regular and according to the tenor of the covenant of holiness as well as happiness ; and it must be strong, so as to overcome contrary difficulties, lusts, and desires. Let us instance in Balaam. He said, Num. xxiii. 10, ' Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his.' He saw that the state of a righteous man at the end of it is a blessed estate, and this he longed for. But there was

a double defect in his desire ; it was not regular. Balaam desired to be saved, but he did not delight in God's law. He would be at the journey's end, but was loath to take the way ; there was a complacency and well-pleasedness in the end, but a refusing of the means. Again, this desire was but a flash, a sudden motion, occasioned by contemplation of the blessedness of God's people, but no operative transforming desire ; a desire which the love of the wages of unrighteousness prevailed over. All men will long for salvation, but all men will not take a right course to obtain it ; and so it is a wish rather than a desire, if we long for salvation but have not a heart to use the means appointed thereunto. Where there is a true longing there will be a using the means, and a using the means with delight. They that will not submit to these conditions, or snuff at these conditions as troublesome, they do not long for his salvation, nor delight in his law.

Secondly, That we must delight in the way that leadeth to glory ; but this argument being handled in other verses of this psalm, it is omitted here.

### SERMON CLXXXIX.

*Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee ; and let thy judgments help me.*—VER. 175.

THIS verse containeth three things :—

1. David's petition for life, *let my soul live.*
2. His argument from the end, *and it shall praise thee.*
3. The ground of his hope and confidence, *and let thy judgments help me.*

1. David's petition for life, 'Let my soul live.' 'My soul,' that is, myself : the soul is put for the whole man. The contrary, Judges xvi. 30, 'Let me die with the Philistines,' said Samson : Heb. marg., 'Let my soul die.' His life was sought after by the cruelty of his enemies, and he desireth God to keep him alive.

2. His argument from the end, 'And it shall praise thee.' The glorifying of God was his aim. The fruit of all God's benefits is to profit us and praise God. Now David professeth that all the days of his life he should live in the sense and acknowledgment of such a benefit.

3. The ground of his hope and confidence, in the last clause, 'And let thy judgments help me.' Our hopes of help are grounded on God's judgment, whereby is meant his word. There are judgments decreed and judgments executed, doctrinal judgments and providential judgments. That place intimateth the distinction : Eccles. viii. 11, '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. There is *sententia lata et dilata*. Here God's judgments are put for the sentence pronounced, and chiefly for one part of them, the promises of grace. As also Ps. cxix. 43, 'I hope in thy judgments. Promises are the objects of hope.



The points are two:—

*Doct.* 1. That we may beg the continuation of life for the honouring of God.

*Doct.* 2. That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him, even when they are in danger of their lives.

For the first, that we may beg the continuation of life, for the honouring of God. This point must be divided into two parts:—

1. That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life is to praise and glorify God.

2. That we may desire life upon these ends.

First, That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life is to praise and glorify God. This appeareth—

1. By direct scriptures: Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's;' and Phil. i. 20, 21, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or death: for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

2. By the prayers of the saints; as Ps. cxix. 17, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live,' &c.; and Ps. cxviii. 17, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have farther opportunities to honour God. But of this more at large, ver. 17 of this psalm.

3. By the arguments urged in prayer: Ps. vi. 5, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' and Ps. xxx. 9, 'What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?' Ps. lxxxviii. 11–13, 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise, and praise thee, Selah? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness,' &c.; and Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19, 'For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth: the living, the living, he shall praise thee,' &c. A man may praise God in heaven, but from their bodies no service is performed for a long while in the other world. There is no such service there as here; as reducing the stray, instructing the ignorant, propagating godliness to others who want it, by our counsels and example.

4. By reasons.

[1.] Life is given us by God at first: Acts xvii. 25, 'He giveth to all life and breath, and all things;' and ver. 28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being.' Now all things that come from God must be used for him: Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,' &c., angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expecteth more from men than from beasts, and from saints than from men. Life was given for this end, and therefore not to be desired

and loved but for this end, even God's glory. How grievous a thing is it to go out of the world ere we know why we came into the world ! We live not barely to eat and drink, as brute beasts live ; we live not to live as heathens. The end of our life is service and obedience to God ; yea, and it is the life of our lives, the perfection of them. Well, then, since we live by God, we must live to him.

[2.] It is preserved by him. It is God's prerogative to kill and to make alive ; to wound and to heal, Deut. xxxii. 39. Our life dependeth wholly on him. It is said, Job xii. 10, ' In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.' God hath a dominion over all his creatures, over every living thing, and man in especial, to dispose of them according to his pleasure ; not an hair of our heads can fall to the ground without him, Mat. x. 29, 30. Our life is wholly in his hands ; we cannot add one cubit to our stature, make one hair white or black at our pleasure. Life cannot be taken away without him, how casual soever the stroke is : Exod. xxi. 13, ' If a man lie not in wait for his brother, but God delivereth him into his hand,' &c. Well, then, in all reason we should serve and glorify him who by his providential influence continueth life to us every moment : Deut. xxx. 20, ' Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and obey his voice, and cleave unto him ; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.' It is a charge against Belshazzar, Dan. v. 23, ' God, in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.' We must not look upon ourselves as made for ourselves, but for God. He gave us life, and keepeth it, that we may wholly be at his disposing. While we have it, we must have it for God, that he may be glorified in the use of it ; and when he cometh to take it away, he may be glorified by our submitting to his dominion. It is a presumption and encroachment on God's right to seek satisfaction to ourselves in any state, without a subordination and subserviency to his glory. He that giveth and preserveth life may dispose of it at his pleasure ; and our life so continually preserved by him ought to be devoted to him.

[3.] When he preserveth it in any imminent danger, it is twice given. I say, in such preservations our life is twice received from God—in our birth, and as spared in the danger ; and therefore, in all justice it ought to be dedicated to his service ; 2 Cor. i. 9, 10, ' But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead ; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver ; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' Many times there is but a step between us and death, as if God were putting the old bond in suit, and executing the sentence of the law upon us. Deliverance in such a case is called a pardon and remission ; and even in the case of the wicked and impenitent : Ps. lxxviii. 38, ' He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.' It was but properly a reprieve for the time, a forbearance of the temporal judgment, not executing the sentence, or not destroying the sinner presently ; much more to a godly man : Isa. xxxviii. 17, ' Loved my soul from the grave.' To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of a sickness, that is a blessed thing, a great obligation upon us.

[4.] We must surrender our life to him again ; and therefore, while we have it, we must employ it for him, Luke xix. 23 ; into his hands we must resign our spirits. Every one must give an account of himself to God, what honour he hath by our lives.

[5.] We shall never glorify him in heaven unless we glorify God on earth first, or carefully serve him : John xvii. 4, 5, 'I have glorified thee on earth ; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do : and now, O Father, glorify me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' Here is our trial, our present service. Saints above are ἐξώβελεις ; that is our reward, to glorify God in heaven.

Secondly, That we may desire life upon these ends ; as Ps. xxxix. 12, 'O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more.' A little time of relaxation, to serve and glorify thee ere I die.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing, taken into the promises, though more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. Of this, see more at large, ver. 17.

2. It is well sought when this is our scope, for then the request is lawful both for matter and end : James iv. 3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' Life should not be loved but for further glorifying of God, for all our natural interests must be subordinate to our great end.

Well, then, we may lawfully pray for long life, with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, but according to the ordinary course of nature.

But how will this stand with the desires of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity should cherish in their hearts ?

To this I answer—(1.) By concession ; (2.) By correction.

1. By concession. It is true we are to train up ourselves in an expectation of our dissolution, &c. See ver. 17 more fully. But—

2. By correction. Though it be expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it, till the time come. For—

[1.] They do not simply desire death for itself, but as a means to enjoy those better things which follow after death : Phil. i. 23, 'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.' It is not our duty to love death as death. No ; so it is an evil which we must patiently bear, and may holily deprecate it ; but because of the good beyond it, it is our duty to love God, to long after communion with him, and to be perfected in holiness. Had it not been an evil to be avoided and dreaded, Christ had never prayed against it ; and 2 Cor. v. 4, 'For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened : not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.' It were an unnatural desire to desire death as death. A creature cannot desire its own destruction. Jesus Christ, before he manifested his submission, did first manifest the innocent desires of nature : 'Father, let the cup pass.' The separation of the soul from the body, and the body remaining under corruption, is in itself evil, and the fruit of sin : Rom. v. 12, 'And so death passed upon all men, for that all have



sinned.' Grace is not given to reconcile us to corruption, or to make death, as death, desirable, or to cross the inclinations of innocent nature. But—

[2.] Upon these terms, death is sweetened to them, and they readily submit to it. Though it be not to be desired as it is death, yet heaven and eternal happiness beyond it is still matter of desire to us. Death is God's threatening; and we are not threatened with benefits, but evils; and evils of punishment are not to be desired, but cheerfully submitted unto for a higher end. Nature abhorreth and feareth death; but yet grace desireth glory. The soul is loath to part with the body, but yet it is far loather to miss Christ, and be without him. A man is loath to lose a leg or an arm, yet, to preserve the whole body, he is contented to part with it. In short, the soul is bound to the body with a double band—the one natural, the other voluntary, by love and affection, desiring and seeking its welfare. The voluntary bond is governed and ordered by religion till the natural bond be loosed, either in the ordinary course of nature, or at the will of God.

[3.] There are certain circumstances in death which do invite us to ask longer life in order to this end; as—

(1.) God's children would not have the occasion of well-doing or self-denying obedience taken from them too soon; so great is their love and desire of gratitude to God, that they would yet longer praise God in this self-denying way. Death would shut their mouths.

(2.) They would not be taken away in a cloud, or before they see the issue of some present trials on the church or them. They have no will to die till the sense of wrath be removed: Ps. xxvii. 13, 'I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.'

(3.) They may have some design a-foot for God, and therefore are desirous of a little more time to attain this design; therefore pray to God to prolong their lives a while: Rom. xv. 31, 32, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea: and that my service which I have done for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.'

(4.) To breed up their children in the nurture of the Lord, and that they may be useful in their families, as Jacob desired to see Joseph.

(5.) We may beg it that we may not fall into the hands of men, lose our life by murderers: Ps. xxxi. 15, 'My times are in thy hand; deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.' The dispensation of all mercies, comforts, troubles, life, death, are in God's hand, not in man's power; therefore we pray that it may rest there, that we may not be given up to the will of those that hate us.

All these desires have a respect to the glory of God, and if conceived with submission and trust, that God will do what is for the best, they are all lawful.

*Use of all.* 1. Exhortation. It presseth you—

1. To consecrate yourselves to God: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you

therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' Under the law the bodies of beasts were to be slain; yours is a living sacrifice. Both were set apart for God, the one to die, the other to live to God.

2. Having given up yourselves to God, use yourselves for God: there will be an inquiry what share God hath in your time: Acts xxvii. 23, 'The God whose I am, and whom I serve.'

3. Praise the Lord with heart, mouth, and life. A Christian's conversation is nothing but a hymn to God: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' The virtues of God, his attributes.

4. Whenever you pray for continuance of life in any danger or distress, either for yourself or others, propound this as the end, not so much your own satisfaction as the honour of God. A Christian is not content to have the use of the benefit to himself alone.

[1.] For self. Every man desireth life. The whole world would all and every of them put this request to God, 'Let my soul live;' but very few consider why they should live. Some desire life only to please the flesh, and that they may enjoy the delights of the present world, a brutish wish. A heathen could say, he doth not deserve the name of a man, *qui unam diem velit esse in voluptate*, &c., certainly not of a Christian, that would desire life merely to enjoy the delights of the flesh. These would not leave their hog's trough to go home to their father. Some there are who desire life to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance, and are loath to part from their natural relations, wife, children, friends. This is a natural respect, and should be subordinate to a higher end. Though this desire, keeping its place, may be lawful, yet, out of its place, sinful. We use to profess, Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.'

In short, two motives I will urge why the glory of God should have the chief respect in our affections:—

(1.) The benefit it giveth, hope of prolonging life, if this desire be true and real; and it giveth certain assurance of not perishing for ever. The one it doth, for God doeth all things with respect to his glory, Ps. cxix. 94. The other also, for he will glorify those that glorify him.

(2.) This is the temper of a sincere Christian. Surely to a believer it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of heaven longer; therefore it must be sweetened with some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind, and contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit we pitch upon; there is nothing worthy to be compared but our service: if God may have glory, if our lives may do good; a gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons.

[2.] For others. If we make it our request, we must have the same aims in this case, that the faith and grace of others may benefit them: Mark ii. 5, 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee.' Now in such requests bare natural

reasons should not move us, but that God may not lose an instrument of his glory, and that his power and providence may be more seen in the world in the recovery. It is good to beg of God for God : Ps. cxv. 1, 'Not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.' It should be accounted as a mercy unto us : Phil. ii. 27, 'For indeed he was sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.'

5. This end is known by the use in having and submission in asking.

[1.] The use in having, how we use a mercy when we have it, if we do indeed live to the glory of God, and the rather for these experiences.

[2.] Submission in asking, whether we fight or are crowned, work or receive our reward; for God is the best judge of what is most for his own glory.

Use 2. Direction; but of this see ver. 17.

I come now to the second point.

Doct. 2. That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him, even when they are in danger of their lives.

Here I shall show—(1.) What are God's judgments; (2.) How they are a help.

First, What is the meaning of *misphalim*, judgments here?

1. God governeth the world; that is called judgment: Ps. ix. 7, 8, 'He hath prepared his throne for judgment, he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister judgment in uprightness.' So John v. 22. When the government is put into the hands of Christ, it is said, 'For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.'

2. God governeth the world according to this word; there is his judgment concerning things and persons, stating what is good and evil; the reward of the one, and punishment of the other: Ps. xix. 9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' The precept is the rule of our duty, the sanction of God's process. Therefore in scripture the punishments of the wicked are sometimes called judgments; so also the rewards of the righteous, as ver. 43 of this psalm. The word pronounceth concerning every man's condition. His delivering of the righteous: Ps. lxxviii. 8, 9, 'Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the Lord arose to judgment, to save the people of the earth.' The moderation of their affliction: Jer. x. 24, 'Correct me, but with judgment;' that is, his merciful judgment, according to the new covenant dispensations. Punishment of sins, that they are judgments we are sufficiently convinced of and sensible of it. Well, then, he prayeth that that of the word may be executed either—(1.) By breaking his enemies, and giving them the merit of their doings; or, (2.) That his promises may be accomplished by sending him help and relief in his troubles.

3. This government is to be observed, for it confirmeth the word: Heb. ii. 2, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect?' &c.; and he punisheth them 'as the congregation have heard.' Carnal men attribute all to chance, but God's people observe his word.



Secondly, Now these judgments must needs be for a help to God's people, because the word of God speaketh more good to them than it doth to others; and if God judgeth according to his word, they may conclude that his children are never finally forsaken, nor will their enemies escape unpunished. There will be an accomplishment of promises, and an execution of threatenings, which is a comfort to them that walk uprightly.

1. In the general case, it is a relief to us; for God hath a provident care over all those that desire to honour and glorify him; their hopes will not altogether be frustrate. Keep his commandments, and it will turn to good. They shall have seasonable preservation according to God's promised and wonted mercies.

2. In the particular case of contests and conflicts with the wicked, he will punish enemies and reward the faithful. This is the tenor of the word. And to this word of God he ascribed his deliverance. Not this power, or this means, but thy judgments held me. God doth not deceive us with vain promises; when matters are strangely carried on in the world, here is our comfort.

### SERMON CXC.

*I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*—VER. 176.

THESE words are the close of the whole psalm. In them observe—

1. A representation of his case, or, if you will, a confession of his sin, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep.*

2. A petition for mercy, *seek thy servant.*

3. A protestation of obedience by way of argument, *I do not forget thy precepts.*

The chiefest matter that needs to be opened is the representation of his case, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Sheep are *animalia gregalia*, such kind of creatures as naturally gather together and unite themselves into a flock. Many other creatures live single and apart; they may sometimes sort together, yet are oftener severed and kept asunder: but the property of sheep, and their safety, is to come together in a flock. But now, when they are out of the flock, then they are exposed to all manner of misery, and therefore a strayed sheep is usually put in scripture for misery and sin, Isa. liii. 6; Mat. xv. 24. Lost sheep are represented as those that are ready to perish. Now the business is whether this similitude here mentioned be to be interpreted of David's misery or his sin. Interpreters are divided, both ancient and modern. The similitude itself is applicable to either, and accordingly used in scripture. Sometimes it is put for sin: Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' Sheep are creatures very subject to stray and wander, especially if driven by wolves or dogs; and sometimes by a disease, a sort of madness incident to them, follow not the rest of the flock: the Arabians call it *tsunall*—(*Bochart*). And so they would

have it signify here his going astray out of infirmity, from the way of God's commandments. Or else sometimes the condition of strayed sheep is put for misery; as Hosea iv. 16, 'The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place.' A lamb that is out of the fold goes up and down bleating to seek the fold again, and some company with which it may join itself. It is spoken of them that affected liberty; the Lord by his prophet tells them they should have liberty enough, but little for their profit and comfort; leave to wander in the world, and should bleat alone, bemoaning their solitude and danger, and be exposed as a prey to the next wolf. He would not feed them in the flock and body of the Israelites together, but would scatter them by exile and banishment, so that there should be Israelites amidst many Assyrians, like a lamb bleating up and down that is gone out of the fold. Some think David here represents his misery, when he was a banished exile from the assemblies of the faithful; not living like a prince in his palace, but wandering from place to place to shift for his life, as a poor sheep doth that is driven from the flock, exposed to beasts of prey; and thus it befell him in the case of Saul's and Absalom's persecution. If this be the meaning, the following clauses must be suitably expounded: 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant;' that is, consider my affliction, and in thy good time relieve me and restore me; and the last clause, 'For I do not forget thy precepts:' he did not forget his duty, whatever his condition was.

If we should follow this sense, it yields us these points:—

1. That a believer may be driven from place to place, in perpetual hazards and distresses, wandering up and down like a strayed sheep, driven by the wolf, and scattered from the fold: 1 Cor. iv. 11, 'We have,' saith the apostle, 'no certain dwelling-place.'

2. In such a case we may with confidence go to God, the good shepherd, who hears the bleating of the poor wandering sheep, takes care of them, seeks them, and reduceth them into the fold.

3. That whatever befalls us, we should still go on in the way of obedience: 'I have gone astray,' &c.; driven up and down, and yet, 'I do not forget thy precepts.' When God seems to forget us, we should not forget his precepts. These points might profitably be insisted upon.

But because many ancient and modern, both Jewish and Christian interpreters, understand it of sinful errors, and the words will commodiously enough bear this sense, and it being a similitude very frequently used in scripture, to compare the faithful to sheep, and God to a shepherd, I shall handle the words with respect to this interpretation: 'I have gone astray,' &c. We may all of us make this confession to God, we are too apt to straggle from our duty, and we all of us need to make this petition to God, to beg his watchful providence and shepherd-like care over us; and we may do it with encouragement to be heard of God, if our hearts are unfeignedly set to keep his law, that God will hear us, and keep us from our wandering.

*Doct.* That a Christian that is obedient for the main, yet may run into many failings and errors of life.

David was right for the main course of his life. He professeth here he did not forget God's precepts, he did not cast off the yoke of his law;

but yet in particular acts he acknowledgeth he did err and fail, and went astray like a lost sheep. And so many who are God's own servants, that do not forget his precepts, may thus err and go astray.

First, In our natural estate, man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and true happiness. The Holy Ghost sets forth the degeneration of mankind by the similitude and emblem of a strayed lost sheep : Luke xv. and Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.' Mark, he speaks of our estate by nature collectively and distributively. Collectively and in common, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' And distributively, 'Every man to his own way.' We all agree in forsaking the right way of pleasing and enjoying God, but we disagree, as each one hath a bypath of his own. Some are running after this lust, some after that, and so are not only divided from God, but divided from one another, whilst every one makes his own will his law, *quicquid velit, licet*. As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature in every one finds an issue and passage : Ps. xiv. 3, 'They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one.' Some run this way, some that way; some are enslaved by pleasures, others are captivated by the honours of the present world, and some are oppressed by the cares of this life. Every man hath his way of sinning and running away from God. But, however, the emblem and similitude of the Holy Ghost is to be considered, that our departing from God and his ways is like the straying of a sheep. What doth that note?

1. In general it implies this, that we are brutish in our sin and defection from God, led by sense, fancy, and appetite; and therefore our condition could not be expressed but by a comparison fetched from the beasts. Silly sheep are carried away by their fancy and appetite from the flock : Ps. xlix. 12, 'Man being in honour, abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish;' that is, he abode not in the honour of his creation. Some would render it 'for a night.' Adam 'abode not for a night.' What we translate *man*, is *Adam* : the excellency and dignity wherein God had set us; he became like a beast. How is man like a beast? We are governed by our senses and lower appetites. The senses are grown masterly and inordinate, so eagerly set upon their objects, that they will not be reclaimed, and man's life just like that of the brutes; it is things of the same nature we value and adhere unto, terrene and earthly things, the comforts of the animal life; and as we have the same objects, so the same ends, to enjoy our sensual pleasures, and satisfy our fleshly minds as long as we may; now what is this but to suffer the beast to ride the man; to put reason and conscience in vassallage, and subjection to sense and appetite?

2. This similitude is used to show our proneness to err. There is no creature more prone to wander and lose its way without a shepherd than the sheep. Sheep are creatures subject to straying if they be not kept in the pasture; so all men are obnoxious to erring and straying : Jer. xiv. 10, 'They love to wander.' It is a delight to us to be pleasing our flesh and gratifying our carnal senses. So Ps. xcv. 10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts.' We do not only err in our minds, but err in our hearts. To err in our mind is to err out of



ignorance, but to err in our heart is to err out of sensual obstinacy ; so are we carried away with the desires of the flesh, think ourselves never better than when we run away from God. Ah ! the best of us is soon out of the way. If God takes off his guidance, and leaves us to ourselves, we are apt to transgress the bounds wherewith God hath hedged up our way, and make it our business still to be running away from the chief good, into the bushes and thickets of carnal error, wherein we are entangled.

3. Our inability to return, and set ourselves into the right way again ; for we stray like sheep, not like swine and dogs. Swine and dogs, though they wander, they will find the way home again ; but a sheep is irrecoverably lost without the shepherd's diligence and care : Jer. l. 6, 'My people have been lost ; they have gone from mountain to mountain, they have forgotten their resting-place.' So should we run, and keep running away from, and forget our resting-place. I remember Austin in his meditations hath this passage, *Domine errare potui, redire non potui*—Lord, I could go astray by myself, but I cannot return of myself. The sheep easily straggle, but it is the shepherd must bring home the lost sheep upon his own shoulders, Luke xv. 5. And to this we may apply that of the prophet, Hosea xiii. 9, 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.' We could destroy and ruin ourselves, but we cannot recover and save ourselves. The shiftless infant can defile himself, but it is the nurse must cleanse it, and we ourselves can fall from God, but to recover us to God, that is the shepherd's care.

4. It shows our readiness to follow evil example. A sheep is *animal sequax*, a creature that runs after the drove, they run out of the gap one after another, and one straggler draws away the whole flock. When the apostle speaks of the sinful state of mankind, Eph. ii. 2, 3, he reckons up example as one : 'Walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.' In that place there is the devil, the world, and the flesh. There is the prince of the power of the air, and there is the course of this world (that I quote it for now), there is Satan, corrupt example, and evil inclination, all which are depravers of mankind, and all concur to our ruin and destruction. We easily swim with the stream and the torrent of common example, do as others do, and so mutually propagate and receive taint from one another. Imitation is not the whole cause of sin, but propagation and inclination of nature, yet imitation and example doth much to the perverting of the world, and increasing wickedness and fleshly-mindedness makes us addicted to worldly vanities, and so we run with the fowl into the snare, walking according to the course of this world, Eph. ii. 2 ; Isa. vi. 6, 'I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among a people of polluted lips.' We have sin within, but it is mightily increased by example without ; by dwelling among those that are polluted, we are more defiled ; we catch sickness one of another, we do not get health one from another ; as in the law, by touching an unclean thing a man was made unclean, but not on the contrary. We, being polluted ourselves, are more defiled by others, by conversing with them. We live among them that are

neglectful of God, and unmindful of heavenly things, and we come also to grow more so ourselves.

5. To represent the danger of straying. Sheep when they are out of the pasture, are in harm's way, exposed to a thousand dangers: Jer. l. 7, 'All that find them have devoured them.' So are we in danger to become a prey to the roaring lion, who goes about seeking whom he may devour, and to the dogs and wolves that are abroad. In his sinful state man is a sheep, whom no man taketh up, out of God's protection, and a ready prey for Satan, taken captive by him at his pleasure, 2 Tim. ii. 26, till the Lord recover him by repentance. Thus God forms, represents, and points out our condition before conversion. Certainly before we were converted to God we were as sheep wandering in our ignorance and sinful ways to our own destruction, and in hazard to be preyed upon continually by the roaring lion.

Secondly, See if it be better with us after conversion. For here is a man of God; he saith, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Now, after grace received, though our heart was set to walk with God for the main, yet we often swerve from our rule through ignorance or through inadvertency, and sometimes are blinded by worldly desires and fleshly lusts, and so transgress our bounds and neglect our duty: Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors?' Our errors are so many, who can bear them all in mind? who can know and remember them all? I say, even the best, who are tender of displeasing and dishonouring God by sin, they have their errors, yea, and sometimes too their foul faults.

Let me a little show this.

1. There are some unavoidable infirmities and frailties which we cannot get rid of though we fain would; as Rom. vii. 15, 'What I hate, that do I;' and ver. 19, 'The good that I would, that I do not; and the evil that I would not, that do I;' and Gal. v. 17, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' A true Christian would love God more perfectly, delight in him more abundantly, and bring every thought into subjection to his will. He would get rid of the fountain of sin, of natural concupiscence, and of the stirrings of envy, lust, pride, anger; but alas! the spirit that worketh in us lusteth to envy, and bewrayeth itself in these carnal affections. These are aberrations from the strict law, which God hath given to us, but such as men are subject unto in this state of frailty. Though they be hated, resisted, though they be restrained in a great measure, that they do not break out into gross acts, yet a child of God cannot get rid of them; though this fire is not blown up but smothered, yet in some degree it burns in our bosoms; there is life in it still.

2. There are other things which they might get rid of if they would, and yet they are not always so happy as to withstand it; certain sins that are avoidable by the ordinary assistances of grace which God vouchsafes to his people, yet a believer may relapse into them many times. Men are not always so watchful, nor is the bent of their hearts so strongly fixed in them; and there is very much security in the saints, and they run into the snare till they be awakened either by some powerful convictions or some smart affliction; as David saith,

Ps. cxix. 67, 'Before I was afflicted, I went astray.' The best of God's children many times in their peace and prosperity they fall asleep and forget themselves, and so let some infirmity still be upon them, before God doth awaken them, and bring them to themselves again. Hezekiah was no sooner settled in a peaceful estate, but presently he forgets himself, and suffers pride to steal upon his heart, till the Lord humbled him for the pride of his heart, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26. When all things went happily with him, he was recovered out of his sickness, and had congratulatory messages from the princes of the nations round about him, and lived in great prosperity, then his heart was lifted up. Some carnal distemper may grow upon us, or evil practice we may fall into. David, when he had gotten a carnal pillow under his head, he lay down and slept, and dreamt of nothing but prosperity, a perpetual uninterrupted temporal happiness, Ps. xxx. 6. He was full of carnal complacency, until God made him look about him. Thus by our carelessness do we often provoke God to use sharp remedies. There are some are not avoidable, but left for humiliation; but those that are avoidable by such ordinary assistances of God's grace to his people, yet many times, through our folly and inadvertency and sleepiness of conscience, we run into them.

Having showed the kinds of these sins, let me now show the causes, why many times those whose hearts are right with God, that do not forget his precepts, yet they go astray like lost sheep.

1. The first cause is their present imperfection. Though grace doth heal all the faculties, yet it doth not totally heal them, or wholly overcome the weakness which is in them. God promiseth to put his law into their hearts and minds, yet both the understanding and will, and all the inferior faculties, they are but in part sanctified. You know our soul is divided into two parts, into the *ἡγημόνικον*, and the faculties which should command and direct, and into the faculties which should be commanded and directed. The commanding faculties are called spirit, and the faculties which should be commanded are called soul. The reason, or the incitation, the affections, the dispositions, which incline us to things good for us, there is a weakness in all these. Whence comes all the weaknesses and errors of the saints? There is a defect in the leading or commanding part of the soul, which is the understanding and the will. In the understanding is the directive counsel, and in the will is the imperial power. Now the understanding, which should direct and guide us, is blind and sleepy, and not so vigilant and watchful as it should be; and so in many cases it proves but a dark and imperfect guide and director to us, and so we err like lost sheep. We have not always so clear and so deep a sense of our duty as we ought, and find not such lively, powerful, and effectual thoughts of God and heavenly things, and so clear a sense, so that the directive part fails us. Then for our wills, which should command us where the imperial power resides, they are imperfect. There is, I confess, in the regenerate a sincere will to please God in all things, but it is not a perfect will; so that our willing and nilling, our consent and dissent, is not so powerful as it ought to be; but the will being tainted by the neighbourhood of a distempered sense, it yields a little, and bends to the flesh, and gives way to



evil, and many times it opposeth that which is good ; at least we are often overtaken in a fault, being inconsiderately and suddenly surprised, as the apostle useth that expression, Gal. vi. 1, ' If a man be overtaken in a fault.' Though a regenerate man hath a new light put into his mind, he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, though he hath a new bent and bias put upon his heart, yet the imperial and directive power have flesh in them still, and the wisdom of the flesh is so ingrained and kneaded into our natures, that it cannot be totally dispossessed, no more than we can sever the leaven and the dough when once they are mingled together. If there be a defect in the governing and leading part of the soul, there will be disorders in the life and conversation.

Come we now from the *ἡγεμόνικον*, the leading faculties, to the faculties which should be commanded and directed. Alas ! they are by sin grown obstinate and masterly, and are so eagerly set upon their objects (carnal vanities) that they will not be reclaimed, but rebel against the direction of conscience and inclinations of the renewed will. The apostle speaks of a law of his members warring against the law of his mind, Rom. vii. 23. In the lower, in the most sensitive faculties, there is much headstrong opposition against the directions of the will. We have but a slender feeble guide. The leading part of the will is defective, and there is much of the wisdom of the flesh there. It is a trouble to the flesh to be restrained from what it desires and inclines us to, as a headstrong horse is loath to be governed ; therefore we yield and suffer ourselves to be transported and led away by our passions and carnal affections. Now, though the rebellious and disobedient disposition of the appetite and senses is in a great measure broken and subdued in us by the power of grace, yet the best have somewhat of inordinate sensuality and weakness, and being imperfect, are tempted by the world and sense, as well as others. Well, then, ever weigh in your mind for your direction these two grand reasons of all the weakness that is in the saints,—there is the debility and the weakness of the leading and commanding part, and the rebelling of the inferior faculties, which should be ruled and commanded. (1.) The debility and weakness of the leading and commanding part of the soul. And thence is it that we are so inconsiderate, so dull of apprehension, have such dark and ineffectual thoughts of God and heavenly things ; and thence is it that the will doth not so potently and rulingly command the directive faculties, but is apt to yield to, that it doth not stand upon its authority as it was wont to do. (2.) The other part is the rebellion of the inferior faculties, and stubbornness of our sensual and carnal inclinations. Look, as in a kingdom and commonwealth, where are rebellious subjects and a feeble empire, things must needs run into disorder, so here the reins are managed very weak ; there is a feeble empire in the soul, and here are strong rebellious desires not easily controlled, and so draw the soul away. To make this more evident a little, I shall show the order of all human operations, if rightly constituted. Their actions are governed in this manner :—The understanding and the conscience, they are to guide and direct the will ; the will, according to right reason and conscience, moves the affections ; the affections, according to the counsel and command of the under-

standing and will, move the bodily spirits; the bodily spirits, they move the senses and members of the body. But now by corruption there is a manifest inversion and change, for bodily pleasure doth affect the senses, the senses corrupt the phantasy, the phantasy moves the bodily spirits, and by them the lighter part of the affections. The affections by their violence and inclination captivate the will, and blind the mind, and so the man is carried headlong to his own destruction. Now, though this servitude be in a great measure broken in them that are called unto the liberty of God's children, they are not slaves to their lusts, and the vain pleasures of this life; yet too too often the senses are too masterly, and too too often transmit objects into the soul in a rebellious way, against the command of sanctified reason and conscience. Affections are stirred by thoughts, and thoughts by objects thus represented. I am the larger in this, that you may more perfectly understand the reason of the weakness of the saints.

2. The violence of temptations. As sheep may be driven out of the pasture by the wolf, so is a poor soul hurried into evil to commit known sin, or omit known duty, by the incursion and shock of temptations, though for the main he doth adhere to Christ by faith, love, and new obedience. Thus Peter was drawn to deny Christ, and many are drawn in the violence of a passion to do things which their hearts do utterly condemn and disallow. In a storm it is hard for a skilful pilot to steer aright; and though it be dangerous to dash against the rocks, yet Christians come off without a total shipwreck, though they may be sore bruised and battered. In such hurries God's children may go astray, but God will not suffer them to be totally lost. David wandered far as well as Saul, but God sought David again; he would not lose him so. A strong temptation may drive us out of the way, as sheep when thieves come are driven out of the fold, whither else they would not have gone.

3. The Lord may withdraw himself for just and wise reasons, and then, when the shepherd is gone aside, we have neither wisdom to direct ourselves nor strength to defend ourselves; as when Moses went away for a while, how soon did Israel corrupt their way! So if God be gone, we see how little we can keep ourselves. God left Hezekiah to try him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. God will show us what is in our hearts, and that our standing is not of ourselves. We represent ourselves to ourselves in a feigned likeness, and therefore God will truly show ourselves to ourselves. We do not know what pride and passion and carnality lies hid in our hearts when he is present, warming, comforting, quickening, guiding, directing the soul in the way to life. Now, God, by withdrawing, will show us the folly of our wisdom, and the weakness of our strength, and the pride of our humility, and the passionateness of our meekness. Divines distinguish of desertion; they say that there is *desertio correctiva*, and *desertio erudativa*—a desertion by way of correction, and a desertion by way of instruction. Sometimes, by way of correction, because of former sins, or some unkindness, or ungracious dealing with God—God withdraws; and there is a desertion by way of instruction, to teach us to know the sovereignty of grace, and to know our own weakness. Usually both go together in the same dispensation. It is very hard almost to imagine that the same dispensation

should not be both instructive and corrective. But the reason why they distinguish thus is this, because some dispensations are more clearly for correction, and others more clearly for instruction, but usually they go together. We provoke the Lord by some slight or unworthy dealing with him, and then the Lord corrects us, and corrects us that he may instruct us, to see our all depends upon him, and how he should be prized in these things.

4. The fourth reason is some special disease, it may be not yet cured, in our going astray like a lost sheep, even though our hearts be right in the main with God. It may be some corruption too that they cherished, some carnal interest which is too near and dear to us; either worldly, ambitious, or sensual lusts. Though these reign in the unconverted, yet they dwell too much in a heart that is gracious, and so may prevail sometimes to turn us away from God; something there is which we may call our iniquity, Ps. xviii. 23. Though in the general we keep ourselves from it, as an upright heart will, yet it may sometimes foil us.

*Use 1.* Let us stand upon our guard. Oh! let us not leave the boat to the stream, for there is an erring straying disposition in a great measure left in the people of God. Consider, Satan is subtle and assiduous in tempting: 1 Peter v. 8, 'He goes about like a roaring lion;' he is searching up and down after the prey, and an unwary and unmortified soul soon falls into his snare. The flesh is ready to close with the temptation as soon as it is presented; and therefore the best of God's children had need be circumspect and diligent: 'Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation,' Mat. xxvi. 41, lest you be surprised unawares by some sin or other. There is enough corruption in every one of you to betray you to it, if you be not aware; and your resisting graces are very weak and imperfect in degree, and (which is one consideration more) the danger of a fall is very great, for thereby God is dishonoured, 2 Sam. xii. 14, and your own peace is mightily ruffled: Ps. xxxii. 3, 4, 'My moisture was turned into the drought of summer, and I was filled with roaring all the day long.' Yea, and a stumbling-block is laid before others, and you may destroy those for whom Christ died; and woe be to men by whom offences come, Mat. xviii. 7. Under the law, the Lord ordered that if two men strove and hurt a woman with child, that her fruit departed from her, he should surely be punished. To hinder birth was counted murder, so to hinder those that are coming on by any sins of yours in a way to life. If the offence be foul, you may feel it long afterward, as an old bruise is felt upon every change of weather; and this sin may cost you dear, though your salvation be secured. This should make us stand upon our guard; it shows that a Christian should live in constant vigilancy and daily conflict with sin, and deny the desires of the flesh, that he may love God, and live to him.

*Use 2.* It shows us the need of the new covenant, wherein the pardon of sins is established. All the saints that ever lived have had their failings, and what would become of them, even of God's own children, if there were not a forgiving God, and a gracious covenant, a way found out to remit their offences? Ps. cxxx. 3, If the righteous God should call us to a strict account, how could the best of his chil-



dren stand before him? So Ps. cxlii. 2. It would go ill with all the world if strict justice of law were still in force. All are guilty, and all must perish, the holy, humblest soul cannot abide the trial of that court; not only God's enemies, but his servants cannot. The good they do, it cannot be laid in balance against the evil; it would yield no relief as to remission and pardon. Plainly, if the guilt of sins remain upon us, our duties will not compensate with our sins. But such was the Lord's mercy, that when we all like sheep had gone astray, the Lord found a ransom for us, and laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all, Isa. liii. 6, that there might be pardon for poor creatures.

*Use 3.* It teacheth us, again, the necessity of dependence upon God's care and power for our spiritual preservation. Of all creatures sheep need a shepherd, so do we a spiritual shepherd to keep us from straying, to reduce us from our wanderings, to weaken our distemper, to drive away the wolf. In short, these two considerations will enforce the necessity of dependence, the indefatigable malice of Satan, and the unknown weakness and imperfection of the saints.

1. The indefatigable malice of Satan, and his unwearied diligence in tempting us to sin; his hatred and envy against God and mankind is such that he leaves no man untempted. He would not leave the Lord Christ untempted. Especially in some regards above others he labours to draw the children of God into sin, because he knows their sins, by reason of their profession, will give great occasion of scandal to the weak, and blasphemy to the profane and wicked. Now, as his power is very great, so is his subtlety and diligence. That which Hannibal said of Marcellus perfectly agrees with him; whether he gives or takes the foil, he ever renews and reinforceth the fight. When Job had carried it very innocently in his prosperity in a dangerous time, yet try him in adversity, Job i. 12. Nay, when he had carried it off in a very grievous trial, as the loss of his goods and children, Job ii., &c.

2. The weakness and imperfection of the saints. How easily, if we take not more diligent heed and care, may we fall into sins, both with respect to the weakness of our understandings and perverseness of our affections!

[1.] Our understanding is so weak that we are ignorant of many things necessary to be known; for we know but in part, 1 Cor. xiii. 12; and if we know something in general, we do not know it as we ought to know it, 1 Cor. viii. 2. How is that? Either we fail in particular application, as the heathens that knew there was a divine, an eternal, and almighty power in general, yet were vain in their imaginations, in their discourses, and practical inferences. Or if we should know how to use these truths, if we know them habitually, yet we do not actually consider. Here is a great part of man's misery, being hurried by a multitude of business or violence of temptation, that being laid asleep by the pleasures of the flesh many times fall off. Though men have a perfect knowledge of their duty, and how to apply it habitually, yet actually do not consider; their sin carries them away: 'They consider not that they do evil,' Eccles. v. 1. Thus for the understanding.

[2.] Our affections are so apt to be led by sense and not by right reason, that there is many times great danger that in seeing we should

not see, lest seeing, knowing, and approving that which is better, we should embrace and follow that which is worse, act contrary to our knowledge and conscience, Rom. ii. 18. Thou approvest the things that differ, yet doest thus and thus. Many have an approbation, yet cannot bring forth grace to victory, cannot govern their hearts according to their speculative approbation. Now if a man be such a blind indigent creature, it is his wisdom still to look out off himself, to lift up his eyes to God; that is, the God of our salvation and our guide, and defence; all our confidence must be in him.

*Use 4.* We learn hence the encouragement which one hath who is right for the main, but hath run into some errors of life, to apply himself to God to remedy that evil, as the good shepherd who must seek the lost sheep, and reduce him into the right way.

Here let me show two things:—

1. Who are those that are right for the main, and may look upon their sins as particular errors and frailties.

2. What encouragement they have to apply themselves unto the Lord.

First, Who are those that are right for the main, and whose sins are infirmities, such as David's are represented to be here in this text? (for I will go no further than the text). To represent that in five things:—

1. Such as have a conscience, an awful sense of their duty: 'I do not forget thy precepts.' He had transgressed some of God's commandments, but still he had a sense of his duty; that was kept alive in his heart, that awakened him to return again to the Lord.

2. Such as have a habitual will to keep the commandment of God, though there be failings; as David, when he asks for his servant, 'Seek thy servant,' he acknowledged his duty still. God's children may sometimes go astray, but not totally and finally; they never fall so but there remains something that maintains God's interest in the soul: 1 John iii. 9, 'He that is born of God doth not commit sin,' he cannot sin, &c. He doth not sin so as to lie in sin; the seed of God still remains, and so is more easily reclaimed than others. Look, as in Nebuchadnezzar's vision there was represented a tree that was to be cut down by the watchman, but yet the stump of the roots remained in the earth, Dan. iv. 23, that is in his melancholy, when he crept on all four, like beasts (I suppose there was not a transformation into a beast), he did lodge in the forest among beasts, and ate their kind of food; yet there was a stump of this great tree that should bud and scent again, there was a stock of human nature that should recover and show itself again; so here, though a child of God behave himself like a brute beast, and be mastered by his sense, yet the root of the matter is still in him; there is something that will put forth itself again. Or as a spinster leaves a lock of wool to draw on the next thread, so there is something left; they do not wholly cast off the fear of God, nor the yoke. No; their souls are habitually bent to please God more than they are to sin: 'I am thy servant.'

3. As here is a conscience of his duty, and a habitual will to serve God, so here is a broken-hearted confession of his error: 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep;' and so a repentance of the sin committed.

It is grievous to a child of God in the remembrance of it; the sin is thereby more mortified and subdued.

4. Here is an unfeigned desire to return to his duty, and grace humbly sought that he may be set in joint again: 'Lord, seek thy servant.' He would not remain in this condition still; his desire was to do the will of God, and to live in no neglect; and therefore he complains of his straying disposition, and would fain have it cured: 'Lord, seek thy servant.'

5. The conscience of his sincerity was not wholly lost. Mark, not only the conscience of his duty, but of his sincerity; for he prays still to be sought as a sheep belonging to the fold. I am thine, though I am gone astray: John x. 3, 'The sheep hear his voice.' Now this evidence was yet left, I am, Lord, thy servant, and I do not forget thy precepts. He was willing to hear the voice of God. In grievous falls it is otherwise. If a man fall grievously (this doth not relate to any grievous fall), then all were to begin anew. That robs all our peace; as David, 'Lord, create in me a clean heart,' Ps. li. 10. After his grievous fall he speaks as if all was lost. David here professeth still his devotedness to God as his servant, his love and respect to his law as his rule; he could own such a thing in it; it was an evil that annoyed him, but it had not rifled his peace.

Secondly, To speak of the encouragement that we have to go to God if this be our case, as the man of God here desires the Lord to seek him out, and to bring him again into the right way. Those that have gone astray, yet should not keep off, but run to their shepherd: 'Seek thy servant.' Why?

1. We have a shepherd that loves us, whereof he hath given full proof and demonstration in that he died for us: John x. 11, 'I am the good shepherd, that lay down my life for the sheep.' He is not only the great shepherd, as called sometimes, but the good shepherd gave his life in a way of ransom to expiate our sins. When he came to seek and save that which was lost, his first work was to redeem them by his blood. If he could find in his heart to redeem us by his blood, and expiate all our faults, he will recover us.

2. It is one great part of his office to reduce his people from their straggling: Ps. xxiii. 1, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' What then? Ver. 3, 'He restoreth my soul.' If the Lord be our shepherd, it is a great part of his work to restore our souls. We fall into the disease of sin, sometimes wander out of the path, in which we should perish, if God did not reclaim us from our wandering. Now, it is his work to restore our souls, that is, to keep us from going on still in our bypaths; therefore we may come and press it. He is inclined to show favour to those who confess their errors, and for the glory of his grace, and constant love, and sworn covenant, he will not be unmindful of us.

3. He delights to guide us in our wanderings, Luke xv. 4, 5. The good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, and seeks out the strayed sheep upon the hills and mountains, and brings it home upon his own shoulders rejoicing. It is a pleasing thing to Christ to be reducing strayed souls, Ezek. xxxiv. 4. He was angry with the under-shepherds, and rebukes them because they discharged not their duty: 'The dis-



eased have you not strengthened,' &c. ; and he promiseth his own care : ver. 6, ' I will seek that which was lost.'

4. He will bear with our infirmities, and if humbly sought to, will take care of us. We straggle sometimes out of weakness, and out of vanity of spirit, and lose ourselves through our own folly ; therefore Christ saith, ' I will seek that which was lost.' Sometimes we are driven away by wolves. Christ will fetch us back again, that we may not be meat for their mouth. If sin be as a breach upon conscience, he will heal that wound and bind up the broken. If we be weak, ready to straggle, he will confirm us, and strengthen us more and more. Having such a shepherd, this should encourage us more to go to him.

*Use 5.* Here is caution ; take heed not to run into infirmities, as if it were matter of nothing. Why ? They must be repented ; and it is part of wilfulness voluntarily and allowedly to do that which he must undo again, and necessarily be repented of ; as David confesseth his error. Little sins allowed and customarily committed, on the presumption of a pardon, they are not infirmities, but are of a dangerous nature. If you indulge iniquity, you lose your claim as those that are devoted to God ; you will hazard this if you indulge your straying humour. And consider, even infirmities may cost us dear, for though they do not make void the eternal reward, yet usually God reduceth us not by internal grace, but by some smart providence ; as David, Ps. cxix. 67, ' Before I was afflicted I went astray.' God will teach you your duty by briars and thorns, by sharp affliction. And where the distemper is more rooted in us, if it be not an act only, but a kind of rooted distemper, then the dispensation of God's providence may be very sharp. As Paul's thorn in the flesh, when he was apt to be lifted up in pride, he prays thrice : the Lord was terrible to him ; possibly it was the stone, or gout, some racking pain, 2 Cor. xii. Though he prays, God would not release him, but still keeps the pain and trouble upon him. So our strayings will cost us dear. To be sure they must cost us repentance, but they may cost us a great deal of sorrow in the world. We should not incur the hazard of God's temporal displeasure. Again, you have no assurance and command of the time and measure of the Spirit's assistance ; and therefore, if you give way to little failings, they may become grievous enormities in the end, and when you grieve the Spirit, you do what lies in you to drive him from you, and provoke him to suspend his assistance the longer ; and therefore, ' Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption,' Eph. iv. 30.



SEVERAL SERMONS

UPON THE

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF  
ST MATTHEW.



## THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

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To the Right Hon. WILLIAM, Earl of Bedford, Baron of Thornaugh,  
and Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter.\*

MY LORD,—If the sovereign disposer of all things had continued the life of the author of the following sermons, he had expressed his thankfulness for your real and noble favours by the dedication of the best fruits of his studies to your Lordship; but since it hath pleased God to remove him from the church on earth to the church in heaven, I am desired by his most near surviving relation to comply with his intention, by inscribing your highly honourable name in the frontispiece of this work.

Your Lordship's esteem of the author, and most free kindness, placed him in an eminent station; and how faithfully he discharged his public ministry for those great and most worthy ends, the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, as there is a full testimony given by many sincere and understanding persons of all ranks, that were the happy partakers of it, so it is evident to others by the several volumes of most useful sermons printed since his decease. These had been more exact, and worthy of your Lordship's perusal, if they had been published by himself; but such as they are, I doubt not but they will be very acceptable for the heavenly matter contained in them.

I shall not record here the many excellent virtues that are conspicuous in your Lordship, and truly adorn your honour; but I cannot forbear to mention the foundation of them, sincere and solid piety, so clearly discovered in a most Christian deportment under your heavy afflictions. Surely that reverence and meek submission to the high and holy providence of God, that humble trust in his mercy, which so admirably appeared in your deep distress, was from the divine Spirit, whose glorious attribute is the Comforter. I shall earnestly pray that God, who turneth the shadow of death into the morning, will be pleased always to support you with his reviving presence, that he will guide you by his counsel through this afflicting world, and bring you to his glory.—I am, my Lord, your Lordship's very humble and obedient servant,  
WILLIAM BATES.

\* This dedication, and the Address to the Reader which follows it, refer to the second volume of 'Manton's Works,' which contains twenty-seven sermons on Mat. xxv., forty-five on John xvii., twenty-four on Rom. vi., forty-five on Rom. viii., and forty on 2 Cor. v.—ED.

## TO THE READER.

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CHRISTIAN READER,—Our blessed Lord, calling the multitude to some account of their so free and frequent motions in going to hear the first gospel preacher, John the Baptist, doth it in these terms, Mat. xi. 7, 8, 'What went you out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? They that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet;' ver. 11, 'Verily I say unto you, that amongst them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he;'—teaching us several things by that speech, relating to the religious action of hearing the word, and to a true gospel minister. With reference to the former—(1.) That he that goeth out to hear ought in the first place to propound to himself a due end. (2.) That men may propose to themselves in such motions very false and undue ends, such as going to see reeds shaken with the wind, men clothed with soft raiment, &c. (3.) That the true end men should propose to themselves should be, not to hear a philosopher or an orator, but a prophet; which term signifieth a person revealing the will of God; for the signification of that term is not to be restrained to one only from God revealing things to come, but publishing the divine will, whether relating to future things or things before revealed; which is evident not only from the application of it to the Baptist, but to any that will consider that predictions of future contingencies was the least part of any of the ancient prophets' work. This is that true and more special end which every good man ought to propound to himself when he goeth to hear as a religious action, whose object is not a mere sound, which is the object of hearing considered as a natural act, but of the 'joyful sound.' Nor can there lie any obligation upon any religiously to hear anything but the will of God, which a discourse doth not cease to be by the addition of man's words for the explanation or application of any part of the divine will, by such as God hath entrusted with that employment, more than an ambassador's message ceaseth to be his master's will because delivered in his own words, though to the sense of his instructions. Which thing well digested would not only teach ministers what and how to preach, but the people also what and how to hear, according to the direction of their Lord. If our end in hearing were to tickle our ears

with a sound, our reason would guide us to hear such whose language is 'as the voice of one that hath a lovely song, and can play well on an instrument.' If our end were to promove ourselves in critical learning, or improve our reason, the same reason would guide us to choose to hear the best philosophisers or grammarians, such as best understood the niceties of words and varieties of syntax. But if our end be to hear a prophet, one that should reveal God's mind unto us, and to make it more intelligible, that by it we may be more improved in knowledge, faith, love, obedience, and other habits fitting us for the kingdom of God and eternal salvation, the same reason will teach us to hear the most substantial, scriptural, and practical sermons that we can, as being most accommodate to the true end of our action, to which every wise man proportioneth mediate actions. And indeed all other discourses are abusively called preaching, and Athens were a more proper place for them than a preacher's pulpit.

God hath seemed to have reserved it for a great blessing to the last age of the world that, for aught appears to us from any books, it hath been more fertile of such preaching than any since that of the apostles. The ancient church had persons that did famously in their generations; such were Chrysostom in the Greek, and Augustine in the Latin church; but besides that they were but very few, whoso reads the one and the other must compliment antiquity at a great rate, if himself hath any judgment, and doth not say that multitudes in the last age have been as to preaching greater than they. In the former are to be found many judicious explications of scripture, many honest and spiritual discourses; in the latter, not these things only, but a pleasantness of wit and fancy. But for plenty of matter, clearness of judgment, orderliness of method, and many other things, they have not been a little exceeded by men of this last age. Nor is it any disparagement to them, more than it was to John the Baptist, that 'the least in the kingdom of heaven' was to be 'greater than he;' or to Christ, that the apostles, John xiv. 12, were to do greater things than he had done. In the middle ages of the church, preaching generally was turned into trifling about scholastic niceties; and to the very dawning of the Reformation the priests' texts were out of Scotus or Aquinas; and we remember they were not ashamed when Luther, Melancthon, &c., restored in some degree the true kind of preaching, to petition magistrates for the suppression of it, and a liberty to trifle still in that great work of God with discourses upon Scotus and Aquinas. Though Luther, Zuinglius, and others in Germany, and Mr Calvin, Farellus, and Viret, and Beza, in France, about a hundred and fifty years since mended this matter in a great degree, yet we all know how ill their examples were followed; so as Mr Perkins, who began to flourish about the year 1580, is generally judged to have been the first who amongst us restored preaching to its true use, and taught us the true manner of it, whose piety was followed by many; but as their number hath vastly increased since that time, especially in the fifty or sixty years last past, so God hath seemed to pour out his Spirit upon ministers, as to spiritual gifts, in a more plentiful measure, yet in very different proportions, that he might have some to feed his lambs, as well as others to feed his sheep. The generality of good



preachers have made it their business to preach Christ, and the exceeding riches of his grace, and to study matter rather than words, upon Mr Perkins' old principle *verba sequuntur res*. But all have not had alike fertile invention, or solid judgment, or alike skill and learning in languages and arts, &c. Some particular persons have been blessed with them all, by which they have made stars of the first magnitude in the church of God. Such, reader, we take the reverend author of these sermons to have been, in all whose writings thou shalt find a quick and fertile invention, governed with a grave and solid judgment, and the issue of both expressed in a grave and decent style, so as it is not easy to say what one would desire in a divine that was wanting in him. He had a heart full of love and zeal for God and his glory, and out of the abundance of his heart his mouth continually spake. So frequent, yet so learned and solid preaching by the same person, was little less than miraculous. But he was a scribe fully instructed in the things of the kingdom of God, and, like a good householder, was continually fetching out of the storehouse of his knowing and judicious soul things both old and new. He was no studier of words and phrases, he abhorred such a pedantry, and debasing the authority of gospel propositions; but a grave and serious soul, fitted with his skill in arts and languages; neither ever did nor could want expressions above the scorn of the most wanton word-dressers, though beneath the expectations of such as can be pleased with the tuneableness of *paranomasias*, or the rollings of six-footed words. He was a good and learned, a grave and judicious person, and his auditory never failed (though he laboured more than the most preachers, his constant course of preaching being for many years five times, and, till near his end, three times a week) to hear from him a pious, learned, and most judicious discourse. This those who never heard him may easily believe by his printed commentaries and sermons, in which we never met with any that complained for want of anything fit for a divine. So that he is one of those authors upon the credit of whose name not only the plainer and less intelligent sort of people, but even scholars, may adventure to buy any book that was his, and be assured they will see no cause to repent of the expense of their money. His late large folio upon the 119th Psalm is a plentiful evidence of this; and a great part of our English world hath given their suffrage to this, by making it so scarce in so short a time, as the price of it is enhanced above a fifth part.

We here offer a second volume, of a greater bulk (though no greater price), which contains his discourses upon the 25th of Matthew, the 17th chapter of John, the 6th and 8th chapters of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and the 5th chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians; five chapters, than which possibly in the whole New Testament there will not be found five others more full of gospel doctrine, in the knowledge of which God's people are more concerned.

In the first, under the parable of the ten virgins (five of which were wise, five foolish), our Lord represents to us the state of the members of the church waiting for Christ's second coming to judgment; amongst whom some are sincere, some are hypocrites, the different actions and issues of whom are excellently represented to us, and most worthy

to be learned and considered. Secondly, Under the parable of the talents we are instructed in God's different dispensation of his gifts to men, their different use of them, and the account they are like to be called to about them. To which is subjoined a *hypotuposis* of the day of judgment, fit to be continually in our eyes and ears.

In the second, we have our Saviour's last prayer for his elect, as well those that to the end of the world should believe, as those who at that time did believe. It was our Lord's legacy; what good Christian desireth not a full understanding of it, that he may know what to hope, and pray in faith for, as being first secured to him by the prayer of him whom the Father heareth always?

In the 6th and 8th of the Romans are contained great treasures of gospel truth. Upon both (the latter especially) many learned men have spent their labours to great advantage; but the scripture is such a book as we never know when we fully comprehend it, and (if he may judge to whose share it fell to peruse some of those notes) the reader will find some things here discovered which he will hardly meet with elsewhere. His way of handling it is rather dogmatical and practical than polemical; yet he now and then judiciously resolveth a question. But all along in the handling of it he discovereth both an excellent notion, and a most profound and solid judgment.

The last discourses, on 2 Cor. v., look like a *cygnea cantio*. Whether they were some of his last discourses we cannot tell, nor can we judge it from the subject, he being a person who was dying daily, and never so in love with his earthly tabernacle, nor possessed of so weak a faith as to the house in the heavens, as either to desire the former should stand longer than should be for the glory of God, or himself kept from the latter overlong. It pleased God not to surprise him with death, but to let him see it at some distance, making its approaches to him before it gave him the fatal word of arrest.

Thou wilt, reader, find some things once and again spoken to, as the text led him, but in such a variety of phrase that they have much new in them. Had this eminent person lived to have supravised his own notes, he might possibly have added or altered something. We have seen no reason to do it, but given thee his notes as they were under his hand, only when, not able to read some words in his notes, we were forced to add a word or two for clearing the sense.

Now, reader, what shall we say to thee, but only to quicken thee to bless God for this milk from the bottle, when thou canst not have it from the breasts, τοῦ μακαρίτου. Thus Dr Manton, though dead, yet speaketh. God give thee and us an hearing ear and an understanding heart! We have thus line upon line, and precept upon precept; let us not be barren and unfruitful. We commend these labours and thy soul to God's blessing, subscribing ourselves,

Thine affectionate servants in the work of the gospel,

WILLIAM BATES.  
JOHN COLLINGES.  
JOHN HOWE.

# SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF ST MATTHEW.

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## SERMON I.

*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.—MAT. XXV. 1, 2.*

IT was Christ's manner to instruct by parables, partly for the greater evidence and force, while heavenly things are represented to us in such notions as we do best understand; and partly to teach us the art of holy chemistry, or extracting spiritual advantages out of obvious occurrences and occasions. Now parables are of two sorts—argumentative and representative.

First, The argumentative parables are such wherein some notable reason is couched, or ground is laid for some excellent encouragement in our converse with God, by showing what falleth out among men. In these argumentative parables, the parts of the parable are not to be strained, but the scope and parable itself is to be regarded. As in the parable, Luke xviii., of the unjust judge, the scope is to be regarded, but not the parts strained, as if God were to be compared to an unjust judge. And that famous parable, Luke xi. 8, concerning success in prayer, where there is *argumentum a minori ad majus*, an argument from the less to the greater: 'Though he will not rise and give him as he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him.' And those passages of giving good things to our children: 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?'

Secondly, The other sort of parables, which I call representative, yields us a notable delineation of some heavenly matter, by laying the scene of it among earthly affairs; for God is fain to lisp to us in our own dialect, and speak as we can understand. This and the next parable are of this sort. The occasion of it was thus: Our Lord had been discoursing of the dangerous state of the latter times, and therefore presseth to watchfulness and timely preparation. This he doth by three parables: First, By the good man of the house watching against the coming of the thief, Mat. xxiv. 42, 43; by the parable of



the servant misbehaving himself in the absence of his Lord, Mat. xxiv. 45, to the end ; and now, the third time, by this parable of the virgins. Still, in the close of all, he repeateth his charge of watchfulness, not so much because of the difficulty of the matter, as because of our dulness. We cannot often enough be put in mind of vigilancy and diligence in preparing for the coming of the Lord ; so great is our sloth and drowsiness, and non-attention to the great affairs of our souls. Now these three parables, though they come to one effect, yet have their special use. The first of these concerns all ; the second, the officers of the church ; the third, the members. First, The good man of the house watching against the coming of the thief speaketh thus much : If men watch to avoid a temporal inconvenience, much more should we watch to eschew eternal destruction. The diligence of the men of the world in worldly things upbraideth and condemneth our negligence in heavenly things. The parable of the unfaithful servant, that put off the thoughts of his master's coming, and therefore eateth and drinketh with the drunken, and beats his fellow-servants, is a notable warning to the officers of the church, that they do not abuse the power of the keys, and inhabit with the wicked, and discourage the godly, and blast them with censures, and stir up the displeasure of the magistrate against their faithful and painful brethren in the ministry. A drunkard shall find more favour with them than one that is mindful of his Lord's coming, and would keep punctual to the orders and institutions he hath left before he went. Now, lest the members of the church should want their admonition, besides a warning to the officers in the second parable, here is a warning to the members in this third parable, to watch and be ready, that they be not surprised. In the wise virgins is represented the comfortable fruit of watchfulness ; in the foolish, the sad effects of security : ' Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened,' &c.

