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HELPS TO COMPOSITION;

OR,

SIX HUNDRED SKELETONS OF SERMONS;

SEVERAL

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SERMONS PREACHED
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY:

BY THE

REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M. A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not
to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ST. PAUL.*

VOL. V.

THE THIRD EDITION.

London:

Printed by Luke Hansard & Sons,

FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND.

1815.



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PROMISES.

CCCCLXXIV. GOD'S WAYS ABOVE OURS.

Isai. lv. 8, 9. *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

MEN are apt to judge of God by themselves, and to suppose him restricted by such laws as they deem proper for their own observance. The wicked almost reduce him to a level with themselves in a moral view^a: and even the godly form very inadequate conceptions of his ways and works. Of this God himself apprises us in the words before us; which we shall elucidate by shewing how different his thoughts and ways are from what we should have expected with respect to

I. The objects of his choice

[If we thought to take a person into the nearest relation to ourselves, we should be inclined to prefer one of high rank: if we undertook to instruct a person, we should select one who was intelligent and docile: or if we purposed to confer any favour, we should look out for an object that was worthy of it. But God acts in a very different manner. He takes the poor in preference to the rich^b———the ignorant before the wise^c———and, in many instances, the vile before those, whose lives have been more moral^d———Not that God disregards morality, where it flows from proper principles, and has respect to his glory: but his grace is his own^e; and he will impart it to whomsoever he will^f, without accounting

^a Ps. l. 21.

^b Matt. xi. 5. James ii. 5. John vii. 48.

^c Matt. xi. 25, 26. 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

^d Matt. xxi. 31, 32. and xix. 20—22. contrasted with Luke vii. 37, 47. and 1 Tim. ii. 13.

^e Matt. xx. 15.

^f Rom. ix. 15, 16.

accounting himself responsible to any for the distribution of his favours^g.

This exactly accords with the experience of the primitive saints^h, and with the church of God in every age and place — — —]

II. The extent of his love

[If it were told us that God would shew mercy to our fallen race, what should we have been led to expect at his hands? We should scarcely have raised our thoughts higher than an exemption from punishment. Indeed, *this* is the limit which unenlightened men universally assign to God's mercy; "He is merciful, therefore he will not punish." But who would have ever thought, that he should *so* love us, as to give his only dear Son to die for us? — — — Who would have conceived, that he should moreover send his holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts as our instructor, sanctifier, and comforter? — — — Who would have imagined that he should give *himself* to us, with all that he is, and all that he has, as our present and everlasting portion? — — — Is not all this "as much above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth?"]

III. The methods by which he accomplishes towards us the purposes of his grace

[Supposing us informed that God would take us to heaven, we should be ready to think, that certainly he would deliver us at once from temporal affliction, and more especially from spiritual conflicts. Would it ever enter our minds, that the objects of his eternal love should be left to endure the pressures of want, or the agonies of a cruel death? Could we once imagine, that they should be exposed, year after year, to the assaults of Satan; and be suffered, on many occasions, to wound their consciences, to defile their souls, and to grieve his good Spirit, by the commission of sin? Yet these are the ways in which he deals with them, and it is by these means that he "fulfils in them the good pleasure of his goodnessⁱ." Nor is this a mere arbitrary appointment: for, by these means, he discovers to us far more abundantly the riches of his grace, and

^g Job xxxiii. 13. Rom. ix. 20.

^h See 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

¹ God does not *approve* of sin, or *tempt* to sin; but he *makes use* of the sins which men commit, to humble them in the dust, and to magnify his own super-abounding mercy. Rom. v. 20, 21. Thus he *permitted* the fall of Peter, and overruled it for good; Luke xxii. 31, 32. but that *permission* neither excused, nor extenuated Peter's guilt. The sin was the same, whether it were pardoned or punished: but the Grace of Christ was eminently displayed in the pardon of it; and backsliders have ever since derived much encouragement from thence (*not to deny their Lord, but*) to repent, and turn to God.

and affords us more ample grounds for praise and thanksgiving^k. The way is circuitous indeed; but it is the right way to the promised land^l.]

IMPROVEMENT

1. How should we magnify and adore our God for the blessings of his grace!

[Well may every child of God exclaim with wonder, "Why *me*, Lord? why hast thou chosen *me*, and plucked *me* as a brand out of the burning? Why too didst thou use such methods for my recovery and salvation? What manner of love is this wherewith thou hast loved me, that thou shouldest give thine only dear Son to redeem me by his blood, and thine eternal Spirit to sanctify me by his grace! Bless the Lord, O my soul; let all that is within me bless his holy name."]

2. How submissive should we be under the darkest dispensations of his Providence!

[While we are saying, with Jacob, "All these things are against me," perhaps the very dispensations, of which we so complain, are absolutely necessary to our eternal welfare. Let this thought silence every murmur, and encourage us to say, even in the most afflictive circumstances, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him^m."]

3. How should we acknowledge God even in the most trivial occurrences!

[There is no occurrence really trivial, or unimportant: for there is such a concatenation of causes and effects fixed in the divine purpose, that the most important events depend on circumstances, which seem to us altogether trifling and contingentⁿ. Let the life of Joseph be surveyed, and we shall find that a thousand different things, apparently casual and independent, concurred to accomplish God's promises towards him. Thus it is with respect to us; and it is our privilege to "acknowledge God in all our ways," and to commit ourselves wholly to his guidance.]

4. What a glorious place will heaven be!

[There the whole of the divine dispensations towards us will be opened to our view. There God's "ways, which were in the great deep, and his footsteps, which were not known," or perhaps capable of being comprehended by us in this world, will

^k The deliverance vouchsafed to the Israelites was not a little enhanced by their oppression in Egypt, and their subsequent embarrassments.

^l Ps. cvii. 7.

^m Job xiii. 15.

ⁿ Luke xix. 3, 4, 9.

will be clearly seen. O! what wonders of love and mercy shall we then behold! With what rapture shall we then exclaim, O the depths*! Let us then wait a few days; and the most painful events of this life shall be a source of everlasting joy.]

* Rom. xi. 33.

CCCCLXXV. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH.

Exod. xxxiii. 14. *And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.*

IT is not in the power of words to express, or of any finite imagination to conceive, the extent and riches of divine grace—The instances in which it was manifested to the Israelites of old, inasmuch as they were obvious to the eye of sense, are more calculated to excite our admiration; but the church at this time, and every believer in it, experiences equal tokens of God's kindness, if we can but view them with the eye of faith—It was under circumstances, wherein the Israelites had justly incurred God's heavy displeasure, that the promise in the text was made to them: and to *us*, if we do but use the proper means of attaining an interest in it, is the same promise given, notwithstanding our heinous backslidings, and innumerable provocations—

That we may be stirred up to improve it, we shall point out

I. The blessings here promised

Though the promise was given immediately to Moses, yet it was not *literally* fulfilled either to him or to the people of that generation; since both he, and they, died in the wilderness—This circumstance alone would lead us to look for some mystical accomplishment, which it should receive; and while the scripture warrants, it will also fully satisfy, our enquiries on this head—The promise has relation to us, as well as to the Israelites; and teaches us to expect

1. God's presence in our way

[God

[God had refused to proceed any further with the Israelites, on account of their worshipping the golden calf—In answer however to the supplications of Moses, he had condescended to say, that he would “send an angel” in his stead—But when Moses would not be satisfied with that, and continued to plead for a complete restoration of his favour to Israel, God, overcome, as it were, by his importunity, promised to go before them still in the pillar and the cloud^a—More than this they did not need; and less than this could never satisfy one, who had ever experienced the divine guidance and protection—And has not our blessed Lord made the same promise to *us*? Has he not said, “Lo, I am with you alway even to the end of the world^b?”—Has he not assigned this as a reason why we should dissipate our fears, and look forward to the eternal world with confidence and joy^c?—On this promise then let us rely; and let us know, that if we have God for our guide, our protector, and provider, we have all that can be necessary for us in this dreary wilderness—]

2. His glory as our end

[Canaan was a place of rest to the Israelites after the many difficulties that they sustained in their way to it—And heaven will be indeed a glorious rest to us after our weary pilgrimage in this world—Now as the prospect of the land flowing with milk and honey, sweetened all the fatigues and dangers of their journey in the wilderness, so the hope of “that rest which remaineth for God’s children,” encourages us to persevere in our labours to attain it—And this rest is promised us, in spite of all the exertions of men or devils to deprive us of it—Our conflicts may be many, and our trials great; but our rest is sure; for God hath said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee^d”—]

These blessings being so necessary, we should anxiously enquire into

II. The means of attaining them

Moses is here to be considered in a double view, as a type of Christ, and as an example to us: and, in these two capacities, he teaches us to look for these blessings

1. Through the intercession of Christ

[Christ, like Moses, has immediate access to that divine Being who is wholly inaccessible to us^e; and it is owing to his entrance *within the tabernacle* to “appear in the presence of God for us,” that the wrath of the Almighty has not burst

^a Chap. xxxii. 34. with the text.

^b Matt. xxviii. 20.

^c Isai. xli. 10.

^d Compare Josh. i. 5. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^e 1 Tim. vi. 16.

burst forth upon us on numberless occasions, and consumed us utterly^f—It is not only at our first return to God that we must seek the mediation of Jesus Christ; we must apply to him continually as our advocate with the Father, expecting nothing but through his prevailing intercession—This is the way pointed out for us by the beloved disciple, especially in seasons, when fresh-contracted guilt has excited just apprehensions of the divine displeasure; “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous^g”—Whether therefore we desire grace or glory, let us seek it through Christ, as the purchase of his blood, and the consequence of his intercession—]

2. Through our own importunate supplications

[While the Israelites put off their ornaments in token of their unfeigned humiliation, Moses, as their representative, importuned God for mercy, and urged his requests with the most forcible and appropriate pleas^h—In this manner should we also cry unto our God for pardon and acceptance, not enduring the thought of being left by him, lest we come short of that rest to which he has undertaken to lead usⁱ—Nor should we cease to plead, till we have an assured hope that he is reconciled towards us, and a renewed prospect of his continued presence with us to the end of life—It is in this way that his people have prevailed with him in every age^k; and he has pledged himself to us, that, when our uncircumcised hearts are humbled, he will remember his holy covenant, and return in mercy to us^l—]

INFER

1. How greatly are we indebted to Jesus Christ!

[Where shall we find one who has not made to himself some idol, and “provoked the Lord to jealousy?”—And how justly might God have sworn in his wrath that we should not enter into his rest!—But our adorable Saviour has sprinkled the mercy-seat with his precious blood, and offered up the incense of his own prevailing intercession on our behalf—Surely he is well called “*Our peace*^m,” since he alone procures it, maintains it, perfects it—Let us bear in mind then our obligations to him, and ascribe to him the glory due unto his name—]

2. How earnest ought we to be in intercession for each other!

[In the history before us we behold one man interceding for

^f Heb. ix. 24.

^g 1 John ii. 1.

^h Heb. iv. 1.

ⁱ Lev. xxvi. 40—42.

^j Dan. ix. 7, 8, 17, 18, 19.

^k Eph. ii. 14.

^l 1 John ii. 1.

^m Ver. 6. 13.

for an whole nation, and *that* too under circumstances where there could be scarcely an hope to prevail: yet he not only obtains a revocation of the sentence which God had passed, but a renewal and continuance of his wonted favours towards them—Shall we then neglect the duty of intercession, or intercede for each other merely in a formal way, as though we expected no answer to our petitions?—Let us not so greatly dishonour God, and so wickedly slight our own privilegesⁿ—We are expressly commanded to pray one for another, yea, and to make intercessions for all men^o: let us not doubt therefore but that, by pleading earnestly with God, we may obtain blessings for our friends, for our country, and for all whose cause we plead—“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”—]

3. How happy are they who are enabled to live upon the promises!

[Were we to consider the length and difficulty of our way, the enemies we have to encounter, and our utter insufficiency for any thing that is good, we should utterly despair of ever reaching the heavenly Canaan—But God promises to us his presence in the way, and his rest at the end of our journey; and “he who has promised is able also to perform”—Let our trust then be in him, “with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning”—Let us “cast our care on him who careth for us”—Let our discouragements, yea, our very iniquities, bring us nearer to him, and cause us to rely more simply on his word—Thus shall we experience his faithfulness and truth, and be monuments of his unbounded mercy to all eternity—]

ⁿ 1 Sam. xii. 23.

^o James v. 16.

CCCCLXXVI. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

Prov. xv. 3. *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

THE omnipresence of the Deity is plain and obvious to all, who have learned to acknowledge the unity of God. The heathens indeed, who worshipped a multitude of gods, assigned to each his proper limits, conceiving that they who could exert their power in the hills, were destitute of power in the neighbouring vallies. But this absurd idea arose from their polytheism; and vanishes

the very instant we confess the true God. The scriptures place this matter beyond a doubt: every page of the inspired volume either expressly asserts the omnipresence of God, or takes it for granted as an unquestionable truth. In the words before us, Solomon not only affirms it, but declares, that God is actively employed throughout the whole universe in inspecting the ways of men.

In discoursing on his words we shall shew,

I. The truth of his assertion

[One would suppose that reason itself might discern the point in question: for, if God be not every where present, how can he either govern, or judge, the world? His creatures, if removed from the sphere of his activity, would be independent of him; and, if withdrawn from his sight, would cease to feel any responsibility for their actions; since, being ignorant of what they did, he would be altogether unqualified to pass upon them any sentence of condemnation or acquittal.

But, to proceed on surer ground, let us notice *the declarations of holy men, and especially of God himself*, respecting this point.

If we look into the Old Testament, we shall find, that the testimony of all the prophets is in perfect correspondence with those words of David, "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts^a." Sometimes they assert this matter as a thing *they know*, and are assured of; "I know," says Job, "that no thought can be withholden from thee^b." Sometimes, with yet greater energy, they make it *a subject of appeal* to the whole universe, defying any one to gainsay it, or even to doubt it; "Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps^c?" Sometimes they labour to convey this truth under the most impressive images; "His eyes behold, his *eye-lids try*, the children of men^d."

In the New Testament, the same important truth is inculcated in terms equally clear and energetic. Not to mention mere assertions^e, or acknowledgments^f, that "God knoweth all things," the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews represents the perfect insight of the Deity into the hearts of men under the image of the sacrifices, which, when flayed and cut down the back-bone, were open to the minutest inspection of the priests; "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do^g."

But

^a 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^b Job xlii. 2.

^c Job xxxi. 4.

^d Ps. xi. 4.

^e 1 John iii. 20.

^f John xxi. 17.

^g Heb. iv. 13.

But let us now turn our attention to *God's own declarations*. He is peculiarly jealous with respect to this attribute. In reference to "*places*" and "*persons*," he says, "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord^b." Again, in reference to *things* that might be supposed most beyond his reach, he says, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them^c." And when an atheistical world have entertained doubts respecting this, and said, "Thick clouds are a covering to him^k;" "he cannot see, he will not regard us;" he has risen with utter indignation to vindicate his injured honour; "Understand ye brutish among the people; and, ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see^l?"

To multiply proofs of so plain a point is needless. We shall therefore pass on to shew

II. The concern we have in it

[Here the text directs and limits our views. "The evil and the good" are objects of his unwearied attention; and consequently, both the one and the other are equally interested in the subject before us.

Let "*the evil*" then consider their concern in this momentous truth. God views them all, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. If they come up to worship in his *sanctuary*, he sees their impious mockery, while "they draw nigh to him with their lips, but are far from him in their hearts^m." He follows them to their *families*, and observes all their tempers, dispositions, and conduct. He enters with them into their *shops*: he inspects their weights and measures; he examines their commodities; he hears their bargains; he marks their deviations from truth and honestyⁿ. He retires with them to their *chambers*, and "compasseth about their beds," (for "the darkness and light to him are both alike") and notices their every thought^o. If they were to go up to heaven, or down to hell, they could not for one moment escape his all-seeing eye^p.

But *for what end* does he thus "behold" them? Is he a mere curious or unconcerned spectator? no: "he pondereth all their goings^q," in order *to restrain* that excess of wickedness which would militate against his sovereign appointments^r;

to

^b Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

^k Job xxii. 13, 14.

^m Matt. xv. 7, 8.

^o Ps. cxxxix. 1—5.

^q Prov. v. 21.

ⁱ Exek. xi. 5. Deut. xxxi. 21

^l Ps. xciv. 7—9.

ⁿ Mic. vi. 2, 10, 11, 12.

^p Ib. ver. 7—12.

^r Gen. xx. 6. and xxxi. 24.

to confound their daring attempts against his church and people^a; to over-rule for the accomplishment of his own purposes the voluntary exercise of their own inveterate corruptions^c; and finally to justify himself in the eternal judgments, which he will hereafter inflict upon them^d.

O that the wicked would consider these things, and lay them to heart, while yet they might obtain mercy!

Next, let "*the good*" consider their concern also in this truth. "God's eye is on them also; and his ear is open to their prayers^e." He meets them in his house of prayer^f; if there were but one broken-hearted sinner in the midst of a whole congregation, God would fix his eye in a more especial manner upon him^g. When they go forth into the world, he follows them as closely as their shadow^h. When they retire to their secret chamber, he "draws nigh to themⁱ," and "manifests himself to them as he does not unto the world^j."

And *wherefore is all this solicitude* about such unworthy creatures? *wherefore is all this attention* to their concerns? "Hear, O heavens; and be astonished, O earth." God has deigned to inform us on this subject, and to declare, that he "beholds the good," to protect them in danger^k; to comfort them in trouble^l; to supply their wants^m; to over-rule for good their multiplied afflictionsⁿ; lastly, he notices them, to observe the workings of his grace in them^o, in order that he may proclaim before the assembled universe the secret exercises of piety in their hearts^p, and give a lively demonstration to all, that, in exalting them to a participation of his glory, he acts agreeably to the immutable dictates of justice and equity^q.

