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DISCOURSES

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.



IN TWO VOLUMES.

DISCOURSES

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY SAMUEL SEABURY, D. D.

Bishop of Connecticut and Rhode-Island.

VOL. II.

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DISCOURSE I.

PART I.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE FAITH AND CONDUCT OF ABRAHAM.

GAL. iii. 6.

Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

THE high character, which the inspired Servants of God give of Abraham, justly intitles him to our esteem. He is called, the “friend of God,”* “the father of all them that believe;”† his faith and obedience are set as patterns for our imitation; and we are taught to estimate the value of our faith by its conformity to his. Propriety, therefore, as well as duty, require us to examine the nature and effects of that faith and obedience which were so eminent in him, that we may judge whether we are possessed of them. To this inquiry we are led by the text, which presents four things to our consideration.

I. The meaning of the phrase, “Abraham believed God.”

II. What is meant by his belief being “accounted to him for righteousness.”

III. What is meant by the expression, “They which are of faith.”

IV. What we are to understand by “the children of Abraham.”

* Jam, ii. 23.

† Rom. iv. 11.

I. The first thing into which we are to inquire, is the meaning of the phrase, "Abraham believed God." To ascertain this, I know no better way than to apply to the history of the faith of Abraham, as it is recorded in the Bible; for to that history the subsequent writers refer, in their commendations of him.

The first instance we have of Abraham's faith, is his leaving his father's house and his country, at the command of God, and going into a strange land to sojourn, "not knowing whither he went,"* nor what was to be his portion in the world. When we reflect, that by the command of God Abraham was obliged to leave his country, family, friends, connections, and all the interest and advantages which could arise from them; and to throw himself, unconnected, unsupported, friendless, and a stranger on the wide world, trusting merely and solely to the promise which God had made, that he would be with him, and protect, and support him; it must appear, that his faith in the divine promise was exceedingly strong.

Should a reason be asked, why God commanded Abraham to leave his country; the common opinion is highly probable, that his countrymen were degenerating fast into idolatry; and that it was to preserve him, and, through him, the line from which the great Mediator was to spring, in the pure worship of the true God. For this promise was made to him at this time, "Thou shalt be a blessing—and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."† This promise evidently relates to Messiah, the Mediator whom God had promised to Adam. It was, therefore, his faith in the promise of a Mediator to spring from him, that induced Abraham to leave his country and religion, and to become a stranger and sojourner in the world. It could not be the promise of the land of Canaan—That was rather made to his descendants than to him; nor were *they* to enjoy it, till four hundred and thirty years after. Nor could it be the promise of worldly prosperity; of being made a great nation, and living under the blessing and protection of God. Worldly prosperity seems to have

* Heb. xi. 8.

† Gen. xii. 2, 3.

been more in his power, in his own country, than when he was a stranger and wanderer in the world. His father's family were probably of considerable note, if not among the first in Chaldea; and consequently his chance of worldly advantages was greater by staying at home, than by wandering abroad. But he sought "a better country, that is, an heavenly"—"a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* He, therefore, resigned himself up into the hands of God, to be directed by him in all things; knowing, that the promise he had received was merely of grace and favour, and only to be obtained in the precise way God should direct. Accordingly, at the next interview which God afforded him, he graciously promised him a son, whereby the promise that all nations should be blessed in his seed became possible to him. Great must have been the support of this promise to his faith and hope; for it is with regard to this very promise, that Abraham is said to have "believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."†

Another instance of the faith of Abraham, was his confident assurance, that he should have a son by Sarah his wife, who had ever been childless, and was then arrived at the age, when the bearing of a child was beyond the power of nature. At the time this promise was made, the rite of circumcision was enjoined him. The great age of Sarah staggered not his faith in the promise; nor did the pain and inconvenience of circumcision make him hesitate in his obedience. He knew in whom he believed, and whom he obeyed; even the "Almighty God," before whom he was directed to "walk, and be perfect;"‡ that is, with a sincere and upright heart, to believe all his declarations, and obey all his commands. This God, he knew, was able to fulfil the promise, and had a right to impose the command. He believed the promise, that he should have a son by Sarah, even against the course of nature, through whom the blessing of all nations should come: and he submitted to circumcision as the means of entering into that covenant which was to be established

* Heb. xi. 10, 16.

† Gen. xv. 6.

‡ Gen. xviii. 1.

through the promised seed—a mark or seal on the part of God, that he would make good that promise; and a testimony to him, that he and his seed were heirs through hope of the promise, partakers in the covenant of mediation, and entitled to all the rights and privileges of it.

I shall mention but one instance more of the faith of Abraham, and that is his offering up his son Isaac in sacrifice, at the command of God. This, probably, was the greatest trial that ever happened to mere man. He had received Isaac as the child of the promise, being assured, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and just as he was come to the years of manhood,* he had a positive and peremptory command to offer him up a burnt-offering to God. Who could bear this? An unheard of thing! A human sacrifice! An obedient and beloved son to be slain and offered in sacrifice by a tender father! The child of promise to be put to death by him to whom the promise had been made! Where now is the mercy, and truth, and loving-kindness of God? “His truth endureth to all generations,”†—his “mercy is great above the heavens,”‡ and his “faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.”§ This Abraham knew, and that no word of his would fall to the ground. God had promised, and he would perform—God had commanded, and he would justify the deed. He knew that he had received Isaac by the power of God, and not according to the course of nature; that HE who gave him a son, was able to raise him from the dead ||, and to fulfil all his promises in him; and he humbly trusted he would do so. Therefore he stumbled not at the command, but was confident God would fulfil the word which had gone out of his mouth. Graciously did God accept his faith and submission, and graciously did he reward them, by sending his angel to prevent the death of his son; by blessing him with temporal promises; and by renewing to him the assurance, that the blessing of all nations should come through him.

This instance of Abraham’s faith affords the most live-

* According to the chronology of the Bible, Isaac was, at this time, twenty five years old.

† Psa. c. 5.

‡ cviii. 4.

§ xxxvi. 5.

¶ Heb. xi. 19.

ly representation of the love of God, in the redemption of the world, that was ever exhibited. Through faith and love of God, Abraham gave up his only, his beloved son, in sacrifice to him; and consented to take away his life and reduce his body to ashes, because he commanded. The meek and humble submission of Isaac demands also our attention. Though able, he made no resistance; nor did opposition proceed from his mouth. Abraham, through faith, submitted to make the required offering; and Isaac, through faith, submitted to become the offering which God demanded, and thereby shewed himself an eminent type of the Saviour of the world. And behold the reward from the goodness of God! Abraham withheld not his son from God; and God gave up his Son for Abraham, and all the families of the earth. Isaac refused not to become a sacrifice when God required; and the Son of God refused not to be made a sacrifice for Isaac, and for all who were to be blessed through the promised seed.

But to form a true estimate of Abraham's faith and submission, it is necessary to take one circumstance more into the account—the tender scene which passed between the father and son, as they walked together to the place of sacrifice. Isaac, loaded with the wood, seeing the knife and fire in his father's hands, said, "Behold, my father, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," replied the heart-rent father. So much has Moses recorded—The scene he has not described. Feel it every parent must; but what imagination can do justice to the emotions of nature, the agonies of piety, the rendings of affection, which tore the heart of Abraham while he informed his son, that *he himself* was the lamb which God had provided for a burnt-offering? We may figure the scene to ourselves, but it cannot be described.

Equally beyond the power of description must have been the feelings of Isaac's heart, on that occasion. He knew himself to be the heir of the promise made to his father. Yet, just when he was come to man's estate, he

consented to be cut off by a violent death—a death, too, inflicted by a tender parent—and in obedience to the command of God who had made the promise. Nothing but a firm belief in the power, and truth, and goodness of God, that he would raise Isaac to life, and in him fulfil his promises, though his blood should be poured out and his body reduced to ashes, could have supported either father or son, in so great a conflict between faith and sense, grace and nature. They both knew, that through Isaac, the promised seed, the blessing of all nations, was to come: And they firmly believed, that under the direction of God, by ways and means they could not account for, and which to human reason appeared dark and intricate, they were contributing to the grand event.

Let any one now draw the conclusion, and I trust he will determine with me, that the meaning of the phrase, “Abraham believed God,” is, that he had so firm and undoubting a belief of the promises of God, as produced the most willing and absolute obedience to every thing he commanded, even against the workings of nature, the dictates of reason, and the suggestions of sense.

II. The second thing promised from the text was, to inquire into the meaning of the declaration, that Abraham’s faith was “accounted to him for righteousness.”

The works of every man proceed from his faith; and such as his faith is, such will his life be. If he believe that his happiness is to proceed from the riches, honours, or pleasures of the world, it will be the endeavour of his life to obtain them. If his faith be in the world to come, and he should believe that the favour of God is that alone which can give him peace of conscience in this world, and happiness in the next, his life will be according to his faith; it will be passed in obedience to God, that he may obtain his favour. Works, then, are the fruit of faith, the effects which it produceth, and cannot be necessary for the information of God, who knoweth the state of our hearts without them, and will accept us as our heart is towards him. But they are necessary for us and for the world. They increase and strengthen our faith and patience by

exercise; they give us comfort in ourselves, and confidence in the grace and protection of our heavenly Father; and they are examples of faith and holy living to the world, as well as evidences of the truth and reality of the divine power and goodness.

There is, therefore, no absurdity in supposing, that it is the state of the heart which God principally regards; and that where he sees that to be stedfastly fixed in firm faith and trust in him, he accepts the person as righteous and upright before him, without waiting for those works of holiness which are necessary evidences to the world; because he knows his faith, when tried, will produce them.

God promised Abraham a son in his old age, and that his seed should be innumerable like the stars of heaven:* Abraham believed God without hesitation or doubt, and God esteemed it a righteous act, and him a righteous man on account of it. But it will not follow from hence, that no works were after this expected of Abraham; no acts of obedience, and patience, and self-denial. His history shews that they were required, and that God commanded particular instances of them. Nor will it follow, that they had no effect in his justification, that is, in procuring remission of his sins. St. James affirms expressly, that "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone;" and saith, that "Abraham our father was justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar;" that his "faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect;" and that thereby "the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness." He then draweth this general conclusion, "that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only;" and that, "as the body without the soul is dead, so faith without works is dead also."† Abraham's faith was, therefore, accounted to him for righteousness, because he implicitly believed every promise which God made, humbly obeyed every command he gave, and patiently endured every trial he laid on him. Now, this is

* Gen. xv. 5, 6.

† Jam. ii. 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26.

righteousness itself—the very state in which all created beings ought to live.

I have hitherto considered this matter on general principles ; but there is another sense in which the text ought to be regarded, and which, I suppose, St. Paul principally intended, when he wrote it.

From his Epistle to the Galatians it appears, that at least some of those who had been converted from Gentilism, had been beguiled by judaising teachers, to submit to the law of Moses; esteeming circumcision and the observance of the law of the Jews necessary to obtain justification, or remission of sins, under the Gospel. Against this error St. Paul contended; and, from it endeavoured to rescue the Galatians, by his Epistle. Among other arguments, he reasons from the instance of Abraham, who was not justified either by circumcision, or the law of Moses; neither of which were instituted, when his faith was accounted to him for righteousness; but on account of his faith in the promises of God, among which, that of the Mediator, or *seed* in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed, was a principal one. The consequence is evident, that as Abraham was justified, without circumcision or the law of Moses, by his faith looking forward to the fulfilling of the promises of God; so Christians were to expect justification, not by submitting to circumcision and the Mosaic law; but by faith in the promises of God, particularly the great promise of a Mediator, which God had fulfilled to them in the person of Jesus.

St. Paul, therefore, hath said nothing against the good works of Christians, which spring from faith in Christ, that is, a firm belief of the Gospel. He argues merely from the inefficacy of the law of Moses, called the law of works, to obtain justification with God; shews that Abraham was not justified by it; and that, therefore, it would be idle and wicked in the Galatians to renounce their dependence on the Gospel of Christ, and seek for justification by circumcision and the law of Moses, by which even Abraham himself did not obtain his justification, or the honourable titles of the *Friend* of God, and,

the *Father* of those who believe. To this let it be added, that St. Paul as strongly recommends Christian works, as he discountenances those of Judaism; and as forcibly insists on the necessity of obedience to the Gospel, as he rejects the necessity of obedience to the law of Moses.

III. Let us now attend to the third particular, the meaning of the expression, “they which are of faith.”

To be of faith, as Abraham was of faith, means, undoubtedly, to believe God as Abraham believed him. He believed God to be true and faithful, and that his promises were sure and certain—that he was infinite in power, and therefore able to fulfil all that he engaged, even when it appeared incongruous to reason, and against the course of natural events—that he was the Creator, and consequently the Proprietor of all things; and therefore had a right to dispose of them, and order them all as he saw best—that every creature was bound to obey him, who, as he was just and holy, would command nothing evil; as he was good and gracious, nothing cruel or unnecessary—that the obedience of his creatures ought, therefore, to be unreserved and unlimited, extending to all circumstances and degrees.

He believed moreover, for he found himself to be a weak, helpless creature, who wanted the favour and direction of his Almighty Creator; a sinful, erring creature, who needed his mercy and forgiveness. He therefore willingly obeyed what God commanded, that he might enjoy his favour and protection. He embraced thankfully and eagerly that mediation and atonement which God pointed out to him; and cheerfully submitted to all the institutions of that religion which God thought best for him, that he might, by the mercy of God, obtain, in the use of them, that remission of sins which he so much needed.

This appears to me to be a summary of the properties of Abraham’s faith: and to be “of faith” as Abraham was, we must have the same faith which he had—Believe, that as God is the Creator, so he is the supreme Governor of all things; that therefore it is the duty of man to obey

what he commands; to give up his own partial, dark, blind understanding, to his direction—that he is True, and Almighty, and therefore will perform his promises—however difficult and improbable they may appear to our limited capacities—that he is Holy and Just—and will finally recompense every one according to his deeds—that he is the Lord of life—that, therefore, life is his property, and to be given on what terms he pleases—that as all men are sinners against him—it belongs to him to appoint the mode of reconciliation and remission of sins; and that we have no other part to act, than to submit to what he shall direct—that whatever atonement he hath appointed for sin, or whatever institutions he hath commanded in order to make us partakers of the atonement, our duty is to obey absolutely and implicitly—that whatever mode of conduct he shall prescribe, we ought cheerfully to conform to it—that, therefore, we must do all those things which he commandeth, and refrain from every thing which he forbid- deth. Then shall we be “of faith, and,” consequently, “the children of Abraham;” for so it is asserted in the text, “They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” This was the last thing into which I proposed to inquire, namely,

IV. The meaning of the expression, “the children of Abraham.”

The relative state of father and child is used in a variety of senses in the Bible, but they are not necessary to be here considered.

The Jews called themselves “the children of Abraham,” not only on account of their natural descent from him; but also because they were heirs of the covenant of circumcision, and of all the promises made to him. In this sense, they who were proselyted to their religion, and admitted into the covenant made with Abraham, were his children equally with those who were born Jews. In conformity to this Hebrew expression, St. Paul uses the phrase, “children of Abraham” in the text, to mean those who imitated Abraham’s faith, by believing God as he did. And as children are entitled to their father’s inheritance,

it will follow, that they who are of faith, and thereby the children of Abraham, shall possess the blessings promised to him, and conferred on him by God, in whom he believed. Accordingly the Apostle saith, "They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham;"* that is, they who believe God, as Abraham believed him, shall have their faith accounted to them for righteousness, even as their father Abraham had his faith accounted to him.

Upon the whole, the meaning of the text appears to be this—That Abraham believed God to be the Creator and Disposer of all things; the supreme Lord of all nature; that he was worthy to be relied on in all he said, and able to perform all he promised; that he was good, and would not fail to give him all good things necessary for him; that he was his Creator, and had a right to command his obedience; his Sovereign whom he had offended, and therefore, it was his duty to submit to the terms of reconciliation which he should appoint, and faithfully perform them: That accordingly he did do all these things with a sincere heart; believed what God said; embraced what he promised; obeyed what he commanded: Particularly with regard to the great Mediator whom God gave him a right to expect, that, by faith, he embraced him, and entered into covenant with God, that he might receive the blessings of his mediation: That God accepted his faith and piety, and accounted him righteous, forgiving his sins on account of it: That all they, of whatever age or nation, who do imitate this faith of Abraham, shall be esteemed by God as his children, and heirs of the spiritual promises made to him; particularly of that forgiveness of sins, through the Mediator, which he obtained.

The way, then, is plain and open before us. God is the same now, as he was in the days of Abraham; merciful, and gracious, and just, and powerful; as ready to help, and protect, and bless us, as him. With us, then, it remains to imitate Abraham's faithful and obedient disposition; and God will give us the blessing of Abraham, the holy protection of his good providence, the powerful

* Gal. iii. 9.

assistance of his divine grace, the remission of our sins through the atonement of the Mediator, and eternal life in the heavenly Canaan.

DISCOURSE I.

PART II.

THE faith and piety towards God, for which Abraham hath always been justly celebrated, have been already noticed, in the more remarkable circumstances of his life. But as some of them were but slightly considered, I shall bring them again under consideration, with a view of drawing from them some lessons of use to us, in our Christian conduct. And,

I. When Abraham, at the command of God, quitted his native country, it seems to have been sinking fast into idolatry and wickedness. To preserve him pure in religion and virtue, God probably took him out of it. He readily obeyed the command of God to leave it, renouncing at once all the advantages of family, friends, and connections, when they came in competition with his duty. In this let Abraham be our example.

God does not command us to leave our country, and the advantages of family connections, and to sojourn in a strange land; but he does command us to renounce the world, and not to live by its temper and spirit, because “the friendship of the world is enmity with” him*—He does require us to forego all advantages of every kind, and all gratifications of body or mind, which are inconsistent with our duty to him; all extravagant appetites of nature, the lust of covetousness, the pride of life, he does command us to mortify and keep under. And if we would be “the children of Abraham,” and heirs of the promises God made and fulfilled to him, we must imitate his faith and obedience—believe stedfastly what God hath said, and obey exactly what he hath commanded. Then shall the blessings of Abraham descend on us—the protection and grace of God, the remission of sins, and everlast-

* Jam. iv. 4.

ing life through the Redeemer: For “they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham.”

2. When Abraham sojourned in Canaan, the inhabitants, though their iniquity was not full, were irreligious and wicked; yet Abraham lived among them, without having his religion or morals corrupted by their evil example. God promised, if he would obey him with an honest and upright heart, to protect and bless him, and to give that country to him and his descendants: He also promised, that the Mediator, who should be a blessing to him and to all the families of the earth, should be born of his posterity. That our state does, in many respects, resemble that of Abraham, a little reflection will convince us.

By God’s providence we are to sojourn in Christ’s Church or Kingdom in this world, which is infested with idolatry, heresy, schism, false doctrines, and wicked members. He hath commanded us to govern ourselves by his laws, that our faith be not corrupted, nor our unity with his Church destroyed, nor our Christian practice depraved, by their errors and evil example; and hath promised, that if we do walk before him in faith and uprightness of heart, in union with his Church, and in holiness of life, according to the gospel, he will protect and bless us, and, through the mediation of Christ, make us partakers of eternal life in his heavenly kingdom.

This is a short account of our true and real state; what then ought to be our conduct in it? We call ourselves reasonable creatures, and, I hope, endeavour to believe as such: How then will reason direct us to act under such circumstances? to pay no regard to the commands, and promises, and threats of Almighty God? to be unconcerned about our religious principles? and fondly imagine, that if we choose error, our choice will have an influence on him, and reconcile him to it? that if we indulge the vicious appetites of the body, and the malignant passions of the mind, they must of course appear as harmless to him, as they do to us? that if we perversely confound good and evil, virtue and vice, sin and holiness, truth and falsehood; and, regardless of the distinction

God hath made between them, rush as it were headlong into eternity, we shall be as acceptable to him, as the humble, penitent, and holy Christian? If this be not reasonable, “consider your ways,” and amend your lives.

We are apt to imagine, that if we had the same sensible appearances of God which Abraham and the Patriarchs had; the same demonstrative presence of the Holy Ghost which the Apostles enjoyed, we should be convinced and governed by them, in all the ways of holiness, as they were. That there is a delusion in this supposition, we have reason to conclude from what our Saviour hath said concerning Moses and the Prophets, to whom we may add Christ and his Apostles—That he who is not persuaded by them, would be persuaded by no evidence, not even by one rising from the dead.* We have the evidences of those appearances, the revelations God made, and the commands he gave, transmitted to us. If we believe them, they ought to have the same effect on us, as if they had been made to us personally. If we do not believe them, the matter must rest on the authenticity of the history of the Bible. This history Christians are supposed to believe: Their name implies this faith; and if they do not live according to it, they are condemned by their own principles and profession, and no excuse can be made for them.

Among other things, they believe that HE who made atonement for their sins by his death, and who now makes intercession for them, as their great High Priest in heaven, will, at the end of the world, lay aside his priestly office, and come as King and Head of his Church, and Governor of the world, to judge the quick and the dead—all who have ever lived—those who shall be alive, and those who have died: That all nations of the earth shall then be gathered before him, and “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”† Common sense, it is presumed, ought to induce Christians to

* Luke xvi. 31.

† John v. 28, 29.

live as persons under the influence of this faith, that they may be found of their Judge in peace. If they wish, in that awful hour, to be among the children of Abraham, that they may be blessed with him they must do as he did; live by the same spirit, and in the same faith and obedience towards God, which so eminently shone in his venerable character. They must, therefore, remember, that,

3. While Abraham sojourned in Canaan, he not only kept himself undefiled by the idolatry and immorality of the country, but he served God faithfully in his religion, and uprightly in his life, according to those revelations and directions which God was pleased to give him. God, too, hath given a revelation to us, respecting our religious services towards him, and directions concerning our conduct while we sojourn in Christ's Church militant here on earth. Our duty, therefore, requires that we serve him faithfully according to that revelation which he hath made to us. This revelation is contained in the Bible, and more especially in the New Testament, which gives directions for the conduct of Christians as they are members of Christ's Church, regulating both their faith and practice. As far as the latter is concerned, these directions are plain, and level to common capacities. And that we might not err in matters of faith, the Church hath comprised the essential articles of our religion in her Creeds, which are recited in her public Service, and taught to her young members in her Catechism. Ignorance, therefore, of the doctrines or precepts of our holy religion must be our own fault, proceeding either from our carelessness in not attending to them, or from our perverseness in corrupting them. Reason and duty both require that we take pains in a matter of so much importance, and study our religion with attention; that we use all proper helps to gain information and knowledge, both of its doctrines and practical precepts; and then, that we conform ourselves exactly to it in faith and practice.

4. God entered into covenant with Abraham, and for his comfort and security in it, he gave him the rite of cir-

cumcision, by which he was to know himself to be in covenant with God, entitled to all the blessings, and subject to all the obligations of it. And the instituted means of keeping up fellowship with God in this covenant, were sacrifices and public worship. By the sacrifices, the future atonement of the Mediator was represented, and applied to the soul of the faithful for the remission of sin: And by the public worship with which the sacrifices were attended, God was recognized as the Creator, and Lord, and supreme Governor of all things. Hereby his moral government was acknowledged, and submission to it enforced.

With us also God hath entered into covenant, not by the bloody rite of circumcision, but by the blood of Christ; and hath appointed the sacrament of Baptism by which to admit us into his covenant, making us members of Christ by making us members of his Church, which is his body;* and also to be a sign and token to us of our right to all the promises and blessings of the covenant, and a remembrancer to put us in mind of the obligation of our Christian profession, 'which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptised, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living.†'

The benefits of this sacrament are, Regeneration or New-birth, by which we are, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, born into, that is, made members of the Church or Kingdom of Christ, and, being washed from the defilements of sin, are made the children of God by the grace of adoption. In this blessing our bodies partake equally with our souls. Being sanctified and dedicated to God, they become fit habitations for the Holy Spirit to reside in: And in Confirmation, which is the completion and final ratification of Baptism by Christ's chief Minister, we humbly presume he does condescend

* Coloss. i. 18.

† Public Office of Baptism.

to take possession of his temples ;* to preserve them pure and undefiled from sin ; to guard them from the assaults of their spiritual enemies ; and to build them up and adorn them with all the tempers and habits of holiness and virtue, that they may be presented without spot to their heavenly Father and merciful Redeemer.

To keep up this fellowship and union with Christ, which through the Holy Ghost we obtain by being made members of his Church, he hath instituted the other sacrament of his Church, the Holy Eucharist, or Communion of his own most precious body and blood. This is, in truth, the Christian Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God for the atonement and expiation of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world ; the representation and memorial of his sufferings and death, by which we obtain remission of sins, and everlasting life. The bread and the cup, being the representatives of the body and blood of Christ, are offered to God by his authorised Priest, sanctified by prayer, thanksgiving, and the words of Christ's holy institution ; and, we humbly trust, by the powerful operation of the Holy Ghost. The merit of Christ's death is, by these consecrated memorials, pleaded before the Almighty Father, by his appointed Priest ; and, we assure ourselves, by our Great High Priest himself in heaven, for the remission of our sins ; for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls in all heavenly virtues and graces ; for the assurance of a happy resurrection, and eternal life in the kingdom of God, through the body and blood of Christ, " which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper"—Christ himself having said, " Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."†

How will reason and common sense direct people to act, who believe these things ? Most certainly to comply with them with an upright and sincere heart ; remembering, that God's grace and Holy Spirit do ever accompany his ordinances, when they are administered and received

* 1 Cor. vi. 19

† John vi. 51

according to his appointment. And the death of Christ for all men lays all men under obligation, when they have opportunity, to enter into this Covenant by holy Baptism, with that penitence for their sins past, and faith in the merit and mediation of Christ, which the reason and nature of that holy sacrament demand. That they seriously consider the obligations it lays them under, and faithfully endeavour by God's grace to fulfil them. That they assemble themselves together on all proper occasions for the joint and public worship of his Church, to recognize the Creator, as maker and governor of the world: That they do, as they have opportunity, keep up their union with Christ their head, and with his body the Church, by frequenting the holy Communion, joining with their brethren and Christ's minister in offering the Eucharistic sacrifice in commemoration of the passion and death of their Redeemer, receiving the pledges of his love and heavenly benediction, and in giving praise and adoration to the Almighty Father for the innumerable benefits obtained for us by him. We do not, otherwise, do justice to ourselves, nor to the Saviour who died for us, nor to God our heavenly Father who gave his Son for our redemption; who hath ordained his Church as the ark of our salvation, and his sacraments as the means of our growth in grace and all holy dispositions.

5. The sentiments of St. Paul and St. James, upon this subject, having been both mentioned, it may be worth while, though the present subject may not strictly require it, to mention the different objects those two Apostles had in view, in their arguments. By this means, their different expressions will be fairly understood, and every appearance of inconsistency between them will vanish. St. Paul saith, that Abraham was not justified by works,* and that he offered up Isaac by faith.† St. James asks the question "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"‡

In this argument, both these Apostles were treating with the Jewish converts to Christianity. St. Paul's view

* Rom. iv. 2, &c.

† Heb. xi. 17.

‡ James ii. 21.

was to bring them off from the law of Moses, by convincing them, that justification with God was not to be obtained by it, but by the Gospel of Christ. He calls the Gospel *Faith*, and the law of Moses *Works*; because faith and works were the two great leading points of those dispensations, and on which justification by them depended. The voice of the *Gospel* is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:"* But the *Law* saith, "The man which doeth those things shall live by them."† He proves, that justification could not be had by the law, because no man could perfectly obey it, and it condemned every transgression. He proves also the possibility of obtaining justification without the law, by the instance of Abraham, who had his faith accounted to him for righteousness before the law was given, and therefore he was not justified by it. Consequently, as Abraham was justified by his faith in the promises of God, pointing out to him the atonement of a Mediator to come, before the law was given; so Christians might be justified by their faith in the promises of God, and in the atonement of a Mediator already come, after the law was abrogated and done away.

The reasoning is just, and the conclusions he draws from it are warranted.—That the law had nothing to do with justification with God, but was a temporary institution, intended to keep the Jewish nation, from whom the promised seed was to come, in the true worship of the true God, till he should appear on earth, and then to point him out, and ascertain him to the world. "It was added," that is, instituted by God, "because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made"‡—by pointing out the guilt of sin to restrain men from committing it, and to excite them to seek deliverance from it. It was a school-master to bring the Jews, and by their means, the rest of the world, to Christ, that they might believe on him. The law having answered this end, became useless, and was taken away; and the terms of justification remained the same they ever had

* Acts xvi. 31.

† Rom. x. 5.

‡ Gal. iii. 19.

been, faith in the merit and atonement of the great Mediator; but yet, such a faith as Abraham's was, producing obedience to the commands of God.

The design of St. James was to convince the Jewish Christians, that an inactive, dead faith was not that belief of the Gospel which would obtain justification with God—that true Gospel faith always produced love and obedience toward God, charity and mercy towards men—that it was to be known and judged of by its fruits. He affirms positively, that faith without works can no more save us, or obtain justification with God, than good wishes without good deeds can relieve the necessities of our poor brethren. To say to the hungry, Be fed; or to the naked, Be clothed; while we give them neither food nor raiment, will neither feed nor clothe them. Actual deeds must be added to our kind words. Food and raiment must be conferred, or our charity is nothing worth. So, he saith, is that faith to which Christians must look for justification with God. It must produce obedience to God, and love to man. The instance of Abraham is brought as an example to explain his meaning—His “faith,” when he offered Isaac his son, “wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.”* His faith, therefore, was not a dead, but an active faith. He believed God in his heart, and he obeyed him in his life, and therefore was he justified—“His faith was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.”

6. Should it be thought, that the foregoing account of Abraham's faith ascribes more efficacy to the works of obedience in obtaining justification for him, than ought to be attributed to them; let it be considered, that it ascribes no more to them, than the Holy Scriptures do. Both St. Paul and St. James include obedience in their notion of faith. Of the sentiments of the latter, there can be no doubt. He says expressly, that *Abraham was justified by works*; and that *by works his faith was made perfect*, which would have been imperfect and dead, *being alone*.

That St. Paul teacheth the same doctrine, will appear

* Jam. ii. 22, &c.

to every candid reader of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The instances of faith there mentioned, either directly include works of obedience, or fairly imply them. For example, "By faith Abel *offered* unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain"—"By faith Noah *prepared* an ark to the saving of his household, by the which he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith"—"By faith Abraham" *left his own country* and "*went out*, not knowing whither he went;" and "by faith" he *offered* up Isaac. In these instances it must be evident, that Abel's *offering* his sacrifice, Noah's *preparing* the ark, Abraham's *leaving* his country and *offering* his son Isaac upon the altar at the command of God, were works of obedience which perfected their faith, and made it effectual to their justification; and that without these works, their faith would have been "dead being alone."

Should this be supposed to attribute a degree of merit to works which do not belong to them. I apprehend it to be without reason. That the faith and good works of Christians proceed from the operation of the Holy Spirit of God in them, the Scriptures give us sufficient reason to believe. Considered as the fruits of this Spirit, I know not why we should hesitate in ascribing merit to them. At the same time, when we take into the account our own perverseness in resisting and grieving the Holy Spirit, and quenching his heavenly motions, we can take no merit to ourselves, nor have "whereof to glory before God,"* either on account of our faith or works. Not on account of our faith, for it is weak; and we have constant need to beg with the Apostles, that the Lord would "increase" it; and with the distressed father in the gospel, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."† Nor, on account of our works, for they are imperfect; and should we even do all that is commanded us, still we should be "unprofitable servants," and have done no more than "was our duty to do."‡ We must not, therefore, look to the merit of our faith or works for our justification, but to the mercy of God through the merit of Christ. His mercy gave

* Rom. iv. 2. † Luke xvii. 5. Mark ix. 24. ‡ Luke xvii. 10.

Christ to be the propitiation for sin ; the Mediator between fallen man, and the divine Majesty. Through love, Christ became this Mediator, and made atonement for our sins. By his resurrection and ascension into heaven, God hath declared his acceptance of the atonement which he made ; and hath promised remission of sins to all those who trust in it. Through this Mediator, God hath condescended to enter into covenant with us, and is graciously pleased to accept of our sincere obedience instead of that which is perfect ; of our penitence instead of innocence. He requires us to believe on this Mediator, and to enter into this covenant, that our reliance on him and his atonement may be open and public. All who do enter into it he calls his Church ; the Body of Christ ; the Family of the Mediator ; and hath given them his Spirit, to be in them the principle of a new, holy, and heavenly life ; that under his inspirations they may become fit inhabitants of his kingdom in heaven, and may live with him in happiness forever.

DISCOURSE II.

THE STEADFASTNESS OF JOB.

JOB xiii. 15.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

THERE is nothing that affords so strong an argument against the particular providence of God, or that raises so many doubts and misgivings in the minds of men respecting the moral government of God, as those apparently unmerited disasters and calamities which frequently happen to good and virtuous people. Both reason and revelation teach us, that vice and wickedness are displeasing to God, and the objects of his aversion; and that virtue and goodness are agreeable to him, and beloved by him. Must we not, then, suppose that vice will be invariably punished, and virtue invariably rewarded by him, the moral and righteous Governor of the world; the one being opposite to his nature and will, the other agreeable to both? and yet do we not often see the virtuous man miserable, and the vicious man, in all appearance, happy?—nay, the righteous man involved in the most distressing circumstances, in consequence of that very virtue which, we are taught, is so agreeable to the nature of God? and the vicious man flourishing in prosperity, even in consequence of that vice and villany which God hates and abhors? How is this to be reconciled with the providence of God, the moral Governor of the world? In no other way than by admitting that future state of rewards and punishments, of which revelation informs us, and which reason had long hinted to the more candid and thinking part of mankind.

If this life be only our time of trial, and the next life the season of retribution, we are wrong in expecting an

exact distribution of rewards and punishments in this life ; and the vicious man may here be happy, and the virtuous man miserable, without any impeachment of the moral government of God, the justice of which is only to be fully displayed in the next world.

This answer seems perfectly satisfactory, as far as it goes ; but, I fear, it goes not to the bottom of the matter. If vice and villany be more or oftener successful in procuring the happiness of the world, than virtue and goodness, then the advantage in this world is on the side of vice ; because more men will be influenced by present happiness, than by the distant prospect of that which is future. We must therefore look for some further solution of the difficulty before us ; and if we take the nature of God and of man both into the account, it will not, I trust, be hard to obtain it.

That God is a God of truth, and justice, and goodness, cannot be doubted. He will, therefore, conduct his government so as upon the whole to produce the greatest possible happiness, not only to the universe in general, but to every creature in particular.

That the being of man is not confined to this world, but will extend into futurity, is a belief supported both by reason and revelation : That this world exhibits a scene made up of a mixture of good and evil, our own experience evinces : That the state of man in another world will be either in happiness or misery unmixed, we have all the reason in the world to believe : We have equal reason to suppose that our particular state will be happy or miserable, according as we conduct ourselves in this life. Let it be also considered, that our state in this world is short and uncertain ; but in the next, will be fixed and eternal. The happiness of the next life is therefore of much more consequence to us, than the happiness of this ; because it will be perfect in degree, and infinite in duration.

Must we not, then, in reason conclude, that God is principally concerned to secure the future, the eternal happiness of his creatures ? That, considering this world as only preparatory to the next, he will conduct the af-

fairs of it, so as to give men the greatest possible chance for a blessed immortality? If he sees, that an uninterrupted course of worldly prosperity would bind our affections wholly to this world, and entirely take off our attention from the next, leaving us neither leisure nor inclination to provide for our eternal state; would it not be mercy in God to interrupt our temporal felicity—to send calamities to our aid, and make them the means of weaning our affections from the world, and of turning our thoughts to him, and fixing our confidence in him? Should any vice have acquired a particular ascendancy over us; any evil tempers have taken deep root in our hearts, so as to endanger our future welfare; would it not be an instance of God's goodness, should he send afflictions and distresses upon us, if these only could be the means of bringing us to repentance and amendment of life? Or,

Supposing there was nothing amiss in us (an opinion which I hope no one will be forward to entertain of himself) but that God saw afflictions and calamities would increase or confirm our good tempers and dispositions, and thereby increase our capacity of happiness with him: Would there be any injustice; would there not be mercy and goodness in visiting us with afflictions, under such circumstances? Would any one attribute it to the want of tenderness in a parent, that he gave his child an education rather more rough than the common mode, that he might qualify him to enjoy an estate which he was to inherit, with more dignity and satisfaction; or to discharge an employment that belonged to his family, with greater honor to himself, and advantage to the public?

There are two errors which men are apt to run into, in this matter. The one is the supposition, that God takes little or no notice of our conduct in this world; that he sits rather an unconcerned spectator, and permits virtue and vice, honesty and villany, to contest the matter between themselves; and that, therefore, there is in reality no great difference between them; but either of them is best, as it happens to succeed best, in promoting our interest. The other is the supposition, that worldly pros-

perity and adversity are to be considered as instances of the favour or displeasure of God; and that a man is just so much the favourite of heaven, as he is blessed with worldly prosperity.

That God never interposes, for the reward of virtue or the punishment of vice, in this world, we do not pretend; but we do say, that we are not to expect an exact display of the justice of God in this world, but must wait for that future state, when his ways shall be vindicated to man, and every one shall receive the just recompense of his deeds: And this belief, we affirm, is supported both by reason and revelation.

The dispensations of God's providence are, therefore, to be regarded as the means which infinite wisdom and infinite goodness make use of, to correct the evil tempers and passions of men; and to lead them, through faith and obedience, to that eternal state of blessedness with their Creator, to which all those shall be admitted, who shall be found capable of enjoying it, in the day when he shall judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained.

The great lesson which Almighty God is endeavouring to teach mankind is that of faith, and trust, and dependence on himself—the only sure foundation of virtue and goodness. That virtue which is built only on popular sentiment, or public good, or the fitness of things, depends so much on mode and fashion, upon the caprice and sometimes the folly of men, that it cannot be permanent or entire. But the belief that God sees and regards all our actions, and the principles from which they proceed; that he will, in a future life, judge us according to the law of the gospel, and of that reasonable nature which he hath given us, and will reward or punish us according as our life has been—this belief fixes virtue on a sure foundation, carries its principles to the heart, and extends its influence through all the scenes of life; and, in conjunction with the belief of the particular providence of God, becomes the ground work of that firm faith and trust in God, which abides all trials, and remains unshaken by the storms and

commotions of the world, the temptations of vice, the allurements of pleasure, the strokes of adversity, and the smiles of prosperity.

The author of the text was a remarkable instance of the truth of what I have said; and indeed the most of the preceding observations presented themselves to my mind, when contemplating the history of so extraordinary a man. From the height of worldly prosperity, he was suddenly plunged into the depth of adversity; and that by such events as human prudence could neither foresee nor prevent. His wealth seized by rapacious enemies—his children crushed by unnatural deaths—his body smitten by a strange and loathsome disease—the wife of his bosom fretting and tempting him to murmur and abjure his God—and his friends upbraiding him as a vile hypocritical reprobate then suffering the vengeance of incensed heaven. Unhappy man! to what should he look for support, or where find it under this pressure of complicated misery! He could look for it, he could find it only in that firm trust and confidence in God, which it had been the business of his life to cultivate; and which the conscious innocence of his heart assured him, was not placed in vain.

When acquainted with the loss of his substance, and of his children; though oppressed with the deepest sorrow, he recalls to his mind a due sense of his own natural indigence and inability to supply his own wants, and trusts himself to that never failing anchor in all the tattering storms of affliction, hope and confidence in God, and submission to his will—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

To the grating importunity of a fretful wife urging him to renounce the maxims of his former life, and to abjure his God, he answers, gently reproving her folly and impiety, with meekness and patience unparalleled—"Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh: What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"—Shall we place our hope and trust in

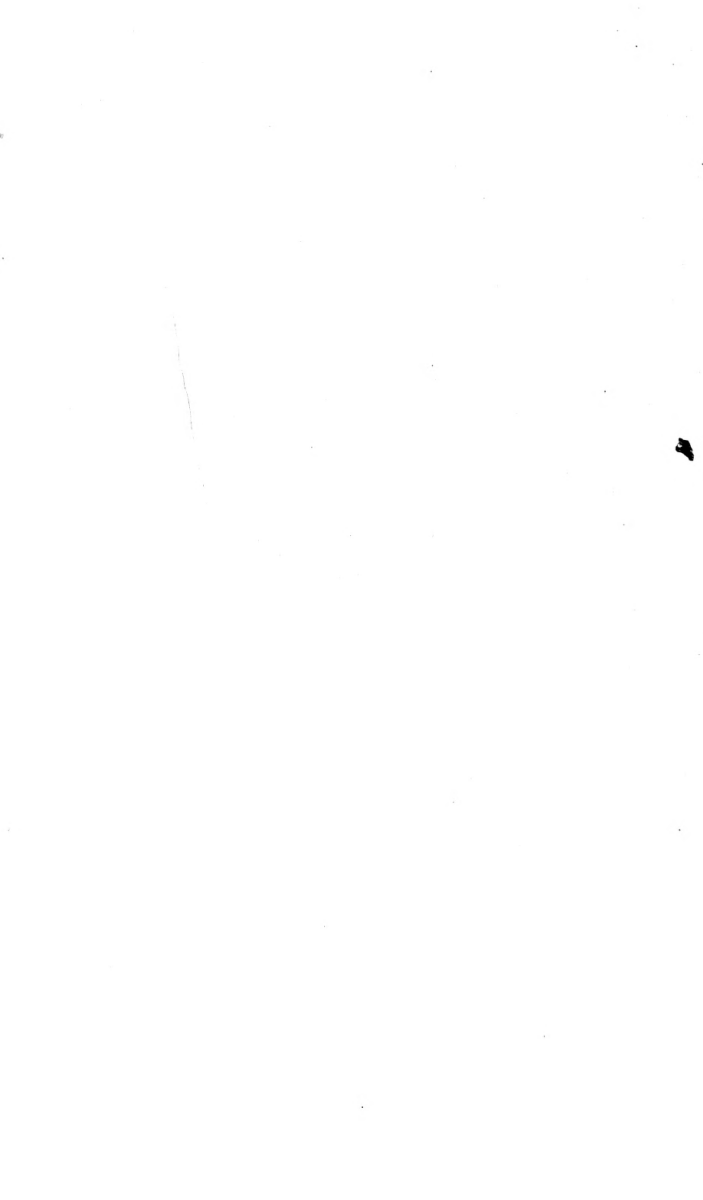
God, only when he blesses us with prosperity, and crowns our wishes with success? Shall we not also consider him as our heavenly father, when he visits us with afflictions, and chastises us for our good? Shall we trust in him and submit to him, only when he supports and protects us with his staff? Shall we not also trust in him, and submit to him, when he corrects us with his rod?

Against the remonstrances and upbraidings of his friends, who considered his misfortunes as the vengeance of God against his impiety and hypocrisy, which they supposed he had covered with the garb of religion and sanctity, he pleads the innocency of his life, the integrity of his heart, the uprightness of his intentions; and, assures himself that whatever might be the design of Almighty God in overwhelming him with such a deluge of calamities, it could not be for the punishment of vice, because he had never lived in it; nor for the correction of evil tempers and passions, because he had never indulged them. Upon the most exact review of his life, he could not find any reason to repent of it, or wish his general conduct had been other than it was. He therefore resolves, that, though his sufferings were so exceeding great as to make him curse the day of his birth, and wish himself out of existence; he would still live and act upon his old principles—patient submission to the will of God, and firm trust and confidence in him, be the consequence whatever it might—*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*

From what has been said, and particularly from the example of Job, let us learn to fix our own principles and regulate our own conduct. Should we see virtue and integrity bending beneath the burthen of distress, and enduring every species of misery to which this transitory life is exposed, reaping only calamity and reproach as the fruit of its ways—should we see vice and villany triumphant, exulting in prosperity, and rejoicing in the full success of its iniquitous schemes; let us not conclude with the silly wife of Job, that God regards not the actions of men—that trust and confidence in him are vain and fruitless—and that the best thing we can do is, to renounce

both him, and our integrity, and to give ourselves up to the conduct of knavery and hypocrisy, as the more certain way to obtain the happiness of the world: Nor, let us conclude with Job's friends, that misfortunes and calamities are instances of the vengeance of God; and that every man who falls into disastrous circumstances, is an object of the wrath of God, suffering the just punishment of his wickedness and hypocrisy. But, let us remember, that God, whose knowledge, and goodness, and wisdom are infinite, has many ends to answer by the various dispensations of his providence—that it is his property to bring good out of evil, happiness out of misery, order and regularity out of confusion and contention: And that if he permits virtue and integrity to be distressed, and vice and villany to succeed, he has some good and gracious end to accomplish, which could no other way be so well effected: And that he will finally make his righteousness clear as the sun, and his justice as the noon-day; rewarding every one according to his deeds, giving happiness and glory to the good, and recompensing infamy and misery to the wicked.

Let it also be the care of every one of us, through the whole period of life, so to imitate the integrity and faith of holy Job, that should distress, affliction or poverty come upon us, we may be able with him to appeal to our own hearts, and consciences, in the presence of God, for the uprightness of our intentions and designs, for the virtue and integrity of our actions and principles: For, then only may we with equal confidence, place our hope and trust in God, and reasonably expect his support and protection, when like Job, we hold fast our integrity, and with him resolve, *Though God slay me, yet will I trust in him.*



DISCOURSE III.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE ISRAELITES.

I COR. X. 11, 12.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

ST. Paul, in the end of the preceding chapter, tells us, that he disciplined himself by self-denial; so that, by keeping under the appetites of the body, he might obtain a part in that life eternal through Christ, which he preached to others. He had been called to the profession and preaching of the gospel, in a miraculous manner. He had been favoured with revelations from God, in greater number, and of a more extraordinary nature than any other Apostle. He had been taken up into the third heaven, and there saw and heard things which it exceeded the power of human nature to describe. He had preached and laboured more, in the propagation of the gospel, than the other Apostles had done. He had been assured by God, that his grace was sufficient to support him under the infirmities and distresses of the body, and all temptations to which he was liable. Could any man be sure of his salvation, we might reasonably presume St. Paul had obtained that assurance. And yet he disclaims all pretensions to it. He continued still to run his Christian race; and so to run, that he might obtain the reward of it. He strove to get the mastery over the inordinate passions and appetites of his nature, that he might obtain the incorruptible crown of glory in the life to come; and, therefore, he kept under his body, and brought it into subjection by temperance and mortification; denying himself liberties

which were indifferent, and in themselves innocent ; lest while he “preached to others,” he himself “should be a cast-away”—reprobated, or rejected of God.

To the imitation of his patience and self-denial he calls his Corinthian converts ; and exhorts them to strive for the mastery over unruly tempers and passions, as he did. And to encourage them by example, as well as direct them by precept, he, in the tenth chapter, sets before them the conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the dreadful judgments of God which their wickedness and obstinacy brought on them. His whole reasoning proceeds on this ground ; that the hopes of future happiness founded on the promises of God, ought always to include obedience to what God commands ; because if we fail in our obedience, the promise is no longer in force as to us.

To prove this point, he adduces the instance of the Jewish Church. He mentions several of the blessings and privileges God conferred on it, and the great promises he made to it ; all which they failed to obtain, through unbelief and disobedience, and miserably perished in the wilderness. The inference he draws ought to be a warning to us, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and fail of entering into that rest which is promised to the people of God, under the gospel.

The Jewish Church, in its time, was the true Church of God ; differing, indeed, in many things in its œconomy, from the Christian, but resembling it also in many circumstances. That was the œconomy of types, and representations, and shadows ; the Christian, of substance, and reality, and truth. St. Paul frequently calls those types and shadows by the name of the reality which they represented. The Jews he calls our ancestors or fathers, though they were so, only in a figurative, or in a spiritual sense—having been in the family or Church of God, and having had a right to the blessings of his covenant, before us. The rock which gave them water at Horeb, he says, was Christ ; that is, a figure or type of Christ.

But we will take a nearer view of the discourse which

introduceth the text ; and by which, St. Paul excites the Corinthians to diligence and care in their Christian profession.

“ I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers,” the Church of Israel, “ were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea ; and were all baptised unto Moses,” their appointed conductor and mediator, “ in the cloud, and in the sea ;” that is, they were baptised figuratively into the covenant God made with them, and into the belief of the doctrines taught by Moses at God’s command. Accordingly, this covenant was formally made ; and the Law, containing the peculiar doctrines of it, published a short time after, at Mount Sinai.

St. Paul considered the Israelites being under the cloud and passing through the sea, as figures of Christian Baptism. And their going into the bed of the Red Sea, and coming again up out of it, had a resemblance of the mode of administering Baptism by immersion. It was also believed by the Jews, that their fathers were baptised in the desert, and admitted into covenant with God, before the giving of the Law.* To this opinion of theirs the apostle probably alludes, and thence draws the figure of Christian Baptism.

But, to understand how this Baptism was typified by their being under the cloud, it will be necessary to advert to the several uses which the cloud served. One was to direct their marches ; and this it did as a pillar or column going before them. Another use was to illuminate their horizon in the night, that they might have light to march on their journey, when God gave them notice by putting the cloud in motion ; or to go about their camp, when they rested. Thus we read, that “ the Lord went before them by day, in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way ; and by night, in a pillar of fire, to give them light.”† A third use was to cover them by its shade from the intense heat of the sun on the sands of the wilderness, where there are neither trees nor verdure, but in particular places. “ He spread a cloud,” saith the Psalmist, “ for

* Maimonides, according to Peacock, gives this account.

† Exod. xiii. 21.

a covering; and fire to give light in the night.”* A fourth use was to be a defence against their enemies. Thus the cloud stood betwixt the host of Israel and the Egyptians, giving a bright light to the former, but being impenetrable darkness to the latter.†

The cloud, then, was to them a perpetual indication of the presence, power, and protection of Almighty God—It covered them from inclement heat; it directed and illuminated their path and their camp; and it surrounded and guarded them against the assaults of their enemies. As, therefore, their passing through the sea was a figure of our baptismal washing with water; so their being under the cloud was a figure of our baptism with the Holy Ghost administered in the Christian Church, by the rite of Confirmation or laying on of hands,‡ which is the full completion of Christian Baptism.

The Jews acknowledge, that the cloud of glory signified and represented the Spirit of God.§ This Spirit protects us Christians, (to whom he is given through the mediation of Christ, into whose name we have been baptised,) under the temptations and persecutions which come on us in the wilderness of this world, which, without his support, would overcome and destroy us; even as the heat of the sun would have overpowered and destroyed the Israelites in the desert, had not the cloud been interposed for their protection. The Holy Spirit is also a defence against our spiritual enemy, eminently called the *evil one*, the destroyer; so that he shall not assault us, “above that” we “are able to bear.” He likewise is the guide in our Christian journey; preventing, or going before us, and leading us in the way to the heavenly Canaan. Lastly, He is “a lamp unto” our “feet, and a light unto” our “path,” that we may not walk in darkness, and stumble, and fall; but may have the light of divine truth, while we sojourn in this world, to direct our feet in the way of God’s commandments.

Rightly, therefore, did the Apostle point out the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and their be-

* Psalm cv. 39.

† Exod. xiv. 20.

‡ Heb. vi. 2.

§ Masius on Josh. i.

ing under the guidance and protection of the cloud in the wilderness, as figures and types of Baptism with Water and the Holy Ghost, under the dispensation of Christ.

Let us now pass on to the next verses—"And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink," which Christians do eat and drink. The Apostle undoubtedly refers to the Manna, and water from the rock, with which the Israelites were sustained in the wilderness. And we have the testimony of Christ himself, that the Manna was a type of him who is "the living bread which came down from heaven;" which bread he declareth himself to be: and that "if any man eat of this bread," (his flesh which he would give for the life of the world) "he shall live for ever;" and he would "raise him up at the last day."* The Apostle calls the Manna which the Israelites did eat, *spiritual meat*; because, though it was a bodily substance, it might, by the appointment of God, be the food of the soul to them who ate it with faith in the providence and promises of God. For the same reason, he calls the water which flowed from the rock, *spiritual drink*. And we have his authority for saying, that the rock, from which this spiritual water flowed, *was Christ*; that is, a figure or type of Christ: consequently, the water was the figure or type of that "living water" which Christ giveth unto us;† that is, of all the blessings of his Holy Spirit. And, as all those blessings were obtained for us by the shedding of Christ's blood; therefore was the water, which flowed from the rock in Horeb, a lively and expressive figure of the blood of Christ poured out on the cross for the sin of the world.