In the words we have—

First, The thing compared, *the kingdom of heaven*.

Secondly, The comparison itself, *shall be likened to ten virgins*. Who are—

1. Described by their quality or state, *virgins*.
2. By their number, *ten*.
3. By their rank or distribution, *five wise, and five foolish*.
4. By their work or employment, *they went forth to meet the bridegroom*.
5. Their preparation for that work, *they took their hand-lamps*.

Before I explain these circumstances, I must a little acquaint you with the custom of the Jews to which allusion is here made. The weddings of those times were kept by night, in which the bridegroom and his company were by certain virgins fetched in, and conducted to the bride, with lamps in their hands and songs in their mouths. As for this custom, I shall give you some passages in scripture. That the weddings were in the night-time, we read, Gen. xxix. 23, ' It came to pass in the evening that Laban took Leah his daughter, and brought her to Jacob.' That the bridegroom had his companions, we read, Judges xiii. 11, Sampson had thirty companions brought to him. That both had their companions, we read of ' the children of the bride-

chamber,' Mat. ix. 15, the special guests invited to the marriage-feast, who were by custom to fetch the bridegroom, and wait upon him : these are called *φίλοι νυμφίου*, 'the friends of the bridegroom,' John iii. 29. That the bride had her companions, it is said in Ps. xlv. 14, the spouse 'shall be brought to the king in a raiment of needlework; the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.' And their fashion was to take hand-lamps, then in use, and fit to carry abroad, for night-lights. The scripture frequently alludes to that : Rev. xviii. 23, 'And the light of the candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride no more at all shall be heard in thee.' And thus the bridegroom was met by virgins with lamps; as he drew near the bride's house, he was met by servants with candles returning to the marriage. Therefore it is said, Luke xii. 35, 36, 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding.' This was the custom, which I the rather observe, that you may see how fitly our Lord layeth down things. Now those that accompanied the bridegroom and the bride were children of the bride-chamber, and admitted into the marriage-room and supper; and those that came after that, when once the door was shut, were surely kept out. Now here is a fit representation of the spiritual mystery laid down by Christ; and therefore let us—

1. See the thing compared, 'The kingdom of heaven;' that is, the state of the church wherein God reigneth in the person of the Messiah. Of the kingdom of glory it cannot be meant, for there are no foolish virgins, and in the internal kingdom of grace none; but in the external kingdom of Christ in this world. And this is not considered simply and restrainedly to that point of time when Christ is coming to judgment, but respects and should affect us all; for such as we depart out of the world now, such shall we be found to be at the day of judgment. It concerneth all ages, not only those that shall be found alive at that time, but every one in successive ages.

2. The comparison must be explained; the bridegroom is Christ, and the bride is the church; the whole church is the spouse of Christ, and each particular believer a virgin attending upon this spouse; the marriage is mutually promised; the espousals are in this life: Hosea ii. 19, 20, 'I will betroth thee to me for ever;' and to be solemnised and completed at the coming of our Lord: Rev. xix. 7, 'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.' Here is the betrothing in the covenant of grace. *A nobis accepit arrhabonem carnis*, &c., saith Tertullian; he took the token of our flesh and carried it to heaven, to prepare heaven for us, and left with us the token of his Spirit, to prepare us for heaven: he is not gone from us in discontent, but will come again with all the angels of heaven with him, to receive the bride unto himself.

[1.] The companions of the bride are here represented under the name of 'virgins,' for so Christians are called for the purity of their faith and worship, and also for their blameless conversations.

(1.) Virgins for the purity of their faith, that keep themselves free

and untainted from the corrupt and rotten opinions of the world: 2 Cor. xi. 2, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as chaste virgins to Christ.' He meaneth it here in respect of the purity of their faith, that they might not be corrupted by false teachers.

(2.) Virgins for the purity of worship. Idolatry and corruption of worship is often expressed by harlotry; and therefore the prophet, to figure out Israel's apostasy and corruption in worship, is bidden to take a wife of whoredoms, Hosea iii. And those that followed the Lamb are said to be virgins not defiled, Rev. xiv. 4; not polluted with idolatry, which is spiritual fornication.

(3.) Virgins for purity and blamelessness of conversation. The apostle speaketh of some that 'had escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who might be again entangled and overcome therein,' 2 Peter ii. 20. Well, then, these were all virgins, even the foolish as well as the wise, not tainted with error, nor defiled with false worship, nor profane, corrupt or scandalous in their conversations; they were such as had escaped the corruptions of the world, and had as glorious a form of godliness as any others.

[2.] They are described by their number, 'ten.' This is mentioned either because ten is a number of perfection, or because usually the number of those companions of the bride never exceeded ten.

[3.] They are set forth by their distribution into two ranks—some wise, some foolish; five of the one sort, and five of the other. The number is not exactly to be stood upon, as if the number of the saved and damned were equal; as in the parable of the marriage-feast *one* had not a wedding-garment; it is not to be understood as if only one were damned of all that are invited to the profession of the gospel; it only signifieth that all the virgins are not alike careful to prepare for the coming of the Lord. By the wise are meant provident and diligent Christians; by the foolish, the improvident and negligent. Among those that bear the name and keep up the reputation of Christians, some will be found not to fill up their profession with answerable duty, not to make serious provision for the coming of Christ.

[4.] They are set forth by their work and employment, 'They went forth to meet the bridegroom;' that is, they expected the coming of Christ, and happiness by him. The foolish and the wise did both agree in this; indeed, this is the whole business of a Christian.

[5.] They are set forth by their preparation for this work, 'They took their lamps;' that is, made open profession of their hope: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine among men;' for external shining profession they were both alike. All are called Christians, all are baptized, and all profess faith in Christ, and an expectation of his second coming, with eternal life to ensue upon it; all are virgins, all have lamps, all are devoted to the bridegroom, go forth to meet him, and yet some were wise, and some foolish; some made preparation that whenever the bridegroom should come they might be ready to go in with him, others contented themselves with an outward profession, or loose waiting for his coming, but did not with that serious diligence prepare themselves for it, and so came short of the blessedness expected by them; there wanted a deep radication, and a constant perseverance, without which



the blaze of profession, which lasted for a while, will soon be extinguished.

*Doct.* That in the visible church, among those that give up their names to Christ, some will be found foolish when others are wise, and come short of the blessedness expected by them. Or, in the visible church all are not wise Christians, but some are wise, and really such as they profess themselves to be; others negligent, foolish, and improvident.

The state of the visible church is here represented; and observe—

1. This parable is not spoken of the corrupted members of degenerate churches, but speaketh what shall fall out in the churches not defiled with whoredoms of the world. There are some churches that have turned the government of Christ into a temporal domination, and their worship into a mass of paganish or heathenish rites and superstitions, and place all their glory, not in excellency of gifts and graces, but pomp of living and external splendour, and make Christianity look like a temporal worldly thing, calculated only for this life. Of those Christ speaketh not here; something may be intimated of them in the former parable, but here he speaks of a reformed church; not the church in her pollution and defection, but a church in her right constitution. Papists will be counted Christians, who may be rejected by Christ at his coming; they have so corrupted his worship, discipline, and doctrine. Nay, but Christ speaketh here of those that live under the dispensations of purer Christianity; some will be found true believers, others common professors; even among the members of a reformed church, that make profession of the purity of the gospel, all will not be found such as may abide the day of Christ's appearing in judgment. In Abraham's family there was an Ishmael as well as an Isaac; in Christ's, a Judas; and in the apostles' time, some were enemies to the cross of Christ that yet took the profession of Christ upon them, Phil. iii. 18.

2. Mark again, it is not meant the scandalous and faulty members of a pure church. There are many Christians in name only, but indeed deny it, Titus i. 16. But it is not meant of the scandalous, that live as if their hopes were altogether in this world, that engulph themselves in all manner of sensuality, as if there were no heaven or hell, nor no future account to be given of our actions; but it is meant of such as profess themselves to be devoted unto Jesus Christ the bridegroom, such as are desirous to be admitted into the nuptial-feast, to have communion with him in heaven, and possibly may attain to a blameless conversation, and appear virgin-like, all waiting for the coming of the Lord, in their own and others' estimation. Some that prophesied in Christ's name, and ate and drank in his presence, are yet rejected by Christ as workers of iniquity.

3. It is not meant only of those that have a show or a false and counterfeit profession, that are taught to act over their part in religion as a play, as in the best and purest churches there will be hypocrites. No; these had some real work, though not a saving but a common work, as a man may have a light tincture of religion whose heart is not yet sound with God, Ps. cxix. 80, therefore David prayeth, 'Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.' There was not a universal

renouncing of all corruptions, not that thorough care to please God, nor a rooted affection to Christ, though they have some good motions, hopeful inclinations that way, as these virgins seemed to be well affected to Christ; for the present they had their lamps, made some slender preparation, they went forth to meet the bridegroom as others did. Therefore it will be necessary to show that a common work may go far, and yet come short of blessedness: I shall prove it by three reasons.

[1.] Because a common work may go far.

[2.] Though a common work may go far, yet it is not likely to hold out.

[3.] If it should hold out a constant profession, yet it will not be enough to qualify us for the kingdom of glory, or heavenly bliss and happiness.

*First Reason.* A common work will go far. I take it for granted that there is a real common work of grace, as well as also a real special work. If you doubt it I will inform you from scripture: Heb. vi. 4, compared with the 9th verse. We read there of some that were 'enlightened,' some that 'tasted of the good word, and of the heavenly gift;' and elsewhere of some 'that had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ,' 2 Peter ii. 20. All this is real, the tasting the good word real, the enlightening real, the partaking of the heavenly gift real, the escaping the pollutions of the world real; but the apostle saith in the 9th verse, 'We expect better things of you, and things that do accompany salvation;' or things that have necessarily salvation in them, things that whosoever hath them shall certainly be saved. The graces of temporaries are for substance true, but slightly rooted; there are the purlieus of grace, or the borders of the kingdom of heaven, some flashes of light or dawnings of grace, but the daystar doth not arise in their hearts; many are enlightened, taste the good word, have some delight in the promises, taste of the heavenly gift, apprehend it sweet to have communion with God in Christ, and taste the powers of the world to come, feel some transports of soul when they hear of the hopes of eternal life, and may be brought to some partial reformation; but that which is wanting is a deep radication or a more firm inherency of these graces in the soul, and a habitual predominancy of these motions and affections over all other inclinations; for till it be so, we cannot do any great service for God, or endure any trial for his sake. Sometimes true grace is described by its deep radication; James i. 21, it is called an 'ingrafted word;' it is not something tied on, but ingrafted; the root of the matter is within; and sometimes it is described by its efficacy: Rom. vi. 17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to you.'

But more especially I shall show you that a common work may go far with respect to the three theological graces, faith, hope, and charity, mentioned by the apostle 1 Cor. xiii. 13, 'Now abideth faith, hope, and love;' and again, 1 Thes. v. 8, 'But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.' Now a common work may go very far in all these graces of faith, hope, and love, as here the virgins seemed to believe the coming of Christ, and went forth to meet him.

First, Therefore I shall show you what they may do as to faith. I shall show what the grace is, and how far they may go along with it. The scripture speaketh so much of faith, that we need to know what it is. Faith in its peculiar respect works towards Christ and heaven; but take it in its general latitude, it is a firm and cordial assent to all such things that are revealed by God, as revealed by him. Let us explain this. Here is the object, things revealed by God as revealed by him; then the act, it is an assent; the adjuncts, it is a firm and cordial assent. For the object in this description, I consider it materially and formally, all things revealed by God whatsoever. All things necessary to salvation, faith apprehends them distinctly, other things implicitly, that is, knows them in their general principle. Few Christians know all the doctrines contained in the Christian religion, but they believe them in the general. But now things necessary to salvation, I must distinctly know them, as those that are called articles of the Creed, the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments. Faith is an assent to, and built upon a divine testimony, without any other reason, whether as to things past, present, or to come. Things past, as the creation of the world: Heb. xi. 3, 'By faith we understand the worlds were created by the word of God.' If a man should hold the creation of the world upon some other reason that seemeth cogent unto him, and not upon the discovery of it in the word, certainly it is not faith, whatever it be, for faith assents to whatsoever is revealed by God. So for things present, that God sitteth in heaven, and Christ at his right hand. Stephen saw it by vision and ecstasy, but every believer seeth it by faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, as if with bodily eyes. So for things to come, as Christ's coming to judgment, John saw it in the light of prophecy: Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw the dead, both small and great, stand before God;' and they see it in the light of scripture and the promise. So that you see the objects of faith are things revealed by God, because revealed by him. If a man should believe the Christian religion upon tradition, or the current opinion where he liveth, it is not faith, but human credulity. Now the act of faith it is an assent, not knowledge but acknowledgment: the understanding hath a double act, apprehension or dijudication; it judgeth of the truth of things apprehended, or apprehendeth the tenor of things, and then judgeth of the truth of them. They are not enlightened in a way of faith that are only able to talk of heavenly things, but such as are persuaded of the truth of them. And then mark the adjuncts, it is a firm and cordial assent.

1. It is a firm assent, and that excludeth many things from faith, as light credulity: Prov. xiv. 15, 'The simple believeth every word.' He that believeth everything without search and serious advertency, believeth nothing. And it excludeth bare non-contradiction. Many are thought to believe the religion they live under, because they do not question it. These can no more be said to believe than children are said to believe the questions and answers of the Catechism they have learned by rote. True faith knoweth the certainty of those things wherein they have been instructed, Luke i. 4. And then it excludeth conjecture to be faith, which is a lighter inclination of the mind to a thing as probable; it may be so, yet there is a suspicion to



the contrary. Nay, it excludeth opinion, which goeth higher than conjecture, but cometh short of faith.

Well, now, thus far many go ; there may be an owning of the true orthodox religion, only out of custom, chance of birth, education, tradition of ancestors ; they may talk much, as parrots repeat men's words by rote only. There may be convictions and opinions about them, they may be persuaded those things are true that are in the word of God, and yet no firm assent.

2. But to come nearer yet, the next adjunct it is a cordial and hearty assent, such as engageth the heart to Christ. We read in scripture of 'believing with the heart,' Rom. x. 9, and 'believing with all the heart,' Acts viii. 37. Truths are propounded to us in the scripture not only as true, but good things, of great weight and moment ; as well as certain. Believing is a hearty business ; now this cordial and hearty assent excludeth historical faith, and temporary faith.

[1.] Historical faith, which rests on a naked speculation, or a simple and naked assent to such things as are propounded in the word of God. This consisteth in a mere speculation of the mind, without any change of the bent of the will and affections. True faith ever overcomes all contrary inclinations and motions, so that God's interest may prevail above them : Heb. xi. 13, 'Being persuaded of them, they embraced them.' Those who have a mere historical faith are not excited to holy living ; are rendered more knowing, not better : this is a real faith in its kind. Simon Magus did really believe by the preaching of Philip, Acts viii. 13. It was not counterfeit, for it is said he wondered. And those in John ii. 24, that believed in the name of Christ, but Christ 'would not commit himself to them, for he knew all men.' And no question the devils do really believe, James ii., not only natural truths, but gospel truths : 'I know thou art the holy one of God.' What a confession is this out of the devil's mouth ! Therefore it is wrong to say that unregenerate men do not believe. Because this being the main business in hand, I will tell you why it is called historical faith. Not from the object of it, as if they only believed the histories of the scripture. No ; they believe promises, threatenings, doctrines, precepts, mysteries. But it is called historical faith from the manner wherewith it is conversant about its object. As we read histories in which we are no way concerned, only for contemplation and knowledge' sake, not to make a party in their broils, or interpose in their quarrels ; so they rest in idle speculations, which betters not the practice. Well, now, this speculative assent they may have ; this faith doth not only believe those things that are true, but doth heartily and truly believe them.

[2.] There is besides this, temporary faith ; that is, such an assent as is accompanied with a slight and insufficient touch upon the heart, called a taste, Heb. vi. 4, so that they do not only believe the truths of the gospel, but are tickled with some delight, and do in some measure find their hearts drawn off from worldly lusts and practices ; but the impression is not deep enough, nor the joy rooted enough to counterbalance all temptations to the contrary. They seem to have

their hearts loosened from the world, and to prefer Christ before the creature, as long as no temptations do assault, or sensual objects stand up in any considerable strength to entice them ; but then they bewray their weakness. But that faith that is serious and hearty doth so believe the promises of the gospel as to seek happiness in them, to make it his business so to believe the mysteries of our redemption as to build all his comfort and peace upon them, so believe the commands of God as to frame his heart to observe them ; in short, to improve everything to the use of holy living.

Secondly, The next theological grace is hope. Here was an expectation of the bridegroom's coming, as well as a belief of it. All Christians profess that they expect Christ to come to judgment, and many desire and hope to be entertained at the nuptial feast as well as others, and hope to go in with him into celestial joys. Now there may be much of this in temporaries, not only a bare profession, but some real motions this way. Oh, how often are they pressed to keep on this joy and comfort ! Heb. iii. 6, ' Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end ; ' and Heb. iii. 14, ' For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end ; ' and to maintain it with all serious diligence, Heb. vi. 11, that it may grow into more certainty. But to evidence this to you, let us see what Christian hope is. It seems to be described by the apostle, Rom. ii. 7, those that ' seek for life and immortality by patient continuing in well-doing ; ' or a ' looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life, ' Jude 21. Or more formally, a certain earnest or desirous expectation of blessedness promised, in that way wherein it is promised. We believe there is such a blessedness, therefore wait with earnestness and patience till it come to pass, and exercise ourselves with all diligence for the obtaining it. True hope ever quickeneth our diligence : Acts xxiv. 10, ' And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men. ' Most interpreters say, ' Hereupon do I exercise myself. ' He had spoken of the hope of Israel, so that it was upon the account of his hope he did use that diligence. But more plainly, Acts xxvi. 6, 7, ' Unto which hope our twelve tribes, serving God diligently, hope to come. ' A man that hopeth for anything will earnestly pursue it in the way wherein it is to be obtained, and follow his work close day and night. There is a hope that is but a devout sloth, but the true Christian is lively and active : 1 John iii. 3, ' He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself as Christ is pure. ' Ignorant people say they hope well, that he that made them shall save them, but live as if they fled from heaven and salvation ; but the true hope encourageth us to hold on our course with diligence and cheerfulness, notwithstanding the troubles and difficulties and temptations we meet with in the way to it ; they make it their constant work and business. Now they that are unrenewed may go far in hope, especially when they are under the initial work of the Spirit ; they may have not only the careless man's hope, which is a slight and superficial hope, which groweth upon them they know not how, without any warrant or ground ; nor a dead and cold hope, which is the fruit of opinion, a loose and foud conjecture rather than a certain expectation ; but a hope that hath some life in it ; nor the presumer's hope, which is a lazy loitering

hope, that severeth the end from the means, but may have some lively tastes, which for a while sets them a-work in the spiritual life ; but the fault is, it is not so fixed as it should be, neither doth it beget in us that constant assiduous labour, seriousness and self-denial, but enough to keep up a blazing profession, but doth not make them so earnest for the possession of what they hope for.

Thirdly, The third theological grace is love or charity ; love to God, and love to our neighbour. There is somewhat of both here. They were well affected to the bridegroom ; they went forth to meet and carry lamps before him, for his honour as well as light ; and they went in consort and company with their fellow-virgins. So some are so well affected to the ways of God as to make profession of them to the people of God, so as to walk with them. But let me speak of love to God. Love to God is not a fellow-like familiarity, but ready subjection to his laws : ‘ If ye love me, keep my commandments,’ John xiv. 15, and 1 John v. 3, ‘ For this is love, that we keep his commandments.’ Now they may so far do this as to make profession of the ways of God, and walk blameless in them as to men, yet strangers to heart-mortification and a true preference of God in the soul. The knowledge of Christ may make men cleanse their external conversations, but live in secret love with some lusts, which they serve in a more cleanly manner. They love happiness more than holiness ; they love God, but do little for him. Labour and love are often spoken of ; they have not that active and serious diligence that is commanded in doing the things that please God. Then, for love to the brethren, they may magnify the people of God, Acts v. 13, join with them, and do many offices of love for them ; but the heart needs to be purified before there can be that ‘ unfeigned love to the brethren,’ 1 Peter i. 22. And it is not easy to hold on in the ways of God in all conditions. There are many sins contrary to the grace of love ; pride, envy, self-seeking, self-love, wrath. It must be such a love as floweth from holy principles, and breaketh out in real performances ; and this, to be carried out in a Christian manner, will be found very hard to do.

*Second Reason.* Though a common work may go far, it is not likely to hold out. Their lamps went out, and they had no vessels to supply them. Notwithstanding the sudden pangs and fervours, and forward profession of temporaries, yet usually they fail in the issue. They believe for a while, Luke viii. 13, and hope for a while : Col. i. 23, ‘ If ye continue steadfast, and be not moved from the hope of the gospel.’ Love for a while : Mat. xxiv. 12, ‘ The love of many shall wax cold ;’ and good reason ; partly because they have not the grace to which the promise of perseverance is made. There is *donum perseverantiae*, there is such a thing as the gift of perseverance, and it is assured by promise to special saving grace. Now they that have not this radicated state of grace, have not this promise ; for Christ saith, John iv. 14, ‘ The water that I shall give him, shall be a well of water springing up to eternal life.’ A cruse may fail, a bucket emptied, a pond dried up, but a fountain is ever flowing, and never dried up. Therefore David prayeth, ‘ Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.’ When the heart is not sound before God, disorders break out before men, and many that make a fair show for a while, afterwards shipwreck themselves, and all their credit



for godliness. And partly because where the heart is not thoroughly converted to God, evermore some temporal good thing lieth too close to the heart, and hath a deeper rooting there than grace can have. And these base and carnal delights will in time prevail over the interest God hath in the heart, Heb. xii. 13. That which is lame is soon turned out of the way: 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world.' Men of an unsound heart have some temptation or other that carrieth them quite off from God: as old Eli fell and broke his neck, so they break the neck of their profession.

*Third Reason* why many that are virgins come short of the nuptial feast. Because if they should hold out a constant profession, it will not be enough to qualify them for heaven and everlasting happiness. It is possible an unrenewed man may never fall from his profession, yet he can bring nothing to perfection. Luke viii. 13, the stony ground fell from their profession, but the thorny ground brought nothing to perfection. All are not exposed to great trials. Oh! nothing but a real conversion will qualify us for the kingdom of heaven. The foolish virgins' case was as fair and as good as the other, till the bridegroom came: Mat. xviii. 3, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' The sentence is absolute and peremptory. So John iii. 3, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nothing less than renewing grace will serve the turn. Be a man in appearance better or worse, a gross sinner, or a painted pharisee, a hopeful beginner, or one of long standing, 'Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God.'

*Use 1.* To show how far from salvation some are, if those that have some kind of faith, and hope, and love, may come short; as for instance—(1.) All practical atheists and infidels, that scoff at Christ's coming: 2 Peter iii. 3, 4, 'In the last days there shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying, Where is the promise of his coming?' Some, that they may sin the more securely, question the second coming of Christ, or banish out of their hearts the thoughts of the day of judgment. Many that went out to meet the bridegroom yet were foolish virgins, and were shut out. (2.) Flagitious persons, or scandalous sinners, that neither respect Christ nor his people, that make no show nor preparation, are neither virgins, nor do they take their lamps; if they have a historical certainty, not a temporary faith. How much then of the Christian world would be cut off before we come to an accurate and exquisite trial? 2 Peter iii. 11, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' and Gal. v. 24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof.' If this be a sure rule to try by, what a multitude of Christians are there that do not belong to Christ, that by a real profession have given up their names to him!

*Use 2.* Is caution to us all. Let us take heed we do not deceive ourselves, or rest satisfied with the picture of godliness. An army would be very cautious if they knew beforehand that one-half of them should be destroyed. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Among the virgin professors that hold out an honourable profession, many will be found foolish. Yea, when Christ had said, 'One of you shall betray me;' 'Lord, is it I, is it I?' said the disciples. Now you are here told, not one, but many. Now go home, and say,

Lord, is it I? In the purest churches many may lie hid and not discerned. Oh! therefore take not up with weak and groundless hopes.

1. Do not please yourselves by being of such a sect or such a profession. Men think the safest place to lie asleep in is Christ's own lap. If they are of such a party, they think they are safe; but consider, lead may be cast into all forms, an angel or devil, but it is lead still. Consider God is an exact and impartial judge: 1 Peter iii. 17, 'If you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth all men;' his people as well as others, if they build upon their profession. Do not content yourselves with a form of godliness, though never so strict; nor a name of godliness, though never so renowned. These were virgins, not defiled with error or idolatry, or the scandalous customs or fashions of the world; yet some of them were foolish virgins.

2. Do not content yourselves that you do not take up a profession and an intention of religion merely to serve the times and yourselves of it, not knowing yourselves intentionally and industriously to counterfeit; as Judas, that followed Christ for the bag, being in his heart a traitor and a thief from the beginning, John xiii. 6; or as Simon Magus at first hoped to make as good market of his new faith as his old sorcery, professed to believe in Christ out of design. Nay, a man that, for anything he knoweth or perceiveth, may think that he is in good earnest, yet he may be a temporary, though he is no temporiser. Christ knew them that knew not themselves, John ii. 24. To speak in a word, though you may know nothing of guile, yet do not content yourselves with that merely.

3. Do not rest in this, that you find some real work, and go no further. A man's heart may be softened, but not opened to the purpose: he may have a love and liking of religion, and yet not come under the power of it; some flashes of comfort, yet seek his happiness in worldly things; some desires and good inclinations, and yet be slothful and negligent in the main, in mortifying lusts, or not perfecting holiness, and fain would have some part in Christ, but yet make but slender preparation, get oil in his lamp, but not in his vessel; fain he would have the blessings of grace and glory, if bare wishes and desires would do it; fain would go to heaven, but would do nothing for it, unless it be in a lazy, cold, and dull preparation; doth not make it the chief business of his life to know the will of God and do it.

*Use 3.* Is to exhort us to be very serious in our preparation for the coming of the Lord; or, as the apostle cautions the Ephesians, Eph. v. 15, 16, 'See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.' To this end consider—

1. That our whole life is nothing else but a preparation for Christ's coming. The common duty of all Christians is to go forth and meet the bridegroom; or, to make sure of life eternal is the necessary business we have to do in the world. Our whole life was appointed for this end, and all the time we spend here is worse than lost, if it be not employed and used for this end. It is now preparation time; these are the months of our purification for our immortal souls; therefore our continual care should be to make ready.

2. We may defer this work too long, we cannot begin it too soon. The foolish virgins would get oil in their vessels, but it was too late.

Never any complained of beginning with God too soon: many could have wished they had known the ways of righteousness sooner, Rom. xiii. 11; many have judged 'the time past more than enough,' 1 Peter iv. 3.

3. It is not so slight and easy a thing to get to heaven as the world imagineth: Mat. vii. 14, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter and shall not be able.' Many deceive themselves; it is not so broad as the opinions of some, as the practices of more would make it, and the carnal hearts of all would have it. Broader or narrower it cannot be than Christ hath left it. In the general, a man may come much too short, none go over. Oh! when you do but consider that many are afar off, Eph. ii. 13, and some are near, as Christ told the young man, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven;' and others are scarcely saved, and some enter abundantly, it concerns us therefore to take heed to ourselves.

4. This is your wisdom. There is a great deal of do in the world about wisdom: Job xi. 12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise.' A man cannot endure to be counted a fool, will sooner own a vice in morals than a weakness in intellectuals. Now wisdom lieth in providence, and folly in negligence, especially in weighty matters. These wise virgins provided oil in their vessels, and the wise builder built upon a rock. They are wise in God's account, whatever the world thinketh of them, that are wise for heavenly things, and govern their hearts and ways exactly, Eph. v. 14, 15; and they are fools that never mind the good of their souls.

What would you have us do? I will only press you to three things:—

[1.] Let your belief be sound and firm to the great articles of Christianity. It is faith enlivens all our notions of God: John vi. 69, 'We believe and are sure that thou art Jesus the Son of God.'

[2.] Let your resolutions for God be unbounded, Ps. cxix. 112. You never knew a man fall off from God, but he loved some secret lust, some corruption was left unmortified, though for the present it did not appear to the party himself; this in time will break out, and cause some scandalous fall.

[3.] I would have you put it out of all question by the lively exercise of your grace, and by your diligence in the spiritual life, Phil. ii. 12; and in time it will grow up into an evidence, 2 Peter i. 5; Luke xiii. 3. Nothing will yield you comfort but the exercising and increasing grace.

## SERMON II.

*They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.—MAT. XXV. 3, 4.*

Nor only the openly wicked, those that eat and drink with the drunken, are rejected, but those that have some show of godliness; yea, hopeful beginnings, but not improved, is the drift of this parable.



We have considered wherein the ten virgins agree ; now, wherein they differ : they had so much wisdom to take their lamps with them, but so much folly as to take no oil in their vessels. These vessels were annexed to their lamps, or that part of the lamp which was kindled and lighted. By the lamps are meant outward profession, Mat. v. 16 ; by the oil, the Spirit, called ‘ the anointing which abideth in us,’ 1 John ii. 27. Now the foolish virgins are such inconsiderate Christians as content themselves with the name and blaze of outward profession, neglecting the great work within ; namely, an inward principle of grace, which should maintain their profession before men, and their uprightness before God ; they had only some transient motions of the Spirit, or inclinations to that which is good, enough to keep up their present profession, but not to hold out and suffice at Christ’s coming. But the wise virgins, that had oil in their vessels, with their lamps, are sound and solid Christians, who, with the lamps of external profession, are careful to be furnished inwardly with the graces of the Holy Spirit.

*Doct. 1.* It is not enough to have oil in our lamps, but we must have oil in our vessels also.

*Doct. 2.* This will be found to be our true wisdom, and the other to be the greatest folly.

For the first point, that it is not enough to have oil in our lamps, but we must have oil in our vessels also, let me explain this point in these propositions :—

1. Profession must not be neglected : both the wise and the foolish took their lamps with them. Burning profession is twofold—vocal and real. Vocal : Rom. x. 9, ‘ If thou shalt confess with thy mouth, and believe with thy heart.’ Christ will be owned by those that are his. Christ’s followers need not be ashamed of avowing their master. Faith should not, and love cannot be smothered and hidden ; therefore profession is as necessary as believing in its kind. Again, there is a real profession, not so much by word of mouth as by constant practice and conversation ; so Christians are bidden to ‘ shine as lights,’ Phil. ii. 15. This is for the glory of God, Mat. v. 16, and the honour of Christ that it should be so ; therefore the apostle prayeth, 2 Thes. i. 11, 12, ‘ Wherefore we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you.’ It is not meant of the illicit acts, but the fruit that it produceth ; and it is for the honour of the truth. Suitable practice joined with profession puts a majesty and splendour on the truth, and recommendeth it to the consciences of beholders : Titus ii. 10, ‘ Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.’ It is not so much by good words and expressions that Christians do put a loveliness and beauty upon the ways of God, as by ordering their ways with all strictness and gravity ; so that this fair profession is of great use, especially the real part ; it is an evidence that all is right within, for the breaking out of sin and folly in the life clearly evidenceth the power and prevalency of unmortified lusts in the heart ; therefore we must keep our lamps burning ; the foolish and the wise did both well in that.

2. A profession of godliness, though never so glorious, should not be rested in without a saving work of grace upon the heart to maintain it. There was the folly of one sort of virgins, that they were contented with having oil in their lamps for their present use, without looking further; and the wisdom of the other, that their vessels were furnished as well as their lamps. Grace must flow forth, but withal it must have a bottom within. As a fountain or spring sending forth streams to water the ground about it, or the heart sendeth forth life and spirits to every faculty and member, so the graces of the Spirit in believers flow forth in their carriage and behaviour, to make their tongue drop that which is savoury, their actions orderly and even, their carriage in all relations and affairs grave and serious. It is well when all this hath a bottom, that there is a principle of life within, to diffuse this virtue into every part of their conversations, and to keep them mindful and respective to all the commands of God. Now this is required—(1.) Partly because this glorious profession and practice will not serve the turn for the present; for God looks not to outward appearance, but regards the frame of the heart; it is internal holiness that is lovely in his eyes, Ps. li. 6, and without which the external is loathsome to him, Mat. xxiii. 17. A Christian hath more in the vessel than in the lamp: Ps. xlv. 13, 'The king's daughter is all glorious within.' That which is outwardly professed is inwardly rooted and cherished by them who worship and serve God in spirit and truth. Knowledge, faith, love, hope, zeal, courage, patience, these adorn the heart, as well as the fruits of them appear in the life, and this maketh us beautiful in the eyes of him that seeth in secret. It would help us to discover our mistakes if we did make God our witness, approver, and judge; for the present studying to approve him in the frame of our hearts, which is hidden from all others. And (2.) Partly because the lamp will not long hold burning unless there be a stock of oil to feed it; so that if it could suffice for the present, yet without grace in the heart, for the future, we shall miscarry when the slender provision and store is spent. A Christian is to provide for the time to come such grace as may endure and hold out in all trials, and bear weight in the day of judgment. We are often pressed to set ourselves in such a state, and put ourselves into such a frame, as will endure the glory of Christ's presence; and to think of that time, and what we shall do, or how we shall be found when he appeareth. He only believeth aright in Christ that will not be ashamed at his appearance: Luke xxi. 36, 'That ye may stand before the Son of man;' and 1 John iv. 17, 'That we may have boldness at the day of judgment;' and 1 John ii. 29, 'When he shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed of him at his coming.'

3. A saving work of grace is an inward principle of life, and that in such a degree and measure, which the unsound, though the most glorious professors of the gospel, do not attain unto. Some slight and insufficient touches upon their hearts many professors may attain unto that yet never had this rooted principle of grace, which may properly be called oil in the vessel. It differeth in radication and efficacy, as I showed before. They are enlightened, but the day-star doth not arise in their hearts, 2 Peter i. 19, and Eph. v. 8. A flash

of light they may have, but are not light in the Lord. Are affected with the truths of the gospel, but not changed or transformed by it, 2 Cor. iii. 18. Sin may be restrained or benumbed, but it is not subdued and mortified, Gal. v. 24; we cannot say it is crucified. They are half loosed, but are still in bonds; make some show of escape from Satan, but are surprised by him again; worse hampered than before, Mat. xii. 45; urged, excited to some good, but not enabled and inclined to love God with all the heart, and seriously and constantly to set about the things that please him, and to avoid the contrary. They have not the grace the apostle prayeth for, Heb. xiii. 12, that grace 'that may make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ.' Have you this grace, to be always working that which is pleasing in his sight? Their fire is like a straw fire, soon in and soon out; so that there is a difference. The common grace that they have is real, but not of an abiding and everlasting nature, not secured by God's covenant and promise; there is not that solid, rooted piety. Therefore, it is not enough for Christians to see that the lamp burneth, but to look what there is in the vessel, to feed the flame. It is not sudden affections on our part, nor the transient motions of the Spirit on God's part, that will amount to a constant principle of life.

4. This constant, abiding state of grace or principle of life may be known partly by the terms by which it is set forth in scripture, and partly by the effects of it.

First, By the terms by which it is expressed in scripture.

1. It is expressed sometimes with respect to the original author, pattern, and fountain of it, which is God; and so it is called the divine nature, 2 Peter i. 4; whereby is not meant the infinite essence of God, which can neither be divided, or communicated to any creature, but of those holy and heavenly qualities and dispositions whereby we resemble God. The heart of this Christian is so stamped with God's own image and character, that he beginneth to look like God for wisdom, holiness, purity, pity. So sometimes it is called the life of God, Eph. iv. 18: that spiritual life that is begun in regeneration is so called; not as God is the first original author of life natural, but the pattern of it. From both these places it appeareth we must first be partakers of such a nature as God hath, before we can live such a life as God doth.

2. It is sometimes expressed with respect to the meritorious and procuring cause, or the immediate head and fountain of it; and so Christ is said 'to live in us,' Gal. ii. 20; 'to dwell in us,' Eph. iii. 17; 'to remain in us as the hope of glory,' Col. i. 27. That Christians may live the life of grace, they must first be united to Christ; for he liveth in us as the head in the members, or the root in the branches: we must be united to Christ, and receive influence from him as branches from the root. Through faith Christ is perpetually present in virtue, grace, and spirit. We must first partake of Christ himself, being most strictly united to him, as members to the head, from whence they receive sense



and motion : he taketh up a fixed and unmovable habitation in our hearts, John xiv. 23, not for a visit and away ; but keepeth a perpetual residence in the heart.

3. With respect to the immediate author and fountain, which is the Spirit given to us, to dwell in us, by some special way of operation, Rom. v. 5 ; and 1 Cor. ii. 12, ‘ Now we have not received the spirit of world, but the Spirit of God, that we may know the things that are freely given us of God ;’ and Rom. viii. 11, ‘ If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you.’ A believer’s body and soul is the Spirit’s mansion-house ; and those that have the Spirit to dwell in them, not to come upon them at times, are in an abiding state of grace. The Spirit came upon Balaam at times, Num. xxiv. 34 ; but in his people he makes his abode. He doth act in others as a spirit assisting, but not as a spirit inhabiting : he dwelleth in his people. The Spirit is often promised to dwell in our hearts, not only for a season, but for ever : John iv. 14, ‘ The water that I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up to everlasting life.’ Mark, the Spirit doth not give a draught, but the spring ; not a dash of rain that is soon dried up, but a well ; not a pond, that may be dried up at length, but a fountain that ever keepeth flowing, so that we shall never thirst more. It shall quench his thirst after worldly vanities and delights : these things grow tasteless the more of the Spirit we have. The Spirit of Christ, as the fountain, doth make this grace enduring in itself and in its effects, a well of inexhaustible fulness and refreshment. So John vii. 38, ‘ He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.’ Not a petty refreshment for a season, but his Spirit to dwell in us as a full fountain, to flow forth for the refreshment of himself and others. Though the ocean be in God, yet there is a river in the saints. In Christ there is *plenitudo fontis* ; in us, *plenitudo vasis*. If we find any remission of the comforts of this spring, it is through our own pride and unbelief and idleness : John xiv. 16, 17, ‘ I will give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.’ The Spirit will not change his dwelling-place. This is such a degree of grace as the unregenerate world cannot receive.

4. This inward principle is expressed with respect to the instrument, which is the word of God ; so it is called λόγον ἔμφυτον, James i. 21, ‘ The ingrafted word.’ The root of the matter is within ; it is not the word heard only, or the word obeyed only will save us, but it must be an ingrafted word. It is not bound on, but ingrafted ; it is not enough to yield some present obedience to it, but it must be rooted in us. So in that notable promise, Heb. viii. 10, ‘ I will put my laws in their minds, and write them upon their hearts.’ The writing is the law of God, the tables are the minds and hearts of men ; that is the understanding and will and rational appetite ; and this is written by the finger of God ; there where is the source and original of all moral operations, of all thoughts and affections, and inward motions, there is the law of God written ; in those parts of the soul where the directive counsel and the imperial commanding power of all human actions resideth, there will God write his laws in lively and

legible characters. And what is the effect ? A man becometh a law to himself, he carrieth his rule about with him, and hath a ready and willing mind to obey it : Ps. xxxvii. 31, 'The law of God is in his heart ; none of his steps shall slide.' The truth is rooted in him, and his heart is suited and inclined to it ; he unfeignedly loveth what is commanded of God, and hateth what is forbidden by him.

5. The work itself is sometimes generally expressed by these notions. It is called *καινή κτίσις*, 'The new creature,' 2 Cor. v. 17, when a man is thoroughly framed anew in all his faculties ; and 1 John iii. 9, it is called *σπέρμα*, 'The abiding seed ;' not a vanishing affection, but a remaining seed ; and it is called 'A good treasure,' Mat. xii. 35. There is a stock that supplieth holy thoughts, words, and actions. As a man that hath a bad treasure of corruption, the more he spends, the more it is increased ; so a man that hath a good stock, he bringeth forth holy thoughts, words, and actions. And it is called 'A new heart, and a right spirit,' Ps. li. 10 ; Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27 ; and it is called 'A sound heart,' Ps. cxix. 80. There is a slight heart, and a sound heart, which is not only opposed to the shows of hypocrites, but to the sudden pangs and half-dispositions of temporaries, when grace beareth a universal sovereignty over us, inclining the heart to love, and please, and serve God.

6. Sometimes the work is particularly expressed by the several graces of the Spirit, all which are comprised in faith and repentance : Acts xx. 21, 'Teaching them repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Repentance towards God, because by it we return to the duty we owe to our creator ; and faith, in the gospel notion, doth principally respect our Redeemer, and his mediation for us. By repentance we return to the duty enjoined by the law, from whence we are fallen ; and by faith we apprehend the love of Christ, and what he hath done for us. By repentance we are set in joint again as to our obedience to the lawgiver ; and by faith we close with, and are united to our Redeemer, without which we cannot be accepted with God. Both are the principles of all sincere obedience and subjection to the gospel-law or covenant.

If you ask me, what is this oil in the vessel that we must have to qualify us to meet the bridegroom at his coming ?

*Ans.* It is repentance, mortifying our inward lusts, and faith working by love.

(1.) Repentance, mortifying our inward lusts, that in newness of life we may glorify God ; therefore called 'Repentance from dead works,' Heb. vi. 1. By common grace men may cast off all outward evils, escape the pollutions of the world, but are never really and inwardly changed in their natures till the Spirit of Christ worketh this grace in the heart ; they are but as a sow washed, 2 Peter ii. 22 ; there is an inclination to wallow in the mire of carnal delights again. It is possible a man may see such an excellency in Christ, and be so affected at the hopes of his mercy, and melted at the thoughts of his love, as to cast off outward gross evils which the world liveth in ; but this is but the sow washed ; the heart is not changed. Lust for a while may be benumbed, seem quenched, but it is not deadened, it is not weakened : 'If ye through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body,'

Rom. viii. 13; as appeareth by its breaking out again with the more violence.

(2.) Faith working by love, that is the great principle of gospel-obedience. True grace doth not lie hid in the soul in lazy habits, but sets the soul a-work for God, upon the apprehension of his love in Christ; this constraineth us entirely to give up ourselves to God, 2 Cor. v. 14, minding his interest, studying his will, seeking to please him in all things. A man is not to be judged by present pangs, but by the constant bent and bias of his soul; it is set God-ward, to please him, and enjoy him, notwithstanding the back-bias of corruption.

Secondly, We now come to the effects. The effects are two:—

1. A constant fitness, readiness, and propension to do and suffer what God calleth us unto, or a habitual inclination of heart towards that which is good.

2. A habitual aversion to that which is evil.

1. A habitual inclination of heart towards that which is good; this is called in scripture, 'the having the heart at the right hand,' Eccles. x. 2. He speaketh not of the natural posture, but the leaning of the heart towards duty; he is ready fitted and prepared for duty. And sometimes this is called, 'having our loins girt,' 1 Peter i. 13, as ready to travel; or it noteth the ready disposition that should be in us for duties or conflicts. So 'we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,' Eph. ii. 10; that is, put into a fitness and aptitude for them. As everything that is created hath a fitness and aptitude for that use for which it serveth, the water to flow, the air to be carried to and fro; so a Christian hath a fitness for his work. The opposite to this is that, Titus i. 16, 'To every good work reprobate;' unfit to be employed for this holy business. Briefly, as every habit serveth for this use, *Ut quis facile, jucunde et constanter agat*; to perfect the operation of that faculty in which it is seated, so that a man may act easily, pleasantly, constantly; so doth habitual grace serve for this use, to incline us, and fit us for the service of God. There are three things that are found in those that have this work wrought in them:—

[1.] There is an inclination and propensity to a godly life; for as God created all creatures with an inclination to their proper operations, so the new creature hath a tendency to those actions which are proper to its state; as the sparks fly upward and the stone falleth downward from an inclination of nature, so are their hearts bent to please God and serve him, and what they do therein they do with a kind of naturalness, because of this bent and inclination: 'The law is in their hearts,' Ps. xl. 8. There is a purpose there, Acts xi. 23, an inclination there, Ps. cxix. 112. We read in Exod. xxxv. 29, that they gave to the sanctuary 'every one whose heart made him willing.' I bring this expression to explain what I am speaking of; so their hearts being thus prepared and renewed by the Holy Ghost, make them willing; there is some weight and poise within their hearts to carry them unto God, and the duties that concern his glory and service. A man may act from a violent impression contrary to nature, as a stone moveth upward, or a bowl thrown with great strength where the bias is overruled; so a wicked man may do a good action or two,



as Saul forced himself; but the bent and natural inclination is another thing. It is good to attend to the principle of our motions, whether it be natural or violent, whether our spirits make us willing, or some accidental reason constrain us; as when men are acted by something foreign, as the force of holy example, whereby many a man is drawn to do otherwise than he would, as Joash while Jehoiada lived, 2 Chron. xxiv. A man may be acted by his company, follow good examples, and may be provoked thereby: Heb. x. 24, 'Let us consider one another, to provoke to love and good works.' It were well if one Christian would more provoke another. Man is an imitating creature, loath to be outdone; but if this be all, we shall soon bewray our unsoundness. He may be forced by envy, vainglory, and by-ends (Phil. i. 5) to preach or pray, forced by natural conscience, Rom. ii. 14, 15, or set a-work by a corrupt principle. The urgings of a natural conscience are quite another thing than the bent of a renewed heart; there is a principle of life which breedeth an inclination. He may be forced by a sense of his misery; self sets him a-work to seek after God, because he would use him for a turn, to help him out of his distress; as those in Ps. 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 to him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Their affections were not sincerely set for God, or towards God, or bent against sin; the sense of a present wrath, or the terror of an angry God, did drive them into a fit of religiousness for the present, which can produce no steadfast purpose. They that make self their utmost end can never endeavour constantly to please and glorify God; but where true grace is, there is a propensity and disposition to every good work, which we should always cherish in ourselves; for as it abateth or increaseth, so we are diligent or sluggish in God's service.

[2.] There is not only an inclination, but a readiness or preparedness, which is a further effect of this solid and substantial grace, and often spoken of in scripture; as Titus iii. 1, 'Ready to every good work;' 1 Tim. vi. 18, 'Ready to distribute;' 'Ready to communicate,' Heb. xiii. 16. So Paul, Acts xxi. 13, *ἐτοιμὸς ἔχω*, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem.' Or take a general place, 2 Tim. ii. 4, 'Prepared to every good work;' and Luke xii. 47, 'That servant that knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will;' so Eph. ii. 10, and many other places. This goeth beyond inclination, as fire hath an inclination to ascend upward, but something may violently keep it down that it cannot ascend actually. A Christian may have a will to good, a strong and not a remiss will, yet there are some impediments: Rom. vii. 18, 'For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' Inclination implieth a remote power, but readiness the next or immediate power. God's people, that have the seed of grace in them, yet how unready are they to that which they desire to do! Therefore a Christian ought always to keep himself in all readiness and fitness of disposition for his duty, whether it concern God, or ourselves, or others.

This is opposite to dulness, sleepiness, listlessness, or wearisomeness in our service, opposite to ἀκηδία, which the schoolmen make to be one of the seven deadly sins, a remiss, cold will, hanging off from God.

[3.] An earnest impulsion, which quickeneth us to all holy endeavours of obedience; this is sometimes called the activity or working of grace: 'Faith worketh by love,' Gal. v. 6; sometimes zeal, or an earnest burning of affection towards God, or that holy ardour whereby we repress those affections, unruly motions, and desires which are contrary to his will, and do excite and stir up ourselves more and more to honour him and please him: Titus ii. 14, 'Zealous of good works;' sometimes alacrity and cheerfulness, as we prevail in striving against sin, and our love to God increaseth, 1 John v. 3, 4. All these are so many degrees. First we can make conscience of doing our duty, but that is not enough: a convinced man may have his conscience stirring and pleading for God; but a converted man, or a renewed heart, hath an inclination, and not only an inclination but some fitness, and not only some fitness but there is an impulsion, which discovereth itself either by stirring or exciting to that which is good (though with difficulty), which is the lowest degree. All grace is stirring, and would fain break out into action; for it is not a dead and sleepy habit, but seeketh to break forth, and is called by the apostle, 'The lustings of the spirit,' Gal. v. 17. Another degree is zeal and love to the glory of God, whom they honour and desire to exalt continually, which maketh them complain of corruption, and to strive against it, and to shake off slothfulness, and the weights of sin that hang upon us, when the Spirit gets the upper hand, but the flesh is not easily subdued. Then we are more at liberty to serve God, and so alacrity followeth, when a man hath pleasure in good actions, and the flesh is so overcome and subdued that it can make little or no opposition, and so we perform our duty with more ease and delight, which is the highest degree.

### SERMON III.

*They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*—MAT. XXV. 3, 4.

I COME now to the second effect.

Secondly, A habitual aversion to that which is evil: Ps. xevii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' It is as natural to grace to hate evil as to love good. As love was made for God, and the things which he hath commanded, and tends to the enjoyment of him, so hatred was made for sin, and what is contrary to God. Man hath an eschewing faculty as well as an embracing and choosing faculty, and grace falleth upon both, and sanctifieth the one as well as the other: Amos v. 15, 'Hate the evil, and love the good.' Love was given us for good, and hatred for evil; love was made for the chiefest good, and all things that tend to it; and hatred for that which is truly and pro-

perly evil. Now concerning this effect of grace, I shall observe these things.

1. Grace produceth a hatred of sin, not a bare abstinence from it. Sin may be restrained by foreign reasons not proper to grace, as a dog that hath a mind to the bait may abstain for fear of the cudgel. So men may abstain because of the penalty of laws, infamy, shame in the world, or other reasons; as Haman refrained himself, that he might the better take revenge upon the whole race of the Jews. Men may refrain from sin, when there is not a rooted enmity against it; whereas in the saints there is a constant principle of resistance against it, 1 John iii. 9, *σπέρμα μένον*, 'The seed of God abideth in him.' The grace of sanctification doth change the nature of a man, and his heart is set against that he loved before. Look, as the Lord will not respect men's external practice of good, when it may be their hearts abhor and loathe it, and are bent on other courses—he requireth chiefly that they be rooted in the love of good and delight in it—so he will not accept a simple not doing or forbearing evil, while it may be their hearts are going a-whoring after it, but will have them really hate and detest it, that there should be an abiding enmity in their hearts against it; and where it is so, that there is a habitual love of good and hatred of evil, Christ will pass by many failings in practice; as you may see, Rom. vii. 22–25, that is the case there, 'The evil that I hate, that do I; and I delight in the law of God in the inward man.' Clear these two once, and the remainders of sin will not be your ruin.

2. Grace produceth a hatred of sin as sin, out of a principle of love to God, and as it is contrary to his law, and the new nature planted in us: 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil;' and 'he that is born of God, sinneth not;' that is the principle, 'because the seed of God abideth in you.' The schoolmen distinguish of two sorts and kinds of hatred—*odium abominationis*, and *odium inimicitie*. The first is defined by Aquinas to be *dissonantia quædam appetitus ad id quod apprehenditur ut repugnans et noxium*—an aversion of the appetite to what is apprehended repugnant and contrary to us. Such an hatred there is in the regenerate, for they apprehend sin as repugnant and contrary to their renewed will. To the unregenerate it is agreeable and suitable, as draff to the appetite of a swine, or grass and hay to a bullock and horse. The other is a hatred of enmity, so called both for the ground of it and the effect of it; the ground as an evil, that which is an enemy and hurtful to us, as sin is to our peace and happiness temporal, spiritual, and eternal. But chiefly as to the effect of it, hatred is a willing of evil and mischief to the thing or person hated. Both these hatreds are in the children of God. They hate sin not only as it may bring loss and detriment, horror of conscience and damnation, but out of the pure love of God, as it is contrary to his image and will; and they hate it with a hostile hatred, so as to seek the destruction of it. *Non cessat in læsione peccati, sed in exterminio*. It doth not scratch at the face of sin, but is seeking to mortify and subdue it; and therefore are always mourning, praying, watching, striving, famishing it by cutting off its provisions and denying its satisfactions, and still following the work close, till we get the mastery of it.

3. I observe that renewing grace doth so far obtain and produce



this effect in the hearts of those that are under it, that their hatred to sin is greater than their love to it, and sin is thereby more and more weakened and subdued in the soul. We flatter ourselves with notions of love and hatred, unless there be some answerable success and prevalency. It cannot be imagined that sin should live in its full strength where there is a fixed settled frame of heart against it; that there should be in the soul a working warring principle that shall rouse up a man daily to take heed of it as the greatest evil, and yet sin should be as powerful, and as frequently and freely break out as it doth in others. No; where there is such an enmity, hostility, and irreconcilableness, or, to say in a word, such a habitual aversion, it cannot be: 1 John iii. 9, 'He that is born of God doth not commit sin; his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.' He that hath such a blessed change wrought in him by the operation of God's Spirit as to be transformed in the spirit of his mind, it cannot be supposed but that grace will have such energy and efficacy upon him as to prevent the life and growth of sin, and restrain the practice of it; that the habits of grace being cherished, this must needs be famished and starved by degrees. A man that hath a fixed root of ungodliness in him, he is at sin's beck, the devil's slave; but a permanent habit of grace doth produce a constant carefulness, that God be not dishonoured or displeased. The apostle telleth us that 'Christ bore our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, being dead unto sin, may be alive unto righteousness,' 1 Peter ii. 24. Now certainly this effect is obtained in those that have benefit by his death, or have assured it by faith. Before they were alive to sin, being active, and delighting in the commission of it, but dead to righteousness, impotent and indisposed for any spiritual act; but afterwards their love to sin is weakened, and their hearts quickened to spiritual life. Once more, that there is a decay of the evil principle appeareth by that of Gal. v. 16, 17, 'This I say then, walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; for the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' This place sheweth that the lusts of the flesh, though they be not wholly abandoned, yet they shall not be fulfilled. We take it otherwise; but the meaning is, the unrenewed part shall be kept under; we cannot fully effectuate the evil we would. The spirit always opposeth what we would do according to the direction of the flesh. There are two active principles never wholly dead. The flesh doth not advance with a full gale, but meeteth with a contrary tide of resistance from the spirit.

*Use 1.* Is to reprove those that can afford a little religion, but cannot afford enough. It may be good words without practice, or practice without principle. Good words without practice: many talk well, their notions are high and strict; but observe them narrowly, and you will find them cold and careless; like the carbuncle, at a distance it seemeth all on fire, but touch it and it is key-cold. 'Be warmed, be clothed,' will not pass for charity, nor opinions for faith, nor notions and elevated strains for godliness. You would laugh at him that would think to pay his debts with the noise of money, and instead of opening his purse, shake it. It is as ridiculous to think to satisfy

God or discharge our duty by fine words or heavenly language, without a heavenly heart of life, or afford practice without a principle, or an inward disposition or inclination of heart to holy things. It is not enough to do good, but we must get the habit of doing good; to believe, but we must get the habit of faith; to do a virtuous action, but we must have the habit of virtue; to perform an act of obedience, but we must get the root of obedience. The soul must be divested of evil habits, and decked and adorned with habits of grace, and endowed with new and spiritual qualities, before it can have a principle of life in itself. But most men content themselves with a little good affection, that is soon spent: Hosea vi. 4, Ephraim's goodness is like the morning dew, that wets the surface, but is soon dried up. Many have some good things in them, but they want a firm root, which is a habitual inclination towards God. Oh! the difference that is between a man that forceth himself to do good, and one whose heart is inclined to do good! He doth not go to it like a bear to the stake, but with a native willingness: he is inclined to think of good, inclined to talk of good and holy discourse; inclined to pray, to exercise himself to godliness: the Lord hath put a new nature in him, and he feeleth an internal mover, or an inward impression that moveth him: this is life, but it is little regarded. Many have a show, but life cannot be painted; otherwise a handsome picture of godliness men may keep up.

But what are the reasons of this?

1. Negligence. They are loath to be at the pains to get grace, to be at the expense of brokenness of heart, and that humble waiting and earnest praying that it will cost us. A form is easily gotten and maintained: painted fire needs no fuel to keep it in; vanishing affections are soon stirred. A little remorse in a prayer or delight in a sermon they may have; but it will cost us labour and diligence to have the heart strongly bent towards God: Prov. xiii. 4, 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.' All excellent things have their incident difficulties, and nothing is gotten without diligence, labour, and serious mindfulness, That which is opposed to common grace is casting off slothfulness, and a diligence to keep some 'full assurance of hope to the end,' Heb. vi. 11, 12.

2. Inconsideration. They do not consider how they shall appear before Christ at the day of judgment. Therefore are they called 'foolish virgins,' because they did not foresee all events to provide against them; as if the spouse should come later. They thought this oil they had might suffice, or they should have opportunity to get more. Christianity is a business of consideration. When Christ had laid down the terms, he biddeth them 'sit down and count the charges,' Luke xiv. 28. A builder doth but lay the foundation of his shame in his cost, if he be not able to carry on the building; a war were better never be begun, if we have not means to maintain it. If you mean to build for heaven, to bid defiance against the devil, world and flesh, you must not rashly engage, but deliberately resolve. We must consider the quality of Christ's laws, what visible oppositions there are, that we may knowingly, all difficulties considered, put ourselves into his hands. There is an anxious and serious deliberation neces-

sary ; otherwise, to leap into profession slightly maketh way for apostasy, or else for such a cheap religion which costs nothing, and therefore is worth nothing.

3. Some unmortified corruption or indulged lust, which hindereth both the radication and prevalency of grace ; the heart divided, touched partly with God and partly with the creature, neither loosed nor unloosed, but between both, can never be sound and upright : James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' A man must purge himself from lusts before he be a vessel fit for God's use, 2 Tim. ii. 20. There is some delight in lawful or unlawful things, that lieth between us and Christ, and is so near and dear to us, as to draw away the heart, at least in part, that the heavenly plantation cannot thrive and prosper in our souls, Luke viii. 14. There is some unmortified root of bitterness : Jer. iv. 3, 4, 'Sow not among thorns ; plough up the fallow ground.' Till God be our scope, religion can never be our work. If the pleasing, enjoying, or glorifying him were more sincerely intended, other things would come on with more ease and success ; as the water floweth of its own accord if the pipe be not leaky. If the honour of Christ, his glory, will, and command, lie nearest and closest to the heart, then sin would be more loathed than any other thing, more feared, more avoided, and we would follow our work more heartily. We are enlivened in the means, by an unfeigned regarding of the end ; our carelessness cometh from this, that God is only minded as a matter by the by. The end and means always go together. If anything be prized more than God, or equal with him, or apart from him, a little grace and godliness will serve the turn. If God were entirely our end, we would be mainly for him, and most industrious to approve ourselves to him ; if it be not so, something there is that causeth that neglect, that must be found out ; something that cloggeth thy heart, and detaineth thee from this effectual pursuit ; some lust, the gratifying of which is the delight and pleasure which contents us, and therefore are we cold and slight in religion.

4. Unbelief ; for faith doth enliven all our notions of God, and Christ, and heaven, and the day of judgment, and maketh them effectual and powerful. The apostle telleth us, Heb. xi. 1, 'That faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' It puts a presence into things, and so affects us as if the things believed were before our eyes ; otherwise, a man cannot see things at a distance, 2 Peter i. 9. Christ and eternity are afar off, hence to an unbeliever they seem little, and therefore, it is not made a business of the greatest weight or importance to seek after them. At the day of judgment how will wicked men stamp and tear their hair, when matters of faith become matters of sense, that they minded them no more ! Oh ! if I had known this, I should never have dreamed out my time as I have done, saith the convinced wretch, but made a more serious business of my preparation. If the day of judgment be too far off, let us lay the scene a little nearer. Suppose one of the damned souls now in torments, that feeleth that which he would never believe, thus crying out, Oh ! had I thought my lazy desires and good meanings would have done me no more good, that my slothfulness would have ended so sadly, I would rather have wept out my eyes, and have



filled the world with sorrowful complaints; I would have bereaved myself of sleep by night, and refused my bread by day, rather than to have wanted time to have thought of God, and the great affairs of my soul. If our faith be so short-sighted that we cannot look as far as the region of darkness, time may come in this world that we shall wish we had done more for God and our precious and immortal souls. First or last we bear witness to this truth, when the neglected soul cometh to be separated from the pampered flesh or over-prized body. If we would learn to shut the eye of sense, and open the eye of faith, we might see it now.