Let the righteous then "set the Lord always before them^r." Let them "walk circumspectly," that they may not grieve him^s; and actively, that they may please him well in all things^t; and, whatever difficulties they may have to contend with, let them proceed boldly, and "endure, as seeing him that is invisible^u."

^a Exod. xiv. 24, 25. "*looked,*" and Isai. xxxvii. 28, 29.

^c Ps. ii. 1—6.

^e Jer. xvii. 10, and xvi. 17, 18. and Ps. li. 4.

^x Ps. xxxiv. 15.

^y Isai. lxiv. 5. Matt. xviii. 20.

^z Isai. lxvi. 2.

^a Josh. i. 9. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^b James iv. 8.

^c John xiv. 22.

^d 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Ps. cxxi. 5—7.

^e Ps. xli. 1, 3.

^f Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19. and xxxiv. 9, 10.

^g Mal. iii. 3. "*as a refiner.*" Job xxiii. 10. with John xv. 2.

^h Hos. xiv. 8. Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

ⁱ Matt. vi. 4, 6, 18.

^k Rom. ii. 5—7. "*righteous judgment.*"

^l Ps. xvi. 8.

See also Matt. xxv. 35, 36, 46.

^m Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.

ⁿ Col. i. 10.

^o Is. xli. 10, 13, 14. Heb. xi. 27.

CCCCLXVII. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD
DISPENSES HIS FAVOURS.

Gen. xxviii. 15. *Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land: for I will not leave thee, till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*

THE study of profane history is exceeding profitable, inasmuch as it brings us into an acquaintance with human nature in all its diversified forms, and thereby qualifies us to discharge all our own duties with more wisdom and propriety. But sacred history, besides that it sets before us incomparably brighter examples of virtue, has this peculiar advantage, that it brings God himself to our view, and exhibits him in all the dispensations of his providence and grace. The account which is here given us of his intercourse with Jacob, will serve to shew us, in a very striking point of view, in what manner he dispenses his favours.

I. He bestows them sovereignly

[Jacob had grievously sinned both against God and man, in personating his brother, in imposing on his father, in blasphemously ascribing to God what was the fruit of his own device, and in fraudulently obtaining his brother's birthright. Having incensed his injured brother, he was now fleeing, to avoid the effects of his indignation. And in what manner should we suppose that God would meet him, if indeed he should deign to notice such a miscreant? Would he not say to him, as he afterwards did to the fugitive prophet, What dost thou here, Elijah? Or rather, instead of noticing him at all, may we not suppose that he would send a lion to destroy him^a? But behold, for the displaying of the riches of his own grace, he revealed himself to him in a most instructive vision; he confirmed to him all the promises that had been made to Abraham and to Isaac; and even extended beyond all former bounds the manifestations of his favour.

A similar instance we have in the apostle Paul; whom, at the very instant that he was labouring to extirpate the followers of Christ, God was pleased to stop, not, as might have been expected, with some signal judgment, but with singular expressions

^a 1 Kings xiii. 24.

expressions of his regard, conferring on him the highest honours, and communicating to him the richest blessings.

And may not we also admire the sovereignty of God in the exercise of his mercy towards ourselves? Wherefore is it that we are favoured with the light of his gospel, when so many myriads of our fellow-sinners are left in darkness and the shadow of death? If we have experienced in our souls the efficacy of divine grace, may we not look back with wonder to the period of our conversion, when we were either drinking iniquity with greediness, or proudly establishing our own righteousness in opposition to the righteousness of Christ? Let us deliberately consider our state when God first caused a ray of light to shine into our minds, and implanted his grace in our hearts, and we shall esteem ourselves no less indebted to the electing love of God, than Jacob, or Saul, or any other whom he has ever chosen^b.]

II. He times them seasonably

[The fugitive patriarch was now in a very desolate and forlorn condition, wearied in body^c, and distressed in mind. Probably his conscience now smote him, and he was saying with himself, as Joseph's brethren afterwards did, "I am verily guilty concerning my brother^d." How welcome then must the tokens of God's regard be to him at that season! What a support under his present trials! what an antidote against any future calamities!

Thus it is that God interposes on the behalf of his people, and "repents himself for them, when their strength is gone, and there is none shut up or left^e." When the contrite soul is bowed down under a sense of guilt, and ready to say, There is no hope; then does God speak peace unto it, saying, "Be of good cheer, I am thy salvation." Just as, in Hagar's extremity, God sent his angel to point out to her a spring, whereby the life of her child was unexpectedly preserved, so in ten thousand instances he appears for us, when we are ready to despair of help: and though his interpositions on our behalf are less visible than these, yet every one of us has reason to acknowledge the truth of that proverb, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen^f." Let us but review our lives, and call to mind the aids of his Spirit under temptations, trials, difficulties; let us see how marvellously we have been upheld when conflicting with sin and Satan, and we shall confess indeed, that "he is a present, a very present, help in trouble."]

III. He

^b 2 Tim. i. 9.

^c From Beersheba to Bethel was about forty miles.

^d Gen. xlii. 21.

^e Deut. xxxii. 36.

^f Gen. xxii. 14.

III. He imparts them suitably

[It is probable that Jacob's reply to the advice of his mother was now, in his apprehension, about to be verified; and that he expected a curse rather than a blessing. His evil conscience now might well suggest to him such thoughts as these: "God has forsaken me, and some great evil will come upon me. I can never hope to return again to my father's house in peace, or to enjoy the blessing, which I have so treacherously gained." To remove these apprehensions, God vouchsafed to him exactly such tokens of his regard, as were best calculated to allay his fears. *In the vision*, God shewed to him both his providential care, and his redeeming love: for doubtless, while he discovered to him the ministry of angels who were commissioned to protect him, he also shewed him that promised seed, who was in due time to spring from him, and whom at that very instant he typically represented². *In the promise*, he assured him, that his presence should follow him; that his power should preserve him; that he would bring him back again to that very land; and that not one of all the promises that had been ever made to him, should fail of accomplishment.

In this respect also we may trace the tender mercies of our God towards all his people. His manifestations of himself to them, and his application of promises to their souls, are wonderfully suited to their several necessities. We cannot indeed justify those, who open the sacred records, and expect that the portion of scripture, on which they cast their eye, shall be a kind of *literal* direction to them; (a most unwarranted and delusive method of ascertaining the mind of God!) but this we must affirm, that, whatever we want, whether wisdom, or strength, or grace of any kind, it shall be given us, if we ask in faith. And the experience of all the saints attests the truth of that promise, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."]

IV. He continues them faithfully

[God had given promises, not to Abraham only and to Isaac, but to Jacob also, while he was yet in his mother's womb. But instead of fulfilling them to him after this flagrant instance of misconduct, he might well have said to him, as he did to his unbelieving posterity, "Thou shalt know my breach of promise³:" "I said indeed, that thy house and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now it shall be far from me: for them that honour me I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed¹." But he had spoken, and would not go back: for his word's sake

² This is more fully opened in the 14th Skeleton.

³ Numb. xiii. 34.

¹ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

sake he would not cast off his offending child, or even suffer one jot or tittle of his promises to fail.

Thus to his descendants in future ages did God manifest his fidelity; insomuch that Joshua, after eighty years experience, could appeal to the whole nation, saying, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof^k."

To us also will he approve himself faithful. "He will not cast off his people, because it hath pleased him to make us his people^l." He has said, I will never leave thee, I will never, never forsake thee^m. "He may indeed hide his face from us for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on us: the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but the covenant of my peace," says he, "shall not be removed; for like as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke theeⁿ."] "

IMPROVEMENT

1. For caution

[We have seen that Jacob inherited the blessing which he had gained by treachery; and that, where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound. But shall we do evil that good may come; or commit sin that grace may abound? God forbid. We must never expect the blessing of God but in the way of duty.]

2. For encouragement

[If through temptation we have fallen into sin, let us not flee from God, like Adam, but go to him in humble hope that he will magnify his mercy towards the chief of sinners.]

^k Josh. xxiii. 14.

^m Heb. xiii. 5.

^l 1 Sam. xii. 22.

ⁿ Isa. liv. 7—10.

CCCCLXXVIII. GOD'S DELIGHT IN SAVING SINNERS.

Zeph. iii. 17. *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.*

A KNOWLEDGE of ourselves will shew us how much need we have of repentance: and a knowledge of God will

will encourage us to repent. Many are the descriptions which we have of God in the inspired volume; but none deserves our attention more than that before us. In it we behold

I. God's power to save

[We shall not speak of God's power in general, but as it is manifested in the salvation of his church and people. He dwelt "in the midst" of his people in the wilderness^a; and displayed his "power to save them" by delivering them from all their enemies^b, and supplying all their wants^c. Thus is he in the midst of his church at this time^d; and is as able as ever to save his people. For this end he orders every thing by his providence^e, and makes his word effectual through the almighty operation of his Holy Spirit^f.]

II. His determination to save

[If he should leave us to ourselves none of us would be saved. We all say to him, "Depart from us^g;" nor do we ever turn effectually to him till he has made us willing in the day of his power^h. On this account he takes the matter into his own hands, and determines to save those whom he has given to his Sonⁱ. Having bought us with the blood of his Son, he will secure us to himself, by the operation of his Spirit. He does not indeed destroy our free agency; but he overcomes our reluctance^k, and draws us to himself by an operation not less powerful than that, which he exerted in raising his Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead^l.]

III. His delight in saving

[There is not any thing so delightful to God as the work of saving sinners. Nor will he merely feel an inward pleasure; but, as a man, overjoyed at any event, involuntarily expresses his joy by singing, or some other outward token, so will God manifest his pleasure to the returning soul^m. Man by nature knows no greater happiness than that which a bridegroom feels, when, after long suspense and many fears, he is united to his bride. Yet such is the image which God himself uses, to illustrate his joy over returning sinnersⁿ.]

IV. His

^a Exod. xl. 38.

^b Exod. xiv. 27, 28. and xvii. 14.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 15, 16, 24, 25.

^e Rom. viii. 28.

^g Job xxi. 14, 15.

ⁱ John vi. 37. See this exemplified, Jer. iii. 19.

^k Phil. ii. 13.

^m Luke xv. 23, 24.

^d Matt. xviii. 20. and xxviii. 20.

^f Heb. iv. 12. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^h John vi. 44. Ps. cx. 3.

^l Eph. i. 19, 20.

ⁿ Isai. lxii. 5.

IV. His immutability towards those whom he intends to save

[Man is often alienated from the object of his affections, either by means of some unexpected evil he has discovered, or through his own fickleness and inconstancy. But God changeth not^o. Whom he loveth he loveth to the end^p. He hateth putting away^q. And, as he loved his people from eternity^r, and chose them without any reference to good either seen or foreseen in them^s, so will he not forsake them on account of their infirmities^t. He will indeed punish their transgressions with all needful severity^u; but his gifts and callings are without repentance^x; nor will he cast off the people, whom he has chosen in Christ, and given to him^y.]

USES—In this glorious character of God we may see

1. The evil of sin

[Sin, under whatever circumstances it may be committed, is directly levelled against him^z. And, if our consciences be not seared as with an hot iron, the thought of having so often committed that, which militates against the honour, the authority, and the very existence of such a God, must render us loathsome in our own eyes, and cause us to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes^a.]

2. The danger of dying in an unconverted state

[Those to whom our Lord preached, and amongst whom he wrought his miracles, had a far heavier condemnation than they would have received, if they had never enjoyed such advantages^b. And will it be no aggravation of our guilt in the day of judgment to have despised such a loving and gracious God? Surely, he will then shew himself mighty to destroy such obdurate rebels; and will feel an abiding satisfaction in vindicating the honour of his insulted majesty^c, as he now would in displaying the riches of his mercy. It will be “a fearful thing to fall into his hands” under such aggravated guilt.]

3. The obligation that lies upon believers to serve the Lord

[Have you been selected by God as objects of his unmerited love? Have you been redeemed with the blood of his

^o Mal. iii. 6. Jam. i. 17.

^r Jer. xxxi. 3.

^t Isai. liv. 7—10.

^x Rom. xi. 29.

^z Gen. xxxix. 9. Ps. li. 4.

^b John xv. 22. Matt. xi. 20—24.

^c Luke xii. 20. Prov. i. 24—30. Deut. xxviii. 58, 63.

^p John xiii. 1.

^q Mal. ii. 16.

^s Deut. vii. 7, 8. and ix. 5, 6.

^u Ps. lxxxix. 30—34.

^y 1 Sam. xii. 22. Hos. ii. 19, 20.

^a Ezek. xxxvi. 28, 31. Job xlii. 6.

his dear Son? And have you a good hope, that you shall be made eternal monuments of his power and grace? What should you render to the Lord for such benefits? O love him; rejoice in him with joy unspeakable; and rest in your love to him; having no end, no aim, no wish, but to please and honour the God of your salvation.]

CCCCLXXIX. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN CHRIST'S INTERCESSION.

John xvii. 24. *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.*

THERE is an height, and depth, and length, and breadth in the love of Christ, which can never be explored—His assumption of our sinful nature, and his submission to the accursed death of the cross for our sake, will fill the universe with wonder to all eternity—Next to those unparalleled instances of his love, we cannot but notice the concern which he expressed for his people's welfare in the last hours of his life—Well did he know all that was coming upon him; yet instead of being occupied, as might have been expected, about his own sufferings, he was intent only on the salvation of others—Having prayed in the hearing of his disciples that they, and all his followers to the end of the world, might be preserved and sanctified, he adds the petition which we have now read; in discoursing on which we shall

I. Explain the petition

There is something peculiar in *the manner* in which it is expressed

[It is generally considered as *an authoritative demand*, which he made in consequence of the right he had in them, and with a more especial view to their comfort—Certain it is that, as his people had been “given him by the Father,” and as he was now about to confirm his title to them by the surrender of his own life in their stead, he might justly claim the blessings which he asked in their behalf—But the same expression is elsewhere used where nothing more is intended than *great earnestness* in the request^a; and this seems to be the real

^a Mark vi. 25. and x 35.

real import of the words before us—Our Lord had come down from heaven to rescue his people from destruction; nor could he endure the thought of returning thither without first securing them to himself as the trophies of his victory—Hence was there an extraordinary emphasis laid on this petition, because, if that should not be granted, all which he had done and suffered for them would be in vain—]

The *petition itself* represents the final glorification of all his disciples

[Jesus was now going to his Father in heaven—He was already in heaven as to his divine nature; but his human nature also was speedily to be removed thither—A short separation from them was necessary, in order that *he* might prosecute his mediatorial work in heaven, and *they* discharge their apostolic office on earth—But he had promised that, “where he was, there should also his servants be^b ;” and that, as he was going to prepare mansions for them, so he would surely come again and receive them to himself, that they might be with him for ever^c—Besides, he had already given them a glimpse of his glory, which they had seen through the vail of his flesh^d ; and had taught them to expect that what they had beheld in the dawn, should be revealed to them in its meridian splendor^e—These expectations he would never disappoint—Hence in his intercession he gave them an additional assurance, that they should in due time possess the promised bliss—At the same time he taught them by his example, that the promises of God were not to supersede, but to encourage prayer: and that, however secure they might feel themselves in knowing the eternal purposes of God, they were never to relax their earnestness in prayer till every decree of God should be finally accomplished^f—]

As we cannot conceive any petition more important, we shall proceed to

II. Shew the blessedness of those who are interested in it

There are two things suggested in the text which may well elucidate this subject—We may observe

1. The security of their souls

[The saints are frequently, especially in this intercessory prayer, spoken of as “*given* to Christ by the Father”—And *when* were they given him, but from all eternity^g ?—Nor was it merely in his personal, but also in his official character,

as

^b John xii. 26.

^c John xiv. 3.

^d John i. 14. 2 Pet. i. 16, 17.

^e Matt. xix. 28.

^f For the same effect see Jer. xxix. 11, 12. and Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^g 1. J. 1. 3.

as the head and representative of his elect, that "the Father loved Christ from before the foundation of the world"^h—Can we suppose then that they were given to Christ, and that it was left uncertain whether he should ever enjoy the gift? Has not our Lord himself repeatedly declared, that they should never perish, and that none should ever pluck them out of his handⁱ?—Further, it was for them that Jesus prayed; and "we know that him the Father heareth always"—For them too he is carrying on his intercession in heaven; and is not he an all-prevailing advocate? yea, is not his intercession for them a ground of assurance, that he both can and will save them to the uttermost^k?—"Fear not then, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"^l—Rejoice in your security, and know that "having loved you, our Lord will love you to the end^m;" having "bought you with a price," he will never suffer himself to be deprived of "his purchased possession"—]

2. The greatness of their salvation

[It is the glory of Christ which irradiates heaven, and makes it what it is; "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof"—Hence the apostle speaks of "being with Christ," and "being present with the Lord," as terms equivalent with the glorification of his soul: yea, he mentions it as that which conveys the most consoling idea of heavenⁿ—Now if we only consider what unspeakable joy arises from a view of Christ, through the medium of the written word, we may well conceive that an *immediate* vision of his unveiled glory constitutes the felicity of heaven—And this, believer, is thy portion: it is reserved for thee, and thou for it—Thou shalt behold him face to face^o—Though now thou canst not endure the splendor of the meridian sun, thou shalt soon have thine organs of vision strengthened to gaze on him, who is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person"—What felicity must this be! If the Queen of Sheba, enraptured with the glory of Solomon, exclaimed, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants who stand before thee, and that hear thy wisdom^p," what must be the happiness of those who behold "the Lamb upon his throne," and enjoy that beatific vision without weariness or intermission?—O that we might all aspire after this honour! O that not one of us might come short of it!—]

We

^h Isai. xlii. 1.

ⁱ John x. 28, 29.

^k Heb. vii. 25.

^l Luke xii. 32.

^m John xiii. 1.

ⁿ 1 Thess. iv. 18.

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^p 1 Kings x. 8.