It is scarcely possible to read St. Paul's account of the Baptism of the Israelites in the sea and in the cloud, without perceiving the allusion he has to the Christian Sacrament of Baptism. Nor can we attend to his account of the Manna, and the water which flowed from the rock, which he calls the same spiritual meat and drink of which Christians partake, without seeing the allusion he must have intended to the other Sacrament of the Christian

* See Christ's discourse, John vi.

† John iv. 10.

Church, the Holy Eucharist, or Communion of the body and blood of Christ. By the Manna and the Water, the Israelites were preserved from famishing in the barren and dry wilderness: and, by the body and blood of Christ, truly represented and exhibited by the consecrated bread and the cup of the Eucharist, our spiritual famine in this world is prevented, and our souls refreshed by the love and grace of God through Christ. They who ate of that spiritual meat, and drank of that spiritual drink, with dependence on God's providence, and faith in his promises, found them conducive to their spiritual comfort, and growth in grace, and all holy tempers. And when we receive the Holy Communion with faith in the promises of God, and in the atonement of Christ; we do, in virtue and effect, receive the body and blood of Christ, the true bread which came down from heaven, and drink that living water, which shall be in us "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* The manna came down from heaven, and is called the food or bread of angels; and Christ saith of his body, that it is the true bread which came down from heaven, and giveth life to the world. The rock, the figure of Christ, poured out its water when miraculously cleft by a stroke of the rod of Moses, to the preservation and refreshment of the host of Israel perishing with thirst. And when the Saviour's side was cleft and torn by the soldier's spear, "forthwith came thereout blood and water," to the refreshment and preservation of man, perishing with spiritual thirst, in the barren desert of sin and iniquity.†

* John iv. 14.

† In commemoration of the blood and water which flowed from our Saviour's side when pierced with the spear, the Christian Church universally administered the Sacrament of the blood of Christ in a mixed cup of wine and water, till the reformation, when the Genevans (I believe first) departed from this primitive practice. The other Reformers on the continent generally followed their example, merely as it should seem, to get as far as possible from the Church of Rome. But in justification of the practice it may be observed, that as our Saviour instituted the Holy Eucharist immediately after the celebration of the Passover, the cup which he took was the last paschal cup, called the *cup of blessing*, because the master of the family used to *bless it*. This cup is well known, from the testimony of Jewish writers, to have been a mixture of wine and water. Of this mixed cup our Saviour said, *This is my blood which is shed for you*. All the old Liturgies of the Church now extant, Greek, Latin, and African, direct the Eucharist to be celebra-

Though so many and so great favours had been conferred on the Israelites; “with many of them,” saith the apostle, “God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown” by him, “in the wilderness.” He then mentions some of the crimes by which they lost the favour of God, and drew down his judgments on them to their utter destruction. But first he puts us in mind, that “all these things are our examples; to the intent, we” who succeed them in the favours and blessings of God, “should not lust after evil things, as some of them also lusted”—ungratefully murmuring, and demanding flesh from God to gratify the craving of appetite,* when he had already given them food sufficient for health and support, in the manna which he rained down on them. At their desire, God brought them quails, and rained flesh upon them, as thick as dust. “But, while the meat was yet in their mouths, the heavy wrath of God came upon them, and slew the wealthiest of them, and smote down the chosen men that were in Israel.”†

“Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them”—eating of the sacrifices offered to idols, and thereby acknowledging them as their God—“As it is written, The people sat down to eat and to drink” of the sacrifices offered to

ted in the *mixed cup*. All the old writers, who mention the subject, speak of the *cup* as *mixed*. And, as the practice of the mixture can be traced up to Justin Martyr, and was the universal usage of the Church in his time, there is no doubt of its being derived from the Apostles. In the New Testament, the *cup* is always called expressly by that name, and never called *wine* simply. To cite particularly the authorities of the old Liturgies and Writers would take up too much room. I shall therefore content myself with observing, that the first English Liturgy of Edward VI. directed the Communion to be administered with a mixed cup. And that when that mode was altered by a second reformation in the same reign, it was probably omitted in compliance with the sentiments of Calvin and Beza, and in hopes that the foreign Protestants would unite, and make one Church with the Church of England. In this, however, they were mistaken. This last Prayer-Book of Edward VI. never had any Ecclesiastical authority to support it, till the revision of the book under Charles II. but, during that period, subsisted on authority purely regal and parliamentary.

Whoever wishes to examine into this matter, may consult Dr. Brett's Dissertation on the Old Liturgies, p. 348, &c. Bishop Hicke's Preparatory Discourse to the Rights, &c. edit. iii. p. 63. Mr. Thorndike's Weights and Measures, p. 159. Dr. Heylin, Antidotum Lincolnense, p. 110. To whom may be added, Mr. Bingham, and Mr. Johnson's Unbloody Sacrifice. And also, Reasons for restoring some Prayers and Directions, as they stand in the Communion Service of the first English Reformed Liturgy; with its defence, vindication, &c.

* Num. xi.

† Psalm cv. 40. lxxviii. 28, 31.

the golden calf, “and rose up to play” and dance in honor to it, after the manner of the heathen. This caution was particularly necessary for the Corinthians, who seem to have had no scruple about eating things offered to idols, by which they avoided persecution on account of their religion. In justification of themselves, they pleaded, that an idol was nothing; and that, therefore, there could be no harm in eating what had been offered to it. To this the apostle replies, that though an idol be nothing; yet eating of sacrifices offered to it, was worshipping it, and acknowledging it to be our God—That the devil was the author of idol-worship; and that the sacrifices offered to the idol were in reality offered to devils. It was, therefore, a renouncing of their God and Saviour, and giving his glory to evil spirits, and to the works of men’s hands—an abomination to be abhorred of all Christian people.*

“Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed;” namely, at the sacrifices of Baal-peor; “and,” by the judgment of God, “fell in one day three and twenty thousand.” The necessity of this admonition to those to whom the apostle was writing, appears from the proneness of the Corinthians to the crime he reproveth. Of this we have several intimations in his two Epistles; particularly when he says, “Lest when I come, I shall bewail many which have sinned already; and have not repented of the uncleanness, and fornication, and lasciviousness which they have committed.”†

“Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted” him, “and were destroyed of serpents.” In the history to which this relates, we find, that “the people spake against God, and against Moses; Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.”‡ The murmuring of the people against God, their distrusting his providence and power, and despising the provision of manna he had made for them, is, by the

* 1 Cor. x. 18, &c. † 2 Cor. xii. 21. ‡ Num. xxi. 5, 6.

apostle, called tempting of Christ. And from hence an argument has been drawn to prove the divinity of Christ—that he was the Lord who brought the Israelites out of Egypt; who published the law from mount Sinai; who gave them manna from heaven, and water from the rock; who led them through, and supported them in the wilderness; who drove the Canaanites before them, and finally settled them in their country: and that he is the very God Jehovah whom they worshipped.

By their *tempting God* is meant their requiring further and greater instances of his power, when he had already done what was sufficient, which ought to have convinced them that he was the Almighty God, infinite in power and goodness. Their doubting of the power of God to provide them with bread in the wilderness, when they confessed he had brought water out of the dry rock to relieve their necessity, is called by the Psalmist, *tempting God*.*

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” When the spies, who were sent to examine the state of the country of Canaan and of its inhabitants, returned, and represented the country as too strong for them to conquer, the people were discouraged, and “murmured against Moses, and against Aaron;” and said, “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt; or would God we had died in this wilderness. And they said one to the other, Let us make a Captain, and let us return into Egypt.”† For their punishment, God sent a plague among them—the angel of death—the destroyer‡—“him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil.”§ And all the men, who had been to examine the country, died in the plague, except Caleb and Joshua; who had not joined in their report, nor discouraged the people, but had believed the Lord and trusted in his power.||

At this time, also, though God withdrew the plague, at the intercession of Moses, and did not destroy the

* Psalm lxxviii. 19. † Num. xiv. 2, 4. ‡ Heb. xi. 28.

§ Heb. ii. 14. || Num. xiv. 27, 38.

whole congregation ; yet in his anger he determined that none of those who came up out of Egypt, “from twenty years old and upward,” should enter into rest in Canaan ; but should die in the wilderness, as they had wished ;* being unworthy, through obstinate unbelief, to be made partakers of his promises.

“Now all these things happened to them for ensamples” to us, “and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

By “the ends of the world,” is meant the last dispensation of God to man. The Jews divided the duration of the world into three periods, which they called *ages*. The first was the Patriarchal age or dispensation, which continued to the giving of the Law. The second was the age of the Law ; and the third was the age after the Law, or the age of Messiah. This dispensation they called the last age—the end of the ages ; because no dispensation was to succeed ; but the end of the world was to come, when the dispensation of Messiah should cease.

According to the text, the design of God in having the crimes of the Israelites in the wilderness recorded, together with the judgments with which they were punished, was, that they might be examples and admonitions to his Church, in after times ; particularly to those who live under the last dispensation of God, the age of Messiah. And the lesson we are to learn from them is, not to “lust after evil things, as they also lusted ;” nor to “be idolaters,” nor “commit fornication,” nor “tempt Christ,” nor “murmur” at the dispensations of God ; of all which crimes some of them were guilty ; lest we be rejected of God, as they were ; and he determine with regard to us, as he did with regard to them, that *we shall not enter into his rest*—the heavenly Canaan—the rest reserved for “the people of God.” †

From the example of the Israelites, we may also learn, that the covenanted privileges which God gives to men, are not only the objects of their faith, but imply obligations of obedience to what God commands ; and that without

* Num. xiv. 26, 29.

† Heb. iv. 9.

both faith and obedience on our part, they will fail and be lost to us. We may learn also, that the greater those privileges and mercies are, the greater ought to be our gratitude; the stronger our faith; the more punctual, and cheerful, and steady our obedience. That the mercies and promises of the Christian covenant are greater and more precious than those of the Jewish, cannot be doubted; and the greater and more dreadful will be our punishment, if we be faithless and disobedient under them: For if God spared not his old people who sinned under less, how can we expect he will spare us, if we sin under greater advantages? In this Scripture, then, we see “the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell” in the wilderness, “severity; but towards” us, “goodness,” (in causing their example to be recorded for our admonition) “if” we “continue in his goodness; otherwise” we “also shall be cut off.”*

It will now be easy to assign the meaning of the latter verse of the text; “Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” “Let him”—let every Christian—“that thinketh he standeth” high and securely in the favor of God, and that there is no danger of losing it by his own ill conduct, “take heed lest he fall” from it, through want of faith in God’s promises, or by disobedience to his commands.

The Israelites who came out of Egypt were once as truly the Church, or chosen people of God, as we are now. They had entered into covenant with God, as well as we have. He promised their fathers to bring their children into the land of Canaan, and give it to them for a possession. He, therefore, brought them out from their oppression in Egypt with a “mighty hand,” and by “great signs and wonders; He parted the Red Sea, and made a passage for them through it on dry land; He published his Law to them, at Sinai, from the midst of thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes; He satisfied them with manna, when they were hungry; and when they were thirsty, with water from the rock; He directed their marches by

* Rom. xi. 22.

the pillar of a cloud ; illuminating their camp by its shining, and spreading it over their whole host, to guard them from the heat of the sun, and from the attacks of enemies. They murmured ; they distrusted his power ; they did not believe his promises ; they disobeyed his commandments ; and he cast them off—"He swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest"—and they perished in the wilderness.

And now, what greater security have we of inheriting the promises of God, than the Israelites had ? Theirs were "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises."* They had, therefore, the same security which we have : yet they failed ; and failed through unbelief and disobedience : And are not unbelief and disobedience as great crimes in a Christian, as they were in an Israelite ? Or hath God changed his nature, and will now overlook crimes in Christians, which he formerly punished severely in the Israelites ?

God does not change his mind, nor alter his purpose. His promises are "yea, and amen"—sure and certain. They are made to the faithful and obedient ; and if the unbelieving and disobedient fail to obtain them, it is because they want that faith and obedience on which the promises are grounded. Let us, then, learn instruction from the lesson which the apostle endeavours to teach us, by setting before us the conduct and punishment of the old Israelites—the lesson of faith and obedience to God.

We have sufficient authority to say that the Church of the Israelites was typical of the Church of Christ—Their redemption from Egypt, of our redemption from sin and satan—Their Laptism "in the cloud and in the sea, of our baptism with water and the Holy Ghost—Their manna and water from the rock, of the Christian Eucharist. or communion of the body and blood of Christ—Their journeyings in the wilderness, of our pilgrimage in this world—and the promised land of Canaan, of the heavenly kingdom of our Redeemer. I would to God there was no re-

* Rom. ix. 4.

semblance between their unbelief and disobedience, and ours. The holy apostle, however, thought his Corinthian converts to be in danger of similar judgments, because he saw them guilty of similar crimes. He, therefore, warned them of their danger; and in warning them, he hath warned us also. Happy will it be for us, if we pay attention to his warning, and govern ourselves by his admonition. Consider, therefore, the similarity of their situation, and ours; and act accordingly. But remember, we are not travelling to an earthly, but to a heavenly Canaan; and if we fail of entering into it, terrible indeed will be the failure.

What St. Paul hath said in the context, did not arise from a transient view of the subject, but from deliberate judgment. He produceth the same argument in his Epistle to the Hebrews. Citing from the ninety-fifth Psalm, "Wherefore the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness,"* &c.; he asks, "With whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So, we see, that they could not enter in because of unbelief." In the next chapter, he continues his exhortation in the most earnest manner; "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest"—the heavenly Canaan—"any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the Gospel"—the good tidings of a rest for the people of God—"preached, as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Let us labour, therefore, to enter into "that rest, lest any man fall from it, after the same example of unbelief."†

"Let him," therefore, that thinketh he standeth, "take heed lest he fall." Does a man think, that because God hath adopted us for his children, and made to us the promise of future rest in the kingdom of heaven, that he

* Heb. iii. 7, &c.

† Heb. iv. 11 disobedience

cannot fail of obtaining that rest? let him know, that the promise of God is made to the faithful and obedient; and that unbelief and disobedience will render it vain with regard to him. Does he think, that (let him live as he will) because Christ hath made atonement for sin, and reconciled God to us, that therefore he cannot fail to obtain the promise of that eternal life which Christ hath purchased? let him know, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” and that though the promise of God is certain, it is made only to those who believe and obey God.

DISCOURSE IV.

NO TEMPTATIONS UNSURMOUNTABLE BY CHRISTIANS.

I COR. X. 13.

There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man : But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

THERE are two errors into which Christians, who are not well grounded in the principles of their religion, are apt to run. The one is presumption on the promises of God, which they suppose to be so absolute that they cannot fail to obtain them, be their conduct whatever it may. Against this error St. Paul sufficiently cautions us, when he said, " Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"—Let him who thinketh he standeth secure in the favour of God, take heed that he forfeit it not by unbelief and disobedience. The other error is dejection of spirits, and despondence at the prospect of the temptations and difficulties that lie in the way of a holy and Christian life. Sensible of the weakness of nature, many people suffer the imagination to dwell on the difficulties that are before them; till they persuade themselves, that these difficulties are so inevitable, that they cannot avoid them, and so strong that they cannot resist them. This conclusion, had they nothing but their own wisdom and strength to depend on, would be perfectly just, and they would have every reason to dread all the evils they so anxiously forebode. Blind indeed is human wisdom in the things of God; and, to resist temptations, the greatest strength of nature is perfect weakness. But to the wisdom and weakness of nature God hath not left us. His power, his grace,

his Holy Spirit, are our defence and security in our Christian warfare. And the holy Apostle appeals to the experience of his Corinthian converts, that no insupportable temptation had yet come upon them—none “but such as is common to man,” and therefore such as all men must expect; and, of course, such as all men may, by God’s grace, endure. The same appeal, I trust, may be made to us; and every one of us must acknowledge the justice of it. If, then, God hath hitherto preserved us from insupportable trials, why should we doubt that he will continue to preserve us, if we do our duty; place our trust in him, and exercise that portion of reason and grace which he hath given us, and make use of those means of religion and holy living, which he hath put in our power?

Besides, “God,” saith the Apostle, “is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also, make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” We, therefore, are not left to the general notions we have of the goodness and power of God for the ground of our faith in him, that he will preserve us from, or succour us under severe temptations; nor to the bare testimony of our own experience, that he hath, as yet, ever done so: But we have his express promise, that as he “redeemeth the soul of his servants,” so “none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”* “But the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: He shall deliver them from the wicked”—not only the wicked of this world, but from the wicked or *evil one*—“and save them because they trust in him.”† In these, and in many other places of Holy Scripture, we have the express promise of God to confirm what is asserted in the text; and he “is faithful,” and will faithfully make good what he hath engaged—that we shall be protected against all temptations insupportable by human nature, so that they shall never come upon us; or, we shall receive supernatural strength to enable us to bear them; or, a way shall be provided for us to escape from them.

What the Apostle hath said in the text, stands on the

* Psalm xxxiv. 22.

† Psalm xxxvii. 40.

certainty of our being exposed to a variety of temptations in our Christian course. To lessen the apprehension of this certainty, or of the strength of those temptations which we must endure, can answer no good purpose: It would only make us more careless of ourselves and of our duty, and less watchful against the trials of our faith and patience which must come upon us; and, consequently, more liable to sink under them. We will, therefore, consider,

1. The different kinds of temptations to which we are exposed.

2. The sources from which they rise.

3. The power we have to resist and overcome them.

From all which it will appear, that however numerous and strong the temptations may be which we have to encounter, God hath amply provided for our security under them; and that we have no good reason for dejection or despondency of spirits, at the prospect of them.

1. We are to consider the various kinds of temptations to which we are exposed.

The word *temptation*, though now generally used to signify *excitement or solicitation to evil*, means *trial, or experiment*; and in Scripture, persecution on account of religion is sometimes expressed by it; because such persecution brings our religion to the trial, and makes an experiment of our faith and sincerity in it. In this sense it is used by St. Luke,* “These have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of *temptation* fall away.” In the parallel place of St. Matthew† it is, “when *tribulation or persecution* ariseth on account of the word, by and by he is offended.” This, probably, is the more precise meaning of the word *temptation* in the text; by which the apostle warns his Corinthian converts of those persecutions on account of their religion, which were then common in the world, and which they were to expect both from Jewish and Gentile unbelievers; exhorts them to behave with patience and confidence in God, should they come on

* viii. 13.

† xiii. 21.

them; and assures them, if they did so, God would support and deliver them.

Sometimes *temptation* signifies the troubles and afflictions of this life. With these the servants of God are frequently tried: Not because God is ignorant of the state of their hearts, but to make them sensible of the weakness of their nature, and well acquainted with their own spiritual condition; to exercise and strengthen their faith and patience; to set them for examples to others; to correct whatever may be amiss in them; to show the pleasure he takes in those who remain faithful to him, by fitting them for a brighter crown of glory in his heavenly kingdom. In this sense the word is used by St. James, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience," which is the proper fruit of affliction that is borne with Christian temper. Again, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life."*

Sometimes *temptation* signifies the arts and excitements of the *evil one*, the Devil, to draw us into sin. This seems to be the more particular sense of the word in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"—Suffer us not to fall into the snares of the devil, but deliver us from sin.

To temptations of all these kinds we are liable, and must expect to be encountered by them all, in a greater or less degree. The state of the world in which we live is such, that persecution on account of our religion must be endured, especially by those who "will live godly in Christ Jesus." The malice of wicked men will exert itself either openly or secretly; if not to the injury of the body by direct violence, yet to the vexation of the mind by scolds and revilings, and to the prejudice of the reputation by false reports and wicked calumnies.

Nor can we reasonably hope to pass through life, without suffering some of the troubles and afflictions to which it is liable. The constant experience of the world hath

* James i. 2, 12.

fully established the truth of the observation made by holy Job, that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Disappointment of our expectations, damage of our substance, loss of friends, sickness of body, vexations of mind, are among the evils to which we are exposed, and some of which we must feel.

And who is secure against the assaults of that Adversary who, armed with subtilty and inflamed by malice, "goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour?" While we are subject to the cravings of appetite, and to the influence of the passions, we must be exposed to his attempts: And the attempts of one who knows so well how to let in excitements to sin upon us by every avenue, to gild them over with cunning, and to urge them with art, are always to be dreaded. By him also the passions of evil men are inflamed, and their malice excited, till it vents itself in persecuting the Church and servants of God: And he renders the troubles and afflictions of life more bitter, by the impatience and despondency which he excites in the soul.

2. Let us next attend to the sources from which these temptations spring.

It hath already been noted, that one kind of temptation proceeds from the *devil*, the great adversary of God and man. By this word is meant, not only the prince, but the whole host of angels who kept not their first estate, but "being lifted up with pride," lost their heavenly nature, and were filled with malice and all evil. A desire to become independent of God, and to stand in their own strength and power, seems to have been the cause of their fall. With this bait they beguiled and caught the unhappy parents of mankind; and have ever since been the constant and successful tempters of their posterity. To repair the fall of human nature which they introduced, and to make man again capable of heavenly happiness, was the object the Son of God had in view when he came into the world; and of all his doctrines, and miracles, and sufferings. It must, therefore, be necessary for us to renounce the temptations and inspirations of the devil, be-

cause they are contrary to the nature of God, who is the source of all happiness; they tend only to that which is evil; and to live according to them, will make us incapable of happiness in heaven.

In a larger sense, all sin and wickedness of every kind and degree are the works of the devil, because he is their original author and fountain. In a more particular sense, the malevolent passions of the mind, and the actions which proceed from them, anger, envy, hatred, malice, revenge, murder, are his works. The crafty, subtle, serpentine dispositions and actions of men, fraud, cheating, hypocrisy, lying, deceiving with an intention to injure, are also ascribed to him. Aversion from God, hatred of him, the refusal to give him the reverence and worship that are due to him, idolatry, or the worship of any thing besides God, are particularly attributed to the devil.

When we are tempted to any of these things, the temptation is properly said to come from the devil; and our duty requires that we resist and renounce every inclination to such tempers and actions. If we do so, we really "resist the devil;" and if we do so, earnestly and faithfully, "he will flee from us." Nor let us suppose, that any thing singular happens to us, when we are thus tempted by him; but remember that the "same afflictions and temptations" with which we are tried, "are accomplished in our brethren that "are in the world"—in all the members of the Christian Church.

The world in which we live is another source of temptations. Its vain pomp, the covetous desire of its riches, and the lust after its magnificence and grandeur, often draw us from our duty, and consequently from the true road to happiness with God. Many people, indeed, make the world and its enjoyments the great business of their lives, the object of their most passionate desires. Difficult will it be to persuade *them* that the world can be their enemy, or that there is any harm in gratifying to the utmost the tempers which spring from it. Well, however, would it be for them, if they would pay some regard to the observation of their Saviour, "Ye cannot serve God

and Mammon ;” and would remember, that one apostle hath said, “ If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ;”* and another, “ the friendship of the world is enmity against God.”† It is also suggested to them, that covetousness, which is a temper purely worldly, is called *Idolatry* ;‡ and that God is said particularly to *abhor the covetous*.§

On account of the wickedness of the world, and its enmity against God, he hath called us out of it, that we might not be defiled by it, and live in that state of enmity against our Creator in which it lieth : And he hath brought us into his Church, which is not of the world, but of him who hath created and redeemed us ; that in his own family we might be trained up in holiness, and made fit to be partakers of his heavenly kingdom.

Our duty, therefore, requires us to deny and keep under the thirst for grandeur and magnificence which vanity and ambition inspire ; that greedy desire of riches, and confident dependence on them, which draw the heart from God, and prompt it to look to the world for happiness ; that care for this world, which prevents our caring for the next ; and that love for temporal things, which makes us forget the things that are eternal. Then may we assure ourselves, that we shall get the victory over the world, and shall stand superior to all its hopes and fears.—God will not suffer us to be tempted by it, above that we are able to bear.

The lusts of the flesh involve us in another scene of temptation. By the lusts of the flesh are meant the appetites which belong to the body. These, though not directly sinful in themselves, lead men into all the sins of impurity and sensuality. The love of pleasure is so strong in us, that, spurning the restraints of reason and religion, we seek it where it is not to be found—in extravagance and excess. Under the restraint of reason and religion, the appetites of the body are not only innocent in themselves, but necessary to our well-being. Excess, therefore, in the indulgence of bodily appetites, is what we are particular-

* 1 John ii. 15.

† James iv. 4.

‡ Colos. iii. 5.

§ Psalm x. 3.

ly to guard against. Every instance and degree of sensual indulgence which reason disallows, or which the law of God prohibits, must be forborne, because "fleshly lusts war against the soul;"* because, also, "they who do the works of the flesh, shall not inherit the kingdom of God."†

Thus are we every way exposed to temptations, not only from our enemies who are without, but from enemies also who are among "them of our own household." With the power of the *evil one*, him who in the Scripture and by the Church is emphatically called *the enemy*, are combined the force and impetuosity of our passions and appetites; and powerful indeed must be the temptations of the adversary, when our own hearts are by nature, possibly too by habit, disposed to favour his solicitations. Let us then consider,

3. The power we have to resist and repel them.

Against a confederacy so strong, and under the direction of an artful manager, instigated too by malice and envy, our own ability can do but little, for our strength is only weakness. But the goodness of our God hath provided strength for us fully sufficient for our necessities, even the power of his own most Holy Spirit, whom he hath given to his church, the mystical body of his Son; and through the church, to every member of it. This Spirit, Christ promised to his apostles under the character of the *Comforter*, who was to abide with *them*, and consequently with his church to the end of the world; to lead them into all truth; to support them under adversity; to secure them against the wiles of the devil; and to renew and sanctify their hearts. This promise was most graciously fulfilled, when, on the day of Pentecost, he descended in a bodily shape, like to cloven tongues of fire, on the heads of the Apostles, and of the other Christians who were assembled with them. To this Holy Spirit, St. John had reference, when he said, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."‡ To the power of this Divine Being, St. Paul had regard, when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."§

* 1 Peter ii. 11. † Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. ‡ 1 John iv. 4. § Philip. iv. 13.

For what Christ doth for us in this world, he doth by the Holy Ghost, to whom the care of the church in its militant state is committed. If we faithfully rely on the power and presence of this Holy Spirit, and steadily endeavor to do our duty in the station to which God's providence hath called us; we shall find his influence in us of more efficacy to overcome the temptations of satan, the love of the world, the evil propensities of the flesh, and to renew in us the spirit of holiness; than all the power and subtilty of the devil can be of, to destroy us.

Should it be asked, How it comes to pass, that we do not see the efficacy of the Spirit in the lives of Christians? How it happens, that they are so easily led away by their spiritual enemy, to live in malice and envy, and to become slaves to the world, and to their own lusts, when they have so strong a support against temptations, and so powerful a principle of holiness always with them? I answer; That the presence and efficacy of the Holy Spirit is apparent in many Christians, who allow themselves in no wickedness, and who delight to practise all goodness; and that this would be the case with every one, did every one faithfully obey his holy inspirations. It is a truth which cannot be too strongly inculcated, that every thing good in us is from God, and the fruit of his Spirit. And that every thing which is evil—every evil desire, wish, purpose, word, or action—is from ourselves, from our own carnal and corrupt affections. No person who fairly reflects on the operations of his own mind, and on his conduct as it proceeds from his own deliberate determination, can doubt that he has an *own* will, by which he can turn himself to a compliance with the good purposes and desires which form themselves in him; or to the fulfilling of the evil, selfish, malicious, proud, and sensual passions and appetites of his nature. No one can otherwise be accountable for his actions, because no one can be accountable for actions which he could not have forborne. Herein then lies the difference between the good and bad man. The one attends to, and complies with all good desires and inclinations within his power; and, in so doing, he

co-operates with the Spirit of God, from whom every thing in him that is good must proceed. He rejects every evil thought, desire, and propensity; and, in rejecting them, he rejects and resists the devil, the world, and the flesh. The other turns from and checks the good desires and dispositions which rise up in him, so long and so often, that either they cease, or he ceases to perceive them; and, in so doing, he resists, and grieves, and quenches, and drives from him the Spirit of God. He delights in the gratification of the appetites and passions of his nature; and, is ever ready, when it is in his power, to comply with their impulse, and thereby acts with the devil, becomes his servant, the slave of the world and of his own wicked inclinations; for his servants we are to whom we obey.* Hence it comes to pass, that so many Christians are Christians only in name; for no person is any further a Christian in the true sense of the word, than as he acts and lives under the constant influence of the Spirit of God.

That we are placed in a state which exposes us to so many and so strong temptations, with which we have but little power to contend, has been urged as an argument against the goodness of God. If we acquit those who make this objection of all sinister purposes, we must suppose it to be made without due consideration of the subject. God hath sufficiently provided for our security by the gift of his Holy Spirit. By temptations he proves us, whether we will obey him; and, by the proof, he forms the heart to habits of holiness and virtue, that we may be made fit for the kingdom of heaven. If we renounce that state of apostacy into which human nature fell by the disobedience of its first parent, by resisting stedfastly the inspirations of satan, the impurities of the flesh, and the perverse, selfish tempers of the world, that great object will be fully accomplished. For these corrupt passions and tempers constitute our fallen nature: they make up the "old man" of sin and death which hold us in bondage. We cannot be delivered from the evil of our nature, but

* Rom. vi. 16.

by being made superior to it: we cannot be made superior to it, but by overcoming it: we cannot overcome it, but by overcoming the temptations which arise from it. Temptations, therefore, are necessary for us; and it is only through them that we can be made capable of heavenly happiness. For which reason, the blessed apostle St. James saith, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trial of your faith," if ye endure it, "worketh patience;" and patience, if it be not interrupted, but hath its "perfect work," will make you "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."*

The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through temptations and sufferings.† He endured the fiercest assaults of satan, the bitterest persecutions, and sharpest pains that the world could inflict: And being "in all things made like unto his brethren,"‡ having been "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and "in all points tempted like as we are," continued "yet without sin."§ Neither the desires of the flesh, nor the evil passions of the mind, nor the spirit of the world, prevailed in him. In that human nature which he assumed, he triumphed over them all: He then sacrificed it on the cross, having first offered it to God to bear the punishment, that he might deliver it from the curse of sin: He raised it from the dead, that he might rescue it from the power of the grave, of hell, and the devil: And he carried it triumphantly to heaven, that he might make it again capable of inheriting God's kingdom of glory and happiness.

Did the Captain of our salvation do all this to exempt his soldiers and servants from all enduring of temptations and sufferings? No, certainly; but to set them an example of patience and constancy; that they might follow his steps.||

That the process of our salvation through Christ might be carried on, and we enabled to endure suffering and temptations with firmness and patience, we, as hath been observed, are called into the Church of Christ, and put

* Jam. i. 2, 3, 4 † Heb. ii. 10. ‡ Heb. ii. 17. § Heb. iv. 15. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 21, 24.

under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. Into this Church we are entered by baptism, which “representeth unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptised, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living.” Therefore, at our baptism, we promise to renounce the devil and all his works; the vain pomp and glory, with all covetous desires of the world; and the carnal desires of the flesh, so as not to follow nor be led by them:” But on the contrary, “obediently to keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life.” Therefore the church prays for the baptised person, “That the old Adam,” the body of sin “in him may be buried, and the new man raised up in him: That he may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh: That all carnal affections may die in him, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him:” And, that he being “endued with heavenly virtues, may be everlastingly rewarded through the mercy of God.” Therefore doth the Church teach us in her Catechism, that the inward and spiritual grace of baptism is a ‘death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; for being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace.’

It being, therefore, the state of our nature in this world, that makes temptations necessary for us; and the presence of the Holy Spirit of God being our only security against their prevailing over us, there are several duties which arise from it, and which most highly concern us.

1. Through the weakness of nature and the corrupt disposition of the heart, we have all erred and strayed from the ways of God, and have thereby added the guilt of our own personal misdeeds to the depravity of nature. Repentance, therefore, that is the conversion of the heart from evil, must be our first step; and this repentance must

be sincere and absolute. It must reach to the utter rejection of all evil propensities and desires, and to the turning of the will to the love and practice of every thing that is good. If we attend to those checks and restraints from evil which we certainly do and shall find in us; and comply with the motions to goodness and holiness, which the Spirit does put into our hearts, we shall find that *God's grace is sufficient for us*; and that *his strength is made perfect in our weakness*. But as the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce repentance, as well as every other grace and virtue, we must,

2. In the second place, apply earnestly and faithfully to God by constant prayer for the precious gift. Sensible of our need, and trusting in the intercession of our great High Priest and Advocate in heaven, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace," and make our humble supplications to Almighty God our heavenly Father, through the merit of his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, "that we may obtain mercy" for our sins, "and find grace to help in time of need,* when temptations and trouble press upon us; remembering that the blessed Saviour hath said, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"†

3. The same divine lips have declared, that "whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."‡ As we pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, we must be careful to follow his heavenly motions and inspirations, lest the gift of which we make no use, be taken from us. Not to comply with the motions of the Spirit, that is, with the good desires and dispositions that rise up in us, is to resist and quench him; and to turn from them towards that which is evil, is to grieve and drive him away.

4. Another great security against temptations is watchfulness: "Watch and pray," said Jesus to his disciples in the greatest extremity of his life, "that ye enter not into temptation."§ To our fervent prayers, therefore, to Al-

* Heb. iv. 16.

† Luke xi. 13.

‡ Luke viii. 18.

§ Matt. xxvi. 41.

mighty God, we must add steady attention to our own hearts, that we may perceive and repress all emotions to evil in their first rise, before they obtain the consent of the will, which makes them to be formally sinful.

The Christian life may be comprised in two words; namely, *penitence* and *faith*. By the former we forsake all sin and every thing that is evil. By the latter we resign ourselves up to God in all things; looking only to him, and relying solely upon him for every thing necessary for this life and the next. Whenever this shall be the state of our hearts we shall fully experience the goodness and faithfulness of God—that he “will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able.” Then, too, we shall be blessed with the full power of his Spirit; and “he will defend us under his wings, and we shall be safe under his feathers; his faithfulness and truth shall be our shield and buckler.”

DISCOURSE V.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CURE OF THE PARALYTIC MAN WHO WAS BROUGHT TO CHRIST.

MATT. ix. 2.

*Jesus seeing their faith, saith unto the sick of the palsy,
Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

BY comparing together the accounts which St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke* have given of the paralytic man to whom the text refers, we shall collect the following circumstances: That, returning from the country of the Gergesenes, Jesus came again to Capernaum, the place of his ordinary residence—that as soon as it was generally known he was returned home, such a multitude assembled as filled the house and crowded the door; and among the rest, a number of Pharisees and Doctors of the law—that he took the opportunity of such an assembly to preach the words of eternal life to them—that while he was preaching, a paralytic man was brought on a bed borne by four people, who, not being able to get through the crowd into the house, went upon the roof, and, opening a passage through the tiling, let him down on his bed into the room where Jesus was—that, seeing this instance of their faith, he said to the sick man, “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee”—that thereupon some of the Scribes said “within themselves, this man blasphemeth”—and that Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, demanded of them, why they accused him of blasphemy? whether it required greater, or a more divine power to forgive his sins, than to cure his disease by a word? But that ye may be convinced I have the power to forgive his sins, I say to thee, O sick man, “Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine

* Mark. ii. 5. Luke v. 18.

house"—that accordingly the man "arose and departed to his house;" and the people "marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men."

This, in few words, is the history of the transaction. My duty is to make such observations on it, as shall tend to confirm our faith, and regulate our practice.

1. The first observation relates to the Ministers and Preachers of the Gospel. They have in this conduct of their Master, an instance of his readiness to instruct all, in the will of God, who would give him an opportunity to do so. It was indeed the great desire of his heart—his meat and his drink—the pleasure of his life—"to do the will of him that sent him, and finish his work." For this end, he travelled through the cities of Judea, and taught and "preached the Gospel of the kingdom" of God; and "healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people." The desire of doing good, which actuated all his actions, excited him to embrace the opportunity of instructing the multitude, which crowded about him, upon his return from the country of the Gergesenes, by preaching the word to them.

Let this convince his Ministers, that every fair opportunity of giving instruction to those who are disposed to receive it, ought to be embraced; and that when such opportunities present themselves, it is their duty to lay hold on them, and to spread the knowledge, and declare the terms of salvation through Christ, and to persuade and entreat men to be reconciled to God through him. If they be sincere in their holy profession, this duty will be their pleasure; to it all their views and designs will be directed, and every thing else will be managed so as to promote it.

2. The second observation relates to the multitude which assembled to hear our Saviour's instructions. No sooner did the people of Capernaum know that Jesus was returned to their city, than they assembled about the house where he resided. They knew the goodness of his heart always disposed him to give instruction to those who would hear; and they doubted not of his doing so, at that time. Be their conduct our pattern; and let it teach us, that no

opportunity of hearing the words of eternal life from Christ's authorised ministers is to be neglected, but ought, on the contrary, to be sought for, and embraced with pleasure. By God's goodness, these opportunities are frequently presented to us in his holy Church; where we meet, as well to hear his Word, as to celebrate his praise and make our requests known unto him. Were our hearts rightly disposed, no trivial excuse would keep us away from the stated assemblies of the church. The sloth of the morning and indolence of the afternoon would no more assume the names of sickness and indisposition, to cover the shame of absence. Like the people of Capernaum, we should crowd even the door to join in adoration to our Almighty Creator, and receive the instructions he hath provided for us.

3. The third observation relates to the temper with which the people of Capernaum went to hear the instructions of Jesus. A multitude of hearers must have various dispositions. Some, probably, went because they were convinced he spake to them the words of eternal life, and pointed out the road to the favour and mercy of God; others because they loved to hear a good sermon—to have their imaginations delighted with lively images, and their ears with melodious accents. The former, no doubt, received instruction as well as delight; while the pleasure of the latter was, probably, much greater than their profit. If we may judge of the conduct of those people from observations made on the same class of hearers, at this period of the world, no rapture could exceed theirs. The sermon they undoubtedly extolled as the best they had ever heard—greatly exceeding their utmost expectation: And then, the Preacher—such music in his voice; such energy in his expression; such grace and dignity in his manner, as exceeded every thing of which they had any conception. To this encomium was probably added the resolution, that if he ever preached there again, they would certainly increase the number of his hearers. Here, in all likelihood, the matter ended—quiet and easy in their sins and vices, they sat down contented, and gave them-

selves, and expected that God also would give them great credit, because they had heard a good sermon.

If this be all such people get from a good sermon, they might as well not hear. They are, in truth, the very persons who "hearing hear not." A good sermon is a great blessing to those who improve it as they ought to do. Preaching is one of the means God hath appointed to instruct us in our duty; to confirm our faith; to enliven our hopes; to open our hearts to the impressions of his grace, and the motions of his Spirit within us; to call us to repentance, and build us up in piety and holiness. But if it answer none of these purposes; like other abused means of grace, it will harden the heart, and increase our condemnation. "Take heed therefore how ye hear."

The Scribes and Pharisees seem, on several occasions, to have attended Christ with very perverse dispositions—to watch his words, and try to find something on which their malice might fasten, and render him obnoxious to public authority, or lessen his influence with the people. Their accusing him in their hearts of blasphemy, because he said to the man sick of the palsy, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," makes it probable they came, at this time, with that malevolent intention. To such hearers a good sermon is a grievance. If the Preacher's voice and manner be agreeable, and they can fix no imputation of heresy or false doctrine on what he delivers, they will be disappointed, and displeased. In such cases, the too general practice is, where they cannot find faults, to make them—to catch at appearances, to misrepresent expression, and pervert every thing that can be perverted; and, at the same time, to cover their evil purposes with the greatest professions of liberality and candour.

It is a comfort that truth fears no watching, and malice commonly brings confusion on its own head; always torment to the heart infested with it. This was the issue in the case before us. The cure of the paralytic man with a word, excited universal admiration; and while it confounded the malicious Scribes and Pharisees, and obliged them to hold their peace, it loosed the tongues of the as-

sembly to ascribe praise and glory to God, who had given such power unto man.

4. The fourth observation relates to the great power and efficacy of faith. No conduct can show stronger faith than that of the persons who brought the paralytic man to Christ. The pains they took to bring him, and the manner of their conveying him into the house, show the utmost confidence in the power and goodness of Christ. They made no verbal application to him, for there needed none. He saw their faith—Their earnest desire, their reliance on his power, and trust in his goodness, appeared by what they had done. These circumstances, with the helpless condition of the poor man, pleaded with him beyond all words, and instantly called his benevolence into action.

He came to bear our infirmities, and to take our sins upon him. All our infirmities spring from sin: From the same source proceed all our sicknesses, diseases, and adversities. To the root of the evil the mercy of Jesus applied the remedy: "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."

From this circumstance let us learn, at least, this useful lesson: That spiritual blessings are to be preferred to temporal ones; the health of the soul before the health of the body; the forgiveness of sins before recovery even from a dead palsy: Always remembering, that Christ applied the balm of forgiveness to the soul of the paralytic man, before he healed his diseased body. And,

With regard to the power of faith in this matter, let us be cautious in ascribing any merit to it, as the cause of his forgiveness, or of healing his disease. Such is the weakness of human nature, that in quitting a false opinion, men seldom stop at the true medium, but run to the other extreme. From the Romish absurdity of the merit of Works, the common divinity seems to have passed to the Calvinistic absurdity of the merit of Faith. Whereas, neither our faith nor our works can have any merit in them with God, or be, in any sense, the cause of the forgiveness of our sins. In the text, it is not said, *because of their*

faith, or, *on account of their faith*, but “Jesus seeing their faith, said to the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Their “faith wrought with” their “works, and by works was faith made” manifest.* In this transaction, Christ saw a fair opportunity of making known his divine nature and Godhead; his wisdom embraced it, and conducted the miracle so as to answer all the purposes he intended by it.

Here, then, let us fix our foot even on the foundation which God’s word hath laid for us, and be content to show our faith by our works, without ascribing merit to either. Works are the trial and fruit of faith: without them our faith cannot appear unto men, nor bring glory to God; nor can we ourselves be certain of it. In reality it is no faith: Being alone it is dead; † and what is dead is of no avail.

5. The next observation I shall make from the text is, that the faith of others is sometimes of use to us in procuring the favour and blessing of God. Upon this ground it is we ask the prayers of good people, and of the church of God for us. If their faith can do us no good, their prayers can do us none, unless prayer without faith will prevail with God. One distinction is here necessary to be made; that where the party is capable of personal faith, and in circumstances to declare it, there it is required, together with the public profession of it.

It was our Saviour’s general custom to demand of those who came to be healed, Whether they believed? Whether they had faith in his power—that he was able to do that for them which they requested of him? He sometimes told them their faith had saved them—their faith had made them whole. At other times, he dismissed them with the declaration, “According to your faith be it unto you.” But where the party was, by immature age, by disease, or by distance disqualified for acting personally, the faith of others was accepted for him. ‡ The paralytic man, beyond all doubt, obtained forgiveness of his sins and health of body through the faith of those who brought him. No

* James ii. 22. † James ii. 17. ‡ See Matt. viii. 13. xv. 28. xviii. 6.

reason can be given why Christ did not inquire of him, as he commonly did of others, Whether he believed him able to do what was requested of him? but that he was unable to act for himself; possibly, unable to speak: And if we suppose him incapable of thinking, the supposition will not be unreasonable—a violent stroke of the palsy frequently affecting the faculties of the mind, as well as those of the body.

Upon the same ground does God sometimes remit, or postpone his judgments against wicked people and countries. Ten righteous persons would have saved Sodom from destruction: Lot was saved from that overthrow, on account of faithful Abraham: And the faith of Ahab in the declaration of God by Elijah, and his consequent penitence, though some have supposed it to have been mere hypocrisy, postponed the destruction God had denounced against him and his wicked house.

6. Another observation arising from the text is, that it affords a strong, and, to ingenuous minds, an irresistible argument of the Divinity of Christ. The argument, I confess, applies only to those who believe divine revelation, and the reality of miracles; and that they are a proof of a commission from God. This was the case of the Jews: To them, therefore, the argument *did* apply, and ought to have convinced them of the Divinity of the person by whom this miracle was wrought. It also applies directly to Christians, and ought to keep us stedfast in the faith, that Jesus is the Son of God, of the same Divine Nature with the Father.

If we attend to the process of the cure of the paralytic man, we shall have reason to suppose, that Christ conducted that miracle, with a particular view to make his Godhead appear to all who would fairly consider it. The uncommon way in which the man was brought to him—lying on a bed borne by four friends; and the singular method they took to get him into the house, must have attracted the notice of all who saw it. The scene was as open and public as could be. Among the spectators was a number of Pharisees and Doctors of the law—persons

of learning and observation, who probably came to watch him, and catch an opportunity to blast his reputation.

The cure of paralytic complaints by natural means, has always been so difficult and uncertain, that but few instances of recovery from a severe attack are to be found on the records of medicine. This man's disease seems to have been severe. It had deprived him of the use of his limbs; most probably also of the power of speech and of reflection. To restore a person in this situation to perfect health, in an instant; to send him, who the moment before was unable to move hand or foot, home to his house strong and hearty, and loaded with the bed on which he had been brought, with a word only—"Rise, take up thy bed, and depart to thine house," could be effected only by him who is the Lord of life and death, of sickness and health. Look through all nature; try all art; nothing short of his power who made the body, and informed it with a reasonable soul, could restore body and mind to perfect soundness, when so disordered. The power, then, which did so, must have been the power of God; and the person who could, in this case, command, and be obeyed, must be a divine person.

By the appointment of God, Moses wrought his miracles with his rod. Both he and the Prophets delivered their messages in the name of the Lord, prefacing all their declarations with, "Thus saith the Lord." The Apostles of our Lord preached and did miracles in *his* name, and in virtue of that power he conferred on them, when he said to them, "These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."* But Christ preached and wrought miracles in his own name. In his sermon on the mount, he delivered his precepts by his own authority—"I say unto you." Cleansing a leper, he said, "I will; be thou clean." To the Centurion who sought relief for his servant, he replied, "Go thy way;

* Mark xvi. 17, 18.

and, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." When he raised the daughter of Jairus to life, he took her by the hand, and said to her, "Maid arise." When he called Lazarus from the grave, it was with his own powerful voice, "Lazarus come forth." He named no power; he invoked no power; he appealed to no power but his own.

A circumstance so peculiar to him ought to have excited the attention of the Jews, and to have convinced them, that as he, in his own name, did such works as none but God could do, he must be a Divine Person—God in human nature. This circumstance they, however, overlooked. They saw his miracles, and wondered, and gave glory to God who had visited his people and raised up a mighty prophet among them: But more than a prophet they considered him not.

To turn their attention to this subject, and place it in such a point of view, that they could not miss to observe it, seems to have been one design of our Saviour in conducting the miracle of healing the paralytic man. Instead of making any experiment or inquiry about his faith, or applying himself to heal his disease according to the expectation of those who brought him; he declared to him the forgiveness of his sins without limitation or condition. This drew the attention of the Scribes and Pharisees. That none could forgive sins but God only, was a principle of their religion, as well as it is of ours. In their hearts they, therefore, accused him of blasphemy; because, being a man, he assumed the prerogative of God. They, however, kept their thoughts to themselves for the present, waiting probably for an opportunity to bring their charge, when they could do it to more effect. But though they kept their thoughts to themselves, they could not conceal them from him with whom they had to do. "Why reason ye," or "think evil in your hearts?" said he to them. How knew he, that they did reason, or think evil of him in their hearts? How knew he the evil which they thought? or the subject and conclusion of their reasoning? He could only know them, because he knew every thing, even the

secrets of the hearts of men. But to know the hearts, and search out the spirits of men, is the property of God only. It never did, nor can belong to any creature. He who breathed the soul into man, and he only, can know its thoughts and operations. So the Scribes and Pharisees ought to have reasoned; and to have concluded, that he who knew their thoughts was a Divine Person; he who possessed this incommunicable attribute of God must be God; and, of course, had the right to forgive sins. But through prejudice, they overlooked, or resisted both the argument and its consequence.

Our Redeemer then brought the matter to a short issue, addressing himself to them to this effect—‘In your hearts you accuse me of blasphemy, because I said to this man,’ “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” ‘But does it not require as great, and as truly a divine power, to restore him to health by a word, as it does to forgive his sins? Does one encroach more on the prerogative of God, than the other? I have said to him, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” That ye may know that I have this power, I will now, “with a word restore him to health and strength.” Then said he to the sick of the palsy, “Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.” He spake, and it was done. The man who could not move his limbs, arose at the instant. He who was brought on a bed, carried back the bed on which he had lain. He who had been borne by the strength of others, returned in full vigour—in vigour imparted by his God and Saviour. Light must have been his burden, when God supplied strength to bear it. Light, too, must have been his heart, when the absolution of God had removed its load of guilt.

This subject deserves the attention of the finest imagination and genius. The tongue of an Archangel would scarcely do it justice. Yet in the light in which my abilities have placed it, I dare trust it to the decision of all reasonable men, whether this miracle ought not to have convinced all who saw it, of the Divinity of Christ? That it failed to do so is no less true, than hard to reconcile with candour. Strange is the perversity of human nature.

Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the miracles which were wrought for his conviction and amendment. The miracles of Christ, though such as no mere man ever did; and the subsequent miracles of his apostles, though wrought in his name, had the same unhappy effect on the body of the Jewish nation: Intended for their conviction, they hardened them in their impiety. Pharaoh sinned against Moses the messenger of God: the Jews against Christ the Son of God. As their guilt exceeded his, more terrible was their destruction. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy judgments." We see in what they erred, and we know the destruction which swept them away. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges" and people "of the earth." "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way: When his wrath is kindled but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

7. The last observation I shall make from the text most nearly concerns us all, and I hope will make a deep and lasting impression on us: People who have a high notion of the rectitude of human nature, and of the all-sufficiency of human reason, may, if they please, treat it with ridicule: The pious Christian will feel its truth, and cordially embrace it: It is, that the poor paralytic man who was brought helpless to Christ, is the perfect emblem of human nature. As he was diseased in body, so are we all diseased in soul: To goodness as motionless, as he to bodily action. From nature he could get no relief; and from nature no relief can come to us. To a miracle of grace he owed his recovery; and where he found his cure, we too must find ours. In his distress, God's providence provided friends to carry him where only he could obtain help: Blessed be God, he hath provided means to lead us also to the arms of his mercy. His Word, his Providence, his Ministers, his Church, are the four supporting friends who convey us to Jesus the Saviour, and present us to the embraces of his love. This further advantage we also have—In our helpless state, he disdains not to come to us, by the influence of his grace, by the inspira-

tion of his Spirit, by the force of his mercy, by the merit of his sufferings. And O! that he could see our faith; that he could behold our penitence; that he could witness our earnest desire of his salvation. Then should we feel the power of those blessed words, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." And, till this be done; till the absolution of God, in the forgiveness of sins through the mediation of Jesus shall descend upon us, the palsy of our nature must still continue: Nothing else can give health and soundness to us. Nothing else can cure the broken spirit, or heal the contrite heart, or relieve the weary, famishing prodigal from his distress. "Come unto me," said Christ, "all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

We see then from whence our help must come. They who feel their malady, and wish to have it removed, will apply for relief; and they who apply in faith and penitence will surely find it in the mercy of God, and through the mediation of Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

DISCOURSE VI.

BLIND BARTIMEUS.

LUKE xviii. 42.

And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight, thy faith hath saved thee.