*Use 2.* Is to press you to get oil in your vessels, to be rooted and grounded in faith, settled in love, hope, zeal, temperance, and perfect what is lacking to every grace. That you may be sensible what I exhort you to, I shall give you the sun of it by degrees.

1. Do not merely affect the reputation of good people, and rest there. As the Lord saith of the church of Sardis, Rev. iii. 1, 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' Do not rest in this, that you have a name to live. God judgeth not as man judgeth. Man judgeth according to outward appearance, but God judgeth according to the reality of the thing. Many have the name without the thing: Isa. xlvi. 2, 'For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel;' that is, they get themselves a name to be his people, but they have not the thing itself. On the other side, we read of some 'that are Israelites indeed,' John i. 47. Some are only so in the show and outside, and some are 'disciples indeed,' John viii. 31; so in reality; others are so in pretence only. There is no true ground of solid comfort but in this, in being real disciples. So John viii. 37, we read of some that were 'free indeed.' The Jews had the name of freemen, but were not 'free indeed;' stood upon their liberty; they were in bondage to no man. Some are religious indeed, humble indeed, fear God indeed: when a man hath gotten the thing, he may refer himself to God for the name.

2. Do not rest in a common work of grace. Look, as in the beasts there is some little tincture of reason, so in temporaries there is something that looks like saving grace, but is not; something that resembles it, and looketh most like it; yet it is but the shadow of grace, not true grace itself. Historical faith is the shadow of true saving faith. There are some outward lineaments of repentance in Ahab's humiliation, and Judas his compunction; of spiritual affection in Herod's delight in John; and 'the stony ground received the word with joy;' and some show of reformation there was in those that escaped the pollutions of the world. Therefore if you rest here, without a powerful and inward affecting of the whole heart, you may come short of glory. The grace of temporaries is good in its kind, but must not be rested in. It is good in its kind, it is like priming the post, to make it receptive of other colours; it is an inchoate, imperfect thing. They are affected almost with the same feeling the godly are, come very near. How nice a point is that wherein the temporary and the real Christian differ! Both pray with sorrow, hear with joy, perform duties with some enlargement and sweetness—*Simili fere sensu afficiuntur*—yet, as two hills may seem very near at the top, when their bottoms are far

distant one from another, so these operation may seem near together, when in bottom and root they much differ. These motions argue God's Spirit working on them, not dwelling in them. Actuated they are with the Spirit of Christ assisting, but not reforming; as an angel sometimes appears in an assumed body. But it is dangerous to rest in this; it maketh our sin and judgment the greater if after a taste we rest in a common work. Historical faith, if not growing into a saving sound faith, it is a kind of mocking of God, and a hypocrite's portion. As for instance, we profess to believe him omniscient, yet fear not to sin in his presence; omnipotent, yet cannot depend upon his all-sufficiency; to believe a day of judgment, yet make no preparation for our account, Titus i. 16. Men's sins and judgments are aggravated according to the sense they have had of religion, and so 'their latter end may be worse than their beginning,' 2 Peter ii. 20. And sad it will be for those that from hopeful beginnings fall off from God. I will tell you, a man may live and die with a temporary faith and affections to God and holiness, without making any visible apostasy, and yet have no sound faith of the right constitution. Yea, if you regard what little rooting grace hath in men's hearts, how weak their pulse beateth this way, how strong their affections are to the world and the things thereof, how little they can vanquish the cares and fears of this world, and the temptations that arise from voluptuous living, it is to be feared the far greatest part of Christians are but temporaries.

3. Oh! then, be sure to get this truth of grace into your hearts. Let your hearts be effectually subdued to God; let there be a principle of life set up in them. Religion respects our principles as well as our performances: 2 Tim i. 5, 'The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.' There must be a renewed heart as the fountain, a well-informed conscience as our guide, and faith unfeigned as our great encouragement. And so all acts of charity to God and men are accepted with God as a piece of obedience done to him. If we will not regard the manner, God will not regard the matter. Oh! then, get this renewed heart, and a lively faith, and an awakened conscience: this is to get oil into your vessels, and if once you get this, it will never fail, but increase exceedingly, like the Sareptan's oil.

But how shall we get it?

I answer—(1.) You have this oil from Christ. The unction is from the Holy One, 1 John ii. 20. As the precious oil was first poured on Aaron's head, and then came down to the skirts of his garment, so Christ is first possessed of the Spirit, and then we have it by our union with him: John i. 16, 'Of his fulness we receive grace for grace.' We must go to the fountain every day to seek new supplies. Christ was 'anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows.' Zech. iv., Christ is represented by the bowl and the two olive-trees that always poured forth golden oil. Christ as mediator is the storehouse of the church, who is instructed with all gifts and graces for our benefit. Oh! bring your empty vessels to this golden olive-tree. The widow only brought casks, the oil failed not till the vessels failed.

(2.) If you would have it from Christ, you must use the means of grace, the word, prayer, sacraments, meditation. We need continual

supplies, must use continual prayers, seek the grace of the Spirit to keep in our lamps, Luke xi. 13. So the word; God droppeth in something to the soul that waiteth on him: Mark iv. 24, 'Take heed how you hear; for with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.' If we be earnest and diligent in waiting upon God, God will abound to us in blessing his word to us. So for meditation; Mat. xiii. 19, the highway ground did not bring the word to their minds again; doth not revolve it, mindeth it not, heedeth it not. So for the Lord's supper; it is a means to root us in the love of God when we so often renew our oath of allegiance to him, to excite our faith in Christ. All these are a price put into our hands to get oil in our lamps, and prepare for his coming.

(3.) Keep your vessels clean. The Spirit dwelleth not but in a clean heart: doves build not their habitations on dunghills. He cometh as an efficient cause, as a Spirit assisting, before he comes as a Spirit inhabiting, and purifieth our hearts by faith.

(4.) After you have gotten this oil, cherish it, that it may not decay. Of its own nature it would do so; witness that stock of original righteousness which Adam had. God's promise by which it is secured supposeth our endeavours to waste it: Luke viii. 18, 'Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.'

(5.) Do not only cherish, and keep it from decay, but see that you increase it: 2 Peter i. 5, 'Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge;' 1 Thes. iii. 10, 'Perfect what is lacking;' 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'That as you have received of us how you ought to walk, and please God, so you should abound therein.' A little faith will be as no faith; not honourable to God, nor comfortable to you, nor useful to others. All our doubts, perplexities, uncertainties, come from the smallness of our graces. It will not make an evidence, therefore give diligence. No endeavour, labour, pursuit after God, but hath its recompense; not an earnest thought, an earnest prayer, or time spent. What shall I say? They whose hearts are upon the ways thereof, go on 'from strength to strength.' You are almost at home; nearer than when you first believed; then you thought all your pains too much, now all too little.

Let me apply all to the sacrament.

1. There we come to meet the bridegroom in a way of grace. The marriage covenant between God incarnate and his espoused ones is here celebrated and solemnised. The sacrament is a transfiguration of the last marriage-supper, to ascertain us what entertainment we shall have at the day of judgment, when the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall be made ready, and clothed with fine linen, Rev. xix. 23, and then be received into the nuptial feast: 'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.' All is now prepared in this duty.

2. In some respect there should be as serious preparation for the one as for the other, as we would prepare to die, or prepare to meet Christ the judge. Christ did not wash his disciples' feet when he took them with him to Tabor, to his transfiguration, but when he took them with him at his last supper, John xiii. 7. Surely, to rush upon the presence of the bridegroom with a perfunctory, careless, common frame



of spirit, is a dangerous thing. When a people come hand-over-head, prepare themselves slightly, pray slightly before they come, and live carelessly and negligently, they slight the bridegroom, and wrong themselves, strengthen themselves in sin, rather than against it. Methinks it looks like going to the day of judgment. Here we receive the pledges of our salvation or damnation.

3. We should come with oil in our vessels as well as in our lamps.

[1.] Our lamps should be kept burning bright. If you are sluggish now, it is a sign you are slight in the whole. Surely, now the king sitteth at his table, Cant. i. 2, our spikenard should send forth the smell thereof; a lively exercise of grace. Now we come for meat which perisheth not; now is our familiar converse with Christ, and near communion with him; now we come to our legal investiture; Christ and all his benefits are delivered by these signs which he hath instituted. As if a man should say, Here is my house, when a deed is delivered, and you give up the key, or give possession of land by a turf: this is our solemn taking possession of him and all his benefits. We receive Christ in the promises of the covenant, but here is a particular close application. In the word Christ is offered, and exposed to all, as the brazen serpent, that whoever looked upon him might be healed; but this supper is like the blood sprinkled upon the door-posts. In the work, Christ and immortality are brought to light. Now Christ is slain before our eyes; the bread is put into our hands and mouths.

[2.] We should come with oil in our vessels. Would we have the Spirit blow upon a dead coal? He findeth nothing in us to work upon. We are bidden to examine; and what must we examine? 1 Cor. xi. 28. The apostle will tell you: 'Whether you be in the faith or no,' 2 Cor. xiii. 5. But to speak to this case: I confess, that *in foro ecclesiae*, in the court of the church, all are virgins that take their lamps, that do profess to believe; all these must be admitted; but *in foro cæli*, in the court of heaven, none but converted ones are admitted; but *in foro conscientie*, in the court of conscience, I dare not discourage those that have the grace of the second or third ground. It is a means to strengthen them in faith, hope, and love, and make them more firm in the covenant of God; and the difference is too nice between temporary grace and saving grace for any to exclude themselves. I am bound to come with grace, but I am not bound to come with assurance. Besides, in the kingdom of grace Christ will not shut them out. They that have good affections should come, but with this caution: I would press them to mind the renouncing and engaging part of the covenant, and earnestly to break the league between themselves and their own ways, and engage themselves more firmly to God for time to come; that you may not think as you have done, or speak as you have done, nor behave yourselves in your relations as you have done; but throw sin out of doors. I would press you in the apostle's words, Heb. x. 22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with clean water.' The one relateth to the duty part. 'Let us draw nigh with a true heart;' the other relateth to the promissory part. Though your grace be common grace, it is this way moulded into special.

*Doct. 2.* That this will be found to be true wisdom, and the other folly.

For wisdom, to begin with that. Wisdom is *index sui et obliqui*. Wisdom lieth—

1. In proposing a right end.

2. In the choice of fit means.

3. In an earnest prosecution of the end by these means. This is the property of wisdom in the general, and it holdeth true in godly wisdom. The wise virgins did so. Their end was right; to be admitted into the nuptial feast, or everlasting enjoyment of God. And then they use right means, such as will bring them to the end. We do not use to draw ships in the sea with horses, nor draw waggons with the wind. We must not use contrary means, nor insufficient means. We cannot go to the bottom of a well that is thirty foot deep with a line that is but ten foot. We must use such as will certainly do. The wisdom of God hath fixed means for us, and we are doubly fools if we will not use them opportunely, carefully and constantly; else it is a 'price put into a fool's hand,' Prov. xvi. 17. The wise virgins did all this; sought oil in time both for their lamps and vessels, Luke xiii. 24. On the contrary, he that contents himself with a profession of Christ, without a work of grace upon his heart, is a fool; he is not a profane fool that doth the contrary, but a professing fool; that sort of profession is better than profaneness, so far it is a degree of wisdom; but rested in it is folly, it faileth in all the points of wisdom in the end. They do not esteem the Lord as the chief good, for they think a little ease of the flesh, or a little sensual liberty, or a satisfaction of a lust, to be better; or honour, or pleasure, or gain; this quiets them in the neglect or want of God. They see some good in Christ, offer fair for him, but take him not as the chiefest good; they are willing to part with something, but not with all for his sake.

#### SERMON IV.

*While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.—*

MAT. XXV. 5.

WE have seen wherein they differed, now we shall see again wherein they agree. In the words observe—

1. What happened to the virgins, *they all slumbered and slept*.

2. The occasion of it (I do not say the cause), *while the bridegroom tarried*. The cause of sleeping was *infirmitas humana*; the occasion of it, *mora sponsi*. In the first of these—

[1.] Who? *they all*.

[2.] What? *slumbered and slept*.

First, Who? *they all*. It is no wonder to hear it of the foolish virgins, but that the wise should do it, there is the difficulty; therefore some of the ancients understand it of death, which is called sleep in scripture; but that is improbable, and suiteth not with the frame and drift of this parable. Some would understand it distributively,

not conjunctively; that the wise slumbered, and the foolish slept; but it is not said slumbered *or* slept, but slumbered *and* slept. The meaning is, all of them were not so diligent in their duty as they should have been: even the good are in part negligent as well as the foolish, though they always keep a good conscience, and a heart in some measure always prepared to meet Christ.

Secondly, What? *slumbered and slept*; wherein the degree of their security is set forth. They did not only *slumber*, which is a less failing, but *slept*.

Thirdly, The order, first *slumbered*, and then *slept*.

*Doct.* That the foolish and wise both slumber and sleep.

I shall first inquire, What this slumbering and sleeping is.

Secondly, How far it may befall the children of God, or the wise virgins.

Thirdly, The causes and reasons of it.

First, What this slumbering and sleeping is. It is twofold—that of the body, and that of the mind. That of the body, when the senses cease for a time to do their office; that of the mind is a secure state of soul, and that is twofold—moral and spiritual.

1. Moral. When reason and natural knowledge is as it were asleep and useless to us, a man doth not act as a reasonable creature: Ps. xciv. 8, ‘O ye brutish among the people, when will ye be wise?’ and Ps. xxii. 27, ‘All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;’ Ps. cxix. 59, ‘I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.’ If men did improve common principles, show themselves men, they could not continue in that course of life wherein they allow themselves. In part this sleep of reason may befall the children of God: they do not consider nor turn their minds to their affairs, nor act as men whose eyes are open.

2. Spiritual sleeping. Here I shall show the nature and effects of it.

[1.] The nature of it; when graces are not lively and kept in exercise. I shall instance in those three theological graces, faith, hope, and love; a weak dead faith, a feeble sleepy love, a cold and careless hope.

(1.) A weak and dead faith, that consists more in a form of knowledge than a lively assent to the truths of godliness. A dead opinionative belief may stand with a carnal life: James ii. 20, ‘Faith without works is dead.’ The word of God is come to them in word only, not in power; it puts no life into what we do believe, 1 Thes. ii. 13; doth not work effectually. This will fit the slumbering and sleeping of the foolish virgins. But alas! the wise have their drowsy fits; the truths of the word concerning God, Christ, heaven, and hell, have not such a lively influence upon them, by the blandishments of worldly prosperity. Faith is fallen asleep, ready to give place to the flesh, and they are governed more by fancy and appetite than by the heavenly mind; there is no consideration of the vanity of earthly things; the heart is kept strange to God and heaven, and the soul is taken up with carnal projects more than it should be.

(2.) A feeble sleepy love, which doth not level and direct our actions to the great end of them, which is the pleasing and glorifying of God, so that they live too much to themselves. Love in vigour doth over-



rule us to live unto God : 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 should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.' And this keepeth us more sincere and uniform in our course, always tending to the great end.

(3.) A cold and careless hope, when there is not that earnest and desirous expectation of blessedness to come which doth fortify us against the allurements of sense: Mat. vi. 19-21, ' Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal ; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal ; for where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also.' They do not mind their true treasure.

[2.] The effects of this sleepiness are seen in these things :—

(1.) In some intermission of their care and caution. Watching is a diligent taking heed to ourselves and ways, so as we keep ourselves from sin. We are in constant danger of sins that come on us by insensible degrees: Ps. xxxix. 1, ' I said I would take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.' The best are surprised, and corruption often breaketh out. We may say of them, as Christ of the damsel, ' They are not dead, but sleep.' The children of God are sometimes overtaken by their inadvertency, Gal. vi. 1, or overborne by the violence of temptations, James i. 14, inconsiderately and suddenly surprised with sin. So subtle and assiduous is Satan in tempting, and so ready is corruption to close with the temptation as soon as it is represented, that if a child of God doth but abate anything of his circumspection and diligence, he will be surprised by some one sin or other, and thereby be brought to dishonour God, and so lay a stumbling-block before others. Besides those sins of daily incursion and sudden surreption, Satan lieth in wait to draw us to greater offences, that may dishonour God and wound our peace, and scandalise the world against our profession.

(2.) Some abatement of our zeal and fervency. We are not always fervent in spirit, and do not keep up our life and seriousness in the duties of holiness. Our graces are not actuated and kept in exercise, but suffer some decay, though they be not quite dead. Faith is weak, love is cold, Mat. xxiv. 12. There is not that lively hope, 1 Peter i. 3. Christians should not only be living, but lively: 1 Peter ii. 5, ' Ye as living stones.' Nay, there may be so great a damp and quenching upon us, that there is no outward visible difference between a dead man and a dying Christian: all things in us may be ready to die: Rev. iii. 2, ' Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die.' Life is even quite gone in some cases, when sin hath made fearful havoc in the conscience.

(3.) In forgetfulness or non-attendancy to the Lord's coming. When we live merrily, quietly, in a careless and unprepared estate; this is necessarily to be taken in as the cause of the two former. In the slumbering and sleeping of the foolish virgins the case is clear; Christ's absence or tarrying long is the occasion the world takes to grow secure

and wicked. The scoffers walked after their own lusts, because they said, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' 2 Peter iii. 3, 4. And in the degenerate church, the reason why they were given to sensuality, carnal pomp, and persecution, is set down, Mat. xxiv. 49, 'My Lord delayeth his coming.' Therefore the officers of the church smite their fellow-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken, encourage the wicked, and smite the godly with censures; as it was with the Israelites, there was no speech of making a calf when Moses first went up to the mount, but when he tarried long, Exod. xxxii., 'And as for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him;' then nothing would content them but making a calf. The ordinances and institutions of Christ had never been so perverted in the Christian world, but that they forgot Christ's coming to see how they have been observed: 1 Tim. vi. 14, 'That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.' But now for the wise virgins. Alas! there is not such a constant waiting for the coming of the Lord; for if we did not leave off to think of it, surely we would walk more cautiously, and serve God with greater ardency and alacrity of spirit; but when we forget it, we let loose the reins, and slacken our diligence, and yield to the importunity of the flesh, and suffer ourselves to be distracted with worldly cares, or benumbed with fleshly delights, that we do not mind our duty of preparing for the Lord's coming.

Secondly, How far may this seize upon Christians? The question may be stated negatively and affirmatively; how far it may, and how far it may not.

### 1. Affirmatively.

[1.] It may seize upon them not only when they are young, but when they are of long standing. When they are young: Many a man newly converted, having had as yet no thorough experience of the strength of sin, the danger of temptations, and his own weakness, may bear a little too high upon the confidence of his own resolutions, which, because they are sincere, he thinketh they will easily obtain their effect. In this rank I put Peter, whilst as yet the Spirit was not poured out, and was only under his Master's wing: I count him but a novice then, in comparison of what he was afterwards. He was so confident of his affection to Christ and resolution, that he had not a due sense of his danger, Mat. xxvi. 33. But alas! how soon were his unpractised wings clipped, and he taken in the snare of the fowler! Honest Peter would not believe such weakness in himself; and so inexperienced Christians can hardly believe themselves to be so weak as a temptation sheweth them to be; the more sincere their purpose is, the more confident they are in their own strength, even when near a fearful fall. So a man of long standing, being assured of salvation, may grow negligent; and supposing he hath grace, and is possessed of the love of God, presumes that he needeth not such diligence as when he was doubtful of his state; and if he go round in a course of duty, and avoid grosser sins, he may think it is enough, as if he were now past all danger, and so insensibly falleth asleep or into decay: Rev. iii. 18, 'Because thou sayest that 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 : 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, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and eye-salve that thou mayest see.' It is not spoken to the gross carnal, or to beginners, or persons unacquainted with Christ, but to lukewarm professors, after the first labours of regeneration, and the difficulties of reconciliation with God are passed over, and the terrors of the law well vanquished, and some peace and confidence gotten; then we are in danger of security, by which means all may run to waste in the soul, and sins break out and make our blindness and nakedness appear. The wise virgins slept not until their main work was in some measure over : and therefore a strange security and sleepiness is incident to us, and may befall not only the wicked, who scarce ever think of the world to come, being blinded with present things, but those that are good have their drowsy fits, by which they remit of their zeal, and grow more dead, and are not so diligent in seeking occasions to do good.

[2.] When we are in greatest danger, and matters most concerning us are in hand, and God calleth most for our service, and so have most need to watch, then are we usually most secure; witness the disciples upon Mount Olivet, after many warnings given them by Christ, Mat. xxvi. 41-45. Until Christ telleth them, 'Sleep on now;' that is, sleep if you can; it will not be long ere you are thoroughly awakened; so often are the saints slumbering and sleeping when most need to be awake, and misspend the time in sluggishness and carnal rest which is granted them to prepare themselves for trial. So Jonah i. 5, when a storm arises for his sake, though the winds blow, and the sea roar, and the mariners at their wits' end, yet Jonah was fast asleep. Those most guilty, and those whom the correction pointed at, are most secure under it. And Samson is asleep when the Philistines are ready to come upon him. Now, if ever, should men be awake. Now we are awakened by God's providence, and the estate of the Christian world round about us; now we should exercise all the grace and skill we can.

[3.] They may show their sleepiness in their public relations; as while the envious man sowed tares, the husbandmen were asleep, Mat. xiii. 25. Many times magistrates are asleep when abuses creep in and eat out the bowels of the commonwealth; and ministers are asleep while the kingdom of Christ is undermined; masters of families asleep while disorders creep into their houses. Magistrates are watchers as well as private Christians, Rom. xiii. 6, who sleep, and neglect the care of souls. But especially ministers are to watch over their people's souls, and should put forth their utmost care and diligence, Heb. xiii. 17.

[4.] It may befall them after some solemn service, 2 Chron. xxxv. 20. After this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, then he falleth into that rash engagement against Pharaoh Necho, which cost him his life. Hezekiah after his reformation fell into pride and provocation of God, 2 Chron. xxxii. Many times when we have performed some good service to God, we take occasion to be more careless and secure. We think we are privileged by our former diligence: 'If the righteous



trust in his righteousness, and commit iniquity,' Ezek. xxxiii. 13; that is, upon the presumption that he laid in a fore-merit. Our hearts will be seeking some unlawful liberty, and we intermit our watch upon such occasions.

2. Negatively. We must make the exceptions that are necessary.

[1.] Though the wise virgins may slumber and sleep, and there be an intermission of the acts of grace, yet no intercision of the habits of grace, or radical inclination to God. *Gradus remittitur, actus intermittitur, habitus non amittitur*. Some degrees may be remitted, acts intermitted, but the habit not extinguished; still the seed of God remaineth in them; love is the predominant habit. Sin doth not possess the heart instead of God, 1 John ii. 15. The habitual bent of the soul is more for God than for the flesh or the world. However he fail in some individual actions, the scope and tenor of his life is for God and sincere obedience. There is life and sap at the root, though in the winter the trees be without leaves and blossoms: Cant. v. 2, 'I sleep, but my heart waketh.' There is faith, and hope, and love in their hearts all this while; the Spirit of God abideth in them, and keepeth alive his work: 2 Tim. i. 14, 'That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.' The Spirit remaineth in the saints, to maintain the habits of grace. Their choice of God for their portion remaineth unshaken. They have chosen the better part, adhere to it, and have a general purpose to please God in all things.

[2.] A universal slumber is not usually incident to the saints. It is not the sleep of the whole man as to all goodness; it is not in all parts of the soul. If there be a remiss will, and dead affections, yet not a sleepy conscience; something that taketh God's part, as appeareth, because they are unsatisfied with this dull and drowsy estate.

[3.] They are more easily alarmed and roused up out of it than others that sleep the sleep of death. Their faith and love is soon awake again, and easily set a-work for God; there is somewhat to work upon. A true Christian riseth by unfeigned repentance, when his conscience hath but leisure, and helps to deliberate, and bethinks what he hath done; and so much the better resolveth and bethinketh himself against his sin for the time to come.

[4.] When they arise again, and repent, and do their first works, they are more earnest and fervent than they were before: as it were to make amends for their former languishing, and to redeem the time they have lost, they double their diligence.

Thirdly, I come to the reasons of this sleepiness.

1. There are two principles in the children of God—the flesh inclining to sleep, and the spirit to wake: Mat xxvi. 41, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;' and therefore the degree of grace which the best attain unto in this life is mixed with imperfection. The guiding and commanding faculties do but imperfectly direct, and the inferior faculties imperfectly obey. It is the office of the understanding and the will to command, of the inferior faculties to obey. There is weakness in all of them; therefore it is said, James iii. 2, 'In many things we offend all.' The understanding in many things is but a blind guide; the will is but in part rectified, and so cannot exercise such a powerful command over our thoughts, passions, and senses.

2. Variety of outward occurrences, working upon the diversity of principles in us; as sometimes we are in a prosperous estate, sometimes in deep troubles; both may cause this deadness and drowsiness in us. Sometimes deep troubles make us 'weary of well-doing,' 2 Thes. iii. 13. So Heb. xii. 3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners, lest you be weary, and faint in your minds.' Now, as this weariness and heaviness causeth sleep in the body, so it doth in the soul. We are tired in God's service, and then our wheels are clogged. A man may be secure in trouble, but usually he is so in time of peace. Peace, wealth, and honour are often abused to spiritual drowsiness, and secure neglect of God: 'Ease slayeth the fool,' Prov. i. 32. We had need watch when Delilah spreads her lap for us, and the delights of the world open their bosom to us. Surfeiting with the abundance of worldly prosperity, we neglect the power of religion, and please ourselves with the form. David, enjoying peace and plenty, slew Uriah his friend, who in his adversity spared Saul his enemy; yea, his heart smote him but for the cutting off the lap of his garment. In the abundance of outward comforts we sit loose from God; therefore we have those cautions, Deut. viii. from ver. 7 to ver. 14.

3. Conversing with spiritual sluggards, that count it a high piece of wisdom not to be too forward. Irreligious company and example is a great matter, and hath a mighty force upon us; and though it doth not begin sin in the soul, it doth increase it, Isa. vi. 6. Sin is by propagation, not by imitation; but yet the contagion of example is a great advantage to corruption. To be among warm, heavenly, mortified, self-denying Christians, is a great advantage in the spiritual life. There is a notable provocation and excitement in their example. Saul among the prophets had his raptures, 1 Sam. x. 10; Heb. x. 24, 'Let us provoke one another to love and good works.' This begets a holy emulation who shall excel; but carnal company is a deadening thing. We are more susceptible of evil than good; we catch a disease from one another, but we do not get health one from another. By touching the unclean they became unclean, but he that was unclean was not purified by touching the clean. The conversations of the wicked have more power to corrupt than the good to provoke and excite to virtue. A man that would keep himself awake unto God, and mind the saving of his soul, must shake off evil company: Ps. cxix. 115, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.' And by evil company I mean not only the profane, who bespeak their own hatred and detestation by their apparent odiousness, but the loose and careless. As we are to take heed that we be not allured to that which is evil, so that we be not deadened to that which is good. Neglect of God will keep us out of heaven as well as profaneness. We easily leaven one another with deadness and formality; frequent society with dead-hearted persons breedeth it, such whose conference is empty and unsavoury, and altogether of worldly things. Certainly our dulness and backwardness is such that we need the most powerful helps.

4. Another cause is a dead worship: *missa non mordet*. Christ compareth spiritual duties to new wine, Mat. ix., but the pharisaical feasts to taplash, or old unsavoury stuff that hath no spirits. Old

bottles will endure that well enough. Nothing lulleth the soul asleep so much as a perfunctory worship, or sleepy devotions. Christ's ordinances are simple, but full of virtue; his institutions conscientiously observed will keep us awake: Ps. cxix. 93, 'I will never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me.' Use them much in faith and obedience, and graces will be preserved in us in a lively manner, and constant exercise: 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 'Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesying.' If you would not quench the Spirit, you must not carelessly use the means of grace: 'The words of the wise are as goads to prick us forward' (Eccles. xii. 10) in heaven's way. To stir us up to our duty, the Spirit of God sharpeneth and pointeth the word, that it may be as goads in our sides. When we are negligent, here is quickening. A dull ministry as well as a dull minister maketh us fall asleep.

5. Slumber is the cause of sleeping. Mark the order in the text: they first slumbered, and afterwards slept. One degree of carelessness makes way for another; and usually there is a lesser degree at first. Take heed of the beginnings of declinations. If we would avoid sleep, we must avoid slumber. No man becometh stark naught at the first step. One careless prayer maketh way for another. Give way to it now, and it will settle into an utter deadness at last. Men fear not the danger of little sins, and so are hardened under them, till they fall into greater. Small sins harden as well as great sins; it is hard to say which more. Indeed at first little sins seem to awaken compunction. The prick of a pin maketh a man start, but a heavy blow stunneth him. David, when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, his heart smote him; but when he fell into adultery and blood, he was like one in a swoon. This is true; but then, on the other side, great sins are more apparent and liable to the notice of conscience; but we neglect small sins, and so inveterate custom groweth upon us, and we are insensibly hardened by a carelessness and constant neglect of those kind of sins; yea, sometimes more than by gross falls. A surfeit or violent distemper maketh us run to a physician; but when a disease groweth upon us by degrees, we have death in our bowels ere we know it. We take care to mend a great breach, but a leak unespied drowneth the ship. We have need always to stand upon our watch. Many great mischiefs would not ensue, if we took notice of the beginnings of those distempers which afterwards settle upon us.

6. The omission of holy duties, and the want of a constant serious exercise, induces a secure careless temper of spirit. Solomon telleth us, Prov. xix. 15, 'Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep, and the idle soul shall suffer hunger.' Labour dispelleth the vapours, and scattereth them, but sloth and idleness maketh way for sleep. It is true in the soul. The renewed part hath need of a great deal of spiritual exercise to keep it awake; much prayer, much hearing, much fasting. The apostle saith, Rom. xii. 11, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' The way to be fervent in duties is to be frequent in them. Be much in action, and in the exercise of grace, that you may be kept fresh and lively. Wells are the sweeter for draining; so is the soul the more fresh and ready for every good work. In gifts, we see, if they be not traded with, they rust and decay, and fail; so in



graces: 'To him that hath shall be given.' He that uses his gifts well shall find them increased. The right arm is bigger and stronger and fuller of spirits than the left, because more in use.

7. Grieving the Spirit causeth him to suspend his quickening influence, and then the soul is in a dead and drowsy estate. Though the children of God dare not quench the Spirit, yet they may grieve the Spirit, Eph. iv. 30. The conscience of a renewed man, after it is wounded by gross sins, may be a dead and stupified conscience for a long time: witness David and Jonah.

8. Immoderate liberty in worldly things, as worldly cares and fleshly delights. Sobriety is necessary, or a sparing meddling with those worldly comforts that do mightily indispose us for the Christian warfare, 1 Peter ii. 7; Luke xxi. 34, 'Take heed your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.' Look, as the multitude of gross vapours cast us into a sleep, so do these delights and cares stupify the soul: Ps. cxix. 37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' You will need quickening if you give way to vanity.

*Use.* Oh! take heed of this evil: Mark xiii. 26, 'Watch, lest the Lord cometh suddenly, and he find you sleeping.' Would you have Christ come and find you in this case?

1. Some are wholly in a state of spiritual sleep. To them the Lord speaketh, Eph. v. 14, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' And of such the apostle speaks, 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4, 'Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.' It is all reason, and more than time, that you should thoroughly rouse up yourselves from the condition of sin wherein you have gone. It is a shame such should be among Christians, such as snort still upon the bed of security, when the light of the gospel shineth round about them. Oh! when God calleth, 'Awake, and rise from the dead;' if not, God may punish you by your own sin. One of his heaviest judgments is a 'spirit of slumber, and deep sleep,' Rom. xi. 8. And then what will the end of it be? You may sleep, but 'your damnation sleepeth not,' 2 Peter ii. 3. Certainly we should commiserate the case of such, especially if they be related to us; and seek to awaken them from the sleep of sin, that they may be brought home to Christ. Oh! poor careless creatures! they fear not God, nor think of his wrath, nor make preparation to stand before the Son of man at his coming.

2. There are others apt to slumber now and then, though for the main they have 'chosen the better part.' To these the apostle speaks, 1 Thes. v. 6, 'Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.' There is great need. Our adversary watcheth; the devil is observing all our motions and postures; if we fall asleep, we are exposed as a prey to him. There are many that mind our spiritual harm. If we had no enemy without, there is *hostis domesticus*, a bosom enemy; and we are prone as others to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore you may not sleep as do others. You have another spirit in you, and if you are God's children you have other obligations: Rom. xiii. 11, 'It is high time to awake out of sleep; for your salvation is nearer than when you first believed.'

When you first gave your names to Christ, you thought no labour too much, no pains too great. How vigilant and diligent then ! and will you sleep now ? Your course beginneth to draw to an end, and you are almost ready to set sail for the other world, that you may meet with Christ. Oh ! now you have shaken off the sleep of sin, shake off the sleep of sloth too. Shall we be drowsy and cold at last ?

First, I shall give you the signs of this sin.

Secondly, Motives against it.

Thirdly, Directions to avoid it.

First, The signs.

1. Senselessness, in not discerning and weighing the things that befall us, good or evil. An instance of the one we have, Hosea vii. 8, 'For she did not know that I gave her corn and wine and oil.' The Lord is very liberal to us, yet little notice is taken of it. An instance of the other we have, Isa. xlii. 25, 'Yet he laid it not to heart.' In mercies we neither consider their author, nor their end, nor their cause. Their author : We are like swine, that eat the acorns, but never look up to the oak from whence they fall. It is said of the church, 'She hath dove's eyes ;' they peck and look upward. We should see God in every mercy. A drowsy inattentive soul heedeth it not, but is swallowed up in present delights and enjoyments, and looketh no further. It is our privilege above the beasts to know the first cause. Other creatures live upon God, but are not capable of knowing God. Idolatry and profaneness had never crept into the world if men had kept up the sense of God's bounty. Some never regard the end of mercies, which is to draw in our hearts to God ; therefore called the 'cords of a man,' Hosea vi. 4, being so many bonds and ties upon us : What honour hath been done to God for this and that mercy ? I allude to that in Esther vi. 3. See how David reasoneth, 2 Sam. vii. 2, 'I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God within curtains.' When the heart is urging to duty upon this score : God hath been good to me, given me food and raiment, and plentiful provision for the comfort of this life ; what have I done for God ? Not only the impenitent abuse mercy, Rom. ii. 4, but David lost his awe of God, because he had not a thankful sense of the mercies of God, 2 Sam. xii. 7, 8. So for corrective providences. The body is a tender part with most men ; though they are sensible of the smart of the lash, yet they do not consider the hand that striketh, nor the deserving procuring cause ; they do not look upward nor inward ; they do not see the hand of God in it : Isa. xxvi. 11, 'When his hand is lifted up they will not see ;' look upon it as a chance, 1 Sam. vi. 4. Job had explicit thoughts of God : Job i. 23, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken.' Nor the cause, Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain ? a man for the punishment of his sins ?' If sickness cometh, if a relation be taken away, if an estate blasted, a waking conscience looketh to the cause : 'For this cause many are sick, and many are fallen asleep,' 1 Cor. xi. We should see the mind of God in his rod. When the Israelites fled before the men of Ai, Joshua looketh out for the troubler. So the children of God search for the sin that is the cause of their trouble.

2. Stupid dulness and cold indifferency in heavenly things : their

want of zeal and cheerfulness in holy duties ; they go about them heavily : dull of hearing, Mat. xiii. 5 ; cold in prayer, when they should be fervent and effectual, James v. 6. In all things we show forth a heartless formality. Grace is asleep in the soul, and thence cometh a sleepy profession, a sleepy hearing, a sleepy praying, a sleepy receiving. The word, that was wont to be as burning coals, leaveth no impression, Luke xxiv. 32. Your whole converse with the living God is cold and dead-hearted. In such a condition a man heareth as if he heard not, and prayeth as if he prayed not, and receiveth as if he received not, and mourns for sin as if he mourned not, and rejoiceth in God as if he rejoiced not, looks after heaven and heavenly things as if he sought them not ; and so brings little honour to God, and little profit and comfort to his own soul.

3. Tedious irksomeness in God's service. They grow weary of the ways of God : Mal. i. 13, ' Behold, what a weariness is it ! ' Amos viii. 5, ' When will the new moons be over, and the sabbath past ? ' Shall God do so great things for us in Christ, and shall anything which God hath commanded be grievous to us ? How unkind is this ! Neither have we a hard master, nor hath he enjoined us tedious work, but all our duties have a sweetness in them : Micah vi. 3, ' Do not my words do good ? ' You carry it so as if God did not deal well with his people, or were not easy to be served. His commands are not grievous, and his yoke is easy ; trials sent by him not above measure, his corrections not above our deserving ; therefore why should we snuff at his service ? Weariness and repining at God's service is an ill sign. God loveth and requireth a willing people. This weariness, though it doth not make us wholly abandon God's service, yet it makes us slight it, and mind it no more than how to get it over any way. Oh ! take heed, then, of growing weary of religion, and attending on the duties thereof ; to look upon these as distractions, or matters by the by, or interruptions of the work we would be upon. They are led much by sense and carnality that esteem nothing but what yieldeth pleasure to the sense, or gratifieth the outward man.

4. Forgetfulness of changes, and vain dreams of worldly happiness. When we have a carnal pillow to rest upon, we fall asleep, Ps. xxx. 6, 7. A Christian should sit loose from all earthly things. There was leaven in the thank-offering. We should be content to dwell in booths as the Israelites : Ps. xxxix. 5, ' Surely every man in his best estate is vanity. '

5. Carnal complacency. The peace and pleasure which you live upon is fetched more from the world than from God and heaven ; and you live in quietness of mind, not so much from the belief of the love of God in Christ, and the hope of heaven, as because you feel yourselves well in your bodily estate, and live at ease and in prosperity in the world, and have something grateful to the flesh, Luke xii. 19-21. Oh ! that soul is in a dangerous condition, when the world is so pleasing and lovely to it, that it can take contentment and delight in it without God, or apart from God. To many worldly prosperity is so sweet, that it can keep them quiet under the guilt of wilful sins. When you have your heart's desire for a while, you can forget eternity,



or bear those thoughts with security which otherwise would amaze your souls.

Secondly, Motives.

1. Your enemy watcheth ; the devil is never asleep, 1 Peter v. 8 ; he observeth you in all postures, and watcheth all possible advantages against the children of God ; and will not you stand upon your guard and look about you ?

2. If you sleep you hazard yourselves to the whip, or God's severe correction, Hosea v. 15. God findeth out many times a very smart rod to whip lazy drowsy saints to their duty. He will not suffer grace to rust in his children. Your awakening will be sad. God sent a tempest after Jonah. Some sharp cross or other will fall upon us.

3. The eyes of many are upon us, and shall we be slumbering and sleeping ? 1 Cor. iv. 9, ' We are made a spectacle to the world, angels, and men.' Miscarriages will tend to God's dishonour.

4. When grace is asleep, sin breaketh loose. There is no sin but a man is exposed to in a secure estate : therefore the devil laboureth as much as he can to cast us into this temper. When David walked at ease on the top of his house, little did he know the evil of his own heart, and the danger of the temptation.

5. Every lesser indisposition, that hindereth any degree of communion with God, should be grievous to the children of God. If we do not take heed to the beginnings of sins, further mischief will ensue, when temptations are near, importunate, and constant. Little sticks set green ones on fire ; when the thatch once taketh fire, it is hard to quench it ; therefore we should not rest in such a temper.

6. Consider, God's eye is ever upon us, and beholdeth all our ways : Job xxxi. 4, ' Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps ? ' Shall we sleep when the great God looketh on us ? How dreadful is his displeasure ! There is no dallying with him.

Thirdly, Means.

1. Pray to God for his quickening Spirit, that he would stir us up to watchfulness. David is ever and anon crying out for quickening grace.

2. We should stir up ourselves. Much of this temper cometh upon us because of our own laziness, and ordinary indisposition : 2 Tim. i. 6, ' Stir up the gift of God that is in thee ; ' Isa. lxiv. 6, ' There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.'

3. We should maintain a lively sense of Christ's appearing, Luke xii. 35. ' This looking, and longing, and waiting keepeth the soul alive and awake : Heb. ix. 28, ' To them that look for him ; ' Phil. iii. 20, ' Whence we look for a Saviour.' Many may talk of that day, but do not look for it.

4. Keep these four fundamental radical graces lively and active in the soul—faith, fear, hope, and love. Faith presents things to us as they are, and puts them in being. Love constraineth us, 2 Cor. v. 14. Fear maketh God everywhere present ; and hope worketh in us a desirous expectation of blessedness to come, and this keeps the soul awake.

5. Keep a sense of the love of God upon your hearts. When your

drowsy fits are coming on you, say as they in Jer. xxxv. 6, I dare not; my Father hath commanded me the contrary. Hath not God forbidden this? how can I rest in such a temper of soul?

6. Improve the death of Christ for the destroying this sleepy temper. The great design of Satan is to lull us asleep; now Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John iii. 8. Now, shall we tie those knots the faster that Christ came to unloose, and tear open those wounds that Christ came to bind up and heal? Therefore let this evil frame of soul be far from you.

## SERMON V.

*While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*—MAT. XXV. 5, 6.

THERE is one clause in the former verse that remaineth undiscussed, 'The bridegroom tarried,' which I shall speak to in this verse.

Where observe—

1. The time, *at midnight*.

2. The means of awakening the sleepy virgins, *there was a cry made*.

3. The matter of the cry, the unexpected coming of the bridegroom, *behold, the bridegroom cometh*.

4. An excitement to their duty, *go ye out to meet him*. Still the allusion is carried on to the matter from whence this parable is taken. There were virgins with the bridegroom, and virgins with the bride; and that the bridegroom might be received with esteem, and attended with all respect, some of them were to go before and raise the cry in season, to bring the virgins forth to meet him. So here, Christ sends a cry before him to admonish and exhort the church to prepare and meet him.

[1.] With respect to every particular soul, this cry is to be referred to the voice and importunity of them that are the children of the bride-chamber, or friends of the bridegroom, John iii. 29; who all tell us that the Lord is at hand, 1 Peter iv. 7; that he will shortly come, Heb. x. 37. And still the faithful ministers of the church do cry aloud, and call upon us to meet the bridegroom.

[2.] With respect to the general meeting of the church in one great rendezvous or congregation, it is meant of the trump of the archangel, spoken of in many places, which I shall quote by and by, calling us to come to judgment.

*Doct.* The bridegroom will certainly come, but at his own time; and then all shall be called upon to go forth to meet him.

I shall handle this point with respect to the circumstances of this parable.

1. I shall prove the certainty of his coming.

2. Speak of the tarrying of the bridegroom, or the delay of his coming.

3. His coming at midnight, or the uncertainty of the time when he will come.

4. The cry that is raised before his coming. Then I shall give every circumstance mentioned its due weight.

*First*, Of the certainty of his coming : it is needful to premise that, because the efficacy of the whole discourse dependeth upon it. Reason saith he may come, but faith saith he will come.

First, Reason saith he may come : It argueth—

1. From the nature of God. There is a God, and this God is just : it is agreeable to his general justice that it should be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do evil ; these principles are out of dispute, and supposed as the foundations of all religion. Now, supposing these principles, there must be a day of reckoning, for in the world the best go to the wall many times, and are exercised with poverty, disgrace, and scorn, when the wicked are full of plenty, and live at ease, Luke xvi. 25 ; 1 Cor. xv. 19. Sure it is that there is a God, and sure it is that he taketh care of human affairs, and will judge accordingly ; what is the reason then of this disproportion ? The wicked are reserved to future punishment, and the godly to future reward. Now the distinction that is put between men at death doth not suffice, for that is private, and doth not vindicate the justice of God in the eyes of the world, and that is but upon a part. We read of the spirits of just men made perfect, and the spirits that are now in prison ; but nothing of a reward for the body, or punishment for the body. The bodies of men, being servants of righteousness, or instruments of sin, surely ought to partake of weal or woe, of the curse or blessing that is due to the person ; for the body is, as Tertullian saith, the soul's sister and co-heir, and is to share with it in its estate. But at death the body is senseless, and mouldereth into dust, and till it be raised up again and joined to the soul, it can neither partake of weal or woe ; therefore there is a day when God will deal with the whole man ; otherwise, how shall the goodness of God, who is a liberal rewarder of virtue, appear, unless he render to the body a full recompense of the service it hath done the soul, in yielding up all its natural appetites, pleasures, interests, and satisfactions to the conduct of reason and grace, for the practice of that which is good ; or the justice of God, which is the avenger of sin, which would be too narrow and defective, unless it punish the body with the soul ? Usually the affections of the body debauch the soul, and the pleasures of the senses blind and misguide our reason. Certainly, the love of sin being rooted in bodily pleasures, it is fit it should be punished with pain, and such pain as is proportionable to the dignity of him against whom the offence is committed. Now God being of an infinite and unlimited dignity and authority, how could the punishment of the body by death be proportionable to the offence committed against an infinite God ? An outrage done to the supreme majesty of princes is punished more than an offence against an inferior person ; therefore there must be a time when the body shall be raised, to be capable of such a punishment. Besides, how could the soul be completely happy, since it was made for a body, if it should always remain a widow, and never meet with its old mate again ?



2. It argueth from the providence of God. There are many judgments that are pledges that God will at length judge the world for sin; as the drowning of the old world, the burning of Sodom, the destruction of Jerusalem; these are a document and proof what God will do to the rest of ungodly ones, for they are set forth as an ensample, Jude 7. The force of the argument lieth in this, that God is the same, still in one mind, who can turn him? He hateth the sin of one as well as the other. In all his dispensations he is always consonant and like himself, Gal. iii. 20. If he would not put up with the sins of the old world, he will not put off the iniquities of the new; if he punished Sodom, he will punish others that sin in like manner; for he is not grown more indulgent to sin than he was before. Therefore, if it be not now, there will be a time when he will call them to an account and reckoning. When man first sinned, God did not immediately execute the sentence against him, but gave him time of repentance till he died; and since he giveth every man time and space, he would not have all the world be born at once, and die at once, but to live in several successions of ages, from father to son in divers generations, till he cometh to the period which providence hath fixed. Now, as he reckoneth with every man particularly at death, so with all the world at the end of time. Particular judgments show that God is not asleep, nor unmindful of human affairs, but the general judgment is deferred till then.

3. From the feelings of conscience. After sin committed men tremble, though there be none to call them to an account, as when the sin is secret, and the person powerful. Conscience is under a dread of divine justice, and the solemn process and triumph which one day it must have; hence conscience is sensible: Rom. ii. 8, Felix trembled when Paul reasoned of judgment to come, Acts xxiv. 25. There are hidden fears in the conscience, which is soon revived and awakened by the thought of this day. Every guilty person is a prisoner to divine justice, and being held in the invisible chains of conscience, standeth in dread of a great and general assize.

4. The conveniency of such a day.

[1.] To vindicate truth and honesty from the false judgment of the world. The best cause is often oppressed; there needeth a review of things by a higher court, that that which is good may be restored to its public honour, and evil may receive its proper shame. Christ will convince the world of his love to the saints, when he cometh 'to be admired in them,' 2 Thes. i. 10, and when their faith is 'found to praise and glory,' 1 Peter i. 7. Thus shall it be done to the men whom Christ will honour, proclaim their pardon, adorn them with grace, introduce them into their everlasting habitations, and this in the eyes of the scorning wicked; as that nobleman, 'Thine eyes shall see it, but not taste of it.' Then for their everlasting confusion, their crimes shall be repeated in the ears of all the world, and their false appearances shall be refuted.

[2.] That the counsels and courses of God's manifold wisdom and justice may be solemnly applauded. We now view providence by pieces; but then the whole context and coherence of it shall be set together, and the full history of all the world produced before the saints.

[3.] Such a coming is necessary, that God may fit us with all kind of arguments against sin, and so a restraint will be put upon the heart against it. Many times sin and wickedness is acted in secret : Eccles. xii. 14, 'God will bring every work into the judgment, with every secret thought, whether it be good or evil ;' and 1 Cor. iv. 5, 'Christ will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart.' Many make no conscience of secret sins, and if they make conscience of acts, yet not of thoughts ; yet according to Christ's theology, malice is heart-murder, lustful inclinations heart-adultery, mind-imaginations are heart-idolatry. There may be a great deal of evil in a discontented thought against providence, Ps. lxxiii. 22. He that sinneth secretly is conscious to himself that he doth evil, and therefore seeketh a veil and covering. Men are unjust in secret, unclean in secret, envious in secret, declaim against God's children in secret, neglect duty in secret, sensual in secret, afraid that men should know it, yet not afraid of the great God. Man cannot damn us, man cannot fill our consciences with everlasting burnings. Now that we may be ashamed to commit those sins before God, the day of judgment is appointed to set these sins in order before us : Ps. l. 22, 'I will reprove thee, and set thy sins in order before thee.'

Secondly, If it be doubtful to reason, it is sure to faith. Faith showeth he will come. The light of faith is more certain and more distinct. More certain, because it buildeth upon a divine testimony, which is more infallible than the guesses of reason, and yields us a more compendious way to confute atheism than our arguings, by which we are often entangled. It is so, for God hath said it. And it is more distinct. Nature could never find out the circumstances of that day ; it only apprehendeth the coming of a judge ; but by whom this judgment shall be managed, in what quality he shall come, as a bridegroom, and lord, and husband of the church, it knoweth nothing. In what manner he shall proceed, and with what company and attendance, all this we have from special revelation. Faith argueth—

1. From Christ's merit and purchase. Would he buy us at so dear a rate, and cast us off so lightly, as to come no more at us ? Surely he that came to redeem us will come to save us ; if he came to suffer, he will come to triumph. Faith seeing Christ upon the cross, determineth, I shall see him in the clouds. Would he be at all this cost and preparation for nothing, and purchase what he never meant to possess ? It cannot be. If he came from heaven upon the one errand, will he not come upon the other ? Surely Christ will not lose all this pains he hath taken to purchase to himself a people.

2. Faith argueth from Christ's affection to us, which is very great. Christ is not gone in anger, but about business, to set all things at rights for the great espousals. He that wooeth a virgin, if he went away from her in anger, she might well suspect he would never see her again. As bridegrooms use to fetch their brides, so will Christ ; we should never come at him otherwise : his love will not let him rest satisfied till we and he meet again to enjoy one another's company. Certainly he who delighted among the sons of men before the world was, Prov. viii. 31, who delighted to converse with his people in

human shape before his incarnation, who took pleasure to spend his time busily amongst them, and to 'dwell with them in the days of his flesh,' John ix. 45; in short, he that had a mind of returning before he went away, certainly he will once more leave heaven for their sakes. When he hath done his work there, he will return, and bring his people along with him to glory, and the full fruition of the promises. He will stay no longer than our affairs do require, John xiv. 3.

3. The affections of his saints to him, which Christ will satisfy. There are many that never saw him, and yet believed in him, and loved him heartily: 1 Peter i. 8, 'In whom believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' and John xx. 29, 'Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen me, and yet have believed.' Their faith is not misplaced, they shall find him such a one as was to be believed, loved, and obeyed. Now, to gratify their desires, Christ will appear and show himself: 'With these eyes shall I see my redeemer.' The children of God cannot look to heaven, but they remember they have a Saviour to come from thence: Phil. iii. 20, 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' Paul speaketh in his own name, and in the name of all those like himself. And Rev. xxii. 17, 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come.' The Holy Ghost breedeth the desire, and the church answereth the motion. Nature saith not, Come, but, Stay still. If it might go by voices, whether Christ should come or no, would carnal men give their votes this way? The voice of corrupt nature is, Depart, Job xxii. 14. Carnal men are of the mind of the devil: 'Art thou come to torment us before our time?' Mat. viii. But the Spirit in the bride raiseth these desires. Now, would Christ disappoint these desires which he hath raised in the hearts of his children, and set them a-longing, and a-looking, and a-groaning for that which shall never be? It cannot be imagined.

4. From the constitution of the church. He hath dispensed gifts and graces there, and left ordinances there; and he will come, and require an account of things during his absence, how we have improved our talents, Mat. xxv. 31, how things have been managed in his house: 1 Tim. vi. 14, 'Keep my commandments without rebuke, till the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.' Christ is now removed from us, retired within the curtains of the heavens; but he will come again: 1 Cor. xvi. 22, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema maranatha;' that is, cursed till the Lord come.

5. From his promise. We have his word in pawn. It is an ancient promise, made long ago: Jude 15, 'Behold the Lord cometh;' and hath been received in all ages by the Lord's messengers; Moses, and David, and Solomon, and Daniel, and Job, and Zechariah, and Malachi; and revived by Christ at his departure, John xiv. 3; by the angel, Acts i. 11. And the apostles everywhere put us in mind of Christ's coming. Now we may reason thus: *Fidelis Deus in omnibus, in ultimo non deficiet.* God hath ever stood to his word, many inconvenient providences, yet promises still accomplished; not one word of God hath failed. Every one that hath had experience of God may



make that acknowledgment that Joshua did : Josh. xxiii. 14, ‘ Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you.’ As unlikely things have come to pass, that have been foretold in the word. Were the old believers deceived, that expected his coming in the flesh? Surely God never meant to deceive us. He will come again : ‘ If it were not so, I would have told you,’ John xiv. 3. Christ’s deed and performance never gave his word the lie.

6. His promise is solemnly confirmed—

[1.] By an outward sign and memorial : 2 Cor. xi. 26, ‘ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord’s death until he come.’ God knew he had to do with distrustful creatures, therefore left a monument to keep the promise a-foot in the church, and to revive our hopes. Would Christ institute an ordinance for the solemn remembrance of his appearing, if he meant no more to come at us?

[2.] By a real pledge, his Spirit dwelling in us. He is gone to heaven, to prepare heaven for us, and hath left his Spirit with us to prepare us for heaven. He hath left his Spirit in the church, and doth give out frequent tokens of love, to show that he doth not forget us. Christ and a believer are not strange. There is a constant intercourse between them. We are absent from him in the body, but there are frequent messages of love. We hear from him in the word, prayer, supper, and will he not come again that is so mindful of us at every turn? He did not forget us in his exaltation, as the butler forgot Joseph; when preferred at court, he did not remember Joseph in prison. Now, in his Father’s house, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and will not always leave us liable to sinning and suffering. Surely he that quickeneth us by the influences of his grace, and refresheth us with the tastes of his love, he will come again. In short, what would our faith be worth if Christ would not come again? Here we have but a slender enjoyment of Christ; our full communion is when he taketh us to himself.

*Secondly*, I shall now speak of the tarrying of the bridegroom, ‘ While the bridegroom tarried.’ What! is Christ more backward than the church, that goeth forth to meet him? They are ready with their lamps, but he delayeth his coming.

*Ans.* 1. Some understand it of our opinion, not the reality of the thing. Though Christ come always with the soonest, yet to us he seemeth to tarry. Why? Because earnest desires crave a present satisfaction, and ‘ hope deferred maketh the heart sick,’ Prov. xiii. 12; and Prov. x. 26, ‘ As vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.’ Expectation is in itself tedious, especially when accompanied with difficulties. Certainly being accompanied with present troubles, it is more tedious. The flesh groweth impatient after its own ease; and in this sense the bridegroom is not slack, but we are hasty. I do observe it the rather, because the same happeneth when we expect Christ to help us in our particular distresses. Because of the impatiency of the flesh, and the levity of our minds, and the weariness of expectation, the time seemeth

long. There is our time, and Christ's time. Our time is always with us, but his time is not come: Jer. xiv. 19, 'We looked for peace, and there is no good; for the time of healing, and behold trouble.' In this sense Christ only seemeth to delay his coming. We are eager upon enjoyment, we would have it now.

*Ans.* 2. Really. He doth tarry, and suspends his coming. There is a great efflux of time between his ascension and second coming, and that for wise reasons.

1. That all this while there may be space for the world to repent. *Mora sponsi pœnitentie tempus est*, saith Jerome: Rom. ii. 4, 'Despiseest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' There is *finis operis et operantis*. Whatever God's intentions be, his dealings, his forbearance and long-suffering should lead us to repentance. God useth great patience to the wicked: Rom. ix. 22, 'Endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.' So Rev. ii. 21, 'I gave her space to repent, and she repented not.' God giveth leave to repent, visible means to repent, and space to repent, even there where he giveth not effectual grace. Wicked men abuse his patience, take encouragement from thence to run into all extravagancy; but God's aim is to leave them without excuse.

2. That all the elect may be gathered: 2 Peter iii. 9, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' God would have the world filled with mankind, and endure for many generations, till it come to that period which his providence hath appointed. And what is that period? Till all that belong to the election of his grace be brought in to him; for all things are for the elect's sake. Now when his number is full, he will come. These were not to be born all at once; and it requireth time and pains to work upon each elect soul after they are come into the world: therefore 'he is not slack as men are slack.' Men's slowness in performing their promises cometh from their unwillingness, or backwardness to do the thing; or from impotency and weakness, or want of foresight of all possible difficulties; or else from their forgetfulness. None of these are in God: not forgetfulness; for 'he is mindful of his people,' Ps. cxi. 5. He will not stay longer than the appointed time. Not backwardness; for he waiteth, as well as you wait, for the fittest time, Isa. xxx. 18. Not from weariness; for he can do whatever he will.

3. To exercise our patience to the full: Col. i. 24, 'Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you; that fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in the flesh for his body's sake, which is his church.' Not as if Christ's personal sufferings for the redemption of sinners were imperfect, and so to be supplied by the sufferings of others: no; it is meant of Christ mystical. So the sufferings are not perfect, or filled up, till every member of his body endure their allotted portion and share. This cup goeth by course, and round: Christ first, we next. It goeth from hand to hand, while the world continueth: James i. 4, 'Let patience have its perfect work.' That cannot be but under

great and long troubles. And as it is for the exercise of our patience, so to awaken our desires: 2 Peter iii. 12, 'Looking for and hastening to the coming of the day of God.' Hasten it by your prayers, and further the great works that are to be done before. God will not bestow heaven upon us as we lay on gilding and fair colours on wood or stone, that have no sense of it, nor desire of it; but we must first groan, Rom. viii. 23.

*Thirdly*, His coming at midnight. He tarried somewhat beyond the season, to show that he would come unlooked for. Jerome saith it was an ancient tradition that Christ should come at midnight; and therefore in the vigil, or watch before Easter, anciently they were not wont to be sent away till midnight: 'But of that day and hour knoweth no man.' It is put for an unexpected time; as Zech. xiii. 9, 'At evening it shall be light.' Christ cometh when he is least expected, when the world groweth secure, and his own people weary with looking. His coming is often compared in scripture to the coming of a thief in the night: 1 Thes. v. 2, 'For ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night;' by way of surprise; the thief doth not make appointment, nor forewarn the good man of the house: Luke xii. 46, 'The Lord of those servants shall come in a day that he looketh not for him.' Now God hideth this day from us.

1. To show his sovereignty: Prov. xxv. 2, 'The glory of God is to conceal a thing.' There are *arcana imperii*: and the time and season of his coming to judgment is one of God's secrets.

2. That we might always keep ready: Rev. iii. 3, 'Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief; and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee;' and Rev. xvi. 15, 'Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth.' Cæsar would never let his soldiers know his resolution for battle onset, or the removal of his camp, *ut paratum et intentum momentis omnibus quo vellet statim educeret*, that they might be always in a ready posture. So Christ's coming at the last day will be by way of surprisal, that he may have us always ready. Had it been expedient for us to know, he would have told us of it. Men will say, if they knew just the hour and the day, they would be found praying. But you should always watch and be ready, because you 'know not the hour.' Would our preparation be hastened, think you? No; we should say as they, Isa. xxii. 13, 'And behold joy and gladness, slaying of oxen, and killing of sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die;' and 1 Cor. xv. 32, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.' Therefore Christ will choose his own time.