We shall conclude the subject with proposing two
ENQUIRIES

1. Am I interested in this prayer?

[This surely is an important enquiry: it is, in fact, to ask, Shall I behold my Saviour's face with joy, or shall I behold it only at an unapproachable distance, a wretched out-cast from heaven, an hopeless monument of God's displeasure?—Let us enter into this enquiry with fear and trembling—But it may be asked, Is it not presumptuous to attempt an answer to such an enquiry? for who can specify the persons that have been *given to Christ*? who hath looked into the book of God's decrees, that he shall undertake to answer such a question as this?—We answer, That the question may easily be resolved, without presuming to pry into the secrets of God—The point may be determined by asking, *Have I given myself to Christ*? Have I as a guilty, helpless, and undone creature, given up myself to Christ, to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his Spirit? Have I done this repeatedly, with deep humiliation, with fervent prayer, with faith unfeigned?—If our consciences bear witness that we have indeed done this, then do we know that the Father gave us to him from all eternity; for “we love him because he first loved us¹,” and we chose him only in consequence of our having before been chosen of him²—Hither then let our researches be directed; nor let us ever conclude ourselves *his*, till we have shewn ourselves willing and desirous to be his—]

2. How shall I obtain an interest in this prayer?

[We are not to conclude that, because we have no evidence of an interest in it yet, our case is altogether hopeless—We may give ourselves to Christ at this very hour, provided we feel a disposition to do so—Christ is willing to receive us, and assures us, that, if we go to him, he will in no wise cast us out—As for “secret things, they belong to God:” our conduct is not to be regulated by them, but by the written word—“I beseech you then by the mercies of God, that you give up yourselves as living sacrifices to him³”—Maintain fellowship with Christ *here* by prayer and faith, and doubtless ye shall be with him *hereafter*—Be daily surveying his glory *now*, and you shall assuredly behold it *in the world to come*—His prayer was offered not for his immediate disciples only, but “for all who should believe on him through their word”—Be ye of this number, and all the glory of heaven shall be yours—]

¹ 1 John iv. 19.

² John xv. 16.

³ Rom. xii. 1.

CCCCLXXX. THE ABUNDANT GRACE OF GOD.

Rom. v. 20, 21. *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

FROM eternity God determined to glorify his grace—
For this end he permitted sin to enter into the world—
The publication of his law also promoted the same end—

It served to shew how awfully sin had abounded—
And consequently to magnify that grace which destroyed sin—

To this effect the apostle speaks in the text and the words preceding it—

We shall endeavour to shew

I. How sin has abounded

The transgression of Adam was of a very malignant nature

[In the whole preceding context *that* sin in particular is referred to—

And it may well be considered as of a crimson dye—

It argued a contempt of God's goodness, which had bestowed so much upon him ^a—

It argued a doubt of his veracity, which was engaged to inflict the penalty ^b—

It argued a rejection of his authority, which forbade the eating of that fruit ^c—

It argued an attempt to invade the peculiar prerogatives of God ^d—

Surely in this single transgression sin greatly abounded—]

But sin spread also over the whole world

[Adam begat sons "*in his own* fallen likeness"—

All his descendents inherited his corruption ^e—

And cast off the yoke which their Maker had imposed upon them—

There was not so much as one single exception to be found ^f—

On

^a Gen. ii. 8, 9.

^b Gen. iii. 4.

^c Gen. ii. 17.

^d Gen. iii. 5.

^e Job xiv. 4.

^f Ps. xiv. 2, 3.

On this very account God once destroyed all but one family—]

It had moreover prevailed in every heart to an awful degree

[Every faculty of men's souls was debased by it—

The understanding was blinded, the will made obstinate, the conscience seared—

All the “members of their bodies also were made instruments of unrighteousness”—

There was not an imagination of their thoughts that was not evil^g—]

It even took occasion from the holy law of God to rage the more

[God gave his law to discover and repress sin—

But sin would not endure any restraint—

It rose like water against the dam that obstructs its progress^h—

And inflamed men both against the law, and against him who gave it—

Thus, in using so good a law to so vile a purpose, it displayed its own exceeding sinfulnessⁱ—]

But God did not altogether abandon our wretched world

II. How grace much more abounded

God determined that his grace should be victorious—

And that it should establish its throne on the ruins of the empire which sin had erected—

For this purpose he gave us his Son to be a second Adam^k—

He laid on him the curse due to our iniquities—

— enabled him to “bring in an everlasting righteousness”—

—accepted us in him as our new covenant-head—

— restores us through him to eternal life—

Thus the super-abundance of his grace is manifest

1. In the object attained

[The destruction of man for sin was certainly tremendous—

Yet was it no more than what was to be expected—

The fallen angels had already been banished from heaven—

No

^g Gen. vi. 5.

^h Rom. vii. 8.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 13.

^k Rom. v. 14. 1 Cor. xv. 22, 45.

No wonder then if man was made a partaker of their misery—

But how beyond all expectation was the recovery of man!—

How wonderful that he should be restored while a superior order of beings were left to perish!—

And be exalted to a throne of glory from whence they had been cast down!—

This was indeed a manifestation of most abundant grace—]

2. In the method of attaining it

[Sin had reigned unto death by means of Adam—

And certainly the destruction of the whole world for one sin argued a dreadful malignity in sin—

Yet was there nothing in this unjust or unreasonable¹—

But who could have thought that God should send us *his own Son*?—

That he should constitute HIM our new covenant-head and representative?—

That he should remove the curse of sin by HIS death?—

————— accept sinners through HIS righteousness?—

————— remedy by a second Adam what had been brought upon us by the first?—

This was a discovery of grace that infinitely transcends the comprehension of men or angels—]

3. In the peculiar advantage with which it was attained

[If Adam had retained his innocence, we also should have stood in him as our representative—

We should however have possessed only a creature's righteousness—

But in Christ we possess the righteousness of God himself^m—

Our reward therefore may well be augmented in proportion to the excellence of that, for which we are accepted—

Besides,

¹ If, instead of being represented by Adam, we had all undergone the same probation for ourselves, we have no reason to think that we should not have fallen, like him: if we had possessed exactly the same grace as he, and been subjected to the same temptation, we should have acted as he did. The constituting of him our representative was a great advantage to us, because he had much stronger inducements to fidelity than we could have: we should have been concerned only about ourselves; whereas he had the interests of all his posterity depending on him. Besides, he met his temptation when all his powers were in a state of maturity, and when there was no evil example before him; whereas we should be tempted from our earliest infancy, and with the additional influence of bad examples.

^m 2 Cor. v. 21.

Besides, the glory of God is infinitely more displayed in Christ, than ever it would have been if Adam had not fallen—

Our happiness therefore, in beholding it, must be greatly increased—

Thus our restoration through Christ will bring us to the enjoyment of far greater happiness than ever we lost in Adamⁿ—

What can more fully manifest the superabounding grace of God?—]

IMPROVEMENT

1. For caution

[This doctrine seems liable to the imputation of licentiousness—

St. Paul foresaw the objection, and answered it^o—

His answer should satisfy every objector—

But the reign of grace consists in destroying *every* effect of sin—

Therefore to indulge sin would be to counteract, and not to promote, the grace of God—

Let the professors of religion however be careful to give no room for this objection—

Let them “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing.”]

2. For encouragement

[How strange is it that any should despair of mercy!—

The infinite grace of God has been exhibited in many striking instances^p—

Let us seek to become monuments of this mercy—

Let us not indeed “sin, that grace may abound”—

But let us freely acknowledge how much sin has abounded in us—

And yet expect through Christ “abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness”—]

ⁿ Rom. v. 15. This point is insisted on from ver. 15 to 19.

^o Rom. vi. 1, 2.

^p Luke vii. 47. 1 Tim. i. 14, 16.

CCCCCLXXI. THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Ps. ciii. 8—12. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*

WE cannot form a juster conception of the Deity than from the history of the Israelites. In the mixture of mercy and judgment which is there recorded, we see every one of his perfections displayed in most lively characters^a. His dealings with us indeed are less discernible: but, the more they are scrutinized, the more will they appear to be regulated according to the counsels of unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness. The words before us will naturally lead us to a contemplation of this subject: and we shall have abundant evidence of their truth, while we consider his goodness

I. Generally, as it is in himself

The “mercy and grace” of our God are chiefly discovered by

1. His patience in bearing with us

[Had God been such an one as ourselves, he would long since have broke forth in anger against the whole world, and consumed them in his heavy displeasure. But, notwithstanding the multitude of their provocations, he has been long-suffering towards them^b, and has waited to be gracious unto them^c. He has borne with many vessels of wrath, that have been daily fitting themselves for destruction^d: and has kept mercy for thousands^e, who have been continually occupied in casting it away. The description which Nehemiah gives of the divine patience as manifested in his day^f, is no less realized towards the whole world at this very hour.]

2. His mercy in pardoning us

[God, in infinite compassion, laid our iniquities upon his only

^a Ver. 7.^d Rom. ix. 22.^b 2 Pet. iii. 9.^e Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.^c Isai. xxx. 18.^f Neh. ix. 16—21.

only dear Son^g, and exacted of him our debt^h, in order that he might exercise mercy towards us consistently with the demands of truth and justiceⁱ. And, having provided such a remedy, he delights in extending its benefits even to the vilest of the human race^k. Thousands that are now glorified in heaven, and thousands too that are yet compassed with infirmities on earth, can attest, that with him is plenteous redemption^l, and that he is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him^m.]

Not to dwell on general views of his goodness, let us consider it

II. Particularly, as it manifests itself towards us

It is here more minutely delineated

1. In reference to his patience

[God will “chide” his people for their sins; nor would he act worthy of himself, if he did not manifest his displeasure against the violations of his holy lawⁿ. But we must all confess that he punishes *neither soon—nor long—nor according to our deserts*—Not *soon*; for then he would be “always chiding,” seeing that we give continual occasion for his displeasure to arise. But he is not extreme to mark what is done amiss^o, well knowing that if he should contend with us for every fault, we could not answer him one of a thousand^p. Nor will he visit us *long*: if he hide his face, it is but for a little moment^q, and if he wound us, it is, for the most part, but a very short time before he binds us up again and heals us^r. He will not be always wroth, lest our spirits should faint, and fail by reason of his displeasure^s. Nor does he at any time “deal with us *according to our iniquities*.” Where must every one of us have been if he had entered into judgment with us according to the strict tenor of his law^t? Whatever trials we may have been called to endure, they have been infinitely less than our iniquities^u have deserved^u.]

2. In reference to his mercy

[This has been *boundless in its extent*. Who can measure the vast expanse of heaven^x? Yet such is the mercy of our God, having heights that cannot be explored, and depths that cannot be fathomed^y. It reaches, not only to all persons, but to the utmost extent of their necessities or desires.

It

^g Isai. liii. 6.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

^m Rom. x. 12, 13.

^p Job ix. 3.

^s Isai. lvii. 16.

^u Job xi. 6.

^h Isai. liii. 7. Lowth's Translation.

^k Mic. vii. 18.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 6, 7.

^q Isai. liv. 7, 8.

^t Compare Gal. iii. 10. with Ps. cxliii. 2.

^x Jer. xxxi. 37.

^l Ps. cxxx. 7, 8.

^o Ps. cxxx. 3.

^r Hos. vi. 1, 2.

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19.

It is also *tender in its exercise*. Can any thing on earth afford us a stronger image of tenderness, than a parent striving to soothe the anguish of his agonizing infant? Yet such is the anxiety which God himself feels to heal our wounded spirits, and comfort us under all our conflicts^z. It is, moreover, *lasting in its effects*. Let a straight line be drawn from east to west; and the further it is drawn, the further shall the ends be removed from each other. Thus it is with respect to our sins which he has pardoned: they are put away from us to the remotest distance, never to meet upon our souls again, never to be remembered against us to all eternity^a.]

INFER

1. How base is it to sin against such a God!

[Sin, of whatever kind, is really directed against him^b. And shall it appear a light matter to us to offend such a God? See this argument urged by Ezra^c; and let every temptation be repelled with this indignant expression, How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God^d?]

2. How ought we to fear and love our God!

[It is twice observed in the text, that God's mercy is displayed "to them that *fear* him:" and it is manifested on purpose that he may be feared^e. Let us therefore not despise the riches of his goodness^f, but improve them for the confirming of our fear^g, and the quickening of our love^h.]

^z Hos. xi. 8. Jer. xxxi. 20.

^a Ver. 17. Mic. vii. 19.

^b Ps. li. 4.

^c Ezra ix. 13, 14.

Heb. viii. 12.

^d Gen. xxxix. 9.

^e Ps. cxxx. 4.

^f Rom. ii. 4.

^g Hos. iii. 5.

^h Ps. cxvi. 12. and cxlv. 8, 9, 21.

CCCCLXXXII. GOD'S READINESS TO GIVE HIS HOLY SPIRIT.

Luke xi. 11—13. *If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, 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?*

TO argue from ourselves to the Deity, and to conclude that, because we should do, or forbear, any particular thing,

thing, he would do the same, is, in many cases, extremely fallacious; because many things may be proper as a rule of our conduct towards others, which can in no respect be applied to the moral Governor of the universe. There are, however, some instances wherein such an argument may be urged, not only with propriety, but with great effect. Such an instance occurs in the passage we have now read; in considering which, we shall

I. Point out the force of our Lord's appeal

Our Lord addresses himself both to *our feelings* and *our judgment*

[Men who cannot understand a logical deduction, may comprehend, without any difficulty, the argument before us. Every one, whether he be a parent or not, knows sufficiently the feelings of a parent, to answer the question here put to him. We can scarcely conceive that any father should so divest himself of all the sensibilities of his nature, as to refuse a piece of bread to his child. Much less can we imagine, that he should mock his child, by offering him a stone; or give him, instead of necessary food, a serpent or scorpion to destroy him. Who then would think of ascribing such a disposition to God? God is the common parent of all his creatures; and he well knows that his Spirit is as necessary for the imparting and maintaining of spiritual life, as bread is for the support of our natural life. Will he then refuse that blessing to us, when we ask it at his hands; and leave us to perish without affording us the needful succour? It may happen, that an earthly parent may be indisposed, by passion or caprice, to do what is right; or he may be disabled through poverty: but there are no such impediments on the part of God, since he is subject to no infirmities; nor is there any thing impossible with him. We may be sure therefore that he will at all times act worthy of the relation which he bears to his creatures.]

But the force of the appeal lies in the contrast between God and us

[At first sight the appeal may seem inconclusive, since our children have a claim upon us, but we have none on God; and the gift of a piece of bread bears no proportion whatever to the unspeakable gift of God's Spirit. But it must be considered that we are "evil," so evil as to be capable of the greatest cruelties even towards our own children. Instances have occurred, wherein parents have not only murdered, but even eaten, their own offspring^a; and the treating
of

^a 2 Kings vi. 28, 29.

of them with extreme harshness and severity is no uncommon failing. Yet, with all our proneness to evil, and our readiness, under the influence of passion or temptation, to commit the greatest enormities, there cannot be found a person on earth so depraved, as to act towards his children, in the general tenor of his conduct, in the manner stated by our Lord. But God, on the contrary, is *good*, supremely, and *only* good, and therefore incapable of doing any thing, which may in the smallest degree impeach his character. Besides, he has manifested his goodness in that most unparalleled act of mercy, the gift of his own *Son*; the gift of his own Son to *die* for us; and that too, *unasked*; and at a time when we were *in rebellion* against him; and *when he knew the treatment* which his Son would meet with from an ungrateful world: will HE then refuse us any thing? Will he not give us his holy *Spirit*, when we *ask* it at his hands; and *when he knows that the bestowing of that gift will infallibly terminate in his own eternal glory*? It is in this very light that an inspired apostle states the same argument^b; and therefore we may be well assured, that it is unanswerably conclusive.]

That we may not however rest in a mere acknowledgment of this truth, we shall

II. Suggest a suitable improvement of it

Though the great scope of the text relates only to the prospect which we have of receiving answers to prayer, we may learn from it

1. In what light we are to regard God, when we come to a throne of grace

[Men in general either think of God as a being that has no concern about this lower world, or as an harsh master, and a severe judge. Accordingly their prayers are either a mere lip-service, in which they themselves feel no interest; or the supplications of a slave under the apprehension of the lash. But we should rather go to him as a father; we should consider him as a being, able and willing to succour us, yea, infinitely more willing to give than we to ask. How endearing is that address which we are taught to use, Our Father, which art in heaven! If we could approach him with the familiarity, and confidence, of dutiful and beloved children, how sweet would be our fellowship with him, and how successful our petitions! Then, nothing would appear too much to ask, nothing too trifling to lay before him. We should spread before him our every want; and experience, on all occasions, his condescension and grace.]

2. What

^b Rom. viii. 32.

2. What we ought principally to desire in all our addresses to him

[The leading subjects of men's petitions usually are; that their sins may be pardoned, and their ways reformed: and certainly these are important subjects for our supplications. But the offices of the holy Spirit are very much overlooked even by the saints themselves: and though God will not altogether withhold his blessings, because we do not ask for them in the best manner, yet certainly it is of importance that we should feel our need of his Spirit, and express those feelings in our petitions to him. We cannot repent or pray, unless God, "pour out upon us a spirit of grace and of supplication." We cannot know either our disease or our remedy, unless the Spirit be given to us "to convince us of our indwelling sin, and of the Saviour's righteousness." It is the Spirit's office "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and shew them unto us." If we would "mortify the deeds of the body, it must be through the Spirit's" influence: if we would bring forth the fruits of righteousness, it must be through the operation of the same Spirit, whose fruits they are. Every act of the spiritual life must be performed by the intervention and agency of God's Spirit. As Christ is **ALL** in procuring salvation for us, so the Holy Spirit is **ALL** in imparting salvation to us. Our illumination and strength, our sanctification and comfort, are all his gifts; and therefore we should continually acknowledge our dependence upon him, and ask of God the communications we stand in need of. The importance of this is strongly marked in the passage before us; for St. Matthew, relating the substance of our Lord's discourse, says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give *good things* to them that ask him^c;" but St. Luke sums up all good things in *this*, the gift of the Holy Spirit; because, without that gift, all that we possess is of no value; and with it, we cannot want any thing that is good.]