THIS is the answer which our Redeemer made to the blind man, who earnestly intreated of him the restoration of his sight. St. Mark gives the history of the same transaction, and nearly in the same words with St. Luke.* From the two accounts we learn, that as Jesus came from Jericho attended by his disciples, a multitude followed him. Blind Bartimeus, who sat by the road side to beg, hearing the noise of many people passing by, inquired the occasion of it. Being informed that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he cried out, *Jesus, thou son of David have mercy on me.* Some of the people desired him to be quiet, and make no disturbance; but, regardless of their admonition, he cried with greater earnestness, *Thou son of David have mercy on me.* The compassionate heart of Jesus was affected. He stopped, and ordering him to be called, demanded of him, *What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?* He replied, *Lord that I may receive my sight.* *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: Thy faith hath saved thee:* Or, as St. Mark expresses it, *Thy faith hath made thee whole.*

The proper inquiry here to be made is, By what virtue did this man's faith procure sight to his blind eyes? Was it by its own power and energy? Or, by calling forth the miraculous power and energy of Jesus to operate upon his blindness, and pour the light of day upon his darkness?

* Mark x. 46.

Bartimeus had undoubtedly heard of the miracles of Jesus, and believed that he could cure the blindness of his eyes. He had heard and believed that Jesus was good and gracious, and would not drive from him a distressed object who implored his help. But Bartimeus was blind and could not direct his own steps. His very disease prevented him from applying where only he hoped to find relief. God's providence befriended him—Jesus, whom he wished for, passed by. He no sooner heard it, but his faith burst forth into action—'My relief is at hand—I shall now obtain my wish—I shall receive my sight'—*"Thou son of David have mercy on me."* Here was a proper object for the power and benevolence of Jesus. *"Receive thy sight"* was the gracious answer. The light broke in upon his eyes, and *"he followed him, glorifying God."*

Bartimeus, in his blindness, is the very picture of human nature: God grant that his conduct may be our pattern. Blind from disease, he was incapable of directing his own steps to obtain that happiness which he longed to enjoy. And which of us can direct his own steps in the way to that happiness which we seek? How often, how generally do we mistake in our choice, and place our happiness in that which cannot profit, and seek it where it cannot be found? pursuing shadows instead of substance; phantoms instead of reality? For what better does that man, who places his happiness in worldly enjoyments, and seeks it in this life? What better does the covetous man who thinks to be happy by possessing much? and that he may possess much, spends little, even on himself: To whom the precepts and demands of benevolence and liberality are like swords and daggers that pierce his heart: Who must of course fall under every temptation of injustice, knavery, and meanness, that he may increase his possessions. He cannot be happy, for he cannot be satisfied. He still thinks himself poor, and however fast his hoards increase, his covetousness increases faster, and like the grave, cries incessantly, *"give, give."** The God of

* *Prov. xxx. 15.*

this world hath blinded his mind,* and he sees not, that worldly wealth is incapable of giving happiness to an immortal spirit.

Nor does he who pursues the opposite course of prodigality and licentious pleasure, provide any better for rational happiness. Nature hath laid a bar in the way: By limiting our capacity she has limited our enjoyment. For we are so made and so circumstanced in this world, that misery and not happiness is the consequence of unlimited indulgence.

The palled appetite turns with loathing from the repetition of a voluptuous entertainment, till time and abstinence have renewed its craving. Every sensual enjoyment, frequently repeated or immoderately indulged, produces disgust and not pleasure; debases the mind, and enervates the body; and, if long continued, is certainly succeeded by a premature old age, accompanied with painful reflections or sottish stupidity. He, therefore, that pursueth pleasure, is blind to his own happiness. He goeth to destruction, "as an ox goeth to the slaughter,"† and thinketh not, till misery striketh through him like a dart.

Grandeur and ambition seem to be as little calculated to ensure happiness, as either riches or pleasure. Duty requires that a man should live according to his income and station: Otherwise he defrauds the labourer and artificer of his employ; and by lessening the apparent dignity of his station, he weakens its real influence and usefulness. But sumptuous buildings and rich furniture can add nothing to the happiness of life, nor give pleasure to any but weak minds. Food relishes as highly in a cottage as in a palace; and the sleep of the servant is as sweet and refreshing, as that of his lord. How the mind fares in this state, none can tell but they who have made the trial. The corrodings of envy, and the mortification of disappointments, seem peculiarly attached to this condition of life. Such persons either do not, or fear they shall not receive that court and homage they pant to enjoy. And

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

† Prov. vii. 22, 23.

can that state be happy, whose enjoyments depend on the submissive behaviour of other people?

When Haman wished to enjoy the highest state of pomp and glory, he could think of nothing better than a royal robe and diadem; to be led through the streets, mounted upon the king's horse; and have it proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."* We think this an instance of Haman's folly. Let human wisdom, then, try to do better, and she will find no reason to condemn Haman. Every effort of this kind will confirm the sentence of king Solomon; that the highest state of worldly riches, pleasure, and grandeur, "is vanity and vexation of spirit."† It is true, this desire of wealth, and pleasure, and magnificence, shows the original dignity of the human soul, and is a convincing proof that it has capacities too large for this world to fill.

How comes it, then, that we do not extend our view beyond this world, and look forward to the substantial riches of the kingdom of God; to the pleasures that flow at his right hand, and to the magnificence of the New Jerusalem? How, but because sin and folly have blinded the eyes of our mind, have weakened and perverted our reason and understanding, and levelled the dignity of our nature with the beasts of the earth? Insomuch, that when light enough breaks in upon us to convince us of the insufficiency of all worldly possessions and enjoyments, and to excite us to look forward to another world, we are utterly unable to direct our own steps in the way, or to pursue the path which we know leadeth to eternal life and happiness. At every step we hesitate, and stumble, and fall. Folly beguiles us, passion and appetite enslave us, and weakness leaves us a prey to every temptation. And why does this happen? How comes it that man either knows not the road to his own happiness, or is unable to pursue it? Because man is not as God made him: "For God made man upright"‡ without any perversity in his will or understanding; but "they have sought out many inventions"—They have sinned against their Maker, by

* Esth. vi.

† Eccl. ii.

‡ Eccl. vii. 29.

forsaking his law, and following their own imaginations. Having broke loose from restraint, they will not return. Seeing what is right, they follow what is wrong. Knowing the good, they chuse the evil? Neglecting the riches, and glory, and happiness of heaven, they will seek for riches, and glory, and happiness where they are not to be found. Daily disappointed, they daily repeat the search; and "groping" for happiness "at noon-day, as the blind gropeth in darkness," they "stumble as in the night," and "fall like dead men," and yet eagerly renew the pursuit.*

Better to imitate blind Bartimeus, and sit patiently by the way-side begging relief, than to travel on in the road to destruction. His blindness prevented him from going to Jesus, who alone could heal him; and God's providence brought Jesus to him. And has not God's merciful providence brought Jesus to us also? to open the eyes of our minds by the light of his Holy Spirit? "to bless us by turning every one away from his iniquities?"† and to save us from sin and misery by the merit of his own death? Bartimeus could not see his Saviour, for he was blind, but he heard he was passing by. We cannot see him now with our bodily eyes, for he is in heaven; but we have heard of his sojourning in human flesh, and of the wonderful things he did, and suffered for our salvation. The faith of this blind man excited and enabled him to cry out with confidence, *Son of David have mercy on me.* May God inspire us with the same earnest faith, and enable us to "cry mightily unto him,"‡ to be made partakers of all the blessings of redeeming love! Jesus stopped and ordered the blind man to be brought unto him! "Be of good comfort," said they that stood by; "rise, he calleth thee!"§ Be ye all of good comfort too, for he calleth you also. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."|| "Lord, that I may receive my sight," was the ardent prayer of the poor beggar. "Receive thy sight," said the merciful Saviour, and with rapture he beheld the sun, and glorified God.

Deliverance from the power of sin, and from the ma-

* Isa lix. 10. † Acts iii. 29. ‡ Jonah iii. 8. § Mark x. 49. || Matt. xi. 28.

lice of satan, from evil lusts and tempers, from wicked habits, and from everlasting death, should be the fervent prayer of our hearts: And the prayer of faith will not return empty. The compassion of Jesus will be excited; and, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls,"* will be the gracious reply. Rest from the slavery of sin, from the tyranny of satan, from the sting of guilt, from the dominion of lust and passion, from malignant tempers, from anxious care, from the vanities of the world, from the dread of death, and from the terrors of a future judgment.

Whatever reason Bartimeus had to give glory to God for his mercy, we have more. He was delivered from blindness, and enabled to behold the wonders of creation, to rejoice in the splendour of the light, and to find his way upon all occasions. We are delivered from blindness of heart and mind, and from the error of sin; are enabled to behold the wonders of redemption, to rejoice in the mercy of God, the love of Christ, and the grace of the Holy Ghost; by the light of divine truth, to contemplate the glories of the invisible world, the "things which God has prepared for them that love him;" such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which the heart of man cannot conceive."†

But let us ever remember the words of Christ to the blind man; "Thy faith hath made thee whole; thy faith hath saved thee."‡ Not that his faith had any virtue or efficacy to cure his blindness; but it assured him of relief, and excited him to apply with such confidence of hope, and earnestness of desire, as always find acceptance with God. And as it made him a fit object for mercy, so it called forth the miraculous power of Jesus to heal him. Let him then be our pattern. In him we see how ready the blessed Saviour is to be found of those who seek him; to attend to those who call upon him; to present himself to those who cannot come to him; to help those who rely upon him; to heal those who trust in him. If we wish

* Matt. xi. 29.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

‡ Mark x. 52.

to receive the blessings of his mediation, our faith must do for us, what this blind man's faith did for him: it must excite us to cry to the Son of David, the Saviour of sinners, to have mercy upon us. And he will hear the prayer of faith, and regard the humble desires of the penitent heart: For "he loved us, and gave himself for us,"* and is "able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."†

So great was the desire of this poor man to be freed from the darkness which involved him, that when our Redeemer called him, he instantly obeyed. He stayed not even to wrap his weeds about him, but casting them away, obeyed the joyful summons. If we have the same earnest desire to be cured of our spiritual blindness; to be delivered from the power of sin and the sting of guilt, from the delusion of error and vice, and the dominion of passion and appetite, we shall do as he did; cast off every incumbrance, especially "those sins that easily beset us,"‡ and fly to him for deliverance and health. We shall be as ready to part with every vice and wicked habit, with every sinful affection and temper, with every unlawful pleasure and gratification, as he was to abandon his worthless raiment.

Let this then be the test of our faith, and let us fairly try ourselves by it. When God calls us by the admonitions of conscience, by the motions of his spirit, by the dispensations of his providence, by the preaching of his ministers; are we ready to give up the sinful habits and tempers, the worldly views, and evil indulgences, which we find reprov'd and condemn'd of God! If not, we want that faith in God, and that earnest desire of spiritual health and salvation, which influenced the conduct of blind Bartimeus; and which must influence the conduct of every person who hopes to partake of the benefits of redeeming love.

He that cometh to Christ must be ready to forsake father, and mother, and wife, and children—even all he hath, his own life also, if they come in competition with

* Gal. ii. 20.

† Heb. vii. 25.

‡ Heb. xii. 1.

his duty.* How much more must he abandon sin, and vice, and error; evil affections, and tempers, and passions, covetousness and the love of the world; the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.† These things are enmity against God, and cannot be reconciled to him, either in this world, or in the next. He hath told us so; and if we will not believe his word, nor regard his warning, we must abide his judgment, and endure his wrath.

If, on the contrary, we suffer ourselves to obey the calls of God, to return to him by patience and faith; putting iniquity away from us, and relying upon his mercy; we shall as surely find redemption from misery, and health to our souls, as Bartimeus found sight to his blind eyes: For “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”‡

Let us, then, renouncing the spirit of the world, the concupiscence of the flesh, and the inspirations of satan, attend to the impressions of goodness which we find upon us; for they are the motions of the Spirit of God in us; and if we willingly follow, he will lead us into all truth in believing, and all holiness of living. Light will break in upon the darkness of our mind, and strength succeed to the weakness of nature. Faith will lead us to obey God and trust in him. Love will constrain us to practise all the duties of justice and charity; and purity of heart will shew itself in temperance and sobriety of life. We shall die in hope, and rise to glory and immortality.

* Luke xiv. 26. † Rom. viii. 7. James iv. 4. ‡ 1 John i. 9.

DISCOURSE VII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF HAVING EYES THAT SEE AND
EARS THAT HEAR.

MATT. xiii. 16.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.

TO come at the true meaning of these words, it will be necessary to consider the occasion on which they were spoken, and to compare them with similar expressions in Holy Scripture.

Our Saviour having spoken the parable of the sower to the multitude that attended his preaching, his disciples were embarrassed with regard to its meaning, and asked, why he chose to speak to the people in parables, rather than in plain and familiar language? the former being hard to be understood, and liable to misconstruction; the latter easily intelligible, and not subject to misinterpretation. He answered, that he had no intention to conceal his meaning from them; nor from any who, like them, were ready to hear and to obey. *To such*, said he, “it is given”—it is permitted, allowed—“to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”—to have them explained so as to be understood by them. But to the multitude—the bulk of the Jewish nation—“it is not given.” They have stopped their ears, and shut their eyes, and hardened their hearts against the truth, and have thereby rendered themselves incapable of plain instruction. To them, therefore, the mysteries, or abstruser doctrines of the kingdom of heaven, are not explained in an open and familiar manner. “For whosoever hath”—whosoever improves the means of instruction and holy living which God hath put in his power—“to him shall be given, and he shall

have more abundance"—God will increase the means of his knowledge, will open his heart and enlarge his understanding, that he may comprehend the revelation of his will, as far, at least, as his duty is concerned. "But whosoever hath not"—whosoever makes no proper use of the knowledge, understanding, and opportunities of instruction which he hath, and therefore is as though he had them not—"from him shall be taken away even that he hath," but hath without profit or advantage to himself.

The reason, therefore, why our Saviour spake to the Jews in parables, was not that he affected dark expressions, hard to be understood; but because, through their obstinacy and perverseness, they had rendered themselves incapable of profiting by his instructions, had they been ever so plainly delivered. The experiment, in fact, had been made, and the issue was unfavourable. Soon after he entered on his public ministry, he read and expounded a passage of the prophet Isaiah, in the synagogue at Nazareth—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."* When he told them, that the Scripture he had read was that day fulfilled in him, though they acknowledged and admired "the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," their prejudices were immediately excited—Does this man pretend that the prophecy he hath read is fulfilled in him? Who is he? "Is not this Joseph's son," the carpenter? What arrogance to assume so much to himself! However illiberal this conduct was, it excited no resentment in the meek and lowly Jesus. But unreasonable prejudices always hurt the persons who entertain them. To discountenance them, is right; to endeavour to remove them, is kind; and kindness, and a regard to that which is right, excited Christ to attempt it.

The Jews had long considered themselves as the pecu-

* Luke iv. 16, &c.

liar people of God. They claimed, and to them pertained "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises:" Theirs were "the fathers," and of them, "as concerning the flesh," Messiah or Christ was to come.* These privileges they considered as their birth-right, and could not endure that other nations should share in them. The Scripture which Christ had expounded of himself was general, and contained a commission to extend the blessing of Messiah to the poor, broken-hearted, blind, bruised captives of Satan in every nation and country. That this was the design of Almighty God, he had intimated to them, and their passions were alarmed. They expected that Messiah would conquer and subject all nations to their dominion: In that sense they would have allowed, he might be a blessing to the world. But, how could Joseph's son be Messiah? How could he subdue all nations by preaching glad tidings to poor, blind, miserable, broken-hearted objects?

It is the property of goodness, not to be weary in the works of benevolence; of mercy, to be long suffering. One step more the holy Jesus took to calm the passions and abate the prejudices of these unhappy people, and addressed them to the following purpose:—You think all the blessings of Messiah are to be confined to you: But remember, God hath promised him for a blessing to all the families of the earth: To you primarily and particularly, unless you reject the gracious purpose of God towards you. If you do, others will readily receive the glad tidings which you refuse. For however you may construe the promises of God, and appropriate them exclusively to yourselves; he hath, in fact, sometimes passed you over, and employed even his miraculous power for the relief of persons of other nations, in preference to you. In the time of Elijah, when there was no rain for three years and six months, and great famine prevailed: though there were many widows in Israel who wanted support, the prophet was not sent to one of them, but to

* Rom. ix. 4, 5

a widow woman of Sarepta, a city of Sidon. And though there were many lepers in Israel, in the days of Elisha, none of them were cleansed by him: that blessing was conferred on Naaman the Syrian only. When they heard this, they were filled with wrath, and tumultuously forced him out of the city; intending to throw him headlong from the precipice on which it was built.

From this transaction it is plain, that the generality of the Jews would not have borne to have had the great revolutions in their government and religion, which were then impending, declared in plain language. Necessity, and not choice, therefore, carried Christ into the parabolical method of teaching; and that method he seems constantly to have used, in his public discourses, ever after. In kindness to them he forebore plain declarations; and in apt similitudes represented the approaching destruction of their city, the dissolution of their civil and religious polity, the progress his religion would make in the world, notwithstanding their strong opposition, and the calling in of the nations of the world to partake of the promises which they rejected. While they were attending to a parable, their prejudices were quiet, their passions asleep, and the danger of exciting resentment was much lessened by the time and reflection it took to ascertain its meaning.

This reason our Lord gives of his conduct, "Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand." These seem to have been proverbial expressions, by which the Jews reproached the inconsiderate and slothful, who neglected to act according to their knowledge and belief. And because they had, through prejudice, worldly views, and attachment to their sins, wilfully shut their eyes against that light which was intended to lighten, not them only, but "every man that cometh into the world," and stopped their ears against his instructions who had "the words of eternal life," he declares the prophecy of Isaiah to be fulfilled in them, which saith, "By hearing ye shall hear; and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed

gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”* Then followeth the text, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.”

Having now considered these words, and shewn their connection with the context, we will endeavour to ascertain their meaning, by comparing them with similar expressions in Holy Scripture.

The phrase of having eyes and not seeing, and ears and not hearing, is common among the prophets. We will first attend to Jeremiah, who addresseth his countrymen in this manner: “O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes and see not, which have ears and hear not.”† The reason of this sharp rebuke soon follows; they feared not the Lord, but had “a revolting and rebellious heart;” had “revolted and gone:” that is, they obstinately continued in their transgressions, uninformed by instruction, unreclaimed by reproof and correction—“Among my people,” said God, “are found wicked men—As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit.” Not less than ten times doth God expostulate with his people by the mouth of this prophet, reproaching them for their perverseness in refusing the instructions and admonitions of the messengers he had sent among them, “rising up early and sending them; but they would not hear, they would not hearken, they would not incline their ear.” They had perversely shut their eyes and stopped their ears, and resolved, in opposition to all they saw and heard, to continue in their own way. Therefore are they described as having eyes and ears that could neither see nor hear.‡

I shall content myself with citing one passage more on this subject, and that shall be taken from the prophet Ezekiel, to whom God saith, “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see,

* Matt. xiii. 14, 15. from Isa. vi. 9, 10.

† Jerem. v. 21.

‡ See Jerem. vii. 13. xxv. 3, 4. xxvi. 5. xxix. 19. xxxv. 14, 15. xli. 4.

and see not ; they have ears to hear, and hear not ; for they are a rebellious house.* So that rebellion against God in refusing to be governed by his laws, and to receive his instructions and reproofs by his prophets and ministers, is the true meaning of the phrase of having *eyes and not seeing, and ears and not hearing.*

Thus it fared with the old prophets. And when God sent his Son into the world, having none greater by whom to send, and because all other messengers had proved ineffectual, he found the same temper among his countrymen. He came not only to make expiation for our sins by his death, but also to found a spiritual kingdom of peace and holiness, of grace, and mercy, and truth. When he began to publish his commission, to explain the nature of the kingdom he was about to establish, and to invite men to come into it by repentance and faith, that they might be trained up for eternal life, the Jews shewed the same perversity of temper, the same obstinacy of heart, the same attachment to the world, the same prejudice and resentment against him for attempting to reform them, which the old prophets had experienced from their fathers. That he should, under these circumstances, speak of them in the terms the prophets had used, That they *had eyes and saw not, and ears and heard not*, was not strange, especially as those terms were well understood by those who heard him. And when he found that their perverseness, and attachment to their prejudices and vices, would not bear plain and open declarations concerning the nature of his kingdom, it was an instance of humility and kindness in him, to deliver those truths in expressions which were figurative, and something obscure, which their prepossessions and passions would not permit them to receive in a plain and familiar dress.

The audiences to which our Saviour spake were mixed. The love of truth brought some to hear him ; curiosity others ; while not a few came that they might watch his words, and find occasion for censure. Against these last, the parabolical way of speaking was a good guard, and,

* Ezek. xii. 2

at the same time, afforded free scope for instruction and reproof. By it the curious were gratified; and while their attention was engaged, and their ears were delighted, their minds oftentimes were informed, and their hearts made better. And the diligent hearer, and candid inquirer after truth, found his parables capable of an easy interpretation, and full of the most excellent and instructive meaning.

What our Lord intended principally to reprove, was the rebellious temper of the Jews against Almighty God, manifested by their disregarding *his* instructions and reproofs. This appears by his applying to them the aforesaid prophecy of Isaiah, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand," &c. The passage of Isaiah to which this refers, is evidently intended to declare God's giving up his people to the consequences of that dulness and deadness of heart, which they had brought on themselves by their obstinate continuance in those sins which his prophets were sent to reprove; and to desolation and destruction, as a punishment for their rebellion and idolatry, in which they had persisted, notwithstanding his repeated calls to repentance: but they *would* not hear, they *would* not see, they *would* not understand. Therefore they were to lie under the curse of seeing without perceiving, of hearing and not understanding, until their cities were "wasted without inhabitant," and their "houses without man," and their "land" was "utterly desolate."*

When it is said, "This people's heart is waxed gross," &c. or, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy," &c. we are not to suppose that God brings on people an incapacity, or inability to receive divine truth, and to attend to his admonitions and threats. They declare the state into which wicked people have brought themselves, by their vices and lusts. Having eyes, they will not see the fatal tendency of sin and error: Having ears, they will not hear the calls of God's Spirit within them, nor of his word and ministers, to repentance and amendment of life. They "hate to be reformed,"

* Isa. vi, 9-11.

and persist in their impenitency till they become incapable of repenting at all. Then will God "pluck them away," and there shall be "none to deliver them."*

On account of this temper—because they shut their eyes, and stopped their ears, and hardened their hearts against reproof, God gave up the old Jews to desolation and destruction. Christ, finding the same rebellious, obstinate, perverse temper in the Jews of his time, seeing them shut their eyes against the evidence of his miracles, and stop their ears against his instructions, and harden their hearts against his reproofs and calls to repentance, warned them, that they would bring the same curse and judgments on themselves, which came upon their progenitors: Though they had eyes and ears—capacity and ability to do it—they would not see, nor understand the things that belonged to their peace, till they should be hid from their eyes; that is, till they had rendered themselves incapable of perceiving them; and then their city and temple would so entirely be given up to destruction, that not one stone should be left upon another.

Of this kind, but dreadful warning, they took no notice, but going on in their hardness and impenitency, they filled up the measure of their iniquity by crucifying the Lord of Glory. Still God waited forty years for their amendment: but this space they abused, and converted their day of grace into a season of persecuting the Church of God. At length his judgments came upon them like a flood. That dreadful scourge which God had provided for the wicked inhabitants of the earth, the Roman power, wasted their country, besieged, and took, and destroyed their city; many of them were crucified, near a million were sold into slavery, and the residue were banished from Judea, under the penalty of death if they ever returned. God thus visiting on the impenitent children, the innocent blood which their fathers, when they demanded Christ to be crucified, had audaciously imprecated on themselves and their posterity.

In this dreadful state of dispersion over the whole world,

* Psalm l. 17, 22

and in the more dreadful state of dereliction of God, having eyes that see not, and ears that hear not, and hearts that understand not the things that belong to their peace, do they still continue: And thus must they continue till the purpose of God is completed; till the measure of their punishment, like the measure of their iniquity, being full and running over, they shall comply with the overtures of divine mercy, and acknowledge for their God and Saviour the Lord and Giver of life, whom their fathers condemned, and delivered up to be slain. Having, as a standing miracle to the world, to prove the truth of God's threats, the justice of his judgments, the superintendency of his providence, fulfilled the time of their punishment, they shall become a miracle of divine grace, and, by their conversion, bring in the fulness of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ, and make, with them, one sheep-fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

If the true exposition of the expression, *having eyes and not seeing, and ears and not hearing*, hath been given, it will be no difficult matter to ascertain our Saviour's meaning when he saith to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." The conduct of his disciples was different from that of the bulk of their nation. In their notions of Messiah they were, it is true, mistaken. In common with their countrymen, they expected a temporal deliverer, who would lead them to victory and triumph. But they shewed not that obstinacy of temper which generally pervaded the Jewish nation. They had no attachment to error and vice which hindered them from understanding the things of the kingdom of God. They gave up all they had in this world, and followed Christ, being determined to abide by him, and take their portion with him, whatever it might be. They were convinced by the miracles they saw, and the doctrines they heard, that he was Messiah; and on all occasions showed a ready disposition to obey his will and conform to his instructions—"Thou art the Christ," said Peter to him on a particular occasion, "the Son of the living God." When some who had set out to follow him.

were offended at the purity he required, and went away and walked no more with him; the disciples remained firm in their resolution to abide by him—"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life: And we believe and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This, it is true, might, at first, have been done from worldly considerations; but their prejudices in favour of the temporal nature of Messiah's kingdom gradually declined. The example and instructions of their Master furnished them with new and just notions of his kingdom; and they, at last, came to understand, and prize, and seek those spiritual blessings which can be had only through him, and which exceed all the pomp, and power, and victories, and triumphs of the world.

The reason, therefore, why their eyes and ears are pronounced *blessed*, is, because they saw and believed, that Jesus was Messiah, and received his instructions as the words of eternal life: because Christ saw them to be of an honest disposition, ready to learn and to obey the will of God—like little children, of teachable and candid minds, disposed to receive instruction, and to "understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." To them, and to all like them, the parables of Christ were explained, and the mysteries of his kingdom laid open. They, having eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand, did attend to the doctrines and instructions of the Son of God, which, like good seed on good ground, took deep root, and sprang up, and grew, and bore fruit, some thirty fold, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

Blessed indeed were their eyes which saw the Son of God in human nature, and beheld the wonders he did for the children of men! Blessed were their ears which heard his heavenly doctrines, and listened to the divine instructions of his mouth! But beyond comparison were they blessed, who, having heard his word, kept it; who in simplicity of heart obeyed his call, and left not only their worldly possessions, but their worldly tempers, and evil habits, and errors, and vices, that they might listen to him who had the words of eternal life, hear the mysteries of

his kingdom explained, and be made partakers of the "good word of God, and the powers of the world to come."*

I have hitherto endeavoured to illustrate the text, by considering the conduct of those Jews who rejected Christ, and of those others who received him in simplicity of heart. To discover the errors of others, and see on what rock they suffered shipwreck, will not only be a warning to us, but may enable us to avoid their danger. And to see by what means the eminent servants of God overcame the world, and obtained the prize of their high calling, will excite our endeavours to imitate their faith and holiness, that we may, with them, partake of the precious gift of eternal life.

When you reflect on the conduct of those Jews who rejected Christ and accomplished his death, your indignation is moved against them; you are amazed at their perverseness and obstinacy. Had you been in their place, you imagine, you should have acted very differently. To have heard the gospel preached by Christ himself; to have seen his gracious mouth opened, and holy hands raised to dispense instruction and blessing to mankind, would have affected you so deeply, that nothing could have hindered you from embracing his gospel with your whole heart.—Take heed, lest in condemning them, you condemn yourselves.

What prevented the Jews from doing that which you suppose you should have done, had you been in their place? They wanted not the strongest means of conviction. Miracles were wrought, and prophecies fulfilled before their eyes. The most heavenly doctrines were preached to them, and in the most engaging manner. The brightest, and most perfect example of holy living was exhibited to their view, by the same person who wrought the miracles, fulfilled the prophecies, and taught those pure and sublime truths: and yet they rejected him. Would you know the reason? Christ hath told you, it was "because their deeds were evil;" because they loved their

* Heb. vi. 5.

sins, and were resolved not to part from them. They, therefore, came not to the light of divine truth, lest their deeds being discovered to be evil, they should be made uneasy by reproof and conviction.

In this case be your own judges: only, for your own sakes, judge righteous judgment. If you also love your sins and evil habits, so as to be unwilling to give them up, and embrace the holiness and purity of the gospel, in what are you better than those Jews were? If you reject Christ preaching to you by his Spirit, his Word, his Ministers—putting into your hearts good desires, exciting you to repentance and amendment of life; if you refuse the order, and government, and discipline of his Church, his sacraments and laws; you do reject him as certainly, as entirely, as wickedly as ever the Jews did, though you have not rejected him preaching to you in the flesh. Say not that you believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Saviour of the world, while you love your sins, the works of the devil which he came to destroy. Pretend not to be his disciples, if you renounce the authority of his Church, the obligation of his sacraments, the preaching of his word, the administration of his ministers.

Can it be supposed, that Christ came into the world, and did, and suffered what is recorded of him, to call men to the mere outward profession of his religion? barely to take the Christian name upon them? No; it was to call them from sin to holiness, from the power of satan unto God; to kill and destroy sin in them; to make them pure in temper and disposition, in mind and thought, that they might be capable of happiness with God.

Let not the man, therefore, who loves his sins, and refuses to forsake them; who disregards the holiness and virtue which the gospel requires, think, that he is in any respect better than the Jews were. Had he lived in their time, he would have done as they did. And he lies under the same curse that was inflicted on them, having eyes that see not, and ears that hear not, and a heart that understands not. From this curse nothing can deliver him but repentance, or conversion of the heart to God—giv-

ing himself up to be ordered and governed by the Holy Spirit, who is constantly calling him to repentance, by the checks of conscience, and by the inspirations of holiness, inviting him to return to the ways of God from which he hath erred and strayed by his evil deeds. Then, "though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be like wool"—washed in the "fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness," even the precious blood of the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."*

Often, and affectionately did the Redeemer invite those to whom he preached to repentance and amendment, that they might receive the forgiveness of God—proclaiming mercy to the penitent, and warning the impenitent of the sure destruction which would overtake the hardened offender. And when all his invitations and admonitions were ineffectual, knowing that in crucifying him they would fill up the measure of their iniquity, and become ripe for the judgments of God, tenderly did he lament the approaching calamities of his country. Going in his humble triumph into Jerusalem, and knowing that all things written of him in the Prophets and in the Psalms were about to be accomplished, when he came within view of the city, he beheld it and wept over it. Pronouncing the dreadful doom which devoted it to the fury of its enemies, who were to lay it, and its inhabitants even with the ground, not leaving one stone upon another, his heart melted with pity, and his last words were words of sympathetic condolence—"If thou hadst known, even thou," O Jerusalem, "at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes," and hid, "because thou knewest not"—because thou didst not consider and improve "the time of thy visitation."

The day of God's grace and merciful visitation was not confined to the Jews; it was extended to the rest of the world; it hath come even to us, giving "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus

* Isa. i. 18. Zech. xiii. 1. John i. 29

Christ,"* and making known eternal life, through him, to lost and miserable man. He hath proclaimed, "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation: Receive not, therefore, the grace of God in vain."†

The punishment which the Jews suffered, ought to be our admonition not to sin after their example of unbelief; and the obstinacy of heart which they showed should caution us, not to harden our hearts through the deceitfulness of sin, lest God should "swear in his wrath, Ye shall not enter into my rest."‡ For the same self-denial, and renunciation of the world, and of evil habits, and wicked tempers and passions, which were necessary in the time of Christ's personal ministry to qualify men to be his disciples, are necessary now. That teachable disposition which then enabled them to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God, must enable us to receive instruction in the same divine science. And the blessings of Christ's redemption must be received by us in the same way of lively faith and holy obedience, in which they received them, who heard his personal preaching.

Examine yourselves, therefore, whether your hearts are, in these respects, right with God? whether you do attend to his word, the doctrines of the Gospel of Christ, with ears that hear, and with hearts that understand; that is, with minds free from the bias of worldly views, and party attachments, and evil habits? If you do, blessed are your eyes and ears: With the holy apostles and followers of Christ, "to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." By the illumination of the Spirit of God, you will discover the "hidden things of his law," and will have your "senses exercised to discern both good and evil."§ By his heavenly influence you will also choose that which is good, and avoid what is evil; and will grow in grace and knowledge, in faith and holiness to the end of your lives. Then shall you receive, with the apostles and faithful servants of God, your portion in that place

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

† vi. 1, 2.

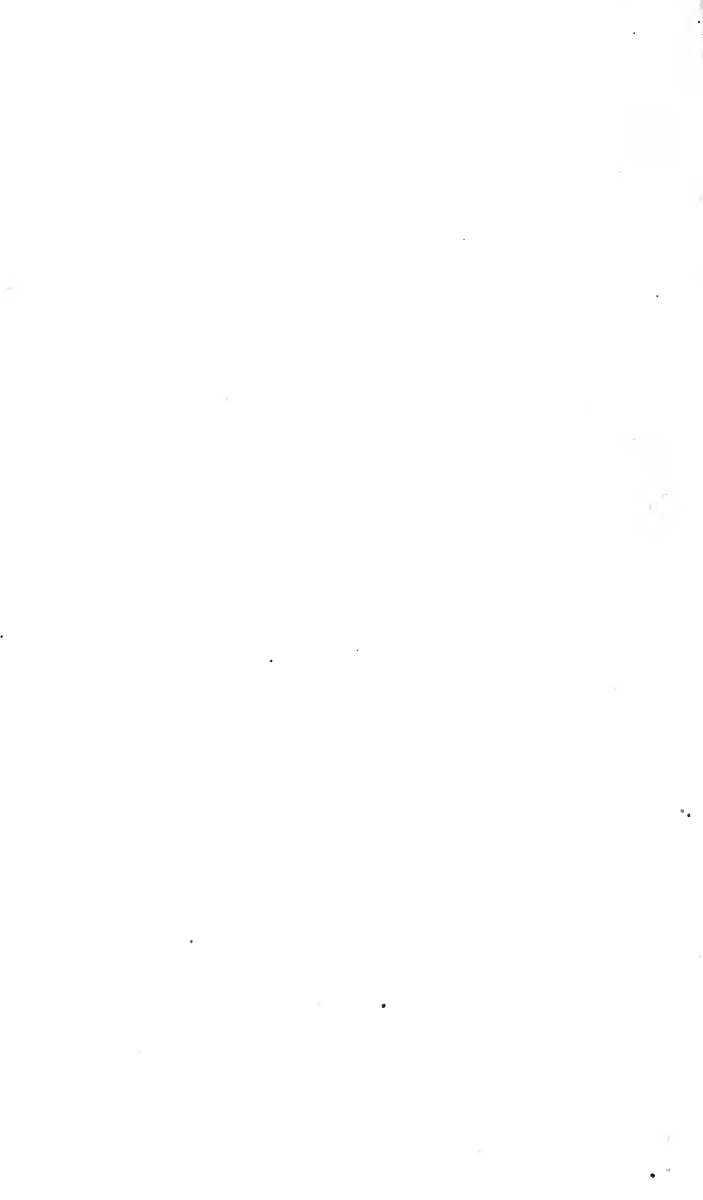
‡ Heb. iii. 8, &c.

§ Heb. v. 14.

which Christ hath prepared for those who love and obey him.

On the contrary ; if you are attached to schemes of ambition and covetousness, which you do not choose to relinquish ; to habits of vice, which you are not disposed to abandon ; to your own system of religious opinions, by which, right or wrong, you are determined to abide, know that you are in the same state with those Jews of whom Christ said, they had eyes which saw not, and ears which heard not, and hearts which understood not ; and unless you repent, like them you will suffer the judgments of God ; possibly not temporal destruction, but what is infinitely worse, “ everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”*

Consider these things ; and may God, who is rich in mercy, make the hours of your consideration conducive to your soul's health. May he pour upon you the abundance of his grace ; give you those blessed eyes which see, ears which hear, and hearts which understand ; that you may perceive, and pursue the things which belong to your everlasting peace ; through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*



DISCOURSE VIII.

PART I.

THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

I JOHN ii. 1, 2.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

THE design of this Epistle of St. John seems to have been to guard the Jewish converts against apostacy from the Christian faith, and to preserve them stedfast in the belief, that *Jesus was the Christ the Son of God*, and in that holiness of life which his religion required. The pernicious doctrines which then prevailed among the Jews; that men were accounted righteous with God by faith alone, without doing the works of righteousness; that zeal for God, and his laws, and service would atone for all crimes, even for the hatred and murder of their brethren, made this conduct of the apostle necessary at that time; and his judgment and authority in these points will serve for the instruction and correction of the church, to the end of the world.

Our Saviour had foretold, that, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, many false Christs and false Prophets should appear, and should deceive many. To guard the Christians against their seductions, was another point the apostle had in view. He tells them, that these false Christs and false Prophets were then abroad; and, with the most affectionate zeal and prudent advice, cautions them against the pollution of their destructive errors.

The text shows particularly the exact judgment and prudence of the holy man; being calculated to preserve them, on the one hand, from presumptuous sins; and, on the other, from desperation of God's mercy.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” To live in innocence, free from the defilement of sin, is the first and great aim of every Christian. It ought to be also the great aim of every one of Christ's Ministers to imitate this holy apostle, in their endeavours to preserve the people of God committed to their charge, free from the stain of guilt, and the anguish of remorse. They will, therefore, earnestly warn them of the dreadful end of a wicked life, and particularly of the fatal tendency of those errors in doctrine which may prevail in their neighbourhood, especially if they should be such as may influence their practice. But with their people it will remain to make their cautions and instructions effectual. Unless they apply them to their own circumstances, and beg of God his grace and holy Spirit to lead and preserve them in the way of truth and holiness, all their Ministers can do, will be lost labour.

The text seems more particularly addressed to young Christians, either in age, or on account of their late conversion to the faith; for of a Father in the church, these are properly the “little children.” And these, through the levity of youth, and the strength of appetite and passion; or through ignorance and inexperience in Christian knowledge and practice, are more exposed to temptations, and more liable to be overcome by them. To them, therefore, the Christian Minister should particularly attend, for they particularly need his admonitions and instructions. In general they will be more candidly received by them. Their hearts are tender, their sense of duty to God is quick, and blessing will be on the head of him who helps to preserve their innocency, and keep them free from the pollutions of this wicked world.

The other danger of which the text warns us, is desperation of God's mercy, should we be so unhappy as to sin against him. The weakness of nature, ignorance, inat-

tion, surprise, example, too frequently involve well disposed Christians in offences which they sincerely lament, and wish to avoid. And we trust, as they are more in number than we can recollect, God will, upon our general confession and repentance, in mercy overlook them for Christ's sake; especially as they arise from infirmity of nature which we cannot help, and against which it does not seem possible always to guard ourselves.

Except they are people of weak understandings, or under bodily disease, the Tempter can seldom find opportunity, from these sins, to drive men to despair. But where the sense of duty is quick, the temper mild, and the heart affectionate, conscience is often exceedingly tender. Remorse for wilful, premeditated sins, or what is unhappily taken for such, will then occasion the bitterest anguish, and deepest regret. Should the Tempter succeed in representing the inefficacy of penitence, and the certainty of the wrath of God; despair of his mercy ensues. This is the sharpest sting of sin; the deadliest wound that satan can inflict, and for which nature furnishes no medicine.

Faith in the propitiation of Jesus Christ the righteous, our Advocate with the Father, is the only balsam that can cure the wounds of conscience, or assuage the agonies of guilt. To this remedy the apostle directs his children in Christ; "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." And, "If we confess our sins, he," who hath "made a new covenant" with us in the blood of Christ, and hath promised that he "will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins; and will remember our iniquities no more," "is faithful and just" to his word "to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The text strongly asserts the doctrine of atonement for the sins of the world by the death of Christ; in virtue of which he is our Advocate in heaven, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us; pleading his own meritorious

* Heb. viii. 8, 12. 1 John i. 8, 9

atonement for the justification, or remission of the sins of all those who believe in him, and do his commandments. And this is the invariable doctrine of the New Testament. His intercession is mentioned by St. Paul in the most express terms; "It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us."* In another place, he saith, "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost," or evermore, "that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." He also speaks of Christ as having entered into the true holy place, even "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."† In as express terms, this same apostle declares Jesus Christ to be a propitiation for sin, "whom," he saith, "God hath set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission," or passing over "of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."‡ He declareth the same doctrine, though in different terms, when, speaking of Christ, he saith, "God hath made him who knew no sin, to be sin," a sin-offering, an atonement "for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."§ And the author of the text hath said, "God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."||

I have brought these passages of Holy Scripture together, because they are full to the point, and concur in proving, that the doctrine of atonement for sin by the death of Christ, is the doctrine of the New Testament. It is a doctrine, however, which is but little regarded by some; openly denied by others who profess the Christian faith; and ridiculed as an absurd system, by all those who reject it. Even that saying, which in the estimation of St. Paul was "worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," is assigned by some as the reason of their rejecting the gospel. Should we suppose that something of vanity, or precipitancy of temper had led these men to decide against the

* Rom. viii. 34.

† Heb. vii. 25. ix. 24.

‡ Rom. iii. 24, 25.

§ 2 Cor. v. 21.

|| 1 John iv. 10

doctrine of atonement, before they had duly examined all the circumstances relating to it; it would, I presume, be no breach of charity towards them.

The man who professes to govern himself by *reason*, must be supposed sometimes to reflect on the conduct of his life, and to examine into the state of his heart. If he should do so, he will find that he hath in many things offended against the sentiments and dictates of his own mind, to say nothing of his transgressions of the positive laws of God. He will, therefore, feel himself to be accountable for his actions, because his conscience condemns him when he does what he knows to be wrong. Now, the sentence of conscience supposes a higher tribunal: For conscience is nothing more than the judgment a man passes on his own actions, compared with some law. If his actions have been agreeable to the law by which he judges, the judgment of his mind—his conscience, will acquit him. If he hath been a transgressor, his conscience will condemn him. If you remove all law, you take away all conscience also. Where there is no law, there can be no transgression; and where there is no transgression, there can be neither judgment nor condemnation, because there is no criminal. Therefore, without a law superior to conscience, there can be no such thing as conscience at all.

Every law must come from a power superior to him who is to be governed by it: he is not otherwise obliged to obey it; because no penalty could be inflicted upon its transgression. Every law must also be superior to the Judge who is to administer it; otherwise he might set the law aside; and should he do so, instead of judging by the law, he would judge and condemn the law itself. Conscience, therefore, must be subject to the law by which it judgeth.

No laws can bind the conscience but his, who is the author of conscience. He who made man, and gave him the conscious principle, by which he can judge and form an estimate of his own actions; and he only can bind the consciences of men. Human laws affect overt actions and words only: the heart and conscience are beyond their

controul. We have, therefore, a right to conclude, that where conscience condemns, the law of God hath been broken. And let such a man beware; for "if his heart condemn him, God is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things."*

Here let nature, with her so much boasted religion, try her ability to screen the offender from punishment, who is condemned of his own conscience, and who must look forward to the sentence of a higher tribunal. No hope to escape can come but from two sources—the mercy of God—the repentance of the offender.

To say that God is too good and merciful to punish the errors and failings of such weak and frail beings as we are, were it true, is shooting beside the mark: It is applying to mercy in a case of justice—applying indeed to mercy, where it does not appear that mercy of itself could give the proper relief. The condemnation and reproaches of conscience are a species of punishment which simple mercy seems incapable of removing.

Besides, errors and failings are one thing; crimes and villanies another. If the mercy of God overlook the errors of the judgment and the failings of infirmity, it will not necessarily follow that it must pass over crimes and villanies that spring from malignity of heart.

But, by punishment let us understand sufferings inflicted by God for sin. And how does it appear that the mercy of God will prevent him from punishing men for the transgression of his laws? Not from his promise, except in divine revelation; and then only upon repentance, and in consequence of the atonement and satisfaction of Christ. If it be said, that it appears from reason and the nature of God: let them speak, and let us attend to what they say. They declare God to be the moral Governor of the world; that he is good and merciful, holy and just. He is, therefore, as much obliged, considered as a just and good Governor, to punish the wicked, as to protect the good. If he be merciful to one sinner, he must, by the same rule, be merciful to all; and if he forgive one kind of sins, he

* 1 John iii. 20.

may forgive all kinds. But if he forgive all sinners, and every kind of sin, his character of moral Governor of the world is destroyed, and moral evil may proceed to the highest pitch without restraint from him.

With regard to repentance; if it be asked, whether, if a man repent, and amend, and sin no more, he may not rely on the mercy and forgiveness of God? I answer, Yes, on Christian principles; but not on the principles of nature and reason. Put a case, and see what it will come to—The malicious man, after having murdered a number of his fellow creatures, is sorry for what he hath done, refrains from violence, and becomes humane and benevolent. On Christian principles he is, through the atonement of the Mediator, entitled to mercy; but not on the principles of reason and nature. For the laws of God have been violated, his moral government insulted, and the man's fellow-creatures destroyed; nor will his repentance repair the breach of the one, nor re-establish the authority of the other, nor restore life to the dead. Others might, by his impunity, be excited to commit, at least, would not be deterred from committing the same, or similar crimes; and the moral government of God would be as effectually destroyed, as it would be, though no repentance were supposed. Some method to re-establish the authority of the divine law must be provided, before the offender can be admitted to mercy. When justice and mercy can be reconciled, we may reasonably hope for the forgiveness of God; but till then, the pardon of offenders would be the destruction of divine authority.

It is, therefore, but a cold prospect which natural religion holds out to us. It has no claim on the mercy of God, but leaves us exposed to punishment for every transgression.

Here Christianity interposeth, and proclaims the atonement of a Substitute, who, by suffering in the stead of man, made expiation for his sin, and re-established the authority of the divine law, by submitting to its penalty; thereby reconciling justice and mercy, and making it possible for them to unite in the pardon of sin.

This Substitute is declared to be the Son of God, who took human nature upon him, and in it endured, and overcame all the temptations to which it is liable; sacrificed it on the cross, sustained in it the full punishment of sin, in the bitter pains of crucifixion, and in the agony which arose from a sense of the displeasure and dereliction of God. The Scriptures which contain the history of his life, and the doctrines delivered by him and his apostles, affirm that God declared his acceptance of his atonement, and ratified all he had said and taught, by raising him from the dead on the third day, according to his own prediction; by receiving him up into heaven in that body which he had assumed, and which had been crucified and raised again; and by sending the Holy Ghost upon his apostles and followers, according to his promise.

That these are true facts is proved, not only from the concurrent testimony of the four Evangelists who wrote his life, but from the continuance of the Christian religion in the world, from that period to this day. On the credit of these facts, that religion was, in the course of a few years, propagated over the whole Roman empire; at a time, too, when arts, and sciences, and learning, and free inquiry were as highly esteemed and cultivated as they are now. Nor were men more deficient in sense, and understanding, and reason, and argument then, than they are now. When, too, it would have been as impossible to have established such a religion as Christianity is, upon the credit of pretended facts, as it would be to do so now.

I know objections have been made against the whole scheme of vicarious satisfaction. It hath been said to be unjust and unreasonable in itself, that the innocent should suffer and the guilty go free; and that it will not answer the end proposed by it, namely, the re-establishment of the authority of God's laws. But,

1. If the Substitute be willing to submit to the terms; and, by doing so, injures no other being; and the party offended be willing to accept the satisfaction of the Substitute; the scheme of vicarious satisfaction is not unjust.

Now the readiness of Christ to become our Substitute,

and of God to accept his satisfaction, are the foundation of the procedure. Love and mercy excited, but no force did, or could constrain them. Nor does it appear how any injury could accrue by it to any other being.

2. If a greater good can be obtained by vicarious satisfaction, than could be obtained by exacting the full penalty upon the offenders personally, then the scheme is not unreasonable.

But to give the whole human race a new, and an advantageous opportunity of obtaining eternal happiness, is a greater good than to consign them all without mercy to everlasting misery; and the future happiness of a part of mankind, is a greater good than the certain destruction of the whole.

3. If the authority of the Lawgiver can be as effectually supported, and the benefits of his government as fully secured by vicarious satisfaction, as by inflicting punishment personally on the offenders, then the scheme is not deficient in efficacy to answer the end proposed by it.

Permit me then to state the matter as I understand it, and I shall cheerfully submit the determination of it to reason and common sense.

Adam sinned against his Creator, and involved himself and his posterity in everlasting misery, the necessary consequence of his disobedience. The Son of God became his Substitute; and, taking his nature upon him, made in it full satisfaction to divine justice for his offence, and for all the sins of the whole world. God approved and accepted this atonement. Adam and his posterity were, in consequence of it, put under a new covenant, by observing which they may recover the favour of God, and obtain endless happiness with him in heaven.

Suppose an hundred orders of intelligent creatures to behold and contemplate this scene: How may we conclude they would be affected by it? Should one of them argue in this manner—Adam hath disobeyed God, and instead of having the full penalty of his disobedience inflicted on him as God threatened; the Son of God, by suffering in his stead, hath redeemed him from endless

misery, and put him into a capacity of obtaining the happiness of heaven. There is, therefore, no great danger in disobeying God, however severely he may threaten. I may safely disobey him also; for, at the worst, the Son of God will suffer for me, as he hath done for Adam and his posterity.

Should another reason in the following manner—How dreadful is God! He hath indeed had mercy on fallen Adam, and his wretched offspring. In a wonderful way he hath reconciled mercy and justice in his forgiveness. That he might pardon him, he hath accepted an atonement. That his government, on which the happiness of all his creatures depends, might be vindicated, he hath required that the atonement be of infinite merit. He hath even permitted innocence to bear the punishment of guilt: His own beloved Son to suffer in Adam's stead. Happy is Adam in finding such mercy—in having such a Redeemer. Let every creature now beware how he disobeys the righteous laws of God—wonderful in mercy—terrible in justice. For will God again accept an atonement? Will the Son of God again consent to be the propitiation for sin? It cannot be. Henceforth all must obey or be miserable—Which of these two would reason most justly?

Whatever may be the judgment of others, the pious Christian will adore with gratitude, the astonishing display of divine justice and mercy, holiness and goodness, righteousness and wisdom, all united and co-operating in the redemption of man by Jesus Christ. And while the heart is raised in grateful devotion; the tongue, with divine rapture, will join the song of holy David, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

DISCOURSE VIII.

PART II.

THE business of this second part of the Discourse on the atonement of Christ, is to inquire into the extent of it, and into its influence in procuring eternal life, that is, future happiness for men in heaven.

With regard to the extent of Christ's atonement, the text doth not confine it to any particular number of men, nor to persons of any particular country or nation, nor of any particular station or condition of life; but extendeth its benefits to the whole world. In conformity with what this apostle hath said, St. Paul, speaking of Christ as the Mediator between God and man, saith, "He gave himself a ransom for all"—that he "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* Our Saviour, speaking of the atonement he was to make on the cross, saith he would "give his flesh for the life of the world."† This doctrine is fully and strongly expressed by the Church in her prayer of consecration in the office of the holy communion; in which prayer we bless God for our redemption by his Son Jesus Christ, "who, by his one oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." I shall only add the authority of the holy Baptist, the harbinger of Christ, who, when he saw "Jesus coming unto him," bare this testimony of him, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."‡

The plain consequence of these authorities is, That all the sins of all men, original and personal, from the beginning to the end of the world, are remittable, or capable

* 1 Tim. ii. 4, &c.

† John vi. 51.

‡ John i. 29.

of being forgiven, through the atonement and satisfaction of Christ.*

But though Christ be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, having made atonement for them by his blood, and thereby rendered it possible for God to forgive them; yet the Scriptures will not justify us in saying that all sin is already forgiven, nor that all sin will be forgiven hereafter. All declarations of forgiveness in the Bible are made to the penitent, either expressly, or by fair implication; and we have no right to extend them further than the "Oracles of God" will support us.