*Fourthly*, I come to speak of the cry made. The cry is the means whereby God rouseth them up out of this slumber. Christ sendeth his cry to awaken souls before his coming. This cry is twofold:—

1. The more remote cry; which is for the rousing of particular persons in all ages; and that is the voice of the ministry of the word. Thus Christ at his first coming had a crier went before him to alarm the world, and prepare them for his reception; and that was John the Baptist: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness.' So still before his second coming he hath some to raise a cry. The cry of the word



is often spoken of in scripture: Prov. i. 24, 'I cried to them, and they would not hear.' So Isa. lviii. 1, 'Cry aloud, lift up thy voice like a trumpet.' And it is the great means to awaken us out of our security. All God's faithful servants in all ages have been crying, 'The Lord is at hand.' Our work is to rouse up the hearts of men, that they may be prepared more and more for the joyful receiving of Christ at his coming. We should not keep silence, nor deal sleepily. It is a convincing powerful word that is a cry; and it is your duty to be awakened by the cry. If this word be not entertained, he hath his rod: Ps. ii. 5, 'Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.' So Micah vi. 9, 'The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city; and the man of wisdom shall see thy name. Hear ye the rod, and him that hath appointed it.' We shall hear the voice of the rough teacher. The word crieth; and if the word be not heard, the rod crieth. We need all kinds of excitations to rouse us out of our careless walking, and heartless praying, and negligent sleepy thoughts; that we may think more seriously of the coming of the bridegroom.

2. There is a more immediate and general cry, for rousing and raising up all at once; and that is the trump of the archangel, spoken of in many places: John v. 28, 29, 'The dead in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation.' The means employed in the resurrection is the voice of Christ Jesus, who shall 'descend with a shout,' 1 Thes. iv. 16, and with the 'sound of a trumpet' sounded by angels: Mat. xxiv. 31, 'He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet.' So 1 Cor. xv. 52, 'The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised.' Christ, that had a forerunner at his first coming, hath also at his second. This trumpet soundeth to summon all to appear before Christ's tribunal to be judged. There was an audible trumpet at the giving of the law, Exod. xix. 20. This sound shall be heard all the world over.

*Use 1.* Let us improve this to the particular use of Christ's coming, either in a way of mercy to his people, or in a way of judgment.

1. In a way of mercy. The Lord tarrieth sometimes when men think he should come sooner: John xi. 6, Jesus loved Lazarus; and he abode still two days in the same place that he was when he heard that he was sick. Let there be no misconstruction. It is not want of love, nor want of power: he could raise him up when he was ready to stink. He may delay our help till a fit time come, wherein his glory may shine forth, and the mercy be more conspicuous. To come late is many times the best time. God keepeth back his best blessings for a while; and detaineth them long in his own hands before they come unto us. Therefore wait his leisure. Expectation is tedious, and reckoneth every minute. Strong desires are importunate; and usually we go by an ill count: not by eternity, but time. The timing of all things is in God's hand; not left to our foolish fancies, but his wise ordering. The dial sometimes goeth before the sun; so doth our time before God's time. We would make short work for faith and patience; and so our graces would not be found to praise and honour. In all such cases let us remember—

[1.] The Lord hath chosen the fittest time, Eccles. iii. 11; it will not

come one jot too soon, or too late; but the fittest time for him to give and us to receive.

[2.] God is very precise in keeping his time: Exod. xii. 41, 42, 'And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the host of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord, for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.'

[3.] God stayeth for us, rather than we for him. Christ will come before we are ready. The great let of mercy was, the people's hearts were not prepared.

[4.] Every delay will bring some advantage. There is somewhat more of ourselves, and somewhat more of God to be discovered: some intervening experience that is worth the having, before full and final deliverance cometh, Isa. xl. 31; Ps. cxxxviii. 39.

2. In a way of judgment. Sometimes Christ raiseth the cry, and giveth notice of great changes. It concerneth us to take notice of this voice, that we may not be taken unprovided: Amos iv. 12, 'Thus will I do unto thee; prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.' When God threateneth, we had need make serious preparation how we shall prevent or bear the stroke of an angry God. It is good counsel: Luke xiv. 31, 32, 'When a king goeth to war against another king, he sitteth down and considereth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth terms of peace.' There needs in such cases serious preparation. The work will be the more difficult when the storm is broken out upon you.

*Use 2.* We may improve this as to his coming to us by death, or rather our coming to him. The end of time and all things in it are near to every particular person. Christ and we are to meet shortly; it should be our care to meet him by true and serious repentance, that we may meet him with joy. We are frail creatures, and within a very little while death will summon us to appear before the Lord; and when you die, you are speedily to come to your trial. Now are all things ready?

1. Is Christ your bridegroom? Was there ever a solemn covenant struck between you and him, as Hosea iii. 3, by renouncing all other husbands, and giving up yourselves to do his will?

2. Are your lamps burning, your graces kept in exercise, and shining forth to the Lord's glory? Are you in a constant and continual readiness to have immediate communion with Christ, or to set sail into the world to come? It should be a cheerful thing to you to depart hence, Phil. i. 23.

3. Have you oil in your vessels; such a deep and powerful work as will keep up this affection? Are these things in you, and 'abound in you'? 2 Peter i. 8-11. What hast thou that others have not, that shall never see God's face? Can you say as Christ, John xvii. 4, 'I have glorified thee upon earth; I have finished the work thou hast given me to do'? Have you been adding one grace to another, so

that now you have nothing to do but to wait for the crowning of all?

*Use 3.* We should improve it as to Christ's general coming. If it be so that the bridegroom will certainly come, but at his own time—

1. Then be not of the number of those scoffers and mockers that either deny or doubt of his coming. The most part of men expect no such matter; the profane scoff at it, and would fain shake off this bridle and restraint upon their lusts, 2 Peter iii. 3. Therefore take heed of the whispers of atheism, which would tempt us to turn unto the world and present things, and give over our hopes. Most men's faith about the eternal recompenses is but pretended, at best but too cold and speculative; an opinion rather than a sound belief, as appeareth by the little fruit and effect it hath upon them; for if we had such a belief of them as we have of other things, we should be 'other manner of persons, in all holy conversation and godliness.' Two things are to be wondered at, viz., that any man should doubt of the Christian faith that is acquainted with it; and that, having embraced it, should live sinfully and carelessly. Therefore believe it as if you saw it: Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw the dead,' &c.

2. Take heed of apprehending it as a thing afar off; look upon it as sure and near, to hasten your preparation. It cannot be long to the end of time, if we compare the remainder with what is past, and the whole with eternity: Ps. xc. 4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.' Alas! it is nothing to the true measure of things: 'He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.' Therefore we should have more quick and lively thoughts and apprehensions about it, such as will awaken us out of our security.

3. Take heed of a cold and ineffectual thinking of it. There is a certain time appointed, and when that appointed time is come, he will certainly appear; therefore look for it and long for it. The saints are described by their looking for it: Titus ii. 13, 'Looking for the blessed hope;' Phil. iii. 20, 'From whence we look for a Saviour;' and Heb. ix. 28. Actual expectation enliveneth all our actions. Rebecca espied Isaac a great way off. Faith and hope standeth ready to embrace him. And also by their longing for it, 2 Tim. iv. 8; Rev. xxii. 17, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.' Long for it for Christ's sake, and your own sakes. For Christ's sake: His interest is concerned in it, that the glory of his person may be cleared. His first coming was obscure; but now he will come in great splendour, accompanied with his holy hosts, ten thousands of saints and angels: 1 Peter iv. 13, 'That when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.' His justice will then be demonstrated: Acts xvii. 31, 'He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness;' and 2 Thes. i. 6, 7, 'It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you that are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed with his mighty angels.' And long for it for your own sake; it is a day of the manifestation of the sons of God, Rom. viii. 19. Then you shall receive your reward to the full: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Then is the fullest manifestation of the love of God.



Now we are pressed with the remainders of corruption within, and temptations and persecutions without: wait for his coming. The people tarried without for the high priest, till he came forth to bless them: so must we look for his return when he will come to bless us.

## SERMON VI.

*Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.*—MAT. XXV. 7, 8.

THE meaning of this part of the parable is, that the virgins being roused by the cry made, went to trim their lamps and fit themselves for their march; while they were so doing, some of them had oil left; but others had spent all their store, and their lamps were going, or had gone out. Three things are remarkable in these parabolical expressions:—

1. That which is common to them all, ‘All those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps;’ which must be differently interpreted of the wise and the foolish. The arising and trimming their lamps noteth in the wise their actual preparation for the Lord’s coming; in the foolish, it noteth the strength of their confidence and self-conceit. The foolish think they are as prepared and ready for Christ’s coming as the wise; they arise and address themselves to meet the bridegroom.

2. On the part of the foolish, they found their oil spent.

3. That they go to the wise for a supply: ‘Give us of your oil.’

*First*, The effect of the cry that is common to them all, ‘They arose and trimmed their lamps.’ Which is first to be considered on the wise virgins’ part, and so it will teach us this note:—

*Doct.* That the faithful, as often as they think of the coming of the Lord, should more rouse up themselves, and prepare themselves to meet him with joy and comfort.

For the trimming of the lamps, on their part it noteth the rousing up of themselves out of their negligence and security, and a serious preparation for his coming. To evidence this to you, we shall consider—

1. How the scripture presseth this upon us.

2. What reasons there are in the thing itself to awaken us to this serious preparation.

*First*, How the scripture presseth this upon us. In the word of God we have not only the doctrine of Christ’s coming to judgment, but the uses and inferences built thereupon. I shall instance in two places in one chapter, 2 Peter iii. 11 and 14.

Ver. 11, ‘What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?’ Where observe—

1. That it is not enough to believe the doctrine of Christ’s coming, but we must improve it to the use of holy living. The improvement is pressed in scripture, as well as the doctrine is revealed. In God’s account no faith will go for faith, but the working faith; all else is

but opinion and cold speculation; whatever truths we believe, we must bring forth to practice. Therefore if we believe steadfastly, we must live accordingly; live as men that look for such things. A bare apprehension or assent to the truth is nothing worth, unless it be accompanied with that care and diligence which belongeth to the truth so apprehended. The Christian religion consisteth not in word, but in deed; and our belief of it is not tried by a speculative assent, especially in the absence of temptations, but by a constant and diligent practice of those duties whereunto this belief bindeth us. So that they do not truly and savingly believe such things who are not seriously and constantly diligent in the spiritual life. I cannot say that an assent separate from practice is no faith, but it is no saving faith; it is such a faith as the devils may have, who know there is a God, and a Christ, and a world to come; they believe it and fear it. So may carnal men believe it so far as to stir up bondage and legal fears in their hearts; but while they improve it not, and prepare not for their everlasting estate, their faith is ineffectual to salvation. True faith is tried rather by living than by talking: 1 John ii. 4, 'He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' There is a difference between an untruth and a lie. Now where the actions do not correspond to the profession, that profession is not only an untruth but a lie. There is a denying in word as well as works,<sup>1</sup> Titus i. 16. Many profess and believe as Christians, but live as atheists. It is not notions, but affections, living rather than talking, that will demonstrate true faith. Now the paucity of serious walkers sheweth the paucity of true believers.

2. In this improvement there is an appeal to conscience; for here is a question put to our own hearts, let reason and conscience speak: After the serious consideration of the glory and terror of Christ's second coming, what holiness and preparation is necessary on our part! Surely the holiest upon earth, if they would put this question to their own hearts, they would not be satisfied with that holiness which they had, but would seek after more; their desires would be strengthened, their endeavours quickened, their diligence doubled. It is for want of self-communing that we are so dull and sluggish. If men did oftener ask of themselves, reason would tell them that no slight thing will serve the turn. But truths are not improved. First, for want of a sound belief; secondly, for want of a serious consideration. Therefore in scripture, when any notable truth is propounded and improved, there are these appeals to conscience: Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' and Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we say to these things?'

3. In this appeal the qualification of our persons is first regarded and looked after. For pray mark the question: it is not, How holy ought our conversations to be? but, What manner of persons? The state of the person must be first regarded, and then the course of our actions and conversations. There are some persons at whose hands God will not accept a gift. God had respect first to Abel, and then to his offering. The state of the person is to be judged of according to the two great privileges of Christianity—justification and sanctification.

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'works as well as word'?—Ed.

[1.] That we be justified, and reconciled to God through Christ ; that we daily renew friendship by the exercise of a godly sorrow for sin, and a lively faith in Christ : 1 John v. 1, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God ;' and 1 John ii. 1, 'Little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not : and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Others are not accepted with God.

[2.] That we be sanctified, or renewed by the Spirit, Titus iii. 5, and so fitted and framed by this general holiness for the particular duties we are called to. A bowl must be made round before it can run round ; the instrument must be framed, and strung, and put in tune before it can make any melody ; the tree must first be made good before we can expect any good fruit from it, Mat. xii. 33. Actions are holy by their rule ; a person is holy by his principle. Therefore, till there be a principle of grace wrought in our hearts, we are not such manner of persons as God will accept ; nor are we fitted to perform him any service, or to meet him at his coming.

4. When our persons are in frame, we must look to the course of our actions or walking ; for the tree is known by its fruit, and a man by the course of his actions. We do but imagine we have holiness within, unless we manifest it in our outward conversation ; and will strive to show ourselves mindful and respectful of God's commands at every turn : Ps. cxix. 1, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord ;' not only undefiled in the rule, but undefiled in the way. A sincere, constant, uniform obedience to God's law, or a careful endeavour to approve ourselves to God in all our ways, is the mark of true blessedness. A man is judged by the tenor of his life, not by one action.

5. This holiness must be in all the parts of our conversation : 'In all holy conversation.' In our outward carriage and secret practice, common affairs and religious duties ; in the duties of God's immediate worship and the duties of relations ; towards superiors, inferiors, and equals, 1 Peter i. 5 ; in every creek and turning of our lives. There is no part of a Christian conversation but should savour of holiness and godliness : his common and civil actions, in adversity, prosperity, at home and abroad. So Titus ii. 12, 13, 'The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying all ungodliness, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' Soberly as to ourselves ; righteously as to our neighbour ; godly as to God. To rest in a partial practice of holiness will not become the expectation of Christ's coming, who will examine us upon every point of duty.

6. Godliness is added to holiness to increase the sense and signification. There is some formal difference between these two. Holiness signifieth the purity of our actions, and godliness the respect they have to God, that he be eyed and aimed at in all that we do ; that all things should be done in and to the Lord, or for his glory. This should be the supreme end of all our ways and actions. If we consider grace as it provideth for the rectitude of our actions, positively it is called holiness ; if relatively, with respect to our dedication to God, it is called godliness. Well, then, we should be such manner of persons,



not only in all holy conversation, but godliness. We should stir up ourselves to do more for God in the world, and love him, and fear him, and honour him in all that we do.

7. In both we should endeavour the highest pitch that possibly we can attain unto; for it is in the original, 'All holy conversations and godlinesses;' which doth not only imply the extension (as we render it), 'in all holy conversation and godliness,' but the intension and degree, as well as all the parts and points of godliness. Those that have made most progress in godliness should still aspire after higher degrees: the more will our comfort be now, and the more our glory when Christ cometh. We cannot be over, it is easy to be short. The most serious and the most painful do exceedingly lament their negligence when they come to die; but none ever begrudged their pains, or bewailed their diligen<sup>ce</sup>. There should be holinesses and godlinesses. Therefore we should not only keep what we have, but seek to get more. This is the apostle's use of the resurrection of the dead, and so by consequence of Christ's second coming, 1 Cor. xv. 18, 19. So Phil. iii. 11.

The next place is ver. 14, 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent, that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.' In which words observe—

1. The exhortation is generally propounded, 'Be diligent.'

2. Particularly, in what this diligence is to be exercised and laid out.

[1.] With respect to the means, 'That ye may be without spot, and blameless.'

[2.] With respect to the end, 'That ye may be found of him in peace.' In the original the posture of the words is thus: 'That ye, being without spot and blameless, may be found of him in peace.' All these circumstances deserve to be considered by us.

1. The general exhortation, 'Be diligent.' Rouse up yourselves, set speedily and earnestly about it. We are apt to delay, therefore make haste: we are too slight and sluggish; therefore be earnest, and zealous, and hard at work: every slight endeavour will not serve the turn. The wife that looketh for her husband's coming home will put all things in readiness: the servant that expects his master's coming will ply his work. Therefore let us not be remiss and negligent, but make serious preparation. A loitering profession will fail us in our greatest need; and when the bridegroom cometh, our lamps will be gone out. The devil's bondslaves spare no cost to serve their lusts; their faulty self-denial may put Christians to shame: Isa. v. 17, 'They draw on iniquity with cart-ropes.' The men of the world use all possible diligence to obtain the good things of this life, Ps. cxxvii. 2, 'Rise early, and go to bed late;' and shall we put our hand in our bosom, and think all will do well, though we mind our business only by the by? No; if your scope be to meet Christ with joy, religion must be your work and main employment.

2. Particularly, wherein you are to show your diligence; for we flatter ourselves with general notions.

[1.] With respect to the means, 'That ye be without spot and blameless.' The one word relateth to the heart, 'That we may be without spot,' and the other to our conversation, 'blameless.'

(1.) The first thing wherein diligence is to be improved is the washing away of our sinful spots, or the washing away of sin in the guilt and filth of it, or in a way of justification and sanctification, 1 Cor. vi. 11, suing out our pardon in the name of Christ, and by his Spirit using all holy means for the cleansing of our polluted natures. This is a work to be done not once, but often; for we are all washed but in part: Prov. xx. 7, 'Who can say his heart is clean?' And when we have once washed, we are inclined to defile ourselves again: John xi. 13, 'He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet.' Every day we contract defilement by living in the world. Our final consummation is in Christ's day, when we shall be presented to God, 'not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,' Eph. v. 27. For the present, still we are cleansing, and making use of the blood and Spirit of Christ for that end and purpose.

(2.) Blameless; that relateth to our carriage and conversation, as it is said, Luke i. 6, that Zachariah and Elizabeth 'walked in all the commandments of God blameless.' So should we take care that we incur no just blame for all those things Christ hath left in trust with us, as to the improvement of our talents, keeping his laws, observing his ordinances, or carriage to his servants and all men.

[2.] As to the end, 'that we may be found of him in peace.' The word *found* is often used with respect to Christ's second coming: 2 Cor. v. 3, 'If so be we shall not be found naked;' Phil. iii. 9, 'That I may be found in him.' It is used, because the last day is a day of exact search and trial, and because that day cometh upon the greatest part of the world by way of surprisal. We do not look for it, nor prepare for it, but it cometh, unthought of, unexpected by the most. But the word *found* noteth either a state of reconciliation with God, Rom. v. 1, or it noteth comfort and joy, 1 John iv. 17. The wicked are then at their wits' end, Rev. xix. 18, call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them. But when you have made diligent preparation, you may have boldness in that day, and 'lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth near.' A peace that will hold out when Christ cometh, is a peace indeed; otherwise what a terror will unpardoned guilt, and an unrenewed nature, a fruitless life, and a blemished conversation breed in us? Thus you see how the scripture presses this.

Secondly, What reasons there are in the thing itself to awaken us to this serious preparation—

1. Because of the person coming, our Redeemer, the bridegroom, the Lord himself, who is so great and holy. If we mean to do him honour, we must prepare to meet him in the best manner we can, as the bride would provide her ornaments against the nuptial day. Oh! what cleansing of soul, what fruitfulness and exercise of grace should there be, that we may not put our Redeemer to shame when he cometh to be glorified in his saints, and to show forth the fruits of his death in us! I say, this preparation should be not only for our own honour, that the bridegroom may not refuse us his company and approbation, 1 Peter i. 7; but for the honour of Christ, that he may be glorified in the faithfulness and obedience of his servants, when it shall be produced to the view of all the world, as the fruits of his purchase and

Spirit : Eph. v. 27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, nor having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.' It is begun here, and consummated there, Col. i. 22, and Jude 25.

2. Because of the manner of his coming, in power and great glory. Every coming of Christ should be entertained with great reverence. When our first parents heard but the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from his presence among the trees of the garden. When he came to give the law, Heb. xii., it was terrible, and made them quake and tremble; much more, now he cometh to judge according to the law, when articles of faith are to be made objects of sense, and God is no longer in a way of trial with the world. Christ, in the days of his flesh, when he came not to judge but to save, yet sometimes beamed out his majesty, as in the miracle of the great draught of fishes. Luke v. 3, but especially when his enemies fell backward with a look or word from his mouth, John xviii. 6; his whipping the buyers and sellers out of the temple, Mat. xxi. 12; and at his transfiguration his disciples were afraid, Mat. xvii. 6. If his voice was so terrible in the days of his flesh, what will it be then? He came at first in the form of a servant, Phil. ii. 6, 7; now he cometh as Lord and heir of all things, Heb. i. 2. Then he came in the similitude of sinful flesh, Rom. viii. 3; now without sin, Heb. ix. 28. Then he had a forerunner, John the Baptist, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness,' Mat. iii. 3; now the archangel, 1 Thes. iv. 16. Then he had twelve companions, poor fishermen; now with saints and angels, his holy ten thousands, Jude 7. Then he raised some few to life; now 'all shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live,' John v. 28. Then he came riding upon an ass; now he shall come in the clouds of heaven, and the Judge shall sit in the throne of majesty, summoning the world to appear before him. As this will be comfortable to the godly, so terrible to the unprepared.

3. Because of his work when he cometh, which is to judge the world, and to make a strict inquiry into the ways of men : Rev. xx. 12, 'And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of the things that were written in the books, according to their works.' All actions are set in order, Ps. l. 21, with such impartiality and strictness, that we should all tremble at the thought of it. Surely if we did believe these things we would prepare ourselves accordingly : Acts xvii. 31, 'He hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness.' God governeth the world now in righteousness, but the justice of God hath not its full scope and measure. God useth patience to the wicked, and doth not give the godly their full reward. God is arbitrary in his gifts, but not in his judgments : all are under a rule, either the law of works or the gospel law : James ii. 12, 13, 'So speak and so do, as those that are to be judged by the law of liberty.'

4. After judgment sentence is passed, never to be reversed again. Here there is a possibility of retrieving it by repentance, for here it is *sententia legis*, but there it is *sententia judicis*, there is no appeal from this sentence. Here sentence may be repealed, Ezek. xviii. 12, 'If



the wicked shall turn from his sins that he hath committed, and keep my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.' Therefore we have need to provide for this day.

5. Prepared or unprepared, we must all go forth to meet the bridegroom. Therefore we had need to consider with ourselves whether we are in case to meet him or no. Others think we make too much ado about it; but this is the great thing that should take up our care and thoughts, whether we are upon a sure bottom for eternity: Luke x. 42, 'This is the one thing necessary.' Alas! that we should make no greater matter of it, and set ourselves about it with no more care and seriousness, Ps. xxvii. 4. It is necessity, and our own necessity, and a necessity for so great an end; not to live honourably and comfortably in the world, but for ever with God. In reason necessary things should be preferred before superfluous; that which cannot be spared should be first regarded.

*Use 1.* Is to quicken you to rouse up yourselves, and to trim your lamps. God's messengers in all ages have raised the cry: Enoch long ago: Jude 14, 15, 'Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.' He speaks of it as a thing in being, and actually in view; so do we call upon men. If we had a deeper sense and more lively apprehensions of that day, surely we would more bestir ourselves.

1. To rouse up ourselves. Shake off sloth and security: 2 Tim. i. 6, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee;' Isa. lxiv. 7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' There is need of awakening ourselves yet more and more. Conscience is too sleepy, the will too remiss, the affections are dead and earthly, and are not so active and powerful upon our hearts as they were wont to be. Oh! do not rest in a lukewarm drowsy profession, but seriously bestir yourselves.

2. Trim up your lamps; that is, let your practice and profession of godliness be more lively and powerful, and grace kept in constant exercise: 'Having your loins girt, and your lamps burning,' Luke xii. 35. Oh! it is a blessed thing to be found so doing. You will never do so—

[1.] While you content yourselves with a little religiousness by the by, and do not make godliness your main work and business: 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.'

[2.] While you content yourselves with doubtful questionable grace, and do not put it out of all doubt: 1 Peter i. 10, 11, 'Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure, that so an abundant entrance may be ministered unto you.'

[3.] You will never do so while you content yourselves with a little general religion, without looking into every part and point of duty: 1 Peter i. 15, 'Be ye holy in all manner of conversation.' Wherein you are to exercise your obedience to God: Acts xxvi. 7, 8, 'Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God night and day, hope to come.'

[4.] You will never do so till your minds be taken off from the present world, and more deeply fixed upon the world to come, Mat. vi. 21. 'Till that be your treasure, Col. iii. 1, 'Set your affections upon things above.' Our affections often cool, being scattered too much upon pre-

sent things; we have little or no thoughts of our spiritual journey: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' It is meant of the affections. It is the lively expectation of blessedness to come that keepeth us in life and exercise.

*Secondly*, We now come to the consideration of it as to the foolish virgins, 'They all arose and trimmed their lamps.' The foolish virgins made a fair flourish; on their part it noteth their vain confidence, as if they were as ready to meet the bridegroom as the wise, though the event showeth the contrary; so that on their part it doth not note so much their serious preparation as their foolish presumption.

*Doct. 2.* Many think they have grace enough to meet Christ at his coming, when the event showeth no such matter; or, many have great confidence of the goodness of their condition, that will be found foolish virgins at last. As in the text, the foolish virgins; and in the 7th of Matthew, the foolish builder.

There are four reasons of this:—

1. Self-love, which blindeth a man in judging of his state and actions: Prov. xvi. 2, 'All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes.' It is natural to a man to have a good conceit of his own ways; so Prov. xxx. 12, 'There is a generation of men pure in their own eyes, yet not washed from their filthiness.' A man will favour himself, be a parasite to himself. A self-suspecting heart is very rare, John xiii. 23, 24, and 2 Sam. xii. 7.

2. An overly sense of their duty, and belief of the world to come. Temporaries have but a taste of heavenly doctrine, Heb. vi. 4, a light tincture. The act of their faith is not so intense and serious as to set them a-work with all life and diligence, or to enable them to judge impartially, whether they are able to bear the coming of Christ, yea or no. Presumption is the child of ignorance and incogitancy; they do not consider of the strictness of the gospel law, or the impartiality of the last day's account; there is but a notional, slight, superficial, ineffectual apprehension of these things. An ignorant person is foolhardy, he doth not weigh the danger. It is not the greatness of our confidence, but the acuteness of our sense.

3. Want of searching or taking the course whereby we may be undeceived: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' Yea, when searched, and their natural face showed them, James i. 23, 24; they will not search and try their ways. A temporary is seldom discovered to himself till it be too late; but you may find him by these notes. Usually he is slothful; he is not a laborious Christian—sound exercise maketh us feel our condition; he is not self-searching, he doth not look into himself, he smothereth those misgivings of heart which he hath, and will not consider the case, or return upon himself. If they do not search, they cannot know themselves; if they should search, they do not like themselves; they choose the latter.

4. Building upon false evidences, or upon sandy foundations. A formal professor may go very far towards salvation. Temporaries may have awakening grace, much trouble about their condition; as Ahab and Judas. So many are full of doubts and stinging fears, and

make their case known, would fain be eased of their smart. 'They may have enlightening grace, Heb. vi. 7, more than many true Christians have; Rom. ii. 18, have an 'approbation of the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law;' 2 Tim. ii. 5, 'having a form of godliness.' Grammatically and logically have a clearer understanding of the sense of words, the texture and dependence of truths, be able to defend any sacred verity, and express their minds about it; yea, some sense of Christ and heaven and glory; yea, they may have affecting grace, be wonderfully taken with the glad tidings of the gospel; may have some taste of the grapes of the good land, may desire to die the 'death of the righteous,' Num. xxiii. 10; desire the 'bread of life,' John vi. 34; they may delight in holy things, Isa. lviii. 2, as Herod heard the word which John preached gladly, Mark vi. 20; the stony ground heard the word with joy. But they have not renewing grace, heart-transforming grace, sin-mortifying grace, nor world-conquering grace. Yet something like these they may have, something like transforming grace; a change wrought in them, though not such as puts grace in sovereignty and dominion. As to sin-mortifying grace, there are some conflicts with sin, and they may sacrifice some of their weaker lusts, yet the flesh is not crucified. As to world-conquering grace, they may profess long, hold out against a persecution: 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 'If I should give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profiteth not.' Compare Acts xix. 33 with 2 Tim. ii. 10, and 2 Tim. iv. 14. Yea, they may keep some profession till death, have a good esteem among the people of God, and yet the heart never be thoroughly subdued to God.

Use 1. Oh! then, 'let us not be high-minded, but fear,' Rom. xi. 20; and let all this that hath been spoken tend to weaken the security of the flesh, but not the joy of faith. Let it batter down all your false confidence and carnal security, by which you are apt to deceive your own souls, and make you build more surely for heaven. Consider—

1. God may see that which yourselves or men do not; for he seeth not as man seeth. Others look upon appearance, you yourselves may be blinded with your own self-love, but God knoweth all things, seeth all things; therefore, though thou hast a name, yet perhaps art dead, Rev. iii. 1; and though we 'know nothing by ourselves, yet we are not thereby justified,' 2 Cor. iv. 4.

2. How dreadful it is to know our error by the event rather than by a search! The foolish virgins said to the wise, 'Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.' They began to see their defect when it was too late. The foolish builder, that built his house upon the sand, his building made as fair a show as any; but it fell, 'and great was the fall of it.' So is the hope of the hypocrite when God cometh to take away his soul: then they will see and bewail their deceits of heart, but have no time to remedy them. Many think they have godliness enough while they live, but when they come to die they will find it little enough, and all their false hopes will leave them ashamed.

3. We have need again and again to bring the grounds of our confidence into the sight and view of conscience, that we may be sure they will hold weight: Ps. xlv. 18, 'Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined thy way;' 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing,



the testimony of our conscience.' At least, when you suspect yourselves, how do you make a shift to quiet your consciences? Is it upon solid grounds, and such as will bear weight in the day of Christ? Many are strongly conceited of themselves, when there is little ground for it: Luke xiii. 24, 'Many shall seek to enter, but shall not be able;' Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest that thou wert rich, and increased with goods, when thou art poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked.' In a poor case to meet the bridegroom, but they thought themselves in a happy condition.

*Use 2.* To excite you to this duty, take these considerations:—

1. Your cure is not fully wrought, you are not yet brought home to God: 1 Peter iii. 18, 'Christ also suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.'

2. To keep to your first beginnings, after a long time of growth, is to be babes still: Heb. v. 12–14, 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat: for every one that useth milk, is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe; but strong meat belongeth unto them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern good and evil.' A child, if he should continue a child and an infant still, is a monster.

3. The same reasons that invited you to begin with Christ should invite you to go on with his service. If a little grace is desirable, surely more is desirable, because it is the adorning of the soul. Excellency in grace is a great means to convince and convert the world: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven;' and John xv. 6, 'Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit.' Deprive not God of the honour you owe him, nor the world of such a powerful help; we put forth our utmost endeavours to get excellent things here on earth, and shall eternal glory be only coldly thought of, and carelessly sought after?

4. The more serviceable you are for Christ here, the more glory you shall receive in heaven. We believe there are degrees of glory; we read of being ruler of many cities, and sitting at Christ's right hand and left, Mat. xx. 13. The mother of Zebedee's children, when she asked Christ that her sons might sit one at his right hand and the other at his left, Christ doth not deny the thing, that there were degrees of glory, but it was to be given them for whom it was prepared of his Father.

The next thing observable in the parable is the going out of their lamps: Our lamps are going, or gone out. What is the meaning of that? Sometimes the phrase is used in scripture for the failing and ceasing of the wicked's happiness, or the splendour and glory wherein they lived in the world; as Job xix. 6, 'The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his lamp shall be put out with him;' and Job xxi. 17, 'How often is the candle of the wicked put out!' But here it must be interpreted with respect to the scope of this parable, and so by the lamps two things are intended:—

1. The glorious profession that they make of religion.

2. The hope and comfort that is built thereupon.

*Doct.* 3. Their lamps will go out who have not a stock of grace to feed and maintain them.

*First,* Let us explain this.

1. What is this going out of their lamps?

2. When is this verified?

*First,* What is this going out of their lamps?

1. It may note an extinction of their profession, and so profession, where it hath not a bottom of grace, will fail: Prov. xxvi. 26, 'His wickedness shall be showed before all the congregation.' God loveth to uncase hypocrites. In the course of his providence one occasion or other falleth out to make them stumble and break the neck of all their respects to the ways of God: John xv. 6, 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch that is withered.' Christ drieth up their gifts and seeming graces, their duties; they are given up headlong to their own apostate courses.

2. It may be meant of the extinction of their vain hopes and foolish confidence and false peace, which is grounded upon their outward profession and formal practice of external duties; thus we read that 'the hope of the wicked shall be as the spider's web,' Job viii. 14, curiously woven, but gone with the turn of the besom. So Job xi. 20, 'The hope of the wicked shall be as the giving up of the ghost.' No more hope of them than of a man's life that is giving up the ghost; or with pains and gripes; which is not only to be meant of the hope, or the continuance of their prosperous condition in the world, but of heavenly happiness; there is a groundless expectation of that, the apostle's expression intimateth it: Rom. v. 5, 'And hope that maketh not ashamed.' The hope of temporaries will at length deceive them in their greatest need, and leave them ashamed. As Absalom's mule left his master hanging on an oak, so will their hopes fail them, and their pretences vanish.

*Secondly,* When is this verified, and upon what occasions?

1. Sometimes in life. They took offence at Christ, his doctrine, or something that did accompany it: John vi. 66, 'At that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him;' some one prejudice or other took them off.

2. Sometimes at death, if their profession and hope thereupon tarry so long: Job xxvii. 8, 'What hope hath the hypocrite, when God cometh to take away his soul?' A man may live by a form, but he cannot die by a form with comfort. Men are more serious in the confines of eternity, when present enjoyments cease, and we have nothing left to comfort us but the expectation of the world to come: then we shall repent that we have been no more provident for eternity; if God would spare them a little longer, they would get oil then. When they come to die, oh! that they could live over their life again. Men that have neglected their time of present profiting then see their folly; then how serious, anxious, and solicitous are they!

3. It is possible men may go down with a careless profession, and a blind confidence to the grave, but in God's judgment it will not hold out; for the day of revelation and manifestation is hereafter, and every one is not in a safe condition that dieth in peace, or without actual

horror and trouble. Usually, indeed, 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin;' but it is possible hypocrites may die with stupid and benumbed consciences, and therefore Christ maketh their vain conceits to be blown away in the day of accounts: Mat. vii. 22, 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord!' that is, till the day of doom, may think their plea sufficient.

*Reasons* why this profession is apt to fail, for there is a distinct consideration of these things:—

1. Because they have a principle of apostasy in their hearts still. The love of some created thing is predominant, as it is in all temporaries; either honour, riches, or pleasure, which when it cometh to be touched or intrenched upon, religion must give way. Christ's first lesson is self-denial. Till there be a universal sovereignty of grace over all our desires and inclinations, so as they shall all give way to the love of God, something is left that will tempt us to leave our profession of godliness, though unwillingly; as the young man went away sad, Mark x. 22; and that which is lame is soon turned out of the way, Heb. xii.; and therefore we can have no satisfaction and security while any one lust remaineth unmortified; if you are not fallen, you are falling.

2. Because they do not improve what they have received. The great want of temporaries is the want of a constant, serious, lively diligence; now when men have made a good progress in religion, and stop there, they lose what they have: Luke viii. 18, 'From him that hath not shall be taken what he seemeth to have;' to him that employeth his stock, more shall be given; but the other is on the losing hand.

*Secondly*, As to the hope and comfort that followeth this profession. An inclination to that which is good: I suppose without that there can be no true comfort, until we should submit to the conditions of the gospel law, Mat. v. 28–30. There temporaries are defective, all therefore see it and know it when they are serious and considerative, and their mistakes and misconceits are blown away by death and judgment. Now the conditions are believing, repenting, and gospel walking. Now their faith will not yield comfort: Gal. v. 6, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything, but faith that worketh by love.' Not their repenting, not a little sorrow for sin past, until carnal distempers are mortified, 2 Cor. vii. 10. So for gospel-walking; not a loose owning of Christ, Mat. vii. 21; until there be a full obedience to his law, putting it in practice with an upright heart, which is not consistent with allowed failings. A man may profess himself a Christian, yet if he do not his Father's will, he may come short.

*Use.* Oh! then, let us take heed we be not of the number of those whose lamps are gone out. The lamps of the sanctuary were never to go out, but to burn always, Exod. xvii. 20. To this end—

1. Apply yourselves to Christ in the use of his appointed means, for the renewing your natures, that his Spirit may give you a new understanding and a new heart: God hath made the offer, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, and it is only made good to those that diligently attend upon the appointed means.



2. Improve what you receive in that way: 1 Thes. v. 14, 'Quench not the Spirit.' Fire may be quenched by pouring on water, or withdrawing the fuel: quench not the Spirit by fleshly delights, nor by a careless conversation.

3. They ask the wise, 'Give us of your oil.' First, This demand was unseasonable; to be getting oil when they should use it, to have their oil to buy when their lamps should have been burning. There is a time of getting, if we lose that, our opportunity is gone, Luke xiv. 32; Isa. lv. 2; John ix. 4. While 'you have the day work, for the night cometh in which no man can work.' Secondly, it was extorted by mere necessity. In a time of straits and distresses men will call upon the people of God to help them, as Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, when God's judgments were upon him.

## SERMON VII.

*But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*—MAT. XXV. 9.

IN the words we have—(1.) A denial; (2.) The reason of the denial; (3.) Their advice and counsel to the foolish.

*First*, The denial, *not so*. It is not a churlish and envious denial, but such an answer as the nature of the thing would bear. If they should be so kind, they would deprive themselves, and not leave sufficient for them both; therefore they were better take the usual way of supply. Three points are in this verse:—

*Doct. 1.* Every one must get oil into his own lamp, or get grace of his own, or else in the day of his accounts the grace of others will do him no good.

Secondly, From the reason, 'Lest there be not enough for us and you.'

*Doct. 2.* They that have most grace have none to spare.

*Doct. 3.* If we would get grace, we must have recourse to the ordinances.

For the first point, that every man must get grace of his own.

1. I do not hereby exclude the righteousness of Christ, or his communicating his Spirit to us. There is a great deal of difference between Christ and the saints in point of sufficiency, power, and authority.

[1.] They have not a sufficiency for themselves and us too. Christ hath a fulness out of which you may receive enough: John i. 16, 'Of his fulness we receive grace for grace.' There is *plenitudo fontis et plenitudo vasis*—the fulness of a fountain and the fulness of a vessel. The fulness of a vessel is lessened and abated the more you take out of it; the creature is wasted by giving, but a fountain is ever flowing and overflowing; it keepeth its fulness still, though it affordeth to others. God saith to Moses, Num. xi. 12, 'I will take of the spirit that is upon thee, and put it upon them.' The words seem principally to

intend as if his own gifts and abilities were given to them to help bear a part in the burden of the government.

[2.] In point of power, they have no power to transfuse and put over their righteousness to another; as a man cannot divide and part his life between him and another. But Christ, who liveth in us, and is spiritually united to us, he can impart his grace and righteousness: 2 Cor. v. 21, 'He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;' Gal. ii. 20, 'The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

[3.] If they could do so, they have no authority and commission to do it, as God hath given to Christ: John iii. 34, 35, 'For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand;' and John xvii. 2, 'As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.' Such a difference there is between the Lord Jesus Christ and the saints. He can give us of his oil, and will do it, will not deny those that seek it humbly and seasonably, and have enough himself; as the 'precious ointment upon Aaron's head and beard ran down to the skirts of his garments,' Ps. cxxxiii. 2, so doth Christ the head communicate his gifts and graces to all his members.

2. I do not hereby exclude the benefit which we have by the 'communion of the saints' in the mystical body of Christ here in this world. The members are mutually useful to one another; as it is said, Col. ii. 19, 'From which all the body by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.' It is from the head, but knit together by nerves, veins, and arteries. The apostle saith, that 'every joint supplieth something,' Eph. iv. 16. We communicate to one another that strength and nourishment which all receive by the head. There is no member but is of use; we have benefit from one another's gifts and graces, or else we could not be serviceable in the body. But the case in the text is different; these foolish virgins had their former advantages, which they should have improved, to have supplied them in the day of their account. Now the wise could not help the foolish, nor the foolish the wise; but every man shall be judged according to what is within him.

3. As to the keeping off of temporal judgments, the very society and neighbourhood of the godly may be a means to respite the wicked: Jer. v. 1, 'Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man that executeth judgment, that seeketh truth, and I will pardon it.' If they are not pardoned they may be respited for a time. So the sentence against Sodom; we read that if ten righteous persons had been found therein, Gen. xviii. 32, God would have spared it. And God gave Paul the lives of all them that sailed in the ship with him for his sake. As to temporal things, God may stay the judgment upon others for the godly's sake, though not always; for it is said, Ezek. xiv. 14, 'Though Noah, Daniel, and Job stood before me, they should deliver but their own souls by their own righteousness.' When the decree was irrevocably past, and their provocations grown to an insufferable height. So it is said in the Jewish proverb, that two dry

sticks may set a green one on fire: to which Christ is supposed to allude when he saith, 'If this be done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?' Well, but bating these cases, we shall not be the better for others' righteousness, and this is often pressed in scripture: Hab. ii. 4, 'The just shall live by his faith;' by his own, not by another man's: Ezek. xviii. 20, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him;' that is, as to eternal rewards and punishments, every one is to be considered according to their own personal estate. Every tub shall stand upon its own bottom, and every soul shall be dealt with according to its own capacity. So Rom. xiv. 12, 'Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.' We shall give an account of our own thoughts, words, and actions; not shuffled together by the lump, and in gross, but every one severally. One shall not appear for another, as here we may appear by proctor or attorney; nor the whole party and profession for single persons, but every one is to give an account of himself apart, man by man. So Gal. vi. 4, 5, 'Let every man approve his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another, for every man shall bear his own burden.' We should every one look to his own actions, and our own spiritual estate and frame of heart: to fetch the grounds of our rejoicing from abroad will not be so comfortable and safe to us. We are to look to our own selves.

*Use 1.* Is to disprove the conceit of works of supererogation, or doing more than is required of us, to increase the stock of good works to be put into the treasury of the church, as if others should fare the better for their over-godlying it.

2. To disprove the vain and foolish confidence by which men please themselves in the goodness of others about them, their relations, and societies in which they live. They have friendship with such good people, are in relation to such eminent and pious persons; a godly wife, or husband, or father: Mat. iii. 9, 'And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.' No; they cannot give us of their oil. Men will catch at anything rather than a right ground of confidence.

*Use 2.* Is to exhort us to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling,' Phil. ii. 12, or to be more careful of our own personal qualification, if we would be saved in the day of the Lord.

1. It is not enough that Christ engaged for us as the public surety of the church, Heb. vii. 22. He did some things for us, and in our names, that we might take a bond upon ourselves, that we may enter ourselves heirs to the benefits of his undertaking. You must give up yourselves to the Lord, 2 Cor. viii. 5. All that are brought home to God do personally covenant for themselves: Ezek. xx. 37, 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant,' one by one. God would not trust the Jews with their own choice, but would take the tenth that came out of the fold by course. God will not covenant with us in the lump or mass, but man by man.

2. It is not enough that the church as a visible political body, pro-



fessing faith in Christ, doth engage for us: Ezek. xvi. 7, 'I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine.' There is a visible church covenanting which is made between God and whole societies, as they do profess submission to Christ's gospel. Alas! in these societies, there may be many persons whose souls have not particularly and personally, each one for himself, entered into covenant with God, therefore we cannot satisfy ourselves with this, but every one of us must engage himself to the Lord.

3. It is not enough that our parents did engage for us, and dedicate us to God in baptism, as they did in their own names, and in the names of their little ones, Deut. xxix. 10-12, as we devote, and dedicate, and engage our children to God in baptism; but this is a work and business that no man can savingly transact for another. The engaging of a soul to Christ is a thing that a man cannot do by proxy or assignee; we must personally enter into covenant with God for ourselves, or else our parents' dedication will not profit us; we shall be children of Ethiopians to God, though children of the covenant, Amos ix. 7.

4. It is not enough that we belong to strict and reformed societies, unless we come visibly to ratify the covenant in our own persons, by that which the apostle calleth 'a professed subjection to the gospel of Christ,' 2 Cor. xiii. 9. Unless there be a hearty and real subjection, as well as a public professed subjection, our company will not save us, nor our church save us. Many fall asleep in Christ's own lap that shall awake in flames. He looketh to single persons, knoweth his sheep by name, and whether they obey and follow him, yea or no. He considereth the frame of their hearts, and how they stand affected to him: 'My son, give me thy heart,' Prov. xxiii. 26. It is the heart he seeketh for: Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is he that hath engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.'

Lastly, Consider the distinction Christ will make at the last day between persons of the same vicinity, family, religion: the one is taken, the other left.

Now, to excite you to get grace into your own hearts, consider—

1. None is more near to you than yourselves. God hath made you guardians of your own souls. We read, Eph. v. 20, that 'no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it.' Oh! that we could say so in this case, that no man ever hated his own soul! It is no less monstrous and unnatural not to take care of our souls, than not to take care of our bodies. The soul is the man, the nobler and better part, that should be first cared for; therefore, if you love yourselves, you should look after your personal interest in Christ.

2. Your happiness is left merely as on your own consent. God offereth his grace to you as well as to others: Isa. lv. 1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters and drink;' Rev. xx. 22, 'Whosoever will,' &c. If you refuse it, you wrong your own souls, Prov. viii. 36, forsake your own mercies, Jonah ii. 8. And if you miss of Christ, and be shut out of heaven, it is by your own default. You have none to blame but yourselves, if you do not enter into covenant with God, and so qualify yourselves for the great blessings and favours thereof.

3. Consider how much others have done for you in a way of means, though they can do nothing in a way of merit. You have received as much benefit by others as can rationally be expected; you were born of Christian parents, by them dedicated to God, and trained up in his fear; and now, after all this, when you come to stand upon your own bottom, you wrest yourselves out of the arms of grace: your obstinate refusing seriously and heartily to enter into personal covenant with God will exclude you out of heaven; you are not moved by the examples of the word, and self-denying Christians. If you never try to bring your heart to consent to the Lord's terms, you will find your oil to seek when you should use it, at the bridegroom's coming.

*Secondly*, I now come to the reason alleged, 'Lest there be not enough for us and you.'

*Doct. 2.* They that have most grace have none to spare.

1. With respect to our great hopes, all our endeavours are little enough for heaven; we cannot be at more cost and pains than our blessed hope is worth: Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' Work, because it is for salvation: 2 Thes. ii. 12, 'Walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory.' That is the worthiness of condecency; walk suitable to your high and holy calling, walk as those that expect such a kingdom and glory, walk as those that are contented with a little here, Heb. xiii. 5. A little here should serve our turn, but in heavenly things it is otherwise; there should be a holy covetousness, and an insatiableness of desiring more, and a suitableness in our walking to that state of life which we expect. But alas! it is otherwise with most, for the comforts of this life, which are but as a vapour, they are insatiable as the grave; but in grace, every little, yea, a bare nothing, is thought sufficient. Surely these men have not a true sense of God's punishments and rewards, nor what preparation is necessary for that heavenly happiness they expect.

2. With respect to our great temptations, not a jot of grace can be spared. We are told that 'the righteous are scarcely saved,' 1 Peter iv. 18. There are so many trials by the way, and our folly and weakness is so great, that it is no easy matter to get safe to heaven. If we have strength to carry us through our present condition, yet we know not what we may meet with before our service be over; a day may come when all the grace we have may be thought little enough, and too little for the trials we may be put upon. Little grace is as no grace when a temptation cometh: Luke viii. 25, 'Where is your faith?' But Mark iv. 4, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' and Mat. viii. 26, it is said, 'Why are ye fearful? O ye of little faith!' Little faith in some cases is as if they had no faith: faith in the habit they had, but they could not put it into act, in that sudden and great trial: Eph. vi. 10, 'Be ye strong in the Lord, and the power of his might.'

3. With respect to our comfort, a large measure of grace is necessary. We are bidden to give all diligence, that we may enter abundantly, 2 Peter i. 11. Not only make a hard shift to get to heaven, but to get thither with full sails of comfort; now this will never be, unless we have much grace, and that kept in lively action; for other-

wise it will not come into the view and notice of conscience, to make up an evidence there.

[1.] I do suppose that conscience hath a vote in the matters of our peace, Rom. viii. 16. In the matters of our sense, Rom. ix. 1, the bosom witness is conscience; the knowledge of our estate is not intuitive, but discursive.

[2.] That small things are inconspicuous, and not easily to be discerned, especially by weak eyes; therefore it is a hard matter for conscience to discern a little grace in a great heap of corruption. Man's heart is not watchful, nor so tender, nor are things in such order there, as that every lesser thing should be taken notice of; though conscience be a secret spy, yet small things escape its view and notice, both in a way of sin and grace; in a drowsy and inattentive soul, it cannot be imagined: therefore there must be a great deal of grace before it can be seen and distinguished from a common work; for the heart of man is deceitful: the woman was forced to light a candle, and search diligently, before she could find her lost groat; so hard will it be to discover that in the soul which is small and little.

[3.] The testimony of the Spirit is usually given in upon the greatest exercise and abounding of grace; for the oil of gladness followeth the oil of grace, and comfort is dispensed according to the rate of obedience: John xv. 10, 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love;' and John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and is loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him.' Therefore out of all this it followeth, that if we would maintain any comfortable and delightful sense of our interest in Christ, and the glory of the world to come, we should not be contented with a little grace.

4. With respect to the nature of grace, it is a sign we have no grace when we think we have enough and to spare; surely they that have tasted that the Lord is gracious, 1 Peter iii. 2, they are not cloyed, but will long for more; that man that doth not desire to be better was never good. As the little seed works through the hard and dry clods, that it may grow up to stalk and flower, so is grace, it is working and increasing to perfection: therefore it is an ill sign, to be satisfied with small measures of grace, to say I have enough. Every degree of grace, is as desirable as that we have attained to; and those whose hearts God hath touched, they earnestly desire more.

5. All is too little to stand before the Lord, and therefore none have any surplusage of grace, or more than will serve their own turn; as in the gathering of manna, he that had much, had nothing over. If we consider the glorious and holy presence of Christ, we have all little enough: Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant;' *Non dicit Cum hostibus tuis, sed Cum servo tuo.* He doth not say, O Lord, enter not into judgment with thine enemies, but, Enter not into judgment with thy servant.

6. Every one is to be considered according to his advantages, and opportunities of growth and improvement. Less may be sufficient to salvation, but not to them to whom more is given; as they distinguish of a fundamental *in se* and *quoad nos*. God may accept of an implicit faith in some, but not in others; so it is true of



grace, that rule, Luke xii. 48, 'He that knew not and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.' God may accept that from others which he will not from us, and we are to be answerable for our means of growth; we expect he should come sooner that rideth on horseback than he that travelleth on foot; and therefore we must not be contented with a bare competency, but labour for abundance.

7. The greatest graces have many times the greatest corruptions and temptations to wrestle with. God doth not call every one to such a trial as he called Abraham; but as Jacob drove as the little ones were able to bear, so doth God proportion temptations according to the measure of grace and strength that every one hath; and therefore he that hath most grace, hath but enough for that condition of life wherein God will exercise and try him.

8. You may easily have too little, you cannot have too much. There are many come short, none over; you never read of any that had too much faith, too much of the love of God and the fear of God. In the internals and essentials of religion, there is no *nimum*: a man may spend too much time in praying and hearing, when it encroacheth upon other duties; but he cannot fear God too much with a filial fear, or love God too much; many love him too little, and therefore are kept so doubtful all their days, that they cannot tell whether they love God at all or no.

9. Because of that conformity that should be between us and Christ, who is our glorious head; and all the heirs of glory are destined to be conformed to the first-born, Rom. viii. 24, chiefly in grace, purity, and holiness: indeed this cannot so full and exactly be till we see him as he is, but the present sight that we have of him by grace should make some change in us, 2 Cor. iii. 18. In heaven we shall be holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, as he, Heb. vii. 26; above the reach of temptations, as he, John x. 30; our vile bodies shall be changed, Phil. iii. 21, and both soul and body conformed to that glorious estate, as he, Rom. vi. 9; but it must be begun here; the very hopes of it should put us upon purifying ourselves: 1 John iii. 3, 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as Christ is pure:' you are to do so, that there may be some proportion between head and members.

10. Because a little grace is not so honourable to God: John xv. 8, 'Herein is my Father glorified, in that ye bring forth much fruit;' and Phil. i. 11, 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God;' 2 Peter i. 8, 'If these things be in you and abound, you shall not be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ.' It is not a naked and empty profession, it is not sleepy habits, or a little grace, but when grace hath a deep power and sovereignty over our hearts and lives, that bringeth God into request, and commendeth him to the consciences of men. The knowledge of Christ is reproached as a low institution by carnal men; but to the truly wise, no such excellent and noble spirits as they that are bred up under him.

Use 1. Of reproof to those that think we make more ado than needeth. When we press men to a constant watchfulness, and serious diligence in the spiritual life, no wonder that every slight thing seemeth enough; so the foolish virgins, 'Give us of your oil;' the wise

virgins are more cautious; their saying is, 'Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.' What thoughts have you of Christ, when you think every slight preparation enough for him? what sense of the world to come, when you do so little in order to it? what is it that you call grace, that you do so easily come by it, and maintain it upon such cheap terms? Surely men have no sense of the end, or else mistake the way, that think so little will serve the turn. Indeed a little in the world will serve the turn, if men had sober and moderate desires, and did not increase their necessities by the largeness of their affections. A man may have estate enough for ten men, yea, twenty men, and yet not be satisfied, but the best hath scarce grace enough for one; but alas! how soon are men satisfied (such is their indifferency) about spiritual things! instead of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a little or none contents them; here only they are for sobriety and moderation; all is too much, and too easily passed over that seemeth to awaken them to a lively sense of that religion they do profess. Christ saith, 'Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,' Mat. v. 20. What do ye more than they? and Luke xi. 24, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate.' They cannot endure that Christ's authority should be urged on the conscience; can you hope to be saved on easier terms without all this ado? A little time will determine whose word shall stand, God's or yours; you cannot do too much as long as you do but what God bids you. Certainly if you judge by that rule which God hath given to try by, no man on earth is as good as he should be, and he that is best is too bad, and he that doth most, cometh unspeakably short of what he should do. All the holy ones of God complain of their naughty hearts, that they cannot do the things that they would; they groan under the body of death, and cry out, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' And will they then obtrude this sorry perfunctory obedience upon God as a full satisfaction of his gospel law?

2. It is to reprove those that think they have grace enough to bring them to heaven. Now they may go rest, and trouble themselves no further. Alas! they know not what belongeth to the spiritual life; for if they had true grace, they would see a need to keep it lively and growing; they would find they could not keep what they had unless they did increase it; the daily lapses make breaches upon it, and conscience would tell them how easily they lose many degrees, and a sense of it, and that every day they need serious humiliation; and it is a naughty heart that can satisfy itself with the *minimum quod sit*, a bare competency, without seeking after greater measures. When men do things against their will, they do not more than needs; but love hath an amplitude and largeness in it, it thinks it can never do enough.

Use 2. Is to excite us: Phil. ii. 13, 14, 'Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching to the things that are before, I press towards the mark of the high prize of God in Christ Jesus.' You have not answered your holy rule, nor done things worthy of your blessed hope, nor answerable to the great obligations laid upon you, nor becoming the glorious salvation which you expect: if these things were well thought of, you would see a need of making a speedy addition to

your stock every day. Oh ! then, as to the internal habits of grace, we beseech you let your love abound more and more, Phil. i. 9 ; and as to the external acts of obedience : 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'As ye have received of us how to walk, and how to please God, so you would abound more and more.' Let your vessel be fuller, and your lamps burn brighter ; you owe God a thousand times more than ever yet you have paid him ; he hath both deserved and required more at your hand ; you cannot make out your gospel qualification of sincerity, unless there be a lamenting of defects, and a striving after perfection.

*Thirdly*, We come to the advice and counsel, 'But go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.' Go to them that sell ; that is, go where it may be had ; for selling and buying are put improperly for getting into our hand. *Emptum cedit in jus emptoris*. Things are said to be bought when they are made ours, as if we had paid a just price for them, as Prov. xxiii. 23, 'Buy the truth, and sell it not ;' that is, keep it, and do not part with it. So Isa. lv. 1, 'Buy wine and milk ;' and Rev. iii. 18, 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold.' Calvin is of opinion, *non admonitio est, sed exprobratio* ; and Austin before, *non consulentium, sed irridendum est ista responsio*. It is a check and rebuke to their negligence ; as if it were said, Go buy now if you can ; heretofore you had a time of buying, which you neglected ; the shops were open, but now the opportunity is lost : and so think it not a counsel but a rebuke. You should have bought for yourselves. I rather think it is an advice, directing them to the remedy, or the true course that must be taken if we would get oil, as appeareth by the practice of the foolish virgins in the next verse ; and if they used this remedy too late, it was their own folly.

*Doct. 3.* Those that would have grace must have recourse to the ordinances.

1. Mark iv. 24, 'Take heed how you hear, for with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.' And you that attend upon hearing, more shall be given to you. 'With what measure ye mete,' that is a proper rule for commerce between man and man, and our Saviour urgeth it, Mat. vii. 12. But it is true also in commerce between God and man ; if you take heed how you hear, and do what you hear, that is, seriously weigh that divine and heavenly doctrine in your deep and ponderous thoughts ; if they would use such conscionable care to profit as was fit, the Lord would recompense their diligence with an answerable blessing on the soul. Another place is 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 'Quench not the Spirit ; despise not prophesying.' If you would not quench the Spirit, his convictions, excitations, and counsels, you must use the means ; they are instituted to this end, and God instituteth nothing in vain ; they have a tendency to that end ; the formality of the institution is a word of command and a word of promise.

2. Christ hath sanctified ordinances to this end, Eph. v. 26, 27 ; and John xvii. 8, 'Sanctify them by thy truth ; thy word is truth.'

*Use 3.* If we would have the graces of the Spirit begotten, strengthened, and increased in us, let us use the means, Acts xvii. 11. Let us use them more conscionably, and see <sup>1</sup> that by every converse with God we may get some new blessing from him.

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'seek' ?—ED.



## SERMON VIII.

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

THREE things are here remarkable:—

1. The coming of the bridegroom while they went to buy.
2. The entering in, or admission of those that were ready, into the marriage-chamber.
3. The shutting of the door to exclude the rest.

For the first of these, their going to buy must be interpreted according to the scope of the parable; and so it signifieth their unreadiness and unpreparedness for Christ's coming: they were to seek of grace when they had most need to use it. In parables, things are said to be done in the day of judgment which are done in order to or with respect unto that day; not that men do go and buy oil then, &c. I might observe from hence—

1. The certainty of Christ's coming. We heard before of a great expectation, of his tarrying, of the cry raised, now of his coming, he really came at last; but of that point before.

2. Of the suddenness of his coming, by way of surprise on the carnal world. When the careless were little ready for him, he came; when they went to buy; but of that in verse the 13th.

3. I shall choose to speak now of the quality in which he cometh; he cometh as a bridegroom.

*Doct.* 1. That the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to his people as a bridegroom at his second coming.

Rev. xix. 7, 9, 'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready: and he saith unto me, write, Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.'

To evidence this unto you, consider these propositions:—

1. That between Christ and believers there is a mutual tie, consent, and obligation each to other, which may be notably represented by the marriage covenant, Ps. xlv., Isa. xlv. 5, and elsewhere. There is a living relation between Christ and them, beyond what is between him and others; a relation not only notional and imaginary, but is really transacted between them, as between two parties in the marriage covenant. So Cant. ii. 16, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' Both the parties are mutually, explicitly, and formally engaged and contracted to one another; Christ to us as head, we to him as members of his mystical body. As it is real, so it is near; they twain shall be one flesh, we one spirit: 1 Cor. vi. 17, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' Whole Christ is ours, we are or should be altogether his, as full of kindness and love, Eph. v. 25–27; Zeph. iii. 17. And it is indissoluble; the marriage-knot remaineth inviolable for ever: 'I will betroth thee to me for ever,' Hosea ii. 19.

2. This marriage may be considered in four respects:—(1.) With respect to the ground and foundation of it; (2.) With respect to our

first entrance into this relation ; (3.) With respect to the state of it in this world ; (4.) With respect to its perfect consummation.

[1.] With respect to the ground and foundation that was laid for it in Christ's incarnation, or at his first coming. Marriage is between parties of the same kind, as, in the first marriage, Adam called Eve bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, Gen. ii. 20. So Christ came to fit himself for that relation of husband to his church, by taking our nature upon him ; and therefore the apostle, when he speaketh of the marriage between Christ and his church, useth the same name which Adam had used : Eph. v. 30, 'For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bone.' When Christ was in the world, he made a way for the marriage : he parted from us it is true, but there was an interchange of tokens ; he took our flesh, and left with us his Spirit.