3. The efficacy and importance of prayer

[Since God has so strongly declared his readiness to give us his Spirit, we may be well assured, that he will not refuse us any thing else: "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." But, on the other hand, we can expect nothing without prayer: "God will be enquired of by us^d," even for those things which he has promised to give us; nor will he give, if we neglect to ask. This also is intimated in the text itself; his favours are limited to them that *ask* him. It is true indeed, that the first desire after what is good is inspired

^c Matt. vii. 11.

^d Ver. 10.

inspired by him; and, as far as relates to that, "he is found of them that sought him not, and known to them that enquired not after him:" but when he has once communicated this desire, he expects that it should be cultivated and improved at a throne of grace; nor will he open the gate of heaven to any, who do not knock at it with importunate and believing prayer. And can we think hardly of this condition? What if we ourselves had invited a child to come and ask of us the richest gifts we could possibly bestow upon him, and had done every thing in our power to assure him of our unalterable determination to grant his request; could he reasonably blame us for suspending our grant upon his performance of so easy a condition? or is there a parent in the world who would not say, If you are too proud to ask for it, you shall not have it? Surely then if, through pride, or indolence, or unbelief, we will not make our supplications to God, we may well, yea, we must inevitably, be left to perish.

If this appear awful in one view, in another view it is most encouraging. Many are ready to say, "Such an appeal as this affords no comfort to me: were I a child of God, I could not doubt, but that he would give me all that I could ask, with greater readiness than I would give a piece of bread to my beloved offspring; but am I his child? and, if not, what is this assurance to me?" But behold, as though he had intended to cut off all occasion for such a doubt, our Lord has here dropped the parallel, and says, How much more will God give his Spirit, (not to *his children*, but) to *them that ask him*? So then we have no occasion to enquire, Am I a child? We must go immediately to God and implore his best and choicest blessings, with a full assurance of success.

Some perhaps may reply, I have tried these means, and found them ineffectual. But we are sure either that God has already answered in a way that was not expected, or that he will answer in due time. He is a God that cannot lie; and therefore we have nothing to do but to wait his leisure. Only let us "continue instant in prayer," and heaven, with all its glory, shall be ours.]

CCCCLXXXIII. THE PERSONALITY AND OFFICE OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT.

John xv. 26. *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*

THE characters of the most holy men may suffer from envy and malevolence; but their righteousness often shines forth the brighter afterwards, as the sun obscured for awhile by an intervening cloud—According to all human appearances, our Lord's name must either have sunk into speedy oblivion, or been handed with infamy to the latest posterity. It scarcely seemed possible that the ignominy of his cross could ever be so obliterated as to be succeeded by respect and honour: but our Lord knew that the testimony of the Spirit would assuredly effect this—While therefore he consoled both himself and his disciples with the reflection, that the causeless enmity of his countrymen was nothing more than a completion of the prophecies, he taught them to look forward to the time, when the Spirit of God should come down visibly from heaven, and by the most indubitable testimony efface every stain, and rectify the mistaken apprehensions of the world respecting him—Let us consider

I. Our Lord's description of his promised messenger

In speaking of the inscrutable mysteries of our religion, we are constrained to represent heavenly things in terms, not strictly just perhaps, but such as are best accommodated to our own feeble apprehensions—We observe then respecting the messenger whom Jesus undertook to send, that

He is a distinct person

[Many deny the distinct personality of the Spirit, and affirm that he is only a virtue or quality belonging to the Father: but the text alone shews that this is not a just and scriptural idea: the names given to the Spirit, as "the Comforter," and "the Spirit of truth," import that he is a distinct person—The circumstance of his mission leaves no doubt upon the subject; for he "proceeds from the Father," is "sent" by the Son, and comes down to us—Besides, the very

end of his mission implies the same ; for he comes to “testify,” or be a witness—]

Yet, though distinct from the Father, he is, in his essential properties, equal to him

[He is sent to testify to all persons, in all places, at the very same instant of time : and does not the execution of such an office require both omnipresence and omniscience ? Must he not know what every person needs to be instructed in, and be every where present to hear and grant their requests ?—And are there any attributes more appropriate to the Deity than these ? Yet these the Spirit has in common with the Father : David says respecting him, “Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit ? If I go up to heaven, thou art there ; if I go down to hell, thou art there also ^a”—and St. Paul observes that “the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God ^b”—Nor are these testimonies unsupported by others that are yet more direct and clear : for the Spirit is constantly joined both with the Father and the Son as equally worthy of the highest honour ^c, and equally a source of the richest blessings ^d—Indeed he is expressly and repeatedly called God ; they who lied unto him, were *therefore* guilty of lying unto God ^e ; and they who had him dwelling in them, were *therefore* the temples of the living God ^f—]

Nevertheless in some respects he is subordinate both to the Father and the Son

[*In the order of subsistence*, as the Father is not of the Son, but the Son of the Father, so neither the Father nor the Son proceeds from the Spirit, but the Spirit from them, inasmuch as he proceeds from the Father, and is sent by the Son—*In the order of operation also* the Spirit is inferior: the Father is represented as the fountain of authority and of blessings: the Son acts as his servant ^g; and the Spirit acts under Christ, being sent or deputed by him, according as it was determined in the eternal counsels of the Father, to apply to men that redemption, which Christ procured for them by his death—The Spirit acted in this subordinate capacity *before the time of Christ’s incarnation* : it was by him that Christ went and preached to the antediluvian world ^h : by him also he inspired the prophets to foretel the things relating to his sufferings and glory ⁱ—*During the days of our Lord’s ministry on earth* the Spirit still acted in subserviency to him ;
it

^a Ps. cxxxix. 6, 7.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 10.

^c Matt. xxviii. 19.

^d 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

^e Acts v. 3, 4.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

^g Isai. xlii. 1.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 18, 19.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 11.

it was by the Spirit that Christ cast out devils^k, and performed his other miracles—In a more especial manner did the Spirit exert himself in subserviency to Christ *after he had ascended to heaven*; it was *then* that the Spirit began *fully* to execute the office assigned him, and to “glorify Christ” before an ungodly and unbelieving world^l—*To this very hour* does the Spirit bear the same part, “convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment^m,” in order to magnify Christ, and to enlarge his kingdom.]

As our attention is principally directed to the Holy Spirit, we shall proceed to state

II. The particular office committed to him

The Father, Son, and Spirit, have distinct and different offices in the œconomy of redemption—That of the Spirit is twofold

1. To be a witness for Christ

[Our blessed Lord died under circumstances of the deepest ignominy and reproach; being treated by his whole nation as the vilest of malefactors—Nor could it be conceived that one, who under such circumstances saved not himself, should be constituted by God the Saviour of others—This was, to all appearance, so absurd an idea that it never could have gained any credit in the world, if it had not been confirmed by the most unquestionable testimony—To overcome these obstacles, the Holy Spirit testified of two things, namely, the righteousness of his person, and the sufficiency of his salvation—While the apostles testified of these things to the ears of men, the Spirit confirmed their word with visible signsⁿ, and sealed it on men’s hearts by his invisible, but effectual, influence^o—This he did, not only on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted at once, but on many other occasions—It is worthy of remark, that when he visibly descended on the Gentiles in confirmation of the word that was delivered by Peter, he descended at the very instant that the apostle began to speak of the fulness and excellency of Christ’s salvation^p; as though he designed to intimate, that this was the great truth which he came to attest, and which we ought to receive with our whole hearts—]

2. To be a Comforter to us

[When a soul begins to feel its guilty and undone state, it needs a comforter: but there is no creature in heaven or earth that can administer effectual consolation; none but the
Holy

^k Matt. xii. 28.

^l John xvi. 14.

^m John xvi. 8.

ⁿ Heb. ii. 4.

^o 1 Thess. i. 5.

^p Acts x. 43, 44.

Holy Spirit is sufficient for so great a work : if he reveal Christ to the soul, all tears will instantly be wiped away ; but if he withhold his influence, sorrow and despondency will overwhelm it utterly—Thus also in all subsequent trials and temptations, it is the Holy Ghost alone that can heal the wounded spirit, or bind up the broken and contrite heart—And it must further be noticed, that the principal, if not the only, way, in which he administers consolation to us, is by testifying of Christ ; it is by shewing to us his beauty, his sufficiency, his truth and faithfulness, and by enabling us to rest entirely on him : and as there can be no comfort till this be done, so there can be nothing but joy and exultation arising from it—]

This subject naturally leads us to REFLECT

1. How great and glorious a person Christ is !

[It has been already shewn that the Holy Spirit is God equal with the Father : yet has Christ authority to send him into our hearts—If Christ say, Go, my Spirit, and quicken that dead sinner ; go and dwell in that polluted heart ; go and comfort that drooping and desponding soul ; in short, whatever commission Jesus gives to the ever-blessed Spirit, it is executed instantly, and to its utmost extent—No unworthiness in us excites any reluctance in the mind of the Spirit ; if Jesus do but speak, it is done—Who then would not wish to have this glorious person for his friend ? Who does not desire an interest in him ? Who would not seek him who is so able and willing to save ?—Blessed Lord, send thy Spirit *now* to testify of thee, and to glorify thee in all our hearts !—]

2. How unspeakable is the happiness of Christ's faithful people !

[These enjoy the witness of the Spirit in their own hearts^a—The Spirit not only testifies to them that Jesus is the Saviour of believers in general, but their Saviour in particular : he witnesses to, and with, their spirits, that they are children of God ; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ^r—Can we conceive any greater happiness than this ? Surely not in this present world—Let every one then aspire after this honour—Let every one seek the Spirit, not merely as an instructor, but a comforter—Thus shall we be filled with consolation, even under the most afflictive circumstances ; and his testimonies shall prove to us an earnest, and a foretaste, of our heavenly inheritance.—]

^a 1 John v. 10.

^r Rom. viii. 16, 17.

CCCCCLXXXIV. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD DRAWS
HIS PEOPLE.

Hos. xi. 4. *I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.*

THE doctrine of divine influences is generally considered as enthusiastic and absurd. But though we grant that there is much in it which is above our comprehension, there is nothing in it that is contrary to reason. God brought originally his people out of Egypt: but in what manner did he effect it? he called them when they were, like a little child, ignorant, helpless, froward^a: and, by the signs and wonders that he wrought before them, he shewed, that it would be their wisdom and their happiness to put themselves under his guidance and protection^b. He drew them; but it was with such cords as were proper to move a rational being, and with such bands, as made them his willing captives. And it is thus that he calls *us* out of worse than Egyptian bondage.

We propose to shew

I. That God does draw the hearts of his people
This is evident

1. From scripture

[If we consult *the declarations* of scripture, we shall find that man is not sufficient of himself for a good act^c, word^d, or thought^e. We shall be equally convinced that the word and ordinances, however well administered, have no power in themselves to convert men^f; and that God is the only source of all good^g.

If we attend to *the confessions and petitions* contained in them, we shall see that all the most eminent saints concurred in this acknowledgment, "Thou hast wrought all our works in us^h." St. Paul especially, who was not inferior to any of them, expressly ascribes every spiritual good to the operation of divine graceⁱ: he is fired with indignation at the thought that any one should arrogate to himself the honour due to God

^a Ver. 1.

^b Ver. 2, 3.

^c John xv. 5.

^d Matt. xii. 34.

^e 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

^g Jam. i. 17. Phil. ii. 13. John vi. 44.

^h Isai. xxvi. 12.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 5.

God alone^k: and with respect to himself he shews the greatest jealousy on this head, and, when compelled by his adversaries to speak in commendation of himself, he takes especial care that all the glory shall be given to God alone^l.

From hence then, if we had no other proof, we see the propriety of that petition offered by the church of old, "Draw me, and we will run after thee^m."]

2. From experience

[It cannot be doubted but that many, whose names are recorded in the scriptures, and many also in the present day, have lived, or do yet live, above the world, in a noble contempt of all its pleasures, honours, and interests. If we will look around us, we shall soon be convinced of this fact. Now whence is it that they are enabled to do this? Is it of *themselves*? Why then can you not all do the same? and why, when we urge you to attempt it, do you tell us that it is impracticable? Is it owing to any power in *the ordinances*? Why then have not the ordinances operated in the same manner upon all? Why have many attended them for years without effect, while others have been wrought upon by the first or second sermon that they heard? To whom then can we ascribe the permanent conversion of souls to God, but to *God himself*? Beyond a doubt, it is owing solely to the operation of his grace: and accordingly it will be found, that all truly converted persons throughout the world do ascribe the change to God, and do acknowledge their need of that same grace to *keep* them, which they first of all needed to quicken and renew them.

If any desire to have further proof of this point, they have within themselves the fullest means of conviction. Let them go home and mortify within themselves the love of the world, together with every sinful appetite; and let them fill their own hearts with the love of God, with an abiding delight in holy exercises, and with heavenly affections: let them do *this* by any power of their own, and they will confute us effectually. But we are very sure that the longer they persist in the attempt, the more thoroughly they will feel their need of divine assistance.]

In confirmation of this point we will proceed to shew

II. In what manner he draws them

We are not to imagine that God deals with us as machines, that move involuntarily according as they are impelled by any exterior force. Man is possessed of an understanding

^k 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^m Cant. i. 4.

understanding and a will: and it is by these that God operates upon us: he draws us “with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love.”

1. He enlightens the understanding

[God, in converting any soul to himself, first causes it to see its lost and perishing condition, and then the suitableness and sufficiency of the salvation he has provided for us. By this means he convinces the judgment that it is really a rational thing to “flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life.” He makes it appear that a life of sin, however it may be commended as liberty, is really the sorest bondageⁿ; and that a life of devotedness to God is truly a rational service^o— — —]

2. He engages the will

[As a preparatory means of changing the will, he often “persuades us by his terrors:” but none were ever effectually renewed by fear alone: it is “love,” and love only, that has “bands” sufficiently strong to hold the soul, and to keep it stedfast in the way of holiness. God therefore, to secure us unto himself, shews us “the heights and depths of his incomprehensible love to us in Christ Jesus^p,” and at the same time “sheds abroad his love in our hearts^q,” and enables us by “a spirit of adoption to call him, Abba, Father^r.” This overcomes the reluctance of the stoutest sinner, and “constrains” him to devote himself altogether unto God^s— — —]

Thus does God “make us willing in the day of his power^t,” and to this overpowering influence of divine love does the Prophet ascribe the change, in whomsoever it has been wrought^u.]

INFER

1. What reason for shame have unconverted sinners!

[If men have not committed gross and scandalous offences, they think they have no cause for shame: but every one that is not thoroughly converted to God, has need to blush and be confounded before him. Can any person doubt in his mind whether to love and serve God be not our *reasonable* service? Doubtless, however men may hate the restraints of religion, they must confess, that all who are drawn by the cords of a man, or *are duly influenced by their reason*, will gladly submit to them. And can any one doubt whether God have not given us abundant *cause* to love and serve him? “What could he have done more for us than he has done?”

Yet

ⁿ Rom. vi. 16. ² Pet. ii. 19.

^p Eph. iii. 18, 19.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^q Rom. v. 5.

^r Ps. cx. 3.

^o Rom. xii. 1.

^t Rom. viii. 15.

^u Jer. xxxi. 3.

Yet though he has cast “the bands of love” about us, how have unconverted men “burst them asunder, and cast his cords from them!” Know then, that a worldly and carnal life argues a *most unreasonable* and *most ungrateful* state of mind; and that, if you be not ashamed of it in this world, you will be when you stand at the judgment-seat of Christ.]

2. What reason of thankfulness have they who are converted to God!

[If you had not been drawn by the Father, you would have been, at this very hour, as far from God as any other person in the world. “He looked upon you when you were lying in your blood, and bid you live^x.” What thanks then should you render to him for such distinguishing grace! How should you bless him for encircling you with his bands, and for drawing you with his cords! O beg of him that he would fasten his bands yet more firmly about you, and never suffer any thing, from without or from within, to break them. Endeavour at all times to yield to his kind attractive influences, and to comply with the first intimations of his will. And be assured, that this is to act the part of a rational being; and that the more closely you are drawn to God at present, the more intimately will you enjoy him in a better world.]

^x Ezek. xvi. 6.