There is a manifest difference between being put into a capacity of obtaining forgiveness, and having actually obtained it—between being put into a state of salvation, and having that salvation in actual possession. A man may be put under advantages of acquiring, with the utmost certainty, some great worldly benefit; yet improper conduct may entirely destroy all his expectations. Some of the benefits of Christ's redemption are indeed absolute, and every human creature is born into the actual possession of them. The capacity, or possibility of having our sins forgiven through the atonement of Christ, is one of those benefits. Another is, the presence of the Holy Spirit of God with us, manifesting his divine influence in the sensibility and approbation of virtue and goodness, and in the checks and admonitions of conscience, which in a greater or less degree seem common to all men. By the new covenant in Christ, we are also freed from the law of perfect, unsinning obedience from which Adam fell, and are put under the law of grace; and our unfeigned obedience is accepted instead of that which is perfect. But there are other benefits of Christ's mediation which are ours, at present, only by promise, being not put in actual possession of them, but into a capacity of obtaining them under certain conditions and limitations. Of these, eternal life in the world to come is one. Let us then see what the influence of Christ's propitiation is, in

* One exception ought to be made, because it is made by Christ himself, who hath declared that "whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." Matt. xii. 32.

procuring this eternal life or felicity for us in the next world.

“Eternal life” is always declared to be “the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* It must consequently be the effect of his mediation. I mean not of his death singly and by itself, but of his whole process as our Redeemer—of all that he did, and suffered, and now does, and will do for us. To the attainment of this everlasting life, the remission of sins must be necessary, because, unless sin be forgiven, the sinner must be punished. Not to be punished is one thing; to be put in possession of eternal life is another. Suppose it possible that a sinner may be so far pardoned as not to be punished by the positive infliction of sufferings, may he not be yet excluded from the happy enjoyment of the presence of God in heaven? If his nature be unholy and impure, he must be incapable of happiness with God; for this plain reason, God is holy, and with him nothing impure can dwell. Such sinners, therefore, as men are, defiled in nature, as well as by habit, in heart as well as in deed, in mind and spirit as well as in life and manners, must have their nature new formed, their heart changed, their mind and spirit renewed, and reclaimed from sin to holiness, or they can have no fellowship with God. I say not this, on the mere principles of reason, though both reason and experience join in testifying, that contrary natures cannot be happy together. The lion and the lamb consort not together, nor the hawk and the dove. Modesty can have no complacency in impudence, nor can malice delight in love. Opposite natures flee each other, and like only courts its like.

The Holy Scriptures attest the truth of what I have said, as well in their general tenor, as in particular passages. Their general drift calls men off from sin to holiness, from the pursuit of vicious pleasures to the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to the practice of piety, justice, and temperance; from the indulgence of the malignant passions of envy, anger, hatred, and malice, to the cultivation of meekness, and benevolence, and

* Rom. vi. 23.

love; from covetousness to liberality; from every thing, in short, that is evil, to every thing that is good. They call us to holiness from the particular consideration that God is holy; to be merciful and kind to our fellow creatures, because God is merciful and good to us; to be followers of God as dear children, walking in love, and in all the virtues of a holy life.

Why is all this? Only because it is necessary for us; that so an "entrance may be ministered to us abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."* This penitence and holiness are not required as the meritorious cause of the forgiveness of our sins, or of our obtaining eternal life, which always was, and ever will be the *gift* of God: But they are the qualifications which make us capable of receiving the one and enjoying the other. The habits of vice and the indulgence of evil affections, we are also assured, will exclude us from the happiness of heaven. Impure, and covetous, and profane persons, St. Paul hath told us, shall have no inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ; and that on account of these things, cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.† This point was indeed determined by Christ himself, when he declared that at the general resurrection, they that had done good should come forth from the graves, unto the resurrection of life; and they that had done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.‡

The atonement which Christ made for sin by his death is one step in the process he went through for our redemption. Should it be thought the grand one, I have no inclination to dispute it. Every thing however which he did was necessary to our salvation. By his resurrection we obtain the privilege of rising again from the grave, never more to die. By his ascension into heaven in human nature, he hath opened to us the kingdom of heaven, and made it possible for us to ascend thither also, where he the forerunner for us hath entered;§ that where he is, his faithful servants may also be. In consequence of his as-

* 2 Pet. i. 11.

† Eph. v. 3—6.

‡ John v. 28, 29.

§ Heb. vi. 20.

cension it is, that he now sitteth at the right hand of God, invested with authority to protect his Church by his power, to guide it by his Spirit in this world, and to bless it with glory and happiness in the next. To this we owe the gift of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, by whom our minds are enlightened to understand divine things, strengthened to resist temptations, excited to work righteousness, to live in holiness, and to obey from the heart the commandments of God according to the new covenant under which his goodness hath placed us; and by whom we are enabled to bear with patience the troubles, distresses, and persecutions of this miserable world. To this we owe his perpetual and prevailing intercession for us with the Almighty Father in heaven, the true Holy Place, into which he hath entered, not like the Jewish High Priest, who went once in every year into the most holy place of the tabernacle with the blood of goats and calves, to make an annual atonement for himself and the people; but with his *own blood once*, "having obtained," not annual but "eternal redemption for us: wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."* From this state of exaltation, he will come at the last day in his glorious majesty, to judge the living and the dead, concerning the things done in the body; and will then make an eternal distinction between the good and the evil, recompensing glory and immortality to the one, tribulation and anguish to the other.†

What, therefore, Christ hath done for us, as our Redeemer, is exactly according to the wants and necessities of our situation; and our salvation is to be ascribed to all that he did, and not to any particular thing. All that he did, and now does, was and is necessary for us. Nothing could have been omitted without rendering the plan of our salvation incomplete.

The same observation may be made of those things which are required to be done by us: all of them are necessary, and the omission of any mars the œconomy of

* Heb. ix. 12, &c. and vii. 25.

† Rom. ii. 9. Matt. xxv. 46.

our salvation. Christ calls us to repentance, and gives us his Holy Spirit to enable us to repent; because repentance is necessary to qualify us for that forgiveness of sins which will “cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” and “make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”* He calls us to faith in him, that is, to the belief of his gospel, comprehending every thing that hath been done by the blessed triune God for the redemption of the world—of all that he did, and taught, and suffered, and now does to perfect our salvation; because this faith is necessary to guard the heart from despair, under the weight of that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation,† laying the foundation of that conformity to God in temper and disposition of heart, which makes us capable of happiness with him. He calls us to the practice of every virtue; to the doing of all good works; to the abounding in the fruits of righteousness; to the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts; to the patient endurance of all sufferings, especially for righteousness sake; to the renunciation of every worldly advantage that would be inconsistent with innocence or holiness; to the mortification of all covetous and selfish desires, and malevolent passions; and to the constant exercise of liberality, mercy, and charity; because all these are necessary for us, that we may endure the judgment of God, and be accounted worthy to obtain that future world, and the resurrection from the dead; when we shall die no more, but shall be equal unto the angels; being the children of God, because the children of the resurrection to eternal life.‡

Though, therefore, Christ is the “Mediator between God and man,” and the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, having tasted “death for every man,” paid “a ransom for all,” and is become the Author of eternal life;§ yet the benefits of his mediation are not all of them so absolute as to be unconditional, but some of them are limited to certain terms and qualifications. And it ap-

* 1 John i. 9. Coloss. i. 12. † 2 Cor. vii. 10. ‡ Luke xx. 35.
§ 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. Heb. ii. 9 v. 9.

pears, as well from the nature of the thing as from the general tenor, and concurring testimony of various passages of Scripture, that penitence, faith, and obedience or holiness, are the conditions of salvation through him; or they are qualifications which enable us to receive and enjoy it.

St. John hath told us, that he that "committeth sin"—he that liveth in the habit of any known sin—"is of the devil." The habit of sin must, therefore, be broken by penitence, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that the guilt of it may be taken away by the propitiation of Christ. The sinner must be delivered from the reigning dominion of sin, by the sanctification of the heart through the grace of God; that he may be delivered from the guilt and curse of it, by the atonement of Christ; that living in holiness here, and fleeing from the corruption that is in the world through lust, he may escape the misery which necessarily follows it; he may live hereafter in happiness with God.

In repentance, holiness or obedience to God is included of course. For there is the same reason why we should obey God for the time to come, that there is why we should repent of sin, by which we have disobeyed him heretofore. All the laws of God are intended for our benefit—by obedience to lay in us a foundation for happiness with him. When, therefore, we disobey God, we counteract our own happiness, and rivet the chains of misery on ourselves. That Christ hath relieved us from the law of unsinning obedience, which, through the depravity and weakness of nature, we cannot fulfil, is our great comfort. But he hath not left us without laws to which he does require obedience; which, though it should be imperfect, must be unfeigned. And by giving his Holy Spirit to help our infirmity, he hath enabled us to obey from the heart that form of doctrine whereto we are delivered;* that is, to obey the law of the Gospel, under which we are placed. However heavy our condemnation may be if we neglect

* Rom. vi. 17.

it, it will be just. For the milder the law, the easier is its observance, and the more inexcusable its transgression.

In addition to these considerations, it ought to be observed, that all the benefit of our obedience is our own. God requires nothing by our most punctual obedience; nor, if we disobey him, does he suffer any loss. His moral government stands sure, whether we observe or reject his commands. In the one case, his goodness will be declared in our happiness; in the other, his justice will be vindicated in our punishment. Let it then be remembered, that as Christ is the Author of eternal salvation, he is so to those only who obey him.*

Of penitence and obedience, faith is the principle. The belief of our sinful state and its evil tendency, of the justice of God against impenitent sinners, and of his mercy to those who repent and forsake their sins, of the efficacy of the atonement of Christ for the remission of sins, must all unite in laying the foundation of true repentance. The sense of sin without the hope of mercy is despair; and the hope of mercy without the penitent sense of sin is presumption.

The belief of the authority of God to bind us by his laws in all cases that he shall think proper; and that he actually hath published laws for the regulation of our conduct, both to him, and to each other, is the foundation of true obedience. For obedience means dutiful submission to the authority of a superior—the doing, under all circumstances, what he shall direct to be done. Therefore said the Apostle, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” To please God is to do what he commands, and to live as he directs. And when we do believe his commands and declarations, so as to live and govern ourselves by them, we have that faith in God whose fruit will be holiness, and its end everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

* Heb. v. 9.

DISCOURSE VIII.

PART III.

FROM what hath been said upon the atonement which Jesus Christ hath made for sin, we may see the reason, and be convinced of the truth of the declaration made by St. Peter to the Jewish rulers; "Neither is there salvation in any other" than Jesus Christ; "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* For this is only saying in other words, that there is no salvation for fallen man but only through the atonement and intercession of the One Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ our Lord.

On this subject, however, a question arises, to which it may be proper to attend: The question is this; What is to become of those who lived before the coming of Christ, and of those who since his coming have never heard of him, nor of his gospel; and who consequently know nothing of his atonement, nor of salvation through him?

To resolve this seeming difficulty let it be remembered, that though Christ did not appear in human nature till he was born of the Virgin Mary; nor suffer death on the cross, till the time of Pontius Pilate the Roman governor of Judea; yet, in a true sense, he assumed our nature when he was promised to Adam as the *seed*, one of the posterity of *the woman* Eve, and the bruiser of the serpent, satan; the adversary and beguiler of our original parents. Then, in truth, the gospel, or glad tidings of salvation through the Mediator began; for then he was declared to be the Mediator of a new covenant between a just God and fallen man. This promise was made to Adam, before he had any descendants; all his posterity must, therefore, be included in it, and in the atonement which the Mediator, as sponsor or surety for man, under-

* Acts. iv. 12.

took to make. For this reason, St. John, in his Revelation, speaks of him as the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* And hence it is, that *he is the propitiation not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world.*

We may be unable to discern fully the reasons of God's procedure in many cases. Our capacities are limited, and unequal to the comprehension of his dispensations, who, being infinite in his nature, must "have his ways past finding out." For this reason, there must of necessity be some mysteries in divine revelation; that is, some things which we cannot comprehend, but which we must receive on divine authority. If this be a fault, it is the fault of our nature; just such a fault as it is, that we are not angels; but our religion and its Author are clear of all censure. When a parent cautions a child against running into the fire, or water, or down a precipice; the child may be incapable of comprehending the reason of the prohibition; but if he slight the authority and superior knowledge of his parent; he will, on making the trial, surely smart for his presumption.

Should it be asked, why God did not sooner create this world which we inhabit? every answer we could give would betray our ignorance. We know, indeed, what is intended by the question. Sooner, and later, with regard to us, have a precise meaning; but they are not applicable to God, with whom nothing is past or future, but every thing present. The creation of the world is as much present with God now, as when the world was first made: and the atonement of Christ was as much present with God, when he became our Mediator, as when he suffered at Jerusalem. If, then, they who lived before Christ's personal appearance and suffering in human nature, were as much included in his mediation as they who have lived since, no injustice was done them. Besides,

It appears from the short history which Moses hath given us, that God did make known to Adam the glad tidings of reconciliation with him through the Mediator, and the

* Rev. xiii. 8.

means by which he was to obtain the benefit of it. We find that Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. Abel's offering was an animal for sacrifice. But the offering of animals in sacrifice to God could not have arisen from the suggestions of human reason. Modern philosophers tell us the practice is unreasonable and unnatural, and have generally condemned it. It is fruitless to dispute a point with men who arrogate all reason to themselves, and make their own understandings the measure of every thing, not even excepting the operations and institutions of infinite power and wisdom. In this, however, we are agreed; that animal sacrifices are unnatural, and never could have obtained, on the principles either of natural reason or religion. To what origin, then, shall we ascribe them? The philosopher will say, to superstition. But when he says so, he forgets that superstition is the child of reason, and consists in setting up the inventions of our own reason, and following the dictates of our own hearts in the worship of God, as the means of rendering him propitious to us, instead of abiding by his institutions. Had there been no true religion, there could have been none that is false. Had there been no positive institutions by divine authority in the worship of God, by which to conciliate his favor; superstition could have had no ground to stand on. The abuse of sacrifices, the offering of them to the sun and moon, to Jupiter and Juno, and other fictitious deities, and the vain rites with which they were accompanied, were superstition—the contrivances of human reason. But sacrifices themselves must have been the institution of God; and intended, as types and figures, to point out the expiation and atonement of the great Mediator; and to direct men, by faith and hope, to look to, and rely upon him for redemption from sin, and the wrath of God, by the propitiation of his blood, shadowed forth by the blood of the animal slain for sacrifice.

God, too, had his preachers of righteousness in the first ages of the world, as well as he hath now, to instruct and keep men in the true religion, and in the paths of holiness and virtue: and if men did abuse and debase the sacrifici-

ees and worship of God by their own superstition, paying that adoration to the creatures, which was due only to the blessed Creator, it was because they were philosophers, and preferred the dictates of their own reason, and the suggestions of their own understanding, to the positive commands and institutions of God. If they disregarded the obligations of moral virtue, and indulged themselves in the gratification of the appetites of the body, and of the malignant passions of the mind, it only proves that human nature was then, what it is now—foolish and perverse: but it is no impeachment of the goodness and providence of God, nor of the reality and efficacy of his religious institutions. In the very worst state of human apostasy and licentiousness, God did not leave himself without witnesses of “his eternal power and godhead.” “The heavens declared the power of God, and the firmament shewed his handy-work.” The alternate returns of day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, rain and sunshine, all proclaimed a superior—an almighty power. They proclaimed, too, that this power was good and gracious, giving them “fruitful seasons,” and “filling their hearts with food and gladness.”*

God hath also informed us, that he will require no more of men than the due improvement of the talents committed to them; that they who are left to the light of nature and conscience, and to the law of reason, shall be judged by the light of that conscience, and the law of that reasonable nature, under which his providence hath placed them. To his mercy we leave them; knowing that he is not severe to mark what is done amiss. He knoweth their ignorance, and weakness, and prejudices; and he will deal graciously with them for the sake of the great Intercessor, who is the propitiation for their sins as well as for ours.

Another question arises on this subject, respecting those who reject the mediation of Christ, when it is made known to them by the Gospel. Men of this class are generally great advocates for natural religion, in opposition to the revelation of the Gospel. They seem to think, they are

* Acts xiv. 17.

left to their own liberty to choose either of them, as they shall think best ; supposing they shall, if judged at all, be judged by that religion which they shall have chosen. But in truth, God hath left no man to this liberty, but requires all men to be of the true religion ; that is, of the religion he shall direct, when it is made known to them. Reason and common sense must enable us to judge which is the true religion ; but if we judge wrong, we do it at our own peril ; for God requires and expects that we judge right. Interest, party, prejudice, passion, appetite, love of the world, carelessness, must all be laid aside when this great business is before us. If they bias our judgment, we shall be in danger of a wrong determination ; and if we determine wrong, we shall fall under the condemnation of God. The glad tidings of his Gospel have reached our ears, proclaiming atonement, and pardon, and salvation through the Mediator, and calling us loudly to repentance and holiness, to faith and obedience. By it a future judgment is made known to us ; and the standard by which that judgment is to proceed is declared to be the laws which the Gospel contains, so far as they have been promulgated. This Gospel is the law of our Master, the will of our Creator : If we reject it, we must abide the consequence ; and the consequence will be the same punishment with theirs who would not have this man, Jesus Christ, to reign over them.*

And what mighty advantage shall we gain by rejecting the Gospel which makes known the propitiation of Christ, and retiring to the gloom of natural religion ; an ideal religion, much talked of, but not known ; delineated by some ; but having no original from which to draw, imagination guided the pencil, and fancy ornamented the picture with some strokes from divine revelation.

But suppose natural religion to be, as they who have painted her the fairest, have represented her. She knows of no Mediator, nor Intercessor. She knows of no propitiation for sin. She has no encouragement to repentance, because she has no promise of God on which to build her

* Luke xix. 14.

hopes of mercy ; but leaves her votaries exposed, for every transgression, to his justice, who is “ of purer eyes than to behold evil,” and who will not let the wicked go unpunished.* To the mercy of God there can be no appeal : for without atonement, the punishment, not the forgiveness of offenders, must support the authority of his government, and give efficacy to his laws. Unsinning obedience is therefore the only condition of the religion of nature. Where this condition is fulfilled, there is no need of an atonement. Where it is not fulfilled, an atonement must be accepted, or condemnation must ensue.

But as bad as this pretended religion of nature is, which the advocates for human reason are so anxious to establish as their rule of life, apparently because under it they can live as they please ; it is not so bad as the having no religion at all. Should there be any such persons, who, “ born like the wild asses colt,” wish to live like them, and like them to die and be no more ; let them know that for this very thing “ God will bring them into judgment.” There is one in heaven “ higher than they, higher than the highest, who regardeth” all their actions.† “ The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.”‡ “ His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”§ Neither darkness nor the grave can screen from his power.|| “ He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained,” and whom “ he hath raised from the dead,”¶ who is now the Mediator between God and man, the propitiation for the sins of the world, and our Advocate in heaven. Then will “ he bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts” of all men.** Therefore he “ commandeth all men every where to repent.” “ Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”†† For he will “ pour out his wrath upon them that have not known him, nor called upon his name.”‡‡ Repent, therefore, “ while it is called To-day, lest you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin ;”

* Habb. i. 13. Prov. xi. 21. † Eccl. v. 8. ‡ Ps. ciii. 19. § Prov. xv. 3.
 ¶ Ps. cxxxix. ¶ Acts xvii. 31. ** 1 Cor. iv. 5. †† Ps. l. 22. ‡‡ Ps. lxxix. 6.

for "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* When this life is ended the time of retribution will come; and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "Kiss the Son," therefore—pay your homage and adoration to him who is Messiah, Christ, the Son of God, the Mediator, the Redeemer, the Saviour of men—"lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way: when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."†

Dreadful, also, is their state, who "hold the truth in unrighteousness;" who believe the mediation and atonement of Christ, and live wickedly. Heavy will be their condemnation, when God shall judge the world. If he spared not his own Son when he became our Substitute, but gave him up to the bitterest sufferings; how shall the impenitent sinner escape, who would not be reclaimed by all that Christ hath done for him? To those who believe the gospel, the kingdom of God is come, to deliver them from the kingdom and tyranny of satan. But if entering into this kingdom, they refuse to be governed by its laws, and still keep themselves in bondage to the adversary by doing his work; the judgment of God will be to them a consuming fire.

To those who believe the gospel, and rejoice in the glad tidings of salvation through the propitiation of Christ; who strive to adorn the doctrine of their Lord and Saviour in all things, living in the constant exercise of penitence and faith, and in the observance of all the commands and institutions of God, with an upright heart; I have only to observe, that it is by "patient continuance in well-doing;" by holding "fast their confidence" in their Redeemer, and "their rejoicing in the hope" of the glory of God, that they must enter into the heavenly rest of eternal life. Let them remember, that their High Priest, who is now in heaven making intercession for them, "was," in this world, "tempted as they are." He knows, therefore, how to pity and succour them in all temptations and

* Heb. iii. 13. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† Ps. ii. 12.

adversities. In all their difficulties, then, "let them come boldly unto the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

DISCOURSE IX.

THE NECESSARY EFFECTS OF SIN AND HOLINESS.

GAL. vi. 7, 8.

Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption : but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

THIS chapter begins with some directions from St. Paul to the governors and rulers of the church. From them he turns his attention to the people, and puts them in mind of their obligations to support their Ministers with decency, according to their ability ; “ Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things ;” or, of all his goods. Then follows the text, “ Be not deceived,” &c. which may be thus paraphrased : Let not any man persuade himself that liberality to his spiritual teachers is not a matter of duty, but only of mere generosity ; for in this work of pious liberality to those whom God employs in his immediate service, as well as in all other works of charity, let every man know, that as he deals with God, so God will deal with him ; as his practice is, so shall he speed at God’s tribunal. He that makes provision only for himself and his family, that he may feed and gratify his own worldly desires, shall thereby bring loss and ruin on himself ; but he that fulfils the gospel rule of liberality and charity, and according to his ability lays himself out in works of piety and mercy, shall thereby inherit eternal life.

This was the occasion on which the text was written, and in their primary view this is the purport of the words of it. But it is not my design to confine myself to this meaning of them. In every sense it is true, that a man

must reap what he sows; as his life is, so will its consequences be. So far as we are capable of observing, this is invariably the case with regard to this life, and that not only in things natural, but in moral ones also. Thus idleness produces poverty; debauchery, sickness; pride, contempt: And God has told us that the same law of nature holds invariably with regard to the next life; that the fruit of holiness and charity will be eternal life; of sin, everlasting misery: And yet we are apt to consider the happiness and misery of a future state, not as the fruit which our own ways produce, but as the arbitrary appointment of Almighty God; and to suppose that if he would, he could not only remit the punishment with which impenitent sinners are threatened, but receive them to heavenly happiness just as they are, with all their evil tempers and passions in their full strength: So that the proud oppressor, the unjust extortioner, the impure debauchee, the covetous worldling, the malicious murderer, the despiser of God, the hater of goodness, may all, if God please, go as certainly to heaven, and be as happy there, as the humble, penitent, faithful, and holy Christian.

Instances sometimes happen of people who, having lived in open wickedness and profaneness, at least very loosely and carelessly with regard to God and religion, when sickness brings the apprehension of death home to them, seem to think that the words of a prayer, and professions of general sorrow for their lives past, will sufficiently recommend them to the mercy of God. Far be it from me to undervalue the slightest appearances of repentance: every degree of it is from God. Penitence and faith are, on our part, the fulfilling of the Gospel, and make that state in which we ought to live, and in which we must die, if we hope to be happy with God: and though they be late, yet if they be real, they will be accepted by him who sees the heart, and can judge of their sincerity. But may we then live wickedly, and when we die, cry, Lord have mercy upon us! and be happy with God? The frequent opportunities we have of hearing the strong expressions of repentance which are made by people in sickness, and

their resolutions of living in Christian holiness, should God spare them; and of observing how soon they are forgotten on the return of health, ought to give us but a low opinion of the sincerity of a death-bed repentance. Attend rather to the account which divine Revelation hath given of your state in this world, and judge for yourselves: and so far as your own experience can determine, let experience be called in to assist your judgment.

We are taught that our present state is a state of apostasy from God: That our present nature is corrupt and impure, inheriting the evil tempers and wicked dispositions of fallen Adam; which not only render us liable to sin, but actually lead us into it; and being contrary to the nature of God, make us incapable of all happiness with him: That this nature must be purified by penitence, and renewed by faith and holiness: That to this end, our duty requires that we renounce its sinful tempers, mortify its evil lusts, and correct its wicked dispositions: That as it was impossible for human nature to do this for itself, God gave his Son for its redemption, who, by tasting death for every man, made atonement for sin, that upon repentance, it might be forgiven: That by rising again from the dead, he overcame death, and made it possible for us to rise again from the grave in the power of his resurrection, and to inherit eternal life: And, that to make our nature capable of receiving the benefit of his death and resurrection, he hath given his Holy Spirit to be in us the principle of a new, holy, and heavenly life; to do that for us, which nature cannot do for itself; to carry on and complete the process of our redemption; that, being restored to a state of holiness, we may be capable of heavenly happiness.

This fallen nature into which we are born, is what the Apostle calls the *flesh*; not only because we got this mortal flesh by the fall, but because the passions and appetites of nature all tend to the gratification of the flesh. The complying with this natural propensity, and employing our care, to obtain worldly happiness in the enjoyment of sensual delights, is *sowing to the flesh*; or, as it is

in another place expressed, “making provision for the flesh, that we may fulfil its lusts.” From this course of life, the Apostle saith, we shall reap only corruption; vain, short, unsatisfying enjoyments in this life, and ruin and misery in the world to come. For our present nature is the state of our apostacy; and if we live according to it, we must inherit its evils; from which nothing can deliver us but the redemption of Christ; and if we expect to receive the benefits of this redemption, we must live as his Gospel directs.

By *sowing to the Spirit*, is meant complying with the redemption of Christ, which is the dispensation of the Spirit, because by it we are put under the guidance and conduct of the Spirit of God. That this Spirit is in you, your own experience, if you attend to it, would readily convince you. You all perceive good desires, virtuous purposes, holy wishes stirring and forming themselves in your hearts: When you do well, you have an inward satisfaction, which arises not from any view of profit or advantage; and when you have done ill, a check and internal condemnation, even when your misdoings are known only to yourselves. Now, all these things prove the Spirit of God to be in you. “There is none good but one, that is God,” said our Redeemer. Every thing, therefore, that is good, must be from God, or else there is something good besides God. Consequently, every thing in you that is good, is from the Spirit of God; for by his Spirit, God works in us. This Spirit is the beginner, the supporter, and the finisher of that new life or nature which we receive through Christ; which consists in a love of all goodness, and a hatred of every thing that is evil. The very first inclination of the heart towards God; the first wish for repentance, is from him; and to all those who harden not the heart against him, but comply with his holy inspiration, he gives strength to fulfil the law of the gospel, by doing those things which God hath commanded, and restraining and keeping under those evil appetites and passions which God hath condemned, and which the Spirit in us bears witness against, by the checks and admonitions of

conscience. If we live thus under the guidance of this Spirit, in the constant exercise of penitence and faith, we shall attain in this life that holiness which God requires; and in the world to come shall, through the Spirit, reap that everlasting life which God hath promised. For,

Repentance and faith, as I said before, are what the gospel requires of us. Penitence is the turning of the heart from, and denial of every thing that is evil; and faith, as a principle of action, is the earnest desire of every thing that is good. When we are sensible of the evil tendency of the lusts and passions of our fallen nature, we shall loath, and detest, and turn from them with abhorrence, and shall beg of God to be delivered from their power: And when we believe with the heart, that nothing can deliver us from them, but the redemption of Christ; and that nothing can make us capable of heavenly happiness, but those heavenly tempers which we can receive only through the operation of the Spirit of God; our belief will become an earnest and longing desire of the perpetual presence of the Holy Spirit with us, and of all those tempers, dispositions, and habits of holiness which his inspirations produce. We shall then see and feel the necessity of denying and resisting the evil propensities of our present nature, and of doing implicitly every thing that God requires; because he requires nothing but what is necessary to restore us to a capacity of enjoying happiness with him.

Attend, therefore, to the caution which the holy apostle has given you; *Be not deceived*: Deceive not yourselves with vain hopes, nor let others deceive you with vain words: *God is not*, and cannot be *mocked*. He hath declared it to be a fundamental law of all nature, that *a man should reap what he sows*. You will not be so unreasonable, as to expect that this law should be altered on your account. You will not flatter yourselves with the hopes of sowing one thing, and reaping another; of living to the flesh, and inheriting eternal life. If you do, you mock God; you trifle with his declarations, and make him a liar; for you deny the truth and reality of those

fundamental laws of nature and moral government, which he affirms he hath fixed and established; by which, he declares, he now governs, and will finally judge the world.

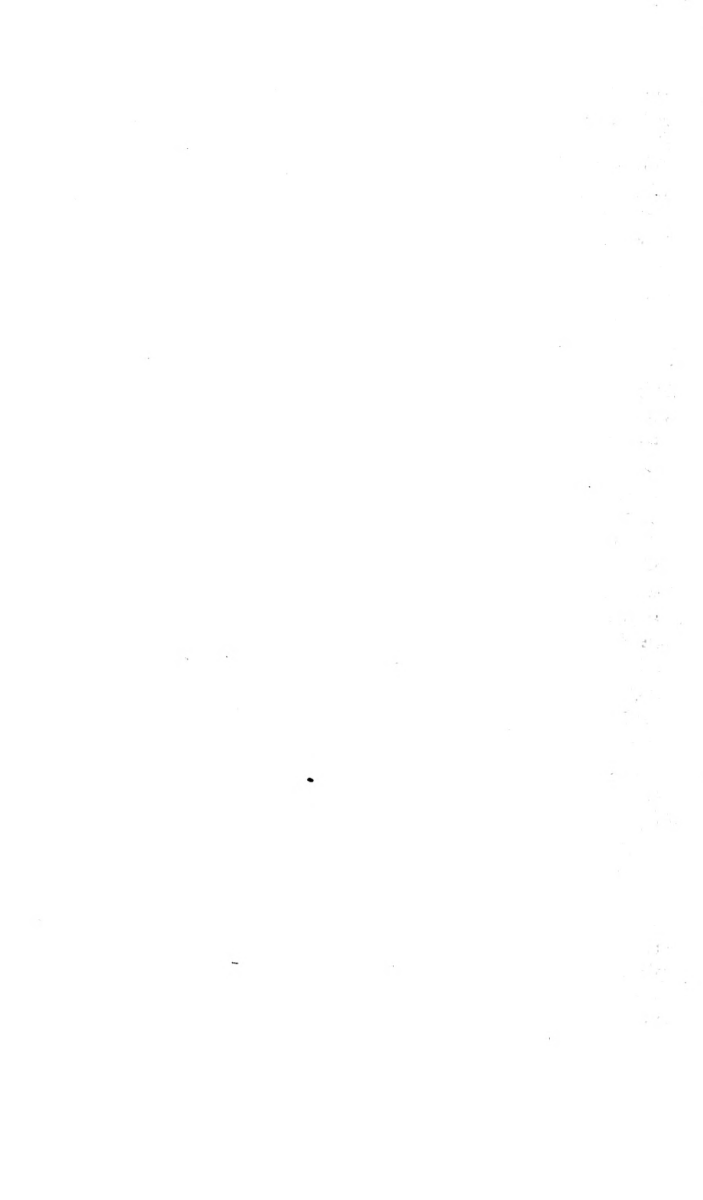
In the management of your worldly affairs, none of you are so weak and foolish, as to expect to reap a different kind of grain from that which you sow. Grain, trees, herbs, all produce their own fruit, and you look for no other from them. You never seek for grapes on the thorn-bush, nor examine the thistle for figs: And why not? because there is a fundamental, invariable law of nature, which has confined grapes to the vine, and figs to the fig-tree; and you know it is impossible to find them growing any where else. By the pen of his Apostle, God has told you that the same law operates as strongly and as invariably in things moral, as in things natural; and that if you *sow to the flesh*—live a wicked, sensual life—you shall reap *corruption*, which here must mean *endless misery*, because it is put in opposition to *eternal life*, which they shall reap who sow to the Spirit.

Should a man sow tares in his field, and tell you seriously that he expected a good crop of wheat from them, because he knew that God was too gracious and merciful to disappoint his hopes, or leave him to the consequences of what possibly was mistake and error in him, a poor, weak, blind creature: if you supposed him in earnest, you could not possibly think him in his right mind. But you would have as much reason to suppose him to be so, as to suppose another judged truly, who should tell you, that at the day of judgment, God would be so gracious and merciful, as to receive him to eternal happiness, notwithstanding he had lived in wickedness, and died without repentance. Both these persons act in direct opposition to the invariable laws of nature, which ordain that a man should reap what he sows. He that sows tares, shall reap tares; and he that sows to his flesh, shall reap corruption.

Of this truth, then, be convinced; that every temper, every passion, every affection, every wish and desire of the heart which you indulge, works either happiness or misery for you; and will produce its own fruit, and its

own fruit you must reap; that is, you must live in that state, both in this life and the next, which your own tempers, and passions, and affections produce. If you sow to the flesh; though you take ever so much pains, and refine its lusts, and polish its tempers, and gild over its passions, and give them even the semblance and appearance of virtues; you can reap from it nothing but corruption. This the Apostle declared, when he said, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap:" and this the Son of God declared, when he said, "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." The corrupt tree of Adam's fallen nature cannot bring forth the good fruits of the Spirit of God, and consequently cannot inherit the happiness arising from the fruits of the Spirit. Corrupt nature can bring forth only corrupt practices. Cultivate it, improve it, adorn it; till it be changed and renewed by repentance and faith—in the language of scripture, created anew in Christ Jesus; it can bring forth nothing but evil lusts, and tempers, and passions: these must be its fruits, and the end eternal death.

That we are born of an evil, and sinful nature, is our great misfortune; but it is a misfortune which may be fully remedied, if it be not our own fault. Through the redemption of Christ, this world is made a place of trial; and gives an opportunity, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, of denying, and correcting, and subduing the evil propensities of nature; and of forming the soul to all the habits and tempers of goodness and holiness which make it capable of happiness with our Creator. This life, then, is properly our seed-time; and our harvest will be in the next: and it is our business, in truth the only business that will justify anxious care, to look forward to that period, when we shall reap what we have sown; and so to conduct ourselves in all our affairs, that our eternal welfare may principally engage our attention; that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things that are eternal.



DISCOURSE X.

THE CASE OF ESAU.

HEB. xii. 17.

For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

THAT the text relates to Esau, the elder son of Isaac, will be readily recollected. The case of Esau seems to have been frequently misunderstood; at least, it hath been frequently misapplied. It may, therefore, be of advantage to us, to consider the circumstances which attend it.

In his Epistle to the Romans,* St. Paul quotes the prophet Malachi, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”† From this passage, in conjunction with the text, it hath been hastily concluded, especially by the followers of the celebrated John Calvin, that from the hatred of God, Esau was reprobated to endless destruction; and from the love of God, Jacob was predestinated to present and future happiness; and that, without any regard to their good or evil qualities. So that when Esau, through sorrow for what he had done, carefully sought, even with tears, to have his repentance accepted, he was rejected by God.

A candid attention to the design of the apostle’s argument will, I trust, convince us that the future state of Esau and Jacob hath nothing to do in it; but that it relates entirely to the conveyance of the blessing which God promised to Abraham; namely, that in his seed—in one descended of him—all the nations of the earth should be blessed. The wisdom of God saw best to convey this blessing by Jacob the younger, and not by Esau the elder son of

* Rom. ix. 12

† Malachi i. 1, 2.

Isaac. The promise to Abraham proceeded from the free grace of God: With him it remained to convey it by either of his descendants, as he saw proper. According to the good pleasure of God, it descended to Isaac, and not to Ishmael; to Jacob, and not to Esau; to Judah, and not to either of the other sons of Jacob; to David, and not to either of his elder brothers, nor to any other descendants of Judah.

With regard to this blessing it was, that God revealed to Rebecca, that the *elder should serve the younger*; that is, that the younger should have the right of primogeniture, the privileges of the first-born son.* Upon this declaration of God, Rebecca probably acted, when she advised Jacob to endeavour to obtain by fraud, the blessing of the first-born, from Isaac his father. She knew it to be the will of God that Jacob should inherit the blessing: a circumstance to which Isaac had less attended; or which, through the infirmities of age, he had forgotten.

Let us come, then, to what St. Paul hath said on the subject; and if we keep in mind, that the blessing conveyed to Jacob related principally to the promise made to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," every difficulty, I trust, which the Predestinarians have made, will come to nothing.

St. Paul begins the chapter of the text with exhorting the Hebrew Christians to "run with patience the race that was set before them." He calls their attention to that cloud of witnesses whom he had mentioned; who had, through faith, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises," &c. particularly to the example of the holy "Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God: Lest," saith the apostle, "ye be weary and faint in your minds"—an expression which, I beg, may be kept in remembrance. He continues the subject down to the fourteenth verse, urging them to bear with steadiness, and without weariness and fainting, the

* Gen. xiv. 22, &c.

troubles and afflictions which God's providence should permit to come on them, however irksome they might be to them.

In the fourteenth verse, he directs them to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." A peaceable and quiet conversation being the most likely to ward off and prevent the troubles and persecutions which the perverse dispositions of men might bring on them: and holiness of life being the sure way to recommend themselves to the favour and protection of God in this world, and to the enjoyment of his presence, in the world to come.

Continuing his exhortation, he next recommends to them diligent care, "lest any man fail of," that is, fall from "the Grace," or Gospel "of God." "Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;" that is, lest any false doctrine beguile your judgment; or envy, or malice creep in among you, and turn you away in faith and practice from the truth and simplicity of the gospel; and others, being corrupted by your evil example, defile their conscience by sin against God. "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right. For ye know how that," &c.

It is plain that the instance of Esau is no further introduced here, than the sale of his birth-right. Let us then see in what his birth-right consisted.

1. It consisted in a right to a double portion of the father's goods; at least, this was the practice with the descendants of Abraham in after times.*

2. The first-born had dominion over the younger children; because he was the father's successor in the government of the family, while the patriarchal government lasted. This blessing Isaac gave expressly to Jacob. "Be thou a master to thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee."

3. It consisted in the honour of the priesthood, at least in their own family. The father was the priest while he

* Deut. xxi. 17.

lived. Upon his death, the priesthood descended to his eldest son. Speaking of Cain and Abel, Moses does not say they *offered*, but they *brought* their offerings unto the Lord; probably to be offered in sacrifice by their father Adam. After the flood, Noah offered sacrifice, and Abraham, and Isaac, &c. but we read not that any of the children officiated as a priest, while their father lived, and they lived with their father: upon his death, the privilege devolved to the eldest son.

In consideration of the preservation of the Israelites when the Egyptian first-born were slain, God claimed to himself, as his own property, the first-born of the Israelites, both of man and of beast.* After the Exodus, he made a more particular designation of the male first-born; "The first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto me."† God had, before, given directions about the altar which they were to build for him.‡ Here the persons who were to officiate at the altar are pointed out; even all the first-born sons of Israel. Accordingly, when Moses was ordered up into the mount, to receive the two tables of stone, and the directions of God concerning the tabernacle; and had built an altar to offer sacrifices of purification for himself and the people; he "sent *young men* of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen to the Lord."§ The Jewish commentators, the Chaldee, the Arabic, and Persian versions, make these *young men* the first-born, who had been taken to be the Lord's priests. Thus it seems to have continued, till shortly after God took the whole tribe of Levi to himself, instead of the first-born of Israel;|| which assumption shows that till then, the first-born had been his Priests.

This is the birth-right which Esau sold. In the whole account there is not a word which relates to his state in the world to come, or that lays any bar to his happiness in this world. The blessing his father gave him included in it all worldly prosperity. From having the dominion over his brother; from the priesthood of his God, except for

* Exod. xiii. 2. † xxv. 29. ‡ xx. 24. § xxiv. 5. † Numb. iii. 40, &c.

his own family ; and from the promise of having Messiah spring from him, he was excluded. The two former he had sold with his birth-right, and had sworn to abide by the bargain. The latter was in the hand of God, to be given to whichever of the sons of Isaac, he saw proper. It was not the privilege of the first-born, but depended on the free will of God.

It is also to be observed, that God made of Esau a great and powerful nation, equally so with the children of Jacob. With regard to their personal prosperity, the life of Jacob was a life of labour and misfortune. Of Esau we have not so particular a history : Yet, when he met Jacob on his return from Padan-aram, he at first declined accepting his brother's present, assigning it as a reason, that he himself had enough.* And when he removed from Hebron, after the death of his father Isaac, the reason given why he removed from his brother Jacob is, that "their riches were more than that they might dwell together ; and the land could not bear them, because of their cattle."†

In a temporal sense, the blessing of Isaac to Jacob, especially that part of it, in which he saith, "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee," does not seem to have been fulfilled in any high degree. Personally Jacob seems ever to have been the inferior. And the contest for superiority between their descendants, the Edomites and Israelites, was so varied, that it is difficult to determine between them. We must, therefore, look out for some other, some spiritual sense, in order to perceive the full completion of this blessing to Jacob ; and this will lead us to that person promised to Abraham, and to Isaac, as the blessing of all nations, even Jesus Christ. St. Paul hath observed, that "the less is blessed of the better," or greater. It must, therefore, be a justifiable figure of speech, to express the submission which all nations were to pay to Messiah, by whom they were to be blessed, by *bowing down to him*. The original promise to Abraham implied that all nations of the earth should have

* Gen. xxxiii. 9.

† xxxvi. 7.

an equal right in the blessing of Messiah. Yet the Church of God, of which Messiah is head and king, was for a time confined to the descendants of Jacob. In this state of the Church, did Esau serve, or was inferior to Jacob. At length the distinction was taken away. The Church of God was opened to all nations, and Gentiles as well as Jews became the people of God. Then did Esau break the yoke of Jacob from off his neck, and became his equal.

The account which hath been given, assigns a plain reason why Esau is, by St. Paul, called *profane*. Profaneness consists in treating improperly something which belongs to God. Nothing of this kind appears, but his despising and selling the priesthood which was part of his birth-right. This belonged to God, and was conferred on the first-born, as a privilege and blessing. To put it away from him, as a common thing of which he might make merchandise, was acting profanely. The sale of his right to a double portion of his father's goods, for a meal's victuals, might have been a very foolish bargain, but there would have been no profaneness in it.

It has been generally supposed, that St. Paul stiles Esau a *fornicator*, as well as a profane person. The Jewish Commentators represent him as an idolater, and addicted to impure lusts. But it does not appear to me that we must necessarily apply that word to him. If it must be so, it is more probable he deserved the appellation on a religious account; by being drawn into the idolatrous worship of the Hittites by the two wives whom he had married of that nation. This supposition will, at least, give a good reason for the uneasiness of his mother, on account of those marriages.

The conduct of Esau, if we attend to it, will let us into the reason why St. Paul mentions him as an instance of that behaviour, which he wished the Hebrew Christians to avoid. He had come from the field weary and fainting with hunting. In his extremity, Jacob bargained with him for his birth-right, with a mess of pottage which he had prepared for himself, and which had caught the anxious

eye of Esau. It was, therefore, his impatience under the sense of hunger which prevailed on him to sell his birth-right for a morsel of food which pleased his appetite. St. Paul introduceth his example as a warning to those Christians to whom he writes, not to be wearied and faint in their minds under the afflictions and persecutions which came upon them. Those things were not marks of God's displeasure, but the corrections of his love, to wean them from their attachment to the world; and to teach them to look to him for their happiness, who alone was able to save them, not only from the short-lived troubles of this world, but from the never-ending anguish of sin and guilt. They must not, therefore, despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when they were rebuked of him; nor, through impatience fall from the grace of God, and give up the hope of the Gospel, eternal life with God in heaven: because, for the enjoyment of that hope, these afflictions, if they supported them with patience and resignation to the will of God, would most amply prepare them.

The lesson, therefore, which the Apostle intended to impress by the instance of Esau was, that if Christians, wearied out with the afflictions of the world, fall from the hope of the Gospel, through impatience of that self-denial, and resignation to the will of God, which their religion requires of them, and turn for relief and happiness to the enjoyments of the world; they act as foolishly, and as profanely as Esau did, when, wearied with hunting and hunger, he sold his birth-right for a morsel of meat.

I come now to the more immediate consideration of the text, which acquaints us with Esau's regret, and repentance or sorrow, when he felt the consequence of what he had done, and perceived the impossibility of recovering the privileges of the birth-right which he had wantonly and profanely thrust from him.

The text recalls to our mind the issue of his application to his father, for the blessing which he supposed belonged of course to him, as his first-born son. Jacob had imposed on his father and obtained by subtilty the blessing which belonged to the first-born, and which he had bought

of Esau when he bought his birth-right. God had also rejected him from inheriting the blessing he had promised to Abraham. So that when Esau applied, no blessing remained, but that of worldly prosperity.

It is not necessary to vindicate the innocency of Jacob, in this transaction. Though his honesty may be impeachable, the purpose of God might still be accomplished by him. He deceived his father, and obtained, under a feigned character, that blessing which would have been denied to him on an open application. He indeed acted under the direction of his mother, who, probably through her partiality for him, seems to have been more anxious that he should obtain the blessing, than he himself was. Probably the answer she had received from God, respecting the children before they were born—that two nations should proceed from her, and that the elder should serve the younger—had made so deep an impression on her mind, that it determined her conduct on this occasion. Perceiving the design of Isaac to give the blessing of primogeniture to Esau, and apprehending it to be contrary to the purpose of God; she persuaded Jacob to personate his brother before his father Isaac.

That the conduct of Rebecca in this matter is censurable, is readily confessed. Her disingenuous deception was unnecessary to accomplish the purposes of God; and more credit would have redounded to her, from patiently waiting for the divine interposition, than from the full success of her deceitful plan. If, however, people will officiously obtrude their own schemes to help forward the designs of infinite wisdom and power, there is no reason why God should not convert them to his own use. He permitted the deceit of Rebecca and Jacob to succeed, and turn aside the blessing from the head of Esau. Notwithstanding the suspicions of Isaac, Jacob by his subtilty obtained the blessing he sought from his father; not only the good things of this world, but the dominion over his brethren. This blessing, though fraudfully obtained, Isaac confirmed, when, upon the retiring of Jacob, Esau brought him the venison he had prepared: "Who, where

is he," said Isaac trembling, "that hath taken venison, and hath brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and *have blessed him?* yea, and *he shall be blessed.*"

A tender and affecting scene ensued, in which Esau, with tears and bitter cries, importuned his father for the blessing. Isaac, however, either by the inspiration of God, or led by what had happened to a better consideration of what he was doing, remained inflexible. He blessed Esau indeed with the fatness of the earth, and with the dew of heaven; but the blessing of the first-born remained with his brother—"By thy sword thou shalt live, and shalt serve thy brother."

To this history the text alludes, when it says, that when Esau "would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected." He had sold his birth-right to Jacob, who, by subtilty, had obtained the blessing from their father; and Esau could not recover it, "for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

A question will here arise, To whom does the expression, *he found no place of repentance*, relate? to Esau, or to Isaac? That Esau did repent is certain. No person could give more unequivocal proofs of his hearty sorrow and regret, than he did. With profuse tears, and earnest entreaties, and loud cries, he ardently endeavoured to prevail on his father to over-rule the foolish bargain he had made, and to give him the blessing. It is also certain, that Isaac did not repent of his having given the blessing to Jacob. Even when he knew that he had been imposed on by the art of his younger son, and had unwittingly given the blessing to him which he had intended for Esau, he repented not, but absolutely confirmed it. "Behold," said he to Esau, "I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given him for servants." That there was found no place of repentance, when Esau sought it carefully with tears, relates not to him, but to Isaac; and its meaning is, that Isaac would not repent of what he had done, nor recall the blessing he had given to Jacob, though Esau sought to move him to do so, by the most earnest and passionate entreaties.

This, I take it, is a fair account of the transaction to which the text alludes, and a full interpretation of the text itself. The case of Esau was not that his repentance came too late to be accepted of God: Of this nothing is said: But that his repentance could not avail to cancel a foolish bargain which he had made. He had sold his birth-right, and all his entreaties could not make void a contract which he had confirmed with an oath.

However justly we may blame Esau, there is not the least intimation that he acted from the control of any decree of God, or from any other cause than his own impatience.

As to the other text which relates to the same subject, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," it is introduced by St. Paul immediately after having quoted the declaration of God to Rebecca, "The elder shall serve the younger."* The design of St. Paul in that place is to prove that all the descendants of Abraham are not the children of promise: That with regard to his own children, the promise was confined to Isaac whom Sarah bare; Ishmael being excluded from it. So with regard to Rebecca; the promise went to her younger, and not to her elder son. And that this determination, that the elder should serve the younger; that is, that the promise, viz. "that the seed of Abraham should be the peculiar people of God, and that from them Messiah should spring," was made according to the sovereign will and purpose of him who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; that is, will shew favour to whom he pleases.

Though this determination was made before the children were born, and therefore, without regard to any good or evil they had done; it will not follow, but that God's purpose was made according to what he saw Esau would do—sell his birth-right, to which the priesthood was annexed, and thereby prove himself unworthy of any distinguishing marks of God's favour.

Let me here remark, what I trust is generally known, that when it is said, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have

* Rom. ix. 12, 13.

I hated," it only means that God preferred Jacob to Esau, to inherit and convey the blessing which had been promised to faithful Abraham. The words are to be understood in the same sense with those of our Saviour, "If any man come to me, and hateth not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."* The meaning is, He that preferreth father, or mother, &c. or his own life before me, and is not willing to part with them, and with every thing in this world, rather than renounce me, is not worthy to be my disciple.

No injury was done to Esau by God's preferring Jacob before him. The blessing which he could not obtain was a privilege which God had a right to confer either on him, or on his brother according to his own good pleasure. In giving it to Jacob, he took nothing from Esau: He only left him as he was before. And in no sense can this preference of Jacob to Esau be carried further, than the inheritance of the blessing which God promised to Abraham, respecting the blessing of all nations. Every thing else was the consequence of his own folly in selling his birth-right to his brother. And nothing but a vain desire to force texts of scripture into the support of an ill-founded scheme of a *particular election* and *reprobation* to eternal life and eternal misery, could induce any one to press the instance of Esau and Jacob into their service.

If we wish to apply their case to the state of Christians, we must consider what there is in our state which answers to Esau's birth-right. Now, that can be only our right and title to future glory through Christ. By the goodness of God, we are made his sons by the Regeneration of Baptism, and by Faith; are thereby taken into his Church, and made heirs of immortal life through his beloved Son. This is the right of our new birth. To sell this birth-right, is to part with our title to immortality with God, for some consideration which we receive instead of it. If we do so for the pleasures, or riches, or honours of the world; we do what Esau did, when he sold his

* Luke xiv. 26.

birth-right for a morsel of meat. We thrust away from us the precious gift of God, and count ourselves unworthy of the blood of the covenant, which sanctifieth those who trust in it, and obey from the heart the Gospel of Christ. They who do so, when the righteous Judge of men shall come, at the last day, to give his blessing, the great mercies and rich rewards he hath promised in his Gospel to the heirs of his glory, shall find themselves in Esau's situation: and though they seek carefully and with tears for those blessings then, which they now despise, the issue shall be the same with his; they shall be rejected. With the importunity of Esau, they may solicit their Judge, and plead their privilege, and the great things they have done; "Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderous works?"—But the time of mercy is past, when the hour of judgment is come. No place of repentance will then be found in him that judgeth: but, "I never knew you; depart from me all ye that work iniquity," will be the awful doom from the offended Majesty of God, to those who have wickedly and profanely bartered away their right to the heavenly inheritance, for the perishing enjoyments of this world.

I say *profanely*, for St. John declares that Christ "hath made us kings and *priests* unto God."* St. Peter also saith, that Christians are "an holy *priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."† This privilege, which is an appendage of their new birth, and belongs to them in consequence of their being the sons of God through faith in Christ, is made an argument to enforce on them that holy and devout life which their relation to God requires. To name one instance: St. Peter hath said of them, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal *priesthood*, an 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: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained

* Rev. i. 6. and v. 10.