[2.] With respect to our first entrance into this relation, when first converted to God, or upon our thankful, broken-hearted, willing acceptance of Christ for Lord and husband. All marriage is entered into by a consent : Christ giveth his consent in the promises, and we by faith, which is a broken-hearted, willing, and thankful acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the ends for which God offereth him. Where note, that faith is an acceptance of Christ : John i. 12, 'To as many as received him.' Next, for the mode and manner of this acceptance, it is broken-hearted, because we are undeserving and ill-deserving creatures, altogether unworthy to be taken into such a near relation to Christ ; as Abigail, when David sent to her to make her his wife, debased herself : 1 Sam. xxv. 40, 41, 'Let thine handmaid wash the feet of thy servants.' Alas ! who are we ? A poor trembling soul is afraid of being too bold, but God's offer encourageth it. And as it is a broken-hearted, so it is a willing acceptance of Christ ; for Christ will not draw us into this relation by force, or bestow the privileges of it without or against our consent : Rev. xxii. 17, 'Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.' If the will be to Christ, the great difficulty is over. Christianity is but a hearty consent to accept of Christ and his benefits ; but the creature's will is not soon gained : Mat. xxiii. 37, 'I would, but ye would not ;' he inviteth and clucketh by the renewed messages of his grace, but we will not be gathered : Isa. lxx. 2, 'I have spread out my hands all the day long to a rebellious people.' The ungodly careless world knoweth not the worth of God's greatest mercies, and therefore despise them, yea, take them for intolerable injuries and troubles, because they are against their fleshly appetites ; but when the will is once thoroughly gained to God, the great work of conversion is drawing to a happy period ; the consent of the will is the closing act, when we yield ourselves to the Lord, resolving to become his, and to be disposed, ordered, and governed by him at his own pleasure : 'I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine,' Ezek. xvi. 8. And as it is a willing acceptance, so it is a thankful acceptance of Christ ; because it is a great favour and honour done to us, considering the infinite distance between the parties to be joined in the marriage-covenant, God over all blessed for ever, and we poor wretched creatures. There may be among us great distance between the persons that enter into the marriage-covenant, but all that distance is but finite, for it is but such

as can be between creature and creature, which are equal in their being, notwithstanding the inequality of many extrinsical respects ; but in this distance between Christ and his people, the distance is between the Creator and the creature, the potter and the clay, the thing formed, and him that formed it ; betwixt the most lovely person, and the most loathsome ; between the heir of all things, and the children of wrath ; the king immortal, and a poor vassal to sin and Satan. And consider also the many benefits we enjoy by it ; we have the communion of his righteousness, Spirit, and graces : 2 Cor. v. 21, ' He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' There are two maxims in the civil law, *Uxor fulget radiis mariti*—the wife participateth in the honour of the husband ; so we have the communion of Christ's righteousness ; and *Uxori lis non intenditur*—the husband is answerable for the wife ; the pleas must be brought against him. So Jesus Christ hath paid our debts, and representeth the merit of his sacrifice ; he is responsible for the debts we owe to divine justice. Participation is another benefit : Eph. v. 26, ' Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water.' Christ upon the cross had merit enough to purchase, and love enough to intend, and wisdom enough to choose, the greatest benefit for us ; and what did he purchase, intend, and choose, but to sanctify and cleanse us by the washing of water through the word ? And lastly, we must receive him to the ends for which God offereth him ; that is, to be Lord and husband ; which importeth a forsaking all others, and a devoting and giving up ourselves to Christ, to live in his love and obedience.

(1.) Before there can be a receiving, there must be a renouncing of all other loves. Christ will be entertained alone. The husband cannot endure a co-rival and competitor. And the marriage consent implieth an election and choice, which is a renouncing all others, and a preferring him alone. So the marriage covenant runneth : Hosea iii. 3, ' Thou shalt not be for another, but shalt be for me.' So Ps. xlv. 10, 11, ' Hearken, O daughter, and consider ; incline thine ear : forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty : for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him.' All that do consider what is offered in Christ's name, and consent to the motion, they must forsake all their old ways, the old corruptions, and old passions, and old affections ; and seriously think of leaving all their worldly pleasures and vanities ; they must not stick at their choicest interests, most pleasing lusts, and dearest sins, though it be a right hand, and a right eye, Mat. v. 29. If we consent to take Christ, and retain our old loves still, we shall be little the better for being Christians.

(2.) You must give yourselves up to him, to live in his love and obedience. There are two grand duties we must resolve upon, if we enter into this relation—conjugal love and conjugal obedience.

(1st.) Conjugal love. There is no want of love on Christ's part : Isa. lxii. 5, ' As a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.' Now this love must be mutual ; as he in us, so we in him. Now conjugal love is such a love as is greater to the yoke-



fellow than to any other. So our love to Christ is a superlative love. We must not only love him not less than other things, nor equal with other things, but above them, cleaving to him alone. Some love Christ less than other things; they love him a little, but love the world better. Honour and greatness better: John xii. 42, 'How can you believe that seek honour one of another?' Pleasure: 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.' Profit: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world.' Some love Christ, but love other things equal with him. They are divided; it is a nice case; hard to say which hath the mastery: they make a pother with religion, but never feel the true force of it. But the true conjugal affection is superlative: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee;' Phil. iii. 8-10, 'I count all things but dung and dross, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.' They prefer Jesus Christ before all things in the world. Besides, as an husband, he must have this love.

(2d.) This is a Lord that must have conjugal obedience: Eph. iii. 23, 24, 'The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, and the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything.' I urge it, as wives are subject to their husbands in everything, so let the church and each believing soul be to Christ. Surely, if you consent to marry to Christ, you must reckon upon it, that you are no longer your own to dispose of, and therefore henceforth you must no more live to yourselves. Christ is accepted and received for Lord, Col. ii. 6, and as such you must consent to serve and obey him: Ps. xlv. 12, 'He is thy Lord, worship thou him.' You must take him so as never to be ashamed to own him; take him for better, for worse; take him and his cross, Mat. xvi. 24; take him and his yoke, Mat. xi. 29; take him and his spiritual laws, John xiv. 21. You are to be obedient to Christ in all things. You are no more to do what you will, but what will please the Lord, 1 Cor. vii. 30. In short, you must obey him, if you will have benefit by him, Heb. v. 9.

[3.] It is spoken of with respect to its present state in this world. The relation is begun, but it is not publicly solemnised: 2 Cor. xi. 2, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' The church is *sponsa*, not *uxor*. Here by the offers of the gospel we are espoused, and by faith engaged to him: it is called a betrothing to him, Hosea ii. 19, 20, 'I will betroth thee to me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee to me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and mercy: I will betroth thee to me in faithfulness.' The word is not taken generally for marriage, but strictly, and hath a special emphasis in that place; and so noteth either the goodness of God; he would not receive Israel as an unchaste prostitute, that had broken covenant with him, but as a virgin, as if never any breach of contract before; or rather noteth the present state of the church: she is betrothed to Christ, but the marriage is not consummate. The day of espousals and public solemnities are deferred till the resurrection, when Christ will come as a bridegroom to conduct his spouse into his Father's house, for ever to remain with him.

[4.] With respect to its consummation ; it is perfected at his second coming ; and it is properly called a marriage. It was but a wooing or betrothing before then, when the queen is brought to the king, and abides with him for ever : Ps. xlv. 15, ' With joy and gladness shall she be brought ; they shall enter into the king's palace.'

Now there are many reasons why this second coming of Christ is called a consummation of the marriage, and Christ may then be said to come as a bridegroom.

1. Because there is a personal meeting and interview between his spouse and himself. Now he employeth spokesmen : 2 Cor. v. 20, ' Now we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.' As Eliezer, Abraham's servant, went to get a match for his master's son, so the ministers of the gospel : 2 Cor. xi. 2, ' I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.' He sends tokens and spiritual refreshings : John xiv. 21, ' He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.' Then he cometh himself, we meet him in person. Here we meet him in ordinances, Isa. lxiv. 5 : ' Present in spirit,' 2 Cor. v. At death our souls meet him, Eccles. xii. 7, but then our whole man shall meet him, Job xix. 26, with these arms embrace him. We are indeed brought near to him by faith, and have some fellowship and communion with him ; but we do not see him as he is, nor see him face to face, as afterwards.

2. For the public solemnisation of the marriage, the bridegroom and the bride do both deck and adorn themselves. The bridegroom cometh in the glory of his Father, with great abundance of the holy angels : Rev. xix. 7, ' Let us be glad, and give honour to him ; for the marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.' Common garments are not for that wedding : we must be active in the purifying ourselves, but the grace is given by God : ver. 8, ' And to her was granted that she might be clothed in white linen ; the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.' As Esther was supplied out of the king's wardrobe, these ornaments and garments of salvation are purchased and bestowed freely upon us ; by Jesus Christ all is given. We are here but renewed in part, and cleansed in part ; all our filthy garments are not yet put off ; but then we shall not have the least remainder of sin and misery. If we should meet Christ with our deformities, we should meet him with shame and discomfort ; it would be a dishonour to our bridegroom to come into his presence with our filthy rags ; therefore we come to present his bride with glory.

3. Then there is an open manifestation of his dearest love. Before the last day the match is concluded between the parties ; there is love expressed, but it is secret and hidden : ' Our life is hid with Christ in God.' But then he will own believers man by man, Luke xii. 8, invite them into his bosom in the sight of the world, Mat. xxv. 34, pronounce their pardon on the throne, Acts iii. 19, set them at his right hand, as judging the world together with himself, 2 Cor. vi. 2. Alas ! now all is under a veil ; the world sees us not, 1 John iii. 1 ; now we ourselves question whether he loves us or no, question it often :

'If the Lord be with us, why are these things befallen us?' But then all is open and clear; when the clouds vanish about Christ's person, so about us also. It is called 'the day of the manifestation of the sons of God,' Rom. viii. 19.

4. Then we are brought home to his house, conducted in state to heaven, John xiv. 3. Then the day is come when you shall have all that you have hoped, desired, looked for. Oh! what a happy day will that be, when the great shepherd of the sheep shall lead his flock into their everlasting fold, and the husband of the church carry her with him into his father's house: John xvii. 24, 'Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me may be where I am, and behold my glory.' And his will and testament is made good. Now we are in the outer court. If one day in the house of God be better than a thousand elsewhere, oh! what is it to be brought home to God! In these blessed mansions there we shall abide for ever, and never to part more.

5. Everlasting cohabitation and living with him: 'We shall be ever with the Lord,' 1 Thes. iv. 17; not get a glimpse and away, but for ever to enjoy his presence. Christ's presence for a time upon earth was very sweet to his disciples; it was bitter to them to think of his going from them, though it were expedient for them; but now remain in an everlasting state of intimacy and familiarity with him. Now we have a taste of Christ, but then our communion shall be without intermission or interruption; we shall be out of the crowd and press of troubles and temptations and sins, and study divinity in the Lamb's face, and he will communicate himself to us according to the vastest extent of our capacity.

Use, Oh! then, be espoused to Christ; otherwise he will not come as a bridegroom, but as a judge. For motives—

1. Consider your necessity. There is a deep necessity lieth upon you; you are undone for ever if you are not married to Christ. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. vii., if a woman can live without a husband, she doth well if she marieth not; but now you are undone for ever if you have him not; you are liable to the wrath of the eternal God. The apostle saith, Rom. vii. 4, that all those are dead to the law who are married to Christ: that must be done necessarily. First, now, what is it to be dead to the law, but to see ourselves miserable and undone for ever, and impotent, and no way able to help ourselves? The law which is written upon every man's conscience is there represented as a hard and cruel husband, that requireth a hard task to do, but affordeth no strength at all to do it; therefore it bindeth us over to death and the curse. The sense of the law, being inbred in the conscience and natural to us, cannot be extinguished, but will return with the more violence. Well, then, the law suggesteth what we should do, threateneth us if we do it not; and conscience telling us we have not done it, this is a continual grief and vexation to us, and a man is kept under fear of death and hell all his days.

2. Consider the excellency of Christ, who is altogether lovely as to his person and offices, and every way suited to your necessities. As to his person, he is God-man, able and willing to do you good; for what cannot God do? and surely he will not be strange to his own flesh. You are condemned by the law; he is a priest to make atone-



ment for you. You are ignorant of the way to true happiness; he is a prophet to teach and guide you. You have many enemies and difficulties to overcome in that way; he points it out to you; and your own flesh is weak, but he is a king to vanquish your enemies, and to assist you with the powerful succours of his Spirit; he will help you to perform your duty in the midst of all temptations to the contrary; for we are to serve him in newness of spirit, Rom. vii. 5, 6.

3. Consider the utility and profit of it: 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23, 'All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' If you could as heartily devote yourselves to the service of Christ, as Christ as mediator did to the work of redemption, nothing would be wanting to you to promote your present holiness and future happiness.

4. It is no presumption to aspire to this marriage, for God maketh the first motion. God hath made love to you, and wooed you by all manner of engaging expressions, that he may win your hearts, and engage your consent. Oh! do not refuse the Lord's kindness, or neglect to bestow your hearts upon him, or to give up yourselves to him. Christ hath employed spokesmen, sends his tokens as presents of love: Mat. xxiii. 37, 'I would, but you would not.' All marriages are brought about by earnest suit on the one side, and consent on the other: so it is here. Oh! therefore consider, and say, as Rebecca, 'I can say no more nor no less; the thing is the Lord's.'

5. Consider how ill Christ will take it to be refused: Prov. i. 29, 30, 'They would none of my counsel, and despised all my reproofs;' and Ps. lxxxi. 11, 'But my people would not hearken to my voice; Israel would none of me.' Despising of kindness is very provoking. Oh! then, give Christ a free and a full and firm consent, and all is ended.

[1.] A free consent, not extorted. When men are a little frightened into a good conscience, Christ seemeth to be welcome to them; but as their trouble weareth off, so doth their resolution to take Christ for their Lord and Saviour: Ps. lxxviii. 34, 35, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High their redeemer.' In such cases men put a force upon themselves, and their heart is not inclined, but compelled, as those that marry against their wills. It is only in a pang and fit of conscience that they like Christ, when some great distress foreeth them to resolve for him, and their fears drive them to Christ, rather than his excellences draw them to him. That which is forced is not sincere. Many own Christ in their sickness and distress, that never care for him when they are well at ease; then they forget all, live as they did before, when their turn is served. There is a difference between a woman's coming to a physician for cure, and her coming to a husband to dwell with him. True conversion doth begin in fear, but it doth not end there; it endeth in a change of heart, and a settled love to God and holiness, and a hatred of sin. This is not only seen in men when the fear of death affrights them, but in their whole lives. Others, under some conviction, they would have Christ for their consciences, and the world for their hearts.

[2.] It must be a full and unbounded consent to all the terms and demands of the gospel, to be what he would have you to be, and to do

what he would have you to do : Mat. xiii. 44, the man ‘sold all to buy the pearl of great price.’ You must not stick at anything. Though you are unwilling to let the match go, yet it is no full consent. Christ will be taken for better for worse ; you must renounce your dearest lusts, devote and resign your choicest interests, or else you are unworthy of him. The bargain is not made till all your interests be laid at his feet, Luke xiv. 26–33. So for lusts, Mat. v. 29, 30. Here men usually stick, and had rather undergo any cost and pains, than undergo the mortification of sin, as you may see in Micah vi. 6, 7, ‘Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God ? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, and 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, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ?’ Now, before it comes to this, man hath many debates of soul. They are convinced that sin is evil, contrary to God, and hurtful to themselves ; and have some mind to let it go ; but, in fine, their hearts are more for it than against it, and so do not come up to a saving consent to take Christ for their Lord and husband. The pleasures of sin are so bewitching, that they cannot come up roundly to Christ’s terms, or to the whole business of Christianity.

[3.] It must be a firm and habitual consent, and such as is not retracted in our after conversation. Weak and wavering purposes soon come to nothing ; but when this is your ordinary frame, and the new nature, and the inclination of your souls is this way, when there is a new bent put upon your spirits, then it will hold out : Ps. cxix. 112, ‘I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.’

The second thing remarkable in the text is the entrance of those that were ready in to the nuptial feast ; and—

1. Who are the persons ? They that are inwardly renewed, and endowed with the saving graces of the Spirit.

2. What is their privilege ? They went into the marriage, to the festivities of the marriage-chamber, or place of nuptial entertainment. Marriage-feasts are often spoken of in scripture : Judges xiv. 10, ‘And Sampson made a feast, for so used the young men to do ;’ and Gen. xxix. 22, ‘And Laban gathered all the young men of the place, and made a feast.’ This figureth the joys of eternal life, and that full and sweet communion we shall have with Christ in heaven.

*Doct.* Those only who are ready and prepared for Christ shall enter into eternal joys, when others are excluded.

Luke xii. 37, ‘Blessed are those servants whom, when the Lord cometh, he shall find watching.’ So Mat. xxiv. 44, ‘Therefore be ye also ready.’

1. I shall inquire what it is to be ready.

2. Show you why they only shall have eternal and immediate communion with Christ.

First, What it is to be ready ? There is a twofold readiness—

1. A habitual and constant readiness.

2. An actual readiness, when you specially compose yourselves to meet with Christ.

1. Of the habitual and constant readiness, that concerneth the

state of the person, the frame of the heart, and the course of our conversations, as represented by oil in the vessel, and the lamps kept burning.

[1.] The state of the person. He must be one reconciled, and one at peace with God. There are two expressions in scripture that speak of the state that we must be found in when Christ cometh; 2 Peter iii. 14, 'That we may be found of him in peace.' The other is, 2 Cor. v. 3, 'That we may not be found naked.' And both do principally relate to justification. Our peace depends upon our reconciliation with God, Rom. v. 1; and till your pardon be sued out in a humble and broken-hearted manner, how will you be able to stand before the Lord? till you be *rectus in curia*, and have a discharge of sin and the curse, and be not found in a natural and unconverted estate? The other expression is, 'That we may not be found naked.' It is sad to appear before God with no other covering but our own skins. No; there is no getting the blessing but in the garment of our elder brother. Therefore we are so often bidden to 'put on the Lord Jesus,' Rom. xiii. 14, and Gal. iii. 27, and that you buy of Him 'white raiment to cover your nakedness,' Rev. iii. 17, 18. These places are principally to be interpreted of justification, though it will not exclude sanctification; for that is a garment of salvation to cover our loathsome nakedness from the sight of the Lord.

[2.] As to the frame of the heart, that it may be renewed and sanctified. Habitual grace is oil in the vessel, that there may be a spring or fountain of grace in the heart, John vii. 38; but that I spake of before. The graces of the Spirit are the bride's jewels, and ornaments are the things which the bridegroom delights in: Isa. lxi. 10, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robes of his righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels,' &c. The more these things are in us, and abound in us, the more lovely in Christ's eyes.

[3.] Something as to the course of our conversation. It is not enough to have oil in the vessel, but the lamp must be kept burning, our graces in actual and continual exercise; and we must always make it our study to please the Lord. This is part of our preparation; for men are judged according to their works: 'Therefore what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?' 2 Peter iii. 10. The life of grace is seen in the fruits of it; for that end was it given us; not to lie idle in the heart, but to discover its influence and efficacy in every part of our conversation: 2 Peter i. 8, 'If these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.' That will make a Christian busy and active in God's service. Well, then, by this you know who are prepared and who unprepared.

2. There is an actual preparation, which is like the trimming the lamps when they heard the cry, and that noteth our actual fitting ourselves for death and judgment. Besides our general habitual preparation, there needeth actual preparation. When Pharaoh sent for Joseph,



he washed himself. It is no slight thing to appear before Christ. Our general work should often be reviewed, that we may get promises ready, evidences ready, experiences ready; that we may have nothing to do but to wait the good hour, and give welcome to the Lord Jesus Christ, as old Simeon, Luke ii. 29, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' You should be so settled in conscience, weaned in heart, purified in spirit, that you do with comfort wait for the salvation of God; and not only wait for it, but long for it, love his appearing; especially after a long profession of the name of Christ, so it should be.

Now this actual preparation should be made, either—

[1.] Daily, and when you are in the greatest health and strength: we should think of our great change, Job xiv. 14, for death doth not always give warning; and to be provided doth no hurt. It enliveneth our general preparation, and maketh us the more serious: it is like poisoning our confidence, and weighing the strength and temper of it, to see if it can encounter the thoughts of death and judgment to come. A runaway cowardly faith, that cannot endure the serious thoughts and supposition of these things, will do us no good: presumption is a coward. Besides, it riddeth off the present work with more success when we live every day as if it were our last, and do all things as if presently to give an account to Christ of the doing of them. Once more, to familiarise the thoughts of Christ's coming to us, it allayeth so much of the dread and terror of it as belongeth to bondage, and keepeth up so much as belongs to reverence, and serious and awful walking with God.

[2.] When God summons us by his providence to make up our account: Luke xvi. 2, 'Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.' Many are about to go into the other world, but they do not think of making ready for it. The wrath of God is even at the door, and they are stupid and careless. Surely such a frame of heart should be far from the children of God. They have a tender conscience, and a deep sense of the world to come; therefore in probability, when they have but a short time wherein to prepare, their preparation should be the more serious. So when we are to partake of the Lord's supper, a man would go aside and renew his evidences for heaven, and awaken his spiritual desire; so for hearing the word, a man would compose his heart to receive the word with meekness; and should we not set our hearts in frame when we are to meet with Christ, not only in the ordinances, but in person?

Secondly, Why those only that are ready and prepared are to enter into the nuptial chamber.

1. Those are only meet for heavenly happiness. It is most suitable to them, as having that life begun in their hearts which shall be perfected there, Col. i. 12. What should poor sensual, sinful creatures do with heaven? Heaven is prepared for us, and we for heaven, Rom. vi. 23. When we are put into a heavenly frame and temper, heaven's gates stand open for us. It is the wisdom of God to put all things in their proper place; heavy and light bodies in their proper places. So here the apostle saith, 2 Cor. v. 5, 'He that wrought us for this very thing is God.' Excellent vessels are not thrown about the house, but

put into a place suitable. The purging and purifying of our souls is a kind of spiritualising of our bodies, and so we are fitted both in body and soul.

2. These only have a lively sense of the coming of the Lord. Temporaries are a sort of hypocrites; their work is real, though but a common work; not because they purposely and intendedly dissemble, but because they have not answerable impressions to the things which they profess to believe, and their affections and preparations are not answerable to what they know; and so it is a kind of mocking of God. They profess and believe God omniscient, yet fear not to sin in his presence; to believe eternity, yet temporal things have the greatest power and influence upon them: they look for the coming of Christ in great majesty and glory, but do not make suitable provision. If we had high thoughts of Christ, and a great respect to him, we would prepare accordingly; but surely we have lessening thoughts of Christ, and his glorious coming, if we do not make ready for him, how high soever our notions be about it.

*Use.* Are we ready? I must direct the edge of this use to four sorts of people:—

1. Some care not whether they be ready or no; they do but dally with eternity and things of religion; their hearts are not moved with joy, or grief, or hope, or fear at the remembrance of this day. Surely they have no faith, at least not a lively, but dead faith; and therefore are so dead-hearted; and besides they care for none of these things, 'They mind earthly things.' If they can live comfortably here, be well at ease here, they never take care to live eternally. Now to these I shall only say, Live in no state or frame of heart but what you would die in. Alas! in your serious moods you cannot but say, I would not die for all the world. But what if God should arrest thee before thou thinkest of it? What would become of thee? On the other side consider, when our work is done, and our ornaments put on, then it will be pleasant to us to think of the coming of Christ: 'Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,' Luke ii. 29.

2. Some think themselves ready when they are not: Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest thou wast rich, and increased with goods; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' I trust in God's mercy, and hope I shall go to Christ: it is easy to say this; but do you know what it is to meet with Christ, what honour he expecteth from you at the last day, and how little a naked trust and a dead and empty faith will do to your acceptance with him? I confess we have all from Christ, and all the honour we can do him results from his own grace; but yet it is said, Rev. xix. 5, 'The bride hath made herself ready.' There is work required of us, and such as may be answerable to the dignity of so great a Lord and husband.

3. Others think a habitual readiness will serve the turn. They mind present duties, but do not enliven them by the remembrance of the coming of the Lord; or they have not done their main work, and therefore take more liberty about the world than others, and a greater liberty in the delights of sense; and therefore we have that caution,

Luke xxi. 24, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares.' That will make you wither and contract; deadness and drowsiness hinder your comfort and peace, and that cheerful testimony you may give for God to others; as Peter's question, 'Lord, speakest thou to us, or to all?' Luke xii. 41.

4. Many are ready, but think themselves unready. It concerneth them to study gospel grounds of comfort and peace, if they can endure the touchstone, though not the balance. Where there is a sincere bent of heart to please him, there is a law of liberty, James ii. 12; a law of liberty, not for the carnal, but the sincere; not a law of trial, but of gospel liberty.

We now come to the third thing in the text, 'And the door was shut.' The shutting the door noteth the impossibility of getting our condition altered when the day of grace and trial is once over. There is a twofold door:—

1. *Janua misericordiæ ad ignoscendum*—the door of Christ's pity and mercy to returning sinners: Mat. vii. 7, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' And John vi. 37, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast off.' But then this door is shut.

2. *Janua gratiæ ad convertendum*—there is the door of repentance and conversion; but there is no repentance when we are *in termino*. They may have a sense of their misery, but their habitual hatred to God remaineth: they that have wittingly and wilfully rejected his counsel, remain so still. The fire of hell doth not soften, but harden them; their self-love may make them sensible of their pain.

*Reason 1.* His love to his people. Though Christ waiteth long for the preparation of the wicked, yet he will not always delay the desire of the godly.

*Reason 2.* His justice. It is fit that they that live so long in their unbelief, and disobedience of the counsels and precepts of the gospel, should at length find this dispensation continued, who grow unteachable and hardened in their negligences: Ps. xcvi. 7, 8, 'To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.'

*Use.* Is to press us to begin with God betimes. You that are young, take warning this day; do not think there is time enough hereafter. You that are old, do not think it is too late, nor be ashamed to begin now. (1.) The present time is the only opportunity of salvation, or embracing the offer of God's grace, Heb. iii. 7; Ps. xcvi. 7. Oh! do not reject his counsel. (2.) Love is impatient of delay; if we could hope to prevail with you that way. (3.) When the angels sinned, the Lord immediately shut the door against them; to us he hath given leave, Acts xi. 13, 14, and 'space to repent,' Rev. ii. 21; let us not 'receive the grace of God in vain,' 2 Cor. vi. 1.



## SERMON IX.

*Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*—MAT. XXV. 11, 12.

IN these words we have two branches :—

1. The supplication of the foolish virgins, ver. 11.

2. The answer of the bridegroom, ver. 12.

In the first consider the time when it was. These foolish virgins came *afterwards*, when the door was shut.

Secondly, The blandishment and compellation here used, *Lord, Lord*.

First, For the time when it was. These virgins came *afterwards*, when it was too late. They should have knocked and cried for mercy before the door was shut : Isa. lv. 6, ‘Seek the Lord while he may be found ; call upon him while he is near.’ Otherwise our cries are but howlings, the fruit of our discontent rather than our own choice. Heb. xi. 5, it is said of Enoch that he pleased God. If we would live with God in a blessed estate hereafter, we must please God ere we depart hence. This is the time of grace, or God’s patience : Luke ii. 14, ‘Peace upon earth, good-will to men ;’ and 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. This is the time of labour and service, Eccles. ix. 10. Judgment findeth us as death leaveth us, Eccles. xi. 3. Then we are *in termino*. When this life is ended, all opportunities of doing good end with it. Corn doth not grow in the barn, but in the field ; therefore we had need to work now, seek grace now, be instant with God now : John ix. 4, ‘I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day ; the night cometh, wherein no man can work.’ And now, that is, not only while life lasteth, but instantly.

Secondly, Here is the blandishment, and compellation used, *Lord, Lord!* So Mat. 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 ;’ and ver. 22, ‘Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord.’

1. Here is a title of honour given to Christ by hypocrites, and it is ingeminated. The title of honour given to Christ is due to him : John xiii. 13, ‘Ye call me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.’ But the title must be verified by suitable practice. Men may delight to be flattered with the title of Lord, Lord, by those that inwardly bear them no reverence ; but Christ, who knoweth the heart, will not be pleased with those glorious titles, when your hearts give your tongues the lie : Luke vi. 46, ‘Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say ?’ As they cried, ‘Hail king of the Jews,’ when the soldiers mocked him. Many often intitle Christ to their party, take upon them to be his disciples in words ; but the ‘kingdom of God standeth not in word, but in power.’ But these served their master more with mouth than with heart ; therefore Christ doth not accept of them, nor approve of them for his servants. They call Christ Lord, but obey the devil, are led and governed by the flesh, disobedient

to Christ's counsels and precepts. I hear 'Lord, Lord;' but what means the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen? Therefore it is vain to use this honourable title to move pity in the judge.

2. They ingeminate it to show the ardency of their desires, and earnestness to have Christ for their Lord. Now, first or last every knee shall bow to Christ; they are forced to fly to him now in their extremity and pressures of misery. Though men will not come to Christ for grace, yet they will come to him for glory. Now they cannot come because busied about something else, Luke xiv. 18-20; indeed, will not come: John v. 40, 'And ye will not come to me, that ye may have life.' But then it is all 'Lord, Lord.' Oh! how fain would they own Christ, and be owned by him! But alas! their repentance cometh too late, their desires too late, their tears too late; it is all forced by their extremity: Job xxvii. 9, 'Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?' A hypocrite would not much care if he were heard in the times of peace, and the affluence of outward enjoyments; but then, when he would fain flatter God into a hearing, God rejecteth him. In extremity they prize mercy above a thousand worlds; but all will not do, the door is shut.

3. The matter of the petition, 'Open to us;' that is, the door of the nuptial chamber. None but desire happiness. This petition, as set here, noteth two things:—

[1.] The innate desire of happiness that is in man. All desire to enter, and to be saved at length, however they neglect the means for the present, to get oil in their vessels, or to keep in their lamps.

[2.] How deeply leavened with self-confidence and self-conceit the hearts of men are, so that they are not easily dispossessed of it. When the door is shut, the foolish virgins make full account to enter. The most sottish think they shall do well enough: Deut. xxix. 19, 'I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, and add drunkenness to thirst.' Especially the temporary, who is the refined hypocrite: 'Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name,' &c.; make full account to go to heaven, that shall never come there. They trust to false evidences; use negligent endeavours, please themselves with uncertain and deceitful hopes; but all vain and false pretences shall then be confuted, and those that have a high and false opinion of their interest in Christ shall then be disapproved by him.

*Secondly*, I now come to the bridegroom's reply, Where note—

1. The vehemency and asseveration, 'Verily I say unto you.' To cut off all further hope, his answer is peremptory and decisive.

2. The reply itself, 'I know you not.' There is a twofold knowledge—intuitive and approbative. (1.) By an intuitive knowledge: 'Known unto the Lord from the beginning are all his works,' Acts xv. 18. God had an idea of all things in himself before he gave them actual being: he knoweth all whom he conserves by his providence. Every wise man knoweth what he hath. Christ knew that virtue went from him in the throng. (2.) But this knowledge is here meant of the knowledge of approbation, as we find it often in scripture. Now Christ's knowledge of his own people is threefold:—

[1.] As they fall under the purposes of his grace. So it is said, 2

Tim. ii. 12, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his.' This is also in scripture called his fore-knowledge : Rom. viii. 29, 'Whom he did foreknow, them he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son ;' 1 Peter i. 2, 'Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.' God the Father having all persons that ever should be in the world under his all-seeing eye, he did out of his free love single and choose out some to be the objects of his grace, designing them by the redemption of Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit to come unto glory. He particularly treated with Christ about them, John xvii. 6, put them into his hands, to be justified, sanctified, and finally saved. This is 'the foundation of the Lord that standeth sure.'

[2.] As they are under the care of his special providence, when they are in actual being, to supply them with all things necessary and good for them. So it is said, Ps. i. 6, 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish ;' John x. 14, 'I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.' Christ knoweth them man by man, person by person ; and all their safety cometh from his particular care over them : Gal. iv. 9, 'But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God.' He assigneth the work of conversion to God's preventing grace. Sinners in an unconverted estate are such of whom God taketh no notice and knowledge so as to be familiar with them, and to communicate his special and saving blessings to them.

[3.] It is put for his rewarding grace ; and so he is said to know, or not to know. To know his people : 1 Cor. viii. 3, 'If any man love God, the same is known of him.' Those that choose God for their portion, and cleave to him, and serve him faithfully, Christ will own them or 'confess them before his Father in heaven,' Luke xii. 8 ; but others he will not own. See Mat. vii. 21, 'And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.' He will not own them in judgment that will not own and obey him now. So Luke xiii. 25-27, 'When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door ; and ye begin to stand without, and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us ; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not, whence you are : then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell ye, I know you not.' Here is no entertainment for such as you, who have by your sloth, negligence, and improvidence forfeited the advantages offered you. I never approved you for my disciples and servants. *Μάλλον δέ τῆς γέενης τουτο*, &c., saith Chrysostom ; these words are more cutting and grievous than hell itself, 'I know you not.' Well, these three sorts of knowing must be distinguished.

The first is this, that Christ hath a particular and exact knowledge of all the elect, and who they are that shall be saved, wherein he will not be disappointed : John xiii. 18, 'I know whom I have chosen.'

The second is the ground of our present comfort and support. He hath a special affection to them, taketh special notice and care of them, and will bring them to know, love, and acknowledge him, as he doth also them : he beareth a suitable impression thereto.



The third is matter of our hope, and will be our honour at the last day, that Christ will come to us, and own us, and reward us for all that we have done or suffered for him here. When others have the entertainment of strangers, and are rejected as no true believers and professors of the gospel, then shall we be owned and admitted into heaven by him.

Here is a large field of matter. I shall single out those things that are most obvious and worthy of our remark and observation.

First, That they came afterwards; I shall take occasion to show the necessity of hastening our preparation for the day of our accounts.

Secondly, From their passionate desire to have the door opened to them; here is a strong insinuation, and vehement desire, 'Lord, Lord;' that even in reprobates and castaways there may be a desire of entering into the joys of everlasting life.

Thirdly, From Christ's reply, I shall show you the dreadful misery and direful effect of being disowned by Christ at his coming.

For the first, since the foolish virgins came too late, we should all take care to begin with God betimes; the sooner the better.

1. Because you make a necessary work sure, and put it out of doubt and hazard. The time of life is the time of grace, Luke ii. 14; 2 Cor. vi. 2. Now the time of life is uncertain: James iv. 14, 'Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is but a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.' And a work of necessity should not be left on peradventures: therefore we ought to bestir ourselves without delay or fore-slowing. We know not how soon opportunity will be over. It cannot be done too soon, it may be done too late: and therefore it is good to be on the surest side. Ludovicus Capellus telleth us, out of Rabbi Jonah's book of the Mystery of Repentance, that when a disciple came to his teacher to know what was the fittest time to repent in, he answered, One day before his death, meaning presently; for we have not assurance of another day: Prov. xxvii. 1, 'Thou knowest not what to-morrow may bring forth.' Our greatest works, and of most absolute necessity, should be done first, and have the quickest despatch, lest it be too late before we go about them. Oh! woe to us if God should call us off before we have minded coming to him, and walking with him.

2. In point of obedience; God presseth to now. God doth not only command us to please him, but to do it presently: Heb. iii. 7, 8, 'Now, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts.' Pompilius the Roman ambassador, when he made delays and excuses, the emperor drew a circle on the ground, saying, *Intra hunc*—answer me before thou stirrest from this place. God standeth upon his authority, and will have a present answer: if he say, To-day, it is flat disobedience for you to say, To-morrow. Now is the time of salvation, at this instant, 2 Cor. vi. 2. You are charged in his name, as you will answer the contrary. You say, No; I will please the flesh a little longer. It may be just with God, if you refuse him, never to call you more.

3. In point of ingenuity: we receive a plenteous recompense for a small service. When a man thinketh what God hath provided for them that love him and serve him, he should be ashamed that he

receives so much and does so little ; and therefore he should redeem all the time that he can, that he may answer his expectations from God. Shall we adjourn and put off God to our decrepid time, when he hath provided for us eternal happiness? Can a man that hath any ingenuity in his breast be content to dishonour God longer, grieve his Spirit longer, provided that at length he may be saved? Those that have any due sense of God's kindness, or their own duty, will think God hath too long been kept out of his right, and that all the time that remaineth is too little to express our love and thankfulness to him, 1 Peter iv. 3. Men that do delay, do in effect say, Let me despise thy commands, and abuse thy mercy a little longer ; but then when my lusts are satisfied, and youthful heats are spent, I will see what I can do to be saved. What baseness of spirit is this !

4. It is our advantage to begin betimes, both here and hereafter.

[1.] Here. The sooner you begin to please God, the sooner you have an evidence of your interest in his favour, more experience of his love, more hopes of living with him in heaven. Oh ! these things are not slight things ! When once you come to taste the comfort of them you will be sorry that you had begun no sooner ; as Paul complaineth that he was 'born out of due time,' 1 Cor. xv. 8, because he lost the advantage of seeing Christ in the flesh, and so of many sweet conferences, and many sweet visits of love and experiences of grace, that otherwise might fall to his share : Rom. xvi. 7, 'They were in Christ before me.' An early acquaintance with Christ bringeth many benefits with it, as peace, and comfort, and joy, and hope, which others that set forth later want. The consolations of God should not be vile and cheap with us : if you were acquainted with them you would leave your husks for bread in your Father's house.

[2.] The sooner you begin with God the greater will your glory be hereafter, for the more we improve our talents here, the greater will our reward be in heaven : Luke xix. 16-19, 'And he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant ; because thou hast been faithful in a little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, and said, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds : and he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.' And when the mother of Zebedee's children came to Christ, and desired that her two sons might sit, one at his right hand, and the other at his left, Mat. xx. 23, Christ doth not deny the thing, that there are degrees of glory, set forth by sitting on the right hand, and on the left ; but telleth her that it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of his Father ; as in hell there is a hotter and cooler judgment. Certainly then they that have long pleased God, and made it the whole business of their lives, shall have larger measures of happiness.

*Use.* Is to reprove those that adjourn and put off the work of religion from time to time, till they have lost all time. It is Satan's artifice to cheat men of the present opportunity, by promises of a future obedience. Oh ! consider the work is much, and life is short. If we did live as many years as days, all would be little enough ; therefore let us begin betimes. There are three arguments to press this. If this work must be once done, why not now? your hearts will not be better, nor the terms less.

1. Your hearts are not like to be better; for the longer we continue in sin, the heart is the more hardened. As the highway by continual treading groweth the harder, and the anvil by continual smiting is hardened the more, so long use in sin obdureth the heart, and long resistance grieveth the Spirit, and carnal affections grow upon us: 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.' It is hard to transplant an old tree. The affections are now more settled in a course of sin.

2. The terms of the gospel will not be more easy, and we better able to obey them hereafter than now we are. The laws of Christianity are always the same. The pleasures of sin must one day be renounced, or we are for ever miserable; and why not now? Sin will be as sweet hereafter as now it is; and salvation dispensed upon the same terms. You cannot be saved hereafter with less ado, or bring down Christ or heaven to a lower rate. If this be a reason, it will ever be as a reason against Christ and religion, because you are loath to part with this or that pleasing lust; and so it will never be.

3. The suspicion that is upon a late repentance. It is seldom sound, and therefore always questionable. That is no true repentance which ariseth merely from horror and the sense of hell. This sensible work that men have upon them may be but the beginning of everlasting despair. All men seek the Lord at length, but the wise seek him in time. This was the great difference between the wise and foolish virgins; one sought him 'in time,' the other 'out of time.' They would covet his favour at last. Upon a death-bed the most profane would have God for their portion: when they can sin no more, and enjoy the world no longer, then they cry and howl for mercy and comfort, and a little well-grounded hope of heaven or eternal life: but who can tell whether this sensible work that is upon them be not merely an act of self-love, and the fruit of those natural desires which all the creatures have after their own happiness, or a mere retreat others have when they can hold the world no longer. We cannot say this repentance is true, nor affirm the contrary, that it is false; but it is doubtful. There is but that one instance of the thief on the cross, that truly repented when he came to die. The scriptures contain a history of four thousand years, or thereabouts; and yet all that while we have but this one instance of a true repentance just at death; and in that instance there is an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances which cannot reasonably be expected again. Christ was now at his right hand, in the height of his love drawing sinners to God: never such a season as then; and it is more than probable he had never a call before then. Well, then, let us put this necessary work of preparation for God out of doubt betimes; yea, let the children of God, if they have not yet prevailed against such a lust, or lived in the neglect of such a duty, could not bring their hearts to it hitherto, make speed, lest they be surprised, and this defect in their preparation make their death uncomfortable. A good Christian is always converting, yet not fully converted: the first work is often gone over, and he is still getting nearer to God by a more affectionate compliance with his whole will.



*Doct 2.* That those that are finally refused by the Lord may yet have a desire of the joys of heaven.

1. Consider them in this world, and in the world to come. These two respects are different; for though self-love be the common cause of their desiring heaven both now and then, yet there is a difference: it is more commendable to desire it now than to desire it then, though neither be an argument of any gracious constitution of soul. It is more commendable to desire it now, when it is a matter of faith to believe the world to come, than when it is a matter of sense; as when all shadows are chased away, then it is no hard matter to convince men of things that lie within the veil; that is, of the truth and worth of heavenly things: and yet if they should be convinced of this, we cannot say they are gracious, however they are better than mere infidels; for carnal men may desire a share in the state of the blessed, as Num. xxiii. 10, 'Oh! that I might die the death of the righteous!' Balaam had his wishes. And those that did not like Christ's doctrine, but departed from him, said, John vi. 34, 'Lord, evermore give us of this bread of life.' They would fain be happy. When this happiness was represented unto them, it may and doth stir up strange motions in the hearts of those that are unrenewed and unchanged.

2. There is a difference in the end and use of this desire of happiness. Now and then God leaveth these velleities and inclinations as a stock upon which to graft grace; as a spinster leaveth a lock of wool to fasten the next thread; as Nebuchadnezzar's shape remained when he was turned a-grazing among the beasts; and as Job's messengers, 'I alone am escaped to tell thee.' There are these inclinations to happiness that are escaped out of the ruins of the fall. God by our self-love would draw us to love himself: man will not be dealt with else. It leaveth men capable of heaven<sup>1</sup> the doctrine of life represented to them, they are without excuse if they refuse it. This is the use of it now; but then when we are *in termino*, it hath another use. This love of their own happiness, and desire to be saved, serveth for this very use, to make them sensible of their loss, the grief of their condemnation and lost estate is increased thereby. Now this is little thought of by carnal men, because they have *oblectamenta sensus*, the entertainments of sense to divert their minds; but when separate and set apart from all these, then, if they have no other punishment, this is enough. Surely their understanding remaineth, having nothing to comfort them and allay the bitter sense of their loss. But now let us see—

1. How far carnal and unregenerate men desire happiness.

2. Why this is so little improved, and they make so little use of it.

First, How far a carnal and unregenerate man may desire happiness?

1. They may desire good *confuse*, *non indefinite*,<sup>2</sup> happiness in the general; but this desire cometh under no deliberation and choice. The happiness that is offered by Christ, or that life and immortality that he bringeth to light, cometh under another consideration. Good, good, is the cry of the world. Certainly no man would be miserable, but all would be happy, and live at ease. Christians, pagans, all good men, bad men, they that seldom agree in anything, do all agree

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'having'?—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> Qu. 'definite'?—Ed.

in this, they would have good. To ask men whether they would be happy or no, is to ask them whether they love themselves, yea or no.

2. They would not only have good in the general, but some eternal good. And because this is not so evident by nature, they grope and feel about for it, Acts xvii. 26. There is an unsatisfiedness<sup>1</sup> in present things, and therefore they are scrambling and feeling about for some better thing. As Solomon tried all experiments, so do men go about seeking for good, Eccles. vii. 29. Since we lost the straight line of God's direction, we seek it sometimes in one thing, sometimes in another; and Christ saith, Mat. xiii. 45, 46, that the 'kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; and when he had found one pearl of good price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' Man would have something contentful, that may be an everlasting ground of rejoicing to him.

3. As to true happiness and eternal good, when it is discovered to us, our inclinations to it are but weak and ineffectual. Without grace we discern it but weakly; for there is a great mist upon eternity, and the light of nature being dim, cannot pierce through it, 2 Peter i. 9. As a spire at a distance, men see it so that they cannot know whether they see it, yea or nay; or as the blind man, when his eyes were first touched by Christ, he saw men walking like trees. Again we consider it but weakly, the mind being diverted by other objects. As when we see a man in a crowd, we can hardly take notice of him; so men seldom retire to consider what God offereth them in Christ. When God promised Abraham the land of Canaan, he biddeth him go and view the length and the breadth of it, Gen. xiii. 14-17. So when he promiseth the kingdom of heaven, he doth in effect speak the same to us; for certainly no man shall enter into that land of promise but he that hath considered it, and well viewed it, and can lay aside his earthly distractions sometimes, to take a turn in the land of promise: but few do this; few send their thoughts before them as spies into that blessed land, and therefore it worketh so little upon them. And we desire it but weakly; the affections being prepossessed and pre-engaged by things that come next to hand, we conceive only a wish or a velleity for this happy estate, not a serious volition, or a firm bent of heart; and therefore we pursue it but weakly, as children desire a thing passionately, but are soon put out of the humour: they do not pursue it with that earnestness, exactness, and uniformity, which is requisite: 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing,' Prov. xiii. 4, 'because his hands refuse to labour,' Prov. xxi. 25. So that this inclination to happiness is neither serious, nor constant, nor laborious: these desires are but desires.

4. If they like the end, they dislike the means. Our souls are more averse from the means than from the end. All agree in opinions and wishes about a supreme and immortal happiness; yet there is a great discord in the way that leadeth to it, not so much in opinion as practice. Men like not God's terms: Esau would have the blessing, yet sold the birthright, Heb. xii. 16, 17. Indeed in things natural we do not expect the end without the means; but in things supernatural we do, and so by refusing the means, we do separate the end, Ps. cvi. 24.

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'unsatisfyingness'?—ED.

Heaven is a good place, but it is a hard matter to get thither ; so loath are we to be at the cost and pains : we desire happiness, not holiness. God doth promote those things we naturally desire ; but still that we submit to those things we are naturally against. Whatsoever maketh for ourselves we are naturally more willing of than what maketh for the honour of God : now if we will not submit to the one, we shall not have the other. We would all be pardoned, and freed from the curse of the law, and the damnation of hell ; but we are unwilling to let go the profit and pleasure that we fancy in sin.

Secondly, Why this is no more improved, and why we make no better use of it ? There are four causes of it—(1.) Ignorance. To many the object is not represented ; as to heathens and to sottish Christians. (2.) Inconsideration. Spiritual objects must not only be represented, but enforced upon the will by the efficacy and weight of meditation, Ps. i. 3. (3.) Unbelief. They have not a sound persuasion of these truths : Heb. xi. 13, ‘They were persuaded of them, and embraced them.’ They had not a guess, but a sound belief. (4.) Unsubjection of will : Rom. viii. 7, ‘Because the carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ It is easier to cure their errors than to mortify their affections.

*Use.* Oh ! do not rest in desiring to be happy ; there is no great matter in that ; the damned would have the door opened to them : but desire grace, Ps. cxix. 5 ; Rom. vii. 23 ; desire it prevalently, so as not to be put out of the humour ; as children would fain have something when they are in pain, but are pleased with rattles or any toy. If your vain delights abate not, this desire will do you no good. Desire it so as to labour for it, yea, so as to make it your main business, Ps. xxvii. 4 ; yea, to part with all for it, Mat. xiii. 46. This is the way to be happy indeed.

*Doct.* 3. That it is a dreadful misery to be disowned by Christ at his coming : ‘I know you not.’

1. Consider who may be disowned. Many that profess respect to Christ, and may be well esteemed of in the visible church ; many that cry ‘Lord, Lord ;’ many that have ‘eat and drunk in his presence.’ There is a great deal of difference between the esteem of God and the judgment of the world. Many whom we take to be forward professors, yea, many that have great gifts and employments in the ministry, and with great success, Mat. vii. 22. If only pagans, or only profane persons were damned, or the opposite party to Christ, it were another matter ; there were not such cause of fear : but those of Christ’s faction, many that profess to know him, but were never subdued by the power of his grace, John xi. 52–54, Christ doth not know, because he doth not love them.

2. The misery of being disowned. (1.) This disowning is the act and sentence of a judge. If it were the frown of a bare friend in our misery, it even cuts the heart in sunder ; but when a neglected Saviour shall become an angry judge, when his favour hath been slighted long, then he will stir up all his wrath. When it is ‘kindled but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in him,’ Ps. ii. 12. (2.) It is the disappointment of a hope. They supposed he meant to own them,



and therefore put in their plea. There is a hope that will leave ashamed, Rom. v. 5. (3.) It is the cause of all other misery. *Pœna damni* maketh way for *pœna sensus*. Here we care not for him, so long as we can be well without him. It may be now you esteem it nothing to have a frown from Christ in the day of his patience; but then, 'Depart, ye cursed.'

*Use.* Oh! let this make you more serious for the time to come. Do not grieve the Spirit any longer, Eph. iv. 30. Do you receive and own Christ when others refuse him, and you will be owned by Christ: Luke xii. 8, 9, 'And I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.'

## SERMON X.

*Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*—MAT. XXV. 13.

HERE is the conclusion of the whole parable, as the illative particle *therefore* sheweth. Every passage in it will infer this conclusion.

First, The suddenness and unexpectedness of his coming, *watch therefore*.

Secondly, Only those that are ready shall enter into the marriage-chamber, *watch therefore*, that ye may be always ready.

Thirdly, The shutting the door, and exclusion of the unprepared, *watch therefore*.

Fourthly, The door is shut, as never to be opened again. When they beg entrance they are refused and disowned by Christ, as having not his mark upon them, *watch therefore; for ye know not the day, neither the hour, &c.*

In the words we have—(1.) A duty; (2.) The reason of it. The one will explain the other.

1. For the duty; what is meant by watching? Because we are pressed to it upon the account of the uncertain time of Christ's coming. Here it meaneth a care to get and keep ourselves always ready, and in a posture to receive him for our Lord, as himself explaineth it, Mat. xxiv. 42, 'Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.'

2. The reason, 'For ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh;' Mat. xxiv. 44, 'For in such an hour you think not of, the Son of man cometh.'

*Doct.* The great duty that lieth upon them that believe and look for Christ's coming is watching.

My business will be to show you what watching is in the general notion of it. As it is taken spiritually and metaphorically, it implieth a diligent care and heed to the great affairs of our souls; for it is a mixed thing, made up of prudence and diligence. It implieth a prudent foresight of the soul's danger, with a diligent care to avoid it. It

is pressed in scripture to a double end; partly that we may maintain the present state, and partly that we may prepare for the future: the one quickeneth the other. And though the latter be of chief consideration in this place, yet it will not be amiss to consider both; for there is no hope to stand before Christ at his coming, unless we be careful to get and keep grace for the present. And on the other side, the argument to quicken us to present care and diligence is the blessedness we shall have at Christ's coming, and the danger of being disallowed at last.

1. Watching with respect to our present preservation is pressed: Mat. xxvi. 41, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation;' and 1 Cor. xvi. 13, 'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith.'

2. Watching with respect to future acceptance. That is pressed in other places: Mat. xxiv. 42, 'Watch ye, for ye know not in what hour the Lord cometh.' The particular time of Christ's coming is kept secret, that we may be moved at all times to prepare for it. The Lord foresaw that we would be prone to negligence and carnal security, and that the knowledge of the express time of his coming would be hurtful to us; therefore it is *inter arcana imperii*, among the secrets kept in the Father's bosom, that we might be always ready. So Luke xxi. 36, 'Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of man.' The meaning is, that we may escape the judgments then to be poured out upon the wicked and the careless; that we may not *causa cadere*; that we may have a sentence of approbation passed in our favour. These are the two sorts of watching pressed upon us in scripture, the one to avoid the snares of the devil, the other that we may be ready for the coming of the Lord.

First, Watching with respect to our present state and safety. This again is twofold—a watching to avoid evil, and a watching for the careful performance of that which is good. The scripture speaketh of both; and both are enforced by their own proper reasons.

1. For the avoiding of evil. There is in us all a sinful proneness to evil, which we must seek to cure and prevent: Prov. iv. 23, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' The heart is *terminus actionum ad intra, et fons actionum ad extra*. It is the heart that God aimeth at in all that he doth upon us, and it is the heart that is the ground of all our actions. The fountain must be kept pure from pollutions, that the streams may be the more limpid and clear. Every man hath a little garrison to keep, and he himself is the watchman of it; his conscience is to sit porter at the door, and to examine whatever cometh out and entereth in, as a watchman doth at the gates of a city. All the thoughts, affections, words, actions, are to be examined, what they are, whither they go, whence they come, whither they tend, lest a temptation be let in, or a corruption be let out; otherwise the heart cannot be kept pure and loyal to God. Solomon telleth us, Prov. xxv. 28, 'He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is without walls.' A town without walls lieth open to every comer: sin and danger, and all kind of evil motions go to and fro, without any kind of check and control: things will pass out which should be suppressed and kept in, and temptations will enter which should be kept out. Now this caution is no more

than needeth, if we consider the enemies of our salvation, the devil, the world, and the flesh.

[1.] The malice of Satan. Our adversary is very watchful, and getteth advantage by nothing so much as our security. *Vigilat hostis, et dormis?* It was an old word: the devil is neither dead nor asleep, and shall not we stand upon our guard? 1 Peter v. 8, 'Be sober and watchful, for your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.' Satan is a restless adversary, full of malice and craft; his end is to destroy and to devour souls, and his diligence is answerable to his malice. Night and day we are in danger every one of us. There were but two Adams, and they were both tempted, though the one was made after God's image, and the other had the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily. Adam in innocency and Christ in human nature were tempted, and can we hope to escape? Neglect your watch, and you become a ready prey to the devil: 'When the servants slept, the enemy sowed tares,' Mat. xiii. 25. He observeth all our drowsy fits, and is waiting for some advantage, or at least some occasion. Sometimes we give him an advantage by our folly and indiscretion: 2 Cor. ii. 11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage against us.' Or if not, he taketh occasion, as he tempted Christ when he was an hungry, Mat. iv. 2; and 2 Cor. vii. 5, 'That Satan tempt you not.' He can interpret the silent language of a blush, a smile, a frown, a look, the glance of a lustful eye, the most secret discovery of wrath and discontent, and suiteth his temptations to all the postures of spirit we are in.

[2.] There is besides this, *hostis domesticus*, the bosom enemy, the flesh, or the inbred corruption of our nature, that is ready to betray us to the basest temptations, and to open the gates to the enemy without. Man needeth no devil to tempt him, we have enough in our own bosoms to prompt and urge us to sin: James i. 5, 'The spirit in us lusteth to envy;' Gen. vi. 5, 'The thoughts and imaginations of our hearts are evil continually.' It is easy to set tinder, gunpowder, or flax on fire, and therefore they had need to be kept asunder. We cannot be too careful, the best of us have a good self and a bad self; the one must watch over the other, or all will come to ruin, and grace will be ready to die: Rev. ii. 2, 'Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die.' From whence cometh the vanity of our minds, our proneness to break the bounds of due liberty in all our comforts, our readiness to err in speech, our frequent miscarriages in conversation, our frequent unfitness for holy duties, our unfruitfulness in our conversing with others, our unsettledness in our consciences, our immoderate cares and fears; whence, I say, cometh all this, but from our want of watching against this inward enemy our flesh? Especially when temptations are near, importunate, and constant. We proceed every step to heaven by conflict and contest, because sin is always at hand, ready to assault us and taint us; so that a serious Christian cannot but take himself to be still in danger.

[3.] The world. We walk in the midst of snares and temptations, saith Austin; and Bernard saith that our life is a continual temptation. We are in the midst of tempting objects, that are comfortable to our senses, necessary to our uses, and present to our embraces, that



we can hardly distinguish between what necessity craveth, and lust desireth, and so we are strangely gained upon: 1 John ii. 16, 'For all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and pride of life.' He doth not say, 'Whatsoever is in our corrupt hearts;' but he describeth the objects by the lusts, because they are readily excited by them: 'All that is in the world.' There are baits for every temper; honour for the ambitious, wealth for the covetous, pleasure for the sensual. Now every distemper loveth the diet that feedeth it: lust in the soul, or unmortified corruption maketh our abode in the world dangerous: 2 Peter i. 4, that 'having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' Here one plungeth himself over head and ears in the world; another is intemperate in the delights of the flesh and the entertainments of sense; another is aspiring after honour, great places, and pomp of living, or esteem in the world; or at least we give ourselves too great a liberty and freedom in these things. Therefore you see what need there is of watching, when alluring objects lay such close siege to the appetite and senses.

2. There is a watching unto good, or for the performance of our duties, that we go about them in a holy, serious, conscionable manner, observing the best opportunities, and taking heed there be no secret leaven of hypocrisy in them. Of all holy duties the scripture applieth it to prayer, which of all other holy services is the commonest and the chiefest; and watching therein is a great help; though by analogy it holdeth good in other duties, as we shall see in a few places: Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving.' So 1 Peter iv. 7, 'Be sober, and watch unto prayer.' So Eph. vi. 18, 'Watching therein with all perseverance.' Satan is a great enemy to this duty, and our hearts are averse, and hardly brought and kept to it. Unless it be well performed, our communion with God is interrupted and at a stand. Out of all these places we may well collect that there is—(1.) A watching unto prayer, or before prayer. (2.) A watching in prayer, or in the duty. (3.) A watching after prayer, or when the duty is over.

[1.] The watching unto prayer, or before the duty, is mainly to keep up a praying frame, that we may be ready upon all occasions to call upon God. The praying frame lieth partly in brokenness of heart, or a due sense of our necessities; and partly in an earnest bent of heart towards God, and holy and heavenly things; and partly in a holy liberty, and child-like confidence. If either of these be lost, how slack and backward shall we be in God's worship, or slight in the performance of it, whether in closet, or family, or public assemblies; and slubber it over in any fashion. But when this frame of spirit is kept up, the soul is mightily actuated and enlarged in the duty. As when there is brokenness of heart, or a due sense of our necessities, which is the occasion of prayer, or an earnest desire of grace, which is the soul of prayer, or our liberty and confidence is not broken, which is the great encouragement of prayer, then we are like light and airy bodies, whose natural motion is upwards; so are we carried out towards God, and prayer is our element in which we live and breathe. Indeed the whole spiritual life is but a 'watching unto prayer,' that we may have always a readiness for communion with God, 1 Peter iii. 7.

[2.] There is a watching in prayer, that the duty be performed with that seriousness, attention, and affection that the nature of it doth require. This watching is necessary because of the slipperiness of our hearts, which easily go off from the work in hand. We often mingle sulphur with our incense, interline our prayers with carnal distractions, suffer our hearts to be stolen away from under Christ's own arm; therefore we had need to watch, Eccles. v. 1, 2.

[3.] There is a watching after prayer, partly that we may observe God's dealing with us, whether our souls have been straitened, or whether he hath given liberty, hidden his face, or showed himself gracious. Here we may gather some matter of comfort to ourselves and thanksgiving to God, Col. iv. 2. We must not throw away our prayers, as children shoot away their arrows, and never look after them: Hab. ii. 1, 'I will pray and look up,' to spy the blessing a-coming. We should have many an argument against atheism, great helps to faith, and encouragements to love God, and many a sure ground of comfort in ourselves, if we did look after the answer of our prayers. And partly that we lose not that affection which we have professed and expressed before God. We seemed to express a great desire of glorifying his name, and doing his will, and being sanctified, pardoned, and strengthened against temptations. Now it is but the personating and acting a part before God, if we be not such in some measure as we pressed ourselves to be in prayer; if we be not careful to glorify his name, zealous to promote his kingdom, ready to do his will, earnest for pardoning grace, watchful against temptations. A Christian's life is a comment upon his prayers, and his prayers do interpret his life; we understand the one by the other. Our endeavours and diligent use of means do show what we really desire; for what we pray to God for we bind ourselves to seek after.