CCCCCLXXXV. THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT.

Matt. iii. 11. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*

IT is ignorantly imagined, that they who are most enlightened with the knowledge of Christ, and are most zealous in bringing others to an acquaintance with him, must of necessity be puffed up with pride, and be filled with an high conceit of their superiority to others—But none ever surpassed the apostle Paul either in zeal or knowledge; yet none ever manifested more deep humility, since language could not even afford him words whereby sufficiently to express the low sense he had of himself before God: he calls himself “less than the

least of all saints"—Another eminent example of humility is exhibited in the conduct of John the Baptist, who, though faithful in the highest degree as a preacher of righteousness, never sought his own glory, but invariably directed the eyes of his followers to Christ, in comparison of whom he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest regard—His expressions before us lead us to consider

I. The transcendant dignity of Christ

Christ, in a civil view, was not at all superior to John, yea, perhaps inferior, inasmuch as the son of a carpenter might be reckoned inferior in rank to the son of a priest: nevertheless he was, in other points of view, infinitely superior:

1. In his person

[The person of John might well be considered as dignified in no common degree—He was the subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world^a: his formation in the womb was announced by an angel from heaven, and that too at a period when his parents, according to the common course of nature, could entertain no hope of having any progeny—He was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his very birth: and was ushered into the world with the restoration of prophecy, after that gift had been withdrawn from the church almost four hundred years—But in all these respects Christ was far greater than he: Christ had been the subject of prophecy from the very foundation of the world: his work and offices had been exhibited to the world in numberless types and prophecies during the space of four thousand years—His body was formed, not merely in a preternatural, but in a supernatural way, by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, who created it in the womb of a virgin; by which means he was not merely holy, but spotless, without the smallest taint of that corruption, which every child of Adam inherits—Without noticing the songs with which the heavenly choir celebrated the tidings of his birth, or any of those miraculous circumstances which pointed him out to the eastern magi, we see already how far superior he was to John, even in those things wherein John surpassed all other men—

But what must we say, when to this we add, that he was God, "God manifest in the flesh," "God over all blessed for ever?" Then all comparison must cease: and the expressions
used

^a Isai. xl. 3. Mal. iii. 1

used by John, instead of appearing exaggerated, will be acknowledged to be infinitely below the truth: though the loosing of the sandals, and carrying them to the bath, was deemed too mean an employment for an Hebrew servant, or for any but a slave^b, yet John accounted it far too high an honour for him to render such a service to that glorious person, whose advent he announced—]

2. In his office

[John was a prophet of the most high God, yea, “more than a prophet”—He had the distinguished honour of being the forerunner of the Messiah, who should prepare his way, and point him out to the people, being himself divinely instructed how to distinguish him from all others who should attend his ministrations—Hence our Lord himself declares respecting him, that there “never had been a greater person born of woman than John the Baptist”—But glorious as he was, Jesus far excelled him in glory—Jesus was *the* great prophet, to whom Moses and all the prophets gave testimony, and to whose directions all were commanded to submit. He was the Messiah himself, the very “Lamb of God that was to take away the sins of the world,” of whom “John himself needed to be baptized,” and by whom alone John himself could be saved—Surely then the words of John respecting him were not an unmeaning hyperbole, the offspring of affectation and the footstool of vanity, but they were the words of truth and soberness; for though John was like the morning star, yet he was altogether eclipsed as soon as ever the Sun of Righteousness arose—]

The superiority of Jesus will still further appear while we consider

II. The baptism he administered

Jesus never administered the baptism of water to any: but to him was committed the work of baptizing with the Holy Ghost

[Though the Church had from the beginning received, in some measure, the communications of God's Spirit, yet, “till Christ was glorified, the Holy Ghost was not given” in a very general or abundant manner: it was reserved for Christ to send him down, in order that, through the Spirit's testimony, his own divine mission might be established beyond a possibility of doubt—Accordingly, a few days after his ascension, he fulfilled his promise, and sent down the Spirit upon his waiting disciples, causing it to rest upon them visibly, in the shape of cloven tongues of fire—And when, on another occasion,

^b See Gill on the place.

occasion, he poured out the Spirit upon Cornelius and his company, Peter particularly called to mind this declaration, which John the Baptist had made to the infant church, and acknowledged it to be a glorious completion of his prophecy—]

This baptism infinitely surpassed that of John

[John baptized with water those who were penitent, testifying to them that they should believe on him who was to come after him^d; but Jesus, by the baptism which he administers, makes men both penitent and believing—John, in applying water to the body, even if he had immersed his followers ten thousand times, could do no more than cleanse the outward body; he could not reach the mind; he could not affect the soul; he could not in any degree change the character of his disciples—But the Spirit, with which Jesus baptized, acted with the powerful energy of “fire”—This was no sooner poured out than it penetrated the inmost recesses of the soul, and, like a furnace, purged away the dross which was there concealed—What a change it effected in the characters of men may be seen by its operations on the day of Pentecost: how was the lion instantly transformed into a lamb! and how did the noxious qualities, which had so lately rendered men like incarnate fiends, immediately subside and disappear! And such are the effects which it invariably produces wheresoever it is bestowed—]

INFER

1. How awfully are they mistaken who rest in the outward form of baptism!

[We mean not to depreciate baptism in any respect: it is a rite whereby the people of God are initiated into covenant with him: “it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace;” of a grace, which shall be most assuredly communicated to every penitent and believing soul—But what can the sprinkling of water, of itself, effect? What does it effect in thousands and myriads who both live and die in sin? Can it save them? yea, does it not rather aggravate their condemnation an hundred-fold?—Let all then beware how they rest in the sign, without receiving the thing signified—Let all remember, that if they have not been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and so experienced the mighty working of his power as to be quickened to newness of life, they only deceive their own souls; their religion is vain; they are yet in their sins—Let them not “say with themselves, We have Abraham to our father;” for, notwithstanding all their
outward

^c Acts xi. 16.

^d Acts xix. 4.

outward privileges, they shall surely perish: "if they have not the Spirit of Christ, they are none of his"—]

2. What rich encouragement does the gospel afford to drooping contrite souls !

[Many are complaining, "Alas, I am cold; my heart is harder than adamant; and my corruptions are so many, that I almost despair of subduing them"—But has not Jesus "the residue of the Spirit?" And can he not pour out the Spirit upon you as easily as a fellow-creature can baptize you with water? Yea, is not this his very office, which he has undertaken, and promised to perform? And will not that Spirit operate as fire? will it not search your very inmost soul? will it not inflame the cold, and melt the stony heart? will it not purge and purify you, that you may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness?—Yield not then to desponding thoughts; but beg of him to baptize you with the Holy Ghost—Water baptism you are to receive but once; but the baptism of the Spirit you are to have renewed from day to day as long as you continue in the body—Plead then with your adorable Saviour; entertain worthy thoughts both of his greatness and goodness; and know that, if a father will not refuse bread to his hungry child, much less will Jesus refuse the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him—]

* Rom. viii. 9.

† Isai. xlv. 3, 4.

CCCCCLXXXVI. THE SEALING OF THE SPIRIT.

Eph. i. 13, 14. *In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

THE blessings which we receive through Christ are innumerable—

Many are mentioned in the preceding part of this chapter—

One of the last and greatest blessings which we receive in this life, is the sealing of the Holy Spirit—

This was vouchsafed to many of the saints at Ephesus—

We shall shew

I. What the sealing of the Spirit is

The

The metaphor of sealing conveys no inadequate idea of the Spirit's operations

[A seal stamps its own image on the wax that is impressed by it; and marks the thing sealed to be the property of him that sealed it—

And the Holy Spirit forms all the lineaments of the divine image on the soul that is sealed by him; and shews that it belongs to God—]

But the text itself affords us the best explanation of this term

[The future inheritance of the saints consists in a perfect conformity to God's image, and a perfect enjoyment of his love—

The sealing of the Spirit is an "earnest of that inheritance," or, in other words, *a part* of that inheritance already vouchsafed to the soul, and *a pledge* that the remainder shall in due time be given to it—

This gift of the Spirit is to be continued to the church till the final consummation of all things^a—

The experience of individuals may vary with respect to it; but there shall always be some in the church who possess and enjoy it—]

We are also informed respecting

II. The manner in which it is effected

The *agent* is none other than the Holy Ghost

[It is not in man's power to sanctify his own soul—

Nor can any one assure himself that he is the Lord's—

To impart these blessings is the prerogative of God alone^b—]

The *subjects* of this work are true believers

[An unbeliever cannot possibly be sealed; because the Holy Spirit would never mark those as God's property, who do not really belong to him—

Nor are persons usually sealed on their first believing in Christ—

This higher state of sanctification and assurance is reserved for those, who, "after having believed," have maintained a close walk with God—

They must first be "in Christ," and then for Christ's sake this benefit shall be vouchsafed unto them—]

The *means* by which it is effected, are the promises

[We

^a The church is Christ's "purchased possession," Acts xx. 28. And its complete "redemption" from all the penal effects of sin will be at the day of judgment, Rom. viii. 23.

^b 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.

[We do not presume to limit the Spirit's operations—

But his usual method of sealing is by applying the “promises” to the soul^c—

Of themselves, the promises can accomplish nothing; but, through his divine power, they have a comforting and transforming efficacy^d—]

The apostle further specifics

III. Its proper tendency and operation

The sealing of the Spirit will never elate a man with pride

[It may seem indeed that such distinguishing mercies would puff us up—

But their invariable effect is to humble those who receive them—

All the saints of old abased themselves in proportion as they were favoured of God^e—

Nor can there be any stronger evidence that a work is not of God, than its producing a contrary effect upon us—]

It is intended solely to honour and glorify God

[Every work of grace should lead the mind to God as the author of it—

And the more exalted the mercy, the more powerful should this effect be—

Now this, above all, administers to us the greatest cause of thankfulness—

And will certainly incline us to love and serve him from whom it has been derived—]

ADDRESS

1. To those who are ignorant of this sublime subject

[To many, alas! the sealing of the Spirit is mere foolishness—

But those who account it so, “speak evil of things that they understand not”—

Let us seek to experience it ourselves, instead of censuring those who do—]

2. To those who desire to be sealed

[God is willing to bestow this blessing on all who seek it—

If we possess it not, we should enquire what there is in us which has occasioned God to withhold it from us—

And live more on the promises, that by them it may be imparted to our souls—]

3. To

^c 1 Cor. ii. 4. 1 Thess. i. 5.

^d 2 Pet. i. 4.

^e Job xlii. 5, 6, and Isai. vi. 5.

3. To those who are sealed

[What a mercy is it, that you, who might long since have been sealed for condemnation, have, according to the good pleasure of God, been sealed for heaven!—

Be thankful to God for this unspeakable gift—

Be careful too that you grieve not him by whom you have been sealed^f—

But improve the promises yet further for your progressive advancement in true holiness^g—]

^f Eph. iv. 30.

^g 2 Cor. vii. 1.

CCCCLXXXVII. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

Rom. viii. 16. *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*

THERE is a tribunal before which we must all appear at the last day—

But we need not wait till that time to ascertain our true character—

Every man has a tribunal erected in his own bosom—

The conscience, according to the light it has received, accuses or excuses, those who will listen to its voice—

This is common to heathens as well as Christians^a—

But God's people are favoured with the additional testimony of the Holy Spirit—

Of this the apostle speaks in the passage before us—

We shall endeavour to shew—

I. What is the witness here spoken of

Witnesses imply a doubt of the thing which is to be confirmed—

The thing to be ascertained here is, “That we are the children of God”—

Respecting this, many are in suspense all their days—

But God has provided means for the removal of these doubts—

He has been pleased to give us the witness of his Spirit

1. Through the medium of rational deduction

[We

^a Rom. ii. 15.

[We may judge of our state by comparing it with the declarations of scripture—

God has given many marks and characters of his own people^b—

We may examine by these how far our practice corresponds with our duty—

And know from the testimony of an enlightened conscience our real state—

This is a scriptural way of judging—

St. Paul used it^c; and exhorts us to use it^d—

St. Peter represents the attainment of this as a principal part of our baptismal engagement^e—

St. John also assures us, that this is the way in which God would have us to know our state^f—]

2. In a way of immediate impression

[The Spirit, as a “Spirit of adoption,” testifies to the believer’s soul, that he belongs to God—

Not that this testimony is given without *any* reference to the scripture—

Yet it is imparted in a more instantaneous manner, and in a far higher degree, at some times than at others—

God by his Spirit sometimes “sheds abroad his love in the heart” in such a measure, and shines so clearly on the work he has already wrought there, as to convey immediately a full persuasion and assurance of an interest in his favour—

As by “the sealing of the Spirit” he stamps his own image on his children for the conviction of others, so by “the witness of the Spirit” he testifies of their adoption for the more immediate comfort of their own souls—

These manifestations are vouchsafed, for the most part, to prepare the soul for trials, to support it under them, or to comfort it after them—

But they cannot be explained for the satisfaction of others^f—

Yet

^b e. g. 1 John iii. 10.

^c He knew that God required real integrity of heart, Ps. li. 6. He therefore laboured to attain it, Acts xxiv. 16. He had the testimony of his conscience that he had attained it, Heb. xiii. 18. And this testimony was a ground of joy before God, 2 Cor. i. 12.

^d 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^e 1 Pet iii. 21.

^f We cannot convey to any man a just idea of sensations which he has never felt; they must be experienced in order to be understood. The work of the Spirit in regeneration is not fully understood even by those who are the subjects of it, notwithstanding its effects are as visible as those of the wind: John iii. 8. We cannot expect, therefore, that his less visible operations should be more intelligible to those who have never experienced them at all. See Rev. ii. 17.

Yet may they be sufficiently proved from scripture to be the privilege and portion of true believers^g—]

To guard the doctrine against every species of delusion, we shall shew

II. How to distinguish it from all false and enthusiastic pretensions

Many, it must be confessed, have pretended to this witness on false grounds^h—

And Satan is ready enough to help forward such delusions—

But the witness of the Spirit may be distinguished from all enthusiastic pretensions to it, if we consider attentively

1. What precedes it

[Conviction of our lost estate—faith in the Redeemer—and devotedness to God as our rightful Sovereign, must precede it—

If we have not these things, we cannot be God's children; and we may be sure the Spirit will never attest a falsehood—]

2. What accompanies it

[Humility of mind—a jealous fear of ourselves—and a love to the weakest of God's people, attend these divine communications—

Whereas pride and conceit, with a presumptuous confidence, and a contempt of others, are ever found in deluded enthusiasts—]

3. What follows it

[Manifestations of God to the soul always produce zeal in his service—victory over sin—and a longing for the enjoyment of him in heaven—

But supineness, subjection to evil tempers, and a forgetfulness of the eternal world, generally characterize the self-deceiving professor—

Let every one therefore examine his pretensions by these marks———]

ADDRESS

^g See Rom. viii. 15; 2 Cor. i. 21, 22; and Eph. iv. 30; which clearly shew, that the Holy Spirit does operate on the souls of God's people, and perform towards them the office both of a sanctifier and a comforter.

^h Some have fancied that the Spirit witnessed their adoption because they have had a singular dream, or a portion of scripture has been suddenly and strongly impressed upon their minds, or they have enjoyed peculiar comfort in their souls.

ADDRESS

1. Those who know nothing of this testimony of the Spirit

[You probably do not understand the regenerating influences of the Spirit; and yet you see them manifested in the lives of many around you—

Do not then condemn the witness of the Spirit merely because you cannot comprehend it—

Rather pray to God that you yourselves may be his children—

In this way you may hope that the Spirit will testify of your adoption—]

2. Those who profess to have received it

[A delusion in this is above all things to be guarded against—

If your dispositions be habitually bad, your pretensions are all a delusion—

Where the witness of the Spirit is, there will the fruits also of the Spirit be—]

3. Those who long to receive it

[To have the full witness of the Spirit is desirable, but not necessary—

It is a great mercy if we enjoy his lower attestations in a good conscience—

Let us labour to serve God, and leave to him the time, manner, and degree, in which he shall reveal himself to us—]

4. Those who now enjoy this witness

[The manifestations of God to the soul are a very heaven upon earth—

Let them therefore be duly esteemed and diligently improved—

But beware lest you “grieve the Spirit by whom you are sealed”—

Be looking forward with increasing earnestness to your inheritance—

And while you enjoy the inward witness that you are the children of God, let the world have an outward evidence of it in your lives—*]

* In confirmation of this view of a very difficult subject, the reader is referred to an elaborate and judicious discussion of it in *Edwards on the Affections*, page 168—185; at the close of which that most penetrating author gives a summary of the whole in these words: “When the Apostle Paul speaks of the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit, *he is not to be understood of two*

spirits, that are two separate, collateral, independent witnesses; but it is by one, that we receive the witness of the other: the Spirit of God gives the evidence, by infusing and shedding abroad the love of God, the spirit of a child, in the heart; and our spirit, or our conscience, receives and declares this evidence of our rejoicing."

To obviate any objection that may seem to arise from the term *συμμαρτυρεῖν*, see how the same word is used, Rom. ix. 1.

CCCCLXXXVIII. THE HOLY GHOST IS THE AUTHOR OF ALL SOLID HOPE.

Rom. xv. 13. *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

CHRISTIANS, even in the purest ages of the church, have been too ready to indulge a spirit of bigotry and contention—

The Jewish and Gentile converts in every place were much addicted to it—

St. Paul, studious to counteract it in those at Rome, shews that Christ, though a minister of the circumcision, intended to incorporate the Gentiles into his church—

And prays for both parties, that, as the means of restoring union among themselves, they might be endued with more grace—

His words shew us

I. The privileges of true Christians

The world forms a very false estimate of the Christian's portion—

And Christians themselves too often live below their privileges—

It is their privilege to be filled

1. With lively joy

[No one in the world has so much cause for joy as they — — —

Nor is their joy like that of sinners, which soon expires in spleen and melancholy^a—

They may "rejoice evermore," and that too with "joy unspeakable"—]

2. With

^a Eccl. vii. 6. and Prov. xiv. 13.

2. With abiding peace

[It would be thought by many that "peace" should have preceded "joy"—

But the experience of God's people accords exactly with the scriptures^b—

Being freed from the torment of a guilty conscience, they have peace with God^c—

Christ has both purchased for them, and bequeathed to them, his peace, which passeth all understanding^d—

Their "peace may well be as a river, since their righteousness is as the waves of the sea^e"—]

3. With assured hope

[This is the fruit, rather than the root, of peace and joy—

They have the promise and oath of God on their side^f—

And have already received in their souls an earnest of their inheritance^g—

Well therefore may they enjoy a confident expectation of the promised land—

All indeed are not sufficiently studious to "walk thus in the light"—

But, what the apostle prayed for on the behalf of all, all may possess—]

The apostle further directs us

II. How we may attain the enjoyment of them

In this short and comprehensive prayer we are taught to seek them

1. From God as the fountain

[God in Christ is the "God of hope," and the source of all good^h—

In vain will be the use of other means, if we apply not to him in prayer—

But nothing is too great for God to give to the believing suppliant—]

2. By faith as the means

[We can receive nothing but by the exercise of faithⁱ—

But "in believing we shall be *filled* with joy and peace"—

It is faith that enables us to realize invisible things—

And,

^b Compare Isai. lv. 12. with the text.

^d John xiv. 27. and Phil. iv. 7.

^f Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^h Jam. i. 17.

^c Rom. v. 1.

^e Isai. xlvi. 18.

^g Eph. i. 14.

ⁱ Jam. i. 6, 7.