† 1 Pct. ii. 5

mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," &c.* If, therefore, we sell the right to an heavenly inheritance which we obtain by the new birth, for the indulgence of fleshly lusts, the enjoyments of the world; we, at the same time, part with the priesthood annexed to it, the happy privilege of offering spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In that case, the charge of profaneness will lie against us, as strongly, at least, as it lay against Esau, for despising and selling that priesthood with which his priority of birth had invested him.

And let us remember, that the history of his conduct was written for our admonition, that we should not sin after the example of his perverseness; but highly prize, faithfully retain, and devoutly use all the gracious privileges which the mercy of God hath conferred on us. Let, then, every Christian take care, that he despise not the blessings which God hath prepared for them who love and obey him—that he throw not from him the precious gift of God, eternal life through Jesus Christ, and cleave to the enjoyments of this world; lest he fare as Esau did.

* 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10, 11, &c.

DISCOURSE XI.

THE EXULTATION OF ZACHARIAS.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

LUKE i. 68, 69.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David.

THESE are the words of Zacharias upon his recovering his speech, after the miraculous dumbness which God had inflicted on him, for his backwardness in believing the angel whom he had sent to him with the promise of a son, when he and his wife had lived to a great age without having had any child. It is to be remarked that they are the first words which he spake; and that they were spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, for whose divine influence he had been previously prepared by a holy unblameable life. St. Luke saith, of both him and Elizabeth, that they were “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Probably, too, the long silence imposed on him by the hand of God, had turned his mind more intensely to divine contemplation, and the consideration of spiritual objects. Penitence and prayer had, no doubt, increased his humility, and enlivened his faith and confidence in God. Finding how speedily the divine threat was inflicted on him, he became fully certain of the truth of God, and boldly assured himself, that all his promises by the mouth of his holy Prophets, of sending salvation to his people, were then on the eve of being fulfilled. Accordingly when the visitation of God on him was ended, he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, “Blessed be the

Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David."

Behold the pious rapture of the holy man, upon seeing, by the spirit of prophecy, the approaching birth of the Saviour Christ! His own circumstances are overlooked and disregarded, as being unworthy of his attention when so glorious and majestic a subject was before him. Two grand and miraculous events, in both of which he was deeply interested, had just happened to him—the birth of his son, and the recovery of his speech. These, it may be supposed, employed his mind, and would call forth his praise and adoration to God, at this time. But greater things, a more august theme filled his heart. The prophecies that had gone before, the promises of God by the mouth of his inspired servants, that he would send a mighty Saviour to deliver his people, rushed upon him. He saw the incarnation of this almighty Deliverer begun—by faith he saw it completed in the birth of Christ the Lord: and with prophetic rapture he proclaimed to the world as already past, what did not happen till six months after. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people."

None among the children of men is less interested in this propitious event than Zacharias was. Why then should it not be the rapture of our hearts, as it was of his? What should hinder us from joining in the triumphant song, and repeating with grateful hearts, before men and angels, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people." We have before us the same prophecies that Zacharias had; and, by faith in the records of the holy Evangelists, we see them wonderfully fulfilled. His need of this Saviour is also ours; and we derive the same blessings from him which he did. Let him, therefore, be our pattern; and may his divine hymn inflame our hearts with grateful praise and adoration of our gracious God for the astonishing instance of his love, in the happy event which we this day commemorate in his holy Church. All glory be to his holy name, that

he hath given his Son to be born of human nature, to take away the sin of the world, and restore fallen man to his favour : now no longer a God of wrath and vindictive justice ; but, through his Beloved, the God of mercy, and goodness, and love, not willing the death of a sinner, but that he should repent and be saved.

The Jews fondly expected a temporal deliverer in Christ, who should free them from worldly thralldom, as Moses had delivered their fathers from the slavery of Egypt. Under the influence of this vain expectation, they, with scorn, rejected the true Messiah, when he appeared among them. Little sensible must they have been of their sinful state and its consequent miseries, when they were so insensible of the love and mercy of God in sending a Saviour to redeem them from it. What was the thralldom of the Romans under which they lived, compared with the thralldom of satan, who held all mankind in bondage ? or what was the mischief of living under foreign laws, and paying tribute to a foreign power, compared with slavery to the law of sin, to boisterous passions and unruly appetites—all foreign to the original nature of man ; and at last to pay the tribute of eternal torment to a foreign lord, the prince of darkness, who hath usurped dominion over us ?

Some Christians, under the power of a vain philosophy, expect little better from Christ, than did these unhappy Jews. They expect he will save them from the penalty, though not from the power of sin. They say HE hath paid the whole penalty of sin ; and, therefore, no further punishment can be justly inflicted on account of it. If so, the habits of sin may remain ; and should any one live his whole life under their full power, the slave of evil lusts and passions, and die without repentance, Christ will, by the arbitrary imputation of his own righteousness and merit, secure him from punishment, and make him happy in heaven, where no evil can enter.

Be not deceived with vain schemes and fallacious hopes. Magnify this doctrine as much as you will, preach it with ever so much confidence, believe it with ever so much earnestness, love it with ever so much ardor ; that salva-

tion which does not deliver you from the power and dominion of sin, never will free you from its penalty. In the same proportion that it leaves you unholy, it will leave you unhappy. "If we say that we have fellowship with" Christ, and that his righteousness is imputed us, "and walk in darkness; we lie, and do not the truth."* The venom of sin lies in the power and dominion it hath over us. "He that committeth sin," that liveth under its power and dominion, "is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning," and still continueth to sin. For "this purpose the Son of God was manifested," by coming into the world, "that he might *destroy* the works of the devil."† Unless, therefore, the power of sin in us be broken and destroyed, the works of the devil remain. And if we do his works, we are his servants, and must receive his wages. Now, "the wages of sin is death"—What that death is, may you never know!

Remember, therefore, that the Son of God became the Mediator between God and man, was born of the holy Virgin, and suffered death on the cross, to make it possible for you to repent and turn to God; and to make it also possible for God to forgive, or pass over your sins: neither of which could have been possible without his atonement. Look to the song of holy Zacharias, and you will find he had far other notions of Christ's salvation than merely exemption from punishment for sin; namely, "That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies"—from the power of sin and satan—"might serve" God "without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." How exemption from punishment, while the habits of sin remain, can be called serving God in holiness and righteousness, is too hard for me to conceive. Or how we can be said to serve God *without fear*, that is, in peace and quietness from our spiritual enemies, while we love and delight in the bondage of sinful lusts and affections, is as hard for me to comprehend. It

* 1 John i. 6.

† 1 John iii. 8. λύσῃ from λύω, that he might *break* or *dissolve* the works of the devil, and set man free from them.

is true, all men are sinners; that is, all have sinned. But there is a great difference between continuing in the habits of sin, and repenting and forsaking it. Against the former, the wrath of God is denounced in the Bible; to the latter, the merciful forgiveness of God is promised through Jesus Christ. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It is also true, that there is none who liveth and sinneth not. But there is also a great difference between those miscarriages which spring from weakness of nature, from the surprise of sudden temptation which gives no time for thought, from involuntary ignorance, or real weakness of understanding; and habitual, wilful, and premeditated sins. By the merciful covenant of the gospel, if we strive against the offences of infirmity, they shall not be imputed to us by our gracious God.

But let us return to the more direct consideration of the text.

The reason why Zacharias blessed the Lord God of Israel was, that he had "visited and redeemed his people," and had "raised up a horn of salvation" for them, "in the house of his servant David."

Under the Law, and in the time of the Patriarchs; besides the standing revelation of his will, God communicated his pleasure to man by messages; sending either angels or his inspired prophets, to speak to his people in his name. But in the event which we this day celebrate, the "Lord God visited his people"—came in his own person united to human nature; and was, therefore, Emmanuel, God with us.

St. John, speaking of the same event, saith, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" literally, He *tabernacled, pitched his tent* among men. His visit was not intended to be a short one: And from the history of his life we find, that when he assumed our nature, his tabernacle of human flesh was not soon removed. Thirty and three years did he continue in this miserable world;

going about and doing good both to the souls and bodies of men, by his instructions and miracles. He came to bear our infirmities, to feel our distresses, to taste our sorrows, to endure our temptations, as well as to make atonement for our sins; that he might be a merciful, as well as an all-powerful High Priest, who, having felt the force of our temptations and sorrows, might be touched with a sense of them, and know how to pity us under them.

How gracious was this Lord God, thus to condescend to our state—to endure the weaknesses of childhood, the dangers and sorrows of youth and manhood, the whole burden of our infirmities, that he might, from his own experience, know how to pity and succour us under them! Blessed be his holy name, for such transcendent love and goodness!

Blessed also be his holy name, that he hath not only visited, but redeemed his people. Merely to have visited his people, and borne their sorrows and infirmities through his life, would have done them but little good: His gracious views went further: He bore them, that he might deliver us from them, and from sin, which causeth them all. By yielding up his most precious life, in the bitter agonies of crucifixion, he made an expiation and atonement for the sins of the world, and paid the ransom of its captivity to satan and to death.

This it behoved him to do, according to the prophecies that had gone before concerning him. And this, through the intenseness of his love, he condescended to do, that he might fulfil those prophecies, and become an all-powerful and perfect Saviour. He saw us miserable and helpless under the dominion of sin; fast bound with the fetters of evil passions and impure lusts; at enmity with God; and, every moment, exposed to the burden of his wrath. He saw, he pitied, and determined to relieve us. He left the throne of his Father; he emptied himself of the glories of the Godhead; and, in the womb of the blessed Mary, he united human nature to it, making one Christ. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him; he

anointed him with the Holy Ghost, to preach the gospel to the poor in spirit; he sent him to heal the heart which was broken with the sense and weight of sin, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of satan, and recovering of sight to those who are blind with error and vice, to set at liberty them that are bruised with guilt and despair, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, the day of salvation. This was, this is the will of God; and in the volume of the book it is written of Christ, that he should fulfil the will of the Almighty Father. Perfectly content was he to do so. The language of his heart and lips was, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God." The will of God, in his life and in his death, he fully accomplished, leaving no part undone. Every thing which divine justice required to make atonement for sin and reconcile us to God, he freely endured, and thereby "washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God his Father."*

But the mercy of God in Christ, celebrated by good Zacharias, stops not here. He not only visited and redeemed his people from the captivity of satan, but he hath raised up a horn of salvation for them, in the house of his servant David. This is the crown of all the rest. He visited us, that he might redeem us. He redeemed, that he might save us. Only to have visited us, though it might have shown his good will towards us, would have done us little good. To have redeemed us from the captivity of satan, and have left us to our own strength, would have been to have left us to the certainty of again falling into the same thralldom from which we had been rescued. But, by raising a horn of salvation for us, a power is provided to make his redemption effectual to all those who believe and trust in him.

The expression signifies power, glory, and royalty. It is a metaphor taken from those beasts whose strength is in their horns. A horn of salvation is, therefore, a strong and mighty salvation, or a glorious and royal salvation; such as was fit for a king to undertake and accomplish.

As it is applied to Christ, it includes both these meanings. His salvation consists in our deliverance from the power of satan, of sin, and of the grave; and in our restoration to freedom, to holiness, and to life eternal. The difficulty of the work proves the strength of the Saviour. Had he not been mighty to save, one whose own arm could bring him salvation, who could enter the house of the strong man and bind him, who could burst the bands of death, and open the jaws of the grave—one who can defend his redeemed that trust in him, make them superior to all their enemies, support them in holiness and righteousness before God to the end of their life, and receive them to glory in his heavenly kingdom; our salvation had been impossible, and we must forever have continued the captives of satan. But,

The *horn* in the holy scripture signifies not only power and strength, but glory and royalty also. In this sense, a horn of salvation means a glorious and royal Saviour. This is implied in another circumstance in the text. God is said to have raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. The glory of David consisted in his being an eminent type of Christ; in the royalty of his house, made royal by God himself; and in Christ's coming, according to the flesh, of his family. Royalty, therefore, belonged to Christ by his descent from the family of David, by his being placed by God upon the throne of David, even on the holy hill of Zion, the head of the Church of the living God, to rule and govern it forever. Moreover, as the Son of God most high, Christ, from eternity, had a royalty above all the kings of the earth, above every name that can be named.

As the difficulty of our salvation argues the power and might of the Saviour; so the dignity of the Saviour proves the importance and difficulty of the enterprize. Grand designs should not be committed to mean hands, nor should dignified persons be employed on low and trivial affairs.

View it then in any, in every light, and you will see the majesty of God, as well as his mercy and love, employed in the redemption and salvation of man; and, with the

holy Psalmist, will be ready with astonishment to cry out, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" And with our wonder and admiration at the love and condescension of our God and Saviour, let us mix our gratitude and praise; and testify the joy of our hearts, that he hath regarded our low estate, and laid help on one who is mighty; that he hath exalted him to be our Prince and Saviour, who is strong, and able to rescue the prey from the jaws of that destroyer, who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. "Blessed be the Lord, that he hath not given us a prey to his teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken, and we are escaped."* "Blessed, therefore, be the Lord God of Israel who hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for them, in the house of his servant David."

Judge now what return you ought to make for the blessings of that happy event which the Church of God this day commemorates—the coming of the Lord God, Christ Jesus, Jehovah, to visit and redeem his people, and to raise up a horn of salvation for them against the power of all their enemies. The tribute of praise and thanksgiving hath been already mentioned. This tribute hath been, I trust, devoutly paid this day in his Church; and may we ever continue gratefully to pay it, on every return of this holy Festival. But, from persons so highly obliged as we are, something more than words of praise and thanksgiving are certainly due. We are among those happy people whom Christ, when he took our mortal nature upon him, visited and redeemed, and to whom he is now a horn of salvation against their enemies. Through the good providence of God, the knowledge of this salvation, with all its blessings, is come to us. What return does it demand from us? What effect ought it to have on us? The Church hath taught us, in the Collect for the day, that Christ was born of the holy Virgin, that we, through him, might be

* Psal. cxxiv. 6, 7.

born of God, and made his children by adoption and grace. St. John also hath told us, that “to as many as received” Christ when he came into the world, “he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* Being, then, through Christ, made the children of God, it is naturally to be expected, that we live and behave as such. Remember, therefore, the words of St. Paul, who saith, “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; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God,” even “our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”†

Behold, in this account of the holy Apostle, what you ought to be, in consequence of Christ’s redemption—pure in heart, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts—holy in life, living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world—zealous of good works, as the peculiar people of God.—This conduct alone becomes the children of God. Happy privilege, if you live worthy of the family into which you are adopted: But dreadful will be their condemnation, if the people of God sell themselves to do the work of the devil!

Permit me just to observe, that in the language of the scriptures, *good works*, are works of mercy and charity which do good to others. When these works proceed from a heart warm with the love of God, and of man for God’s sake, they are highly acceptable to him as imitations of his goodness: They are also the best expressions of our gratitude for the love he hath shown to us. “If God so loved us,” saith St. John, that he hath “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins; we ought also to love one another.”‡

Consider these things—and may God of his mercy in-

* John i. 12, 13.

† Tit. ii. 11—14.

‡ 1 John iv. 10, 11.

aspire your hearts with love and gratitude for all his goodness ; particularly for that instance of it which we now commemorate : May he purify your hearts to serve him in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of your life ; make you zealous in all good works, to do his will in all things, and confirm your faith and hope in that salvation which he hath wrought for you. Then will you devoutly give praise and glory to God, and joyfully join in the song of Zacharias, “ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people ; and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David.”

DISCOURSE XII.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD, OR NEW-YEAR'S DAY.

GAL. vi. 15.

In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

IN the beginning of Christianity, an unhappy dispute prevailed between the Jewish and Gentile converts, concerning the obligation of the Law of Moses. Though many of the former heartily received the Christian Revelation, and believed Jesus to be Messiah whom their Prophets had foretold; they yet retained the peculiarities of their old religion, and strove hard to oblige the Gentile converts to submit also to them, as equally necessary to salvation with Christianity itself. The Gentile Christians thought this an intolerable burden; and could not see the necessity of their becoming Jews, in order to their being Christians. St. Paul became their advocate; and the dispute being referred to the apostles at Jerusalem, was determined in their favour.

This determination encouraged the Gentile converts in their opposition to Judaism, and confirmed their Christian liberty; but it did not entirely silence the Jews, nor remove their prejudices. They had been long in the habit of considering themselves the favourites of heaven, and had no notion of God's shewing mercy to the rest of the world, unless they were by circumcision incorporated into their nation, and submitted to their Law. The first preachers of the gospel were Jews, and were also tainted with the same prejudice. Finding many of their countrymen settled in the larger cities of the Roman Empire, they first made known to them the glad tidings of salvation through Christ; proclaiming him to be Messiah, whom

God had promised to their fathers. By these means the first converts to Christianity were generally Jews, who, having so fair an opportunity to propagate their own opinions and prejudices, made diligent use of it, to the great disturbance of the Church.

This controversy seems to have been the principal occasion of St. Paul's writing his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and of many digressions and incidental remarks in his other Epistles. He warmly espoused and pleaded the cause of the Gentiles; proving by many arguments, that Judaism was only a temporary institution, intended by God to prepare the Jews, and, by their means, the rest of the world, for the coming of his Son: that all the institutions and ceremonies of that religion were only types and figures of what was to be done by Christ, and in his Church: that these having now been fulfilled, the Law of Moses had answered its purpose, and was at an end; and that there no longer lay any obligation on Jew or Gentile to observe it.

In the management of this controversy, St. Paul was led to extol the glory, and celebrate the excellency of the method of Man's redemption by Jesus Christ; and, in comparison with it, to undervalue the Law of Moses. Under the word *faith*, he declares the Gospel to be sufficient, without the Law, for salvation; and under the style of *the Law*, he asserts and proves the inefficacy of the institutions of Moses for that purpose.

From what he hath said on this subject, in his Epistles in general, and particularly in that to the Galatians, it appears that by the terms *circumcision* and *uncircumcision*, he frequently distinguisheth the Jewish nation or Church from the Gentile world. So that the meaning of the text, "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature," is this; "with respect to a man's becoming a Christian, it is a matter of no importance whether he be a Jew, or a Gentile. When a Jew embraceth Christianity, his circumcision becomes uncircumcision, and he is no longer obliged to continue his observance of the Law of Moses. And when a Gentile is

converted to the Gospel, there is no necessity for him to become a Jew, and bind himself by circumcision to the observance of that Law. The wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles is broken down, and the Jewish œconomy dissolved. All nations, therefore, stand on equal ground before God, in respect of the means of salvation, and are equally entitled to his favour. All that he requires of men is that *new creature*, or *new creation*, which the redemption of Christ is intended to produce, and bring to maturity in them."

The imputation of vanity will not, I trust, lie against me, if I say, that many writers and preachers have run wild in explaining this phrase, *a new creature*. Every sober-minded Christian, however, must have observed that many of them have lost both themselves and those who attended to them, by endeavouring to hunt out meanings from it, and from similar expressions in Scripture, which they were never intended to convey. It is a misfortune that preachers attached to a particular system, are apt to bend and warp the expressions of the Scripture, to make them comport with their own opinions. Unhappily, too, they are sometimes seized by the lust of popularity; and then fall into strong temptations to accommodate their discourses to the prevailing popular opinion. Be this opinion true or false, the Scripture is too often interpreted agreeably to it.

That there are some things dark and mysterious in our holy religion, no sensible Christian will deny. When infinite wisdom speaks to beings of limited capacities, obscurity must rest on those parts of divine revelation which they have not abilities to comprehend. In the Christian Revelation, however, all that relates to our duty is so plainly expressed, that it will always be intelligible to common sense, if we carry an honest heart and an attentive mind to the study of it.

If we compare the expression in the text, *a new creature*, with what St. Paul hath said in other places, there will, I apprehend, be no difficulty in assigning its true meaning, nor in understanding it, when pointed out. In another

part of his Epistle to the Galatians, he thus expresseth himself: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but *faith which worketh by love.*"* Writing to the Corinthians, he saith, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the *keeping of the commandments of God.*"† Compare these passages with the text, and it will be evident, that the *new creature*, and *faith which worketh by love*, and the *keeping of the commandments of God*, all mean the same thing. If, then, we can ascertain the meaning of one of those phrases, we shall understand them all.

What the commandments of God are, the Bible will inform us; and we all know, that by *keeping* the commandments is meant *observing* and *obeying* them. Our Saviour hath taught us, that all the Law and the Prophets do depend on these commandments comprehended in the love of God and man.‡ This lets us into the meaning of the other expression of the Apostle, *faith which worketh by love*. In a Christian sense, *faith* means the belief of the Gospel. And if our belief of the Gospel work in us *love* to God and man; in other words, if it produce in us obedience to the commandments of God; which, our Saviour saith, are fulfilled by loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves; then is accomplished what God would have done: the *new creature* is formed; the *new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, is put on.§ Then are we the children, the beloved, the elect of God. And it matters not whether we are, by birth, Jews or Greeks, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free.

Whatever schemes of salvation people may form for themselves or adopt from others, they never will find peace of mind, except in that faith and holiness, which are required by the Gospel. They may be enamoured of this Preacher, and of that Doctrine; they may attach themselves to this or that Party, and suppose themselves in union with the People of God; they may recur to the decrees of God, and bolster themselves up with a fond per-

* Gal. v. 6.

† 1 Cor. vii. 19.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 40.

§ Eph. iv. 24.

vision that they were from eternity elected to everlasting life; they may look to the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and imagine that he hath done all for them, in such a manner as to leave nothing for them to do; they may fancy themselves sure of salvation, because they know the time and manner of their conversion, and have had some indescribable feelings, which have brought them into a state of grace from which they cannot finally fall away: But after all this, they can give no sufficient evidence to others; nor, on good grounds, satisfy themselves that they are the children of God, and have put on the new man, if that faith and holiness be wanting, which show themselves in obedience to the commandments of God.

Our Saviour makes a distinction between the children of this world, and the children of light. The same distinction is kept constantly in view by his Apostles. The children of this world are remarked for their attention to the things of the world, and for their prudence in the management of them: the children of light, for their attention to the things of eternity. The former live after the flesh; the latter after the spirit. The former keep on the old man, the latter put on the new man.*

In the language of Scripture, the *old man* signifies the fallen nature of Adam, with all its evil tempers and passions. These we inherit by our descent from him, and not by any imputation of his sin to us by God. They who live according to the appetites and passions of this nature, keep on the old man, with which our natural birth hath, as it were, clothed us. They mind the things of the flesh, and of the world; which things are "enmity against God."† They cannot please God; but live in sin, committing many actual transgressions.‡

By the *new man*, or *new creature*, is meant the holy nature of Christ, which is love and obedience to God. This nature we obtain, not by the imputation of what Christ hath done for us, but by having his spirit, and temper, and disposition actually produced in us by the Holy Spir-

* Rom. vi. 6. Eph. iv. 22, 24. Col. iii. 9, 10. † Rom. viii. 7.

‡ Office of Adult Baptism. Rom. viii. 8.

it of God: Therefore said St. Paul, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:" And also, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* For this reason, they who believe the Gospel, so as to be convinced of the fatal tendency of the natural appetites and passions which lead to sin against God; and do renounce and deny them, and are no longer governed by them, are said to have put off the *old man* with his corrupt deeds. And they who, being convinced of the blessed effect of obeying God in all things, do manifest in their lives, the same spirit, and temper, and disposition which appeared in Christ, copying the example of his holy life, are said to have "put on the *new man*, which after" the image of "God is created in righteousness and true holiness,"† They, in truth, become *new creatures*; they acquire a new heart, new tempers, new desires, a new nature; "old things are past away; behold, all things are become new."‡ Then are they partakers of Christ's righteousness, not by an arbitrary imputation of it to them, which, was it possible, could do them no good; but, as I said before, by being born of his nature; that is, by having his spirit and temper produced, and living in them. This nature will grow and increase in them, in the same degree they attend to it, and comply with its holy suggestions, till they come to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, and are "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light"—being "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love; in whom they have redemption thro' his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"§

This is the end and design of the redemption of Christ, and of that holy religion, to the profession of which we are called by the mercy of God. Christ hath made known to us the way, and furnished the means by which this new-birth is produced, the new creature formed, and kept alive, and increasing in us; namely, the operation of his own most blessed Spirit, and the practice of all holiness and righteousness of life. To this end, he requires that

* Rom. viii. 9. † Eph. iv. 24. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 17. § Col. i. 13, 14.

we repent of all past sin, so as no longer to live in it; that we believe his Gospel and rely on his atonement for the forgiveness of our sins; that we come into his Church by Baptism; profess our faith and trust in him; renounce his enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, and no longer take part with them; but, on the contrary, engage to keep all the commandments of God, to the end of our lives; that we actually do, in consequence of this our faith and profession, deny and keep under the evil appetites and passions of the body and mind, withdraw our affections from the world, and look to our heavenly country for that happiness which our nature so ardently desires; live in faithful obedience to the will of God, and devoutly comply with all the institutions ordained in his Church. These institutions are to us means of grace and holy living, intended to strengthen our faith, enliven our hope, support our weakness, and assure us of the mercy of God; to be pledges of his love and goodness to us, of the forgiveness of our sins, of acceptance with him through the Redeemer, and of eternal life in heaven.

All this was typified by the rites and ceremonies of the Jews' religion. That we, who are descended from the race of the Gentiles, are exempt from the burden of that religion, is a happiness for which we ought ever to bless God. But the spiritual, or moral meaning of their Law, and particularly of Circumcision, the sacrament of initiation into the covenant made with Abraham, we are as much obliged to regard as the Jews were. The external circumcision of the flesh gave all those who submitted to it, a right to all the civil and religious privileges of their nation. But it will be evident to a careful reader of the Bible, that something more than a compliance with the external rite was necessary to recommend even the Jews to the favour of God.

The external circumcision was a sign and evidence of the covenant made with Abraham. But that it had an inward and spiritual meaning, which looked beyond the legal ordinances of the Jews, even to the eternal and immutable Law of righteousness, will appear from the three following particulars.

1. Circumcision implied a ready disposition to learn and obey the will of God. This, indeed, is the great lesson which God hath ever endeavoured to teach mankind. It was what he required of Adam and of the Jews, and what he now requires of Christians. "Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts," said Moses to the Israelites, "and be no more stiff-necked."* To be stiff-necked is to be rebellious and disobedient to the will of God. St. Stephen reproacheth the Jews with being "uncircumcised in heart and ears," because they "always resisted the Holy Ghost;" and had then just given an eminent instance of their perverseness, in their bitter and incurable opposition to the will of God made known by his Son.

Look now into the Law of the Gospel, and you will see how strongly this duty is enjoined on Christians by Christ himself: "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."

2. The spiritual meaning of circumcision required the withdrawing of the affections from the world, and placing them on God. This also we learn from Moses, who, to encourage the Israelites to repentance, makes them this promise: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul."†

Look again into the Law of the Gospel, and you will find Christ declaring the first and great commandment to be, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."

3. The spirit of circumcision implied a strict guard over the sensual appetites. This appears from the prophet Jeremiah, who exhorting the Jews to repentance, addressed them in these words: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskin of your hearts, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."‡ Here the foreskin of their

* Deut. x. 16.

† xxx. 6.

‡ Jerem. iv. 4.

hearts which they were to take away, is interpreted to mean the evil of their doings; and the evil of their doings is described in the next chapter; "They committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife."* It is indeed obvious, that the restraining lascivious desires is more than intimated in the rite, and is the first thought that presents itself about it.

Attend now to the writings of the author of the text, and you will find him exhorting Christians in these words: "Mortify your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."† In another place, he gives this caution, "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."‡

If, therefore, the Jew was obliged to love and obey God, to be chaste, and pure, and holy, that he might fulfil the spiritual meaning of the Law; how strong must be the obligation on Christians, that they may fulfil the Law of the Gospel!

The blessed Redeemer, who loved us even to death, hath expressed himself on the duty of self-denial in terms which ought to make the deepest impression on us. Having sharply rebuked Peter for regarding the things of men; the honour, power, and happiness of the world, more than the things of God; he addressed his disciples, and all who were with him, in these memorable words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." On another occasion, he said, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." The reason with which he supports this observation is drawn from a principle which seldom fails to influence men in the strongest manner—the natural love of life and happiness. "Whosoever will save his life," by renouncing me, and departing from the puri-

* Jerem. v. 7, 8.

† Col. iii. 5, 6.

‡ Rom. viii. 13.

ty and holiness of the gospel, that he may consult his own ease and worldly prosperity, will find himself miserably mistaken; he "shall lose it;" he shall forfeit that life and happiness which is principally worth regarding. But, "whosoever will lose his life;" is willing to forego the happiness of the world, and even to part with his present life, "for my sake, shall find it;" shall obtain life and happiness eternal.

Though, therefore, the mortification of the inordinate passions and appetites, and the renouncing of that happiness which arises from sensual indulgence, may be a painful task; more so than the external circumcision of the flesh; yet, unless it be done, that soul shall be cut off from the kingdom of heaven.

The Church supposeth this duty to be absolutely necessary to the Christian life; and, therefore, when we declare our faith in the Holy Trinity at our Baptism, and take on us the profession of Christ's religion; she obliges us to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh; and to promise that we will not follow, nor be led by them. She also directs us to "remember always, that Baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptised, die from sin and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living."

If what hath been said serves, in any degree, to impress on you the necessity of that spiritual circumcision, or change of heart and life which is meant by the *new creature*; and to enforce the obligations you are under to learn and obey the will of God, to love him with your whole heart, to deny your sensual appetites, by a total abstinence from forbidden pleasures; what more proper time can there be to begin to acquire, or to cherish and perfect those good dispositions, than this Day, when Christ began to fulfil the Law, to bear our sins in his own body, and shed his blood for us? He was circumcised, and became obedient to the

Law, not for his own sake, but for ours; that he might fulfil all righteousness, and by obeying perfectly the law of unsinning obedience, might abolish and take it away, and place us under the mild law of the Gospel; by which our penitence, and faithful, though imperfect obedience, is accepted by God through him.

There is also another reason why we should at this time begin, if we have not already begun this good work. This Day opens a new scene; it is to us the beginning of a New-Year; and I pray God it may be a prosperous and happy one: Most happy indeed will it be, if it prove to you the occasion of prudent reflection and sincere repentance, the beginning of a new and holy life.

Let us, then, suspend the joy and mirth of this cheerful season, and turn our thoughts on the past year. The past year! and where is it? It is gone, irrecoverably gone: gone to be an evidence in your favour, or a witness against you with God, according as you have employed it in his service, or in the service of the world and its vanities. Let every one ask himself this important question; How have I employed the past year? and let conscience answer. If that acquit you, and testify for you, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have had your conversation in the world;" then may you have "confidence towards God." But, should your conscience condemn you; remember, "God is greater than your conscience, and knoweth all things."

Be not deceived; nor think, because you see the same seasons return, and the sun in the same point of the heavens now, that he was in twelve months ago, that you also are in the same state you then were in: very far otherwise. God hath intrusted you with another year; that year is past and gone. You have, therefore, a year more to account for, than you had a twelvemonth ago; and you are a year nearer making your account, than you then were.

Recollect how many within the narrow circle of your acquaintance, who were perhaps as gay, and as vain in

the expectation of living many years, as you can be, have been called out of the world in the course of the past year. Some of them were your equals in health and strength. They were not all old or sickly. Why then were they taken, and you left? Let this reflection instruct you in the value of your time, and convince you how little you ought to depend on finishing the year you have now begun. Frail and uncertain is human life. Constantly exposed to accidents, and sickness, no one can assure himself that he shall live to see another New Year's day. Make this, then, a *New Year* in the Christian sense of that word, by becoming *new creatures*; by putting on the *new man*, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.

If you were certain, or was it only very probable, that the year you have now begun, would be your last; how would you pass it? Certainly not in the vanities of the world, nor in the lusts of the flesh, nor in the works of darkness; but in the service of God. You owe this to the mercy of God, who hath manifested his patience and long-suffering in your preservation; and who hath, therefore, a right to the service of your future years. You also owe this to yourselves; because otherwise you will lose your heavenly inheritance, and "treasure up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds."

Permit me, then, to address you in the words of St. Peter: "Let the time past of your lives suffice you to have wrought the will of the Gentiles; when ye walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings," and such like. Let the time past suffice you to have lived in worldly vanities and anxious cares, in strife or envy, in pride or vain-glory, in deceit or hypocrisy, in profaneness or carelessness of religion and eternity: And, for the time to come, which God grant may be long and happy, let it be so employed, that it may not rise up in judgment against you, but may increase your joy and blessedness in the kingdom of God.

May God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom—To that wisdom which is from above, and which seeketh the things which are above; which will make us wise unto salvation; which will endure, when days, and weeks, and months, and years are gone; when time itself shall be no more: That wisdom which will dispose us fervently to seek, and instruct us effectually to obtain, that eternal, incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven for all the faithful servants of God: To him be glory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



DISCOURSE XIII.

DELIVERANCE FROM SIN THE DESIGN OF CHRIST'S
COMING.

1 JOHN iii. 3.

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

TO come at the full meaning of the text, it will be necessary to ascertain the sense of the several phrases used in it, viz.

I. What is meant, in the sense of the apostle, by *committing sin*.

II. What he means by such a person's being *of the devil*, who sinneth from the beginning.

III. What is intended by the *manifestation of the Son of God*. And,

IV. What is meant by *destroying the works of the devil*.

I. What the apostle means by *committing sin* was the first thing proposed for our inquiry. This is the more necessary to be ascertained, because he useth the phrases *to sin*, and *to commit sin*, in a peculiar sense—to denote not a single act, but the habit of sin; and not the habits of what are commonly called *sins of infirmity*, arising from the unavoidable weaknesses of nature, but the habits of *wilful, deliberate sins*. That this is the meaning of the phrase, *he that committeth sin*, will appear from the sense in which our Saviour useth it: “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”* Compare this with what St. Paul hath said on the subject; “Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the

* John viii. 34.

lusts thereof,"—"Sin shall not have dominion over you,"—"To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness."* To be the servants of sin, therefore, is to live under its dominion, to have it reign over us, to obey it even in its lust, that is, whenever the temptation to it assaults us. Now, to *commit sin*, and to be the *servant of sin*, are used by Christ as equivalent phrases.

In the servitude of sin there are evidently two degrees. One, when a man is in such subjection to some particular sin, that he commits it habitually, whenever its lust assaults him; even against the sense of his mind and conscience, the light of his reason, and against his better resolution. But wanting strength to overcome it, he falls into it on every temptation, and is properly its *servant*. He is overcome and brought in bondage by it. It compels him to do the evil which he would not. It has him under its dominion and reigns over him.

The other degree of servitude to sin arises from the long continued practice of it. If a man habituate himself to act against the dictates of his conscience, the sense of his duty, and his own resolutions to do better; they will all at last cease to check him. He will feel no admonitions of conscience, no reluctance of mind or will: All sense of the shame of men, all regard to the fear of God will be lost. Dreadful is this state! properly called the *reprobate mind*; because, being past feeling, such persons give themselves over, to work all iniquity with greediness.

In one or other of these states, the common drunkard, the profane swearer, the lascivious debauchee, the rapacious usurer, the fraudulent dealer, the cruel oppressor, and covetous worldling seem to live. God give them repentance and a better mind!

If we understand the expression, *he that committeth sin*, to mean, as hath been explained, not any single act of sin, nor those deviations from duty which happen through weakness of nature; but a course of sinning, living habit-

* Rom. vi. 12, 14, 16.

ually in a state which God hath forbidden ; it will afford an easy solution of a difficulty in this Epistle, which does not seem capable of being solved on any other ground. The Apostle saith, " Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

Some idle, and some dangerous interpretations have been given of this text : I shall mention such of them as occur to me. One interpretation is, that he who is born of God ought not to sin ; it would be very absurd in him to do so. This we know : We know also, that too many who profess Christ's religion live habitually in this absurd and reproachful state. But the Apostle speaketh of what the man who commits sin does do, and not of what he ought not to do. Another interpretation refers freedom from sin to the future life ; assigning it as a reason, that we are not perfectly born of God till the resurrection, which is by Christ called the regeneration.* But it is evident the Apostle doth not speak of committing sin, or of freedom from sin in the next life, but in the present. A third interpretation is, that he who is born of God sinneth not while he continueth a child of God ; because if he sin, he ceaseth to be a child of God. If there be any sense in this interpretation, it directly contradicts what the Apostle saith in this very Epistle ; " My little children these things write I unto you, that ye sin not : And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,"† plainly admitting that they were liable to sin, and directing them to the atonement and intercession of Christ for its remission, when they were so unhappy as to fall into it. The exposition of Tertullian, that a child of God cannot fall into any great and deliberate crime, is, I suppose, false in fact, as will appear under the next inquiry. The exposition of St. Bernard, who is followed by the Calvinists, is, that a child of God sinneth not, because, though he should do what would be sin in others, God, who seeth no sin in his elect for whom Christ died, will not impute it to him. If the other inter-

* Matt. xx. 28.

† 1 John ii. 1.

pretations were weak, this is wicked. It amounts to a full permission to sin through a man's whole life time, and yet God shall take no notice of it; whereas the text saith, "He that committeth sin," that is, lives in it, "is of the devil." Far worse is this doctrine than the Pope's indulgence: That, at the worst, only dispenses with sinning by the month or year; but here is a plenary indulgence from God himself, for a man to sin through his whole life, and yet be God's elect, his dear and beloved child. The last interpretation which I have seen is, that he who is born of God sinneth not willingly, not without great reluctance and striving against it. But this cannot be the meaning of the Apostle, because it ascribes to the child of God, the very character of the servant of sin. There can be no lower degree of slavery than to be obliged to act against our own mind and conscience; and the greater the reluctance is with which we do so, the greater and heavier is our bondage.

To be *born of God*, and to be the *child of God*, are synonymous expressions. The child of God doth not commit sin, in this sense—He doth not allow himself in any known sin; consequently he cannot live in any habit of sin. He may fall through human infirmity, through violent and sudden temptation, which allows no time for reflection; but he will not, he cannot continue in it. The fixed purpose of his heart, the habit of his life, is perfect obedience to God: When, therefore, it is his unhappiness to offend, he turns from his offence with detestation, and with penitence hastens back to the stated purpose of his heart, obedience to the commandments of God.

The reason assigned by the Apostle, why he who is born of God *cannot sin*, that is, cannot *continue* or *live* in sin, is, because *his seed*, the Holy Spirit of God by which he is begotten and born to this holy and Christian life, *remaineth in him*, influencing his conscience, mind, and will, by his divine energy, to turn from and abhor every thing that is contrary to the will of God, and to do every thing which he requires.

II. I come now to the second consideration, namely,

to inquire what is meant by the Apostle, when he saith, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning."

The meaning of the expression, "the devil sinneth from the beginning," is, that he began to sin soon after his creation, and hath continued to sin ever since. They, therefore, who live in a course of sin are of him, because they imitate him; continuing to sin as he doth; persist in it in imitation of him; and thereby keep up that rebellion against God which he first began, and still continues; into which he first tempted Adam, and even now tempts his descendants. They, therefore, who live in habits of wilful sin, are "of the devil," his children: They manifest the same opposition to God, and are of the same temper and disposition with him.

They are not, therefore, what are called *sins of infirmity* which make a person a child of the devil; nor is it any single act of deliberate sin, unless it be that sin against the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour saith shall not be forgiven, either in this world or the world to come. Not sins of infirmity; for into such sins Christ's Apostles fell more than once: Witness their ambitious contention, who should be the greatest in his kingdom: witness also their forsaking him in the hour of his distress when he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies; witness Peter's regarding the things that are of men, more than the things that are of God; and Thomas's doubting of his resurrection after sufficient evidence of the fact had been given him; witness likewise the angry contention between Paul and Barnabas about their companion Mark. These things ought not to have been. They were not only wrong in themselves and in their consequences, but they proceeded from the evil root which sin hath planted in human nature, and which is the cause of human infirmity. Yet surely the Apostles did not thereby become the children of the devil, nor lose the favour of God.

Nor is it one single act of deliberate sin which will make a person the child of the devil, unless it be followed by impenitency and hardness of heart. Into such sins both

David and St. Peter fell; the former in the matter of Uriah; the latter in the denial of his Lord. In these instances they sinned greatly and deliberately; but they continued not in their sin; therefore they were not of the devil, but remained the children, though the undutiful and disobedient children of God, till they were restored to the full enjoyment of his favour by their deep and bitter repentance. The seed of the Father, the Holy Spirit, the principle of filial reverence, remained in them so that they could not continue in their sin; but the message of the Prophet brought the one, and the reproving look of the holy Jesus the other, to a full sense of the great evil they had committed, to true compunction of heart for it, and to greater watchfulness and care in the future conduct of their lives. Had they continued in their sin, and remained impenitent under the admonitions they received, their case would have been very different, and we should have lamented them as reprobates, instead of rejoicing in them as instances of the efficacy of true and unfeigned repentance.

Blessed be the holy name of our God, that, through the Mediator, he hath made it possible for his justice to accept of repentance instead of innocence; to overlook the deviations from strict duty which arise from weakness of nature; to pardon the defects of our best obedience; and to regard the uprightness of our intentions and endeavours to do his will. Thanksgiving and praise be ascribed to the holy Jesus, the adorable Son of God, that he hath wrought so great salvation for us: and glory be to the Holy Ghost, the blessed Spirit of God, that he condescendeth to regenerate our natures, to dwell in us, to sanctify our persons, to preserve us in the way of holiness which leadeth unto life eternal.

Prudence, as well as Christian duty, will oblige us to beware of presumption in this matter. Deliberately to sin, because God will accept of repentance, is to abuse, not to comply with his mercy. Repentance is his gift: Are we sure he will bestow it on the presumptuous offender? on him who sins, that grace may abound in the for-

givenness of it? Rather fear God, because of his mercy; because there is forgiveness with him; because he is not extreme to mark what is done amiss.* Remember, that you cannot repent and forsake sin of your own strength; nor command your own will to do good. "Work out, therefore, your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure."†

III. Let us now attend to the third thing proposed from the text, namely, to inquire what is meant by the *manifestation of the Son of God*.

By this phrase, the writers of the New Testament frequently express the birth of Christ in human nature. In this sense it is used by St. Paul; "God was manifest in the flesh;"‡ that is, was made man by being born of human nature; thereby uniting humanity to his divinity, making one Christ. In the same sense is the word used by St. Peter; "Christ was manifest in these last times for you;"§ that is, under this last dispensation, Christ, God and Man united, appeared in the world for your redemption. St. John affixeth the same meaning to the expression in the fifth verse of the context; "He was manifested to take away our sins;" that is, Christ came into the world to make atonement for sin, and reconcile man to God, by being made a sin-offering for him.

In common language, to be *manifest* is to appear evidently, to be visible. The Son of God, according to his divine nature, is invisible to mortal eyes. But when he united human nature to his own divinity, and became man by being born of the holy Virgin; he openly and visibly appeared in the world, in the person of Christ; like other men was *manifested* to the sight, and hearing, and touch.

IV. The fourth point to be considered, was the meaning of the expression, "destroy the works of the devil."

The Greek word rendered to *destroy*, signifies to *dissolve* to *loosen*, to *set at liberty*, or to *set free from*; and metaphorically, to *pardon*. By the *works of the devil*, is meant

* Psal. cxxx. 3, 4. † Philip. ii. 12, 13. ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 16. § 1 Pet. i. 20.

all sin, wickedness of every kind, every thing that is evil, whatever is contrary to the will or law of God. By rebelling against his Maker, he first introduced evil into the creation; and, by continuing his rebellion, and tempting others to join in it, he became the patron and promoter of all sin. Evil tempers, and actions, and habits, are therefore, in Scripture, ascribed to him, as to their proper source and original, and are called his works: They are also called the works of darkness; not only because they who live in them commonly choose darkness and privacy to conceal their evil practices from observation; but because those practices proceed originally from him who is called the prince of darkness, and who is said to live in darkness. For as God is light, and in him is no darkness at all; they who do his will, are the children of light, and walk in the light; that is, they are the children of God, and live in the light of divine truth: So the devil, having set himself against God, and ever acting in opposition to him, is darkness; his works are the works of darkness; they who do them walk in darkness, live in darkness, and see not the light though it shine unto them; that is, they perceive not the light of divine truth, and goodness, and mercy, though it surrounds them; even as the blind see not the light of the sun, though they live in it.

For the same reason, because the devil is the origin of evil, and the perpetual instigator of others to practise it; they who live in habitual wickedness are said to be led captive by him, to be his children, to do his works, to be under his dominion; because they are led by his spirit, and live in slavery to those evil tempers and passions which come from him.

The Scriptures teach us, that all goodness and holiness are the fruits of the Spirit of God; and that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.* For this reason the Church calls the service of God perfect freedom; because they who are led by the Spirit of God are delivered from the thralldom of contending passions and ungovernable appetites, and are at liberty to act and live according

* 2 Cor. iii. 17.

to the dictates of right reason and a pure conscience. It was, therefore, natural to describe those who lived under the influence of passion and appetite, as being in slavery to them, so that they could not pursue a reasonable course of life, nor do those things which their conscience approved: Especially, to say of those who lived in deceit, and fraud, and malice, and envy, and violence—tempers and practices that are particularly ascribed to the devil—that they were under his dominion and tyranny.

Having ascertained what is meant by the *works of the devil*, and noted the sense of the word which the translators of our Bible have rendered, *destroying*; namely, that it signifies to *dissolve, set free from, release*, and figuratively *to forgive*; it will not be difficult to fix the meaning of the latter part of the text, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil”—For this purpose was the Son of God born of human nature, that he might release, or set men free from all sin and wickedness, the works of the devil who holds them in bondage.

That this deliverance from sin may be complete, it must consist of two particulars. 1. That we be released from the penalty of our past sins; that is, that the works of the devil which we have already done be not placed against us, but that they be passed over and forgiven. 2. That the power of the devil over us be loosened, dissolved, and we set free from it, so that we shall be no longer under the necessity of doing his works.

In both these respects, redemption by Christ hath made the most ample provision. Becoming in our nature a sin-offering to God, he hath made full and perfect atonement for sin, and thereby rendered it possible for a holy and just God to forgive it, and pass it by; which, without his atonement, would have been impossible. By giving to us his Holy Spirit, he hath set all those who obey his holy inspirations free from the vassalage of the devil, and hath brought them “into the glorious liberty of the children of God,”* that they might henceforth walk in newness of life, and obediently serve their heavenly Father.

* Rom. viii. 21.

That we may receive the full benefit of what Christ hath in these two respects done for us, two things are required on our part—*repentance* and *faith*.

The necessity of repentance appears not only from its nature, being the effect of godly sorrow for sin, and of a firm resolution to forsake it; but also from the many declarations in the Bible respecting it. The Holy Baptist, who, in the spirit and power of Elias, prepared the way of the Lord, fulfilled his mission by the preaching and baptism of repentance: “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand: Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance.”* And, a greater than John, the Lord Christ himself, who certainly knew best the end for which he came into the world, and the fittest means to accomplish it, began his preaching with the same solemn call; “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”†

The necessity of faith appears not only from the last cited text, and from what St. John hath said, “As many as received him, to them gave he power,” the right or privilege, “to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;”‡ but from the declaration of Christ to the Jews, “This is the work of God,” that work which he endeavoureth to accomplish by my coming, “that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” That we might be at no loss to know on whom they were required to believe, he said, “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”§

If, now, repentance and faith be necessary to our admission into the kingdom of heaven, the Church of Christ in this world, which is the lowest sense of that expression; and, to give us, through Christ, the privilege of becoming the sons of God, and heirs of everlasting salvation; for in that sense only have we everlasting life in this world; then repentance and faith must be necessary to our continuance in that state—to preserve our privilege of being the sons of God, and heirs of everlasting glory; then also must repentance and faith be necessary to our finally obtaining that heavenly inheritance of which we are now

* Matt. iii. 2, 8. † Mark i. 15. ‡ John i. 12. § John vi. 29, 47.

heirs through hope—God's kingdom of glory and happiness in the world to come—which is the highest sense of the phrase, the *kingdom of heaven*.

For let it be remembered, that the end of Christ's mediation is two-fold. One is to reconcile God to us, by making atonement for our sins; the other is to reconcile us to God by repentance and faith, "that henceforth we should not serve sin:"* One is to give us power to become the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life with God; the other to excite and enable us to live in that holiness and purity which become those who are endowed with so exalted a privilege: One to open to us the kingdom of heaven; the other to make us capable of enjoying it.

No state can make us happy, unless we have a capacity of enjoying its pleasures. We could not enjoy the happiness of this world, did not our bodily senses and appetites give us a relish for the pleasures of the world. Neither can we enjoy the happiness of heaven, unless holy tempers and dispositions give us a relish for those pleasures which flow at God's right hand. An ox would find no happiness in a prince's palace. He has no appetite nor relish for its pleasures; but in the midst of gay company, rich furniture, and magnificent entertainments, he would pine for his grass and hay. Before he could there be happy his nature must be changed. He must lose his relish for the enjoyments of a brute, and get a taste suitable to the pleasures of a palace. There is the same necessity that the nature of the wicked man be changed, to make him capable of heavenly happiness; or, like the brute in a palace, he will be uneasy and pining for something which cannot there be found.

It is for this reason that we are commanded to imitate God, to be followers of him as dear children, to walk in love, to preserve ourselves in purity, to perfect holiness in the fear of God; namely, that, obtaining a taste and capacity for heavenly enjoyments through the operation of his Spirit, we may live with him in happiness and glory forever. Therefore, too, are we told that Baptism, by

* See Rom. vi. 2 Cor. v. 17, to the end, and vi. 1.

which we are taken into the Church of Christ, is a figure of his death ; and representeth to us, that as he died and rose again for us, so we who are baptised should die from sin, and live unto righteousness, and be made like unto him by continually mortifying our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living.

Then will the end of Christ's manifestation be fully answered in us. We shall be no longer of the devil, because we no longer do his works ; but shall be set free from his tyranny, and from the bands of those sins which, through our own frailty or his instigations, we have committed : And, being animated by the Holy Spirit, shall walk in newness of life ; doing all those good works which God hath prepared for us to live in, that we may be conformed to the image of his Son in this world, and be made partakers of his glory in the world to come.

DISCOURSE XIV.

NO RESPECT OF PERSONS WITH GOD.

ROM. ii. 28, 29.

He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : But he is a Jew which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men but of God.

TO see the force of what the apostle hath remarked in the text, we must attend to the design and manner of his reasoning in this and the foregoing chapter.

His design was to convict the world of sin ; that is, to convince all men that they are sinners, and on that account are under the sentence of condemnation from the justice of God : And that, from this condemnation, nothing can deliver them but the atonement of Christ.

At the time of his writing this Epistle, the whole world consisted either of Jews who were the worshippers of the true God, or of Gentiles who were idolaters of various descriptions. He begins with the latter, and proves them to be sinners and under condemnation on account of their idolatry and immorality. They worshipped the creatures instead of the Creator, and gave that glory which was due to the invisible God only, to the works of his hands : Their “ heart was darkened ;” they “ became vain in their imaginations ;” they were “ filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, deceit, contention,” &c. He brings no accusation against the Gentiles, on account of their transgressing any precepts of divine revelation, for none had been made to them—no express law had been given to them. But they had acted against the light of natural reason and

conscience—the law of God written in their hearts: They did not “like to retain God in their knowledge;” wherefore he gave them up to a reprobate mind—a mind void of judgment—to worship the host of heaven and dead heroes; and to work all unrighteousness and “uncleanness with greediness.”

This mode of reasoning would not lie against the Jews. They were the worshippers of the true God. He had given them a particular Revelation and Law for the rule of their conduct, and for the celebration of his worship. They were the descendants of Abraham the friend of God. They were the chosen people of God; who had made many great promises to them. On these privileges they valued themselves highly; and of their Law they were zealous to superstition. Whatever became of the Gentiles, the Jews thought themselves safe, and so secure of the favour of God, that they could not fall under his condemnation.