Secondly, There is a watching with respect to our future estate, that we may be ready to meet Christ at his coming. Now this consisteth—

1. In a deep and lively sense of Christ's appearing, and the whole state of the world to come. We look for nothing but what we believe. Faith is a realising sight of things not yet in being; and maketh them in some measure to work as if they were at hand and ready to be enjoyed. Now the more lively sense we have of the concerns of the other world, the more diligent and serious shall we be in our preparation; when we have a deep sense of these things, as if presently to be arraigned, and walk as before the judge to whom we are to give an account of all our actions. Most men live as if there were no day of reckoning, no God to see and punish, no books to be opened: the careless spending their time sheweth they have no deep sense of these things, no sound belief of them. But faith looketh upon these things as great, sure, and near, and so keepeth the soul awake and alive. It greateneth our apprehensions of these things; for it is no slight matter for the creature to meet with his creator, the sinner with his judge, from whom he must now receive his final doom. Faith doth speak aloud to a sluggish soul, Thou must be judged: Rom. xiv. 12, 'So then every one of us must give an account of himself to God.' And as it is sure, so it is near: 'The judge is at the door,' James v. 9. You must

hear of what you now speak and do another day : Mat. xii. 36, 'For every idle word that a man shall speak, he shall give an account of at the day of judgment.' It suppresseth sin, and quickeneth and awakeneth to duty, 2 Peter iii. 11, 12. Without faith we have no sensible, awakening, practical knowledge of these things. The sight of faith differeth from the sight of sense. Sense can discern little more than we see, taste, smell, hear, and feel. We are affected with these things ; so are the beasts, who only see things before their eyes by the eye of sense. We see nothing but what dogs may see and beasts may see ; that it is comfortable to eat well, and drink well, and sleep well, and be well clothed, and walk up and down at pleasure, and pursue the advantages of the animal life. There is a mist upon eternity ; how acute soever men be in worldly things, they are blind here : 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off ;' sharp-sighted in things that concern the back and belly, and this present world, but know nothing of the hazard of perishing for ever, or the worth of salvation, their need of Christ, and making serious preparation for their great account. Faith is a perspective, by which we look into the other world. None have such a sharp sight as believers have ; for they can see beyond the limits of time, the corruption and changes of all things that are in the world, even to that blessedness which God hath reserved for them that love him. And the light of faith differeth from reason. That can only see things by guess, or see things in their causes, and that as probable ; but faith can look through the mists and clouds of intervening ages : Heb. xi. 13, 'Having seen them afar off, embraced them ;' and with certainty, and such a sure persuasion, as if the things we are persuaded of were in hand and actually enjoyed. Reason corrects sense. A star to the eye of sense looks no bigger than a spangle, but reason sheweth it must be of a vast bigness, because of its distance from us. But faith is a higher light ; and compare it with the light of prophecy, Rev. xx. 12 ; they agree in the common object, divine revelation ; they agree in their common nature, that they are both for things future, and things future to us ; but they differ, that faith depends upon the common revelation which God hath made to all the saints, whereas prophecy hath more of ecstasy and rapture in it, and the light is like the *lumen gloriæ*, the beatifical vision in some measure and degree. We do not see him face to face, but are desirous of this blessed estate, and persuaded of it, and are affected with it as if we saw it. The sight of faith is not a full enjoyment, but as sure, and so proportionably affects the heart. Nay, this *lumen fidei* is somewhat like the sight God hath of things. God seeth all things in his own design, and faith seeth them so far as they are manifested in the promises of the gospel. There is no hope to get rid of our dead-heartedness and security till we have this realising light of faith.

2. This watching consisteth in preparation. If we expect a thing to come, and do not prepare accordingly, we do not watch for it but neglect it. Now this preparation must be speedy, thorough, and constant.

[1.] Watching implieth a speedy preparation. That we may be in a fit capacity to receive Christ at his coming, we must take the next



advantage, lest we be surprised and called home before we are ready. This is not a work to be put off to age or sickness. Why should we provide a burden for that time when we are weakest and least able to bear it? And therefore now we should begin it. Every day brings burden enough for itself. He is an unthrifty tenant that suffers the rent of one year to run into another: how shall that crop discharge two years' rent that cannot pay one? If it be tedious now to turn to God, it will be more tedious when thou art hardened in sin, and thy neglects of God and Christ will provoke him to deny his grace. And what assurance have we of another year? We have this by the favour of providence. Our life was forfeited and lost in law the first moment, and therefore we have but a reprieve during pleasure. What warrant have I to expect another day but my own hope and fancy? He that is security for himself to himself is no whit the better secured; he doth but take the word of a spendthrift. If we had a lease of our lives, yet what hope of grace? when we have resisted the Spirit of God all our lives, what hope that he should assist us at death? We do but provide matter of despair to ourselves; every day will prove worse and worse. A traveller may easily pass over the head of a brook, but when he goeth down, thinking to find it narrower, it is so broad that he cannot pass at all. Every delay brings on a new degree of hardness of heart on our part, and a new desertion on God's part. Now how wilt thou untwist the former web which thou hast been so long a-weaving? That soul must needs be in perplexity at the hour of death that seeth the day spent and the business appointed to him not yet begun, and a disease disabling him for any serious reflections; as if a traveller seeth the sun setting when he is entering upon his journey: the evening of the day and the morning of the task do not well agree together. All the time that remaineth is too short to lament the lost time already past. Therefore, if watching inferreth preparation, it inferreth speedy preparation; and a man is not in a good condition to live that is not fit to die.

[2.] It must be a serious and thorough preparation, such as will serve the turn, and be accepted by Christ at his coming. The whole design of this parable is to caution us against the shallowness and slightheadedness of the work of grace upon our hearts. Heathens have a conscience (as Felix trembled); much more Christians. Men may see and have a taste of sin's bitterness, and have a longing mind after Christ, but the life of grace is not begun in them; they do not 'awake to righteousness,' 1 Cor. xv. 34. We should often think what is required in order to that day, and what the scripture maketh our readiness to consist in. Repentance and actual conversion to God, this is pressed upon us, Acts iii. 19, 'Repent, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshment shall come from the presence of the Lord.' Repentance is the soul's return to God in love. And Acts xvii. 30, 31, 'Now he commandeth all men to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.' That day is kept off that we might have time to repent, 2 Peter iii. 9. So faith in Christ, that will unite us to him, or a hearty taking him for our Lord and Saviour: Rom. viii. 1, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ;' Phil. iii. 9, 'Found

in him ;' 1 John ii. 28, ' And now, little children, abide in him ; that when he shall appear you may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.' We must be in Christ, and abide in Christ. To abide in Christ is to persevere in our adhering to him as our Lord and Saviour, in the profession of his name, observation of his precepts, recumbency on his merits, imitation of his graces, communion with his person. Certainly he will not cast off those who are members of his mystical body, and abide in him by faith, nor condemn those whom he hath redeemed and washed in his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit. This is our preparation ; yea, the scripture doth not only look to our hearts, but to our lives, James ii. 1, 2.

[3.] It must be a constant and daily preparation. You must not only get ready, but keep ready. Besides habitual preparation, there must be actual preparation. We must every day be more in a readiness. The sentinel is to watch all hours ; it is death to be taken sleeping, though he hath watched all the night before : ' We know neither the day nor the hour,' it is in the text, implying there must be no intermission of our care. What if my master should come and find me idle ? said Calvin to his friends, that demanded of him why he wasted his body in such constant labours. Few are like-minded that put this question to their souls, Am I as I would meet with Christ ? We should always stand with our lamps burning and our loins girt, Luke xii. 35. A Christian should be always as a ship that hath taken in its lading, and is prepared and furnished with all manner of tackling, ready to set sail, only expecting the good wind to carry him out of the haven. So should we be ready to set sail for eternity, stand at heaven's gates, be in a perpetual exercise of faith and love, and be fittingly prepared to meet our Saviour. Oh ! what a happiness is it to live so that we care not when death cometh upon us ; and so live every day, as if we were presently to be summoned before the tribunal of Christ ! The world thinketh this a foolish strictness, because many days go over our heads, and it proveth not so. But let them mock on ; when they come to hell they will find this to be the greatest wisdom. A Christian will count every day his last. Not only his own necessity, but his love and earnest desire of Christ's coming maketh him look out.

3. The last thing in this watching is earnest expectation of Christ's last appearance, and the grace he will bring along with him : 1 Peter i. 15, ' Gird up the loins of your minds, and be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Our hearts and minds should be more taken up with the thoughts of his coming, and the privileges we shall have by him. It is expressed by looking, longing, waiting ; and Christians are often described by these acts : Titus iii. 13, ' Looking for the blessed hope ;' Phil. iii. 20, 21, ' From whence we look for a Saviour,' Heb. x. 27. We should stir up our minds to look for his coming ; and not only stir up our hopes, but our desires : 2 Tim. iv. 8, ' To them that love his appearing ;' it is a sign and token that he cometh with a blessing to us : to them he cometh with a crown of righteousness. So for waiting : 1 Cor. i. 7, ' Ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' We were converted for this end, to wait for his coming from heaven, 1 Thes. i. 10.

Now I come to show you the reasons why this watching is required of us, or to move us to it.

1. Consider who it is that biddeth you watch. Christ himself, whom you call Lord and Master, who knows the worth and danger of souls, and hath a tender esteem and value for them. If we did impose so strict a duty upon you, you might take or leave it as it shall be for your conveniency. In the 1st of Proverbs, Solomon bringeth in Wisdom lifting up her voice, and crying, Prov. i. 20. What to do? To accept of the grace offered. The most then will miss the season; they shall never receive advantage by the cry if they neglect it, ver. 26; ver. 28, 'They shall call upon me, but I will not answer.' Many clauses in these verses do fitly agree with the passages of the parable. It agreeth with the foolish virgins, who lost their opportunity of getting oil; and with the wise, who in a time of plenty provided against a famine, as Joseph advised the Egyptians: a greater than Joseph is here. Now in the times of grace watch.

2. Consider whom it is he inviteth. Do not put it off to others: Mark xiii. 37, 'What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.' Some persons are especially deputed to watch over others, as magistrates, Rom. xiii. 6; ministers, Heb. xiii. 12; but every man is made a guardian over his own soul; rich and poor, they are both to watch. The meanest people are then taken notice of, and that exactly: Mat. xxiv. 40, 41, 'Two women grinding at the mill; one shall be taken, and the other left: two in the field, one taken, and the other left.' Those of the meanest degree. All that live in all ages, in all times, to them he said, Watch. Do not put it off to them that live in the age on which the ends of the world are come. You will be found at that day as death leaveth you. None of all degrees of grace are past this care. If there be any difference between Christian and Christian, one is more watchful than another; if of never so long standing and experience, yet if not watchful, soon surprised. God's best servants have been surprised for want of watching. Noah was overtaken in drunkenness; Lot, that was chaste in Sodom, committed incest in the mountains, where were none but his own family. And do but compare David and Joseph; you find David tempting, Joseph tempted. David was a king, Joseph a slave; David an old man of much experience, Joseph a young man; David a married man, and Joseph a single man. David was fain to plot and contrive to make way for his sin, but Joseph had the advantage of secrecy; but the one stood, and the other fell; David left his senses at random, but Joseph kept himself in an awful watchful posture: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?'

3. Consider when and how long we are to watch. The time is kept from our knowledge for this very end, that we may always be watching: Mat. xxi. 36, 'Watch and pray always;' 2 Tim. iv. 5, 'But watch thou in all things.' There must be a constant and continual watch. When we are secure we lose our actual fitness, and our common enemy breaks in upon us. There is a working, warring principle in our hearts.

4. There is a blessing promised to those that watch: Rev. xvi. 15, 'Blessed is he that watcheth;' and Luke xii. 37, 'Blessed are those



servants whom their Lord when he cometh shall find watching.' What do we lose by watching but a few trifling pleasures, which are abundantly recompensed here and hereafter by solid rejoicing in Christ? It is irksome to the flesh, but the reward sweeteneth it.

5. The hazard and danger of not watching. It is notably represented in this parable: only the ready enter. Take heed, therefore, the like do not happen to you as to the foolish virgins: they are excluded, and that irrevocably; if they would never so fain enter, Christ will not hearken unto them: Rev. iii. 3, 'If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee like a thief in the night;' 1 Thes. v. 3. Woful is their condition that are secure and unprovided.

6. Consider what men would do to avoid temporal inconveniency: Mat. xxiv. 43, 'If the good man of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have watched;' much more should Christ's disciples to avoid eternal destruction. It is an advantage to put the case in outward things, Mal. i. 8; it sheweth the disproportion of our respects to temporals and spirituals. If we are so careful in looking to our bodies and goods, we are or should be more careful in watching over our souls, where the danger is greater. The world's diligence and double diligence in earthly things will condemn our neglect in spiritual things.

*Use 1.* I may from hence take occasion to bewail the neglect of this duty. Oh! how much is watching laid aside! Thence cometh our decay of grace. The church of Sardis was even dead for want of it, Rev. iii. 2. Thence comes our want of comfort, and of assurance of God's love. Our peace of conscience is gotten by diligence, and kept with watchfulness. Thence comes our loathness to die, and our coldness to everlasting life. We do not 'gird up the loins of our minds, and watch.' Thence come all our afflictions. God is fain to use dreadful means to awaken his servants out of their drowsiness. We are apt to be drowsy and sleepy; God useth sharp discipline to awaken us; some smart cross or sickness to bring us to ourselves again. We should bewail the neglect of watching in two things:—

1. Our not watching for the coming of the Lord. Some can live merrily and quietly in a careless unprepared estate; but do these men consider what it is to meet with their Redeemer, before they have gotten any benefit by his blood? We cannot draw nigh to him with any comfort till we feel the benefit of his death, Heb. x. 22. His business is 'to present his people faultless to God,' Jude 24. These men do not consider what it is to meet with the judge, 1 Peter iv. 5. There is no plea but innocency and pardon in Christ, Rom. viii. 1; 1 John iii. 8. These do not consider how they shall look Christ in the face, when so unlike him, 1 John iii. 1, 2, and 1 John iv. 17. These do not consider what it is to meet the bridegroom when their filthy garments are yet on.

2. Bewail the neglect of watching against present evils with care and circumspection. What is the matter? Is Satan less busy to tempt, or is the heart of man and human nature grown better, and sin less dangerous? Is our weakness and inability so far strengthened and cured, that we are out of danger of falling? Were the servants of God such weaklings, that prayed, as David, Ps. xxxix., 'I put a

watch upon the door of my lips;' and Job, that 'made a covenant with his eyes'? Job xxxi. 1. But rather are not we more foolhardy and negligent, do not mind our business, and consider not the inconveniency of not watching?

*Use 2.* To press us to this duty; there is a God that watcheth, and enemies that watch, and conscience watcheth, and will do its office first or last; a day of judgment, when you are to answer for all that you have done; and will not you watch? When you consider how much you are in danger of sin, and in danger by sin, can you be negligent and secure? Oh! watch your hearts, Prov. iv. 23; watch your tongue, Ps. xxxix. 1; watch your senses, Job xxxi. 1: gratify them and you wound your hearts. Watch your ways, Prov. iv. 24; but above all watch your state. Let us examine well our case, that we may be found in Christ, and have the 'seal of his Spirit,' Eph. i. 13. That is your warrant.

For means to help us in this duty of watchfulness:—

1. Sobriety, or moderation in the use of all outward things: 1 Thes. v. 6, 'Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but watch and be sober,' 1 Peter i. 13, iv. 7.

2. Go to God in prayer. Watching and prayer are often joined together. We are best kept when recommended into God's hand: Ps. cxli. 3, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.' I do observe there—(1.) That unadvised and passionate speeches do easily drop from us in our troubles, especially in our persecution. (2.) That a godly conscientious man is very tender of these, as of all evil. He that would live in communion with God for the present, and hope to appear with comfort before him hereafter, is sensible of the least thing that tends to God's displeasure and God's dishonour. This is the true spirit of one that will be owned by Christ at the last day. (3.) There is no way to prevent being provoked to impatience and rashness of speech, or any evil, but by keeping a watch, and renewing our obligations to God. (4.) Whoever would keep a watch must call in the aid and assistance of God's grace: 'Lord, set a watch upon the door of my lips.'

## SERMON XI.

*For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to every one according to his several ability.—MAT. XXV. 14, 15.*

THE particle *for* sheweth that this parable hath some connection with the former. We have but two great affairs in the world—the one to promote God's glory, the other to save our own souls; or, in other words, to be faithful to God and wise for ourselves. This latter was taught us in the former parable; the wise and provident virgins made sufficient preparation for their reception into the nuptial feast. The other, faithfulness to God, in employing our gifts, talents, and oppor-

tunities for his glory, is taught in this parable. Therefore the drift of it is, to set us all a-work in our places and callings for the glory of God, that we may look Christ in the face at his coming, *for the kingdom of heaven, &c.*

In which words we have—

First, The person trusting, *a man*; who is here represented—

1. As a great lord and master, that hath servants of his own, and several gifts to bestow upon them at his pleasure. In Luke it is, ‘A certain nobleman, who went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom,’ Luke xix. 12. In Mark, chap. xiii. 34, ‘A great master of a house,’ who intrusts his servants with his goods till his return.

2. He is here considered as *travelling into a far country*. Christ’s ascending into heaven is thereby intended; for gifts are the fruits of his ascension.

Secondly, The persons intrusted; he *called his own servants, and delivered to them*. Not only ministers and officers of the church are meant, though they especially; but all Christians, who are Christ’s servants, employed by him in one state of life or other.

Thirdly, The things intrusted, *his goods*; they are *bona*, things good in their nature; and they are *dona*, gifts freely given, and delivered to us: and not merely given; they are *talenta*, talents; not things merely given as we give money to a beggar, but as we give to a factor. As they are *bona*, they must not be despised; as *dona*, gifts, they call for thankfulness; as talents, for faithfulness. The Jewish talent was a hundred and eighty-one pounds ten shillings. Now these talents are ordinances, opportunities, estates, gifts, graces, all that we have received from God, either *dona administrantia* or *sanctificantia*: helps and means and opportunities to glorify him, which are the occasions or the graces of the Spirit; which are the dispositions to make us so to do.

Fourthly, The variety observed in the distribution, *to one five, to another two, to another one*; which difference expresseth the divers kinds of gifts, and the measure and the degree in which they are bestowed. Though all have not equal measure, yet every one hath some gift and some measure, something that is peculiar to himself, whereby he may be useful.

Fifthly, The rule which is observed in the distribution, *to every one according to his ability*. As in the parable the wise master knoweth every servant, according to his prudence and skill, so in the explication of the parable every man is gifted and employed by Christ according to his natural receptivity. The eye hath its office as an eye, and the hand as a hand, and the foot as a foot.

I shall not pursue every minute circumstance, but only touch upon those things which are most remarkable.

First, Observe then—

*Doct. 1.* That Christ Jesus is the great Lord and owner.

He is so represented here with respect to persons and things. Persons: those that receive the talents are called ‘his own servants;’ and the several gifts and good things bestowed upon them are called ‘his goods;’ and these dispensed according to his sovereign will and pleasure, to one more, to another less.



Concerning Christ's being a lord and owner, let me give you these observations :—

First, The power of Christ as an owner and free lord is to be distinguished from his power as a governor and ruler. As a free lord, 'he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy.' As a governor and ruler, so he 'judgeth the world in righteousness,' or according to the law or stated rule which he hath given of his will. With respect to the one, 'it is not in him that willeth, or in him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy.' But with respect to the other 'so run that you may obtain.' Compare Rom. ix. 16, with 1 Cor. ix. 24; for God, that is arbitrary in his gifts, is not arbitrary in his judgments. His law and the precepts of it is the rule of our duty; but in the sanction of it it is the rule of God's process. But as an owner he discovereth his sovereignty and dominion; as a ruler or judge, his justice or righteousness. All acts and matters of free favour are dispensed by him as a lord, but matters of right and wrong come before him as a judge. The goodman of the house pleaded ill, 'I may do with my own as it pleaseth me,' Mat. xx. 15; that belongeth to a supreme owner. Besides, his being an owner goeth before his being a ruler, and is the foundation of it; for his absolute propriety in us giveth him a legislative power over us, to dispose of us or command us according to his own will. He may give his creatures what rules he pleaseth, and order them to what ends he thinketh good, and bind them to observe his order upon what terms he will: 'I am the Lord,' Lev. xviii. 1-6. Therefore, before the course of government established between him and the world, he is first considered as an owner.

Secondly, This power and ownership accrueth to Christ by a double title—*jure creationis, et redemptionis*.

1. By right of creation: Ezek. xviii. 4, 'Behold, all souls are mine.' He hath a right to dispose of man, and all the rest of his creatures, as being all of them the works of his hands. He that gave them their beings when they were not, and still supporteth them now they are, hath an undoubted just right to order them according to his own will. We have nothing but what we had from him; and we have nothing that we ourselves can keep a moment; and we have it upon these terms, to use it for his glory.

2. By right of redemption: Rom. xiv. 9, 'For to this end Christ both died and rose again, that he might be Lord of dead and living;' and 1 Cor. vi. 20, 'Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your bodies and souls, which are his.' This giveth him a new title to us, though the former ceased not, but will continue.' Whilst man receiveth his being from God by creation, and the continuance of his being by preservation, it is a power commutative, not destructive; it is superadded to the former, and is more comfortable and beneficial to us, as well as bindeth us more firmly to God, wholly to be disposed, guided, and ordered by him at his will.

Thirdly, This power as owner is entire and absolute: Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' We receiving our whole being from God, it is all at his dispose. All human propriety is derived, limited, and respective, because we in being and operation depend upon another; and therefore man cannot be *sui juris*,

at his own dispose, and lord of his own actions. He hath *principium et finem*, a principle upon which he dependeth, and an end to which he is appointed. Now it is no more lawful to abstain from respecting and seeking his end, than it is possible not to depend upon his principle. He hath a superior, to whom he must give an account, seeing he wholly dependeth upon him, and is wholly subject to him. But this property is originally and primarily in God as a fountain, not subordinate, or dependent upon any higher. If this be not so intelligible, let me speak more plainly. There is *dominium jurisdictionis, et dominium proprietatis*; such as a prince hath over his goods and lands. His dominion is more absolute over his goods and lands than over his subjects; that is bounded by laws. God hath the most absolute title over us, and all that we possess; it is so great that it cannot be greater.

Fourthly, God cannot be divested of this power and interest in us.

1. It is so absolutely inherent in him, that it cannot be communicated to another; that is, we cannot alienate and make void this right by our sins. Though we sold ourselves for nought, Isa. lii. 3, it was to our loss, not to God's. He hath a full right to command us to keep his law, whether men be faulty or innocent. A drunken servant is a servant, though he be disabled to do his master's work. No man's right can be vacated without his consent. Creatures are creatures still, obnoxious to the law of the Creator, or his punishment for the breach of it. In that interest we have in things, the default of another doth not make void our right, especially if it be inferiors; as the rebellion of the subject doth not exempt him from the power of his prince.

2. Neither doth God give it away by bestowing gifts upon the creature; for he hath given us only *dispensationem*, the employment of these things, not *dominium*, the sovereign power over them. Man hath nothing that is his own. As to life, it is clear man is not *dominus vite*, but *custos*; which is true not only of our life, but of our time, wealth, strength, parts, yea, of all that we have. Still we are subject to a higher lord, who hath an absolute uncontrollable right. All our owning is but a stewardship, Luke xvi. 2. We have a right to prevent the encroachment of our fellow-creatures. We have a right by way of charge and trust, as a steward to things committed to him, or as a workman hath a right to his tools or instruments to do his work, or a factor in the estates committed to him; but an absolute independent right we have not. They are not ours to use as we think meet. They were rebels that said, 'Our tongues are our own,' Ps. xii.

4. Well, then, when God dispersed his gifts, he did not dispossess himself. As the husbandman doth not intend to throw away his seed when he scattereth it in the furrows, but soweth it to receive it again with increase, so God.

3. I will add this, that God cannot give this absolute right to another that is not God, no more than he can cut off the creature from depending upon himself. In our way of owning our petty interests it may be permitted, as a lord may make his vassal and slave free, or a prince his subjects; as Saul proclaimed that whosoever should overcome Goliath, he would make his house free in Israel; that is, free from

taxes, imposts, service in war, 1 Sam. xvii. 25. But now no creature can be exempted from duty to God; for dependence upon God and subjection to him are so twisted together, that the one cannot be without the other. We wholly depend upon him for being, and all things else, and therefore must be wholly subject to him. We still continue in our being; now the continuance of our very duty and being doth still depend upon God.

Fifthly, God's sovereign dominion over us, and interest in us, may be set forth by these three things, at least to our present purpose:—

1. A right of making or framing anything as he willeth, in any manner as it pleaseth him: 'As the potter hath power over his own clay to form what vessel he pleaseth, either of honour or dishonour,' Rom. ix. 21; and Jer. viii. 16, 'As clay in the hand of the potter, so are ye in my hand, saith the Lord of hosts.' Nothing before it had a being had a right to dispose of itself, neither did God make it what it was by necessity of nature, nor by the command, counsel, or will of any superior, or the direction of any coadjutor; neither is there any to whom he should render an account of his work; but merely produced all things by the act of his own will, as an absolute owner and sovereign lord of all his actions: Eph. i. 11, 'He worketh all things according to the counsel of his will;' and Rev. iv. 11, 'Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' Such was God's absolute power. This should be thought of by us, because whatever was given us in creation is not a matter of right, but the mere effect of God's good-will and good pleasure. He might have made us stocks and stones, and not living creatures, or, among living creatures, plants only, with a life of vegetation and growth; or if a sensitive life, in the lowest rank, toads and vipers, or at best, but as horse or mule, without understanding, and not men. Among men, all the blessings and privileges we were born to might have been withheld without any injustice. The various constitutions and complexions of men, all their gifts and natural capacities, are the fruits of his sovereign will.

2. A right of having and possessing all things so made and framed by him. Amongst men, whosoever maketh anything by his own proper art and labour, and of his own stuff, must needs have a full right to it, and a full power to dispose of it; yet no workman ever made anything without some matter; but God made all things without matter pre-existing, and therefore surely his right is greater. Wherefore God is called not only the maker of heaven and earth, but the possessor, Gen. xiv. 19. God is the great proprietor, and in a sense the only proprietor that hath *dominium proprie dictum*: 'Gold and silver are mine,' Hag. ii. 8; and Hosea ii. 9, 'I will return, and take away my corn and my wine in the season thereof;' Ps. l. 10, 'His are the cattle upon a thousand hills;' yea, 'The whole earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,' Ps. xxix. 1, 16. All is God's, in whatsoever hands it be: 'The Lord hath need of him,' is argument enough. Now this doth mightily increase our confidence, check our usurpations, quicken us to faithfulness, that the great owner may not be deprived of his right.

3. He hath a right of using and disposing all things thus in his



possession according to his own pleasure. Reason will tell us that the use, benefit, and utility of anything belongeth to him whose it is ; so God is the sole disposer of all things. As he made them for himself, so he governeth them ultimately and terminatively for himself ; some things immediately, all things ultimately : ‘ By whom and for whom all things were made,’ Prov. xvi. 4 ; all the conditions of men, riches, poverty, health, sickness, ease, pain, life, death. Now this right of disposing of us is of great use to keep us in a quiet subjection to God’s laws and providence, without murmuring or repining. We cannot say to him, What makest thou ? or, Why doest thou this ? Isa. xlv. 9. It is enough God did it. But to apply the whole.

*Use 1.* It serveth to check many sins. All mischief and disorder cometh from looking upon ourselves as proprietaries and owners, and not considering who hath the great interest in us. Surely were these truths well digested and thought of by us, it would work a great cure upon mankind.

1. That nothing we have is our own.

2. That whatsoever is given us by God, is given us for his service, to be done to him.

3. That to this Lord of ours we must be answerable, who will one day call us to an account. Or will you take one of them, if all be too many to be remembered by you ; and that one implieth all the rest : ‘ Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price.’ If a man did think of this, My heart is not my own, it is God’s, and he must have it, he would not fill it with the dross of evil thoughts. My time is not my own ; my tongue, my wit, my language, it is not my own. Would the prodigal waste his estate so vainly ? Reprove him, and he will tell you, I spend but my own. The covetous man saith, ‘ Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, and give it to men that I know not ?’ 1 Sam. xxv. 11. How easily might you persuade him to charity, could you convince him it is another’s goods, and to be laid out when the Lord hath need of it. It would check our pride to consider ‘ who made us to differ,’ 1 Cor. iv. 7. Alas ! master, it was borrowed, as Elisha’s servant told his master. A groom is proud of his master’s horse : they are proud of that which is none of theirs, that are proud of their parts and proud of their estates. Yea, it would check our spiritual pride, when we have done anything for God, or suffered anything for God, or given anything for God’s sake : 1 Chron. xxix. 12–14, ‘ Of thine own have we given thee, for all is thine.’

*Use 2.* Is to press us to more faithfulness in God’s service ; to serve him more with our parts, time, strength, wit, wealth, power, and interest. All the good things that God hath given us are God’s still. Now you should ‘ give unto God the things that are God’s. You are robbers if you lay not out all that you have according to his will, and for his glory. But (1.) ‘ Give yourselves to the Lord,’ 2 Cor. viii. 5, and then other things will come in the more easily. You are his already ; you cannot add to God’s right ; yet it may add to the obligation, bind you more strongly to subjection and obedience. Oh ! then, in the first place, become his servants and vassals ; avouch God to be your God : Deut. xxvi. 17, ‘ Thou hast avouched this day the Lord to be thy God.’ Wicked men give up themselves to the Lord, but it is by constraint :

‘All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.’ But, ‘Oh, that they had an heart!’ Deut. v. 28, 29. (2.) Having given yourselves to the Lord, give other things to him. A Christian lays himself, and all his interests and capacities, at Jesus Christ’s feet, that he may make an advantage of everything for God: Zech. xiv. 20, ‘In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; yea, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord.’ We have received nothing from ourselves, and therefore should improve all we are and have for God. (3.) The reality of our dedication will be known by our use, if hard at work for God, and this be the business of our lives: Phil. i. 21, ‘To me to live is Christ.’ It is not enough negatively that our gifts be not employed against Christ as weapons of unrighteousness, but positively for God, that he gets something by every relation and acquaintance: Neh. i. 11, ‘Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and give him mercy in the sight of this man; for I was the king’s cup-bearer.’ He improved his place for God when he was in it. God hath made many great and rich, but what doth the Lord get by them? Are they more useful? Some have wit, but do not consecrate it to Jesus Christ; have power, interest, and great place, but they do not honour God thereby: though they profess to give up themselves to God, yet in the use of themselves there appeareth no such matter: they use their tongues as their own, hearts as their own, wealth, strength, and interests as their own. Therefore you should keep a constant reckoning how you lay out yourselves for God. Undertake nothing but what will bear this inscription upon it, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ Put this question to yourselves, Can I dedicate this to the Lord? Eccles. ii. 2, ‘What doth it?’

*Secondly*, In the parable, this man, the owner, is represented as ‘travelling into a far country,’ and undertakes there to receive a kingdom, and disposing of all his interests till his return. This noteth Christ’s ascension into heaven; and the point will be—

*Doct. 2.* That Christ at his departure appointed every man his work, and at his ascension gave gifts unto men, to be employed for his glory till he come again.

There are two things offered in the parable and in the point:—

1. His appointing every man his work; as the man disposed of all his matters till his return. Christ hath given order how every man, according to his ability and calling, should employ himself till he come again. We read, Acts i. 3, how Christ before his ascension instructed his disciples in ‘all things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven;’ that is, in all the duties of rulers and ruled, teachers and taught; the ordinances, laws, and institutions of his kingdom, the duties and privileges of the subjects thereof; what immunities they enjoy, what obedience they must perform. This was his last charge before his departure. Now we are to keep his charge as we will answer it to him at his coming: 1 Tim. vi. 13, 14, ‘I charge thee in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ It was needful that Christ should go from us for a while; for he would not govern the world by sense, but by faith.

Now he will make trial of our faithfulness and diligence during his absence ; and therefore, having appointed us our work, he withdraweth. He will come again to take notice not only of the malice of his enemies against his people and interest, but also of the coldness and negligence of his own servants and domestics: 2 Thes. i. 8, 'He shall come in flaming fire, rendering vengeance upon them that know not God, and obey not the gospel;' nay, if not flatly disobedient, yet if evil slothful servants.

2. His giving gifts. Gifts were given at Christ's ascension ; when he took his journey, then he bestowed his goods to his servants. As Elijah let fall his mantle, when he was translated, so did Christ bestow his gifts and the graces of his Spirit: Eph. iv. 8, 'He ascended up on high, and gave gifts to men.' There is a threefold reason of this:—

[1.] The bestowing of the Spirit was necessary to supply the want of his bodily presence: John xvi. 7, 'Nevertheless, I tell you the truth ; it is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.' While Christ was with them, the Spirit was not given ; but when his bodily presence was removed, then cometh the Comforter: God will not withhold what is useful. If he take away outward comforts, he will give us the Spirit.

[2.] It was fit he should enter upon his kingdom before his members participate so largely of his fulness, John vii. 38. Before his incarnation grace was given upon trust, therefore more sparingly ; afterwards coming in the flesh, the disciples were dull in comparison of what they were when the price was paid. He was entered into possession of his dignity, had taken actual possession of his kingdom ; then he poureth out the gifts and graces of the Spirit, that the glorious estate of his church and subjects might not go before, but come after the glorious estate of their king and head.

[3.] To show that in his exaltation he is still mindful of his servants. As soon as warm in the mediatorial throne, he sendeth down gifts and graces: Acts ii. 33, 'Being at the right hand of the Father exalted, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.' Presently he beginneth to show for what reason he is gone to heaven, powerfully to apply the work of redemption.

*Use 1.* Hath Christ appointed to men their work? It should quicken us to keep the charge of the Lord: Gen. i. 16, 'Thy father did command before he died.' If we have any respect to the memory of our Lord departed from us, any expectation of his coming again, so let us be faithful in the work appointed us to do. He instructed his apostles in all the duties and privileges of the kingdom of God, and they have instructed us, and you must answer it to Christ at his coming ; therefore be diligent in glorifying God in your places.

*Use 2.* As he gave gifts. Look upon Christ as exalted at the right hand of God to dispense the gifts and graces of the Spirit, for the bringing about the salvation of all that come to God by him. It is said, 2 Kings ii. 9, 10, that if Elisha should see his master ascending, he should have his spirit doubled upon him. It is true here ; if by faith we look to Christ ascended, his Spirit in some measure will come upon us ; we have free liberty and access to him, to enjoy him for ever.

*Thirdly,* The master in the parable giveth not the same measure



of talents to each servant: Christ giveth not a like measure of grace to every one; but to some more, to some less, as he thinketh expedient. Here are five talents, and two talents, and one talent, given to each servant, as there was a different measure given to Timothy and Demas.

*Doct. 3.* That it pleaseth the Lord to dispense his gifts variously among his people, to some more, to some fewer talents.

See this is often inculcated in the scripture: Rom. xii. 6, 'Having then gifts, differing according to the grace given to us;' 1 Cor. vii. 7, 'Every man hath his proper gift, one after this manner, another after that.' God giveth to every one in the church a measure and portion of gifts as it pleaseth him. So 1 Cor. xii. 11, 'All these things worketh one and the same spirit,' which is the proper seat of this doctrine. So Eph. iv. 7, 'To every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' So 1 Peter iv. 10, 'As every one hath received the gift, so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the grace of God.' I have brought all these scriptures to show you that this is a thing worthy to be taken notice of, and seriously improved by us.

I shall give you some observations concerning this diversity and variety.

1. That every one hath some talent or other to improve for God. He that had least, had one; and the least gift is compared to a talent: there is none of God's people but they have received some gift from him, which, being rightly employed, may make them useful for the glory of God and the good of others; if not in the higher and more public office, yet as wives, children, servants, Titus ii. 10. Every one hath his service and opportunity to do something for God: all offered to the tabernacle gold, or silver, or brass, or chittim-wood, or goats'-hair, or badgers'-skins. So, as Christ went to Jerusalem, some strewed the way with garments, others cut down branches, some cried Hosanna; that was all they could do.

2. That there is a great diversity in the talents which we have. The Lord doth not give all to one, nor to all alike.

[1.] There is a diversity of employments and offices. The apostle telleth us, Rom. xii. 4, 'All members have not the same office;' some an eye, some a hand, some a head, some a foot. Magistracy, ministry are distinct offices in the church, which ought not to be confounded or invaded: Eph. iv. 11, 12, 'And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying the body of Christ;' and Isa. liv. 11, 'I will lay thy foundations with sapphires, and thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.' Here are variety of employments, foundations, windows, gates, borders, to hold forth the variety of the gifts and graces of the members of the Church.

[2.] There is a diversity in the kind of gifts. In the general, some are common, some saving, Heb. vi. 5, 9. Carnal men have great abilities for the good of others, the stamp may be iron or brass, though the impress be on gold and silver; some bodily, some spiritual. Some are called to glorify God with their honour and estates; so Luke

ix. 11; others with the gifts of the mind. The gifts of the mind are common or saving. Among the common gifts, 'One hath the word of wisdom, another the word of knowledge,' 1 Cor. xii. 8-10. Some are able to lay down the truth soundly, others able to apply it forcibly. Some have the gift of prayer and utterance, others are able to inform the judgment or convince gainsayers; some to clear up doctrines, others to stir affections. As the three ministers of Geneva, *Vireto nemo docuit dulcius, Farello nemo tonuit fortius, nemo doctius locutus est Calvino*. Among hearers, some have more wisdom, some more knowledge, some more affection. Amongst the penmen of scripture, there is a great variety: John is sublime and seraphical, Paul spiritual and argumentative, Peter in an easy fluent and mild way, Isaiah more court-like and lofty, Jeremiah more priest-like and grave. Among the saving gifts there is a diversity of graces, though all have all in some measure. The new creature is not maimed, yet some are more eminent, some for one grace, some for another: Abraham for faith, Job for patience, Moses for meekness, Timothy for temperance; every grace working according to the diversity of tempers. Some are modest and mild, others bold and zealous; some are mourning for sin, others raised in the admiration of the grace of God in Christ; others exemplary for strictness, and weanedness from the delights of the animal life.

[3.] There is a diversity as to the measure and degrees. Every barque that saileth to heaven doth not draw a like depth: there is 'the measure of the gift of Christ,' Eph. iv. 7; and 'the measure of every part,' ver. 16. 'To some it may be said, 'Great is thy faith;' to others, 'O ye of little faith!' Some are fathers, some young men, some babes in Christ, 1 John ii. 13, 14; and in heaven there are degrees of glory suitable.

[4.] That this diversity cometh from the same free love of God, and therefore not to be used contrary to the mind of the giver. This is the free gift of God, flowing from his undeserved grace, there being nothing foreseen in any that can merit the least good at God's hand: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'Who made thee to differ?' Rom. xii. 35, 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' The sun oweth nothing to the stars, nor the fountain to the streams.

[5.] Our account must be answerable to our receipts; there is a proportion of return expected: Hezekiah rendered not according to what he received. They that have received much shall account for much; and they that have received little shall account for little: he that received five talents must look to reckon for five: as he comforted his friend that had but one eye, that he should account but for the sins of one eye.

Now for the reasons of this diversity.

1. To show the liberty of his counsels. Christ may do with his own as he pleaseth; he will be known to be the sovereign Lord in the distribution of his gifts, and giving out his grace to his creatures as he shall see good: Mat. xi. 26, 'Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight;' 1 Cor. xii. 11, 'For all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, distributing to every man severally as he will.' Not as you will, but as he will. The Spirit is compared to wind, not only

for its force, but its liberty, John iii. 8; when and how he pleaseth. To some he giveth riches, to some gifts, common knowledge and utterance; some have this gift, some that; some in a lower measure, some in a higher; some have a peculiar excellency in gifts and graces, others only the common sincerity.

2. That all may know that all fulness is only in himself, Col. i. 19. The greatest degree of gifts and graces that God bestoweth upon any is far below that fulness that is in Christ; they have a measure, but Christ without measure, John iii. 34. He giveth to none so much but there is always something wanting; and they that have received most are capable of receiving more.

3. God will have this difference for the beauty and order of the whole: variety is more grateful. Hills and valleys make the world beautiful; so do distinct orders, ranks, and degrees of men. All eye or all belly is monstrous; difference with proportion maketh beauty; therefore one excelleth another, and several gifts and ranks there are for the service of the whole.

4. That every one in the sight of his own wants may be kept humble. When we are singular for any excellency, we are apt to grow proud and unsociable; the eye is apt to say to the hand or foot, 'I have no need of thee,' 1 Cor. xii. 21. Every man hath something to commend him to the respect of others; therefore God hath so scattered his gifts that every one should need another, that we may have the use of that gift which we have not the possession of.

[1.] To maintain love and mutual respect, and that there might be no schism in the body. The apostle saith, Eph. iv. 16, 'The whole body compacted and joined together by that which every part supplieth.'

[2.] Diversity of gifts was most intended, not to dissolve the bonds of union, but to strengthen them rather; and therefore the apostle, when he had reckoned up the bonds of union, he presently addeth, 'But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ,' Eph. iv. 7. First he speaketh of what is one in all, and then of those things which are not one in all, but diverse in every one. Every one hath his distinct excellency to endear him to the respects of others. Diversity of gifts are an ordinary occasion of division and strife; contempt, envy, pride, discouragement ariseth from hence, but in itself one of the strongest bonds of union; whilst all in their way contribute to the good of the whole, and make use of that excellency in another which themselves want, and we mutually communicate to one another our benefits. As divers countries have divers commodities, and one needeth another; one aboundeth with wines, some have spices, others have skins, and commodities in other kinds, that by commerce and traffic there might be society maintained among mankind; so God in his church hath given to one gifts, to another grace, to maintain a holy society and spiritual commerce among themselves.

*Use 1.* Is to persuade us to employ our several talents for God, be they more or less; none are to be idle: 2 Tim. ii. 6, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee.'

1. If we have but one talent, God expects the improvement of it: Adam in innocency had his work appointed him by God.



2. Those that have the greatest gifts should not contemn those that have few or less ; and those that have few not envy others that have more, but be mutually helpful one to another, acknowledging the wisdom and goodness of God in all that we have. It is a base spirit that would shine alone, or set up one gift to the prejudice of another : 'Let no man glory, for all things are yours,' 1 Cor. iii. 21. He that laid the world in hills and valleys would not have all champaign and smooth ground, Prov. xvii. 15.

*Use.* 2. Give yourselves and all that is yours to God. Nothing is more reasonable than that every one should have his own ; therefore let us consent to God's propriety, and absolutely resign ourselves to the will, dispose, and use of our creator ; but first ourselves, and then what is ours.

## SERMON XII.

*Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. Likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.—MAT. XXV. 16–18.*

THIS is the second part of the parable. We have heard of the master's distribution, now we shall hear of the servants' negotiations, how they employed the talents received. There was a disparity and inequality in the distribution, so in the negotiation. Two of the servants used their talents well ; the third traded not at all, but 'went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.' Among them that used their talents well there was a difference, but still with proportion to what they had received : 'He that had received five talents made them other five : and he also that had received two gained other two.'

*Doct.* 1. That those that have received talents must trade with them for God's glory and the salvation of their own souls and the good of others.

*Doct.* 2. In trading, our returns must carry proportion with our receipts.

*Doct.* 3. Among those that have received talents all are not faithful ; for one hid his lord's money.

For the first point—

*Doct.* 1. That those that have received talents must trade with them for God's glory and the salvation of their own souls and the good of others, I shall first explain the point, and then prove it.

*First,* For the explication or illustration, I will inquire—

1. What things are to be accounted talents ?
2. What it is to trade with them ?
3. To whom the gain and increase redoundeth ?

First, What are these talents ? In the general, all the things God hath intrusted us with, or anything that may help to promote the glory of God ; reason, health, strength, time, parts, interests, power,

authority, wealth, the mercies of his providence, afflictions, ordinances, means of grace; yea, grace itself. All these are vouchsafed to us freely by God, and may be improved for his glory. There is none of us but have had many advantages and opportunities put into our hands of glorifying God and promoting our own and others' salvation. Of all it may be said, Prov. xvii. 16, 'Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to use it?' Reason and parts are a price put into your hands, so is time and strength, so are riches and power, so are ordinances and providences, and indeed all the blessings of this life. God must be gainer, and also yourselves. In a spiritual sense he must have a share in your time, strength, wealth, and power; and you must gain by every ordinance and every providence something whereby you may be more fitted to glorify his name, and to do good in your generation. But more particularly talents may be referred to two heads—*dona sanctificantia et administrantia*: graces, helps, and saving gifts.

1. *Dona sanctificantia*, sanctifying gifts, or the graces of the Spirit; these are highest, and are called the 'true riches;' Luke xvi. 11, 'If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who shall commit to your trust the true riches?' To be trusted with an estate is not so great a trust as to be trusted with grace: this is a gift more precious, and should not lie idle. God trusts ordinary men with common gifts before he trusts them with grace. When we suspect that a vessel is leaky, we try it first with water before we fill it with wine. God expecteth more honour from new creatures than he doth from all the world besides, that they should do more good in their places; partly because they have new obligations by redemption: 1 Cor. vi. 20, 'You are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your bodies and souls, which are God's.' You are twice bound, and a double obligation will infer a double condemnation, if we answer it not. And partly because by regeneration they have new dispositions, they are more fitted to glorify God and do good to others; Eph. i. 12, 'That we should be to the praise of his glory.' Their τὸ εἶναι, their new being, fitteth them to honour God. They serve mainly for this very use, and therefore this duty of trading for God lieth first and most upon them. Wherefore hath God created them anew in Christ Jesus but to glorify his name, and admire his grace, and live answerable to his love, and to bring him into request among all about them? Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' They that are eminent for the profession of godliness, and are set as lights in the world, or a city upon a hill, these should bring much honour to God, and provoke others to do so; as the stars, which are the shining part of heaven, draw eyes after them; if they should be eclipsed they set the world a-wondering: so should they shine as lights in the 'midst of a crooked generation,' Phil. ii. 15; or as the star that shined at Christ's birth conducted the wise men to him, so should they by their profession and practice lead others to Christ.

2. *Dona administrantia*, subservient helps. Now these are of several sorts.

[1.] Either gifts of nature, both of the mind and of the body. Of the mind, as promptness of wit, clearness of the understanding, soundness of judgment, or solid wisdom; all these were given you of God, and he expects an improvement of these for his glory; that every man should be what he is for his creator. It was a good saying of Epictetus in Arrian, *Si essem lusciniæ*, &c.—If I were a nightingale, I would sing as a nightingale: *Si essem alauda*, &c.—If I were a lark, I would pierce as a lark; but now I am a man I will glorify God as a man. But alas! how often do men of the best endowments miscarry! Isa. xlvii. 10, 'For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness, thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none besides me.' Satan made use of the serpent, who was the subtlest of beasts of the field, Gen. iii. 1. The devil loveth to go to work with the sharpest tools. God hath given great abilities to some above others, to enable them for his service. Now the devil, to despite God the more, turneth his own weapons against himself. But it should not be so. We should remember that we have nothing but what we have received, and 'who maketh us to differ?' 1 Cor. iv. 7. So of the body, as health and strength. Surely these *bona corporis* are talents. God fitteth every man for the work wherein he will be honoured by him: Gal. i. 15, 'Separated from his mother's womb,' with a body fit to endure travel and hardship. Strength is not to be wasted in sin and vanity, but employed for God. It is better it should be worn out with labours than eaten out with rust.

[2.] Outward interests, such as wealth, honour, and power; these are comfortable to the animal life, and lay an obligation upon us, and also they give us many advantages of doing good, which should always be taken hold of, and used by us; as the greater veins abound with blood to supply the less: Prov. iii. 9, 'Honour the Lord with thy substance, and the first-fruits of all thy increase.' Though many never forget God more than when he hath blessed them, it is their duty to make some improvement of this talent also: Ecces. vii. 11, 'Wisdom with an inheritance is good.' It is good of itself alone, but it is better, more useful and beneficial to ourselves and others, when God giveth us, with the blessings of this life, wisdom. Wealth is an excellent instrument, whereby a man is enabled to do much good, and is a help to piety and charity. Poor men are not heeded and regarded. So honour and great place is an opportunity whereby grace may put forth itself with greater advantage: Neh. i. 11, 'The Lord show me favour in the sight of this man; for I was the king's cup-bearer.' He mentions his relation as having made an advantage of it.

[3.] The providences we are exercised withal, whether mercies or afflictions, we are to give an account of them: mercies and comforts vouchsafed to us by God. It is a naughty heart that would enjoy anything apart from God, and looketh to his own personal contentment more than God's glory, Joel ii. 14. In a great famine they desire plenty, that there may be a meat-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord. So for afflictions; God expecteth some improvement of them. There is mercy in it, that God will put us under his discipline: Job vii. 18, 'What is man that thou shouldest visit him every morning,



and try him every moment?' And we must account for our afflictions, Amos iv. 2, 3. God reckoneth up our chastisements.

[4.] Ordinances and instituted helps; they come under a fourfold notion—duties, privileges, means, talents. As duties enjoined, so they are part of our homage due to God. It is not a matter arbitrary; there is a tie upon our consciences to keep us to the due observance of them. As privileges: Hosea viii. 12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law.' This keepeth us from weariness, that we may not consider them as a burdensome task: they are a great privilege, dearly bought: it is by the blood of Jesus that we draw near to God. As means for our growth and improvement; that notion is necessary, that we may not rest in the work wrought, but look after the grace dispensed thereby. There is much difference in doing things as a task and using them as a means; means are for some end. As talents for which we must give an account, which will quicken us to more earnest diligence in the improvement of them. Some do not look upon them as duties, and so neglect them; others not as privileges, and so are not so cheerful in the use of them; others not as means, and so rest in the work wrought; others not as talents, and so are indifferent whether they get good by them, yea or no.

Secondly, What is it to trade with them? It implieth—

1. A conscionable use of all our gifts.
2. A diligent improvement of them to the ends for which they were intended.

1. That we should use them well and holily; our graces well, our parts well, our estates well. Our gifts and graces are not for pride and ostentation: 'Open my lips, that my mouth may show forth thy praise,' not my own, saith holy David. The service of hell must not be maintained with the contributions of heaven, neither must we seek God's approbation to the setting up of our own glory: Phil. i. 15, some 'preached the gospel out of strife and envy.' Unmortified corruption will make a man's most excellent gifts subservient to his basest lusts, though exercised in the choicest duties of prayer and preaching. Applause, vainglory, and such like carnal motions and ends may set some men on work, and make them prostitute the service of Christ to their own lusts. This is not to trade as factors for God, but to set up for ourselves. So for estate; to spend it in pomp and vanity, it is 'sowing to the flesh,' Gal. vi. 8. To spend our wit, time, and strength upon the service of our fleshly lusts, or to make our body a strainer for meat and drink, or a channel for lust to run through; to be all for present profit, pleasure, and preferment; this is, instead of trading with talents, to use them to God's dishonour.

2. That we should be laborious according to our gifts and opportunities. As a servant is sent abroad to spy all advantages of gain for his master, so we are sent into the world to take all occasions of doing good: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Always abounding in the work of the Lord.' Ministers are to watch for souls, and magistrates are to watch for good, and private Christians to be careful to maintain good works. To do a little good by the by will not be accepted; we must be hard at work for God.

Thirdly, To whom the gain and increase redoundeth? In a moral

consideration there are three beings—God, neighbour, and self: accordingly we are appointed to work for three ends—the glory of God, the salvation of our own souls, and the good of others; and as we promote either of these ends, we are said to gain and increase our talents.

1. The glory of God must be regarded in the first place, or, which is always concerned with it, the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and his interest in the world; for all the gifts that we have received are for the Master's use. Though God cannot be enriched by anything that we can do, yet he counteth it an increase if we study to bring him into request, or to advance the kingdom of his Son. Therefore this must be our supreme end in all things: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' If in eating and drinking, and the use of our ordinary comforts, much more in the supreme and important actions of our lives, such as we would make a business of: God must be specially eyed there. God only is independent and self-sufficient, of himself and from himself; but self-seeking is monstrous and unnatural in the creature; they are of him, and by him, and for him: Rom. xi. 36, 'Of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' The motion of the creatures is circular, they end where they begun, man especially. Other creatures glorify God necessarily, we voluntarily and by choice; they passively, as they minister matter to the beholders to glorify God; we actively, as we are to intend and seek his glory in all things. They are made for God ultimately, but mediately for man; but we are made for his immediate service, and should glorify him in all.

2. The saving of our own souls, that must be regarded next to the glory of God. For next to the love of God, man is to love himself, and in himself first his better part. The great errors of the world come from mistaking self, and misplacing self: they misplace self when they set it above God, and prefer their interests before the conscience of their duty to him; then they mistake self, thinking themselves more concerned as a body than a soul, and prefer the satisfactions of the carnal life before the happiness of the spiritual. We never truly love ourselves but when we love our souls and seek their good. God ordereth all his providences for his own glory and the good of his people: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' So should we order all our actions. All things are sanctified to them that are sanctified to God, as helps and means, and something to bring us to him; so should we use all gifts, ordinances, and providences. We distinguished before of *bona sanctificantia, et administrantia*; this is the difference between them. The graces of sanctification, though profitable for others, yet are chiefly intended for the good of him that hath them; gifts of edification, though profitable for the owner, yet are principally intended for the good of others. A man that hath sanctifying grace, he doth good to others with it, that is but *utilitas emergens, not finis proprius*; it is not the proper and chief end for which those graces were chiefly given; but other subservient gifts are for the good of the body, not for the worth of the person that hath them: 1 Cor. xii. 7, 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.' That was the main and proper end.

3. For the good of others, their edification and benefit; as the sun doth not shine for himself, nor the fountains flow for themselves. We drive a joint-trade for heaven, and God hath scattered his gifts, that every part may supply somewhat for the good of the whole; as every member in the body hath its proper station and several use, by which the whole body receiveth benefit: Rom. xii. 4, 'For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office;' 1 Cor. xii. 14, 'For the body is not one member, but many.' A man hath not wealth for himself, nor parts for himself, not ministerial gifts for himself, to promote his own ends, but to bring in souls to God; not for pomp, but for use. All have their proper and distinct offices, some to serve, others to rule, some to counsel, others to execute. Every one hath their proper and distinct use; for God maketh nothing in vain, nor was the world appointed to be a hive for drones and idle ones. Therefore we should all in our places be doing good to others, helping them by our counsel, or by our estate and interest, or by our service; but especially should we do good to their souls; for we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, that is, by a regular love. Therefore first seek their spiritual good, as we would do our own, gaining upon them by assiduous counsels, provoking them by our example. Otherwise we hide what we have in a napkin; and what profit hath the world by hidden wisdom more than by hidden treasure?

*Secondly*, The reasons, or the confirmation of this point.

1. They that have received talents must trade, with them, because they are not only a gift, but a trust, given us to employ. As a gift, they call for our thankfulness; as a trust, for our faithfulness. He that hath an estate made over to him in trust, and for certain uses expressed in the conveyance, hath indeed no estate therein at all, but only with respect to those uses. The right of a feoffee in trust is *fidei commissarius*, is quite distinct from that of an owner and possessor. Just so it is here; and oh! that we could make you sensible that all that you have is for such uses whereby you may bring some glory to God and some good to others, and so save your own souls by the discharge of your trust! Surely, then, men would use their gifts more industriously, spend their estates better, their time better, and be more profitable in all their relations.

2. This trust is committed to servants, not to strangers or freemen, who are at their own dispose; so that from the quality of the persons receiving there is an argument and obligation upon them. I may desire another to take a trust, who may refuse me; but those under command must do as their Lord would have them. Now, thus are we to Christ, who hath an absolute right in us, and both made us and bought us.

3. The argument is still more binding, if there be a formal covenant and promise on their part that they will faithfully perform this trust. Now there is a covenant between God and us: 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people.' In that covenant we bind ourselves to seek his glory, and to do his people good. As we take God, whole God, to be ours, so we give up ourselves and all that is ours to him, to be for his use and service. In this covenant the *altera pars paciscens* is an inferior. Though there be a mutual interest, yet there cannot



be such an interest in God as God hath in us. God hath not only an interest in us, but a dominion over us, which an inferior cannot have over a superior; so that we are God's more fully than he can be ours. Now a trust accepted and broken afterwards involveth us in the greater crime. I am God's, and will be God's, and would I could do more for his glory; as a Christian in general, as a husband, or wife, or father, or child, or servant, I will more honour God in my place.

4. The fruit, comfort, and excellency of the thing trusted is most seen in the use. It is true of all sorts of talents. Take the lowest outward subservient helps, wealth, power, and honour. A man doth not see the comfort and use of wealth so much in anything as when he doth employ it for God. If he hoard it up, he hath it only for show; if he layeth it out to clothe his back or to feed his belly, he doth but make himself a more honourable sort of brute beast; all the while he is sowing to the flesh, or sacrificing to his god, the belly, or offering up a meat-offering or a drink-offering to appetite. But how sweet is it when we have opportunities of doing more for God! Then he seeth the use of wealth indeed; it giveth him advantages of service, and a more diffusive charity. Ordinances, the worth of them is most known in the use and improvement; not when we resort to them out of custom and fashion's sake, but use them as means to do our souls good. So for gifts; as wells are the sweeter for draining, so gifts are improved by using: so graces of the Spirit. God's most precious gifts should not lie idle: 2 Cor. vi. 1, 'We beseech you receive not the grace of God in vain.' In short, you do not taste the true sweetness of wealth when gorgeously attired, your tables plentifully furnished, and you glut yourselves with all manner of fleshly delights; but in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, that satisfieth the mind and conscience of them that do it; as you do not reap the increase of corn by scattering it in the sand, but casting it into a fruitful soil.

*Use 1.* To press us to this negotiation; for if these things be so, we should all rouse up ourselves, and say, What honour hath God by my wealth, my parts, my honour and greatness, my place and office? what protection to his cause, what relief and comfort to his people?

1. Consider, it is our business in the world. Now every one should ask for what end he was born, and continued in the world so long. Our Lord Jesus, John xviii. 37, saith, 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.' Every one is sent into the world for some end; for surely God would not make a creature in vain. We did not come into the world merely to fill up the number of things, as stones and rubbish, nor to grow in bulk and stature, as the plants, nor to enjoy pleasure without remorse, as the beasts: God would never then have given us those higher faculties of reason and conscience. For what end did I come into the world but to glorify God in my place, to act that part in the world which the great Master of the scenes appointed to me? Why do I live here? What have I done in pursuance of my great end? Most men live as beasts; eat, and drink, and sleep, and die, and there is an end of them; they never asked in good earnest for what purpose they came hither.

2. Every one is trading for somebody, the devil or the flesh, regard-

ing his maker's glory or his own satisfaction: there is no medium. Now which are you doing, trading for heaven or hell?

3. Consider how much you are intrusted with. Look within you, without you, round about you, and see how much you have to account for; the faculties of the mind, the members of the body, your time, health, honour, estate, lifted up to heaven in ordinances, Mat. xi. 23; much given, Mat. xii. 48, and Neh. i. 11. Now improve all for God.

4. Talents are increased the more employed. We double our gifts by the faithful use of them: 'He that had five talents gained other five; and he that had two, other two.' The more grace here, the more glory hereafter. If they be not employed they are lost. How many poor, blasted, withered Christians may we find, by slacking their zeal, and for want of diligent exercise! But on the contrary, as the widow's oil increased in the spending, and the loaves multiplied in the breaking, in Christ's miracle, and the right arm is bigger and fuller of spirits than the left, so grace, that decayeth by disuse, groweth by exercise. The corn sown bringeth in the increase.

5. We must give an account at last to God, Luke xix. 23; he will 'demand his own with usury.' What honour hath God had by us as ministers, magistrates, masters of families, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants? Beasts are not called to an account, for they have no reason and conscience, as man hath. What will you say when God shall reckon with you, what you have done with your time, strength, and estates? If an ambassador that is sent abroad to serve his king and country should return no other account of his negotiation than I was busy at cards and dice, and could not mind the employment I was sent about; or a factor, I spent riotously that which I should have spent in the mart or fair, will this pass for an excuse?

6. What a sad thing is it to have gifts for this end, to leave us without excuse, as the Gentiles have the 'light of nature,' Rom. i. 20, and Christians the 'light of the gospel:' John xv. 22, 'If I had not come, and spoken to them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin.' Others have the word preached to them: Mat. xxiv. 14, 'And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations;' compared with Mat. xiii. 9, 'Know that a prophet hath been among them;' have advantages and opportunities, but no heart to use them; only that God may be clear when he judgeth.