And, by experiencing the joy of faith, our hope will be confirmed ^k—]

3. Through the Holy Ghost as the agent

[There is no power less than his that will produce these things—

The whole work of grace is, not by might or by power, but by God's Spirit ^l—

He will afford us clear discoveries of the heavenly glory—

He will witness to us our adoption, and seal us with God's image ^m—

And thus while he forms us to a meetness for heaven, he gives us also a foretaste of it in our hearts—]

INFER

[1. How much happier is the Christian than others even in this world!

2. How happy will he be when he shall receive these communications from the Deity, not through the narrow and obstructed channel of faith, but immediately at the fountain head!

3. How deservedly will they be left destitute of this happiness hereafter, who now give the pleasures of sin their decided preference!]

^k Rom. v. 5.

^l Zech. iv. 6.

^m 1 Cor. i. 22.

CCCCLXXXIX. THE BELIEVER'S INWARD WITNESS.

¹ John v. 10. *He that believeth in the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.*

THE testimonies which God has given to his Son are numerous and convincing. There are three in heaven, and a similar number on earth, who bear record, that Christ is the Saviour of the world ^a. But the believer has a distinct witness within himself; a witness, which gives a clearer insight into divine truth than any other, and fixes it with deeper conviction upon the mind. What this witness is, will best appear, by considering what that is, of which it testifies.

It

^a Ver. 7, 8, 11.

It testifies of Christ, not only that he is a Saviour in general, but, more particularly, that he is

I. A needful Saviour

[The believer feels within himself such a load of guilt, such inability to remove it by any sufferings or obedience of his own, and such utter insufficiency for any good thing, that he is sensible he must perish, if "help be not laid for him upon one that is mighty^b." As for his attempting to satisfy divine justice, or to discharge the debt he has incurred, he sees that the very thought of it is folly and madness. Nor has he any hope of ever renewing his own corrupt nature: as well might he think to change the leopard's spots, or the Ethiopian's complexion^c. Hence, when he hears of Jesus as a Saviour, he acknowledges from his inmost soul, that such an one was needed by him, and that, without such an one, he never could have entertained a hope of mercy.]

II. A suitable Saviour

[When the believer compares his own necessities with the scripture representations of Jesus Christ, he perceives a wonderful correspondence between them, insomuch that there is nothing in Christ either superfluous or defective. Is the believer blind and ignorant? Christ is his wisdom. Is he guilty? Christ is his righteousness. Is he polluted? Christ is sanctification unto him. Is he enslaved to sin and Satan? Christ is his complete redemption^d. Is Christ represented as bread to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty; as a Physician to heal, a Fountain to cleanse, a Sun to enlighten, a Shepherd to keep, &c. &c.? the believer feels within his own bosom that, which renders Christ precious to him in each particular view. He can find nothing in Christ, which his own necessities do not call for; nor any want in himself, which Christ is not exactly qualified to supply.]

III. A willing Saviour

[In the whole circle of the Christian's experience there is not any thing which does not throw light upon this subject. If he ask himself, What did I, to induce Jesus to take upon him my nature, and to die in my stead? What was there in me either of merit or of strength, that I should be stopped in my career of sin; that I should be pardoned, sanctified, and saved through his meritorious death, and his almighty grace? Did I choose him before he chose me^e? Do I not daily give him abundant reason to cast me off; and is it not of his own
mere

^b Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^d 1 Cor. i. 30. Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^c Jer. xiii. 23.

^e John xv. 16.

mere mercy that he still maintains my peace with God? Surely then mercy is his delight, and the exercise of it, his chief glory.]

IV. An all-sufficient Saviour

[The believer is a wonder to himself; a bush burning, and unconsumed; a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean: nor do the works of creation appear to him a stronger evidence of the almighty power of God, than his own preservation in the ways of godliness does, of the all-sufficiency of Christ. He cannot reflect on his errors and corruptions, his temptations and enemies, his falls and recoveries, but he is constrained to admire the efficacy of that grace, which alone has kept him, or alone restored him. As the woman who touched his garment, felt instantly within herself a proof of his ability to heal^f, so the believer daily and hourly feels within himself a most indubitable testimony of Christ's "ability to save him to the uttermost."]

OBSERVE from hence

1. How wonderfully has God, in the constitution of his gospel, consulted the benefit of the poor!

[Suppose erudition or strength of intellect had been necessary to the obtaining of divine knowledge, how melancholy had been the condition of the weak and illiterate! But the gospel is like the hidden manna, which is to be known only by its taste, or the name upon the white stone, which can be read only by those who have actually received it^g. The broken and contrite heart, with an humble faith in Christ, will give an insight into the gospel, infinitely beyond all that books can impart, or the learned of this world obtain^h. Let the poor then know, and duly improve, this their high privilege, their inestimable benefit.]

2. How easily may we determine whether we be believers or not!

[We need only consult our own consciences, and enquire whether we have an inward witness of the gospel salvation? Let not any one, however, suppose, that we are speaking of an inward persuasion of our interest in Christ. In *that*, we may easily deceive ourselves: but, in the former, we cannot. The inward witness gathers strength in proportion to our proficiency, and will exist, yea, will be perfected, in heaven itselfⁱ.]

3. What

^f Mark v. 28, 29.

^g Rev. ii. 17.

^h Matt. xi. 25, 26.

ⁱ See note ^e.

3. What comfort we may derive even from our own corruptions!

[Doubtless there is no ground of comfort in our corruptions, simply considered. Nevertheless, as reflecting light upon the gospel salvation, and especially as illustrating the power and grace of Christ, they may afford us some consolation. When they rage, then we may rejoice that there is one able to pardon our transgressions, and to heal our backslidings: and when, through grace, they are mortified, then we may rejoice that we are living witnesses of Christ's faithfulness and all-sufficiency.]

CCCCXC. THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD.

Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8. *How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house: and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.*

THE more we know of man, the more shall we see the folly of trusting in an arm of flesh: but, the more we are acquainted with God, the more enlarged will be our expectations from him, and the more unreserved our confidence in his power and grace. David had found by bitter experience, that no dependence could be placed on the protestations of Saul. But he had a friend, in whose protection he could trust; and in the contemplation of whose character he could find the richest consolation, while his views of man filled him with nothing but grief and anguish. Having expatiated upon his perfections, as contrasted with the deceitfulness and depravity of man, he bursts forth into a rapturous admiration of his love.

His words furnish us with an occasion to consider

I. The loving-kindness of God

[Wherever we turn our eyes, we behold the most astonishing displays of God's love. Every work of creation, every dispensation of providence, every effort of grace, exhibits him to us in the most endearing view. But most of all must we admire the wonders of redemption. This is the

work whereby God commends his love to us ^a. This is the one subject of adoration to all the saints in glory ^b. No sooner was it declared in the incarnation of Christ, than multitudes of the heavenly host began a new song, singing "Glory to God in the highest ^c." Yea, from that moment have they been occupied in exploring its mysteries ^d. But so unsearchable are its heights and depths, that no finite understanding can fully comprehend, nor will eternity suffice to unfold, all the wonders contained in it ^e. "How excellent then is thy loving-kindness, O God!"]

II. The improvement we should make of it

[This is not a speculative subject, but is influential in the hearts of all that give it a due measure of their attention. It is this which encourages sinners to approach their God with confidence. In the view of this, no guilt appals, no strait depresses, no grief dejects. Whatever we want of pardon, peace, or strength, one thought suffices to support the soul; "he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ^f!" This is the genuine and legitimate use which we are to make of the loving-kindness of God ^g. We are to go to him as to a Father, confessing our faults ^h; to follow him as our guide in all our ways ⁱ; and to commit ourselves to him without fear, knowing that he will either extricate us from all trouble ^k, or overrule it for our good ^l.]

III. The blessings which we may expect to flow from it

[There is nothing which can conduce to our happiness either in time or eternity, which we are not warranted to expect at God's hands, provided we contemplate, and be suitably impressed with, the excellencies of his love.

The priests of old feasted their families with the offerings which belonged to them by virtue of their office ^m. Now to our great High Priest belong all the glory and blessedness of heaven: and every member of his family is privileged to partake with him. In his house he spreads his feast ⁿ, and says to his dear children, "Come eat and drink abundantly, O beloved ^o, and let your souls delight themselves with fatness ^p. And who can declare what "abundant satisfaction" their souls feel while feeding on the promises of his word, and the communications of his love; or how enviable is the state of those
who

^a Rom. v. 8.

^h 1 Pet. i. 12.

^g Ps. ix. 10.

^k Dan. iii. 17.

^m Numb. xviii. 11.

^p Isai. lv. 2.

^b Rev. v. 11—18.

^c Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^d Luke xv. 18, 19.

ⁱ Phil. i. 19, 20. 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^l Isai. xxxv. 6.

^e Luke ii. 13, 14.

^f Rom. viii. 32.

^h Heb. xi. 8.

^o Song v. 1.

who are thus highly privileged^q? Surely if we taste this promised blessing^r, we may well desire rather to be door-keepers in his house, than to enjoy the splendor of an earthly court^s.

But there are still sweeter fruits of God's love to be enjoyed in heaven. *There* flows a river, which gladdens that holy city, the new Jerusalem^t, and fills with unspeakable delight every inhabitant of those blissful mansions. *There* is a fulness of joy, emanating from the fountain of the Deity, and filling with God's own blessedness every soul according to its capacity^u. Of this shall every one be "made to drink;" and, drinking of it, shall thirst no more for ever^x.]

APPLICATION

[Let the love of God in Christ Jesus be our meditation all the day—Let it lead us to trust in him both for body and soul—And let a sense of it shed abroad in our hearts, be the one object of our desire^y and delight^z—]

^q Ps. lxxv. 4.

^r Jer. xxxi. 14.

^s Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

^t Ps. xlv. 4.

^u Rev. xxii. 1. and Ps. xvi. 11.

^x Ps. xvii. 17.

^y Ps. xxvii. 4.

^z Phil. iii. 8.

CCCCXCI. GOD WILL BLESS HIS OWN ORDINANCES.

Numb. vi. 23—27. *On this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.*

THE exercise of benevolence is that which every child of God should cultivate to the uttermost: but Ministers above all should consider it as the distinguishing badge of their office: they are compelled indeed sometimes to "use sharpness;" but whether they rebuke, or whether they exhort, they should be actuated by nothing but a principle of love—Under the law, it was a very important part of the priestly office to bless the people; and God prescribed a form of words to be used by Aaron and his

his sons in the discharge of that duty^a—Nor can any words better express the scope and end of the Christian ministry—If the people be brought to receive abundant communications of grace and peace, and to surrender up themselves entirely to God, a minister can desire nothing more in this world; his labours are well repaid—To promote this blessed end, we shall

I. Explain the words before us

God is here making known his will to Moses, and directing him what orders to give to Aaron and his sons respecting the execution of their priestly office: and there are two duties which he assigns to them;

1. To bless the people in God's name

[This was repeatedly declared to be their office^b; and the constant practice of the apostles shews that it was to be continued under the Christian dispensation—In conformity to their example, the Christian church has universally retained the custom of closing the service with a pastoral benediction—We are not indeed to suppose that ministers can, by any power or authority of their own, convey a blessing^c: they can neither select the persons who shall be blessed, nor fix the time, the manner or the degree in which any shall receive a blessing: but, as stewards of the mysteries of God, they dispense the bread of life, assuredly expecting, that their divine master will give a salutary effect to the ordinances of his own appointment—The direction in the text was confirmed with an express promise, that what they spake on earth should be ratified in heaven: and every faithful minister may take encouragement from it in the discharge of his own duty, and may consider God as saying to him, *Bless thou the congregation, "and I will bless them"*^d.—]

2. To claim the people as God's property

[To "put the name of God upon them" is, to challenge them as "his portion, the lot of his inheritance"^e—This every minister must do in most authoritative terms; and not only claim them as his property, but excite them with all earnestness to surrender up themselves to his service—Nor shall their exhortations be lost; for God will accompany them "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;" and the people,

^a The circumstance of its being a prescribed form of words, did not render it the less efficacious for the people's good.

^b Deut. xxi. 5.

^c Acts iii. 12.

^d To this effect, see Luke x. 5, 6. and John xx. 23.

^e Deut. xxxii. 9.

people, constrained by a divine impulse, shall say "I am the Lord's^f"—Moreover, in their intercessions for the people, they are also to urge this plea with God on their behalf^g—Thus are they to strengthen the connexion between God and them; and to promote that fellowship with God, which is the end, as well as means, of all spiritual communications—]

Having thus explained the general import of the words, we shall

II. Notice some truths contained in them

Amidst the many profitable observations that may be deduced from the text, there are some deserving of peculiar attention

1. The priests under the law, while they blessed the people, typically represented the office of Christ himself

[Christ as our High-Priest performs every part of the priestly office: and it is remarkable that he was in the very act of blessing his disciples, when he was taken up from them into heaven^h—Nor did he then cease, but rather began, as it were, to execute that office, which he has been fulfilling from that time to the present hour—St. Peter, preaching afterwards to a vast concourse of people, declared to them, that to bless them was the great end for which Jesus had ascended, and that he was ready, both as a Prince and a Saviour, to give them repentance and remission of sinsⁱ—Let us then conceive the Lord Jesus standing now in the midst of us, and, with uplifted hands, pronouncing the benediction in the text; is there one amongst us that would not cordially add, "Amen, Amen?"—Nor let this be thought a vain and fanciful idea, since he has promised to be wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, and *that* too, for the very purpose which is here expressed^k—]

2. Though ministers are used as instruments to convey blessings, God himself is the only author and giver of them

[The very words, which the priests were commanded to use, directed the attention of all to God himself; nor could the frequent repetition of Jehovah's name fail to impress the most careless auditor with a conviction, that the blessing could come from God alone—Perhaps too the mystery of the Trinity might

^f Isa. xliv. 3—5.

^g Dan. ix. 17—19 Jer. xiv. 9

^h Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

ⁱ Acts iii. 26. and v. 31.

^k Compare Matt. xviii. 20. with Exod. xx. 24.

might be intimated in these expressions¹; since it is certain that we, under the clearer light of the gospel, are taught to look to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the distinct, though united, authors of all spiritual good^m—We ought indeed to reverence God's ministers as the authorized dispensers of his blessingsⁿ; but we must look for the blessings themselves to God alone; and endeavour to exercise faith on the Father as the fountain of them, on Christ as the channel in which they flow, and on the Holy Spirit as the agent, by whose divine energy they are imparted to the soul^o—At the same time we should remember the obligation which these mercies lay us under to devote ourselves entirely to the service of our gracious and adorable benefactor—]

3. However weak the ordinances be in themselves, yet shall they, if attended in faith, be available for our greatest good

[Nothing can be conceived more simple in itself than a priestly benediction: yet, most undoubtedly, it brought down many blessings upon the people—And can we suppose that God will put less honour upon his ordinances under the gospel dispensation?—Shall not, “*grace, mercy and peace*, flow down from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ,” in answer to the fervent intercessions of his ministers^p?—Though Ministers be but earthen vessels, yet shall they impart unto the people the richest treasures^q—Their word shall not be in vain, but shall accomplish God's good pleasure, and prosper in the thing whereunto he has sent it^r—Let not then the benediction be so often slighted, as though it were only a signal to depart: but while it is delivered with solemnity in the name of God, let every heart be expanded to receive the benefit—Let every one consider *himself in particular* as the person addressed^s; and may the experience of all attest at this time, that God is ready to “grant us above all that we can ask or think.”]

¹ See Bp. Patrick on the place.

^m 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

ⁿ 1 Thess. v. 13.

^o Rev. i. 4, 5.

^p 2 Tim. i. 2. These three words seem to contain all that is implied in the text.

^q 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^r Isai. lv. 10, 11.

^s “*Thee*” was repeated six times, though addressed to the whole congregation, that every person might feel himself as much interested as if he alone were present.

CCCCXCII. THE CHURCH'S SECURITY.

Isai. xxxiii. 20—22. *Look upon Zion the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.*

IN times of national calamity or danger, if we do not immediately see the means of our preservation “our hearts are apt to meditate terror,” and to tremble even for the ark of God. But, though we ought to mourn for the desolations of Zion, and to desire its prosperity, we may safely leave the concerns of the church to him who has founded it on a rock, and who is incessantly engaged for its defence. God may purge his floor, and burn up the chaff; but he will not suffer one grain of pure wheat to be lost. This was the consolatory truth with which the prophet encouraged the godly, while he foretold the miseries which the Jewish nation should endure in the Babylonish captivity: and it is equally applicable to the church of God in all ages. In the words before us are contained

I. The promise which God makes to his church

The church is here compared to Jerusalem and the tabernacle, particularly with a view to its weakness and danger

[Jerusalem was “the city of their solemnities,” whither all the tribes went up at stated seasons to worship God: and the tabernacle was the place where God in a more especial manner revealed himself to his believing people. But though, in these points of view, they were objects of God’s peculiar regard, they were at the same time peculiarly exposed to danger. Jerusalem was encompassed with enemies, who incessantly sought its destruction: and the tabernacle (which on this account is mentioned rather than the temple) was assailed by storms and tempests, in the wilderness, and in Shiloh, for many hundred years.

Thus

Thus the church is that society of godly persons, to which all in every place unite themselves, as soon as ever they are converted to God: and it enjoys exclusively the manifestations of God's love and favour. But it is hated by the world with a deadly hatred: and is often menaced by all the powers of earth and hell.]

But God promises that, notwithstanding its weakness, it shall enjoy quietness and stability

[This was in part fulfilled in the preservation of the Jews at those seasons when all the males were withdrawn from the country, and collected in Jerusalem; none of their enemies ever being permitted to take advantage of their absence, and to attack their land at those times. It was also fulfilled in part, when the temple worship was restored after the Babylonish captivity. But its full accomplishment must be looked for in the apostolic and millennial periods. In the days of the apostles the church was assaulted on every side; but it defied the storms, and stood unmoved in the midst of all its enemies. Hypocrites indeed were cast down; but the church itself stood; "not one of its stakes was moved, nor one of its cords broken." From the days of Christ to the latest period of time may it be said with exultation and triumph, "Look upon our Zion;" though apparently defenceless, it stands secure; though fiercely assailed, it is "a quiet habitation;" though it be as a sycamore, planted in the midst of the sea, it can never be rooted up. What our ears have heard, "our eyes have seen;" and we believe that it shall endure to all generations.]