The apostle, therefore, attacks them on different ground; and observes, that as “there is no respect of persons with God,” he “will render to every man according to his deeds:” That “as many as have sinned without the law”—without being under any revealed law to direct them, which was the case of the Gentiles—“shall perish without law”—shall be condemned when they are judged; not by the law of revelation, which they had not; but by the law of reason and conscience. And “as many as have sinned under the law” of revelation, “shall be judged by that law;” and, if guilty of transgressing it, shall be condemned; because not the *hearers*, but the *doers* of the law are justified before God. If, therefore, the Jews, under their law of revelation, were guilty of the same, or similar crimes with the Gentiles under the law of reason and conscience—the law written in their hearts—they stood as much exposed to the sentence of God’s justice as the Gentiles did.

He then proceeds to prove that the Jews were equally sinners with the Gentiles; and were inexcusable, to condemn them for their idolatry and immorality, while they

themselves committed as great crimes as the Gentiles did. That they might feel the force and justice of his reasoning, he enumerates the privileges which the Jews enjoyed, of which they boasted, and on account of which they expected justification with God ; and compares their conduct under these privileges, with the conduct of the Gentiles under the direction of reason and conscience. “ Behold, thou art called a Jew ;” behold, thou art a Jew ; “ and retest in the law,” art content with it, and dependest upon it ; “ and makest thy boast of” the favour of “ God ; and knowest his will,” by the revelation he hath made to thee ; “ and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law” in what is right and good : “ And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of babes, which hast a form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself ? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal ? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery ? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege ? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God ? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you. For circumcision,” or the being a Jew, “ profiteth, if thou keep the law ;” but if thou be a “ breaker of the law,” if thou steal, or commit adultery or sacrilege, or do any thing else which the law forbids ; “ thy circumcision is made uncircumcision,” and thou mayest just as well be a Gentile as a Jew. Shall not then those Gentiles who fulfil the righteousness which the law requires, be accounted true Jews ? And shall not their doing by nature, through the influence of reason and conscience, the things, the moral duties which the law requires, judge and condemn thee who hast the benefit of God’s revealed law, and yet dishonourest him by transgressing it ? “ For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : But he is a Jew which is one inwardly ; and circumcision

is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God"—He is not a Jew such as God will accept, who is so only by his natural descent from Abraham, or by bearing the seal of God's covenant with Abraham, in his flesh. But he is a real Jew acceptable to God, who is one inwardly as well as outwardly, whose heart is mortified from all carnal and corrupt affections; who obeys God according to the spirit, as well as letter of his law; and who seeks not for popular applause by the parade of religion, but to approve himself to God, who alone can see and judge his heart.

This is the drift of the Apostle's argument, which, I trust, I have fairly represented. Should it be asked in what respect it concerns people who are neither Gentiles nor Jews, but Christians? I answer, much every way. For if God be no respecter of persons, but will render to every man according to his deeds; Christians stand on the same ground with others; that is, God will render to them according to their deeds, as well as to Jews and Gentiles.

According to St. Paul, the Gentiles are condemned as sinners, because they act against their reason and conscience. Now, a Christian hath reason and conscience as well as a Gentile, and is as much obliged to regard them. If, then, he act against his reason and conscience equally with the Gentiles, and God be no respecter of persons, must he not render to the Christian according to his deeds, as well as he doth to the Gentiles?

The Jew hath a positive law, by authority of divine revelation, superadded to the law of reason and conscience: so hath the Christian. And if the Jew be condemned as a sinner for breaking and transgressing his law, and, under it, living in immorality like a wicked Gentile; what reason can be given, why a Christian should not be condemned as a sinner, if he break and transgress the law of the Gospel, and live immorally under it, like a wicked Gentile or Jew?

If it be said that Christ died for Christians, and that through the imputation of his merits and righteousness to them, they shall be saved, notwithstanding their trans-

gressions and sins; I reply, that pardon of sin, even through the atonement of Christ, is promised only to the penitent—to him who believes the Gospel and forsakes his sins: that the notion of imputation either of the merit and righteousness, or of the demerit and guilt of one person to another, in the sense in which the Antinomians use it, hath no foundation in the Bible fairly interpreted; and that common sense disavows it altogether. Besides, if imputation be admitted, it will not answer the purpose in the present case. Christ redeemed Gentiles and Jews, as well as Christians; and “God is no respecter of persons.” As far, therefore, as imputation will go, Gentiles and Jews must partake in the merits and righteousness of Christ equally with Christians. On this ground, no room is left for the judgment of God, nor can it ever take place with regard to men; their final state being already settled by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to them. Yet the Apostle hath said, “God will render to every man according to his deeds;” and that “as many as have sinned without the law” of divine revelation, “shall perish without law;” shall be judged and condemned by the law of reason and conscience. And “as many as have sinned under the law” which God superadded to the law or light of reason and conscience, by the positive authority of divine revelation “shall be judged by that law;” and if they have transgressed it, and lived impenitently under it, shall be condemned by it, “in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel,”* when he “will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; eternal life: But to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”†

Now, if the Gentiles are to be judged by the law of reason and conscience, under which the providence of God hath placed them; and the Jews, by the law of Mo-

* Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

† Rom. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, &c.

ses, which God, by revelation gave them, till Messiah should come; what reason can be given why Christians, Jews, and Gentiles converted to Christ, should not be judged by the law of his gospel which God hath given for the rule of their conduct, to the end of the world? and if under it they have lived like unconverted, wicked Heathens and Jews, why they should not have their portion with unconverted, wicked Heathens and Jews? "God is no respecter of persons," but "will render to every man according to his deeds."

Should it be observed, that on this ground the Christian hath no advantage over the Jew or Gentile; I readily confess, that I know of no advantage that a wicked, impenitent Christian hath over any other wicked impenitent person, whether Jew or Heathen. It will not, however, follow that the Christian hath not great advantages, if he will avail himself of them—advantages which he cannot have by the law of reason and conscience, nor by the law of the Jews. And to convince both Gentiles and Jews of the great privileges and blessings to be enjoyed under the gospel, eminently superior to all that the law of reason and nature, or of Moses afforded; and thereby to induce them to receive the gospel, is the end St. Paul aims at, in the fore part of his Epistle to the Romans.

The law of reason and conscience, otherwise called the law of nature, knows of no atonement for sin, and consequently of no forgiveness of sin. It cannot, therefore, reform the evil lives of men, because it hath no ground of repentance; unless we should ascribe more to what is called the natural notion of the goodness of God, than it hath ever yet been able to produce. And probably this notion, supposed to be natural, that God is kind and good, and will forgive the penitent, came originally from divine revelation, and hath become general in the world by tradition from Adam. The law of nature, however, hath more to dread from the *justice* of God, than to hope from his *mercy*: Its language is, *The soul that sinneth shall bear the penalty of its sin.*

The law which God gave by Moses is a law of exact

and punctual obedience: Its language is, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."* For though this law directed sacrifices of atonement, and called those who were under it to repentance; yet there were many transgressions for which no atonement or repentance was admitted. It was, therefore, the law of condemnation, by which a more certain knowledge of the heinous nature of sin, and of the justice of God against it, were made known to men.

But it is the Christian's glory, that Christ hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, not only for his sins, but for the sins of the whole world; and that, through penitence and faith in him, all his past sins are forgiven and passed over, and shall never come into judgment against him. And it ought to be the joy of the heart of his old people, that God hath, by the most certain revelation, given them absolute certainty, that through faith in his Son Christ Jesus, all of them may be "justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."†

Another advantage which Christianity hath over both the law of Nature and of Moses, is, that Christians are delivered from the obligation of perfect obedience, and are put under the mild law of Grace and Mercy, by which not only penitence is accepted instead of innocence; but their earnest endeavours after holiness are graciously received, instead of that holiness which is without fault.

A third advantage which Christians have over all other people is, the gift and constant presence of the Holy Spirit of God with them; not only in those influences which are common to all men, which are the consequences of the word of God to Adam, *The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent*, and which, I suppose, ought to be meant by the phrases, *common grace* and *preventing grace*: but as the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Almighty Father, through Christ, to the Church; to be its comforter, governor, and sanctifier, in the sense in which he

* Deut. xxvii. 26.

† Acts xiii. 39.

is said in the Catechism to be *the sanctifier of all the elect people of God*; that is, of all the faithful members of Christ's Church. The office of the Holy Spirit is to preserve them in faith, to support them in temptations, and to conduct them in holy living, that they may become fit for the heavenly kingdom of God.

A fourth advantage which Christians enjoy is, the certainty of the revelation which God hath made to them by his Son, and the precision with which the conditions of eternal life with him after the resurrection, are expressed. Thereby all the doubts concerning a future life, and acceptance with God, which perplexed the Gentile world, are removed: The prospect of eternity, and the means of obtaining happiness in it are fully laid open.

A fifth advantage which Christians enjoy is, that as they are freed from the doubts and uncertainties of Gentilism, or the law of Nature; so they are delivered from the burden of the law of the Jews. Its numerous and inconvenient rites, and ceremonies, and purifications, together with its expensive sacrifices, being all fulfilled and taken away by the obedience and death of Christ in our nature. The painful Sacrament of initiation into the covenant made with Abraham having given place to the institution of Baptism, the mild Sacrament of initiation into the Church of Christ, which is his mystical Body. By Baptism, they who come worthily to it, are, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, washed from all past sin, original and actual; and being thereby regenerated and made members of Christ, are sanctified, body and soul, to be the temples of the Holy Ghost; who, according to the opinion of the primitive Christians, in Confirmation, which they considered as the completion of Baptism, took possession of his temple cleansed from the defilements of sin, to dwell in it, to preserve its purity, to build it up in holiness, and fit it to be a vessel of honour in the temple of the great High Priest in heaven forever.

In the room of the Paschal Lamb, and of the other sacrifices of the Mosaic law, Christ hath ordained the Holy Eucharist, the commemorative sacrifice of his own offer-

ing up of himself to God for us, and of his consequent sufferings and death for our redemption. And we believe, that when we make this memorial of his offering and death, according to his will, before the Almighty Father, pleading his merit and intercession, we do obtain all the benefits of his passion and death—remission of sins, renewed influences of the Holy Spirit, sanctification of our persons, the principle of reviviscence or of a glorious resurrection from the grave, the assurance of a happy acquittal in the day of judgment, and of a triumphant entrance with him into his own eternal kingdom.

These, in few words, are the advantages which Christians enjoy over other people, whether Jews or Gentiles. To the participation of these blessings the holy apostle invited all men of all countries and nations, endeavouring to prevail on them to receive the gospel, and become fellow-heirs with Christians of all its promises and blessings. But none of these advantages, or privileges, or promises give a Christian any indulgence to live wickedly; or, if he do, and die without repentance, any hope that he shall escape the sentence of God's condemnation; who, being "no respecter of persons, will render to every man," whether Gentile, Jew, or Christian, "according to his deeds."

While it is true, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" it must also be true, that no wicked person can enter into heaven. The reason is, *God is holy*; and it will be hard to show, that the impurity of a wicked Christian is not as contrary to the holy nature of God, as the impurity of a wicked Gentile or Jew.

Therefore it is, that Christianity calls all its professors to the mortification of their sensual lusts and unruly passions; to the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts; to the rejection of all injustice, and deceit, and violence, and envy, and malice, and hatred. All this was dictated to the Gentile by his reason and conscience, the law written in his heart; and all this was declared to the Jew by the very rite of initiation into the covenant made with Abraham. To this rite Christ submitted, not only that he might be obedient to the law for man; but also that he

might teach us the true circumcision of the heart; that all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey God's blessed will. This is the true Christian sanctification; and to produce it in us is the office of the Holy Ghost. The great purpose for which he is given to the Church being the sanctification of its members, that under his gracious and holy inspiration, they may truly and acceptably serve God, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of their life.

In this way we become partakers of the righteousness of Christ: Not by an outward imputation of his righteousness, but by having the Spirit of God—the Spirit of Holiness—the same Spirit which dwelt in Christ without measure, dwelling and operating in us according to the measure of the gift of Christ.* And remember, this same apostle hath said, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:” And also, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.”

* Eph. iv. 7.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE CHILDREN OF WISDOM.

MATT. xi. 19.

But wisdom is justified of her children.

THE occasion of the text was our Saviour's reproof of the wicked perverseness of his countrymen, in rejecting both his ministry and that of his fore-runner the holy Baptist: So that for the same reason they rejected John, they ought to have received him; or else, on the same ground they rejected him, they ought to have received John. The manner in which he expressed his censure was drawn from the common custom of his country, with which his audience was well acquainted, and which they could easily apply.

In the time of our Saviour, it was common for the Jews to heighten the festivity of weddings with music, particularly with the pipe, to which the company danced in chorus. Music was also introduced at their funerals; and more particularly the mournful modulation of the voices of elderly women hired for the purpose, who began and increased the lamentation by repeating in melancholy accents, *Alas, my brother! Ah, his glory!* Of this we have an instance in the house of Jairus, at the death of his daughter. When Jesus came into his house, he found "the minstrels and the people making a noise"*—the musicians and mourners lamenting her death.

These practices the children imitated in their play in the markets. To them Christ compares the Jews of his time. The complaint of the children was the want of a suitable return from their companions. They would neither join

* Matt. ix. 23.

them in representing the merry festivity of a wedding, nor the mournful sadness of a funeral. Unsocial and morose, they would be pleased with neither: "We have piped to you" according to the custom of weddings, "and ye have not danced;" "We have mourned to you," as is done at funerals, "and ye have not lamented." Compare this complaint of the children with the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees—the great and the learned among the Jews, and the justness of the representation will readily appear.

The holy Baptist came, with all the austere and mortified appearance of Elias, to proclaim the approach of Messiah, and to prepare the way for his appearance. His education had been in the desert. His food was locusts and wild honey. His clothing a rough garment of camels hair, tied about him with a girdle of common leather. His preaching was repentance, or conversion to God, and a ready disposition to receive the promised Messiah, the Messenger, or Angel of the new covenant which God would make with his people in the latter day.* Notwithstanding the austerity of his life, the gravity of his manners, the solemnity of his preaching, the purity of his character; the Scribes and Pharisees not only rejected him, but reviled him as a demoniac—one possessed by the devil, or a melancholy madman. By these slanders they so effectually took off the impression he had made on the common people, that Herod first imprisoned him for reproving his vicious life; and then, at the instigation of a wicked woman, cut off his head, without causing even a murmur of disapprobation that we know of.

Though he mourned to them on account of their sins and evil deeds, and, by his life and preaching, called them to repentance and amendment, that they might escape the wrath of God which was to burn as an oven, and to consume all the proud, and all who do wickedly,† they lamented not; neither did they repent nor turn from their wickedness, till the vengeance of God like an overflowing flood came upon them, and swept them away from the land which they had defiled with the foulest crimes.

* Malachi iii. 1. Jerem. xxxi. 31, &c.

† Malachi iv. 1.

The blessed Saviour came not as John had done. No visible marks of mortification noted his appearance. He had been brought up among men, and had been used to converse with them. He ate and drank the common food, and partook of entertainments provided for him, even of those where, according to custom, mirth and festivity were to be expected. He, too, called men to repentance and amendment of life. He, too, proclaimed the quick approach of the kingdom of God, and invited men into it. They who had reviled John as a madman, would surely regard the preaching of Jesus, whom no disgustful austerities rendered disagreeable to them. But, no: John was a madman, who had lost his senses by melancholy, or by diabolical possession; and Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard, the friend and companion of publicans and sinners; and his preaching was to them just what the pipe of the children in the markets, was to their churlish companions.

Folly, not wisdom gave rise to this conduct. If the reservedness and mortification of John offended them, why be offended also at the more easy conduct and conversation of Jesus? Or if the free intercourse of the holy Jesus, and his living, in all appearance as others lived, was thought to partake too much of the world, and approach too near to levity, why censure the more reserved conduct of the pious Baptist? They both preached the same doctrine. They both declared the near approach of the kingdom of God, and called men to repentance that they might be worthy members of it, and thereby escape the vengeance of God, which both declared would overtake and destroy the obstinate and impenitent sinners. The one passed his life in rigid abstinence and mortification. The other lived according to the common mode. The one both fasted himself, and taught his disciples to fast also. The other fasted not, so far as we know, except at the season of his temptation; but declared it improper for his disciples to fast, while he was with them in the world. His devotions also were as private as possible: On these occasions he withdrew himself from all observation, even from the company of his constant attendants. Why now

should both be censured? Where is the wisdom or propriety of finding fault with one, for not pursuing that conduct which they condemned in the other?

This is the light in which Christ hath set that generation among which he lived. "John," said he, "came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners: But wisdom is justified of her children."

By wisdom, in the Scripture, is meant that heavenly quality and disposition which the apostle saith is "from above," and is "pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality," or wrangling, "and without hypocrisy;" which David notes as arising from the "fear of the Lord," and which Solomon celebrates as being of more excellent value than all the riches, and honours, and pleasures of the world. In most places, it seems to be another name for divine knowledge and religion according to the revelation of God, and of those tempers and dispositions which flow from it. By this revelation we are instructed in the will of God, and in our duty to him and to one another. So that to believe what God saith, and do what he commandeth in the revelation of his will to us, is our wisdom—the highest wisdom we can possess, seeing it will make us wise unto salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Wisdom, then, in the sense of the text, is to believe what God hath revealed, and to do what God hath commanded. Earnestly to seek this knowledge, and to labour sincerely to do what it directs, is to be the child of wisdom: And of her children—of those who seek to know the will of God and to do it—wisdom will be justified, that is, approved and vindicated from slander and misrepresentation.

The meaning of the text is, therefore, this: In condemning both Jesus and John, the latter for his austerity and mortification; the former for his more free and social life;

* 2 Tim. iii 15.

calling the one a madman, the other a glutton ; the Scribes and Pharisees showed their folly, not their wisdom. The children of wisdom, who study to live in the knowledge and obedience of God, the only wisdom which is worth seeking, will see, and will justify the propriety of the conduct of both. They will see that the glory of God and the good of men were truly sought and promoted by both: That though the Scribes and Pharisees reviled both for their manner of living, yet they who sought to know and obey the will of God applauded their conduct, knowing that it proceeded from a hearty desire to promote the glory of God, by promoting the happiness of his creatures.

We see, then, both the ground and the severity of our Saviour's censure, and let us avoid them. Many will readily join in condemning the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees, and yet will too often imitate them. That we may not tread in their steps, we must avoid their principles. Let us, then, reflect on the subject that is before us, that we may guard ourselves against error, and remain the children of that wisdom which has God for its object, and is taught only in his school.

The great obstructions to receiving religious truth when it is fairly presented to us, are prejudice, party, misconstruction of Holy Scripture, and wickedness of heart, or the love of sin.

Prejudice most commonly arises from education and habit. Opinions in which we have grown up, which we have long believed, and on which we have repeatedly acted, engage our affections, and hold our judgments in such subjection, that it is with difficulty we free ourselves from it. It is not my business to account for the rise or strength of prejudice ; but only to point out its influence on the Scribes and Pharisees, in the time of our Saviour.

These people had been educated in a strict attention to the law of Moses, and to the traditions of their Elders. They believed both to be of divine authority, and of equal obligation, and would not bear to see the least deviation from them ; or, more properly, from their construction of

them. Whatever tended to depreciate their character, or lessen their influence, excited their resentment. Hence proceeded their accusation against Christ, as one who disregarded the Sabbath, because he hesitated not to heal the sick on that day. Hence their complaint, that he neglected the traditions of the Elders, because he and his disciples washed not their hands before they ate, and fasted not as the Elders had directed. Hence it came, that the instructions and reproofs of Christ had so little effect on them. Their prejudices had closed their ears and hardened their hearts against him, and instigated them to put unnatural and malicious constructions on all he said and did. He taught the typical meaning and temporary continuance of their law—that it should all be fulfilled and pass away; and they thought him a blasphemer. He taught the necessity of purity of heart, and holiness of life, and called them to repentance and amendment: They thought themselves pure and holy through the external observance of their law and traditions, and looking on him as a depraver of both, they disregarded all his admonitions.

If we find similar prejudices prevailing in our own time—if we see Christians in bondage to religious errors which education hath begun, and habit confirmed; let us not be surprised at it. Human nature is the same in all ages and countries: Education and habit make nearly all the difference. Under the same circumstances, it will act in much the same manner. Our duty is with patience and meekness to set the truth before them, as clearly as we can, and in a manner the most likely to engage their attention. Their will and affections we cannot command; but to our efforts we can join our prayers to God for them, that he would pour the light of divine truth on their minds, and enable them to break the bonds of those prejudices by which they are held in subjection.

The next cause of error in religion is a party spirit. Whether this be a particular kind of prejudice or not, is not necessary for me to discuss: Its baneful influence on the mind is full as bad, if not worse than that of the prejudice of education, as it more directly leads to persecu-

tion and violence. The sect of the Pharisees, in the time of our Saviour, had become numerous, and formed a strong party. Their great pretensions to holiness, and their exact obedience to the law and to the traditions of the Elders, gave them a high character with the people. Though full of pride, and hypocrisy, and oppression, such was their opinion of their own sanctity that they separated themselves from all familiar intercourse with other people, and thought themselves defiled by eating with, or even touching those whom they called sinners.

Their pride, and hypocrisy, and oppression were exposed and severely censured by the Baptist and by Christ. The resentment of the whole party was excited. It became necessary to support their character and consequence. This could be done only by lessening the influence which the preaching and conduct of Jesus and of John had on the people. To accomplish this purpose they exerted their utmost efforts.

John came, as hath been observed, in the spirit and power of Elias, with all the abstinence, self-denial, and mortification which had distinguished the old Prophet. His example was as illustrious, his preaching as powerful, and as much tending to the reformation of his countrymen, as the ministry of Elias had been. Had they compared him with the character which their Prophets had given of the fore-runner of Messiah, they must have perceived John to be that Elijah whom God had promised to them: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."* But then they must have become his disciples; and by establishing his character, have destroyed their own influence with the people. They therefore cut the matter short; and in the true spirit of party, pronounced John a lunatic, a demoniac, a fanciful madman, though he sustained the very character which their old Prophets had given of him. Then all was well

* Malachi iv. 5, 6.

—their conscience was at ease, their character supported, and their importance established: For who is obliged to regard the reveries of a lunatic, or copy the extravagancies of a demoniac, or listen to the harangues of a madman, be his appearance and pretensions whatever they may.

The free and social converse of the holy Jesus gave them full opportunity to fasten the misrepresentation of malice on him. He mingled in all companies where he could do good, and conversed with all persons who were willing to be instructed by him. His miracles were of the most beneficent kind, and freely wrought on all who were disposed to be benefited by them. Instead of comparing his character, and conduct, and miracles with what their law prefigured, and their Prophets had foretold concerning Messiah; they did to him what they had done with regard to John, only flying to the other extreme: "Why should we regard this man? or mind what he says? God cannot be with him. He loves wine, and good eating. He is the friend of sinners; the companion of the vilest and most abandoned people, whom our wise and good men will not touch, much less eat and drink with them. He observes not the traditions of our Elders; never fasts, nor washes his hands before he eats. Nay more; he regards not the Sabbath, but on that solemn day hath presumed to give sight to a man who was born blind, by tempering clay and spreading it on his eyes." Hereby the same effect was produced which followed the calumnies cast on the holy Baptist. Their conscience remained undisturbed, and an ostentatious character of goodness and holiness was established: No one can be under obligations to hear the discourses, or believe the tales, or imitate the example of a glutton, a drunkard, and a profaner of the Sabbath.

It may not be amiss to observe, that at the beginning of the ministry of John, his mortified appearance, and the necessity of repentance which he preached, made a strong impression on the people. They generally repaired to him from Jerusalem and Judea, and the region round

about Jordan, and were baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. "All men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not." The Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, "who art thou?" Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees presented themselves to his baptism.* But when they found that he sharply and openly reprov'd their hypocrisy and wickedness, the Pharisees and Rulers of the people set themselves against him, and endeavoured all that was in their power, to draw the attention of the people from him. "The Pharisees and Lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptised of him:† That is, by rejecting John, they frustrated the purpose of God, which was, by his ministry, to bring them to repentance.

Nor did the holy Jesus fare better. His meek and inoffensive behaviour, his benevolent miracles, and the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, induced great multitudes to follow him, from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond Jordan. Often times did they declare him to be the Christ—that Prophet that should come into the world. So high had his reputation risen at one time, that they intended to come and take him by force and make him a king. No decided opposition against him from the Pharisees and great men appeared, till his reproofs of their wickedness and perversion of God's Law convinced them, they were to expect no support to their party from him. And probably had Jesus and John become Pharisees, they would have escaped all the hard names and reproachful treatment they received from them, however well they might have deserved them.

The next obstruction to the receiving of religious truth when it is fairly proposed to us, is, the misconstruction of Scripture. Whether this arise from design, from ignorance, from education, it has nearly the same ill effect. It shuts up all the avenues of instruction, and hardens the heart against it. Neither reason nor argument can have

* Matt. iii. 5, 6, 7. Luke iii. 15. John i. 19.

† Luke vii. 30.

any effect; the authority of God, or what is pleaded as such, is urged against them. Had the Pharisees and Jewish rulers fairly compared the characters of John and of Jesus with the declarations of their own Scriptures; they must have perceived that the first was Elijah, who was to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord—"the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight;" and that the latter was Messiah, whom their Prophets had foretold and celebrated; whom their Law had prefigured and pointed out; and whom God had promised to send, to be the Deliverer and Saviour of his people. Unhappily, they looked on their law and religious œconomy as being perfect and complete, the centre of wisdom and truth; not as bearing relation to, and prefiguring a future dispensation, which was to be really perfect and the truth, and by which their law was to be fulfilled and superseded.

From Messiah they looked not for this new dispensation which their Prophets had foretold, which was to be the completion of their law, to deliver them from the guilt and power of sin, through faith in his atonement and intercession, and to enable them to serve God in newness of life by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit: But they looked for temporal deliverance from the Romans, and from all their enemies, for victory and dominion over them, and probably for the conversion of the whole world to their religion and polity. So powerful was this error arising from the misconstruction of Scripture, that the preaching and baptism of John; the miracles, parables, and instructions of Jesus; the examples, admonitions, and threats of both were too little to correct it: Instead of convincing and reclaiming, they served only to irritate and provoke them.

The last obstacle to the reception of religious truth which I shall mention, is wickedness of heart, or the love of sin: Severe is the censure of the wicked in the fiftieth Psalm: "Unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, and that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction,

and hast cast my words behind thee." This could proceed from nothing but the vilest hypocrisy—a love of sin, and a desire to support a fair and religious reputation in the practice of it. No character can be more odious. To great wickedness it adds great meanness—the practice of vices which it dares not avow, and the abominable supposition that God may be ignorant of the state of the heart and deceived by a fair outside, as well as man.

Bad as this character is, it seems exactly to belong to those revilers of Christ, against whom the sharp reproof of the text is directed; and justifies the opinion of the old Rabbies, that this Psalm is a prophetic declaration of the judgment which was to be executed in the days of Messiah. Strangely did the Scribes and Pharisees make good the character the Psalmist drew of them: They declared God's statutes, and professed to walk in them: They took his covenant in their mouths, and pretended it governed their hearts: But they hated instruction, and cast all God's calls to repentance and amendment behind them. So tenacious of the sanctity of the Sabbath, that they could not bear the most beneficent miracles should, on that day, be wrought on the sick; and yet they neglected judgment, and justice, and mercy. The strictest intercourse with heaven has ever been supposed to be maintained by prayer: they therefore made long prayers; and that they might be observed, they prayed in the corners and turnings of the streets: And yet on every occasion they rapaciously seized the substance of the widow.

Suppose these people had been the children of wisdom, had honestly sought to know the will of God that they might do it, and had fallen into mistakes through ignorance, and weakness of understanding, without any perversity of heart: Can we also suppose they would not have perceived that John was Elijah, whom Malachi had foretold? and Jesus, Messiah, whom their Law and Prophets had pointed out and promised? that they would not have seen and adored the wisdom and mercy of his dispensations to them, all whose works are wisdom, and mercy, and truth to them who devoutly contemplate, and

strive earnestly to live according to them? Could they have heard those divine messengers call all men to repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand? because the axe was then to be laid to the trees, and every tree which did not bring forth good fruit was to be hewn down and cast into the fire? because Messiah was come, who, like the fuller's soap, and the refiner's fire, should purify the sons of Levi, and refine the penitent from the defilement of sin; but should burn the proud and all who do wickedly as stubble in an oven, and tread them down like ashes under his feet? with the winnowers fan in his hand, to separate the wheat of his floor from the chaff; the former for his granary, the latter for the fire? But they were not the children of wisdom, therefore they regarded not. They loved their pride, and covetousness, and oppression, and hypocrisy, and they would not part from them: Therefore they rejected both John and Christ, and the judgments of God came on them to their utter destruction.

To represent the perverseness and wickedness of the Scribes and Pharisees, unless we make them conducive to our own instruction, can answer no good purpose. To point out a similarity of corrupt principles and evil manners in the present age; to show that the same prejudices, party spirit, misinterpretation or perversion of Scripture, hypocrisy and love of sin which blinded and hardened them, prevail still, act with as much force, and produce equal effects, could afford no advantage, unless it lead us to consider and correct our own errors and vices. To see men blinded by the prejudices of education, bewildered in the misconstruction of Scripture, sunk in hypocrisy and the love of sin, so that they can neither perceive nor follow the truth, must be a subject of grief and mortification to every well informed and pious Christian, and will call for his earnest prayers to God for his grace and mercy upon them: It will call for more—for his good example, and patient and friendly instruction. It will call for the examination of his own principles and temper, lest these evil qualities lurk at the bottom, taint his principles, or vitiate his practice.

Let us, therefore, remember, that "wisdom is justified of her children:" That the knowledge of the will of God and obedience to it, is wisdom: That to study honestly the will of God, and to strive faithfully to obey it, is to be the child of wisdom. The will of God, as far as our salvation is concerned, is made known to us in the Scriptures. The study of the Scriptures is, therefore, the study of wisdom. To this study we must bring the candid teachable disposition of children, because we are God's scholars, and he our master. His book is to us the fountain of that heavenly wisdom which will make us "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Prejudice, party-spirit, love of our lusts and vices, must, as far as possible, be laid aside. They blind the mind, they warp the understanding, they harden the heart against the convictions of truth. Under their influence, we shall probably fall into such constructions of Scripture as comport with our pre-conceived opinions, or with the peculiar sentiments of our party, or with the practice of our favourite vice. So shall we pick out error even from the words of truth; and make the revelation of God, which is intended for our guide unto life, minister to our greater condemnation.

Let, therefore, a sincere desire to know the will of God that you may do it, a candid mind disposed fairly to understand what you read, and a willing disposition to part with every sentiment and practice which you there find condemned, make the temper with which you study the Bible. Add to this your constant and fervent prayers to Almighty God, the author of every good and perfect gift, for the light and grace of his Holy Spirit, that you may perceive and know the things which you ought to believe and do, and may have strength and power faithfully to fulfil the same. Then shall you live free from all dangerous error in this world, and finally obtain the hope of your calling, eternal life with God in the world to come, through the Redeemer Jesus Christ. Amen.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

HEB. xii. 1, 2.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

IN the preceding chapter, the apostle had enumerated many instances of the efficacy of divine faith in the Patriarchs and Prophets, both before and after the flood; and had proved that they overcame all temptations and difficulties, supported by that stedfast faith and trust in Almighty God, to which all Christians are called. The text is the inference he hath drawn from his discourse in that chapter—that since Christians are called to the profession of the same faith which animated those eminent saints of God, and have, in them, so many witnesses attesting its great power and efficacy; they ought to be discouraged by no obstacles, but with patience and resolution, fulfil the duties of that holy religion to the belief of which God's providence had called them: And that, for support and encouragement in their duty, they ought to look to the example of the holy Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, who, in prospect of the joy that was set before him, endured the pain, and despised the shame of the cross; and, as a reward of his sufferings, is, in his human nature, exalted to power and glory at the right hand of God; therefore, in conformity to him, they ought patient-

ly to suffer as he did, that they may be also glorified together with him.*

This is the lesson taught by the apostle in the text. And certainly a more effectual method of impressing his doctrine on the minds of Christian people could not have been taken, than to show them, by instances and facts, what that same principle, under which they profess to act, had already been able to accomplish. The same principle, under the same circumstances, will produce the same effects. It must, therefore, be the particular fault of particular Christians, if their faith does not advance them to the same height of virtue and holiness which the old Patriarchs and Prophets attained, under its influence.

Faith is such a belief of the declarations of God, whether they contain instructions, commands, threats, or promises, as carries the will, and affections, and actions into obedience to what is declared. This faith is called divine, because it proceeds from the operation of the Spirit of God, and because it has God for its object, being founded on his authority. As the object of the Christian's faith cannot change, its effects will always be in proportion to its strength. In other words, our attainments in holiness, or obedience to God, will always be in proportion to the strength of our faith, or belief of what God hath revealed.

When, therefore, we see the present professors of Christianity generally fall short of that virtue and holiness to which the first Christians attained, we ought not to think that their religion is become, through length of time, that vain, powerless, ineffectual thing, which the lives of many Christians might tempt us to suppose it. The revelations of God cannot be less true, because they were made many centuries ago. But the present Christians want that firm faith in the principles of their religion which advanced the first Christians to that eminency of virtue, for which they are so justly celebrated.

They to whom the Apostle wrote, were by him supposed to have been possessed of that faith which the Gospel requires; and he directs them to remove all impediments

which might hinder its free and full operation. We, also, by the good providence of God, profess to have that faith which his Gospel requires. Let us, then, attend to the directions which he gave to the Hebrew Christians; that, all obstructions being taken out of its way, it may, by God's grace, increase in strength, and become perfect in obedience to the will of God.

I. The first direction in the text is, that we "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us."

The Christian life is frequently represented to us in the Scriptures, by those things which require the greatest exertions of bodily strength, and exactest attention of mind; by a state of war, by a combat, by wrestling, &c. and, in the text, by a race. It is common for those who run in a race, to divest themselves of every thing which may add to their weight, or may hinder their speed. This prudent conduct, St. Paul recommends to Christians. The race they are called to run is the Christian life, a life of self-denial and holiness: The prize they hope to obtain, is eternal life with God their Creator. Certainly, to obtain this prize, they must live in that state of holy obedience to God, which he hath promised to accept through the mediation of his son. They must repress every temper, and passion, and appetite, and forbear every action which can hinder their progress in this divine life, or be to them, like a weight to him that runneth in a race.

Christ hath called his disciples to the renunciation of every worldly advantage, of every temporal consideration, which shall come in competition with their duty, or divert them from that holy life which his Gospel requires: Nor father, nor mother, nor wife, nor children, nor any worldly possessions are to be preferred before him. He declares it even better to part with a hand, or an eye, or this temporal life itself, than by complying with evil lusts and vicious pleasures, to render ourselves unworthy of the kingdom of Heaven.

The general rules and cautions of Scripture must, by particular Christians, be accommodated to their own state and circumstances. The various occupations of life, dif-

ferent tempers and dispositions subject particular people to temptations from which others are in a great measure exempt, and which prove great obstructions to a life of holiness. What in the text is called a *weight*, may, therefore, be different in different people, and in the different stations and situations of life. It means, in general, whatever checks in us the increase of holiness, or diverts us from caring for the one thing needful, or weakens our faith and trust in God.

There is, however, one disposition so generally prevalent, which so entirely checks all advances in holiness and obedience to God, that it would be too great an omission to pass it over without notice: It is that eager desire of worldly wealth, from which but few appear to be free. No disposition is more severely censured in Scripture, than that of covetousness: It is branded as idolatry: God is said to abhor the covetous man: It is ranked with heathenish vices, and the impure lusts of the flesh.*

We are apt to suppose ourselves free from covetousness, if we have a disposition to expend the wealth which we acquire. Attentive observation, however, would soon convince us, that prodigality and covetousness do sometimes live and reign very lovingly together. What difference does it make in the lust of acquiring wealth, whether we consume it in sensual pleasure, in attracting the notice of others by grandeur, luxurious living, delicate dissipation; or hoard it up in a chest? In either case, the proper use of wealth is perverted, and more mischief than good is done with it. The spirit and precepts of our holy religion teach us, that beyond providing the necessaries and decencies of life, according to the station in which God's providence hath placed us, our wealth is not properly our own; but is a treasure which God hath placed in our hands for the relief of the necessitous, and ought to be expended in works of benevolence and mercy.

Nor will this seem strange, if we consider, that the evil consequences arising from wealth are more certain, and probably greater than from any other state of life. Rich-

* Col. iii. 5. Psalm x. 5. Rom. i. 29

es seldom fail to have the same effect on others, which they had on the man in the gospel; they tempt the heart to think that it hath "much goods laid up for many years," and that the wisest course is to "eat, drink, and be merry;"* to live at ease, regardless of any world but this. For when the desires are engaged in the pursuit of pleasure, and in the love of wealth as the means of obtaining pleasure; all endeavours, every wish to obtain heavenly happiness will be extinct in it. For this reason, St. Paul said of one sex, what is equally true of both, that "she that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth."† Not dead to the sensibility of pleasure; for that she hath a quick and keen relish; and, by gratifying and indulging it, she hath extinguished the divine life, and is dead to God, and to all holy desires. The love of sensual pleasure will quench all thirst of heavenly happiness, and the delicate indulgence of the body will nourish and strengthen those appetites which hang as a weight on the soul, when it attempts to rise out of the vanities of time, and aspires after the riches of eternity.

We are also directed to lay aside "the sin which doth so easily beset us," that we may not be impeded in running the race of Christian holiness and obedience to God.

Whether the apostle here refers to any particular sin, hath been made a matter of considerable inquiry. The more common opinion is, that he intended to excite Christians to guard themselves more especially against those sins which had the greatest power over them. Probably, natural constitution; certainly habit, and the different situations in life, expose particular men to particular vices. Every considerate person must be sensible, that there is some particular sin, which hath acquired greater power over him than any other. This, then, is the sin which easily *besets* him; and against it he ought earnestly to strive, that he may overcome it, and lay it aside. If, by God's grace, he subdue this sin, which doth easily beset him; other sins which have not so much the mastery over him, will be conquered with less trouble.

* Luke xii.

† 1 Tim. v. 6.

I have no inclination to find fault with this interpretation: It does not, however, seem to me to come up to the energy of St. Paul's expression. He directs us to lay aside *every* weight—whatever may encumber us in our Christian race; and *the* sin which easily besets us, intimating that there was some particular sin to which we are all more subject, and which has a stronger hold of us than any other; and directing us cautiously to guard against that sin, and resolutely to lay it aside.

Let us, then, attend to the discourse of the apostle, previous to the text, and see whether that will not lead us to some probable solution of this matter.

In the tenth chapter, the apostle directs the Hebrew converts to "draw near" unto God "with a true heart, in full assurance of faith:" to "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering," because "he is faithful that promised:" to "consider one another, to provoke unto love, and to good works," the true and proper fruits of faith: To avoid all known and wilful sin since they had "received the knowledge of the truth," or, had been called to the faith of the gospel: not to "cast away their confidence," their stedfast faith and trust in God, "which hath great recompence of reward;" for that they had "need of patience, that after they had done the will of God, they might receive the promise," the crown of eternal life in the world to come. He then quotes the prophet Habakkuk; "The just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him:" and adds, "but we are not of them that draw back unto perdition;" who renounce their religion, and abandon their faith and confidence in God, "but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul."

This introduced his discourse concerning faith in the eleventh chapter, in which he tells us what faith is, points out the necessity of it in order to please God, and enumerates its worthy fruits in the old Patriarchs and Prophets. In the fore part of the twelfth chapter, he renews his exhortation to faith, patience, and good works: Of this exhortation the text is part. As, therefore, by the

weight which we are to lay aside, is meant the evil lusts and corrupt tendencies of our nature, particularly the love of the world and attachment to its enjoyments; so, by the sin which easily besets us, is most probably meant *unbelief*, or the want of a firm, fixed, undoubting faith in the declarations of God to us. This, in truth, seems to be the sin of human nature; which easily besets every person. Through the want of this faith, Adam fell into rebellion against God, and the same want hath been the occasion of all the sins committed by his posterity.

There is a strong propensity in human nature to be the contriver and carver of its own happiness. When God assures us, that the indulgence of certain tempers and passions will be followed by pain and suffering, and that there is no real happiness for us but in obedience to him; we are unaccountably apt to doubt whether that be truly the case; we hesitate whether we shall believe and depend on what he hath declared, or whether we shall follow our own schemes, and try to make ourselves happy in our own way. The latter path is too commonly pursued. We leave the road marked out for us by him, and trust to the dictates of our own passions and appetites, to obtain that happiness which our nature desires. This is really to disbelieve God; and the sin of such unbelief consists in this: It supposeth God to be ignorant of that which will ensure to us the true happiness of our nature, or that he hath represented things to us otherwise than they are, that he may acquire honour to himself from our obedience. If we look at the general conduct of men, it will proclaim this to be the state of their hearts. Did they believe what God hath declared, they would do what he hath commanded: While, therefore, they continually disobey him, the inference is certain, that they do not fully believe him.

II. The second part of the Apostle's exhortation is, that we "run with patience the race that is set before us."

Patience sometimes means that temper or habit of mind, which is opposite to peevishness and fretfulness, to murmuring and repining; sometimes it means perseverance; and sometimes the calm expectation of promised blessings.

In whatever sense we understand the word, patience is necessary for us in our Christian race. A peevish, discontented temper is not only a disagreeable weakness, but a real fault. It shows the heart to be filled with obstinacy and self-will, and that it can be pleased with nothing but the indulgence of its own humours.

The Christian professes to live by faith; that is, to have all his desires, views, and actions governed by his belief of what God hath declared. All occasion of peevishness, and murmuring, and despondency are cut off from him, by his trust and confidence in God who rules and governs the world. If cross and vexatious accidents happen, they happen by the permission of God; and God hath told him to expect them, and to arm himself with patience to bear them, and that then they shall turn to his advantage. Impatience, therefore, or a peevish discontented temper, is inconsistent with the Christian character, as it springs from a want of faith in the kind Creator and Governor of the world.

Patience also sometimes means perseverance. In this sense, to run with patience the race that is set before us, will imply, that we persevere in a life of holiness to the end; that we faint not under the afflictions and persecutions that come on us, but endure them with stedfast submission to the will of God; knowing "that all things work together for good to them that love him," that we resist faithfully all temptations to sin which assault us, trusting in the gracious promises which are made to those who deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, knowing that he is faithful who hath assured us that we shall not be tempted above what we are able to bear: and, that we exercise ourselves in works of holiness and righteousness continually through our whole life, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of God, with an upright heart.

It was also said, that patience sometimes meant the calm and assured expectation of promised blessings. Understanding patience in this sense, its necessity in the Christian race will appear from this circumstance, that the rewards and blessings which God hath promised to his faith-

ful servants, are reserved to the next life. They are now the objects of faith—God, who cannot deceive, hath promised such good things as pass man's understanding ; such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, in the day when he shall judge the world by Jesus Christ, to all those who shall be approved by him. They must, therefore, struggle through the race, and be approved by the Judge, before they receive the "crown of righteousness," now "laid up for them," and "which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give them at that day."* They must "be patient unto the coming of the Lord." Even as "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain," and the harvest be ripe for the sickle ; so must they also be "patient," and "stablish their hearts in faith," until the "coming of the Lord."† Refreshed and strengthened by the heavenly dew of divine grace, as the fruits of the earth are nourished and made to grow by the early and latter rain which the providence of God sendeth on them, they shall increase in all holy tempers and good works, the fruits of faith and patience, till, at the general harvest at the last day, they shall be received like pure wheat into the granary of God, and be filled with "the fulness of him that filleth all in all."‡

III. As a most powerful motive to engage us to this course of life ; as a perfect rule to direct us how we ought to walk and please God ; as a means of begetting and increasing all holy and heavenly tempers in us ; and as the object of our faith and hope, under all the sufferings of life, the Apostle directs us to "look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the Joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Great is the encouragement held out to the pious Christian in these words. If he honestly endeavours to divest himself of all incumbrances in the Christian race ; avoiding sin of every kind, and, through faith, obeying God in all things ; patiently depending on his grace and holy Spi-

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† James v. 7.

‡ Eph. i. 23.

rit to enable him to do his duty under the infirmities and troubles of this life, and waiting in hope for the heavenly inheritance in the world to come through the mediation of Jesus the Saviour; looking to his merit and intercession for the forgiveness of his sins, to his divine power for protection and grace under whatever shall happen to him, to his example for direction in all circumstances; and, in prospect of the crown of righteousness, which God the righteous Judge shall give him at the last day, bearing with patience the evils and troubles of this miserable world—If he act thus, here is assurance for him, that he shall inherit eternal life, and partake of that glory which now adorns the humanity of Christ at the right hand of God.

So much is implied in what the Apostle hath said; and Christ himself hath promised, “where I am, there shall also my servant be.”* Particularly with regard to the suffering of evil for his sake, was this spoken. And that the text principally relates to the imitation of Christ in his patient endurance of sufferings according to the will of God, there can be no doubt. The same Apostle hath also said, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Christ.”†

Many and great are the troubles and afflictions to which we are in this world liable; violent and impetuous the temptations to which we are daily exposed. Every consideration ought to be employed, every help called in, to enable us to bear them with the dignity of reasonable beings, and the humble hope and confidence of Christians.

God hath taught us to consider him as the kind Father, as the all-powerful, all-bounteous Patron of the whole creation. He declares that he doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men; that it is with a view to their benefit, that he permits trouble or temptation to approach them; namely, to exercise and strengthen their faith and patience, to turn their thoughts and wean their desires from this world, and fix them on himself; to weed out every temper, and mortify every affection that is contrary to his will, and destructive of their own true happiness.

* John xii. 26

† 2 Tim. ii. 12.

Could we believe this; could we persuade ourselves of the truth of it, not only in theory, but so as to live and act upon it; our faith would become healing balm to the heart rent with affliction—to the wounding strokes of temptation and adversity. It would pull out the sting of grief: It would assuage the paining troubles of this uncertain life, and sweeten the bitter potion of human misery. O, therefore, have faith in God! Consider him as being full of an infinite desire to do you good; ever willing, ever ready to embrace you with the arms of his mercy: And let your whole soul rely upon him who alone is able to help you; who alone is able to save you, not only from the short-lived troubles of this world, but from the endless anguish of sin and guilt.

In prosperity we are apt to forget God. When our affairs proceed as we wish, and success crowds in upon us, the world appears all-sufficient for our happiness, health gives a relish to our enjoyments, and the tide of pleasure carries us gently down its easy current. We are then very apt to say with the disciples on the mount, “it is good for us to be here.” We wish only for a continuance of the same state, and if we ever think of the necessity of leaving it, it is with sorrow and regret. All thoughts of God and eternity are shut out or stifled; the world has our treasure, and the world hath our heart. Serious reflection is banished; pleasure becomes the object of pursuit; the passions are inflamed; the appetites excited; and the mortification which the gospel requires, the self-denial it enjoins, appear more irksome than to part with a hand or an eye.

God, infinite in goodness, seeth with pity the thralldom of his poor, deceived, yet beloved creatures. He sends affliction and adversity to their relief. He strikes away the props of their worldly happiness, that in the wreck of all they held dear, they may be constrained to catch at him for support. When worldly hopes are gone, and the prospect of happiness in this life is at an end; the soul anxiously looks forward to eternity, for something more stable on which to build her dependence. The pride of

prosperity being taken away by a due sense of our own weakness and inability to help ourselves; we become better prepared for faith in God, the only root from which all divine and Christian virtues do spring. To this truth the Psalmist bore witness, when he said, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word."—"It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."*

God called his own Son to endure the bitterest sufferings of human nature; and as a reward of his perfect obedience, he hath exalted that nature to the right hand of the throne of his glory. In conformity to him, the Captain of our salvation, he hath called all his followers to the patient suffering of the evils and troubles of life, and hath assured us by his apostle, that "if we suffer with his Son, we shall also be glorified together."†

Let us then be persuaded to attend to the exhortation of the text, and "lay aside every weight," all the evil appetites, desires, and propensities of our nature; "and the sin which doth so easily beset us"—particularly that unbelief and distrust of God to which human nature is so very prone. Then shall we be prepared to "run with patience the race that is set before us:" Then shall we be disposed to "look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith," with full resolution to follow his example in all things: Then, also, shall we feel and know, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory" which shall reward the faithful servants of God; "that all things work together for good, to them that love God;" and "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."‡

* Psalm cxix. 67, 71.

† Rom. viii. 17.

‡ Rom. viii. 28, 29.

DISCOURSE XVII.

THE STRAIT GATE.

LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

STRONG is the curiosity of the human heart, and frequently are its efforts misapplied. Our Saviour had been calling men to repentance and amendment of life, by arguments drawn from the most affecting circumstances; the untimely death of those unhappy Galileans, whose blood, the brutality of Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices in the temple; and the fatal accident which happened to eighteen persons, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and crushed them to death. Whether these were, or were not particular judgments of God, Christ doth not determine; but he doth positively say, that they who suffered these calamities were not greater sinners than others who dwelt in Jerusalem. By their disasters he called all the Jews to repentance, pronouncing this heavy sentence on their impenitency, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Continuing obstinate in sin, and hardened in iniquity, they filled up the measure of their guilt, in crucifying the Lord of Glory, and persecuting his Church; and the doom which Christ had pronounced was at last fully executed on them, in the ruin of their country, and destruction of their city and temple by the Romans.

The Galileans, of whose death our Saviour was informed, were probably killed while they were sacrificing in the temple at the Passover, on account of some seditious practices against the Roman government. The tower of Siloam stood in Jerusalem, probably near the pool of the

same name. If so, most exactly was the sentence of Christ fulfilled on the Jews—"ye shall all likewise perish," or perish in like manner, in your temple, and by the falling of your towers, and walls, and houses. That the siege of Jerusalem by Titus commenced at the time of the Pass-over; that the city was then crowded with people, and none suffered to go out; that great numbers of them were slain in the temple itself, and in its courts, by their different parties fighting with each other, as well as by the Romans; we are particularly informed by their own historian Josephus: Nor can we doubt that the ruin of their towers and walls by the Roman engines must have crushed many of them to death. True are thy threats, O God; just are thy judgments!

To these admonitions, Christ added the parable of the barren fig-tree, from which fruit had been in vain expected for three years, and whose sentence of excision was repited for one year, that a trial might be made of opening the soil and manuring it. If that failed, it was then to be cut down, that the ground might be no longer encumbered by it.

In similar discourses, to those who attended on him, particularly in parables explaining the nature of the kingdom of God, and in healing the sick, did the blessed Saviour employ himself as he journeyed on to Jerusalem.

It might reasonably have been expected, that admonitions and instructions of so serious and interesting a nature, would have had a more general effect; and have led all who heard them to the consideration of their state, to the examination of their hearts, and reformation of their lives: This effect, however, did not follow. Curiosity was rather excited; and *one* in particular, neglecting to look at home and take care of his own state, wished eagerly to have his curiosity gratified, and demanded, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" for so our Saviour's serious calls to repentance and exact conduct of life seemed to indicate. If deep repentance and exact holiness were necessary to salvation, this man would probably have cried out, as the Apostles did on another occasion, "Who then can be sa-

ved?" But if the number were very large, he might possibly pass in the crowd, without all that mortification, and self-denial which repentance and holiness required.

To this question of curiosity our Saviour answered not. We may, therefore, be assured it is a question not proper to be asked—an inquiry about which we have no right to busy ourselves. It is one of those things which God hath reserved in his own power, and will then only be made known, when men and angels shall witness the issue of the general judgment. Then it will be truly known, who, and how many shall be saved. In the mean time, let us be just to ourselves, and attend seriously to the admonition of Christ, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate"—That is, "Be not anxious to know the state of others, nor whether there be few or many who shall be saved." Attend to yourself—regard your own condition: And that you may be one of the number who shall be saved, *strive* earnestly, with all your power and might, to enter in at the *strait gate* which leadeth to life. To this end, you must exercise all that deep repentance, severe contrition, abasing humility, and exact self-denial, to which my preaching calls and directs you. Otherwise you will fail to enter in; "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and," because they strive not earnestly, they "shall not be able."