7. We improve the stock of corruption left us by Adam, why not the gifts given us by Jesus Christ? This fire needeth no blowing; of itself it breaketh out into a flame; and shall not we stir up ourselves, that we may be more useful? In employing our gifts three things are necessary—prudence, fidelity, and industry.

[1.] Prudence. This is necessary for a steward or factor: Luke xii. 42, 'Who then is a wise and faithful steward, whom the Lord shall make ruler over his household?' Now, there is a twofold wisdom—a wisdom that is not from above, and a wisdom that is from above, James iii. 16, 17. The first is earthly, sensual, devilish; it either serveth for earthly profits, or to give content to the flesh, or to affect dominion and greatness. He that hath this wisdom sets up for him-

self, and will never be a steward and factor for God. And this is to be wise for the present. But the wisdom we speak of is to be wise for the future, that it may be well with us to all eternity; and that is the wisdom that is 'pure and peaceable,' and full of good fruits; for that is the truest wisdom; it serveth all turns, and provideth for God and self too: that is a holy self-seeking, to seek self in God: it hath what the other affecteth in a more sincere way of enjoyment, 'Honour with God,' Rom. ii. 7; 'Pleasures with God,' Ps. xvi. 2; 'Rich towards God,' Luke xii. 20; 1 Tim. vi. 18, 'Rich in good works, that they may lay hold of eternal life.' This prudence would serve the turn, and make a man take all advantages of doing good.

[2.] Faithful: 1 Cor. iv. 2, 'Moreover, it is required of a steward that a man be found faithful;' that he sincerely seek the glory of God, and watch all advantages to promote his Lord's interest, and carry himself well in his trust.

[3.] Industry, that he stir up himself, 2 Tim. i. 6; 2 Tim. iv. 14, 'Neglect not the gift that is in thee.' Oh! let us not be idle, but hunt out occasions of doing good.

*Doct. 2.* In trading, our returns must carry proportion with our receipts.

'He that had five talents gained other five, and he that had two gained other two.' God will not accept of every man's rendering for the mercies of common providence, deliverances; 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, Hezekiah rendered something, but not according to the benefit received. Nor for the mercies of his covenant, justification, or pardoning mercy: Luke vii. 47, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.' All love requireth love, and an answerable degree. So for sanctification: he expecteth more from them to whom he hath given more grace: 1 Cor. xv. 10, 'But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.' And in general, of all talents, ordinances, he expecteth improvement: suitable, clear knowledge, strong faith, more ready obedience: Luke xii. 47, 48, 'And the servant that knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.' Otherwise his judgments will make it evident: Amos iii. 2, the valley of visions had the heaviest burthen. So for gifts of the mind. God expecteth service according to their measure: Eph. iv. 16, 'That which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part;' according to that place they hold in the body. No member is either dead, or idle, or living and working only to itself, but every one is to contribute for the good of others according to its measure. So for estate. God looks for more from them whose superfluities are larger than others enjoy, that they should be 'rich in good works,' 1 Tim. vi. 18. God accepteth the widow's two mites, that was more than the abundance of the rich; for 'she cast in all that she had,' Luke xxi. Still the rule holdeth.



The account riseth with the gifts ; and God will accept that at one man's hands that he will not accept of another, whose capacities and opportunities are greater, who have more time to spend in his immediate service, more wealth to bestow, more advantages of acquainting themselves with God. Only let me give you two cautions in judging of our returns.

First, That in gifts, either of mind or of the body, our faithfulness is measured by our endeavour, and not by our success. *Dominus non considerat*, saith Jerome, *lucris magnitudinem, sed studii voluntatem*. The crown of faithfulness and the crown of fruitfulness do both adorn the person that wears them. Though they be not gathered, yet our work is with God : Isa. xlix. 4, ' Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain : yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with God.' Though little fruit and effect on men, yet not the less regarded and rewarded by God.

Secondly, That in the laying out of our gifts, God doth not measure them by the quantity and value of what is given, but by the affection and heart of the giver. *Affectus pretium rebus imponit*, saith Ambrose ; which is a comfort to the poorer sort, who have but little to give and contribute to good uses : 1 Cor. viii. 11, ' If there be first a willing mind, a man is accepted according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not.' So in other things ; the smallness and meanness of the benefit doth not diminish God's estimation of man's love and affection. On the other side, it is an awe to the great and rich. All those pompous services, if not a real mind, are not accepted, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. God loveth *non copiosum, sed hilarem datorem*, not a large, but a cheerful giver.

Thirdly, Where the matter will afford it, a liberal and open heart will not be defective in quantity : they think nothing too much for God, and therefore will do all that they can ; all seemeth too little : 1 Chron. xxii. 14, ' And now behold, in my trouble (Heb. or poverty), I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, and brass and iron without weight.' Look, as there may be a winter's day in summer, and a summer's day in winter, for the proportion ; so much may be little, and little much, according to the mind and love of the giver ; the widow gave *ὅλον τὸν βίον*. Some do twice as much good with a little as others with a great deal. Love will not be backward.

Reasons of the point.

Because righteousness doth consist in a proportion, and so it holdeth good both for our duty and God's judgment.

1. For our duty ; that we should be fruitful according to our means, opportunities, and helps ; for every one of these increase our obligation.

2. For God's judgment. God is not a Pharaoh, to require the full tale of brick where he doth not afford stubble. In all his proceedings there is great equity ; he considereth men according to their advantages : Rom. ii. 9, ' Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.'

Use 1. Let this assuage the envy and trouble of the meanest. If

thy gifts be mean, thy account will be so much the easier. Merchants that have the greatest dealing are not ever the safest men: Eccles. i. 18, 'He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' None so miserable as they that have received much and returned little; which should prevail with us to an acquiescence in God's providence, though our talents be not so large.

2. Let it quicken those that have received greater gifts than others to do so much the more good with them. You are more bound, and that which God will accept from others he will not from you. If you have many ordinances and means of improvement, you should get the more grace, Heb. vi. 6, 7, and Mat. xi. 22-24. You are deeper in the state of condemnation if you do not bring forth fruit proportionable to the means of salvation: if greater abilities, you must give God the more glory; if a greater estate, you must be richer in good works, 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8; for you to shut up your bowels: 1 John iii. 17, 'How dwelleth the love of God in you?' *Potentes potentius cruciabantur*. Mighty shall be the destruction of the mighty. If we have greater mercies, there is greater duties; and greater duties, greater sins; and greater sins, greater judgments. Surely if men had any sense of their accounts, those that have much to answer for would have more trouble.

*Doct.* 3. Among those that have received talents all are not alike fruitful.

I shall handle the point with respect to the context we have in hand.

1. Though but one be mentioned, yet the number of unfaithful ones is very great. In parables the scope must be regarded. Now the general scope is to show that as the virgins are not all admitted, so all the servants of the house not accepted. In the parable, indeed, two of the servants are faithful, one unfaithful. We cannot conclude thence that the number of those that used their talents well should be greater than of those that hid them or neglected the improvement of them; as in the former parable, that the number of the foolish shall be just equal with the number of the wise; or in the parable of the wedding garment, that but one shall come to the gospel-feast unprepared. No; the ornament of that scheme and figure which Christ would make use of to signify his mind required it should be so expressed; for since our Lord, to avoid perplexity and confusion, would mention but three servants, it was fit that one should be an instance of eminent faithfulness and service, another of service in a lower degree, that the meanest may not be discouraged, and the other should represent the unfruitful ones. Now experience sheweth they are more than one to two; yea, more than ten to one, much the far greater number. Oh! how few are there even of those that hold much from God, that return him aught of love and service! The idle and unprofitable ones are found everywhere, in all ranks and conditions of men.

2. Observe, he that had but one talent is represented as the unfaithful one, and that with good advice. If the example of reprobation and punishment had been put in the servant that had five talents, or two talents, we might have thought that men of eminent gifts, rank, quality, and employment in the church, shall be called to an account, and pun-

ished for their neglect. No; but as our Lord hath laid it, it reacheth his full scope and purpose. For in the instance of the servant that had but one talent, those that had five and two may easily know how much sorer punishment shall light upon them, if he that had least be called to such a strict reckoning for his non-improvement. However, this we may observe, that he that had the least gift was unfaithful. To be sure, those that have most spiritual gifts, do usually improve them, and the rest are left without excuse.

3. Observe, his crime is, 'he went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.' Men dig in the earth to find metals and talents, not to hide them there. Mark, it is not said he did embezzle his talent, as many waste their substance in riotous living, quench brave parts in excess, sin away many precious advantages of ordinances and education, and powerful convictions. No; he did not embezzle his talent, but hid it. Mark again, he did not misemploy his talent, as some do their wealth, others their wit, to scoff at religion, or to put a varnish on the devil's cause, their power to oppress and crush the good: the precious gifts that many have are like a sword in a mad-man's hand, they use them to hurt and mischief. No; no such thing is charged upon this evil and naughty servant. It is fault enough to hide our talents, though we do not abuse them. That you may conceive of this, I shall show you—

1. His sin, in hiding his lord's money.

2. What may be the cause of it in those that imitate him.

First, It was a sin, partly because it was against the command of his master. In Luke xix. 13, 'He gave them a charge, occupy till I come.' Partly because it was against the end of the distribution of the talents. To keep money unprofitably by us is a loss; it was made for commerce, so were gifts given us to profit withal; scattered into several hands to bring in some increase to the Lord and owner. Partly because it was against the example of his fellow-servants, who were industrious and careful to comply with their charge: 2 Cor. ix. 2, 'Your zeal hath provoked very many.' And partly as his obedience and account would have been easier; as it is more easy to give an account of a small sum than a greater, as there is less trouble, less danger; so his refusal is less excusable. And partly as it was an abuse of his master's patience; it was long ere he called him to a reckoning. God will bear long with us, in infancy, childhood, and youth, but he will not bear always; if we do not bethink ourselves at last, our account is hastened, and God will suffer idle servants no longer to have an opportunity of promoting his glory, the good of others, and their own salvation.

Secondly, What may be the causes of such-like unfaithfulness? Men are taken off from improving their talents—

1. Sometimes by a slothful laziness, and should that hinder us, especially us that are servants to God? What man can endure an idle servant? Though he should not whore and steal, yet if he do not his work, you put him away. Everything in the world costs diligence, and shall not we be diligent in our master's work? How will men labour for a small reward in the world, and is not heaven worth our most industrious care? Shall not we be hard at work? 1 Cor. xv. 58. The



reward is still propounded to the diligent: 1 Cor. iii. 8, 'Every man shall receive his reward according to his own labour;' 2 Cor. ix. 6, 'He that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly.' Idleness is its own punishment. An idle man is a burden to himself, like a man buried alive. When it is morning, would God it were evening. He contracts distempers; a key seldom turned rusts in the lock; standing pools are apt to putrify. David, when he was idle, fell into those foul faults. An idle man can think of nothing but the delights of the flesh, and so becometh a ready prey to Satan.

Oh! then, shake off laziness and the ease of the flesh! God is at work, John v. 17; the creatures are at work; the sun is always going up and down.

2. Another cause is a foolish modesty and pusillanimity. Oh! this should not be; we should not, like Saul, hide among the stuff when God calleth us forth to some employment for his glory, 1 Sam. x. 22; or, with Moses, draw back when opportunity is offered us to be useful in our generation, Exod. iv. 20. God can help the stammering tongue, and will bless mean gifts when you sincerely obey his call.

3. Self-love: Phil. ii. 21, 'All men seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ.' Many care not how it goeth with Christ's matters, if their particular go right: they serve their own worldly ease, profit, credit, pleasure.

4. Distracting businesses, or love to the world; this is digging in the earth, and hiding our talent indeed: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken me, and embraced the present world.'

5. Fear of danger, if publicly active for God. Some are so cowardly that they are browbeaten with a frown; cannot venture a lesser interest, cannot bear a scoff or a disgraceful word; therefore sneak, loath to own what they are, or to do for Christ and his despised cause. This is not a Christian frame: Phil. i. 28, 'In nothing terrified by your adversaries, which to them is a token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.' It looketh like Christ's business; he speaketh of endeavours to propagate the faith of Christ, and to gain men to embrace the gospel.

*Use.* Let us see if we be found in the number of the faithful or unfaithful. A negligent ministry, a Gallio, a careless magistrate, an idle master of a family, a slothful Christian, is like the servant in the text. You have your use whether you be in a public or private station. Let us be faithful; if but one talent, the smallest gifts must not lie idle, but be seriously exercised for God's glory; if but one, your temptations are the less, private men are not exposed to such dangers as public persons. It will aggravate your negligence if, when less is required, you are found idle. Oh! therefore, shake off the ease of the flesh, that loathness to be troubled with the faithful discharge of your duty.

## SERMON XIII.

*After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents : behold, I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents besides them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.—MAT. XXV. 19-23.*

WE now come to the third part of the parable.

The first we called the distribution ; the second, the negotiation ; and the third, the account. This account is—

1. Spoken in the general, ver. 19.

2. More particularly described and set forth. There we shall take notice—

First, Of the reckoning with the good servants.

Secondly, With the bad one. In the passages that concern the good servants, you may take notice of the servants' account and the master's approbation. The account of the first servant is in ver. 20 ; of the second, in ver. 22 ; the master's approbation in ver. 21 and 23. He entertaineth both the servants with the same countenance and the same words.

*First*, I begin with the general intimation of the account, ver. 19 ; where the time—

1. When he cometh, *after a long time*.

2. His work ; what he will do when he cometh ; he *reckoneth with his servants*.

First, For the time.

*Doct.* 1. There is a good space of time between Christ's ascension and second coming.

*Quest.* But why is this last reckoning so long delayed ?

*Ans.* Not from any unreadiness in Christ ; he is ready to judge if we be ready to be judged, 1 Peter iv. 5.

1. There is a reason on the part of the good ; and that is, that the number of the elect may be gathered, who live in several ages and places ; and it requireth some time and pains to work upon each soul of them ; for 'not one of those must perish,' 2 Peter iii. 9. And after they are converted, there must be some time allowed to exercise their diligence : they must have a day to work in, John ix. 4, and to try their faith and patience in : Rev. vi. 11, 'They should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.' A certain number are enrolled for sufferings, as well as for heaven, many of which had

not obtained their crown ; as the high priest tarried within the veil till his ministration ended. As long as there is need of Christ's intercession, he defers his second coming.

2. On the wicked's part ; it is necessary they should have a time of improvement, that they may be left without excuse : Rom. ix. 22, 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ?' It is for the glory of God that he should take them when ripe. Then the 'angel thrusts in his sickle,' Rev. xiv. 15. Therefore they have longer time of prospering in their sinful ways.

[1.] Let us not make an ill use of this, either to deny or doubt of his coming, as those, 2 Peter iii. 3, or of slackening or putting off your preparation, as the naughty servant, Mat. xxiv. 48, 49. But let us 'wait with patience,' and 'hold out to the very last.' Saul held out till Samuel was even ready to come, and so forced himself to offer sacrifice, whereby he lost his kingdom, 1 Sam. xiii. 8, 9. If he had stayed a little longer, Samuel had come. So many grow weary of doing and suffering, and miscarry in the very haven. We wait in ordinary things : James v. 7, 8, 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' His hastiness cannot alter the seasons ; so we, in improving our interests and employing our talents, should not faint : Gal. vi. 4, 'And be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.'

[2.] Let us shame ourselves that, having so much time, we have done so little work. Our master hath tarried long, and given us a large space of time wherein to employ ourselves ; but what have we done for his glory ? Alas ! either we do *nihil agere*, or *male agere*, or *aliud agere* ; either we do nothing, or nothing to the purpose, or that which is worse than nothing, which will undo us for ever. Oh ! what thoughts will we have of a careless and misspent life when we come to die ! Many do not think of the end of their lives till their lives be ended ; and then they moan and bewail themselves when they lie a-dying. Oh ! rather think of your last end and great account betimes. It is lamentable to begin to live when we must die. *Quidam tunc incipiunt vivere cum desinendum est*—they end their lives before they begin to live. Therefore if hitherto you have been pleasing the flesh, idling and wantoning away your precious time, say, 1 Peter iv. 3, 'Let the time past suffice.' I have been long enough dishonouring God, and destroying my own soul : hath my master tarried so long, and shall I still abuse his patience ? 'This is a holy and right use of this delay.'

Secondly, His work, what he will do when he cometh : he 'reckoneth with his servants.'

*Doct. 2.* Those that have talents must look to reckon for them, for though he be long first, yet at length the Lord cometh.

1. Consider the certainty of this account ; his wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth require it. His wisdom requireth it ; for no wise man would put his goods to trust, and never look after them more ; and



shall we imagine that the wise God would send reasonable creatures into the world, and furnish them with excellent gifts and endowments, and never consider how they employ themselves? Is man God's servant? then certainly he is liable to an account. You had never come into the world but for this business, to serve and please God. For God maketh nothing in vain, but all things for himself, Prov. xvi. 4. And do you think that after you are made for this end you may live as you list, and never be called to a reckoning? So absurd a thought cannot enter into the heart of a reasonable man: Ecces. xi. 9, 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.' Man would be but a sort of beast if he had no other end of his actions but to eat and drink and sleep, and no other account to give. Surely the most wise God would not have given us such excellent faculties in vain. He fitteth all creatures for their use: every workman fitteth his work for the end for which it serveth; so God hath made man for some end and use. And God's justice requireth it that it should be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do ill. In the world it is not so: his servants are very often abused while doing their work most faithfully, the world thinks them mad, hateth them. They that neglect their own work beat their fellow-servants; therefore the honour of his justice requireth they should be called to an account: 1 Peter iv. 5, 'Who must give an account to him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead.' There is not a thought in wicked men's hearts, nor a word in their mouths, contrary to God and his people, but he taketh notice of it, and will exact an account thereof, a strict and impartial account of all their hard speeches. And the goodness of God requireth it. His goodness to the world in general; the world would be a wilderness, and men like ravenous beasts, if there were not some bridle and awe of a world to come upon them; but every one that had power would prey upon others, but that there is a higher judge. God hath appointed a supreme tribunal, where causes are judged over again; otherwise those that have power enough to do mischief would be under no restraint. But it is goodness to his people, whom he hath set a-work, and therefore hath appointed a day when he will give them their wages; his goodness will not permit that they should be any losers by God, their love and obedience to him that deny themselves, their own affections and interest, for his sake. Therefore certainly the great God of recompenses will come and call the world to an account, that the faithfulness of his servants may appear with praise and honour. This is a supreme truth: Heb. xi. 6, 'That he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' And his truth requireth it, it is laid at pledge in the word; that is the proper ground for faith to build upon. Now there we have not only God's word, but God's oath: Rom. xiv. 10, 11, 'For we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' There we have plentiful evidence.

2. It is a personal account: Rom. xiv. 12, 'So then every one of us

shall give an account of himself to God.' We should not look to others what they be and do. As to ourselves, we must give an account of ourselves, our life, our heart, our own thoughts, words, and actions. It is personal, partly because every one must give his account apart; not every one shuffled together and in gross; but every servant apart and severally; first he that had five talents, then two, then one. And partly because every one unavoidably must answer for himself. Here we may have our attorney or advocate to appear for us in court; but there every one for himself, every man must in person, give an account of his own fidelity.

3. It is an impartial account, every one without exception: Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw the dead, both small and great, stand before God.' Small and great, king and peasant, they shall all one day be called to an account, whether faithful or no. None so high as to be exempted from this account; none so mean as to be neglected in it: he that received five talents and he that received one both gave an account. The poor beggar is not left out, nor the king excused.

4. It is a particular account. God will not take our accounts by the heap and lump, but there is a narrow search into all our hearts and ways. The great thing is, What we have done in that place and relation where God hath set us our stewardship? Luke xvi. 2, but that is not all; we are to give an account of every action: Eccles. xii. 14, 'For God shall bring every work into judgment.' Every idle word must be accounted for, Mat. xii. 36. All the time we have spent, degrees of grace we received, what we have done, proportionable to our trust, five for five, two for two.

5. It is an exact account, that nothing is lost: Rev. xx. 12, 'The books were produced;' the book of conscience, and the book of God's remembrance: one of these is in the sinner's keeping, and yet it cannot be blotted out nor defaced: but at the day of judgment, conscience shall be extended to the recognition of all our ways. Now these books of account that are kept between God and the creature are somewhat like the books of merchants, of debtor and creditor, what returned and what received. God's mercies to us are booked, so are our returns. That God's mercies are put upon the book and register appeareth by the expostulations used in scripture when God proceedeth to any particular judgment; as for instance, opportunities of grace, and instructions of the word; the word preached, *εἰς μαρτυρίαν*: Mat. xxiv. 14, 'And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.' God keepeth exact account: 'Behold, these three years came I seeking fruit,' Luke xiii. 7; 'This second epistle write I unto you,' 2 Peter iii. 1. He taketh notice of a former. God remembereth the prophets' words when the prophets are dead and gone. Every pressing sermon, every notable help: 'This second miracle did Jesus in Cana of Galilee,' John iv. 54. Christ's special works and manifestations of himself ought to be marked and kept in memory. God doth so for deliverances from danger: Isa. xi. 11, 'The Lord shall arise the second time for the deliverance of his people.' He taketh notice that he has been once at it, and would be again. So what talents and gifts we have had, whether five, two, or one. Secondly, on the other side, all the good

that we do ; therefore the apostle speaketh of 'fruit abounding to his account,' Phil. iv. 17. The Lord taketh notice of our faithfulness in evil times : Mal. iii. 15, 16, 'And now we call the proud happy ; yea, they that work wickedness are set up ; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another ; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name ;' 1 Kings xix. 18 ; Acts xvii. 34. Kindness to his servants : Mat. x. 42, 'And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, he shall not lose his reward ;' Eccles. xi. 1, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days ;' it is not lost. On the other side, injuries done to his people ; he hath a bottle for their tears, and a book for their sorrows, Ps. lvi. 8. All the snares contrived : Deut. xxxii. 34, 'Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?' Job xiii. 27, 'Thou lookest narrowly to all my paths, thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet.' Every action leaveth a track, every word, Mat. xii. 36, every thought, 1 Cor. iv. 5.

*Use.* Is our account ready against that great day of audit? Most neglect it, put off the thoughts of it. Take occasion hence to reckon with yourselves aforehand, and see what an account you can give to conscience. We should prepare more for this solemn day of reckoning, and therefore should take notice of what we do, and what we receive. We had need keep a register of every day's work, and every day's mercies. There are three questions in scripture ; often put them to your hearts : Deut. xxxii. 6, 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy Father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee and established thee?' Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Isa. v. 4, 'What could I have done more for my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked for grapes, behold it brought forth wild grapes?' The profit of daily arrainging conscience is great.

1. It keepeth us sensible of our duty, maketh us often have recourse to grace, when we continually observe our sins, duties, afflictions, mercies, comforts, opportunities of receiving grace, and do but intermingle this thought, that one day for all these I must give an account.

2. It presseth us to be more earnest for pardoning mercy, and every day to make even. This is the great folly of men, that they put off sin when God doth not put it away. There is an expression often used in scripture, 'Their iniquities shall find them out ;' this notion of accounts will help us to understand it. It was committed many years ago, never heard of it since, but at length they shall hear of it : God reckoneth with them. If men escape and prosper a month, or a year, or two, they think all is forgotten ; but at length it findeth them out. Sins are called debts, and all debts lie upon account against us, till they be cancelled. Augustus bought his guilt of one who slept securely, when he owed an hundred thousand sesterces. We may wonder at the security of sinners, who sleep when their damnation sleepeth not ; they run upon the score, and never think of a reckoning. Solomon adviseth a man in debt 'not to sleep till he be delivered like a roe from the hunter,' Prov. vi. 4, 5. It is good advice to us, to get



our spiritual debts discharged : Ps. li. 1, 'Blot out my transgressions.' Christ hath taught us to pray for daily pardon as well as daily bread. The thought of these records that are kept, and the account we must make, should quicken us to it. Oh ! what a clamour will our sins make when God sets them all in order before us ! Ps. l. 21. Thousands of vain thoughts, light words, and sinful actions, much mispense of time, abuse of mercies. We know not how soon God will put the bond in suit : other debts have a day of payment fixed, but this God hath reserved in his own breast, when he will call us to an account.

3. It presseth us to live always as those that are to give an account. Paul quickened himself to diligence upon this consideration, 2 Cor. v. 9, 10. If we were never to be called to an account, we should do God all the service that possibly we can, we are so much obliged to him ; but he hath set a day wherein he will reckon with us. Oh ! what watchfulness, what diligence and faithfulness, should this produce in us ! James ii. 12, 'So speak and so do as those that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' We read in the story of the Albigenes, when the president of St Juliers coming to Angrogne would have forced a man to re-baptize his child in the popish way, he prayed the president that he would give it in writing, and sign it with his own hand, that he would discharge him before God, and take the peril upon himself ; this made him relent and profess his trouble. Conscience is startled at God's records. If a man should do nothing, and speak nothing but what is to be registered and proclaimed at the market-cross, how watchful would he be ! All is recorded, the books will be opened ; therefore, when we are about to do anything unworthy, say as he, Acts xix. 40, 'We are in danger to be called to an account for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse ;' so should you. We that are to give an account, how careful should we be how we use our time, health, strength, understanding, authority, wealth, and other blessings of God. The commonness of these notions maketh them to lose their life and influence ; therefore we should especially act faith in believing, and urging the soul with this account.

*Secondly*, It is particularly described ; and there—

1. Of the servants' allegation.

2. The master's approbation.

First, The servants' allegation, ver. 20 and 22. The two first servants came cheerfully to their account, as having discharged their duty faithfully, and with all diligence improved the talents received. Not that in the day of judgment good men shall make any narrations of what they have done ; they need not, for Christ shall do it for them : they rather wonder that anything they have done is taken notice of, as in the 37th verse of this chapter ; but all this is spoken after the manner of men, and to keep up the decorum of the parable. If it signifieth anything, it signifieth the confidence of a good conscience, and what comfort and boldness it breedeth in the day of our accounts.

*Doct.* That a faithful discharge of our duty will give us comfort and boldness when our Lord cometh to reckon with us.

1. There is a confidence and comfort that ariseth from a good con-

science, or from sanctification as well as justification. In the inward court, conscience is one of the witnesses, as well as the Spirit of God, Rom. viii. 16, and much comfort ariseth from its testimony : 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience.' A carnal man is ashamed of the grounds of his rejoicing, and what it is that keepeth his heart merry ; but a godly man can own the causes of his joy, which are, in the first place, the blood of Christ : Rom. v. 11, 'We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement ;' next, the testimony of his conscience concerning his sincere walking. But if a man can live with these comforts, can he die with them ?

2. The review of a well-spent life is a great comfort in death. Our Lord Jesus, at the end of his days, when he was to go out of the world, John xvii. 4, saith, 'I have glorified thee upon earth, and finished the work thou gavest me to do.' Hezekiah, when that sad message was brought to him, that he must die, and not live, Isa. xxxviii. 4, that comforted him upon his death-bed : 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done what is good in thy sight.' So the apostle Paul, when he drew nigh his end, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8, saith, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.' Oh ! it is a blessed thing if we can have this comfort, when conscience puts off all disguises, and the everlasting estate is at hand, and we are immediately to appear before the Lord ; to remember then that we have been careful to please and honour God, and done his work, how sweet is it !

3. In the day of judgment ; their works follow them into the other world, Rev. xiv. 13. Their wealth doth not follow them, but the conscience of having done well abideth with them. Conscience is heaven or hell to us. In hell it maketh up a part of the worm that never dieth ; so in heaven, it giveth us confidence, 1 John ii. 28 ; and 1 John iv. 17, 'That we may have boldness in the day of judgment.' Works are not meritorious, and have no causal influence upon our salvation, yet they have the full place of an evidence, and so may wonderfully comfort and embolden our hearts.

*Use.* Let us labour to get this evidence. The time of death is a time that will rife all our false hopes. You are in your health and strength now, but how soon you may shoot the gulph, you know not ; we are hastening into the other world apace. When you are immediately to appear before God, you will have other thoughts of the world to come, and the necessity of preparation for it, than you have now ; that which will comfort you now, will not comfort you then. You must look that the devil will then be most busy to tempt and trouble you, and as now he prejudiceth you against the precepts of the gospel, so then against the promises of it : all your worldly comforts then will fail, and have spent their allowance, and become to you as unsavoury as the white of an egg. Will this comfort you, that you have sported and gamed away your precious time ? that you have fared of the best, and lived in pomp and honour ? Oh, no ! but this will

comfort you: I have made it my business to glorify God, I have been faithful in my place, have gotten some evidence of the love of God. It is not riches or greatness, or any earthly advantage will do you good. Oh! it is a cutting thought to the careless and negligent: Now I must give an account of every day and hour I have spent in this world; the improvement of every opportunity will be called for. Then all your vanities and carnal pleasures will be smart upon you, and vex your souls with the grievous remembrance of them. Well, then, can you in any measure look back upon the discharge of your duty? There are two extremes:—

1. Some are presumptuous and confident, because, they are not gross sinners. But what have they done for God? The sluggish and unprofitable servant was cast into utter darkness; he did not misspend his talent, but yet he did not improve it. The tree that bringeth forth no fruit is hewn down, though it did not bring forth bad fruit. It is not a negative religion will comfort thee, but a positive and a fruitful one. You are no drunkard, no adulterer, no profane person; but have you been at work for God?

2. Others are pusillanimous and diffident, because they do not arrive at the eminency and perfection of the highest. David had other worthies besides the first three. There were two faithful servants; one brought five talents, the other two. Now the middle is of those that can see in themselves more zeal than formality, more grace than corruption, that, for the main, have made it their business to honour God, though conscious to many weaknesses and defects, yet throughout grace gets the upper hand; according to the degrees of grace received they are faithful with God.

Secondly, The master's approbation, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' The faithful servants are well accepted by Christ. First, he entertaineth them with praise, ver. 21, 23. Secondly, with preferment and advancement, 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many.' Thirdly, with joy, 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord.'

*Doct.* That at Christ's appearing, faithful servants shall not only be commended, but gloriously rewarded.

1 Peter i. 7, that your faith may be found unto praise, honour, and glory, at the appearing of Christ.

1. There is not only verbal commendation, but real remuneration; glory and honour put upon them, as well as praise ascribed to them. (1.) Praise, because he shall then commend their faith before men and angels: Rev. iii. 5, 'I will confess his name before my Father and his angels.' (2.) There will be a solemn owning and honouring of them, when all the holy angels shall be present. Oh! what a favour is it to be commended of God! 2 Cor. x. 18, 'For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.' When they had finished the tabernacle, all was viewed and approved by Moses: Moses blessed them. Oh! what is it to be blessed and commended by the Son of God in that great assembly of the whole world!

2. Here is preferment and advancement to a higher place in the family. Christ will prefer them as men do their servants: Mat. xxiv. 47, 'Make him ruler over all his goods.' These expressions are taken



from the greatest honours a man can do his faithful servants in the world, 1 Kings xii. 20. As Jeroboam was made ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph, so will Christ advance his servants to high dignity, sometimes expressed by 'setting them upon thrones,' Rev. iii. 21; 'giving them crowns,' 1 Peter iv. 13; 2 Tim. iv. 8. That antithesis is to be regarded; few things, and many things. All things are few in comparison of heaven, our works, our gifts, our sufferings; the reward is far above all these: Rom. viii. 18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us;' 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For our light afflictions, that are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' It is all little that we do or suffer; it is little that God hath done for us in this world, in comparison of what he will do for us there. Here is the earnest; that is but a small part of the whole sum.

3. The next expression is, 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord.' Here Christ slideth into the thing signified by the parable, as afterward in assigning punishment unto the unfaithful servant: ver. 30, 'Cast him into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Here is joy, and 'the joy of the Lord;' and faithful servants are said to enter into it.

[1.] The estate of the blessed is a state of joy; which ariseth partly from the beatifical vision; partly from their own blessedness, and also the blessed company.

(1.) The beatifical vision, or the vision of God: Ps. xvi. 11, 'In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand pleasures for evermore.' There is a mighty complacency that we take now in seeing, knowing, loving, and being beloved of God. What can be found in the creature is but a drop to the ocean in comparison of what a believer findeth in God himself. God is to them an overflowing fountain of all felicity. But there is *gaudium vite*, and *gaudium patrie*. Here it admits of increase and decrease; but there the soul is so filled that it cannot receive any more: Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' God maketh out himself in the utmost latitude. As to the wicked, he stirreth up all his wrath. Here he punisheth by the creature, and so doth not put forth all his power; as a giant striking with a straw cannot put forth his strength. In heaven the soul shall be filled with unspeakable joy and delight. What delight is to the sense, that joy is to the mind. Three things are necessary to delight—a faculty, or power of the soul capable of pleasure; and then the thing itself; which being brought to the mind, doth stir up delight. As in bodily things, colours, fruits, tastes, pleasure consists in the near union and conjunction of these things. The more noble the faculty, the more excellent the object; the nearer the conjunction, the greater the delight and pleasure. Now in heaven our faculties are perfected: God is the subject, and there is a near conjunction. Oh! what embraces between him and the soul!

(2.) In their own glorified estate: 1 Peter iv. 13, 'Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.' So Jude:

'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.' The fulness of our joy is suspended till then, that we may long much for that day. It will be a glad day to all faithful ones. Joy is *quies animi in bono adepto*; there is an aggregation of all good for soul and body. If the hope of this blessed estate breedeth joy, what will enjoyment, what will fruition do? If a glimpse or taste be so sweet, what will the full enjoyment be? Rom. v. 2, In deep troubles, yet 'we rejoice in hope of the glory of God;' 1 Peter i. 8, 'Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' Their hearts are now and then filled with such a joy as they can hardly contain and keep within doors, when they have but a well-grounded hope, or assurance of the full possession of it.

(3.) In the company of the blessed. It is comfortable to meet with the saints of God now, though it be but in a mourning duty; but the communion of saints there is quite another thing; they are our everlasting companions; they are free from all sin and weakness, Heb. xii. 23. Especially it will be a delight to them whom we have been a means to bring home to God: 1 Thes. ii. 19, 20, 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? for ye are our glory and joy;' and Phil. ii. 16, 'That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not laboured in vain, nor run in vain.' The glory that shall be put upon gracious souls at the day of judgment will add to the glory and joy of those faithful ministers by whose labours they have been gained to God.

[2.] It is called the 'joy of the Lord;' that is, either provided by him—called 'my joy,' by Christ, John xv. 11; this by way of purchase, allowance, and gift, dignified as one of those whom the Lord delighteth to honour, Esther vi. 6—or such as he himself possesseth. Jesus Christ himself had his 'joy set before him,' Heb. xii. 2, that happy and glorious estate that happened upon his sufferings: to this he inviteth us, into his own joy. Men are not wont to treat their servants so as to let them enter into their joy: Luke xvii. 7, 'Which of you having a servant ploughing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go, and sit down to meat?' No; but, Make ready. But Christ, Luke xii. 37, 'will make them sit down to meat, and he will come forth and serve them.' In the civil law, *Accubitus servi a domino invitati*, it was a token of manumission. Now Christ will bring us into his joy, Luke xxii. 30, 'That ye may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel;' John xvii. 24, 'Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me may be where I am, and behold my glory;' Rom. viii. 17, 'If we suffer with him, we may also be glorified together;' 2 Tim. ii. 12, 'If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him.' We are sharers in all the happiness that he enjoyeth, and are partakers of the same glory, and the same kingdom, and the same joy.

[3.] We enter into it. It is a Hebraism such as that, Ps. lxxix. 27, 'Let them not come into thy righteousness;' that is, be partakers of

it. So Ps. lix. 11, 'Not enter into my rest;' that is, partake of it. So the servant entereth into his Lord's joy, *ut possessor sit gaudii, non tantum spectator*. However, it noteth the highest and fullest participation; they enter into the blessed state of eternal joy, and it abideth for ever with them, in a full, constant, uninterrupted joy. We shall have as much as we can hold, and we shall hold more than now we do.

*Use 1.* It informeth us that it is good to be Christ's servants, and to be faithful in his work. See how ready the Lord is to reward our little sorry service. Come and receive the fruit of my bounty, and the reward of your fidelity. Who would not serve such a master?

2. Consider it, this doth make up all the shame and disgrace that can be in our trials. We have enough in hand for all the pains and shame that we suffer for his service; the inward peace that we have, and the sense of his approbation: but our great reward, when we and he meet together, should strike all discouragements dead, and be enough to allay all the sorrows of this life, and the censures of men.

3. To quicken us to diligence, let us often think of this. When God intended to give Canaan to Abraham, he biddeth him 'walk through the land, and view it,' Gen. xiii. 17. He hath promised to give the joys of heaven to us; we should often consider it; then encouragement is no encouragement if it be not regarded.

Lastly, The same words are used to both alike; the second servant is approved, his faithfulness commended and rewarded, as well as the first servant.

*Doct.* Whether our talents be few or many, yet if we be but sincere, we shall be put into everlasting happiness.

The essential happiness of the saints is the same, though the degrees differ; ten cities, and five cities, in Luke.

1. They may be alike in fidelity, though a difference in opportunity. Their industry will be alike. Though their gifts and opportunities be not alike, their zeal to God and love to souls will be alike.

2. The grounds of essential happiness are the same to all.

[1.] They have the same Redeemer and Mediator, Exod. xxx. 15. If they had a better Christ, another mediator to ransom their souls, they might expect another happiness; but all is brought about by the same Redeemer, Jesus Christ, theirs and ours, 1 Cor. i. 2, by his mediation, sacrifice, and meritorious righteousness.

[2.] The same covenant, which is the common charter of the saints: Acts ii. 39, 'The promise is to you, and to your children, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.' A covenant which offereth the same benefits, and requireth the same duties. The same benefits, pardon and life. Pardon: Rom. iv. 23, 24, 'Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead.' Life is the common portion of all the saints: 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness; and not for me only, but for all those that love his appearing.' It requireth the same duties of all the saints, and they have the same rule to walk by, Gal. vi. 16; 'This same gospel is the power of God unto the salvation of every one that believeth,' Rom. i. 16. Well,



then, if all have no other charter from God to show for pardon and life, and all are bound to the same duties, surely all shall have the same happiness.

[3.] The same Spirit to be Christ's agent, to sanctify, and to prepare them for this glory. He is at work in all the saints: 1 Cor. xii. 4, 'There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;' 2 Cor. iv. 13, 'We having the same Spirit of faith.' This is considerable, because the Spirit doth form us for this very thing; that is, prepare us for this very estate. If all have the same heavenly principle, all shall have the same heavenly happiness. We have the same almighty power within to destroy sin, to raise our dead and earthly hearts to God, to keep in us the same love to him, and prepare us for this blessed estate.

[4.] The same mercy of the same God distributeth the reward. The main grounds of the expectation of the best are the mercy of God and the merits of Christ; and we have the same mercy to trust unto: Rom. x. 12, 'For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.' As rich in mercy to you as to others, to pardon your failings, to wash off your stains, and finally to receive you into his blessed presence. They look for mercy, and we look for the same mercy, Jude 21. All that keep themselves in the love of God may do so.

3. The things which are absolutely requisite to this essential happiness are the same. As the vision and fruition of the same God, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, with John xvii. 24, 'All that believe in me through their word:' they have the same place, heaven; the same state, the same company; they all make one family, Eph. iii. 15. Now some are in heaven and some on earth, but then they shall all make one heavenly society, called 'the city of God,' Heb. xii. 22, 23; they shall all 'sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' They have the same work, which is, to love and laud God for evermore.

*Use 1.* To persuade us to be contented with the meanest estate, till God's providence call us to a higher. Every one must glorify God in the place where he hath set him; as in a choir of voices, it is not who sings the bass or who the treble, but who well discharges his own part, bass or treble. So in our account, it is not what part we have acted, so much as how we have acted it, whether glorified God in the work which he hath given us to do, John xvii. 4. If thou hast doubled thy talents, though but two, Christ will welcome thee into the 'joy of thy Lord.' It is not who hath undergone the greatest bodily labour in religion, or passed the severest sufferings, or gone through the eminentest offices and employments, but who hath most honoured God in his place, got most holiness in his heart, been most humble and contented with his condition.

*Use 2.* Is for the encouragement of poor weak Christians, who have the essentials of godliness, though they be weak, and have not attained to the eminency of many others. These should not be dismayed; there are persons of all sizes, and several degrees in heaven, and they are all possessed with the same common happiness: 2 Peter i. 2, 'To them that have obtained like precious faith with us.' Mean believers in some sense have like precious faith with an apostle, as to the great

ends of the covenant; the same jewel. *Complectitur et puerulus, complectitur et gigas*; one holds with a strong, the other with a trembling hand; the jewel is of the same value. The same sacrifice for sin; we all depend upon the infinite mercies of the same God; the same physician of souls hath us in cure who hath cured all others; the same captain that hath saved others who are more eminent is conducting us to salvation, and is preparing us for the same estate which they hope to enjoy. They have no greater nor better high priest and mediator with God than we have; they are going to the same place that we are, and we that they are; only they have gotten the start a great way before us. But whilst we strive to overtake them, and make as much haste as we can, though we bewail our imperfections, yet we should not lose the comfort of our sincerity.

*Doct. 2.* Though the essential happiness of the saints be the same, yet there are degrees in glory.

Luke xix. 16-19. We read there of having authority over ten cities and five cities. More is required of the first servant and more is given him; and more is required of the first servant than the second; as we expect a horseman should come sooner than a footman. But more particularly to prove that there are degrees of glory. First, from scripture: 2 Cor. ix. 6, 'He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully. As there is a difference in the kind of the crop, according to the kind of the seed, Gal. vi. 6, 7, so according to the degree. Some do well, others do better; so some fare well, others fare better, are more bountifully rewarded; for God will deal more liberally with them who shall accordingly with greater fidelity acquit themselves in well-doing. There is a proportion observed. Again, the common happiness of the saints is to shine as the stars, Mat. xiii. and Dan. xii. 3; yet the apostle telleth us, that 'one star differeth from another in glory; so shall it be in the resurrection from the dead,' 1 Cor. xv. 41; namely, that their glory shall be according to their inequality in zeal, service, and faithfulness to God. Another place shall be that, 1 Cor. iii. 8, 'Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour;' that is, according to the degree; for he speaketh there of degrees of serviceableness in the church. Every man hath a labour of his own, that is, such a measure and degree of service appropriately his; and so by consequence hath his own reward, somewhat which doth exactly answer his labour. Some have thought no, that the saints in heaven, their reward is exactly equal. It is true all shall have enough, but some more than others: so Eph. vi. 8, 'Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free;' that is, shall be punctually and particularly considered by God for it; he shall receive the same, not for kind, but quantity and proportion; they shall have in their reward a particular and appropriate consideration; a bondman a bondman's reward, a freeman a freeman's reward; every degree of goodness shall be considered by God: so there seemeth to be a distinction between a prophet's reward, and a righteous man's reward, and a disciple's reward, Mat. x. 41, 42. Add that concerning Zebedee's children, Mat. xx. 21, 22. She cometh to Christ, and prayeth that her two sons might sit one at his right hand and the

other at his left in his kingdom. Christ doth not deny but that something there is which may be signified by his right hand and his left; yea, rather asserts it; for he saith, 'It shall be given to those for whom it is prepared of my Father.' There are some chiefest and highest places of glory and preferment in his kingdom, and he hath prepared these places for persons of the greatest worth and eminency in his service; for these the greatest honours of the world to come are reserved.

Reasons of the point.

1. From the nature of that glory and blessedness we expect. It standeth in communion with God, and conformity to him, or the vision and full fruition of God, Ps. xvii. 15; 1 John iii. 2. Now the more holy the more suited to this happiness, and therefore have larger measures of it: Mat. v. 8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;' Heb. xii. 14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' We 'behold his face in righteousness.' Now we are more capacitated, vessels of a larger bore. It is unreasonable to imagine that clarified souls have no more fruition of God than those that only have grace enough to make a hard shift to get to heaven: *Sicut se habet simpliciter ad simpliciter, ita magis ad magis*. Holiness singly fits to see God, and without it we cannot see him. So a little holiness fits us to take in a little of God; the more holiness the more of God.

2. From the pleasure God taketh in his own image. So much of the image of God as his creature hath, so far more amiable in the sight of God: 'The Lord delighteth in the upright,' Prov. xi. 20. If God delighteth in them, he delighteth more in one that is more holy and upright. Thus from God's holiness we may argue he doth not delight in the impure: Ps. v. 4, 'Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness.' He cannot so fully delight in the less pure: Ps. xviii. 25, 26, 'With the upright man thou wilt show thyself upright, with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure.'

3. From the justice of God, and the quality of that happiness which we expect. Though it be an act of free grace and bounty in God to bestow it on us, yet it is a reward; and reward is considerable with respect to the work. The reward is not of merit, but grace; but yet God's merciful justice respecteth the degree of our service: Heb. vi. 10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work of faith and labour of love.' It is an act of remunerative justice, according to the new covenant. The higher service hath an ordinability to the greatest reward.

4. God doth in this world give the greatest blessings to those that do most eminently glorify him; therefore signal faithfulness is eminently rewarded in the world to come; as God promiseth to make a covenant with Phinehas, because he was zealous for God, to make an atonement for the people, Num. xxv. 13. This the rather holdeth good, because the rewards of the Old Testament were a kind of figure of eternity.

5. In the punishment there are degrees, therefore in the reward God will punish men differently, more or less according to the rate of their sins. We read of *ἀνεκτότερον*, more tolerable. So he will reward men more or less according to the different degrees of their faithfulness: so Mat. xi. 21, 22, 'It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the



day of judgment than for you.' So Luke xii. 47, 48, we read of many stripes and few stripes. It is true the reward is not of debt; yet there is an equity observed in his bounty.

6. The glorified state of the saints in all probability suiteth with all the rest of the creation. There is a difference and disparity in everything else. Among men in the world, in wisdom and rank, and quality and riches; in the church some have meaner, some larger gifts. There are degrees among the devils. We read of Beelzebub the prince of the devils. Among angels there are archangels, principalities, powers, thrones, dominions. So it is likely among the saints.

7. The profit: it encourageth to godliness: this inequality of rewards giving greater things to those that do more, and be more faithful, than to imagine that they who sow more sparingly shall reap as plentifully as those that sow liberally. It is a great damp to all worthy dealing and signal excellency, that all shall fare alike; but it quickeneth us to our utmost activity to remember that as our work is our reward will be.

*Use.* Is to quicken us to be more faithful to God for these considerations:—

1. Heaven being the perfection of holiness, if you do not desire more degrees of holiness, you do not desire heaven itself: 1 John iii. 2, 3, 'Behold now ye are the sons of God, and it doth not 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. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself as he is pure.'

2. It is gross self-love to go as near the brink of hell and destruction without falling into it, and to beat down the price of salvation as low as we can; and he that will do nothing more than what is simply necessary to salvation will never be faithful with God. To save the stake of their souls they will serve God as little as they can.

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#### SERMON XIV.

*Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not straved: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.—MAT. XXV. 24, 25.*

WE have seen the account and reception of the faithful servants; we now come to the master's reckoning with the unfaithful one. The order is observable: first he rewardeth the faithful servants, and then punisheth the careless and negligent. His own nature inclines him to reward; he doth good and showeth mercy out of his own self-inclination; but our sins force him to punish. And mark, he that had received one talent is called to an account as well as he that had received more, that no man may think to be excused for the meanness of his gifts and place. It is true he giveth an account for no more than he hath, but for so much as he hath he must give account.

Christians that have five or two talents must give an account for five or two ; but heathens, that have but one talent, the light of nature, give an account for one. The apostle telleth us, 'That as many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law, but as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law,' Rom. ii. 12; every one according to the dispensation they have lived under. The apostle intimateth a distinction of two sorts that are to be judged : 2 Thes. i. 8, 'In flaming fire, take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Those that have great parts and great opportunities will not be accepted with the same improvement that others are that have fewer ; neither from the same person will God accept a like service when sick as when well ; but according to their abilities and opportunities he doth expect. Well, but let us see what account he bringeth that had but one talent. The parable offereth—

First, The servant's allegation or excuse.

Secondly, The master's answer or reply.

We are now upon the former ; and there—

1. The remote cause of his neglect ; his prejudice against his master, 'Lord, I knew thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.'

2. The effect of this prejudice ; and so the next and immediate cause of this neglect, 'I was afraid.'

3. His negligence and unfaithfulness itself, in bringing his talent without improvement, 'I went and hid thy talent in the earth : Lo, there thou hast what is thine.'

[1.] In the prejudice, Christ impersonateth our natural thoughts and the secret workings of our minds ; we dare not say so, but many think so : as if God were a hard and morose master, whom it is impossible to please. The servant in the parable had as little cause for his pretence as we have for our hard thoughts of God : he knew the contrary. If he would consult his own experience, he might have found his master to be good and kind, who had taken him into his family, intrusted him with a talent, waited long for his improvement. But this is the nature of man ; self-love will rather blame God than acknowledge our own fault and sin, tax his severity than confess its own negligence.

[2.] In the servant's being afraid, Christ would teach us that ill opinions of God beget pusillanimity and slavish fear.

[3.] In his non-improvement, but rendering the talent as he received it, that pusillanimity or slavish fear and sloth go together, or those that are afraid of God will never do him hearty service.

I cannot handle all the points that will arise from this paragraph, yet I shall discuss one, that will take in the substance and effect of all. And that is—

*Doct.* That slavish fear is a great hindrance to the faithful discharge of our duty to God.

First, Let me observe to you that there is a twofold fear—filial and servile, childlike and slavish. The one is a lawful and necessary fear, such as quickeneth us to duty, Phil. ii. 12, and is either the fear of reverence, or the fear of caution. The fear of reverence is nothing else but that awe we are to have of the divine majesty as creatures, or

our humble sense of the condition, place, and duty of a creature towards the Creator. The fear of caution is a due sense of the importance and validity of the business we are engaged in, in order to salvation: certainly none can consider the danger we are to escape, and the blessedness we aim at, but will see a need to be serious. And therefore this fear is good and holy.

1. But there is, besides this, a slavish fear, which doth not further, but extremely hinder our work; for though we are to fear God, yet we are not to be afraid of God. This is that which the apostle calleth, *πνεῦμα δουλείας*, opposite to the 'spirit of adoption,' Rom. viii. 15, and a cowardly fearful spirit, opposite to that spirit of power and love and of a sound mind, which is the principle of all faithful service to God. They that are under the spirit of bondage serve not God as children serve a father, but as slaves serve a hard and cruel master. Fear is the inseparable companion of this spirit, which must needs be a great hindrance to our duty, because it begets hatred to God, and the torment it bringeth to ourselves. As it breedeth hatred to God: *oderunt quem metuunt, quem odimus periisse cupimus*. When we only dread God for his vengeance, we keep off from him, as a dissolute servant hateth that master who would scourge him for his debaucheries. The nature of this fear is to drive us from God: Gen. iii. 7-10, 'I was afraid.' So because of the torment it bringeth to us, Eph. iv. 18, for the legal spirit, it is called a 'spirit of bondage,' Rom. viii. 15; it hath fear and torment in it, and is an enemy to us, for it banisheth all those sweet principles which should enliven our service; as love to God, and delight in our work, which doth enliven and inspire everything that we do with an earnest spirit. But where love is wanting, and all the comfort that should accompany our duties, it is lost; either a man doth nothing, or all that he doth is in a compulsory manner, by mere force; and so our hands must needs be weakened in God's service, if we be not totally discouraged; for often it endeth in a despair of pleasing, or being accepted with God. There is a lazy sottish despair, as well as a raging tormenting despair: Jer. xviii. 12, 'There is no hope; we will walk in the imagination of our own hearts.' Cast off all care of the soul's welfare. This was the fear of the slothful servant in the text; and such a fear have many others in the bosom of their hearts, by which they can never do anything effectually in the business of religion, by reason of their strong prejudices, occasioned by their own tormenting fear.

2. That this fear is begotten in us by a false opinion of God, that rendereth him dreadful, rigorous, and terrible to the soul. The servant in the text doth not only say, 'I was afraid,' but giveth a reason of it, 'I knew that thou wert an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.' A parabolical speech to set forth a cruel tyrant, that doth exact upon those that are under him without mercy and reason. Our affections follow our apprehensions, and we either love or fear according to the inward notions that we have of God in our minds: 'They that know thy name will trust in thee,' Ps. ix. 10. If we had righter notions of God, we would love him more and trust him more; but when we conceive amiss of him, accordingly we are affected to him. And therefore we



should take heed what picture we draw of God in our minds ; for if we have only such apprehensions as render him grievous and burdensome to us, these thoughts will leaven our hearts, and make us either neglect his service, or do it by constraint, in a very awkward and uncomfortable manner. If the devil can bring you to have a base opinion of God, as cruel and tyrannical, and once possess you with sour thoughts and fretful jealousies, or harsh surmises of his government, it will turn all your love and obedience into hatred and slavish fear. Therefore those that consider that love is the great principle of obedience should also consider that there is nothing so necessary to breed love as good thoughts of God, and a due sense of his goodness in Christ. Come to this once, and then all that he requireth and doth will be acceptable to us. His laws will not be grievous, nor his providences seem burdensome to you, nor his judgments intolerable. How can you love him till you represent him as an object of love, one upon whom you may cheerfully depend for life and defence, and from whom you may comfortably expect the rewards of obedience ? Therefore take heed of painting out God in your thoughts as a hard master. The apostle telleth us, Heb. xi. 6, ‘He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.’ As soon as we apprehend his being, we should also pitch upon his bounty and goodness. First that he is, and then that he is a rewarder. There is in all men some impression of a godhead, which is clearly understood and seen ‘by the things that are made,’ Rom. i. 20. This apprehension of God calleth for worship ; for next that God is, we must believe he must be worshipped, John iv. 24. These two notions live and die together ; they are clear and blotted out together. As the apprehension of God is clear, and more deeply engraven upon the soul, so is this notion of man’s duty of worshipping God clear, and imprinted upon the soul also. The one impression cannot be worn out without the other. But now, want of a true knowledge of God breedeth slavish fear, fearing God in excess, rather than loving him in any tolerable measure, because a man naturally looketh upon God with the same eye that a malefactor doth upon his judge. Fear is more natural to carnal men, because a bad conscience is very suspicious, and our sense of God’s benefits is not so great as the sense of our bad deservings is quick and lively. Therefore naturally we have no other notions of God than as a rigid lawgiver and severe avenger. The heathens, who in all their worship discovered the natural sentiments of religion that are in the hearts of men, observed this in their straits, *Ut prius placarent iratos deos*, &c. Wrath and anger were the first thoughts they had of a divine power ; and it is as true among Christians. Guilty nature is more presageous of evil than of good, when it is serious. It is true, wicked men cry out, God is merciful, and that is generally the cause of their laziness and slowness in religion ; but it is when they do not mind what they say : these are but sugared words in their tongues ; when they are serious they have other thoughts. Bondage is more natural than liberty, fear than hope, because of the covenant we are under, which is a covenant of works, a ministry of death and condemnation, and so begetteth fear, and representeth God as terrible : yea, it is found in those that are more serious,

and have some beginnings of a good work upon their hearts ; they are too apt to entertain ill thoughts of God, and looking upon him in the glass of their guilty fears, represent him as harsh and inexorable. All their terrors and troubles are raised by false apprehensions of God ; and therefore the course of their obedience groweth the more uncomfortable. This is a truth, that the law and grace contendeth for the mastery in every heart that entertains thoughts of religion ; not only corruption and grace, but the law and grace : and as their law notions prevail, so their slavish fear increaseth ; but as the gospel apprehensions prevail, so their love of God increaseth, and their comfortableness in religion. Therefore still the caution is bound upon us, to take heed what notions we have of God, and that we have not any diminishing extenuating thoughts of his goodness and mercifulness ; that we do not look upon him as one that lieth upon the catch, to spy out advantages against us ; for that thought will mightily weaken our hands in the Lord's work. Do not think of him as one that delights in the creatures' misery. No ; rather in showing mercy and goodness, and as ready to give out grace to the humble that lie at his feet, however he dealeth with the stubborn and obstinate refusers of his grace. And therefore, if I may digress into application, while I am yet in some doctrinal considerations, I would advise—

[1.] That to preserve the sense of religion in the general, men would consider how much God standeth upon the credit of his goodness, and that he giveth them no cause of discouragement as from him : Micah vi. 3, 'O my people, what have I done unto you, wherein have I wearied you ?' That his commands are not grievous, Mat. xi. 29 ; 1 John iii. 5 ; that the trials sent by him are not above measure, 1 Cor. x. 13, nor his punishments above deservings, Neh. xi. 9–13 ; that he is not hard to be pleased, nor inexorable upon our infirmities, Mal. iii. 17. These things should be constantly in our minds, for the vindication and justification of God from our natural jealousies and evil surmises that we have of his conduct and government.

[2.] I would advise poor trembling souls that are alarmed by their own fears, which represent God as an enemy, and standing at a distance from them, that they would study the name of God ; for surely things are known by their names, and poor disconsolate souls are bidden, Isa. l. 10, 'To trust in the name of the Lord,' &c. Now what is the name of God ? Even that which he proclaimed : Exod. xxxiv. 5–7, 'I am the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.' Therefore take all his name, and meditate upon it. Satan laboureth to represent God by halves, only as a consuming fire, as clothed with justice and vengeance. Oh, no ! It is true he will not suffer his mercy to be abused by contemptuous sinners ; he will not clear the guilty, though he waiteth long on them before he destroyeth them ; but the main of his name is 'his mercy and goodness.' Take it as God proclaimeth it, and see if you have any reason to have hard thoughts of God. You will find, that though he be a high and holy one, yet he is willing to be treated with ; that he is great, but yet good, ready to receive returning sinners : if thou hast sin and misery, Christ hath compassion and pity ; he is the

'Father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3. *Misericors est, cui alterius miseria cordi est*—mercy hath its name from misery, and is no other thing than laying another's misery to heart, not to despise it, nor to add to it, but to help it. And therefore, if thou be miserable, and knowest it indeed, his nature giveth a strong inclination to succour the miserable. Ay! but saith the convinced soul, there is nothing in me to be regarded. The Lord telleth, 'I am gracious;' and grace doth all freely, and from a self-inclination; it giveth all the qualifications he requireth. But I have been long a presumptuous sinner. Why, God telleth you his name is 'long-suffering.' He that gave not the angels one hour's space for repentance, hath long delayed the execution of our sentence, and calleth us to himself, that we may escape the condemnation of angels. But I am exceeding perverse and wicked. The Lord telleth you he is 'abundant in goodness.' I am full of fears and doubtings. Still he is 'abundant in goodness and truth.' I have abused much mercy, and can mercy pity me? The Lord telleth you, he 'keepeth mercy for thousands, and can forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin.' His treasure of mercy is not soon spent and exhausted: no sin can exclude a willing soul; mercy will pardon thy abuse of mercy, if thou repentest of it.

[3.] To the people of God, who having a clearer sense of their duty, and a larger heart towards God than others have, and so are the more troubled for the poverty of their graces, and weakness and imperfection of their services than others are, which may breed bondage and uncomfortableness. I would have them consider that humility and meekness doth still become them, but not dejection and despondency of mind, that they should ever be complaining, fearful, and disconsolate. We have not a hard master; he hath made joy a part of our work, Phil. iv. 4; he gave his Son, Luke i. 74, 75, 'That being delivered from our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness.' We should consider that he is ready to bear with failings where there is an upright heart; that God accepteth what we can through grace well and comfortably perform. It is a general maxim of the gospel, though spoken upon a particular occasion, 2 Cor. viii. 12, 'That if there be a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, not according to that he hath not:' that the God whom they serve in the spirit can put a finger on the scar: 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job,' James v. 11. Ay! and we have heard of his impatience too, his cursing the day of his birth, and his bold expostulations with God; but this is passed over in silence, and his patience commended. Nothing should be a discouragement from serving cheerfully so good and gracious a God, who is so ready to accept and assist us, 1 Peter iii. 6, compared with Gen. xviii. 12. He will own a pearl on a dunghill, the least act of sincere obedience, though there be many failings. But I must return.

3. The usual ill thoughts of God are these three—(1.) That he is rigorous in his commands; (2.) Niggardly and tenacious in his gifts and helps of grace; (3.) And as to acceptance, that he is hard to please and easy to offend. All these may be gathered out of the words of the unfaithful servant, and all these lie deep in the hearts of men against God's sovereignty.