Nor will this appear improbable, if we consider

II. The means of its accomplishment

The way whereby this promise shall be fulfilled, is set forth

1. Figuratively

[Jerusalem was despised as having no river to protect it, as the church also is on account of its defenceless state. But God promises that "he himself will be to it as a broad and rapid river." But it may be said that if, in one view, a river defends a city, in another view it affords means of attacking it to advantage. But God fully obviates this by saying, that he will be such a river as shall not be navigated by vessels, either great or small: yea, that in protecting his church, he will shew himself to be "*the glorious*," the irresistible "*Jehovah*." Hence that triumphant language of the Psalmist, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her, tell the towers thereof; mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye

may tell it to the generation following; for this God is our God for ever and ever^a.”]

2. Plainly

[The church is under the immediate government of God, as Israel was of old. He is its Judge, its Lawgiver, and its King, who, while he requires the obedience of his people, is pledged by that very relation to afford them his protection. Men, standing in that relation to us, may be overcome; and we may fall together with them: but we are *thrice* reminded, that it is JEHOVAH who is our defence. Whom then can we have to fear, when the honour, the power, the veracity of Jehovah are pledged for our protection? How absurd is it to be alarmed on account of our own weakness, or of the power and malignity of our enemies! The answer which David gave to those who persuaded him to flee, is that which should be our solace in the most discouraging circumstances; “How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain, for the foundations are destroyed, and what can the righteous do:” (Tell me not of the failure of earthly helps; for) “JEHOVAH is in his holy temple, JEHOVAH’S throne is in heaven^b.”]

INFER

1. Whither we are to look for the continued enjoyment of our religious privileges

[It is a mercy to us, that, notwithstanding the enmity of the carnal mind against God is as great as ever, we are preserved by the laws from such persecutions as have been endured by the church in former ages. But men are changing, and laws may change with them. Our safety therefore does not depend on man, but on God: and on him alone must we rely for the peace and prosperity of Zion. Let us trust in him; and “he will be a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us^c.”]

2. Whither we are to look for the peace and stability of our own souls

[We should first take care that God be indeed the Judge, the Lawgiver, and the King whom we unfeignedly obey: for, if we refuse allegiance to him, it will be in vain to expect protection from him. But, if we have the testimony of our conscience that we devote ourselves unfeignedly to him, we may say with David, “I will not fear, though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.” We have an almighty defender, who is interested in the welfare of his subjects, and is moreover pledged to us by promise and

^a Ps. xlviii. 12—14.

^b Ps. xi. 1-4.

^c Zech. ii. 5.

and by oath. Let us then "believe his declarations; so shall we prosper; and believe his promises; so shall we be established:" "we shall be even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but standeth fast for ever^d."]]

^d 2 Chron. xx. 20. Ps. cxxv. 1.

CCCCXCIII. THE LIBERTY WHICH CHRIST GIVES HIS PEOPLE.

John viii. 36. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

WE are exceedingly backward to acknowledge our true state and condition—

In consequence of this we disregard the remedy provided for us—

And deprive ourselves of all the blessings of salvation—

Nevertheless our gracious Saviour endures us with much long-suffering—

And repeats to us the overtures of love and mercy—

Thus he acted towards those who denied their need of freedom^a—

Thus also he addresses himself to us at this time—

It will be profitable for us to consider

I. In what respects we are in bondage

We of this nation may justly boast of our civil freedom—

But

^a He might have shewn that their assertions were false: for their ancestors had been in bondage both in Egypt and in Babylon; and at that very time the whole nation was under the Roman yoke. But our Lord waved the subject of civil liberty, and fixed their attention on a freedom of a very different kind: he shewed them that, though they were the natural descendants of Abraham, they were the servants of sin, and should on that account, like Ishmael, be cast out: while they only, who were the sons of promise, should, like Isaac, abide in the house for ever. (Compare ver. 35. with Gal. iv. 28, 30.) Then, speaking of himself as in a more peculiar manner "*the Son*," and as the seed in whom all nations should be blessed, he again repeated his offer, and encouraged them to accept it.

But we are, like all the rest of our species, under spiritual bondage

1. Under the curse of the law

[The law of God requires perfect and perpetual obedience—

It denounces also a curse against us for every transgression^b—

Its precepts have been violated by us in ten thousand instances^c—

We all therefore, without exception, are obnoxious to its curse—

This may well be considered as a state of wretched bondage^d—]

2. Under the power of sin

[Sin has infected all the members of our body, and the faculties of our soul^e—

What can be conceived to argue a state of slavery so much as this^f?—

This construction is so obvious, that no Christian can doubt respecting it^g—

The church of old confessed her iniquities to have been a sore bondage^h—

And St. Paul himself could find no better image whereby to express the evil and bitterness of his indwelling corruptionsⁱ—]

3. Under the tyranny of Satan

[The influence of Satan over us is often denied and ridiculed—

But the wickedness of men is ascribed in scripture to his agency^k—

And every impenitent sinner is expressly said to be in bondage to him^l—]

4. Under the fear of death

[Many will shew a contempt for death on a field of battle—

But all fear it in its more gradual approaches—

Hence even the bravest are averse to meditate on death and judgment—

This

^b Gal. iii. 10.

^d Gal. iii. 23. Ἐφ' ἐξέμεθα συγκεκλισμένοι strongly expresses the idea of close custody.

^f John viii. 34.

^g Rom. vi. 16.

^h Rom. vii. 14, 23.

^k Eph. ii. 2.

^c Rom. iii. 19, 23.

^e Ps. liii. 3.

^l Isai. xxvi. 13.

ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

This is declared to be a state of wretched bondage^m—]

Surely the Egyptian or Chaldean yoke was light in comparison of this—

Yet all may obtain a release from this yoke

II. How we may be delivered from it

Vain are all attempts to liberate ourselves by our own strength

[We cannot make satisfaction for one single breach of the law—

To do this, were beyond the power of the highest archangel—

Nothing but the blood of Christ can ever atone for sinⁿ—

We cannot by any means renew and sanctify our own hearts—

There is not in us a sufficiency even to think a good thought^o—

Our inclination and ability to do good can come from God alone^p—

It is not in the power of fallen man to resist the assaults of Satan—

There is provided for us armour of an heavenly temper—

And in that alone can any man hope to obtain the victory^q—

We are no less unable of ourselves to disarm death of its sting—

In spite of all our efforts its terrors will appal the stoutest heart—]

But “the Son” of God is able and willing to deliver us

[Christ, as “the Son,” is heir and Lord of all things^r—

The very intent for which he came into the world was to give us liberty^s—

He has paid down his own life as *the price* of our redemption^t—

And therefore may claim us as “his purchased possession”—

He is also commissioned to liberate us *by his power*^u—

All fulness resides in him for this very purpose^v—

Nor will he withhold this blessing from any believing soul^y—]

Unspeakably blessed are they to whom this blessing is vouchsafed

III. What

^m Heb. ii. 15.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^r Heb. i. 2.

^u Luke xi. 20—22.

ⁿ Heb. x. 4, 11, 12, 14.

^p Phil. ii. 13.

^q Isai. lxi. 1.

^s Ps. lxxviii. 18.

^t Eph. vi. 11. 13.

^u 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^v John i. 12.

III. What glorious liberty we may obtain

The liberty which sinners enjoy is merely ideal—

But that which Christ will give, is real and substantial^z—

1. He will free us from all our bondage

[The law shall never be suffered to execute its curse upon us^a—

Christ gave himself up as our surety, on purpose to redeem us from it^b—

It shall have no more power over us than a dead man over the wife that survives him^c—

Sin also shall be cast down from the throne which it has erected within us—

Nor, though it may renew its assaults, shall it never regain its dominion^d—

Christ will never suffer this great end of his death to be frustrated^e—

Satan himself too shall yield to the all-conquering arm of Jesus^f—

And flee from the face of the very meanest of his saints^g—

Nor shall death appear any longer formidable as an enemy^h—

It shall be accounted our gain, and numbered among our treasuresⁱ—]

2. He will introduce us to a state of perfect freedom

[There is “a glorious liberty into which God’s children shall be brought”—

Christ will pour into their hearts a spirit of adoption^k—

And admit them to the most intimate fellowship with himself^l—

The most difficult duties also he will render pleasant to their souls^m—

Nor will he confine his blessings to this present life—

To all eternity shall his redeemed delight themselves in him—

Their capacity of enjoyment shall be inconceivably enlarged—

And every power be freely exercised in its proper functions—]

INFERENCES

^z ὉΥΤΩΣ.

^c Rom. vii. 1—4.

^f Rom. xvi. 20.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 55.

^k Rom. viii. 15.

^a Rom. viii. 1.

^d Rom. vi. 6, 14.

^e Contrast 2 Tim. ii. 26. with James iv. 7.

ⁱ Phil. i. 23. 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^l Rev. iii. 20.

^b Gal. iii. 13

^e Tit. ii. 14.

^m Ps. cxix. 32.

INFERENCES

1. How glorious a Saviour is Jesus Christ!

[There is no bond-slave whom he will not liberate—

He offers too this liberty “without money, and without price”—

He even esteems himself glorified in conferring it upon us—

Let us all admire and adore his goodness—

And by faith apply to him for this perfect freedom—]

2. How just will be the condemnation of those that perish!

[None ever perish but through their own fault—

Their condemnation is the consequence of their obstinate attachment to the bonds in which they are held^a—

O that men would reflect how they will one day condemn themselves!—

Let it be remembered that such offers of mercy will never be made to us in the eternal world—

This is a day of grace; but there will come a day of vengeance^b—

Let every one then lay the blame where it is justly due—

And follow without delay the salutary advice of David^c—]

^a John iii. 19.

^b Isai. lxi. 2.

^c Ps. ii. 12.

CCCCXCIV. A PROMISE OF VICTORY OVER SIN.

Rom. vi. 14. *Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

IT is often made a ground of objection against the gospel, that it is unfavourable to morality. But the very reverse of this is true; for the gospel not only inculcates moral duties as strictly as the law itself, but suggests far stronger motives for the performance of them, and even provides strength whereby we shall be enabled to perform them—A great part of this Epistle was written on purpose to establish the doctrine of justification by faith: and yet here is one whole chapter devoted entirely to the enforcing of universal holiness, and to the removing of all ground for the objection before referred to: and in the text an express declaration is given, as from God himself, that

that sin shall never regain its ascendancy over the hearts of his people—We shall consider

I. The promise here given us

The promise is express, and relates to our deliverance from

1. Sin in general

[Sin of almost every kind has dominion over the unregenerate man—All persons indeed are not addicted to the same lusts; nor do they gratify any one lust in the same degree; but the seeds of all evil are in the hearts of men; and if any person abstain from any particular act of sin, it is rather because he is not strongly tempted to commit it, than because he has not a propensity to commit it—And it is universally found, that the sins, which are peculiar to our age, our constitution, our situation and circumstances in life, do habitually get the dominion over us—But God promises, that it shall not be so with his people; that they shall be delivered from this ignominious bondage; and be enabled to resist the solicitations of appetite and passion—]

2. Every sin of whatever kind

[It is not meant by the Apostle that we shall be absolutely perfect—However desirable the attainment of perfection might be in some points of view, it is not the lot of any in this world: even the most eminent of God's saints have failed, and *that* too, in those very points wherein their eminence consisted: Abraham, Moses, Job, and all others, have proved sufficiently, "that there is not a just man on earth that liveth and sinneth not:" and that, "if any say they have no sin, they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them"—Nor does the Apostle mean that sin, even of a grosser kind, shall never, in any instance, be found in a child of God; for, as "in many things we all offend," so, under the influence of strong temptation, we may act very unsuitably to our holy calling: Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, afford melancholy proofs of such weakness and depravity—But *this* is asserted in the text, and attested by the universal voice of scripture, That no child of God shall ever give himself up to the wilful and habitual indulgence of any one sin whatever: he will watch against sin in the heart as well as in the act; and will pray and fight against it to the latest hour of his life—And the reason why he never *can* sin in the same wilful and habitual way that he did before, is, that he has the seed of God, or a living principle of grace, within him, that constantly impels him to hate and flee from all iniquity^a; and, "because

he

^a 1 John iii. 9.

he is Christ's, he cannot but daily crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts"—

The limiting of this promise to believers leads us to shew

II. Its connexion with our new-covenant state

Believers are "no longer under the law but under grace"

[Once they were, like others, under a covenant, which cursed them for disobedience, but afforded them no hope of pardon for past offences, nor any means of resisting sin in future—But now they have embraced that better covenant, the covenant of grace, wherein God offers them a full remission of all their former sins, and assures them that he himself will give them grace sufficient in every time of need—On this promise they rely, knowing by bitter experience that they have not in themselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, and that God alone can give them either to will or to do any good thing—]

It is on this very account that God guarantees to them, if we may so speak, the attainment of universal holiness

[By embracing God's covenant, they become his children, members of his family, and heirs of his glory. Now God's honour is concerned that his own children shall not be left in bondage to the devil: besides, after having made them heirs of his glory, he never will leave them under the power of a corrupt nature; because that would incapacitate them for the fruition of his glory, even if they were admitted to a participation of it: an unholy nature would utterly unfit them for the services and enjoyments of heaven—But there is yet another reason why God fulfils this promise to them; God has made it a part of his covenant, that he will cleanse his people from all their filthiness and all their idols^b; and pledged his word that he will not only forgive all their sins, but cleanse them from all unrighteousness^c—Now this promise they rest upon, and plead as their only hope: and God, who cannot lie, fulfils it to them in the time and manner that he judges most conducive to his own glory—]

To IMPROVE this subject, let us observe that

1. None can have any interest in the covenant of grace who do not experience deliverance from sin

[Though no man is admitted into the covenant of grace on account of any holiness that there is in him, yet none are left

^b Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^c 1 John i. 9.

left unholy after that they have been admitted into it—"That very grace of God which bringeth us salvation, teaches us to deny every species and degree of ungodliness"^d—To fail in this would be to defeat a principal end of Christ's death^e—If there be any *allowed* sin in us, we deceive ourselves, and our religion is vain^f—

2. None, however, need to despair on account of the inveteracy of their lusts

[Were it required of us to purify our hearts by any exertions of our own, we might well despair—But holiness is not only enjoined; it is promised; it is promised by him, who is able also to perform—Let none then say, My wound is irremediable; for with God all things are possible: and *we*, however weak in ourselves, shall be "able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us"—If we had been led captive hitherto by ten thousand lusts, no sin whatever should have dominion over us in future, provided only we took refuge in the covenant of grace—]

3. Nevertheless, this promise does not supersede our prayer and watchfulness

[God's promises are free; "yet will he be enquired of by us before he will perform them"—Nor are we at liberty to run into temptation because he has promised to keep us; for that would be to tempt him: but, in the exercise of prayer and watchfulness, he will keep us—If Paul, that chosen vessel, was obliged to keep his body under, and to bring it into subjection, lest he himself should be a cast-away, surely the same care and diligence are necessary on our part—It is our comfort however, that, while we run, "we do not run as uncertainty;" and while "we fight, it is not as one who only beats the air^g:" for victory is secured for us, and God himself "will bruise Satan under our feet," and preserve us blameless to his heavenly kingdom—]

^d Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^f James i. 26.

^e Ib. ver. 14.

^g 1 Cor. ix. 26.

CCCCXCV. VICTORY OVER SATAN.

Rom. xvi. 20. *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*

IN order to get forward in our christian course, we must unite a strenuous exertion of our own powers with

an humble dependence on the divine aid—We cannot work without God ; and God will not work without us : but if we look to him for assistance, and yet labour in a diligent and prudent way, he will succour us with his almighty power, and “perfect that which concerneth us” —St. Paul, cautioning the Christians at Rome against those who caused divisions and offences, exhorts them to cultivate that wisdom of the serpent and that harmlessness of the dove, which would serve to counteract their efforts : yet for their final success he directs their eyes to God, through whose co-operation alone they could maintain their integrity, and in whose strength they should eventually overcome—In discoursing on his words, we shall consider

I. The promise which God has here given to the church

Satan is an active and powerful adversary to God’s people

[His exertions are directed against *the church at large*, and against *every individual* member of it—Indefatigable are his exertions in causing dissensions and divisions among the various societies of Christians, embittering them one against another, or sowing discord among themselves—And though these feuds may be considered as arising from the turbulence and pride of men, yet must they also be referred to Satan as their original author ; since it is he who instigates the professors of religion, as well as others, to the commission of sin^a—Much of carnal contention prevailed in the church of Corinth ; and *that* the apostle repeatedly ascribes to Satan : he calls the authors of it “*his ministers*,” and puts the members of that church on their guard, “lest the serpent, who beguiled Eve through his subtlety, should corrupt them from the simplicity of Christ^b”—He tells them how ready Satan was to take advantage of them in the matter of the incestuous man^c ; and in general, whatever evils occur in the church, he traces them up to Satan’s temptations as their proper source^d—Nor is there any individual among the Lord’s people, whom that wicked one does not endeavour to harass and destroy—It was he who stirred up David to number the people^e : it was he who influenced Peter to deny his Lord with oaths and curses^f : and, who can tell to what straits he would have reduced the Apostle Paul by his buffetings, if that holy man had

^a This is intimated in the context. Compare ver. 17, 20.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 3, 15.

^c 2 Cor. ii. 11.

^d 1 Thess. iii. 5.