From this reply of Christ we may assuredly conclude, that the number of those who shall be saved is not determined by any decree of God, excluding all who are not contained in that decree from salvation; for then all exhortation and admonition would be utterly vain and useless; and all the *striving* a man could use would be ineffectual, unless his salvation were particularly decreed: And if it be decreed, it would be entirely superfluous—he would just as surely be saved without any striving at all.

Let us not charge Christ with folly, nor with directing men to do what he knew would be of no advantage to them. When he said, "strive to enter in at the strait gate," he in truth said, that *striving* was necessary: The same necessity for striving is implied when he said, "many will

seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Not only the mode of speech, but the Greek word *ἀγωνίζεσθε*, which the Evangelist hath used, shows that it requires great constancy, diligence, and courage; a sharp conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, to succeed in entering through the strait gate into life eternal. The word signifies to strive, to agony, with the utmost resolution, and with every faculty of body and mind. There is, therefore, no arbitrary decree of God ascertaining the number, and determining individually the persons who shall be saved.

I have said the more on this point, because it seems to have been the rock on which the Jews suffered shipwreck. They were the children of Abraham, the chosen, the elect, the peculiar people of God. To them belonged the covenant, and the adoption, and all the promises of God. They, therefore, conceited that they could not fail of the favour of God, nor of finally obtaining all the blessings he could bestow, either in this world, or the world to come. For would God disown his people? reject his chosen? cast off the children of faithful Abraham? disregard his covenant? or break his promises? How otherwise could they fail of being saved? What need had they of the bitter course of repentance and self-denial which Christ prescribed? No; they were Abraham's seed; the elect of God: The divine decree had passed in their favour, and heaven must be their certain portion.

Possibly the question, "Lord are there few that be saved?" was put to Christ on this very ground. His doctrine seemed to restrain salvation to the penitent only. The inquirer might want to know (perhaps insidiously) whether Christ did not suppose the whole posterity of Abraham would be saved. If he affirmed it, the necessity of repentance and reformation of life was at an end. If he denied it, or said only a few should be saved; it would raise an odium against him, and they could the more easily and safely persecute and destroy him. His answer avoided both snares, and hath left us a most useful lesson of caution and instruction.

The question, you see, was directly put to Christ, concerning the number or proportion of men who should be saved. He did not determine it: He did not say that few, or many, or all should be saved. And who is wiser than he was? or has a greater right to determine the inquiry? Let him stand forth, and produce his credentials. Our duty requires that we rest our faith, and build our hopes, on what is clearly revealed to us; and to be very careful that in avoiding one error, we run not into another, equally wide from the truth, and, in its consequences, equally destructive to our eternal felicity. The text takes away the foundation of the doctrine of particular election and reprobation, and equally with it the doctrine of universal election and salvation. Probably the harsh consequences which flow from the former, have given rise to the latter error. Many, said Christ, will seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able.* If a divine decree hath shut them out, they assuredly shall not enter in: Why then are they required to *strive*, when the decree of God against them, makes all their striving ineffectual? But if a decree of God hath passed, enacting that all men shall be saved, they most assuredly shall all enter in: Why then should they *strive*? Can their striving make the decree more effectual than God hath made it? What Christ said implies a fault in those who were not able to enter in. Their inability did not arise from any decree of God against them; nor from any want of God's grace, or of Christ's merits. No notice is taken of any impediment or deficiency on those accounts. But they had wickedly refused to enter, till the gate was shut; or they sought to

* It may be necessary to remark, that though in the text it is said, *Many will seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able*, yet in St. Matthew vii. 7. and St. Luke xi. 9. where it is said, *Ask, and it shall be given you; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*; it is said also, *Seek, and ye shall find*. It is our duty so to construe the Holy Scriptures as to make them agree in all their parts. The two forms of expression were used by Christ on different occasions, and relate to different subjects. The text, to the obtaining eternal life in heaven: the other, to the obtaining the petitions for which we pray. However, to seek earnestly with all our might and power, amounts to the same thing with striving earnestly. The latter passages are thus to be understood: Ask, with faith and resignation, and it shall be given you; seek, with earnestness and diligence, and you shall find; knock, with patience and perseverance, and it shall be opened unto you.

enter in, without that penitence, and faith, and obedience which God requires, and which, taken together, make that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Both the errors I have mentioned, that of particular election and reprobation, and that of universal election and salvation, stand on the same ground, the unconditional decree or purpose of God, secret to us. Had it been revealed, no dispute could have arisen, whether it meant few or all. While, therefore, the Calvinists and Universalists dispute this point, it is a sure sign neither of them can ascertain the decree in which they believe.

Other objections lie hard against these tenets. They both destroy the nature of man, by taking from him his free and moral agency, and making him a mere machine acting under fatal necessity. They both supersede the use of all ordinances and sacraments in religion, and render useless the means of grace in the Christian Church. And they both destroy God's character as a righteous governor and judge of the world: The one representing him as condemning the greater part of mankind; the other, as saving all men, without regard to their good or evil qualities.

Wisdom will teach us to receive and abide by the declarations of God in Holy Scripture. We there find not that God hath made known any decree to exclude men from salvation, but on account of their personal fault: nor any decree to save all men, whatever their personal demerit may be. With these matters, then, we have nothing to do. They belong not to us. They are in the hand of God, and with him we may safely leave them.

But we do know, for God hath told us, that Christ died for all men: We know, therefore, that all men are put into a capacity of being saved by him. We do know that God hath given us his Holy Spirit, to be in us the principle, the author, the continuer, the finisher of a new, holy, and heavenly life. And that if we strive earnestly, through him, to enter in at the strait gate which leadeth unto life eternal, practising that penitence, faith, love, humility, self-denial, and holy obedience which the gospel requires—in other words, walking in all the commandments and or-

dinances of God with a sincere and upright heart; he will, for Christ's sake, forgive our sins, and make us partakers of his heavenly kingdom. This is enough for us to know; for knowing these things, happy shall we be, if we do them. Whereas, to know that few, or many, or all men shall be saved, cannot possibly do us any good. It may drive us into despair: It may make us secure, and careless about our future state. God hath promised eternal life to those who believe and obey him. On this ground salvation is certain; and no other ground we can take will make it more so.

Why, then, weary ourselves in finding out those things which the goodness and wisdom of God have hidden from us? Why destroy the peace of our own minds, of our neighbourhood, of the Church of God, by introducing a wrangling spirit, and disputing about that which cannot possibly do us any good? Dispute and wrangle as we will; determine as we please, that few, that many, that all shall be saved; still it will be true, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" It still will be true, that "he that doeth righteousness," and he only "is righteous, even as" Christ "is righteous." Beware lest these speculations in religion, which can never be proved, lead you into a neglect of that penitence, and faith, and holy obedience which God requires. If they do, be your opinions whatever they may, ever so right in your own opinions, or in the estimation of others; you will be found in the number of those who "will seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able."

Through a principle of duty I have mentioned, and said so much on this subject; and I do earnestly recommend what hath been said to your serious consideration. I am not ignorant of the risk I run in combating prevailing errors. If they be old ones, they are riveted by long habit. Possibly they have been the belief of a long succession of ancestors; and people reluctantly hear a doctrine impeached in which they have grown up, and in which their forefathers lived and died. Hence it comes to pass, that ex-

ror goes unexamined, and is perpetuated merely because it is old.

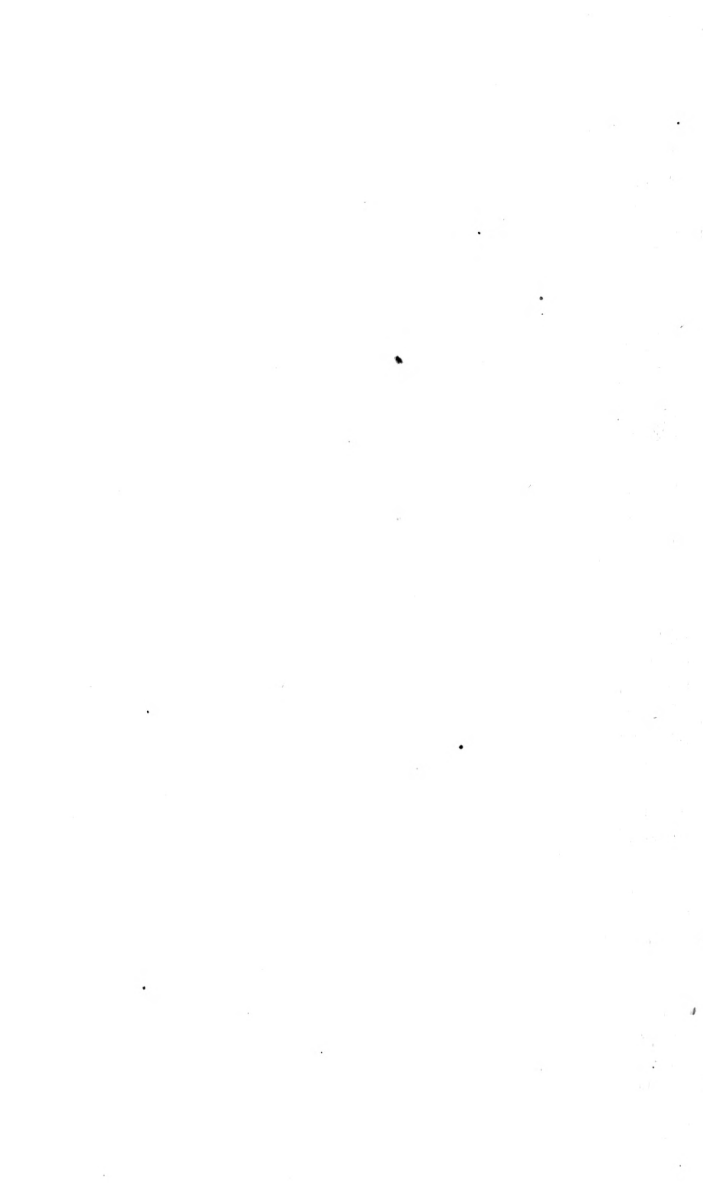
On the other hand, when a new error is started, its very novelty recommends it. The vanity of the human heart is flattered by the notion of being wiser than those who have gone before, and of having struck out some discovery which escaped their sagacity. If it relax the severer precepts of the gospel, and point out an easier way to heaven than repentance and holiness, they who are uneasy in their present state, and not disposed to comply with the terms which the gospel requires, and yet are desirous of supporting a fair appearance, will generally become its partisans. If it set the precepts of the gospel high, and condemn the generality of Christians for falling off from the purity of its manners; a character of great holiness is acquired, and weak people join the error because it is an easy way of being more holy than their neighbours. In neither case is the tenet fairly examined; but it gains proselytes because it gives a man an air of importance, to think and speak differently from his neighbours.

One evil arising from error in religion, especially an error which a man hath taken up of himself, or to which he hath been lately brought over, is, that it wholly employs his thoughts. He can talk of no other religious subject but that. You would imagine he thought the whole gospel was comprised in it. This is more particularly true of the preachers and propagators of error. Their sermons, their conversation, perpetually run on their favorite topic. In the pulpit, in private company, their discourse is the same. Every thing else is neglected as of no importance. Talk with a Calvinist on religion, and begin where you will, you soon get into election and reprobation, and irresistible grace, and the decrees of God: You would think religion consisted of nothing else. If you are not of his opinion, you are a poor, deluded, natural man, who expect to be saved by your own works. Nor will you fare better if you discourse with the retainer to the doctrine of universal salvation. He, too, can talk on no other subject: And though he believes you will be

saved; and that nothing he or you can say or do will alter your eternal state, he will dispute with as much eagerness and heat as the Calvinist, who really fears your eternal damnation.

Novelty truth must ever want. No doctrine of Christian religion is now true, which was not true seventeen hundred years ago. Truth fears no examination, and dreads no discovery. To the law and to the testimony she is ever ready to appeal, and will never shrink from their decision. The written word of God must, therefore, be our last resort. Candor and fair construction are due to the Holy Books. The too common practice, however, is, to judge the Bible by our opinions, not our opinions by the Bible. When our sentiments and the Bible do not accord, instead of correcting our sentiments by it, we are apt to force the construction, vary the connection, put new meanings to old words, charge the holy books with corruptions and interpolations, do any thing rather than give up a favorite sentiment.

Let every one attend to himself, and guard his conduct in this matter: Remembering always, that Christianity is not merely a science to inform the understanding, but a system to correct the heart and regulate the actions and manners of men, and make them capable of happiness with God. Knowledge alone will never do this: It will require the energy of strong endeavours, and long practice. Attend, therefore, I beseech you, to the text. Dismiss the unprofitable inquiries of mere curiosity, and be more anxious to do what God hath commanded, than to know what he hath not revealed. By denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; by living godly, righteously, and soberly in this world, strive to enter in at the strait gate; for they who only seek to enter in, be it in whatever way they please, shall not be able.



DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE VIRGINS.

MATT. XXV. 13.

*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day, nor the hour,
whercin the Son of man cometh.*

IN the preceding Chapter, our Lord hath given us a prophetic description of the destruction of Jerusalem; which was, within forty years, fulfilled by the Roman army under Titus, the son of the Emperor Vespasian. It is remarkable, that the stile and figures of speech, by which this event is foretold, are not only exceeding lofty, but scarcely applicable to any thing that could happen in this world. That the expressions which the Holy Ghost dictated to the prophets, are always proportioned to the event predicted, will be readily allowed by those who have studied their writings. But when Jesus the Son of God, to whom God gave the Holy Ghost without measure, became a prophet to declare the vengeance of heaven in the destruction of Jerusalem, the once favourite city of God most high; all the figures and strong expressions of the old prophets, in foretelling the destruction of old Jerusalem, of Tyre, of Babylon, of Nineveh, sink and become as nothing in the comparison. All nature is disturbed and trembles, because all nature feels the displeasure of God. Wars, and famine, and earthquakes, the darkened sun and moon, the falling stars, the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, the rapid activity of the angels of God, collecting "with a great sound of a trumpet" his "elect from one end of heaven to the other," all precede the final ruin of that devoted city. Can we suppose the sacking of one city, the desolation of one country, could thus affect the powers of na-

ture? could extend its influence to the heavenly orbs, and put the whole creation in confusion?

When God speaks, who would not wish to learn? Who would not wish to draw instruction from the fountain of wisdom, and become master of that knowledge which is infallible? Instruction, and wisdom, and knowledge lie before us in this prophecy. Happy is he who hath ears to hear, and a heart to understand it.

There are two things signified to us by the lofty expressions and strong terms in which the destruction of Jerusalem is described.

1. That as the sin and impenitency of that city had been greater and more obdurate than those of any other, so its destruction should be more terrible, its ruin more dreadful, such as never had happened to any other city; and such as never should happen to any city again. If credit is to be given to their own historian Josephus, this was literally true. The ruin of no other city was preceded by such evident and fearful signs, both in the sky and on the earth, of vengeance impending from heaven. And the miseries suffered by that people in the siege and sacking of the city, were such as the history of no other city can parallel.

2. The second thing signified to us by the highly figurative expressions used by Christ in foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem is, that the judgments and vengeance of God inflicted on that city were figures and emblems of the final judgment and destruction of the world which we inhabit. Take them in this light, and there is nothing hyperbolical in the expressions used by Christ. As they have been verified in the figure, in the destruction of Jerusalem; so they shall be verified in the reality, when "the Lord shall come with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among" men "of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him;" then "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up."

In the Revelations of God, more especially in the prophetic declarations, there is a double language, a language of things, as well as of words. Of the things of another, a spiritual world, we can have no ideas, but by analogy with the things of this world. Therefore spirit, and spiritual things are analogically declared to us by the things of this world with which we are acquainted; that we may have some conception of them, however imperfect it may be. By the words of his Revelation, God calls our attention to the things of this world; and by them our understanding is led on to such a knowledge of the things of the invisible world, as is necessary to our obtaining the full benefit of his Revelations to us, particularly of our redemption from sin and death by Jesus Christ.

To pursue this point is foreign from my present subject. I shall, therefore, return to consider the use our Saviour makes of the destruction of Jerusalem, as a figure of the destruction of the world at the last day.

Having, from several considerations, particularly from the carelessness of the old world in the days of Noah, when "the flood came and took them all away," strongly enforced the duty of watchfulness upon his disciples; that they might be prepared to obey his directions, and quit that devoted city when they saw the signs of its approaching destruction; he introduceth the Parable of the Ten Virgins, which served a double purpose; still more deeply to impress on their minds the great duty of carefully observing the tokens preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, and to lead to the Parable of the Talents, and the description of the General Judgment at the last day; by the first of which the judgment of the Christian Church, and by the latter the judgment of the rest of the world, is represented.

What our Saviour spoke to caution and direct his Apostles, the Holy Ghost hath caused to be written for our admonition also. The destruction of Jerusalem could concern only those who lived at the time, and in the neighbourhood of that dreadful calamity: That hath now been long past, and concerns us no further than as it furnishes

occasion to us to adore the justice of God, and to admire the certainty and severity of his judgments against impenitent and unreclaimable sinners. But as the destruction of Jerusalem was a figure and emblem of the destruction of the world at the last day, it is a matter in which we are deeply interested. The judgment of God which will accompany that event we must all undergo, and ought, therefore, to be "mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour" concerning that solemn audit: And to "watch," because we "know neither the day, nor the hour when the Son of man cometh" to judgment.

The reasonableness as well as necessity of this duty will appear if we consider,

1. The certainty of the judgment which awaits all men at the end of the world, when the things done in the body shall be brought before the tribunal of God, and shall receive the absolution or condemnation of the Judge, according as they have been good or bad.

That this judgment shall take place, at the end of the world, is mentioned and alluded to in so many places of the New Testament, that it seems needless to advert particularly to any one of them. St. Paul declared, in his apology before the court of Areopagus at Athens, that God "hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." He hath also declared that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he done, whether it be good or bad."

2. The certainty, and sometimes the suddenness with which men are taken out of this world. We see that all die; and an Apostle hath told us, "it is appointed unto men once to die," and "after this the judgment." We see also that many die suddenly, without time for thought or reflection; and consequently without time to prepare

themselves for the judgment which is to follow, should they have been so unhappy as to neglect it in their health.

3. That between death and the resurrection, the soul of the deceased must wait in the receptacle appointed for it by God; either in peace and refreshment with the souls of the faithful who have departed this life, in the bosom of Abraham—the Paradise of God—in the society of holy angels, and in the manifestation of Jesus the Saviour; in certain hope and assurance of a blessed resurrection to eternal life, and acquittal at the tribunal of God, when he shall bring the living and the dead to judgment; or, in remorse, and anxious foreboding of the vengeance of God which shall overtake the wicked, when he shall judge the world, and recompense every one according to his deeds.

That judgment does not immediately follow death, is probable, 1. From the silence of Holy Scripture on the subject: It gives us no account of any judgment but after the resurrection, which is to be executed by Jesus Christ, God and Man. 2. From its giving us no account of the souls of the faithful going to heaven—understanding heaven to mean the place or state of perfect glory and happiness—till they are led thither by Christ their Redeemer, in his triumphant train, after their final acquittal at the general judgment. 3. From the impossibility that the soul of any person should enter heaven, till Christ the *forerunner* had entered for us. Accordingly, St. Paul, celebrating the virtues and faith of the old servants of God, saith, “These all having obtained a good report through faith, *received not the promise,*” that heavenly country, that city which God hath prepared for them;* “God having provided” or foreseen “some better thing for us, that they, without us, should not be made perfect.”† 4. From the improbability that the soul of Christ went to heaven, between his death and resurrection. If it did, he ascended twice, once in his human soul, and once soul and body united. According to an article of one of our Creeds, the human soul of Christ, at his death, went into “Aðꝛ, the

* Heb. xi. 13—16.

† Heb. xi. 39, 40

receptacle of departed souls—that part of it called Paradise, where the penitent thief, to whom he had promised, “This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise,” was with him; and there he probably continued till the time of his resurrection.

4. That in this intermediate state, nothing done by the soul can alter its condition with regard to the future judgment. Because that judgment is to be concerning the things done in the body, all the operations of which are ended by death, and must remain in their own state, till judgment decide upon them.

Seeing, then, these things are so: That the judgment of God awaits us after the resurrection: That sudden death sometimes takes men out of the world without giving them any time to prepare themselves for that awful period: That between death and the resurrection, nothing can be done towards altering the state of the soul with regard to the general judgment; and since that judgment is to take cognizance of all things done in the body; great must be the necessity which lies upon us to live so as always to be ready to leave this world, when it shall please God to call us out of it. When that shall be, we know not, nor with how little warning it shall take place. Our only remedy is to watch constantly, that we may always live as God directs, and be prepared for the coming of our Lord to judge the world; or, which to us is a matter of the same importance, for the time of our departure out of it. “Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find” watching, and diligently employed in doing his will.

Great must be the importance of that duty, which our Lord took so much pains to impress upon us; and great the necessity of our carefully attending to what he hath said upon it. To this end, as hath been observed, he spake the parable of the “Ten Virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” Let us, then, inquire into the meaning and application of this parable; and God grant that it may have its full effect upon us.

These ten virgins represent unto us the state of Christ’s

church in this world, consisting of the whole body of professors who have been admitted into it, from its beginning to the end of the world. They moreover represent to us the conduct of these professors, and what shall be their fate at the last. The Church of Christ is, in the gospels, frequently called *the kingdom of heaven*: Its members profess to live in a constant state of preparation for the coming of their Lord, at whatever time that shall happen. These ten virgins "took their lamps," by which the Christian profession is signified, "and went forth to meet the bridegroom," that they might, in his train, go in to the marriage feast. This is the hope of every Christian; and it ought to be the steady purpose of his life, so to conduct himself, that he may be among those "blessed" ones who shall be "called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."*

The union betwixt Christ and his Church is frequently represented to us by marriage, or the union of husband and wife, by which they twain are made one flesh. He is the bridegroom, the Church his bride; and he is the head of the Church, even as the husband is the head of the wife. While this world shall continue, this union must subsist by covenant or contract: It is the time of the espousals: The Church is now betrothed to Christ as a chaste Virgin.† This time of the espousals must continue till the union be perfectly completed; that is, till Christ shall present or take the Church to himself—after he hath sanctified and cleansed it "with the washing of the water" of baptism, the laver of regeneration;‡ and "by the word of his grace, which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among them which are sanctified"§—"a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish."|| Till the general judgment shall have separated the tares from the wheat in the field of God's husbandry, the kingdom of heaven in this world, it will not appear "who are his, and who are holy." Till that period, therefore, the marriage union betwixt Christ and the Church will not be perfected, nor the marriage feast celebrated. But when the judgment

* Rev. xix. 9.

† 2 Cor. xi. 2.

‡ Tit. iii. 5.

§ Acts xx. 32.

|| Eph. v. 26, 27.

shall be passed; all her faithful members who have ever lived, shall hear the joyful voice of the Bridegroom, their Saviour, and their Judge, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord." Then shall they ascend in his triumphant train, and enter his heavenly kingdom, and partake of the marriage feast of the Lamb, those good things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, which God hath prepared for them that love him"*—the rich repast of divine goodness and love.

In the characters of the virgins, in the text, there is a remarkable difference. "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish;" and the folly of the one, and the wisdom of the other showed itself in this circumstance—The foolish virgins took their lamps burning, but took no oil to replenish them, when that which was in them should be expended: that is, they called themselves Christians, and were Christians by profession; but they were not diligent to adorn their holy profession with the proper fruits of Christianity, by walking worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called. But the wise virgins took oil in their vessels with their lamps, that they might be able to supply them, and keep them always burning. They regarded the duties and virtues of their holy religion, as well as the profession of it. To work out their salvation with fear and trembling, and to make their calling and election sure, was the great business of their lives: Knowing, that as God wrought in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure, it was their duty to work in their heavenly calling while he enabled and gave them opportunity to do so, by doing what he had commanded, and living as he had directed, to the utmost of their power.

The same difference that there is in the characters of these virgins may be observed in the characters of Christian professors. Some are careful to adorn their profession with all the virtues of a holy life; to watch carefully against all temptations to sin; and to obey from the heart that form of sound doctrine which was delivered them;

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

walking in all the commandments of God, and mortifying all the evil propensities of their nature. Others are content with their profession, and satisfied with the Christian name: The duties of Christianity are disregarded by them: Professing to be the servants of God, they live in subjection to the inspirations of satan, the lusts of the flesh, the wicked pleasures and covetous tempers of the world. As the conduct of these two kinds of Christians resembles that of the virgins in the parable, so will the issue of their conduct also be like theirs.

Till the Bridegroom came, all the virgins "slumbered and slept." The scene of the parable is laid in the night, to represent to us the darkness, and perplexity, and misery of this wicked world, in which the Church, till the time of her espousals be accomplished, is obliged to continue. The proper business of the night is to sleep and rest the body, that it may be fit for the duties of the succeeding day. In their sleeping, therefore, there was no harm; nature required it, and must be indulged. By their sleeping, is meant the various occupations and employments of life, by which the body is supported and fed. The body is the creature of God, and the heir of immortality: While it pleases God to continue us in the world, it has a right to be fed and nourished; and our duty requires us to provide for its necessities. The danger is in over-feeding and pampering it, to the increase of its evil propensities and lusts, by which we shall be drawn into sin against God.

At midnight, a sudden proclamation was made, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." At this notice, all the Virgins rising to trim their lamps, the foolish ones perceived that their lamps were going out, for want of oil. Having none to supply them, they requested their companions to give them part of their stock. They then found the want of that holy, Christian life which they had neglected, contenting themselves with the profession, without regarding the duties of Christianity; flattering themselves, probably, that they should do well enough without them. However great their necessity was,

their application was rejected by the wise Virgins, who replied, "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: But go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." The expression of *buying oil* for their lamps, seems to be used merely to keep up the similitude in the Parable, because that is the usual way of supplying lamps with oil. If it have any further intention, it is to convince us how fruitless and vain the attempt would be. As oil, in this Parable, signifies that due preparation to meet the Lord when he cometh, either at the day of judgment or at the time of our own death, which arises from watching and the uniform practice of all the good works and duties which our holy religion requires, it cannot be transferred from one to another. Was that possible, no one has more than he will want. Should any one be so presumptuous as to imagine he had done more in the service of God than was required, contrary to the direction of Christ to his Apostles, "When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do;"* and should pretend to transfer the merit of his works to others; the negociation would end with as little advantage to the purchaser as is represented in the Parable: For,

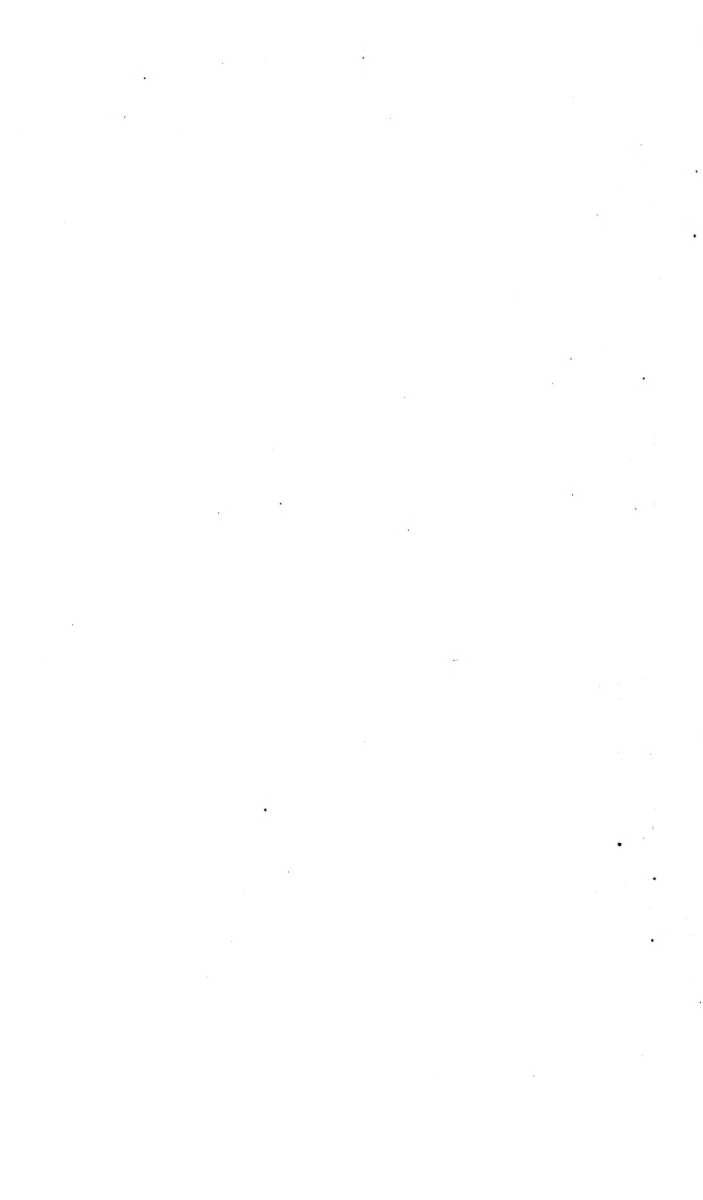
While the foolish Virgins went to buy—in other words, while they endeavoured, in some way or other, to make themselves ready—the Bridegroom came; and the wise Virgins, having trimmed their lamps, and being ready for his coming, went in with him to the marriage feast, and the doors were shut. When, therefore, the foolish Virgins came and requested admission, saying, "Lord, Lord, open" the door "to us" also; he answered, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not"—I own no persons careless and improvident as you are, as fit guests at my feast. The application of the Parable then follows, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day, nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

So much hath been said upon the duty and necessity of watchfulness or great care to fulfil our duty in this world,

according to the will of God, that I shall content myself with observing, that the old Commentators, particularly Origen and Chrysostom, suppose the Parable to have been designed and spoken against *a late, or death-bed repentance*; when the body and mind are so worn down by age and infirmity, or by sickness, that the pleasures of vice and sin can be no longer enjoyed, and the prospect of eternity opens full on the soul. Repentance under such circumstances, this Parable, according to their interpretation of it, declares to be invalid with God.

Without presuming to set limits to the mercy of God, it is obvious to observe, that our Saviour concludes the Parable with declaring the necessity of watchfulness, that we may be always ready, because we know not the day nor hour when the Son of man cometh: Whether that day be the day of our death or the day of judgment, it is of equal importance to us. In the foregoing Chapter, he earnestly presses on us the necessity of doing, with all fidelity and diligence, the work of the Lord; that is, our duty according to God's commandments. In another place,* he strictly commands the same duty, "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: For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." It is hard to conceive that the necessity of watchfulness, and constant prayer, and care to do the will of God, can be so great as Christ hath represented them, if we may neglect them through our whole life, and not suffer at last for our negligence—if we may live in the omission of all God hath commanded, and in the practice of all he hath forbidden; and, in the hour of death, cry, "Lord have mercy upon us;" and thus be happy. Good, therefore, is the advice of the son of Sirach, *Humble thyself, before thou be sick, and in the time of sins show repentance—and defer not until death to be justified.*

* Luke xxi. 34, &c.



DISCOURSE XIX.

CAUTIONS WITH REGARD TO HEARING SERMONS.

LUKE viii. 13.

Take heed how ye hear.

OUR Saviour, having explained the Parable of the Sower to his disciples, added that of the lighted candle; that they might understand, his intention in communicating that knowledge to them was not that they should keep it to themselves, but that they should proclaim and teach it to others. The caution of the text follows, and is supported by a declaration which several times occurs in his instructions; "Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath" (so as to improve it to the purposes for which he hath it) "to him shall" more "be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

The text, therefore, relates to the temper with which we hear religious instruction, especially from those who are appointed by God to dispense it to us. The admonition of our Saviour ought to convince us that it is a matter of serious importance; and the observation which every Minister of Christ must make, that little apparent benefit arises from hearing sermons, will convince him that his admonition is not regarded as it ought to be.

Some part of the blame probably belongs to them whom God hath called to be public Instructors in his Church. They being men of like passions and infirmities with others, may not in every respect come up to their duty. They may be negligent in preparing themselves for the discharge of their office of preaching God's word to advantage. They may be careless and languid in the delivery

of their discourses. Though no crime may stain their characters, their conduct may defeat the benefit of their public instruction. May God give them all grace to attend duly to their own conduct in these respects; for heavy will be their doom, if the preaching of the Gospel of God fail of its full effect through their fault.

But whatever may be the deficiencies of those who preach the Gospel; we have a right to expect more fruit from their labours, such as they are, than we see produced. This must be the fault of the Hearers; and it requires the consideration of their serious hours, and their earnest prayers to Almighty God, the giver of all grace, that they may correct it. The subject is important, and weighty consequences are dependent on it—the glory of God, the honor of our Redeemer, the prosperity of religion, their own future welfare, and the future welfare of others.

Such excuses as satisfy themselves are easily made by most people, when religion is concerned; for when the accused is his own judge, his acquittal too generally follows of course. But whether those excuses, with which men satisfy themselves, will satisfy their final Judge, deserves their consideration. An Apostle hath told us, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” But righteous judgment will certainly be expected of us. If we might be allowed to change one word in the above cited text, and read, “If we would condemn ourselves, we should not be condemned,” I conceive neither the propriety of the translation, nor the truth of Scripture would suffer by it.

Be, therefore, your own judges, while I endeavour, in plainness and sincerity, to lead you to the true apprehension of what is contained in this important text, “Take heed how ye hear.”

I. It implies a disposition to attend to what is said, and to be instructed by it.

To sit within the sound of the Preacher’s voice, and hear his words without attending to them, can answer no good purpose. Thus hearing, you hear not, because you understand not. One design of preaching, is to instruct;

but if you understand not, this end of preaching, with regard to you, is defeated. Or, should the Preacher's view be to correct something amiss, to enliven your devotion, to refresh your memory, to call off your affections from the things of the world and direct them to things above; as to any advantage you will get, you might as well be in any other place, or employed in any other matter.

But possibly the Preacher does not please you. His voice is coarse, or his manner uncouth, or his language inelegant, and you cannot command your attention. But, remember, the Preacher is God's Minister to you, for your good. It is, therefore, your duty to hear him with attention and patience. To have the ears charmed, and the imagination delighted, may be very pleasing sensations: But, unless the understanding be informed, and the heart mended, these sensations might have as well been produced by a song, as a sermon; and, in a general way, the impression would last as long in one case, as in the other.

I mean not to excuse any Clergyman who indulges himself in an indolent, careless, or awkward manner in the pulpit. It is his duty to correct any habits of this kind, and to qualify himself to discharge the solemn office of preaching, with propriety. But suppose, with his utmost endeavour, he should, as a Preacher, fail to please you; still it is your duty, while you live under his ministry, to attend to his discourses, and get as much instruction from them as you can. Possibly some part of the fault may be in you: A careless habit may be more to blame, than any defects in the Preacher. At least, it would be worth the trial, whether continued exertion, on your part, to command your attention, would not wear off, or lessen what appeared disgusting in the Preacher's manner.

Another excuse for inattention is, that the Preacher tells you nothing that is new—nothing but what you knew before: And why should you be obliged to attend for half an hour, to hear only what you had often heard, and with which you was as well acquainted as your Minister?

How, then, did you get your knowledge? If by preaching, why not continue that attention to a method of in-

struction, from which you have received so much benefit? If in any other way; is it no satisfaction to have your knowledge confirmed by discourses from the pulpit? Possibly, too, while you are inattentive, and your thoughts wandering, some sentiment may be delivered which would have pleased you; some duty, in which you are deficient, enforced with motives you never thought of; some sin, in which you lived, reprov'd in a manner which would have affected you; some point of doctrine, in which you wanted instruction, explained; some text of Scripture, which you did not understand, set in a clear light: But through inattention you have lost the opportunity, and it may never again return to you.

Besides; though you may be so well informed as to need no instruction; is that the case with the whole congregation? Others may be ignorant; and you surely would not prevent their improvement. Set, then, a good example; and by your own attention, encourage attention in them. Some advantage may thereby accrue even to you. You may find your love to God enlivened, your faith quickened, your devotion warmed, your piety promoted, your benevolence heightened, and every good disposition animated, by the repetition of what you before knew full well. Why then will you, by inattention, preclude yourself from all chance of so great blessings?

Another cause of inattention is levity. Some persons have so much vivacity in their composition, and require such a perpetual change of objects to entertain them, that they cannot stay in any place, or converse on any topic, or engage in any matter long enough to receive instruction. All must be mirth, or they are unhappy. Brilliant sallies of imagination, lively repartees, puns, jests, laughable merriment of any kind, constitute their whole enjoyment. There may be advantages in such a disposition with regard to this world. The little rubs of life affect not; and the heavy strokes of adversity are soon forgotten. But, to indulge such a disposition in Church, is both ridiculous and wicked. Levity is no friend to consideration; no qualification for attending to the interests of

eternity. It kills devotion; it hinders divine contemplation, and closes the mind against instruction. Let the Preacher have prepared ever so good a sermon; let him deliver it with ever so much propriety; in the midst of a serious argument, or of a pathetic exhortation, some whim strikes the fancy and must be communicated. A whisper ensues; laughter follows; the whole pew is disturbed; and the Minister hath composed, and preached in vain. If nothing worse, yet the occasional adjustment of the little ornaments of dress, observations on the appearance and behaviour of others, and the treasuring up of remarks for future merriment, too probably are the employment of such persons through the whole sermon.

Another cause of inattention is the intrusion of worldly objects into the mind. While at church, the miser may be contemplating his wealth, or calculating his interest; the worldling laying plans for the prosecution of his business; the man of ambition contriving the exaltation of his dignity; the debauchee, the certain enjoyment of his pleasures. God grant there be no occasion for these remarks. Yet solicitude that you may reap the full benefit of that religious instruction which God hath provided for you, hath drawn them from me.

Let me now observe, that in order to make sermons profitable to you, it is not only necessary that you attend to them, but that you attend with a firm and honest resolution to believe and practise whatever you shall be convinced is your duty; and that the seriousness with which you attend be not dropped as soon as you leave the church. It ought to be continued, at least, long enough to give you time for reflection. This reflection ought to be recalled at proper intervals, that you may add to your stock of knowledge what you gained from the last sermon, and make it subservient to your growth in grace and in Christian virtues.

For this reason you ought not to return suddenly to the consideration of worldly business. What necessity requires must be regarded: But unnecessary attention to worldly objects, as soon as we leave the church, will dis-

tract the mind, and lessen the benefit you would otherwise receive from the instructions of the pulpit. Six days in the week our Creator hath given us, to provide for this life; the seventh he hath appropriated to the interests of eternity. We shall show our wisdom by regarding the institution of our Maker, and not by encroaching on a day which he hath blessed and sanctified to so important a purpose.

Far be it from me to recommend a sullen, gloomy behaviour to religious people. It is generally the child of pride and ignorance; the nurse of peevishness and bigotry. I know no person who has a better right to be cheerful than the pious Christian. Only let him take care that his cheerfulness be innocent, and do not degenerate into levity; especially not into such levity as shall lead him into improper behaviour at church, or efface the good impressions he hath there received.

2. The text implies in it the duty of hearing sermons with an open and candid heart; neither warped by prejudice against the Preacher, nor by unreasonable partiality in his favour.

If the mind be barred by prejudice, or warped by partiality, the chance of obtaining instruction, or of having our good dispositions confirmed, will be much lessened. Prejudice will shut the ears and harden the heart against conviction. Partiality will incline us to receive doctrines which have no foundation in truth. The one will prevent our receiving instruction when offered to us; the other may make us a prey to delusion and error. Duty requires that we exercise candor, not that we resign ourselves to implicit belief. Judgment must be used, and discretion must guide it.

Fundamental principles of religion drawn from Holy Scripture, and from the Catholic Creeds and Doctrines of the Church, together with approved maxims of holiness, will enable us to judge, if not with scholastic precision, yet with propriety, and with security to our faith and practice, both as reasonable men, and as Christians. It is not to be expected, nor is it required, that every Chris-

tian should be a casuist, or deeply skilled in controversial divinity: But it is expected that every Christian be an honest man, and receive truth and reject error, as far as his best judgment shall enable him to distinguish them.

A plain sermon in familiar language, seldom acquires the Preacher any credit; never but with good judges. Every man is apt to think he could have composed as good a sermon himself. But if a Preacher busy himself in endeavouring to explain the mysteries of religion,* or to confute old heresies, or reconcile modern systems of divinity, or to distinguish between sin and duty, virtue and vice, and show how near they can come together without the one running into the other, there is a propensity in common hearers to applaud him. The vastness of his abilities, and the immensity of his learning are admired, merely because he was not understood. If such Preachers gain applause; or if light, frothy discourses, hit off in soft words and flowing periods—smooth and cold as polished marble—be preferred to plain, solid, Christian doctrine; some Preachers, it is to be feared, will be found, who will sacrifice their duty to their fame, their conscience to their profit, and will tickle your ears and please your imaginations, without much regard to your growth in grace or Christian knowledge.

Another ground of both prejudice and partiality with regard to Preachers is this: Some religious people form to themselves a particular scheme of Christianity: They understand its principle in a sense of their own: They lay a great stress on some particular doctrine: They use a peculiar set of phrases, and quote certain texts of Scripture, to both which they have affixed their own peculiar meaning. Should a clergyman neglect their mode of expression; or give a different interpretation of their texts; or not lay weight enough upon their favorite doctrine;

* There are, and there must be mysteries, that is, some doctrines in our religion which we cannot comprehend. The infinite nature of God is beyond the reach of our understanding. We have, from nature, no conception of spirit, or of spiritual objects, but by analogy with our own nature and the things of this world. Divine revelation, then, which concerns itself only with spirit and spiritual things, and is obliged to represent them to us by analogy, must have some things in it which to us are incomprehensible.

they first suspect him, and then accuse him of teaching false doctrine. On the other hand, should the preacher use their style of expression, quote their texts, and apply them in their way; support their sentiments, and build up their system; they extol him to the skies; the Spirit of God rests upon him; the words of salvation flow from his lips. But by what criterion do these people judge? Evidently by the criterion of their own preconceived system. Appeals, I know, are always made to Scripture: But when a man puts his own construction on particular texts; should that construction be false, the texts become his texts, and speak his sense, not the sense of Scripture.

The Scripture is the revelation of God to man, making known invisible and spiritual things by analogy drawn from things visible and corporeal. Its language must of necessity be figurative; and, from its figures, as well as from the idiom of the language in which it was written, and the customs of the country where it was written, a degree of obscurity rests on it, which requires greater learning and abilities to clear up, than may be commonly apprehended.*

Considered as a system of morality, the Bible is sufficiently plain to regulate the conduct of human life in all situations: As a divine revelation, making known and offering immortality and happiness to man in a future world, it is sufficiently plain to secure all the benefits of Christ's redemption to the faithful Christian. To this end, the study of the sublime points of theology, the knowledge of dark prophecies, of the mysteries of God's providence, and of the dispensations of his grace, are not necessary. It would be better if people would confine their attention more to matters of duty, what their station in life requires of them; and to take their faith from the Catholic Creeds of the Church, in which the essential Christian doctrines of Scripture are comprised. It would, also, be well, if people of greater abilities and knowledge would be sure they themselves are right, before they form a decided

* The Rev. William Jones, M. A. and F. R. S. in 1787, published a Course of Lectures on the figurative Language of the Holy Scriptures, highly worth the attention of all Christians.

judgment of the doctrines of their Minister; and that neither vanity, nor prejudice, nor pride have any influence to bias their determination. Some regard is due to the station of their Minister in the Church, and to the relation he stands in to them; and great regard is due to the peace, and order, and authority of the Church. Should their opinion of their Minister be just, a private explanation may satisfy all their scruples: But it ought to be the explanation of a friend, not the attack of a disputant. Let them, also, be careful that no petulance, nor obstinacy, nor censoriousness stain their conduct. If they be wrong, their case is dreadful. Prejudice, if their Minister differs from them, precludes all opportunity of better information. If he coincides with them, prepossession hath laid a foundation on which he will build a superstructure of error and delusion.

Some people complain that their Minister confines himself to discourses on dry morality, and never touches on any point of Christian doctrine. Others complain that their Minister preaches constantly on intricate doctrinal points, and never says a word of moral obligation. When either of these charges is just, it ought to be corrected. When a Minister confines himself to moral subjects, he gives occasion to suspicions that he does not believe, or does not understand, or lightly regards the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. If he never treats on Christian virtues, he furnishes occasion to censure, to say, that he is more solicitous to amuse his people with theoretic knowledge, than to form their manners.

The Public Service of the Church calls the Minister to the consideration of particular Christian doctrines on particular days: At other times, she leaves, or rather invites him, not only to inculcate Christian principles, but to enforce the practice of Christian duty. Prudence will direct a Clergyman to conform to this regulation, being careful to draw his morality from Christian sources, to establish it by Christian principles, and enforce it by Christian motives: And when Christian doctrines are under consideration, to point out their moral tendency, and show

how well they are calculated to mend the hearts, and influence the conduct of men.

In some congregations there are people who are dissatisfied with their Minister, and wish to be rid of him. While he is their Minister, duty to God as well as to themselves, the order and peace of the Church require that they submit to his ministry, that they duly attend the public service of the Church, and patiently listen to his discourses. If they should be such as do not entirely please them, they must be bad indeed if they receive no benefit from them.

Humility, without which the Christian character is not complete, by inspiring us with lowly sentiments of our own abilities, will dispose us to peace and quietness, which in the estimation of God are of more worth than all the subtilities of human learning. I know not a worse character (among the religious ones I mean) than a sour, captious, sermon-critic. No sermon pleases him, but in proportion as he can find fault with it. Too often, by mere dint of fault-finding, he collects a party who look up to him as to an oracle, and disperse abroad all his observations: Feeling his power to disturb the serious and unsettle the weak, he becomes intoxicated with his own importance and spiritual attainments, till being lifted up with pride, he falls—but God give him repentance, and a better mind, that he may not fall into the condemnation of the devil. “Take heed,” therefore, “how ye hear,” and let your care be, at least, as much employed on your own temper and conduct, as on the conduct and preaching of your minister.

3. The text implies that we hear with faith in the goodness of God, and in the truth of his promises and threats.

One great end of preaching is to display the goodness of God to man, manifested in his creation, and more especially in his redemption from sin and death by Jesus Christ; in the hope of glory which he hath set before us, and the means of grace by which he enables us to obtain that hope. Unless you have this faith in the goodness of God, all these delightful topics will be urged on you in

vain. You cannot love that goodness in which you do not believe; nor imitate that goodness which you do not love; nor be transformed into the likeness of that goodness which you do not imitate. And yet, our resemblance of God in goodness is made the foundation of happiness with him.

Equally necessary is it that we have firm faith in the truth of God; that we believe he will assuredly make good all his promises, and will execute his threats, unless by repentance, and faith in his mercy, we avail ourselves of the atonement of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. On no other ground but that of your faith in the truth of God, can his promises be made the foundation of your hope, or his threats a motive to your repentance.

If, therefore, the goodness and truth of God are to be of any advantage to you in your Christian course, that advantage must come to you through your faith in them. Your duty, then, requires that, by frequent meditation, you strengthen your faith in the goodness of God expressed to you and to all men; in the truth of his promises to all faithful Christians; and in the certainty of his threats against the impenitent and disobedient. Thereby you will prepare yourselves to receive the full benefit of your Minister's discourses on those important subjects. Beyond every thing else, such meditations warm the heart with devotion to God, and with charity to man; they prepare it for the reception of divine grace; they arm it with holy resolution, and they strengthen it against all temptations to sin.

4. To your faith in the goodness and truth of God, add constant prayer and resignation of the heart to him; that is, a ready desire, in all things to be conformed to his holy will.

The belief that God is our Creator and Redeemer; that he is good and hath provided all things necessary for our present and future happiness; that he is true and will fulfil every word that hath gone out of his mouth, is the foundation of the duty of prayer to him. If he is our Creator, he can help us in all difficulties: If he is good, he will do

what is best for us: If his word is true, he will fulfil the gracious promises which he hath made. My subject obliges me to take notice of only one of these promises—“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” For, “if ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”*

This Holy Spirit, Christ promised to his Church, and, as members of his Church, all Christians receive his heavenly influence. He is the principle of holiness; we are polluted and unholy through sin. He is the principle of strength; we are weak and unable to help ourselves. Most necessary, then, for us is the presence and operation of this Divine Being, without whom we can do nothing that is good and acceptable to God. To our prayers and earnest entreaties God hath promised the precious gift of his presence—most necessary, therefore, it is, that we pray fervently and constantly for it. From this Spirit all good desires, and holy purposes, and just works proceed; from him cometh every good and perfect gift. He disposeth the heart to the fear and service of God: He endueth it with attention, and a disposition to be instructed in the will of God, with candor to receive, and seriousness to consider, and resolution to believe and practise whatever God shall declare to be our duty. Faith, and hope, and dependence on God proceed from him; prayer and resignation are the fruits of his work. He strengtheneth the heart against temptation; he supporteth it in affliction; he guideth it in prosperity. Pray earnestly, therefore, and constantly, for the presence and inspirations of this blessed Spirit. He is the author of all goodness in you: He is your whole security against evil.

And as you pray for his presence and holy gifts, be careful to obey his inspirations. They show themselves in the sensibility and love of goodness, in hatred and detestation of all that is evil. When you comply with the motions to goodness in your own heart, and turn from

* Luke xi. 9, 13.

every thing which you know to be contrary to the will of God, you follow the motions of God's Spirit in you; and he will bless you, and will fulfil his gracious promise, "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."

The business, therefore, of hearing sermons is not of that trivial nature, which many people suppose it to be. If we wish to make it conducive to our growth in grace, it must be accompanied with serious and patient attention, with a disposition to receive instruction in religious knowledge, with faith in the goodness and truth of God, and a determination to obey his will to our utmost ability.

I have gone upon the presumption, that the Preacher faithfully does his duty, and proposes and explains the whole gospel to you in the course of his sermons—that his manner be affectionate, and his language plain—that he neither carelessly nor wilfully perverts or neglects any doctrine necessary for you—that he confines not himself to some favourite system or doctrine, but opens to you the whole will of God concerning you, and leads you in it by a Christian and exemplary life. If he do not, he offends against the strongest obligations that can be laid on man, and heavy will be his condemnation from God.

Before I conclude, let me caution you against the fashionable prejudice in favour of preaching, which prevails with most people who are not well instructed in the nature and design of the Church of Christ. I have no way to judge of the sentiments of people, but from their conduct and discourse. To judge by these, the whole duty of the minister lies in preaching; of the people in hearing. Accordingly, on Prayer-days the congregations are very thin: But if a rambler through the country notifies that he is *to preach*, though too ignorant to speak sense, and one who can only bawl loudly; he shall have his audience fully crowded. No inquiry is made into the qualifications of the preacher; Whether he has been set apart to the work of the ministry according to the institution of Christ? or, whether he has taken up the business by his own authority? or, whether he has been ordained by

those who had no more authority than himself? This shows that a great many people hear sermons with the same idle curiosity, with which they would hear a play. Remember, therefore, that Christians are united to God by being taken into covenant with him, and are united to one another by being members of his Church; that this union can only be supported by the ordinances of his Church, all which are instituted by him for this very end. Joint prayers or social worship, and the participation of the sacraments, are, therefore, as necessary to eternal life, as hearing the word of God preached; and I will add, much more so than hearing the word of God preached, without them.

DISCOURSE XX.

THE DOOM OF JERUSALEM.