[1.] Hypocrites accuse God of tyranny in his laws, as if he dealt hardly with his creatures, to leave them with such affections in the midst of the snares and temptations of the present life, and requiring such duty from them. Certainly, all that God hath required of us is holy, just, and good, conducing not only to his glory, but to the rectitude and perfection of our natures. Man would not be man if such things were not required of him ; so that if we were in our right wits, and were left to our own option and choice, we would prefer subjection to such laws before exemption and freedom, Micah vi. 8. Are justice, temperance, chastity, piety, patience gyves and fetters to human nature? We cannot be without these and preserve the nobleness of our being and the good of human societies. It is true this lower world furnisheth us with many temptations to the contrary, but these temptations work not by constraining efficacy, but only by enticing persuasion ; and have we not more earnest persuasions to love God and please God? Are not God and Christ and heaven more lovely objects than all the pleasures and profits and honours of the world? These things do not force the will, but draw your consent ; and surely God hath propounded more lovely things in his covenant to draw this consent from them. The great fault is in our lust, 2 Peter i. 4 ; as the poison is not in the flower, but in the spider.

[2.] He accuseth God as backward to give grace and help our impotency, and as if he did require more than he giveth. This is obvious and express in the words of the naughty servant : ' Reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.' But this also is an unjust charge ; for God requireth nothing but according to the talents received. Now he needeth not take anything from the creatures, for he giveth all ; he had one talent, and God expected the improvement but of one. Let men try to the utmost, and see if they have cause to make this complaint ; they will find, that ' the way of the Lord is strength to the upright,' Prov. x. 29, and that all these jealousies are but a slander against God's government. Why do you complain that he would reap where he hath not sown? Is it because you would have God force you to be good whether you would or no, and by an absolute constraining power drive you out of your flesh-pleasing course? Consider how unbeseeming it is the wisdom of God that men should be holy and good by necessity, and not by choice. Virtue would then be no virtue, not a moral, but a natural property, as burning is to fire ; and it were no more praiseworthy to mind heavenly things than it is for a stone to move downward. It is true God must make us willing, but willing we must be. Now there is no such thing on your parts, when you wilfully refuse the hopes God offereth : Acts xiii. 46, ' Since ye put away the word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.' At least you do not apply your hearts to work with God, or frame your doings to turn to him, as it is in the prophet ; you do not improve means, and mercies, and providences, and helps vouchsafed. And will you, after all this, think God a Pharaoh, that requireth brick and giveth no straw? Here it is verified, Prov. xix. 3, ' The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.' We usually ruin ourselves, and then complain that God giveth no more

grace. But do not we justify this conceit of wicked men, when we say, God requireth duty of the fallen creatures, who have no power to perform it? I answer—

(1.) We must so maintain God's goodness as still to keep up his sovereignty and right of dominion. Man had power, which was lost by his own default; but God doth not lose his right, though man hath lost his power: their impotency doth not dissolve their obligation. A drunken servant is bound to the duty of a servant still. It is against all reason the master should lose his right to command by the servant's default. A prodigal debtor, that hath nothing to pay, yet is liable to be sued for the debt without injustice. God contracted with us in Adam, and his obedience was not only due by covenant, but by law and immutable right; not by positive law only, or contract; and therefore he hath a right to demand obedience, as the fruit of original righteousness.

(2.) It is harsh, men think, to answer for Adam's fault, to which they were not conscious and consenting. But every man will find an Adam in his own heart: the old man is there wasting away the relics of natural light and strength; and shall not God challenge the debt of obedience from a proud prodigal debtor? We are found naked, yet we think ourselves clothed; poor, yet we think ourselves rich, and to have need of nothing: therefore God may admonish us of our duty, demand his right to convince us of our impotency, and that we may not pretend we were not called upon for what we owe him. Man is prodigal; we spend what is left, lose those relics of conscience and moral inclinations which escaped out of the ruins of the fall.

(3.) God requireth it that we may acknowledge the debt and confess our impotency, being practically convinced thereof, and so humbly implore his grace.

(4.) God is still offering recovering mercy, and never forsaketh any but those that forsake him first: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever;' 2 Chron. xv. 2, 'If you forsake him, he will forsake you.' Did you improve yourselves, and beg God's grace, and carry on the common work as far as you can, then it were another matter. He that useth God's means as well as he can, he lieth nearer to the blessing of them than the wilful despiser and neglecter of them. Unsanctified men may do less evil and more good than they do: therefore if they neglect the means, they are left inexcusable; not only as originally disabled, but as wilfully graceless: so that no such prejudice can lie against God; he offereth grace and power, and men will not have it.

[3.] The third prejudice is, that he is hard to please, and easily offended; as if he did watch advantages to ruin and destroy the creature. Oh, no! This cannot be thought of God. He that rewarded the picture and shadow of duty, as in Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 29, the first offers of it in his servants, Isa. xxxii. 5; that regarded the returning prodigal, Luke xv. 20; Isa. lxv. 24; whose bowels relent presently; who hath promised to reward a cup of cold water given for Christ's sake, Mat. x. 42, and that our slender services should receive so great a reward; that beareth with his people's weakness; that 'spareth them as a man spareth his only son,' by their failing, surely he is not harsh and severe.

[4.] These prejudices are very natural to us, and therefore should be regarded by all. This appeareth partly by the first fall of man. Prejudice against God was the fiery dart that wounded our first parents to death. The first battery that Satan made was against the persuasion of God's goodness and kindness to man; he endeavoured to make them doubt of it by casting jealousies into their minds, as if God were harsh, severe, and envious in restraining them from the tree of knowledge, and the fruit that was so fair to see to, Gen. iii. If once he could bring them to question God's goodness, he knew other things would succeed more easily; for the sense of the Creator's goodness was the strongest bond by which the heart was kept to God. And partly because still the devil seeketh to possess us with this conceit, that God is harsh and severe, and delighteth in our ruin; and casteth jealousies into our heads, as if God did infringe our just liberties by the restraints of his law. And we have the same impatience of restraints which they had; and the flesh being importunate to be pleased, we are apt to find out excuses; and as the naughty servant condemneth his master when he should beg pardon, so such is the perverse disposition of man, when we should confess our fault, we will abuse God himself; as Adam, Gen. iii. 12, 'The woman thou gavest me, gave me, and I did eat.' This monstrous conceit of God we further by observing his injuries (as we count them), rather than his benefits. We take notice of afflictions, but not of daily mercies. David had much ado to hold his principle: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart: but as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped.' These thoughts are very incident to us.

*Use.* Oh! then, when we set our hearts to religion, let us take heed of slavish fear; and if so, take heed with what thoughts of God you are leavened, and that you do not draw a monstrous and horrid picture of him in your minds. Oh! look upon him as full of grace and mercy, ten thousand times more inclined to do good than any friend you have in the world. The devil governeth the dark parts of the world by slavish fear, but God governeth by love. To this end consider—

1. That in his word God representeth himself by mercy and goodness rather than any other attribute. Mercy is natural to him; he is 'the father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3. God is not merciful by accident, but by nature. The sun doth not more naturally shine, nor the fire more naturally burn, nor water more naturally flow, than God doth naturally show mercy. It is pleasing to him, Micah vii. 18; James ii. 13, 'Mercy rejoiceth over judgment.' Punitive acts are forced from him, but gracious acts drop from him of their own accord, like life-honey. Nay, God is mercy itself: 1 John iv. 8, 'God is love.' It cannot be said of a man that he is learning and wisdom, though learned and wise. But God is not only loving, but love, an infinite sea of love, without banks and bounds. It was well observed of Ecolampadius, that men were taught amiss to know the nature of God by vulgar pictures and representations (for their fashion was then to picture God in some fair and beautiful form, and the devil in some foul ugly shape). *Puerorum major pars nescit quid sit Deus, quid sit Sathan.* But he adviseth parents, if they would teach their children to know what God is, they would first teach them to know what goodness is and justice



is, what mercy is, what bounty and loving-kindness is; *per illos enim proprie quid Deus sit discimus*. Again, if they would know what kind of creature the devil is, they should first know what malice is and filthiness, and what villany and treachery is; for Satan is a compound of all these. The best picture that could be taken of the devil would be by the characters of malice, falsehood, and envy. But God is justice itself, goodness itself, mercy itself, as it is expressed in scripture.

2. In Christ, who is the 'express image of his person,' Heb. i. 3. Now, Christ disdained not the company of sinners, went about healing sicknesses and diseases, and doing good. His miracles were acts of relief, not done for pomp and ostentation.

3. In his providence: Acts xiv. 17, 'He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

## SERMON XV.

*His lord said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reaped where I sowed not, and gathered where I have not straved; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*—MAT. XXV. 26, 27.

HERE is the master's reply to the servant's allegation. In the words we have two things:—

1. An exprobration of his naughtiness and sloth.

2. A retortion of his vain excuse upon his own head, 'If thou knewest,' &c. Not as if the lord did grant it to be true that the slothful servant had alleged; but his own opinions and conceits were enough to convict him.

[1.] Here is a *συγχώρησις*, a concession; for dispute's sake, be it as thou hast said.

[2.] The inference, 'Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, that at my coming I might have received my own with usury.' The argument is returned upon himself. The bankers and usury here mentioned are only by way of comparison, and can no more be urged to justify the putting money to use than, 'Behold, I come as a thief,' can justify theft; or that parable Luke xvi. should justify fraud and injustice; the unjust steward did wisely, *non servi fraudem, sed prudentiam*, &c. Parables are not taken from those things that *de jure* ought to be done, but *de facto* are done. Therefore I shall not interpose any judgment of mine upon this occasion as to that case, whether any putting money to use be lawful, yea or no: only observe, that Christ will have his own with usury; some improvement he expects when he cometh.

First, I begin with the exprobration. It was a sharp but well deserved reproof; if the bad servant had feared this aforehand, it might have been better with him; shame is the fear of a just reproof. Mark

the different entertainment of the good and bad servant: there it is, Good and faithful servant; here, Thou wicked and slothful servant: Christ will upbraid the unfaithful at the day of judgment. He is called a wicked, evil servant, because unfaithful; slothful, because negligent.

*Doct. 1.* A slothful servant is a wicked servant.

These two terms are here coupled. There is a twofold sloth:—

First, Common, in the ordinary affairs of this life: 2 Thes. iii. 10, ‘We commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should they eat;’ 1 Tim. v. 8, ‘He that provideth not for his own is worse than an infidel;’ ver. 13, ‘And withal, they learn to be idle.’

Secondly, Spiritual, called *ἀκηδία*, and *torpor spiritualis*, one of the seven deadly sins among the papists; a remiss will in divine and heavenly matters, or a negligence in the duties of holiness, because of the labour and trouble that accompanieth them: Rom. xii. 11, ‘Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;’ Heb. vi. 12, ‘That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.’ There are in these scriptures two words, *δωρηδοι* and *ωθροδι*, dull, stupid, backward. They are both bad; but this latter is worst, because of the matter about which it is conversant. The one in our particular, the other in our general calling. To be negligent in our ordinary callings is bad; but much more in the great affairs of our souls. It is not only an evil thing, but an evil sin. Of this principally.

1. Because total omissions, against knowledge and conscience, especially of necessary duties, are very great sins. That omissions are sins as well as sins of commission, appeareth from the nature of the law, which consists of a precept and prohibition. It enforceth good, as well as forbiddeth what is evil: Ps. xxxiv. 14, ‘Depart from evil, and do good.’ In the government of man, the law useth both these, the bridle and the spur, inciting him to that which is good, and restraining him from that which is evil. You deny God his due when you withhold from him that service, love, and worship which he requireth; which is a great evil in his creatures, which are made by him, and fed and maintained by him. You wrong him when you deprive him of your service for whose use you were made. Therefore sins of omission are sins. Now, of all omissions, omissions of the most necessary duties are most culpable; want of love to God, fear of God, faith in God, are greater evils than not praying at such a time, hearing of the word, or labouring in our callings at such a time. The life of religion lieth in the one more than in the other; and they are more indispensably required. The scripture pronounceth a heavy doom upon these kind of defects: 1 Cor. xvi. 22, ‘If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.’ Among these, sins *contra remedium* are more baneful than *peccata contra officium*: Heb. ii. 3, ‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ Especially when total. To omit an act of love to God, or to fail in point of faith in a particular case or exigence, is a great evil; but to be wholly careless and mindless of the favour of God, or to seek after it in a very overly slight manner, is worst of all: Rom. iii. 11, ‘There is none that understandeth, that seeketh after God.’ They do not make it their business to remember God, or their duty to him, or their study to

please him; they think of him seldom, or very neglectfully worship him, or make mention of him very coldly, serve him carelessly, or by the by. This sheweth that men are naughty, wicked, and in a cursed estate; especially when they are convinced of better, that God deserveth more serious regard at their hands, and Christ to be more dear and precious to them, and their converses with him more delightful. The religion they profess doth plainly call for more at their hands; and their consciences are clamorous, and the Spirit of God importunate with them. To omit a duty against knowledge is as great a sin as to commit evil against knowledge: James iv. 17, 'Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' The closer the application by serious convictions, strong motions, and impulses to do better, the greater their sin; for this argueth a flat disobedience and contempt of God, and a grieving of his Spirit, Eph. iv. 30, to give him the repulse when he would fain enter and take possession of our hearts. Now, put all these things together, and you will soon find that a slothful servant is a very wicked, naughty servant. *Satis est mali ipsum nihil fecisse boni.* They are not only evil servants that teach falsities, but they also that do not promote the kingdom of Christ to their power; not only they that do no hurt, but they that do no good: Mat. iii. 20, 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.' Not only the poisonous, but the barren tree.

2. The motives that draw us to this idleness and sloth are paltry, base, and such as offer great wrong to God. Alas! what have we to hinder us in God's service, but a little worldly profit, pleasure, or honour? Now, what a gross sin is it to love the world above God, or to neglect Christ that died for thee, merely to please the flesh, and to seek its ease and contentment! *Probatio unius sine contumelia alterius procedere non potest:* Heb. xii. 15, 'Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.' If there were some better or more considerable thing in the case, the fault were the less, and our negligence might the more be excused; but this is a gross sin, to despise God for poor contemptible vanities. The world counts profaneness by another measure than the scripture. You count adulterers and drunkards and swearers profane; but the scripture counteth them profane that have not an esteem of spiritual privileges. There are *peccata majoris infamiae*, and *peccata majoris reatus*. Some sins in the eye of the world have more filthiness and turpitude in them, and some sins in the eye of God have more guilt, as when we despise the favour of God, and do not think it worthy our most serious and lively diligence; the smallness of the temptation aggravateth the negligence. The service of God is of everlasting consequence, but the things of the world are of short continuance; all this dust is gone with the spurn of a foot; one turn of the hand of God separateth thy neglected soul from thy pampered body, and then 'whose are all these things?' Luke xii. 20; 2 Cor. iv. 18.

3. Negligent unfruitfulness is a breach of trust, to which we are bound by covenant, and so a disappointment of God's expectation. To fortify this consideration, I need not repeat that all God's gifts to us imply a trust; the very scope of this parable sheweth it, and it may



be further confirmed by Isa. xliii. 21-24, 'This people I have formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise. But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel: thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense; thou hast bought me no sweet-cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities.' That where God hath given a people advantages, he expecteth answerable service and improvement; and that we are bound to this by the covenant of grace, wherein we give up ourselves to the Lord for his use and service; and that God reckoneth upon this: Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know my servant Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him;' and Luke xiii. 7, 'Then said he to the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years have I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree;' and Isa. lxiii. 8, 'For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' Only now I press that unfruitfulness and breach of trust is a great crime, and a disappointing the righteous expectation of God, a very provoking thing; and therefore the slothful servant, that doth not answer the ends of his trust, nor fulfil his covenant vow, must needs be highly culpable, though he should not break out into acts of gross excess, and apparent enmity against God.

4. He that ceaseth to do good, evil must needs ensue; and the unprofitable servant hath his blots and blemishes, which render him odious unto God. *Homines nihil agendo, male agere discunt*, saith Cato. Standing pools are apt to putrify; and the Psalmist saith, Ps. xiv. 2, 'They are all become filthy and abominable, for there is none that seeketh God.' When the gardener holdeth his hand, the ground is soon overgrown with weeds. Sins of omission will make way for sins of commission; and those that neglect improvement lose all reverence and awe of God every day more and more, and so are given up to a hatred of his people, and many brutish lusts. As a carcase not embalmed is more noisome every day: Job xv. 4, 'Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God.'

*Use 1.* Let us all be ashamed of our sloth. There is more evil in it than we are aware of.

1. Consider the necessity of diligence. There is nothing in religion can be gotten, kept, increased, or maintained, without great diligence. No comfort without it: 2 Peter i. 10, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure;' 2 Peter iii. 14, 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace.' No grace without it: 2 Peter i. 5, 'And besides this, give all diligence to add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.' No hope of coming to heaven without it: Heb. vi. 11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.' *Illi falsi sunt*, saith Sallust, *qui diversissimas res expectant, ignavia voluptatem, et premia virtutis*. It is in vain to think that a loitering profession will ever bring any glory to God, comfort, or increase of grace to ourselves, or breed in us any comfortable hope and expectation of blessed-

ness to come. All excellent things are hard to come by; it is true in earthly matters, it is much more true in spiritual.

2. Consider the evil of sloth. A slothful man and a profane man differ very little: Prov. xviii. 9, 'He that is slothful in work is brother to him that is a great waster.' The one getteth nothing, and the other spendeth all. Thou wilt say, thou art no drunkard, no whore-monger. But thou art idle and negligent, so that you and they are brothers; all the difference is as between a consumption and an apoplexy; the one destroyeth in an instant, the other consumeth by degrees; the one is like splitting a ship, that goes down to the bottom presently, the other like a leaky ship that sinketh by degrees. Though you do not run into the same excess of riot with others, yet you are idle in the Lord's work: it cometh much to the same effect; the heart groweth poorer and poorer, till at length it ends in final hardness. Nay, in some sense negligence is worse than gross profaneness. Many from great sinners have turned great saints, but few from a lukewarm careless profession have come to anything. Therefore these are 'spewed out of God's mouth,' Rev. iii. 16. There is more hope of a sinner than of a lukewarm careless person, for he doth not think himself evil, and so is more liable to security. God may give grace to the one, but taketh away the talent from the other.

3. Consider the rewards of diligence. This labour will turn to a good effect: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.' If there were nothing in chase, or not so great a reward, we had more excuse; but when the reward is so full and so sure, shall not we labour for it? We labour and toil, and use all diligence to obtain the things of this world; and shall we think to go to heaven with our hands in our bosom, or lying upon a bed of ease? To see men under the power of a lust may shame us, Ps. cxxvii. 2. Men rise early and go to bed late to gain the world; men labour, sweat, and travail, and spare no cost to go to hell. The devil gets more servants than God with all his promises, threatenings, and mercies. Shall they be so diligent that have such bad work, worse wages, and the worst master, and shall not we bestir ourselves?

4. The whole course of nature inviteth us to labour and diligence, in order to our future estate. The sun is unwearied in his motion, that he may go up and down, preaching God to the world: Prov. vi. 6, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.' There is a great deal of morality hidden in the bosom of nature, if we had the skill to find it out. What can the ant do? 'She provideth her meat in summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.' These little creatures are not able to endure the cold of winter, therefore work themselves deep into the earth, but they carry their food along with them; and should not we have as great a sense of futurity? We cannot endure the day of the Lord unless we make provision: Prov. x. 5, 'He that gathereth in summer is a wise son, but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.' Now is our season to work, that in the day of our accounts we may not be unprovided.

The means against sloth are faith, patience, and love. Faith and patience we have in one place: Heb. vi. 12, 'That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the pro-

mises.' They inherited the promises, that is, the things promised. If we propound to ourselves such a divine and noble end as those great and glorious things that are offered in the promises, we must use the means. They had faith, so must we have; they had patience, and we must be patient.

[1.] By faith we are not to understand confidence and reliance upon God's promises; a probable human faith and hope will not be sufficient; but a firm adherence to God's word: whatever falleth out we are sure to have enough in the promise. We must have faith, because the things promised are invisible, rare, and excellent, far above the power of the creature to give. The promise is a firm and immutable foundation of our hope; we should rejoice in it as much as if the thing promised were in hand: 'In God I will rejoice, in the Lord I will praise his word;' or praise his word till the thing promised cometh to be enjoyed: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for.'

[2.] For patience: Heb. x. 36, 'For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise.' And we must have patience, because the things hoped for are to come, and at a great distance: Rom. viii. 25, 'But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' Besides, we shall meet with many difficulties, oppositions, and trials, all which must be overcome: many things must be done, many things must be suffered, and we must make our way through the midst of dreadful enemies before we can attain our end. Further, our desires are vehement, and we long for enjoyment, which is yet to come; therefore we must be patient, that we may quietly wait God's leisure: Rom. ii. 7, 'To them who by patient continuing in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life.'

[3.] The next grace is love. Where there is love there will be labour, Heb. vi. 10, 'For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love;' 1 Thes. i. 3, 'Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope;' Rev. ii. 3, 4, 'And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted: nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' And love is said 'to endure all things,' 1 Cor. xiii. 7. It was love made Christ to suffer hunger and weariness, and to forbear to refresh himself for the good of souls; it was love made him endure the bitter agonies of the cross. Love puts strength and life into the soul, addeth wings and feet to the body, spareth no pains nor cost. Keep up this grace, and you have an over-ruling bent upon your hearts.

*Use 2.* If spiritual sloth be so great an evil, let the children of God take heed of it when first it beginneth to creep upon their spirits; as when they begin to pray without affection or fervour of spirit, to meditate of divine things without any sense, affection, or fruit; when they find it difficult to withdraw from carnal company or vain discourse, and are hardly persuaded to return unto themselves, and to consider their ways, and can freely let loose their thoughts and words to all manner of vanity, and their comfort is rather sought in the creature than in God; they can rarely speak of others, but it is in reflecting upon them rather than themselves; when reproofs grow burdensome,



and are not entertained as a help but as an injury ; when they give up themselves to carnal sports, and take a license for vain recreations, and so fly from the labours that are profitable and necessary for their soul's health ; their zeal languisheth, their duties are not so frequent, nor the means of grace used with life, vigour, and affection, but they are more coldly affected towards them ; a satiety and fulness creepeth upon them ; they do not so solicitously avoid the causes of sin, begin to indulge the body, or the bodily life, to have more admiring thoughts of the honours and pleasures and profits of the world ; either neglect or quench the motions of the Spirit : all these are the effects of a remiss will, or a fainting heart, that beginneth to tire in the ways of God.

*Use 3.* It serves to justify God in his judgments upon the careless and negligent, though they be not grossly dissolute and profane. There is more contempt of God in neglecters than you can at first be sensible of. Hypocrites complain of the severity of God, the rigour of his law, the grievousness of his judgments ; they should rather complain of the naughtiness of their own hearts. They are convinced of more duty than they are willing to perform, and they are not willing, because they follow after a few paltry vanities, which is a great dishonour to God. It was not the austerity and rigidness of the master in requiring improvement that hindered the increase of his talent, but his own baseness, being wedded to sensual delights. They say, 'The ways of the Lord are not equal ;' but their hearts are not right with God.

*Secondly,* I come now to the retortion of his vain excuse upon himself. The damned can have no just complaint against God ; they are apt to murmur, and lay their defects upon the rigidness of God's government or God's providence ; but in the issue the blame will light upon themselves, even the things they allege make against them. He was convinced the master expected increase, therefore he should have done what he could : Luke xix. 22, 'Out of thy own mouth I will condemn thee.' So it is here ; men's consciences convince them they ought not to live in idleness, and if they have a master, the thought of their account should enforce them, if not their own inclination, especially if a severe master. Grant the sinner's supposition, it bindeth the duty upon him, and so he cuts his throat with his own sword ; as they said of Job, chap. xv. 6, 'Thine own mouth condemneth thee ; thine own lips testify against thee.'

*Doct.* No excuse shall serve the unfaithful and slothful servant at the day of judgment.

Let a man deceive himself now, and please himself with these pretences as he will, all his excuses shall be retorted upon him, and made matter of his condemnation ; for the judge is impartial, and omniscient, his eyes cannot be blinded ; nay, he can open your own consciences, and so overwhelm you with the evidence and conviction of your sins, that you shall have nothing to say. As in the 22d of Matthew, 'The man was speechless' when arraigned. But because the excusing humour is very rife, and many things serve the turn now which will not bear weight then, I shall a little handle this matter of excusing. In the general, an excuse is an apology or vain defence, whereby the

sinner seeketh to palliate his negligence in God's service. To undeceive you—

First, Take these general considerations.

1. That carnal men are ill versed in the art of excusing evil, when they have a right principle to go upon, and that which they think maketh for them usually maketh against them. Solomon telleth us, Prov. xxvi. 9, 'That a parable in a fool's mouth is like a thorn in the hand of a drunkard.' The thorn was their instrument of sewing, as the needle with us. Now, a drunkard woundeth and goeth himself, because of his uneven touch, when his spirits are disturbed with excess of drink. Do but observe how contrarily and perversely wicked men will reason, and what inferences and conclusions they will draw from those very principles the godly make a good use of. As in 1 Cor. xv. 32, 'Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die.' Now, compare this with 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 'But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use the world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away;' 2 Kings vi. 33, 'And while he yet talked with them, behold the messenger came down unto him; and he said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?' Compare this with 1 Sam. iii. 18, 'And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him; and he said, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.' So Haggai i. 2, 'Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, The people say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.' Compare this scripture with 2 Sam. vii. 2, 'And the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.' When David dwelt in a stately house, his heart was set upon building a house for the Lord. So Rom. ii. 4, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' with Titus ii. 11, 12, 'For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;' Jude 4, 'Ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.'

2. Sometimes carnal men pretend certain causes and excuses, when their conscience knoweth it is otherwise; and then the things alleged are not the real opinions and inward sentiments of their own minds, but something said or taken up to justify their sloth: 1 Cor. vi. 9, 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,' &c. As hopes of impunity, though they live a godless and sinful course of life. If they were serious, conscience would tell them men may be deceived with these things, but God cannot. Ye may stifle conscience for a while with these allegations, but it will speak, and then these sorry fig-leaves will not serve the turn to hide your nakedness.

3. Sometimes these excuses are the fruit of blindness, sottishness,

ignorance, and infatuation; and the sluggard hath a high conceit of his own allegations: Prov. xxvi. 16, 'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' He thinketh others are mopish, giddy, and crack-brained people, that make more ado with religion than needeth, are too nice and scrupulous; take it to be good prudence to keep out of harm's way: his very foolish thoughts he thinketh are wise reasons; that religion is a merry thing: Prov. xv. 19, 'The way of a slothful man is a hedge of thorns, but the way of the righteous man is made plain.' He imagineth difficulties and intolerable hardships in a course of godliness. It is our cowardice and pusillanimous ignorance maketh the ways of God seem hard. All things are comfortable, plain, and easy to the pure and upright heart. Thus he bloweth hot and cold, speaketh contrary things, according as he looketh upon them with a slight or pusillanimous heart.

4. Excuses argue an ill spirit and an unwilling heart. When they should do something for God, there is something still in the way, some danger, or some difficulty, which they are loath to encounter withal: Prov. xxvi. 13, 'The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way.' They are fruits of the quarrel between conviction and corruption, and are usually found in us when we first begin to understand the way of the Lord, but are loath to come up to the terms. Certainly it is better be doing than excusing. Doing is safe, but excuses are but a patch upon a sore place. If we have done a fault, it is better confess, and seek a pardon, than to excuse and extenuate.

5. Consider the invalidity of all things that are usually alleged by sinners; and to help you, consider—

[1.] Nothing can be pleaded as reason which God's word disproveth. The scriptures were purposely penned to refute the vain sophisms that are in the hearts of men: Heb. iv. 12, 'To divide between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart;' to discover the affections of a sensual heart, however palliated with the pretences of a crafty understanding, to hide the evil from themselves and others. You must not lift up your private conceits against the wisdom of God.

[2.] Nothing can be pleaded as reason which your consciences are not satisfied with as reason. That is the reason there are so many appeals to conscience in scripture. Do not your consciences tell you you ought to be better, to mind God more? That if these things be true, 2 Peter iii. 11, 'That all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?'

[3.] Nothing can be pleaded by way of excuse which reflects upon God, as if he had made a hard law. We are apt to plead so: 'The way of the Lord is not equal;' 'The woman thou gavest me, she gave me, and I did eat.' Will you excuse your idleness and sin by the severity of your master, and cast your brat at his doors?

[4.] There can be no excuse for a total omission of necessary duties. In a partial omission, the law itself alloweth a dispensation; as in case of sickness we are taken off from some work which God requireth at other times. But some things are indispensably required: John



iii. 5, 'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;' Heb. xii. 14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Here is *necessitas precepti et medii*.

[5.] You should harden yourselves with no excuse or reason but what you dare plead when you stand before the bar of Christ; for then will the weight of all pleas be considered. Now, God hath left all creatures without excuse, Rom. i. 20. There is some witness of God to them, that convinceth them of more duty than they are willing to perform.

Secondly, And more particularly, the usual excuses are these:—

*Object. 1.* I have no time to mind soul-affairs; my distractions in the world are so great, and my course of life is such, I have no leisure.

*Ans. 1.* Whatever your business be, you have a time to eat and drink and sleep; and have you no time to be saved? Better encroach upon other things than that religion should be cast to the walls, or jostled out of your thoughts. David was a king, and he had more distracting affairs than most of us have, or can have; yet, Ps. cxix. 147, 148, he saith, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried;' and 'Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate on thy word.'

2. Do you spend no time in idleness, vain talking, or carnal sports? And might not this be better employed about heavenly things? Eph. v. 16, 'Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.'

3. Much of religion is transacted in the mind. A Christian is always serving God; his second-table duties are first-table duties. As carnal men go about heavenly things with a carnal mind, so the Christian goeth about carnal things with a heavenly mind.

4. God would be sure to have a portion of time, therefore the Lord's day was appointed: Isa. lviii. 13, 'If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words,' &c. That it may be dear to us in the flesh, and in the Lord, when we have God's command, and the laws of the land too.

5. All your time is lost that is not spent in God's service.

*Object. 2.* But I have no power nor strength to do good; and what will you have us do?

*Ans.* You can do more than you do, but you will not make trial. God may be more ready with the assistances of his grace than you can imagine. The tired may complain of the length of the way, but not the lazy that will not stir a foot. If you did make trial, you would not complain of God, but yourselves; and beg grace more feelingly. You are not able because you are not willing. Your impotency is contracted by evil habits and long custom in sin; that is an aggravation of your sin.

*Object. 3.* It is dangerous and troublesome to own God and religion heartily.

*Ans.* Did not you resolve to serve God whatever it cost you? And is God harsh and severe because he trieth whether you will be as good as your word, and will not let you go to heaven with a vain complaint

in your mouths? Will this comfort you in hell, and for the loss of everlasting happiness? In hell will you say, I came hither to save myself a labour, and to be exempt from the diligence of the holy life, and sufferings incident to it? Will you stop a journey for your lives because the wind bloweth on you, and there is dirt in the way? Nothing can take off a minister from seeking the conversion and salvation of souls, Acts xx. 23, 24; and can anything be an excuse to you? Should your souls be dearer to us than you? It is necessary for our trial that we should meet with scorns and oppositions. Should a weak blast drive us from God? Rev. ii. 13, 14, 'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith; even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.' It is exceeding commendable to be zealous in such a place, or in such a time, when religion is hazardous and dangerous. Christ suffered more for you than you can for him, and God hath greater terrors than man can present.

*Object.* 4. I am of a slow wit, have a weak understanding, know not to which party I should cleave and join myself.

*Ans.* Certainly not to that which is most pleasing to corrupt affections. But divisions in the church are to try the approved, who is chaff, and who is good grain: 1 Cor. xi. 19, 'For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.' The scripture is not dark, but we want eyes. You may know the mind of God: Ps. cxix. 18, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' And John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.'

*Object.* 5. I have so many temptations and enticements, I hope God will consider my weakness.

*Ans.* You are as earnestly persuaded upon better motives if persuasion will do it. What is a little worldly glory to eternal glory, brutish pleasures to pure delights?

*Use* 1. Since sloth is so great an evil, let the children of God take heed of it.

And so, first, of sloth and idleness in their particular calling. This was one of Sodom's sins: Ezek. xvi. 49, 'Pride and fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.' This is sensuality, as well as other sins that are more noted in the world, as being an indulgence to the flesh, as well as other things, which are commonly decried, because they betray us to more shame in the world.

1. Every creature is God's servant, and hath his work to do wherein to glorify God; some in one calling, some in another: Neither rich nor poor are exempted; for a lawful calling is not a matter of necessity, but duty, enforced by a commandment. What our callings should be is determined by providence giving gifts and education, and obtruding us upon such a course of life. But it is a mistake to think that bare necessity maketh a calling; no, it is obedience. And if we be without such necessity, we may live idly, without any calling. No; every man and woman hath their labour and service; for God made no man or woman in vain. Would the wise and almighty God make so noble a thing as a rational human creature only to eat, and drink, and sleep.

and rise and dress themselves, that they may show themselves to company, and impertinently chat away their hours and precious time? No; he hath ordained them for some service, which at length they are to give an account of; as the Mediator did of his work: John xvii. 4, 'I have glorified thee on earth, and have finished the work thou gavest me to do.'

2. This work is not of one sort. Some are called to a higher, some to a lower employment, some noble, some citizens, some fathers of families, others matrons or mothers of families, some are magistrates, some ministers; but every one must do their duty in their place. Christianity falleth in with natural relations: 1 Cor. vii. 20, 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.' God gives every man his work: Mark xiii. 34, 'The Son of man is like a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work.'

3. The work of our callings must be constantly and diligently attended upon. A rich man cannot say, I have no need; therefore I will attend upon my calling at my pleasure. You must not consider your present need, but your future account. The baseness of a man's calling must not be a discouragement to a poor man, seeing God counteth himself honoured in the lowest service as well as in the highest, and hath promised the reward of the inheritance to servants as well as nobles: Col. iii. 24, 'Knowing that ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.'

4. Every one that feeleth any tediousness growing upon him in his work should often rouse up himself by considering—

[1.] The active nature of man was never made to be idle; and shall we cross the law of our creation? When the beasts lie down in their dens, 'Man goeth forth to his labour and work till the evening,' Ps. civ. 23.

[2.] The preciousness of time, which is too good to be loitered away upon mere nothing. We should buy it at any price, not waste it: Eph. v. 16, 'Redeem the time.' We shall wish we had done so when it is too late.

[3.] The eye of God, who observeth every man in his station, how he acquitteth himself with good fidelity. Eye-service, with respect to man, maketh us unfaithful: Eph. vi. 6; but eye-service with respect to God is the great ground of diligence, Col. iii. 22, 23.

[4.] The near approach of death. Would we be found eating, drinking, playing, sporting away our precious time, or diligently employing ourselves in our callings, at that day? Luke xii. 43, 'Blessed is that servant whom when his lord cometh he shall find so doing.'

[5.] Our accounts, which mainly concerneth—(1.) Our particular calling, and that course of living wherein we were set to glorify God. The unprofitable servant will be cast into utter darkness, Mat. xxv. 30. God will judge all according to what they have done in their places; and then what will become of the idle and the slothful? (2.) In our general calling, as Christians. Take heed of being naughty and slothful servants.

First, Let us inquire who may be characterised with this brand.

1. Who? Those who complain for want of strength, yet do not



diligently use the means whereby they may be quickened and strengthened: they are idle, and lie upon the bed of ease, and complain that God doth not give grace; languish for comfort, rather than set about the work of obedience. Christ telleth his disciples, John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.'

2. That content themselves with a loitering profession, when their hearts swarm with noisome lusts, and are unfurnished of faith and love, and other necessary graces; and yet think a lazy profession will serve the turn: Mat. vii. 22, 'Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works: and then will I profess, I never knew them.' Because they pray, and hear, and receive sacraments, they think all is well, and they have no more to care for. Is this 'working out our salvation with fear and trembling'? Phil. ii. 12; 'Serving God instantly day and night'? Acts xxvi. 7; 'Labouring for the meat that perisheth not'? John vi. 27; 'Denying ourselves'? Luke xiv. 26.

3. That snuff at a little mock-service as if an intolerable burden: Mal. i. 13, 'What a weariness is it!'

4. The children of God may feel this temper coming upon them, when though they do not cast off prayer altogether, yet they cut off or abate and diminish their prayers, either in fervour, or frequency, or continuance and perseverance in prayer; pray without sense, affection, or life; or do not pray so often, or do not continue instant in prayer.

This cutting short of duties in time tendeth to a quitting of them altogether. Man is ready to cast off what he thinketh to be a burden. So when they are backward to meditation, or to withdraw from the delights of the flesh, and the distraction of ordinary employments. In all such cases we should rouse up ourselves. Time is short; our account sure and near; we are labouring for heaven and salvation: shall we tire and faint? 'Be not weary of well-doing.' It is spoken with respect to the duties of piety, Heb. xii. 12; duties of mercy, Gal. vi. 9; duties of our calling, 2 Thes. iii. 13. Oh! then, let us rouse up ourselves.

## SERMON XVI.

*Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.—MAT. XXV. 28, 29.*

WE have seen the arraignment of the evil servant; now followeth the sentence, which intimateth a double punishment—privative and positive, loss and pain. The former is in these two verses; wherein you may observe three things:—

1. The taking the talent from the evil servant.

2. The disposition of the talent so taken from him.

3. The reason of both.

Let me explain these branches, and then draw one point from the whole.

First, The taking the talent from the evil servant, 'Take therefore the talent from him.' Naughty servants either lose the gifts themselves, or the benefit, comfort, and reward of them. Here, in time, they lose their gifts; when time is no more (which is the case in our parable), they lose their reward.

Secondly, The disposition of the talent so taken from him, 'And give it to him that hath ten talents;' that is, five by trust, and five more by gain and improvement. The giving of the talent to the first servant was thought unequal by some, because he had such plenty already; as appeareth, Luke xix. 25, 'They say unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.' But the Lord adhereth to his sentence: 'For I say unto you, Unto every one that hath shall be given,' &c. He giveth most to those that have done most diligent and faithful service, and delighteth to enrich them more and more with the rewards of grace.

*Object.* But how can we receive other men's talents? Shall the elect receive benefit from the reprobate, and their loss be our gain?

*Ans.* 1. It is spoken after the manner of men. Nothing more usual among men than to take that from the unfaithful which was committed to them, and to give it to the faithful. It is such another expression as Rev. iii. 11, 'Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown;' as if that crown which we had lost were taken and worn by others. So Num. xi. 17, 25, God took of the Spirit that was upon Moses, and gave it to the seventy elders; as if what were given to his assistance were taken from him, and his abilities were lessened with his work; whereas it is only meant of the communication of the same graces.

2. The meaning is, he that useth his gifts well shall be amply rewarded; so amply, as if the happiness which others expect should accrue to them, and be put on their account.

Thirdly, The reason of both, in the 29th verse, 'For unto every one that hath shall be given.' That these expressions are proverbial is out of question with the learned. *Habenti dabitur* is an expression verified in all ages and in all countries. The rich have many friends, and he that hath much shall have more; every one will be presenting them: and they have great advantages of laying out themselves, and improving themselves more than others have. So, on the contrary side, by the neglect of others, and their own incapacity to improve themselves, poor men commonly grow poorer. Upon this occasion were the words first used, which our Saviour is pleased to translate and apply to his own purpose. The sense of the words, as they lie here, will be known by taking this copulate axiom and proposition apart. The first branch speaketh of gain, the second of loss.

First branch. 'Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.' The word *ἔχειν* doth not only signify the possession of a thing, but the use, which is the end of possession: and so he that hath is he that hath to purpose, that occupieth and trafficketh with his grace or gift received, with that care and diligence that belongeth to

so great a treasure and trust: 'To him shall be given;' he shall increase his stock, and accordingly the comfort, benefit, and reward that belongeth to it. Yea, it follows, 'He shall have abundance,' *περισσευθήσεται*; not a single abundance, but a continual increase, even unto perfection; an increase of gifts, graces, and rewards. The sum is, to him that useth and improveth God's grace shall by degrees be given so much as that at last he shall have all abundance.

The second branch of this copulate axiom is, 'From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.' As he that had one talent, but had it not for his master's use, is counted and reckoned as though he had none. We have not what we have if we use it not well; as we say of a covetous man, *avarus tam deest quod habet, quam quod non habet*. It is as if we had it not: idle gifts and habits lie dead and useless. In Luke it is, chap. viii. 18, 'And from whomsoever hath not, shall be taken that which he seemeth to have.' He maketh no use of his gifts, but lets them lie idle, as if he had not had them. Of grace and righteousness the proposition holdeth most true; of reprobates their grace and righteousness is but a pretension: of other gifts which they have, they have them not for use, for the Lord's service; and so, in effect, they have them not: therefore, they shall be taken from them; that is, they lose their reward: Ezek. xxxiii. 13, 'If he trust in his righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered;' 2 John 8, 'Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward;' Gal. iii. 4, 'Have you suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain.' Men may suffer many things for the truth who afterward make foul defection from it; but all is vain, lost, and to no purpose, as to anything that can be expected from God. The Nazarite was to begin again if he had defiled himself in the days of his separation, Num. vi. 12. Thus for their putative righteousness; for other common gifts which they really have, they shall be deprived of all the real benefit which otherwise they might have had, if they had laid them out for the glory of God, their own salvation, and the good of their neighbours.

*Doct.* That all the good gifts which God hath bestowed upon men increase by good use, but wither and are lost by negligence.

For this is the sum of Christ's sentence and reason.

Now, that I may speak distinctly of the point, I must say something as to the increase, and something as to the loss.

First, For the increase, 'To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly, 'I shall deliver my sense of it in these propositions:—

1. That diligence is the means, and God's blessing is the cause, of all increase; and both must be regarded, or else we profit nothing. We cannot expect God's blessing while we sit idle; and it is a wrong to grace to trust merely to endeavours, or without looking up to God. It is said in Prov. x. 4, 'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the diligent hand maketh rich;' that is, that is the means; for ver. 22, it is said, 'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich;' that is, the blessing of the Lord upon the use of means. God hath ordered it so in his providence, that diligence should be always fruitful and pro-



fitable, both in a way of nature and grace; that the joy of the harvest should recompense the pains and patience of the diligent husbandman, and that the field of the sluggard should be overgrown with thorns. Iron by handling weareth brighter and brighter, but by standing still, or being let alone, it contracteth rust, by which it is darkened and eaten out. Take away use and exercise, and wisdom turneth into folly, and learning into ignorance, health into sickness, riches into poverty. Strength of body and mind are both gotten by use; he that useth his talent with fidelity and sedulity shall increase in it, but such as are idle and negligent shall grow worse and worse. God doth plentifully recompense the diligence and fidelity of his servants; he that maketh use of any degree of grace and knowledge shall have more given him; by exercising what he hath he doth still increase it. Whereas, on the contrary, remiss acts weaken habits, as well as contrary acts; this is a common truth, evident by daily experience; but then God's blessing must not be excluded. God would have us labour, rather to keep us doing, than that he needeth our help. He that made the world without us can preserve it without us, as he that planted the garden of Eden could have preserved it without man's dressing, yet we read that when he had furnished the garden of Eden with all delights, God took the man and put him into it, 'to dress it and to keep it,' Gen. ii. 15; that is, to use husbandry about it, that by sowing, setting, pruning, and watering, he might preserve those fruits where-with God had furnished that pleasant garden, and to bestow his pains upon that whereof he was to receive the benefit, and that by busying himself about the creatures, he might the better observe God in his various works in and by them. And indeed nothing was such a means to convince him of his dependence upon God as this labour of dressing and keeping the garden which God put him into; for he could produce no new plant, but only manure and cherish those which God had planted there already, and all his keeping and planting was nothing without dews and showers and influence from heaven, and the continual interposing of God's providence. And still in every calling he that is sedulous in it seeth more need of God's concurrence than those that are idle; for those that have done their utmost by experience find that the success of all their endeavours dependeth upon his power and goodness, or the effect followeth not. I am sure it holdeth good in the work of grace: none are so practically convinced of the necessity of divine assistance as they that do their utmost; for they see plainly all will not do if God withhold his blessing; and their often disappointments when they lean upon their own strength teacheth them this lesson, that all is of God.

2. That this increase must be understood of the same talent, not in another kind. It holdeth not, that he that useth the talent in one kind shall thrive in another, for what a man soweth that shall he reap. No; the meaning is, the thing used is still increased. It is not intended that by employing his talent in riches he should increase in learning, that by improving his learning he should grow in strength and beauty of body. No; it holdeth good *in eodem genere*, in the same kind. Use common helps well, and you increase as far as common helps will carry you; use moral virtue well, and you increase in

moral virtue ; use that measure of saving grace you have well, and you shall have a great measure given you by God ; set a-work thy knowledge, faith, zeal, and love, and all these graces will increase in you : ‘ Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart,’ Ps. xlv. 14 ; and Ps. xxxi. 24, and Isa. lviii. 13, 14, ‘ If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable ; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.’ So Ps. xci. 1, ‘ He that dwelleth in the secret places of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.’ God, that punisheth sin with sin, doth reward grace with grace : they that abuse the light of nature are given up to a reprobate sense ; they that improve the grace they have shall have more ; every act maketh an increase of the habit, and whosoever employeth that spiritual wealth that he hath shall have an addition from God, be more strong in faith and love, and more rich in knowledge.

*Object.* But may not we enlarge this a little further ? Arminius gathereth from hence that the works of the unregenerate, done by the mere strength of nature, are so accepted with God that by them he is moved and induced to give them supernatural grace. And many others, that will not speak so grossly, think that if we improve the gifts of nature, we shall have common grace, and if we improve common grace, we shall have special and saving grace. And ought we not, and can we not, use these common gifts and graces to this end and purpose, that we may obtain conversion and faith in Christ ; such as the use of reason, the freeing of the mind from brutish passions and affections, good education, the examples of others, the powerful preaching of the gospel, and common illumination, and the knowledge of the truth gained thereby ?

*Ans.* 1. Those that have common grace ought and are bound to use it for the obtaining of more grace ; there is no doubt of that, for therefore they are accused that ‘ They have ears and hear not, eyes and see not ;’ and God findeth fault with his people that ‘ they will not frame their doings to turn to the Lord,’ Hosea v. 4. So much as put themselves in a posture ; they are threatened that ‘ it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them ;’ and that ‘ the Ninevites shall rise in judgment against them, and condemn them.’ They are reprov’d for being ‘ idle and slothful servants, and hiding their talents in a napkin.’ Certainly they that are lifted up to heaven in ordinances, that receive so much grace from God, and yet turn it into wantonness, and do not know, nor worship, nor seek after God, they aggravate their own condemnation ; their destruction is of themselves ; they shut themselves out of the kingdom of God, reject the counsels of God against themselves. In short, they put away the word of God from them, and judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. The scripture everywhere speaketh at this rate concerning the folly and negligence of men.

*Ans.* 2. But if it be asked, whether they that have received common grace not only ought, but also can, use it for the acquiring and getting the special grace of conversion? this question concerneth the manner how the will of God and the will of man meet together in the work of conversion. And here we must use great care in answering, to avoid inconveniences on all hands. Certainly merit they cannot, neither *de congruo*, nor *de condigno*, nor by any covenant oblige God to give them the grace of regeneration; neither can Christ be said to have acquired and purchased this grace for them to whom he is not given as a Mediator; nor by any promise is God bound to give us grace for the good use of our natural abilities. No; the distribution of converting grace is not promised or bound to any works of righteousness that we have or can do, but is reserved and referred to the free disposition, good-will, and pleasure of God: Rom. ix. 16, 'Not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.' So Titus iii. 5. 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.' The first grace is given by God as a sovereign Lord, according to the counsel of his own will. But since the question is propounded, whether a man can by common grace obtain special? the answer must be prudent and cautelous, that of the one side we may not prejudice the truth, nor of the other side give scandal and offence to the weak. For—

[1.] If you answer that an unregenerate man may by the use of common grace acquire and obtain the special grace of regeneration, and that the whole business lies in the good use of his will, you seem to dash upon the eternal purpose and decrees of God, by which he hath determined not to give all men, but only the elect, this special grace; and upon the intention of Christ's dying, which was not to sanctify himself for all, but for those whom the Father had given to him; and you seem to put the whole business upon man, as if he did make himself to differ, and that the good use of common grace doth all; and then the Pelagian axiom will be true, *facienti quod in se est*—that he that doth what he can, God is bound to give him what he cannot; which will run little lower than the merit of congruity. Then we cannot say, God hath made himself a debtor; some would seem to have given him first. All which are against the scripture; and therefore we are justly afraid to enlarge and extend the liberty and power of man in this business.

[2.] If you answer that a man cannot use that common grace which he hath received so as to obtain the grace of regeneration, and that the thing dependeth no way upon his will and choice, or that there is no hope or possibility of doing otherwise than they do, or that, do their duty or do it not, still condemnation rests upon them, then no less difficulties will offer themselves. Flesh and blood will then complain that God is harsh and austere, 'Reaping where he hath not sowed, and gathering where he hath not strawed;' and that he requireth what we cannot do; and when we do it not, doth severely punish us. What shall we answer to the question, whether it be in the power of the creature to acquire the special grace of regeneration by the good use of common grace? The best answer that we can give is, that the question is curious, and needeth no answer. The business is not



whether God will or not, but what I am bound to do. The great rule in all such cases is, God may do what he pleaseth, but I must do what he commandeth. He that is deadly sick doth not refuse physic till he be made certain that it will recover him; but useth it, and committeth the event to God. He that is to plough, and commit his precious seed to the ground, doth not stand to have assurance that the next year will prove fruitful and the seasons kindly, but ventures, because usually God's blessing concurreth with man's industry. So in the business of salvation, we should not dispute of our power, nor the event of our endeavours: it is enough to acknowledge the debt of obedience, to try our power, to endeavour to do what we ought to do, and then leave the event to God. There is no need to dispute of our power; it is much safer to confess our impotency, to humble ourselves before God, and to seek his blessing and grace in the means he hath instituted to that end; but not at all to doubt the counsel and will of God. And the intention of Christ, whatever it be, will be no impediment to us in doing our duty. And it is as certain that no man doth all that he can, but by divers offences and abuse of the gifts received giveth God just cause to be angry and withdraw his help. And it is also out of doubt that it is not for want of God's help, but for their own folly and negligence that they perish. Therefore let us do what we are commanded to do, and leave the event to God, confessing when we have done all that we can that God is not our debtor, but that we remain debtors to God, guilty of eternal condemnation, as long as we are not partakers of regeneration and justification by Christ. If we could learn to suppress our cavils and curiosity by this humble submission, the business of our salvation would soon come to an issue, and we should find God better to us than we could imagine.

3. The next consideration is, that this increase is given in by degrees: we have not all at first, nor all at once; but as our capacities are enlarged, so is God's hand: Ps. lxxxi. 10, 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.' The more we improve the grace received, the more are we strengthened for God's service, and our desires and expectations, which are as the mouth of the soul, are more raised. It is exercise maketh us see the necessity and worth of grace, and so desire more as necessary to bear our burdens, perform our duties, and resist temptations. And the more grace we have, and the more we are acquainted with God, the more hopes have we towards him. By hope and desire the soul is more widened and fitted to receive: as Moses, 'Tell me thy name;' and then, 'Show me thy glory.' None see the want of learning so much as they that have most of it. So for grace, the desire and sense of want increaseth with enjoyment; so doth God's bounty to us. The desires and endeavours of believers after grace are not easily satisfied.

4. This gradual increase is continued, till at length all be full and perfect. The apostle prayeth for the saints, Eph. iv. 19, that they 'might be filled with all the fulness of God.' God keepeth filling still, till grace, begun here, be fully completed in glory hereafter; and in heaven they are filled up with God, as far as finite creatures are capable of enjoying that which is infinite. The reason is, because the riches of God's goodness are inexhaustible. God is never weary of

well-doing ; where he hath given, he will give ; and delighteth to crown his own gifts. Some gifts of God leave some obligation upon him to give more. *Deus donando debet*. Christ's reasoning implieth so much : Mat. vi. 25, 'Is not life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' That is an argument, as long as God will use us for his glory he will provide for us : Zech. iii. 2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' The argument is from a brand almost consumed. Would God so eminently appear for them, not to destroy them? Certainly he will still take care of them. This holdeth universally true in point of grace ; for it is given as an earnest ; not as *donum*, a gift, as men give a shilling to a beggar ; nor as *pignus*, a pledge, to be taken away ; but as *arraha*, an earnest of a greater sum, of which that is a part. So that he that hath shall have more, and so abundance in all perfection in heaven.

Secondly, Now I must speak to the loss. Talents may be said to be lost, or taken away, two ways—in this world or in the next. These proverbial speeches are made use of by Christ upon a twofold occasion—after the parable of the sower, Mat. xiii. 12, and here after the parable of the talents : the one relateth to losing in this world, and the other in the world to come. They that rejected the gospel, and would not hear, or heard it carelessly, or would not come under the power and obedience of it, all their external privileges, glittering profession, common gifts of illumination, fasts, partial practice, all will be lost. Only the good and honest heart, that receiveth the good seed so as to keep it, so as to be a principle of life to them, to these shall be given. And then here is the other occasion when Christ speaks this. The taking away of the talents is after the lord had been reckoning with his servants, after he had been a long time absent, and in a far country. Therefore this taking away the talent is not meant of the gift itself, as of the comfort, benefit, and reward of it ; for all trading then is at an end ; that is the time of recompense, and the talent is lost. It will do us no good to have had estates, and to have lived in pomp and splendour in the world, if we have not made use of it for God. Our fall will be the greater because of our height. It will do us no good to have borne office in the church if we have not been faithful : Mat. vii. 22, 'Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name.' Such as have taken up office and employment in the church, and made no conscience of doing the duty that belongeth thereto, these will not have, but lose their reward : these are 'idle shepherds,' Zech. xi. 17 ; their unfaithfulness and idleness in their trust will cost them dear. So for the ordinances and means of grace : Luke xiii. 26, 'Then shall they begin to say, We have ate and drank in thy presence.' It will be no plea that you have been at God's board ; nay, you will have the greater judgment : Mat. xi. 23, 'And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be brought down to hell.' A place that enjoyeth the gospel is near heaven, it is the suburbs of heaven ; but where not improved, these privileges plunge a man deeper in the state of condemnation. Sins against the law do not weigh so deep in his balance as slighting and neglecting the gospel ; that brings on heavy wrath. So for common gifts, good affections, partial reformation ; it is all lost, as to any reward, Ezek. xxxiii. 13.

Yea, it is worse: 2 Peter ii. 20, 21, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment.' The wrath against them that return back to their sins is much greater than if they had never been so enlightened and reformed. Those that have had more light, and some taste of the sweetness of heaven's way, if they fall away, it is hard to renew them to repentance. This is the principal sense intended in this place; yet because the words are so contrived that they comprehend also the loss we may sustain in this world while we are trading for God, I shall show you how God punisheth naughty and slothful servants in this world with the loss of their talents.

1. Sometimes God taketh from them opportunities and liberty of doing good. Nothing is so soon lost as this: Gal. vi. 10, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men.' There are some fit opportunities offered us by the providence of God for doing our duty in this kind, as are soon gone; and being past and gone, it is hard to say whether ever we may enjoy the like. As when we are specially fitted, and there is a concurring harmony of all circumstances. Therefore, we should take hold of them without delay or fore-slowing. Opportunities are not always as long as life: Ecces. xi. 1, 2, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and give a portion to seven and to eight; for thou knowest not what evil there may be upon earth.' Embrace the present opportunity; thou canst not foresee how soon thou mayest be deprived of it. Thou mayest die, and leave thy wealth to those that will shut up their bowels. Thou mayest be in want; God may disable thee: therefore, make use of the season for liberality, for doing good, while you have it. So office, authority, respect in the church, is an opportunity. God may cast us out of the vineyard by the malice of men, or as unsavoury salt, Mat. xiii.: Mal. ii. 9, 'Therefore, I have made you contemptible and base before the people;' though all that are cast out are not so. Mat. xxi. 35, the husbandmen took 'his servants, and beat one and killed another.' However, it will be a discomfort if we have been negligent.

2. Ordinances; means of improvement may be lost: Gen. vi. 3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man;' that is, by the ministry of Noah. And God threateneth to take away the hedge of his vineyard when all his cost is lost: Isa. v. 5, 6, 'What could I have done more for my vineyard?' So Luke xiii. 7, 'And he said to the dresser of the vineyard, Lo, these three years came I seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?'

3. Common gifts; God justly taketh them away from those that abuse, or make no good use of them. Many that excelled in gifts, that seemed to have great parts, are pitifully blasted afterwards. It is no hard matter to discern a maim and decay of gifts in them that use them not, as if the Spirit were departed from them: Zech. xi. 17, 'The idol-shepherd's arm shall be dried up, and his eye darkened;'



that is, his gifts shall be taken away, at least, the power and life of them. Many lose the freshness of their gifts of prayer, the liveliness of their knowledge.

4. Initial grace, Heb. vi. Saving gifts and graces are ἀμεταμέλητα, without repentance, Rom. xi. 29. Where there is life begun, it is not quenched; but where there are some hopeful inclinations, they begin to draw off their hearts from the world to God; though they had 'escaped the pollutions of the world, their latter end may be worse than their beginning,' 2 Peter ii. 20.

5. *Dona sanctificantia* ought still to be improved, that the grace of God be not 'received in vain,' 1 Cor. xv. 10. Grace in some measure may suffer loss by our negligence: 1 Thes. v. 19, 'Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesying.' Fire is quenched by pouring on water or withdrawing fuel; so the Spirit is quenched by living in sin, which is like pouring on water; or not improving our gifts and grace, which is like withdrawing the fuel. *Gradus remittitur, actus intermittitur, habitus non amittitur.* Though the habit be secured by God's covenant, yet such portions and degrees of grace may be lost as may not easily be recovered again.

Use is to commend to us diligence and industry, especially in the work of our heavenly calling. A man's life is divided between waking and sleeping, so is his waking time divided between labour and rest; for human nature cannot endure continual exercise without intermission. Therefore a spiritual wise man should so govern his life that his labour may answer his great work and trust, and his rest may not infringe his labour, but help it. Our first care should be of labour; for man in this world is born to labour. Here is not the place of his rest and recompense, but of his exercise and trial. Rest is but for labour; therefore doth he rest that he may be refreshed for his labour. Six days are given in the law to labour, but one to rest; and that rest is not carnal, but holy, and to be improved for our main duties. Adam in innocency was not made for idleness. Moses telleth us that God put him into the garden to dress it. That happiness we partook of then was consistent enough with our work. He that looketh upon the beauty of the sun may easily collect that God lighted not such a bright torch for man to sleep by, or to pass over his days in ease and idleness. The law that was given man to labour remained after sin; yea, sin brought grievousness and burden to it: so what was a law before, is turned into a punishment now; for God told Adam that 'in the sweat of his brow he should eat his bread.' In the whole course of nature nothing is idle; the sun and stars do perpetually move and roll up and down; the earth bringeth forth fruit; the seas have their ebbings and flowings, and the rivers their courses; the angels are described with wings, as ready to fulfil God's commandment, and run to do his pleasure. It were an unworthy thing, among so many examples and patterns of diligence, for man alone to be idle. In the least creatures God hath taught us; as by the ant or pismire: Prov. vi. 6, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard.' Now, as all men must labour, so chiefly a Christian. The scripture compareth our life to a journey, which is a constant motion till it be accomplished; to threshing, which is the painfullest part of husbandry; yea, to a warfare, when the enemy

is at hand ready to fight. We are always to watch and pray. If our enemy did not alarm us, yet our Master will call us to an account for what we have done.

And consider the danger of negligence. It befalleth to the idle and negligent, as those that came after the camp in the wilderness. Amalek smote the weak and the feeble in the rear. Yea, God himself will be angry with us. The idle and slothful servant is cast into utter darkness, the foolish virgins are shut out. If God, by his prophets, curseth them whom he employeth to execute his judgments—‘Cursed is he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently,’—what will become of them that are negligent in working out their own salvation? Horses grow resty if they be not used, and impatient of a burden; so all goes to wreck in the soul if we are idle. We should profit when we look on the field of the sluggard, Prov. xxiii. 30, 31, 34. So will my soul be, if I let it alone. Oh! then, shake off your sloth; be not always resolving, never beginning the heavenly course. Nothing can be gotten, nothing kept, nothing to be enjoyed, without industry. The saints in heaven are not idle; but are always lauding, and praising, and glorifying of God for evermore.

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