LUKE xix. 41, 42.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

WE have considered the history of Pharaoh, particularly what is meant by God's hardening his heart. We have adverted to the fate of the Israelites who were delivered from Egypt, and afterward perished in the wilderness. We have attended to the conduct and punishment of the latter Jews in the time of Christ; and have explained the meaning of that text which saith, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

It may be worth our while to consider whether these things concern Christians. If God dealt with Pharaoh and the Jews in such a manner as he never did, and never will deal with others, we have little or nothing to do with them, further than curiosity and amusement are concerned. But, if he intended them as warnings and admonitions to us, as examples of the fatal issue of their conduct, and an exemplification of a fixed rule of his dealing with them and with all mankind, we shall find ourselves most deeply interested in whatever related to them. Under the full persuasion that we are so, I take the liberty to bring before you the particular case of the Jews, and the final sentence which Christ passed upon their capital city, Jerusalem, in the words of the text; hoping that your candor will excuse the repetition of sentiments and circumstances that have been before mentioned, or briefly considered.

It is apparent that God dealt with his old people, the church of the Jews, by the same rule by which he dealt with Pharaoh. And, as he is no respecter of persons, but “will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardeneth whom he will;” that is, dispenseth the blessings of his grace and mercy, or executeth his judgments, according to his own good pleasure; rendering to every man according to his deeds, and agreeably to the state he hath formed for himself: What good reason can be given, why he should not deal with Christians as he dealt with Pharaoh and the Jews, if, as Pharaoh and the Jews did, they harden the heart against him, and pass their day of grace in obstinate and final impenitency?

Christians profess to believe, that the Bible contains the history of God’s revelation to the world; making known his will, and directing the conduct of men: that it sets forth the history of many things he hath done in the world to particular nations of men, relative to their conduct compared with his will made known to them; so that, seeing the blessings and judgments his hand hath dispensed to others, they may be induced to live in obedience to him who is the author of life, and the giver of every good thing to his creatures: this is their profession; but, unhappily, their practice corresponds but ill with it.

In respect of holy scripture, Christians seem to have fallen into a state very similar to that of the Jews in the time of Christ. The Jews believed that the books of the Old Testament contained the revelation of God’s will, and were ready, at all times, to dispute about them and for them; to settle philosophic and speculative opinions by them; to interpret the dark prophecies, and explain the deep mysteries contained in them: and so high did they carry their veneration of them, that, lest they should be corrupted, they numbered and carefully noted the sum of the words and letters in which they were written. But to make them the rule of their life, and regulate their conduct by that will of God which they declared, was a matter with which, a few instances excepted, they had little to do.

The example of Pharaoh, exhibited to us by God's hardening his heart, by the miracles he wrought for his conviction, and by withdrawing from him his holy spirit, because he would not suffer his divine motions and inspirations to take any lasting hold of him; by his pronouncing against him the sentence of reprobation, and giving him up to destruction, the Jews perverted, so as to make it of no efficacy to bring them to repentance, but rather to increase their own pride, and harden their hearts in iniquity. For,

Who was Pharaoh? who were the Egyptians that perished with him? Vile heathen, and the objects of God's hatred and wrath. But themselves they believed to be the peculiar people of God—the children of Abraham by Sarah, and the sole heirs of all the blessings of the covenant made with him. If God corrected them for their transgressions, his corrections were but the chastisements of a father. He never would punish them as he did wicked heathen, with blindness of mind and hardness of heart; nor issue the sentence of reprobation and destruction against them.

Nor had the judgments of God upon the Israelites whom he brought through the Red Sea, when Pharaoh and his army were drowned, any greater effect on them. They considered not that those Israelites were the covenanted people of God equally with themselves, being the children of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and heirs of all the promises made to them, particularly of the inheritance of Canaan, whither God was then conducting them: that they had, moreover, personally entered into covenant with God at Horeb, and had been eye-witnesses of all the great things he had done for them, in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness: that, on account of their disbelief and distrust of the power of God to put them in possession of Canaan, occasioned by the report which the spies, whom Moses had sent to view the country, made of the size and strength of the inhabitants, "God sware in his wrath," that not one of those who were numbered when they came out of Egypt, Caleb and Joshua excepted.

should obtain that promise, but should all die in the wilderness; condemning them to forty years wandering in it, till that curse of reprobation should be fulfilled on them. Nor had the goodness of God any effect on them, so as to correct the perversity of their heart. Like Pharaoh, they closed their eyes against his miracles, and regarded not the interpositions of his providence in their favour, till neither miracles nor providential interpositions could do them any good. At Marah they complained of the bitterness of the water, and were relieved from their distress by the goodness of God, who directed Moses to cast the bough of a certain tree into it, and the water became sweet. Shortly after they murmured in the wilderness of Sin, and demanded bread and flesh for their hunger. Again the power of God relieved them by a miraculous supply of quails and manna. It was not long before they repeated their murmurings for water at Rephidim; and so violent were their clamours, that Moses thought himself in danger of being stoned by them. The rock in Horeb, smitten by the rod of Moses, in obedience to the direction of God, supplied them with water to satiety.

Thus they went on during their abode in the wilderness, ever complaining, never satisfied: and though always relieved from distress by the power of God, yet still doubting that power: still doubting whether God was with them, though they saw daily manifestations of his presence, and had beheld his glory visibly displayed on mount Sinai—wishing they had died by the hand of God, with full stomachs, in Egypt; rather than to be left to famish in the wilderness.

God saw the irreclaimable hardness and baseness of their tempers, and he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into Canaan. Their professions of penitence and submission were ineffectual. Their doom was past, and it was literally fulfilled: they all died wandering in the wilderness.

Surprising as it may appear, these instances of the unbelief and rebellion of the Israelites, and of the judgments of God on them, in consequence thereof, never seem to

have ceased while they continued a nation ; nor in their present dispersed state through the world do they appear to be cured of them. In the time of Christ, they went on in the same way with their forefathers, acting from the same temper and disposition of heart, till the wrath of God broke on them, in the final destruction of their civil and religious polity, by the power of the Romans.

Of that terrible and fatal disaster, the goodness of God had given them long and repeated notice. The old prophets had foretold the event, and called them to repentance, as the only method to escape the vengeance of God : but their predictions they regarded not. The holy Baptist, who, in the power, and spirit, and with the mortification of Elias, came to prepare the way of the Lord, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, preached to them the doctrine and baptism of repentance. He declared that the axe was about to be laid to the root of the trees, and that every tree growing in the garden of God, the church of the Jews, which brought not forth good fruit, should be hewn down, and cast into the fire : that God, the great husbandman of the earth, the especial owner and proprietor of that people, had taken his winnowing fan in his hand, and would effectually clear and cleanse his threshing-floor, by separating the chaff from the wheat ; the latter he would gather into his granary, but would burn up the former with fire which none could quench. "Repent," therefore, said he, that ye may escape the judgment of God impending over the wicked ; "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ;" the promised reign of Messiah is now commencing.—They believed not John, but reviled him as a madman possessed of the devil.

The last proffer of mercy was the preaching of Messiah. All meek and lowly, "he came unto his own" people, these hard-hearted and impenitent Jews : they "received him not." He called them to repentance : they would not repent. He proclaimed the kingdom of God : they refused to enter into it. He declared himself to be sent of God, to open the eyes of the blind, to heal the broken

and contrite spirit, to release the captives of satan, to preach good news of salvation to the meek and humble, to make known the acceptable year of the Lord: they attempted to throw him down a precipice for his presumption. He wrought miracles to prove his divine mission: they ascribed his miracles to the power of the devil. He lived not on particular food, like John the Baptist, but ate and drank the food of other people: they blasphemed him as a glutton and a drunkard. In strong allusions and apt parables, he warned them of the impending rejection of God: they contrived his death.

In this state of obdurate impenitency were the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when Jesus, for the last time, approached it. The prospect of the city, the knowledge of what it was to endure, filled his eyes with tears, his heart with sorrow, his mouth with the most plaintive words of commiseration: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," and thou wouldst not! "If thou," Jerusalem, "hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." And "behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth."

But no warning had any effect. The declaration of Jesus excited their malice; the acclamations and hosannas of the multitude inflamed their passions. They seized him as a malefactor, and crucified him by the hand of the Romans. The little flock of chosen disciples and followers whom he left in the world, they persecuted and murdered, or scattered abroad among the nations, because they declared his resurrection, and preached repentance, remission of sins, and eternal life in his name.

Thus they continued provoking God, and increasing the heavy load of their guilt, till the Roman army, the terrible scourge of God, cast a trench about Jerusalem, and compassed her round, and kept her in on every side.

and laid her even with the ground, and her children within her, not leaving one stone upon another; because she knew not the time of her visitation. For had she known, even at the last, in the days of Christ, the things that belonged to her peace; had she then repented of her wickedness, and reformed her manners; had she been convinced by the miracles of Christ, that he was Messiah, the glory of Israel, the light of the Gentiles, the Son of God, the things of peace had still been hers. But,

Against all the admonitions of God she hardened her heart; against the miracles of Christ she shut her eyes; against his preaching she closed her ears. Perfectly similar to the temper and conduct of Pharaoh, and the Israelites in the wilderness, was the temper and conduct of the Jews when Jesus preached among them; and by the same rule did God deal with them, which had directed his treatment of Pharaoh and those Israelites. When neither his providence, nor his miraculous works, nor the motions of his spirit, could do them good, the things which made for their happiness were hidden from them. God gave them up, and their own vain imaginations and reprobate minds took full possession of them. Forsaken of God, and under the direction of so bad guides, they grew more hardened in iniquity, and acted as foolishly, as rashly, as madly, as ever did Pharaoh or the old Israelites. Their end, too, was the same—total destruction from the power of God, executed by his ministers, the Roman army.

It is worth our consideration, whether such a state can possibly be ours, or whether we have some certain security against it. If we advert to the nature of God, it is always the same. He changeth not. He neither is now, nor ever was, any respecter of persons. Human nature, too, is the same it ever was; as weak, and perverse, and obstinate; as liable to error, and wickedness, and hardness of heart, as it was in the days of Pharaoh, or of the Jews. Against the weakness and wickedness of nature we have no security from ourselves: it can only come from God—from the inspirations and strength of his spirit. This spirit is not at our command; it is his gift. To our

prayers for it, and compliance with its holy motions, God hath promised to give and continue it to us. It, therefore, becomes our duty humbly to ask it of God, and obediently to follow its holy inspirations. All desires and tendencies to that which is good are from this spirit. If we turn from them, and resist them, disregard the commands and prohibitions of God, and follow the dictates of our own will, we tread in the steps of reprobate Pharaoh, of the Israelites and Jews. In that road we may arrive at a state of wickedness and hardness of heart equal with theirs. If we should, what shall hinder the sentence of reprobation from passing against us, as it did against them, and leaving us to fill up the measure of our iniquity, and perish miserably, as they did?

Writing to the Hebrew Christians, St. Paul brings the example of their fathers in the wilderness to their recollection. They tempted and provoked God, and he swore in his wrath, "they shall not enter into my rest." "Take heed, brethren," saith he, "lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

There is, then, in the estimation of the apostle, both possibility and danger of Christians falling, through unbelief, under the same sentence of reprobation with the unbelieving and hardened Israelites, whom God disinherited of the land of Canaan, and sentenced their carcasses to fall in the wilderness. (Num. xiv. 12, 29.) And the way which the apostle points out to avoid so miserable a state is, "To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke." (Heb. iii. 11, 12, 15, 16.)

The voice of God now speaks to us by his providence, by his word, by his ministers, by his church, by the inspirations of his holy spirit, who putteth into our hearts good desires, and excites and strengthens us to bring them to good effect. If we stifle the voice of God speaking to us and in us, we do just what the Israelites did—we harden the heart against him.

From comparing together the conduct and declaration

of Christ, it will appear, that he most earnestly desired the conversion of the Jews, even when he pronounced the doom of Jerusalem. The similitude he useth, drawn from the affection of the hen to her chickens, and the tears which he shed, are proofs too strong to be doubted. And that Jerusalem might savingly have known and done the things which belonged to her peace, in the days of the visitation of Messiah, is most certain. It is also clear, that she could thereby have escaped the judgments that were hanging over her, on account of her infidelity and wickedness. Otherwise the tears of the blessed Jesus could not have been the tears of commiseration and love.

No eternal decree of reprobation had, therefore, been passed against her. If there had, Christ's wishing that she had known the things of her peace, would have been contrary to the will and decree of the Father, which is impossible: the will of the Father and of Christ being always one and the same. God the Father had, therefore, the same affection for Jerusalem—the same earnest desire of the conversion and return of the Jews to him, which Christ had. He had laid no bar in the way of their happiness. Nor is there any intimation that either their wickedness or their destruction was in consequence of any eternal decree of God: and what does not appear can be no rule for our judgment or practice.

They might have been sheltered under the divine protection, as the hen shelters her brood under her wings, but they would not. They might have seen the things which belonged to their peace, but they would not. They might have repented at the admonitions and calls of God: they might have regarded the providence, and grace, and miracles of God; but their obdurate hearts were made insensible by long-continued habits of sin, and they would not. The sentence of reprobation then passed on them, and they were given up to vanity and destruction.

Whether Christians who suppose an eternal decree of reprobation from God against Pharaoh, the old Israelites, and the Jews in the time of Christ's ministry; by which they were predisposed to wickedness, and their hearts har-

dened in iniquity, that they might become fit objects of punishment to display the justice of God to the world; do not run into an error which will preclude these examples from being of any use, may be left to the determination of every reasonable man. For if a person is reprobated from eternity, neither these examples, nor any thing else, can do him good against the decree of God: and if he be not so reprobated, the examples of Pharaoh, the Israelites, and Jews, if we suppose them to have acted under such a decree of eternal reprobation, are utterly inapplicable to him.

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.” The instances of God’s goodness, and mercy, and long-suffering, which he hath caused to be recorded, are intended to teach us repentance and faith, and reliance upon him. The instances of his justice and judgments against wicked persons and nations, are designed to shew us the danger of sin, and impenitency, and unbelief; that, encouraged by his promises, and the great things he hath done for his servants, and deterred by his threats, and the severe punishments he hath inflicted on impenitent sinners, we might be kept in faithful obedience to his will, and in humble penitence for all our sins and errors; and, finally, by his mercy, be received, through Jesus Christ, to eternal felicity in the future world.

DISCOURSE XXI.

PART I.

HEAVEN THE CITY OF CHRISTIANS.

PHILIPP. iii. 20, 21.

For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

IN some of the verses which precede the text, the Apostle had directed the Philippians to be followers of him as their pattern in Christian conversation, and to mark them as examples of holy living, who copied after him in the conduct of their lives. He hath thereby not only intimated, but established it to be the duty of all Christian ministers, to adorn their station in Christ's Church with a holy and unblamable life; exhibiting all the graces and virtues of that heavenly conversation which their religion requires. Hence the duty of those who live under their ministry, to follow and imitate their example, will be evident.

The propriety of this conduct, both in Christian ministers and people, appears from what the Apostle hath said in the two verses immediately before the text—"Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now again tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly; and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

This declaration of the Apostle ought to convince us,

that those professors of Christianity who, instead of exhibiting the open practice of the graces and virtues of their holy religion in their lives, indulge themselves in vice and immorality, are enemies to the religion they profess. As much as in them lieth, they destroy the efficacy of the redemption of Christ: With regard to themselves, they entirely defeat it. The design of Christ's redemption is eternal salvation; but their end will be destruction.

That we might be at no loss with respect to that conduct which makes a man the enemy of the cross of Christ, and endeth in destruction, the Apostle hath told us, it is the conduct of those "whose God is their belly"—of those, namely, who indulge themselves in the excesses of sensual living; who exert themselves to enjoy the pleasures of the palate; who place their happiness in eating and drinking, not to satisfy their natural hunger, but to gratify the cravings of appetite, made capricious and humorsome by indulgence.

If we reflect that our religion requires abstinence from sensual pleasure, the denial and mortification of the appetites of the body to that degree, that the flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may obey all godly motions "in righteousness and true holiness;" we shall not be surprized at the heavy censure the Apostle hath cast on those who make the indulgence of the stomach the principal end of their living. "His servants ye are to whom ye obey." He who obeys the cravings of his stomach, and is perpetually contriving ways and means to gratify its desires, is properly its servant—all his care is, how to serve it; and his greatest happiness arises from its gratification. In truth, it is his *God*, for it has his affections and services, and is the source of his highest enjoyment.

Another reason which shows the baneful effects of habitually gratifying the cravings of the stomach is, that over-feeding, especially with rich and delicate food, increases and inflames all the other appetites of the body, and, in proportion, the passions of the mind. They become more unruly, more difficult to be controlled, and lead directly to the perpetration of those crimes which the Apostle cen-

asures, when he says of those who live in them, "whose glory is in their shame"—Shame, indeed, to follow the bent of inordinate affections into the practice of wantonness and lewdness: Still greater shame, to boast and glory in them, as if they were the highest honour and perfection of human nature.

No better conduct, however, is to be expected of those enemies of the cross of Christ, whose evil character the apostle hath summed up, when he said that they "mind earthly things"—mind them so as to mind little else. The enjoyments and delights of the present scene of their being, engage entirely their attention; in them they place their happiness; on them they employ their pains; regardless of all the hopes and promises of another life; as if, like the brute animals, their nature were capable of no enjoyment but what springs from this world, and is to be obtained in this life.

With far different sentiments does our holy religion inspire all its true votaries. View the pattern which the holy apostle set to the Philippians and to all Christians; to the imitation of which he ardently pressed them, when he said, "Brethren, be followers together of me; and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample." The example he set in this matter is described in his Epistle to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. ix. 27.) Instead of feeding his body beyond what the necessity of nature required, he *kept it under, and brought it into subjection*, lest if he neglected to practise that abstinence and mortification which he preached to others, he should become a *castaway*—a reprobate rejected of God.

In the text he also proposeth his own example as a pattern to others, and describeth it as springing from very different principles, when compared to those which govern the conduct of men of the world. "Our conversation," saith he, "is in heaven." We pamper not the body, that we may enjoy its lusts: we make not our belly our God; nor glory in our shame; nor mind earthly things. So far from it, we are scarcely men of this world, and live not according to the fashion of worldly maxims.

The Greek word *πολιτευμα*, translated *conversation*, signifies the government of a city or country, the administration of that government, a number of people living under the same laws, the rights and privileges of a citizen.

The meaning of the expression, "Our conversation is in heaven," is, therefore, that the government of the community to which Christians belong, and the administration of that government, are in heaven, not on earth—that they are members of a society which, though part of it be in the world, is not of the world, but is taken out of it, and, by adoption, made free of the New Jerusalem, the city of the great King, Jesus the Saviour, the head of the Church which is his kingdom.

Of this kingdom Jesus spake when, before "Pontius Pilate, he witnessed a good profession," and said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Its polity, therefore, and the administration of it, are from heaven, the residence of its King. For when he had finished his ministry here on earth, having made expiation for the sin of the world by his death; having laid the foundation of his Church in this world, and committed the administration of it to his apostles, under the direction of the Holy Ghost; having triumphed over the devil, sin, and death, by his resurrection from the grave; he ascended up on high to take possession of his kingdom which he had purchased, or earned by his humiliation and sufferings, and is now "seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. xii. 2.

From this state of exaltation he gave gifts unto men, (Ps. lxxviii. 18. Eph. iv. 8.) particularly the gift of the Holy Ghost, the blessed Spirit of God, whom, according to his own most true promise, he sent from the Father upon his Apostles and Church, to be with them to the end of the world, "that the Lord God might dwell among them." Under the direction of this Spirit is the government, the ministry, the faith, doctrines, discipline, and whatever relates to the Church, placed. All the offices in the Church are his various ministrations for the edification, the building up, the improvement, the perfecting of the Church in faith and holiness. And through the Church, every mem-

ber of it receives the heavenly influences, and holy inspirations of this divine and life-giving Spirit.

Men, therefore, are not born members of this Church by their natural birth; but according to the appointment of him who is its King and Governor, its Redeemer and Saviour, they who by faith embrace his mediation, are taken out of this world, because of its enmity against God, translated into his Church, and made denizens of it by the regeneration of baptism and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

All our sentiments and expressions of spiritual and eternal things, being taken from things natural and temporal, it is highly probable that St. Paul was led into this manner of representing the condition of Christians, by the practice of the Roman government under which he lived. With them it was common, in reward of services performed, or as an encouragement to the performance of them, or from mere good-will, to admit, not only particular persons to the freedom and franchises of Rome, but whole cities in many parts of their empire. All who were afterward born free of such cities, were born free also of the city of Rome.

This was the case of St. Paul. He was born at Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a free colony; that is, its inhabitants enjoyed the immunities and rights of citizens at Rome; and this freedom he pleaded on more than one occasion, to screen himself from such punishment as could not be inflicted legally on Roman freemen.

Philippi, to the Christian inhabitants of which St. Paul wrote this Epistle, had been admitted to the same privileges. They would readily understand the meaning of his expression, "Our citizenship is in heaven," to be, that as they were citizens of heaven, they ought to attend to the interest, and honour, and manners of that city to which they belonged; not to mind earthly things, because they related merely to this world, out of which they had been taken by the mercy of God, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son; made freemen of Jerusalem, which is above, the city of the living God. And that as they

had been endowed with this exalted privilege, they, at the same time, became subject to the government, obliged to obey the laws, fulfil the duties, comply with the manners and customs of that society, and in this world have their conversation in heaven. For this was the case with all those foreigners who were admitted to the freedom of Rome. They became possessed of advantages very considerable, and of high estimation in the world. But they became subject to the laws of Rome, and it was expected they would fulfil all the duties those laws required.

The application of this case to Christians in general is very obvious. By the goodness of God they are taken out of this wicked world, and made free citizens of the New Jerusalem, the city of the living God, which hath foundations stable and eternal, and subject to none of the vicissitudes of mortal things. In virtue of their adoption into this city, they claim many rights and privileges of high value, but which they could claim on no other account: Such are the forgiveness of sins and a blessed immortality after the resurrection.

When they became freemen of this city, and entitled to its privileges and blessings, they became also subject to its laws and government, and obliged to live according to its customs and manners. They must renounce its enemies; they must maintain its honour; they must consult its peace; they must seek its prosperity. At present they live in a foreign country, remote from their city, and from the full enjoyment of the great blessings which they hope assuredly they shall one day receive in it. Their eyes and heart, and every faculty of their soul ought to be fixed where their complete happiness is expected. The friendship of the world, they know, is enmity with God, the Sovereign of that holy city of which they are members. They must not, therefore, hold alliance with it; nor live by its maxims; nor adopt its principles; nor covet its riches; nor seek its pleasures; but renouncing its pomps and vanities, its delusive hopes and vain enjoyments, and keeping stedfast to the laws and manners of that city whose builder and maker is God, wait, in faith and patience, for the completion of all their hopes.

The laws of that city are in full force upon them in their pilgrimage in this world, and by them they are required to regulate their conduct. It is their misfortune that, incumbered as they are in this mortal life, with the body of sin and death, and exposed to the assaults of the prince of darkness, they cannot always live free from sin, and in the same purity with the souls of their fellow-citizens, who have been called already by their King and God, to the participation of peace and refreshment in the heavenly paradise. To aspire after as great a degree of their purity as human frailty will permit, is however their duty. By this resemblance they will become companions meet for them, when it shall please God to call them also out of the miseries of this sinful world, to join their heavenly society.

This happiness we, as Christians, hope to enjoy. We should, therefore, endeavour to fit ourselves for it by doing faithfully all those things which God requires of us. The prospect of the bliss we hope to enjoy in the kingdom of God, ought to fill our hearts with love and gratitude to him, and raise them above all anxious desires after the fleeting happiness of this vain world.

This conduct, on our part, would ward off, or greatly lighten the troubles of life. It would moderate the violence of passion and appetite, which, through their impetuosity, give us so much uneasiness, and involve us in so many sins. It would reconcile us to the thoughts of our own dissolution, which must ere long take place; but whether it will open to us scenes of happiness or misery, depends on our present conduct. If we preserve our right to our heavenly inheritance, by preserving that holy conversation which God requires, happy shall we be in death. It will open to us the gate of paradise, and lead us to a blessed immortality, when the morning of the resurrection shall wake us from the sleep of the grave.

But if we forget or neglect the holy city of our God, and, turning from the glories it holds out to us, become like those of whom the Apostle speaks, when he says, "Whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind

earthly things ;” we shall forfeit our inheritance, and, like them, “ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day.” (2 Thes. i. 9, 10.) For, from heaven “ we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In great humility he once came into the world to redeem us from the deadly curse of sin, to open to us the gate of everlasting life, and make us citizens of Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and the mother of us all. At the end of the world, we believe he will come again in his glorious majesty to judge the quick and the dead, and to recompense every one with happiness or misery eternal, according as his life hath been.

At that time, may we be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, and received to the full enjoyment of the happiness of that city, whose builder and maker is God. So be it, blessed God, for Jesus’ sake, our only Lord and Saviour. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXI.

PART II.

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

IN the former part of this Discourse, I have explained the first part of the text, in which St. Paul recommendeth his own example to the Phillippians, for their imitation in the Christian life. My present business is with the second part of it, which hath been just introduced to your notice by observing, that the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, once came in great humility to redeem us from the curse of sin, and to open to us the gate of everlasting life, by making us free citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The proper inference to be drawn from this observation is, that our conversation ought to correspond with these exalted privileges: because we believe this same Lord Jesus Christ will come again at the end of the world; not in humility as a Redeemer, but in glory and majesty, as the Judge of the living and dead; and that he will then recompense every man according to his deeds.

This is the Christian's faith. Into it he was baptized, when he was admitted as a citizen of heaven. Judge for yourselves, what his life and conversation ought to be: whether he ought not to remember his heavenly inheritance, and live as the laws of that holy place require; or whether it would be decent for him to neglect it, and become the enemy of the cross of Christ, by which he is redeemed from death, and hath those rich blessings made over to him.

Judge also what the magnificent scene of that tremendous majesty must be, when the Son of God shall descend in the glory of the Father, with all his holy Angels, to reckon with the inhabitants of the earth: with you, and

me, and with every one who hath ever lived. Are you prepared to enter the trial? If not, beg of God the grace of repentance, that, through the blood of Jesus, your sins may be passed over, by the mercy of God.

To the good and to the evil the issue of this judgment will be very different. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people who forget God:" while the righteous shall shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father for ever.

"From heaven," saith the Apostle, "we," Christians, "look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

Behold the high reward proposed to the faithful Christian; and let it excite his wishes, and stimulate his endeavours to obtain it. Vile and worthless is the human body, since through the defilement of sin it was loaded with infirmity: through its own frailness it drops into the grave and dissolves in corruption.

However vile and worthless by nature the body of the good Christian may be, it is coheir with the soul of all the privileges of that heavenly city, whose builder and maker is God. It is part of that humanity which the Son of God took on himself, when he came to bear the sin of the world; and, through faith in his blood, it is an heir of all the blessings he purchased by his death—a coheir with him of the kingdom of heaven. Hear what he himself hath said: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice"—the voice of the Son of God—"and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John v. 28, 29.

"They that have done good" shall come forth "unto the resurrection of life." In conformity to this declaration of his divine master, St. Paul, speaking of those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ to judgment, hath said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

There shall, therefore, be a resurrection of the dead, both of the good and of the evil. And when this event shall take place, they who shall be alive shall be changed from corruption to incorruption, from mortality to an endless existence. After this scene, the general judgment shall follow. The good shall be separated from the evil. They who thro' faith, and penitence, and good works, have preserved their right to the heavenly inheritance—have ordered their conversation according to the laws and manners of that city which is above, of which they were admitted to be free members by holy baptism, shall be accepted by their Judge, and advanced to the full enjoyment of those rights and blessings which they can now embrace only by faith and hope. Through the merit of their Redeemer, they shall triumphantly enter in his train into the holy city, the Church of the first-born in heaven, and live with him in glory and happiness for ever.

They, on the contrary, who have done evil—have renounced their faith, have lost their patience, have lived impenitently, have neglected the good works of their holy religion, and have thereby forfeited their right to the heavenly inheritance, have taken part with the enemies of the cross of Christ, have lived in the lust and evil affections of their present nature, have minded only earthly things, and have thereby forfeited their right to the heavenly inheritance, shall then find their end to be destruction: they shall be driven from the presence of the Lord, to live with apostate spirits, whose part they have chosen, and whom they have served.

What change will be made in the bodies of the wicked after the resurrection, further than that they will be rendered immortal, doth not appear. But the bodies of those Christians who have walked worthy of their vocation, shall be changed, and fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ; because they are members of his body, and animated by his Spirit; fellow-heirs with him of the heavenly inheritance, and partakers of the glory which shall be revealed in that day.

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;

neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." In its present state of humiliation and dishonour, of frailty and necessity, of sin and impurity, of affliction and sorrow, of pain and sickness, of decay and death, the human body is incapable of celestial happiness. The Spirit of God, with which the Christian is endued, can animate it by faith, and purify it by holiness. Then, in the day of the resurrection, when the almighty power of the Son of God shall bring the dead from their graves, its vileness shall give place to immortality and glory, in all those "who love his appearing." Though born into this world "in corruption, it shall be raised in incorruption:" though born "in dishonour, it shall be raised in glory:" though born "in weakness, it shall be raised in power:" though born "an animal body, it shall be raised a spiritual body," and be exactly fitted to enjoy the full happiness prepared for it in the city of God.

The greatness of this change will not exceed the belief of the pious Christian. He knows the power of the person who is to effect it. "From heaven he looks for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body—according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself." "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John v. 21, 26.) And "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." Verse 28, 29.

He who hath life in himself, and power to give life to the dead, must be the author and fountain of life—God himself. He, therefore, cannot want power to change our body from its present vile state, and make it what his wisdom sees best—"like unto his own most glorious body." Through the energy of his power "he is able even to subdue all things to himself."

The hope of the Christian, therefore, cannot fail him. It rests on the power of the Son of God. We know he hath power to raise the dead; to change the vile and cor-

ruptible bodies of his faithful servants, and fashion them like unto his own most glorious body, making them thereby capable of living with him in that glory to which his human nature is exalted in the holy city of God most high. He hath promised that he will do so. His word is truth, and shall assuredly be accomplished.

Several inferences, which will be of service to us in the Christian life, may be drawn from what hath been said on this subject.

1. It shows, in a strong light, the necessity of that holy conversation which the gospel requires. It is the body which, by its lusts and appetites, excites men to mind earthly things, and gives them all the excuse they have for making provision for the flesh. But this body, vile in its present state, the slave of appetite and passion, is, with the soul, the adopted citizen of heaven: It shall be raised from death: It shall be changed from vileness to glory: It shall be made capable of happiness eternal. We ought, therefore, to turn ourselves from earthly to heavenly things; and live in this world according to the manners of that city where glory and happiness are provided for us.

2. The view of the subject that hath been before us, shows the folly and absurdity of gratifying the appetites of the body, beyond what nature and necessity require. They are not to be with us forever; nor are they to make any part of our future happiness. Immoderately pursued, they destroy our capacity of enjoyment even in this life; and, at last, they destroy life itself. Besides, the indulgence of them increases the corruption of our nature, and adds to the dregs and dross of our vile body, all which must be refined and purified, or taken away, before it can be capable of eternal happiness.

He, on the contrary, who considers the lusts and gross appetites of the body as marks of its present vileness; who knows that they must be totally abolished before he can be happy with God; and, under that impression, does his utmost to resist and suppress them; will thereby take off a great part of his present humiliation and vileness.

3. The due consideration of this subject will, by God's

grace, help us to bear, with patience and resignation to his will, the wants and distresses of life which arise from the body. Sickness, and decay, and accidents, are the unavoidable attendants of our mortal state. The highest virtue, the most heavenly disposition, secures us not against them. But the faithful Christian knows, and it is his joy to know, that they can endure but for a short time. When God shall call him to rest in the grave, he shall be freed from all the miseries of this world—he shall rest in Jesus till the voice of the Archangel shall summon his body from death, to take possession of the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world.

He will, therefore, bear with patience all the evils of life which God sees best for him to endure. A stranger and pilgrim on earth, he will look to heaven as his home, and be content that every thing in this world should be to him as God pleases.

He, on the contrary, who looks to the world for happiness, and expects his highest enjoyments from the gratification of his animal nature, arms all the accidents, sicknesses, and pains of life, with double force against himself. If he succeed in his views, he hath only the happiness of a brute animal to compensate his pains. If any thing prevent the pleasures he seeks, he must be wretched, for he hath no other expectation left. So foolish is the man who depends on bodily pleasures, and neglects the happiness of the kingdom of God.

4. The change of his mortal body to immortality; for which the pious Christian hopes, and which he knows assuredly he shall attain at the resurrection of the just, by the energy of the power of Christ, will effectually arm him against the terror of death, and comfort him under the loss of his pious friends and connections. To these afflictions we are ever exposed, and often feel their full bitterness. Be it our consolation, that they who die in the Lord are blessed, because they rest from their labours; because, being delivered from the burden of the flesh, and all the miseries of this sinful world, they are in joy and felicity in paradise, waiting for their perfect consummation and bliss,

both in body and soul, in the everlasting glory of the heavenly kingdom of God.

5. The piety of treating the dead bodies of Christians, and even the ground in which they are laid, with reverence and respect, appears evident from this view of the subject. Remarkably did this piety appear in the first Christians. Devout men carried holy Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation for him. Strong was the faith, lively the hope of the first disciples of Jesus. They laid their dead in the earth, and as much as possible guarded them from violence: Knowing that the grave swallowed them not up for ever, but received them as a trust which it would be obliged punctually to restore, when God should demand it.

In this respect the Church hath happily imitated the example of the first Christians. The dead bodies of her members are committed to the ground with decent and affecting solemnity. She professeth her faith in the Saviour, the "Lord Jesus Christ; who is the resurrection and the life; who shall change our vile body of earth, ashes, and dust, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." In the fulness of her faith, she gives thanks to God that he hath been pleased to deliver the faithful departed "out of the miseries of this sinful world," and prays for the full accomplishment of the kingdom of glory in the world to come—that we who yet survive may, with all those who are departed in the "true faith of God's holy name, have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in his eternal glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

As a mean to accomplish this end, she further prays our merciful God, the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Christ; and at the general resurrection in the last day, be found acceptable in the sight of God, and receive that blessing which his well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all who love and fear him, Come, ye blessed children of

my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.”

Be it, then, our steadfast care to live as we pray ; to restrain all sinful desires and actions ; to set our affections on things above ; to have regard to the manners of that holy society to which we belong—the city of the New Jerusalem—the Church of the living God enrolled in heaven. By God’s goodness we are now members of his militant, suffering Church here on earth. Our faith and hope is, that if we live as that Church directs, and pass the time of our sojourning here in the fear of God, we shall, when the resurrection is past, be made partakers of the glory and blessedness of his Church triumphant in heaven, through the power and merit of him who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXII.

MERCY AND JUDGMENT.

ROM. ix. 18.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

THIS text being often misunderstood, at least misinterpreted, I have thought it best to endeavour to point out its sense and meaning, according to the apostle's discourse in which it occurs.

The instance of Pharaoh, in this chapter, is introduced by St. Paul, to illustrate the justice of God in rejecting the Jews from being his covenanted people, and consigning them over to punishment, on account of their impenitency and hardness of heart, and calling in the Gentiles to be heirs of the promises made to Abraham.

The Jewish converts to Christianity strongly insisted that the Gentiles who embraced the faith of Christ, should submit also to circumcision and the observance of the law of Moses. This they did from the opinion of its necessity, in order to obtain *righteousness*, that is, *justification*, or the *remission of sins* from God, which they supposed was confined to the Mosaic law. This, indeed, seems to have been the chief stumbling-block of the Jews, and the principal reason of their generally rejecting the gospel. However willing they may have been that the Gentile converts should, as Christians, be admitted to equal privileges with themselves, they could not bear that they should be exempt from the ceremonial law which they supposed was

necessary for them to observe, because God had made it necessary to salvation.

Not only to ward off the ill effects of this opinion, but entirely to root it out, seems to have been the design of St. Paul, in writing his epistle to the Jewish Christians at Rome. In it he goes to the bottom of the matter, and endeavours to convince both Jews and Gentiles, that *righteousness, justification, remission of sins*, that is, freedom, or exemption from punishment on account of sin, could not be obtained by the Jews through the law of Moses, because that law denounced a curse against every one who continued not in all things written in it, to do them; and because they had all been sinners against it, doing those things which it prohibited, and so were liable to the curse denounced by it: nor could the Gentiles be free from punishment by the law, or light of nature under which they lived; because they had broken it by their idolatry, and other grievous crimes and immoralities, and were, on that account, condemned of their own consciences.

They must, therefore, both Jews and Gentiles, embrace the gospel, become Christians, and rely on the atonement and satisfaction of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And, having received the gospel which promised forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, the Gentile must not despise the Jew on account of his attachment to the law; nor ought the Jew to require obedience from the Gentile, nor consider himself as obliged to obey it.

To this account of the method of obtaining remission of sins, the Jews would object, that they were Abraham's seed, to whom the promises of God were made; and that it was absurd to suppose that God would exclude them from the blessings promised—implying forgiveness of sins, and acceptance with God, because they were sinners; and, accept the converted Gentiles, who were not included in the promises, to all the blessings of them, though they were also sinners against God.

To pursue his argument, it became necessary for the apostle to assert that God had rejected the nation of the

Jews from being any longer his covenanted people, on account of the hardness of their hearts, and untractable disposition. In answering the objection, he assigns the reason of this dispensation of God.

The objection consists of two parts, which he answers distinctly. He first distinguisheth between the seed, children, posterity of Abraham according to the promise, and according to the flesh. Ishmael was Abraham's first-born son; born after the promise of Canaan was made to him, and entered into the covenant of circumcision at its first institution: yet Isaac, at that time not born, inherited the promise; for God said, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee." And that the Jews might not object to this instance, as though Ishmael had offended God, and was excluded for his wickedness, St. Paul adds the further instance of Jacob and Esau, twin children of Isaac, and, consequently, children of the same mother; neither of whom could be suspected of having offended God, for they were not yet born into the world, and could have done neither good nor evil: yet God preferred Jacob to be heir of the promise before Esau. All the natural children of Abraham were not, therefore, the children to whom the promise belonged, for they inherited it not.

As to the children of Jacob, to whom the other part of the objection relates: To reject them, and call in the converted Gentiles to inherit the blessings which had belonged to them, was, according to the judgment of God, a punishment for their infidelity and opposition to the strong and clear evidence which had been before them, both from scripture and miracles—that Jesus was Messiah, the Son of God. By resisting this evidence, and refusing to be convinced by it, they had rendered themselves like Pharaoh, hard in heart, and obstinate against the truth, deservedly obnoxious to punishment, and incapable of being benefited by the blessings promised to Abraham. For,

By the children of Abraham cannot be meant his natural descendants; for then Ishmael, and Esau, and the children of Ketura, would not have been excluded, but the

children of his faith—they who believed and obeyed God as he did. And if the Gentiles deserved this character, through their faith in Christ, “who is over all, God blessed for ever,” they in truth, are Abraham’s seed, and the heirs of the promises made to him, which the unbelieving Jews now unjustly claimed, and from which they are justly rejected by the righteous judgment of God.

With God there can be no unrighteousness; and this procedure with the Jews, rejecting them for their unbelief and impenitency, was perfectly agreeable to the declaration he had formerly made to Moses; I “will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” (Exod. xxxiii. 19.)

Let it be remembered, that this declaration of God was made to Moses concerning the Israelites, who had fallen into idolatry in the matter of the golden calf, and had made themselves naked by their sin; that is, had deprived themselves of the divine presence and protection—had broken and cancelled the covenant of their God, inasmuch that he threatened to consume them in a moment. But, on the intercession of Moses, he again took them so far into favour as to promise to go with them, and conduct them to the land he had given them. On this occasion he proclaimed it to be a principal part of his glory to distribute mercy and judgment to offenders, according to his own good pleasure. No more, therefore, was done by God for the idolatrous Gentiles, in receiving them into his Church, that is, making them his covenanted people, upon their conversion to Christianity, than had been formerly done for the idolatrous Jews, in taking them again to be his people, after the sin of the golden calf.

The principle on which this reasoning is founded could not be controverted by the Jews. It was drawn from a text of their own Scripture; from the solemn declaration of the Lord God of the Hebrews himself, and made on a very solemn occasion. The application, too, was fair and pertinent, and fully justifies the Apostle in the inference he draws from it: “So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy;”

that is, God preferred Isaac to Ishmael, and Jacob to Esau, uninfluenced by the earnest desire of Abraham, who, in requesting of God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee," *willed* that Ishmael might be the favoured seed: and equally uninfluenced by the *running*, the hasty endeavours of Esau to procure the venison which his father longed to eat, that he might, in blessing, transmit to him the promise of God. But the mercy of God showed to Isaac and to Jacob, in making them heirs of the blessing promised to Abraham, was of his own free grace, and mere good will towards them, just as it pleased him who knoweth best on whom to bestow his favours.

The Apostle further illustrateth this matter by the instance of Pharaoh, to whom God thus spoke by Moses; "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."

In the observations on the history of Pharaoh it was shown, that the meaning of the expression, "I have raised thee up," is, *I have preserved thee under my judgments*—have kept thee alive and not suffered thee to fall by them, as thou hast deserved; that thy punishment might be the more remarkable, and my name and power might be made known to the world. The Apostle then applieth the rule which God had declared to Moses, as being exemplified in the case of Pharaoh; "therefore," for this reason, in this manner, "hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

The Apostle, it is true, varies the expression of the latter part of the text; probably to make it comport better with what is said of God's hardening Pharaoh's heart. But it hath been shown, that the expression cannot be interpreted to mean that God infused hardness or obstinacy into his heart, or in any way prevented his obeying him in letting Israel go from his service, without contradicting the whole tenor of the history. Besides, God repeatedly declared to Moses, that Pharaoh would, at last, let them go; though not till a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm obliged him to comply.

That, on several occasions, Pharaoh hardened his own heart, is particularly asserted. So that the most that can be made of God's hardening his heart amounts to this :

1. That God permitted the magicians to work some miracles of the same kind with those of Moses, and that, by those miracles, Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

2. That, in mercy, God removed his judgments when Pharaoh requested it ; and, by his lenity, Pharaoh's heart was hardened in obstinacy : " When Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his heart." Finding that Moses would intercede for him, when any judgment pressed too hard upon him to be longer endured ; and that God regarded the intercession of Moses, he seems to have less regarded the threat of the next calamity ; presuming, perhaps, that should it be inflicted on him, he could prevail with Moses to intercede for its removal.

Under the operation of either of the plagues, had it continued, Pharaoh must have consented to the departure of the Israelites, or sunk under it : or, while the Egyptians were all sore with biles and inflammations ; or fixed in their places by thick darkness, the Israelites might have gone unmolested from Egypt ; none could have followed them. But then it would not so manifestly have appeared, that the God of the Hebrews was superior to all nature ; that he commanded all its powers, and all the elements of the world ; that the issues of sickness and health, of life and death, were in his hand : in short, that he was God Almighty, the only object of the faith and worship of reasonable beings.

3. That when Pharaoh had hardened his own heart so repeatedly and desperately that he became insensible, or incapable of the motions and inspirations of the spirit of God, God gave him up to his own devices ; that is, left him to himself ; but preserved him from immediate death, to make him a conspicuous example of his justice—a monument to the world of his majesty and power.

What, then, we are to understand by God's hardening Pharaoh's heart, is, that when, by abusing the goodness and lenity of God, Pharaoh had hardened himself beyond the

influence of God's grace, and mercy, and miracles, God determined to punish him, and destroy him from the earth; but yet, in a way, the most conducive to his own glory and the good of mankind.

In this matter God acted neither capriciously nor unjustly, but on an established and fixed principle—that "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth;" that is, that he will extend mercy to sinners, or inflict punishment on them, as it pleaseth him, according to his own goodness, and knowledge, and wisdom, and not according to the passions and partialities of human nature.

On this principle no injustice can be charged to God. If he forgive one sinner and punish another, it is not from caprice or mere arbitrary will, but, because he sees that truth and justice demand it—his glory and the good of the creation require it. But, to make this discrimination, he hath reserved to himself, and will suffer no being to interfere in it; nothing being adequate to it but infinite goodness, and mercy, and knowledge, and wisdom.

Nor could the Jews justly object to their being cast off from being God's covenanted people, on this principle. The lenity of God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Hear what God saith to the Jews, by the mouth of his Apostle, in this epistle: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds." Both Pharaoh and the Jews abused and despised the goodness of God, and both suffered unexampled, though merited destruction.

When, indeed, the apostle wrote, the judgments of God had not been fully inflicted on the nation of the Jews: They had not completed the measure of their iniquity. The long-suffering of God yet bore with them: but the sentence of destruction had passed against them. From the mount of Olives, the meek and holy Jesus, to whom

all judgment is committed, had beheld their city; and, while the tears of affection flowed down his cheeks, pronounced their doom: "If thou," Jerusalem, "hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." (Luke xix. 42.) But Jerusalem knew not, she considered not, nor regarded the merciful visitation of God by Jesus, Messiah; therefore was she given up to destruction by cruel enemies. And not many years after the date of this epistle, was the sentence executed by the vindictive Romans.

Nor could the Jews justly complain that God had so long spared them when they deserved punishment—received them often to mercy when they merited to be cut off for their idolatries and wickedness—and, at the last, that he should visit their iniquities, and the iniquities of their forefathers, so severely upon them, rejecting them from the promises made to Abraham, and calling in the Gentiles to supply their place in his covenant, and giving their city and nation up to utter ruin and excision.

If God spared them when they deserved punishment; if he received them to mercy when they merited excision; it only proves that God is gracious, and merciful, long-suffering, and slow to anger. If he visited the iniquities of their fathers upon them, it was because they continued in, and repeated, and would not repent of those iniquities. As God preserved Pharaoh, so he preserved them, till their punishment would most conduce to his glory, and the benefit of the rational world, by making them an illustrious example of his justice and power, who would not be reclaimed by his mercy and goodness.

To this principle the conduct of God is referred in the twenty-second verse of this chapter: "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?"

The only objection that could be made to what the apostle had said, that God "will have mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth," must be drawn from the

absolute power and arbitrary will of God. If God hardened Pharaoh and the impenitent Jews, and reserved them for punishment, why doth he yet find fault with them for their disobedience? They could not resist his will, nor prevent their being hardened if *he would* harden them; nor, when they were hardened by him, could they repent, and become obedient to him.

The objection is founded on false ground—on a supposition that God hardeneth men, and maketh them sinners, and then consigneth them to punishment from mere will and caprice. But who ever entertained this opinion of God? Mercy and justice, goodness and truth, mark all his dealings with men. “Is there unrighteousness with God?” Who can charge him with injustice, or dispute the equity of his ways? Not his arbitrary will, but the iniquity of sinners, occasions the hardness of their hearts. Not his good pleasure, but their impenitency, consigns them to punishment. God made all for some use, to answer good purposes in the creation—some for purposes more honourable than others, yet all for purposes necessary and useful. A potter hath power over his clay, to make of the same parcel, one vessel to an honourable, and another to a dishonourable use; yet both for uses equally necessary. Or, if the clay prove not good enough to make a vessel unto honour, he can make a second attempt, and form another vessel for which the materials are more proper.

So Pharaoh and the obdurate Jews, no longer answering the purpose of God in their creation, by showing his mercy and goodness by their faith and obedience, became hardened against all the motions of his spirit, not by the arbitrary will of God, but by their own wicked perverseness: they were, therefore, like clay marred in the hand of the potter, (Jer. xviii. 4.) converted to another use—to display to the world the power, and justice, and majesty of God Most High, in the tremendous judgments which he inflicted on them.

To make known the wrath and power of God against impenitent sinners—the vessels of wrath—who, under the

goodness and long-suffering of God, have, by their own perverseness, been fitted or made ready for punishment, may be a less honourable purpose, than to "make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore," by his holy spirit, "prepared unto glory:" but, considering God, as he is represented to us in the holy scriptures, not only as the Creator, but as the moral Governor of the world, it becomes not only useful, but necessary, that his justice, as well as mercy, should be known unto men: otherwise his character as moral Governor must cease; for a Governor who is all mercy, and cannot or will not punish a delinquent who continues obstinate in his disobedience, ought to be called by some other name.

The great difficulty in this matter seems to arise from prejudice and prepossession in favour of Calvin's scheme of predestination; by which he means a decree of election and reprobation, passed by God from eternity, respecting the present conduct and future state of every person born into the world. Calvin was undoubtedly a man of abilities, and his whole conduct shows that he was a man of an assuming, intrepid, and vindictive temper. He busied himself in every thing which concerned the reformation, and with every body who had any influence in it. At last he fixed himself at the head of the Protestants, and became their Pope. Little was done; little was taught but as Calvin liked and advised.

Predestination had been fixed in the church of Rome by St. Austin. Calvin made him his master in divinity, and carried his scheme to its utmost extent. Unhappily, there are fashions in divinity as well as in philosophy; and, on the authority of Calvin, the corruption of the Christian doctrine which the church of Rome had made in the matter of predestination, became fashionable among the reformers. All minds were tinctured with it; nor did the translators of the Bible into English escape the infection; but, under its influence, gave a Calvinistic turn to very many expressions in it. These expressions are, indeed, oftentimes softened or corrected by the margin, which is

generally the better translation. But all our Bibles have not the marginal reading; nor will all readers attend to the margin when they have it. By this mean, predestinarianism, having taken deep root, is not likely to be soon, or entirely rooted out.

All objects are said to appear yellow to the jaundiced eye. Predestination is to the mind what the jaundice is to the body. The whole Bible appears tinged with a sickly, yellow hue, when the predestinarian looks into it, especially if he be of a morose and vindictive temper, as most commonly is the case. To see God consigning the greater part of mankind to eternal misery, in consequence of his own arbitrary decree, just to show that he can do it, and will do it—for the glory of his *justice* as they call it—seems to be congenial and grateful to his heart: and, in truth, the consequences of this doctrine, carried to its full extent, however the abettors of it may not own or see them, represent Almighty God, the God of goodness and love, to whom be glory for ever, in a more unamiable light than it is possible for human wit to represent the devil.

It will, I trust, appear to every reasonable mind, that nothing said of Pharaoh, or of the impenitent Jews, hath relation to predestination; but, that every thing which happened to them was the consequence of their own wicked and obstinate disposition. God indeed saw this disposition, and spoke of it, and declared what its consequences would be. But no inference can be drawn from thence in favour of predestination: nor to justify those people who, when they live wickedly, or fall into particular sins, pretend that they were predestinated, or fore-ordained to do so—that they are poor weak creatures, and that God left them to themselves, and they could not help it.

Such pleas are directly against established and undoubted truths; established both by the nature of God and the plain declarations of his word. God delighteth not in the destruction of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live. He will not, therefore, predestinate any persons to the commission of sin, nor pre-ordain any sins to be committed by them: that would be to predestinate

them to destruction, contrary to his own good pleasure. Again;

God is not only described as abounding in love and goodness to us, but also as being our only support and strength; the author and giver of all the abilities of body and mind which we possess; the fountain of grace and goodness in us, without whom we can do nothing that is pleasing to him. He will not, therefore, withdraw from us that grace and strength, without which we can do nothing that is good; that holy spirit, without whose inspiration we cannot have a good thought, working any good design to effect. To leave us to ourselves, would counteract the goodness of his intentions, the designs of his love towards us; and would make us as sure a prey to the strength of temptations, as if an eternal decree of reprobation had passed against us.

That God leaves no man to himself, by withdrawing his holy spirit from him, unless the man first leave God, by sinning wilfully and impenitently against him, till the impressions of goodness are destroyed, and his grace hath no further effect on him, is a maxim, I suppose, acknowledged by all sober divines, and ought to be adopted by all Christian people.

Did men look more to the corruption of their hearts; to the strength of the passions and lusts which they inherit from their fallen nature; to the force of temptations which daily assault them; to the little care they take to obey God by doing his will; to their neglect of prayer for the gift of the holy spirit; to their disregard of the public worship and sacraments of the church, the means and instruments of God's grace and blessing; to their utter contempt of Christian self-denial, mortification, and fasting; to the full scope they give to all worldly, selfish, and pleasurable desires; they would find a most sure source of all their wickedness and impenitency: They need not charge them to the all-gracious, all-righteous God of heaven and earth.