^e 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

^f Luke xxii. 31.

had not obtained timely succour from his Lord^g? Indeed, if he had the effrontery and the malice to assault even our Lord himself, and if he repeatedly reduced even him to such a state as that he needed to be strengthened by an angel from heaven^h, well may we suppose that he will not suffer *us* to pass unmolested and unassailed—]

But God has promised to “bruise him under our feet”

[God is “the God of peace” not merely as being reconciled to us through the death of his Son, but as delighting in the social order and the personal happiness of his people—In this view he enters the lists against our great adversary, and undertakes to subdue him for us—Already has he given us an earnest of our triumph in enabling his Son to “bruise that serpent’s head” upon the crossⁱ; and it is a very short time that that wicked one shall retain the present remnant of his power—Though permitted to fight against us, his rage is overruled for the benefit of the saints and the glory of God: and, as when he possessed the bodies of men, his malice always terminated in his own confusion, so, in every instance, shall he be foiled in his endeavours to destroy the souls that belong to Christ—He is even now a vanquished enemy^k; and soon shall the very weakest believer trample on him, as Joshua trampled on the necks of the kings of Canaan^l—]

If we desire this mercy at the hands of God, we shall be glad to know

II. The way in which we may expect him to accomplish it

However various his dealings may be with different persons in some minute particulars, there are general rules which he will observe towards all

1. He will increase the triumphs of his people over Satan in this world

[Satan gains great advantage over young Christians by means of their unsubdued corruptions, and their inexperience in the spiritual warfare—To defeat his malignant efforts, God increases the strength of his people, and gives them a deeper insight into the devices of their enemy—He clothes them with divine armour, and teaches them how to use the sword of the Spirit, and the shield of faith^m—By exercise he renders them expert soldiers, and enables them to “war a good warfare”—Instead of exposing themselves needlessly to danger, they are now taught to “watch and be sober:” instead of indulging
a vain

^g 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

^h Gen. iii. 15. and Col. ii. 15.

ⁱ Josh. x. 24.

^h Mat. iv. 11. and Luke xxii. 43.

^k John xii. 31.

^m Eph. vi. 13—17.

a vain conceit of their own purity and strength, they are led to suspect the treachery of their own hearts, and to depend more simply on the grace of Christ—Thus they learn to fight a good fight; and, though sometimes wounded by his fiery darts, they “resist their enemy till he flees from themⁿ”—]

2. He will give them a complete and everlasting victory over him in the world to come

[While they are in the flesh Satan will renew his assaults upon them—There is no place so sacred, but he will intrude into it; nor any person so holy, but he will seek to destroy him—When the sons of Job were assembled before the Lord, Satan came also in the midst of them^o; and when Joshua stood in the divine presence, the same wicked fiend stood at his right hand to resist him^p; nor will he suspend his attacks even when we are bowing our knees at the throne of grace, or assembled around the table of the Lord—But into heaven he can never enter: there we shall be lodged in perfect safety: thence we may deride his impotent attempts, and rejoice over him as a captive foe—

But it may be said, ‘That we rather escape from him, than triumph over him; for that he still continues master of the field—We answer, No: for he shall in due time be dragged in chains of darkness into our very presence; and, as assessors with Christ in judgment, we shall judge him and all his angels^q. We shall confirm the sentence passed upon him; and add our hearty Amen to the curse that dooms him to eternal fire—]

INFER

1. How great and precious are the promises of God!

[To those who know nothing of the Christian warfare, this promise will afford but little satisfaction: but to those who have been long conflicting with the powers of darkness, it will be a ground of inexpressible joy and thankfulness. Such an assurance of victory will revive their drooping spirits, and reanimate them for the combat: nor will they be averse to maintain the contest as long as God shall see fit to try their faith and patience; having this word, they want no more: “they know in whom they have believed;” and that, though now their hands hang down and their hearts are faint, they shall soon make heaven itself to echo with their shouts of victory—O that all might have an interest in this promise, and experience its completion in the realms of bliss!—]

2. How

^a James iv. 7.

^p Zech. iii. 1.

^o Job ii. 1.

^q 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3.

2. How much are we concerned to obtain peace with God!

[It is to those only who are reconciled to God that the promise in the text is made—If we have never yet obtained mercy at his hands through the blood of Jesus, we shall in vain hope to conquer this cruel adversary—God, so far from interposing for us, gives us into his hands; and, instead of fighting for us as a friend, is himself our enemy—Miserable indeed shall we then be; for, if we cannot contend with Satan, how shall we with Jehovah? “Will our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us, or can we thunder with a voice like his?”—Let us then seek reconciliation with him; so shall he be a God of peace to us, and secure us victory in the day of battle—]

CCCCXCVI. CHRIST THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE AND LIGHT.

Ps. xxxvi. 9. *With thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light shall we see light.*

BY a sober consideration of scripture metaphors we obtain a more full and comprehensive knowledge of divine truth, than could easily be obtained from the most laboured discussions. Besides, the ideas suggested by them strike the mind so forcibly, that they cannot fail of making a deep and lasting impression. Let us but notice the rich variety of figures whereby the Deity is set forth in the passage before us, and we shall be filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of his goodness. The Psalmist, illustrating the loving-kindness of his God, represents him first under the image of a hen gathering her chickens; then as an opulent host feasting his guests with the richest dainties; and then, in a beautiful climax, he compares him to the sun.

It is this last metaphor, to which we would draw your attention at this time: and in discoursing upon it, we observe

I. Christ is an inexhaustible source of spiritual blessings

Christ may be considered as peculiarly referred to in the metaphor before us

[It is in Christ only that the perfections mentioned in the foregoing

foregoing verses are combined^a. It is in him only that God unites justice with mercy^b, or adheres, in faithfulness to his covenant engagements^c—Besides, it is in this view that Christ is set forth throughout all the sacred oracles, by prophets^d, by apostles^e, and more especially by himself^f— — — We may well therefore apply to him the comparison before us: and we shall find it admirably descriptive of his real character.]

He is to the spiritual, what the sun is to the material, world

[The sun is “the fountain of light and life” to this lower world^g. When that is withdrawn, the earth is left in darkness, the vegetable world decays, and myriads of animals are secluded in a state of torpor. But when it returns in its brightness, it both dispels the darkness, and restores to nature her suspended powers — — —

Thus, where Christ has not shined, universal darkness and death prevail. But when he arises on the soul, he enlightens it, and infuses into it a principle of life^h, whereby its faculties are rendered capable of spiritual exertions: and it is rendered “fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness to God’s praise and glory” — — —]

We have abundant encouragement to seek his influence, since

II. They who live in communion with him shall surely participate his blessings

As the sun shines in vain to him who secludes himself in a dungeon, so we must come forth to “Christ’s light, if we would behold his light.” *Then*

1. Our minds shall be enlightened with divine *knowledge*

[By the light of the sun we behold the objects around us; and by the light of Christ we discern the things belonging to our peace. In his face all the glory of the Godhead shinesⁱ, insomuch that he who has seen him, has seen the Father also^k. Nor is there any one subject relating to salvation which does not receive its clearest illustration from him—]

2. Our

^a Ver. 5, 6.

^b Rom. iii. 26.

^c 2 Cor. i. 20.

^d Isai. lx. 1. Mal. iv. 2.

^e John i. 4, 9. Luke ii. 32. 2 Pet. i. 19.

^f John viii. 12. and xii. 46.

^g There is no such confusion of metaphors in the text, as all the Commentators imagine. The Psalmist speaks not of a fountain, but of the sun only.

^h Eph. ii. 1.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^k John xiv. 9.

2. Our souls shall be enriched with heavenly *comfort*

[The consolation we derive from other sources is light and unsubstantial: and the things which promise us most happiness, often prove only a fleeting meteor, or a delusive vapour. But a sight of Christ, of his fulness, his suitableness, his all-sufficiency, affords a ground of comfort, firm as the rocks, and lasting as eternity^k—]

3. Our hearts shall be “renewed in righteousness and true *holiness*”

[Nothing produces such effects as a sight of Christ. We may hear the law proclaimed in all its terrors, and yet experience no abiding change. But a view of Christ as crucified for us, will break the most obdurate heart^l; will raise the desponding to a lively hope^m; will inspire the selfish with unbounded loveⁿ; and fill the mourner with unutterable joy^o: it will change a sinful man into the very image of his God and Saviour^p.]

4. The light of *glory* itself shall also be enjoyed by us

[Christ is the one source of happiness to all the hosts of heaven^q. To behold his beauty, to taste his love, to celebrate his praises, this is their employment, this their supreme felicity^r. Such too is the occupation, such the happiness of every true believer: he has an earnest of heaven in his soul; and this earnest is a pledge that, in due season, he shall receive the consummation of all his wishes in the immediate vision of his Saviour's glory, and the everlasting fruition of his love^s—]

INFER

1. How great is the folly of seeking happiness in the creature!

[Created things, in comparison of Christ, are no more than a broken cistern to a fountain^t, or, at best, than a star, that shines only as it reflects the lustre of the sun. Let us then seek our happiness in Christ, and in him alone. In him, as in the sun, there is a fulness and a sufficiency for all^u. And to him all may have access, if they will not obstinately immure themselves in impenitence and unbelief^v. Let us not then “kindle sparks for ourselves, or walk in the light of our own

^k 2 Cor. i. 5.

^l Zech. xii. 10.

^m 1 Pet. i. 3.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 16.

^o 1 Pet. i. 8.

^p 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^q Rev. xxi. 23.

^r Rev. v. 8—13.

^s Eph. i. 13, 14. &

^t Jer. ii. 13.

^u Col. i. 19.

1 John iii. 2.

^v Eph. v. 14.

own fires^y,” but “come forth to his light,” and “walk in it” to the latest hour of our lives^z.]

2. How unspeakable is the blessedness of knowing Christ!

[If we could conceive ourselves in a region where a winter's midnight was perpetuated; and then be transported in idea to a climate, where noontide light, and vernal beauty, were uninterruptedly enjoyed, we might have some faint image of the change effected by the knowledge of Christ^a. Truly the Christian is in Goshen^b: or if, for a little moment he be in darkness, there ariseth up a light unto him in the midst of it^c, and his darkness becomes as noon-day^d. And, in a little time “his sun shall no more go down; but his Lord shall be unto him an everlasting light, and his God his glory^e.” O that this may be the constant pursuit, and the happy attainment of us all!]

^y Isai. l. 11.

^z John xii. 35, 36.

^a 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^b Exod. ix. 26. and x. 22, 23.

^c Ps. cxii. 4.

^d Isai. lviii. 10.

^e Isai. lx. 19, 20.

CCCCXCVII. THE END FOR WHICH GOD SENT HIS SON.

John iii. 17. *God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*

AN expectation generally prevailed among the Jews that their Messiah would interpose on behalf of their nation alone, and bring all other kingdoms into subjection to them—Our Lord took frequent occasions to rectify this mistake, and to shew that he was to be the Saviour, not of one people only, but of the whole world—In this discourse with Nicodemus, he introduces this important subject in such a way as to inform his mind, without shocking his prejudices—Having explained to him the nature and necessity of regeneration, and shewn him, by reference to a well-known type, the way of salvation, he declares that the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews, were to participate the benefits of his coming; and that God, in sending him into the world, had as much respect to the welfare of the benighted heathens as of his chosen and peculiar people—To elucidate the words before us, we shall shew

I. That,

I. That, supposing God to send his Son into the world, it was far more probable that he should send him to condemn the world than to save it

That God should ever send his Son into the world at all is such a mystery as must for ever fill the whole universe with amazement—But supposing him to make known his determination to do so, the probability certainly was that it should be for our destruction rather than our salvation—

1. Consider what was the state of the world at the time he did send his Son

[Had he seen the greater part of mankind lamenting their fall, wishing earnestly that some way could be devised for their recovery, and struggling, but with unsuccessful efforts, to get free from sin, we might have supposed that God would exercise mercy towards us, and open a way for our restoration through the sacrifice of his Son—But when the whole mass of mankind were up in arms against him, when not one of the whole human race (except a few whose hearts he himself had touched) desired reconciliation with him; yea, when all were utterly averse from it, and desired nothing so much as to live in sin with impunity, and wished for no better heaven than the unrestrained indulgence of their lusts; for what end could God send his Son, but to execute upon them the vengeance they deserved?—]

2. Consider for what end God had before sent messengers from heaven

[God had on some remarkable occasions commissioned angels to perform his will: and though, when sent to some highly-favoured individuals, they were messengers of mercy, yet, when sent to the avowed enemies of God, they were, for the most part, ministers of wrath to execute the most signal vengeance—Who can contemplate Sodom and the cities of the plain; who can call to mind the Egyptian first-born; who can survey one hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers lying dead in the Assyrian camp; and not tremble at the thought of a messenger being sent from heaven?—Suppose then we should hear that God was about to send his own Son from heaven to execute his will with respect to the whole world, and especially such a world as this; what would any one imagine, but that, as it was not a particular city or nation that God was about to punish, but a whole world, he had determined to employ his own Son; and that the judgments he was about to inflict, would be great in proportion to the power and dignity of the executioner?—As for conceiving the idea that he

should send his Son to *save* the world, it would not so much as enter into the mind of any created being—]

3. Consider that God certainly foreknew the way in which the world would treat his Son

[If God had not certainly foreknown all future events, he might perhaps have reasoned thus: “I have sent to that wretched world my servants the prophets, and instead of attending to them they have persecuted them even unto death: but if I should send them my Son, surely they would reverence HIM; they would not dare to lift up a finger against him; they would be so struck with wonder at my condescension and love, that they would return instantly to their allegiance. Rather therefore than they should perish, I will send them my Son to save them.” But God knew that instead of reverencing his Son, they would no sooner see him, than they would exclaim, “This is the heir; come let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours”—He knew full well that, however manifest the credentials of his Son, and however indisputable the evidences of his divine mission, they would not believe in him, but would cast him out of the vineyard and slay him. What then must we suppose God would say on such an occasion? Surely he would speak to this effect: “If I could hope that they would reverence my Son, I would overlook all the injuries done to my prophets, and would even send my Son for their salvation: but I know they would all thirst for his blood; they would pluck *me* from my throne if they were able; and, if I should put my Son into their power, they would load him with all manner of indignities, and put him to the most ignominious death: shall I then, foreseeing these things as I do, put him into their power? No: *that* were unworthy of my majesty, and degrading to my Son. I may possibly send my Son; but, if I do, it shall not be to save the world, but to condemn them according to their desert”—]

These considerations fully evince the improbability that God should ever use the mediation of his Son in a way of mercy towards us—Yet we must add

II. That, notwithstanding it was so improbable, God did really send his Son, not to condemn, but to save the world

The frequency with which we hear of this stupendous mystery, prevents the surprise which the declaration of it must otherwise excite—But, whatever the ignorance of scoffers, and the pride of infidels may suggest, be it known to all, that God did send his Son

1. To expiate sin

[God knew that it was impossible for man to atone for sin———Yet it was also impossible that sin could be forgiven, unless an adequate atonement were offered to the divine Majesty———What was to be done? The angels, even if they were willing, were not able to undertake our cause—There was but one, even in heaven, that was competent to the mighty task of appeasing incensed Majesty, and of satisfying offended justice: there was none but Jesus, the best-beloved of the Father, who from eternity had lain in his bosom—And would the Father give HIM? Yes; “He spared not his own Son, but delivered HIM up for us all”—“He prepared him a body,” and “sent him to be a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world”———What amazing love! Eternity will not suffice to explore and celebrate this stupendous mystery—]

2. To work out a righteousness for us

[Mankind were as unable to provide for themselves a righteousness wherein they might stand before God, as they were to make an atonement for their past offences———But, behold, God would not leave us destitute; he gave his Son to fulfil the law which we had broken, and, “to bring in an everlasting righteousness,” “which should be unto all and upon all them that believe”———The name given him on this very account is, “The Lord our Righteousness”—Clothed in his unspotted robe, the vilest of returning prodigals may stand perfect and complete in the presence of their God———Every one of them may say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength”——]

3. To exalt us to glory

[It was not only to begin, but to carry on and perfect our salvation, that the Father sent his Son into the world—He is to be both “the author and the finisher of our faith”———Having delivered our souls from the guilt of sin, and from the powers of darkness, he will raise up our bodies also from the grave, and exalt us to sit upon his throne for evermore———Never will he cease from his work, till he has fully and finally accomplished it on behalf of his people———How wonderful is this! Surely it almost exceeds belief: that, instead of condemning the world, God should send his Son to save it, to save it by laying down his own life a ransom for us, and by managing all the concerns of every one of his elect till he shall have finally established them in the possession of their heavenly inheritance! Hear, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth: yea, let all the choirs of heaven make it the everlasting subject of their highest praises———]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are regardless of their own salvation

[Alas! how little effect do the wonders of redemption produce on the world at large!—But what an aggravation of their guilt will it be to have poured contempt upon the Son of God!—Surely God's greatest mercy will prove their heaviest curse—The very devils will have more to say on their own behalf than they—Satan himself may say, "I never had salvation offered me; I never sinned against *redeeming* love." But careless sinners are daily "trampling under foot the Son of God," who lived and died to save them—O lay this to heart, and seek an interest in him who alone can deliver you from the wrath to come—]

2. Those who are ready to doubt whether they ever can be saved

[Many such there are in the church of Christ———But did God send his Son to execute a work which he was not able to perform? or has Jesus discovered any backwardness to fulfil his engagements?———Let not any be afraid: for if a whole world is to be saved by him, he cannot but have a sufficiency to supply all our wants, provided we commit ourselves entirely to him———]

3. Those who are enjoying salvation

[While you are reaping the blessed fruits of the Father's love, surely you will often say, What shall I render to the Lord? If he gave up his dear Son for my salvation, shall not I give up a bosom lust for his glory?———Think how much you are indebted to him; and endeavour to glorify him with your body and your spirit which are his—]

CCCCXCVIII. THE FULNESS OF CHRIST.

Col. i. 19. *It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.*

IT is scarcely possible to read with attention the epistles of St. Paul, and not to be struck with the energetic manner in which he expatiates on the glory and excellency of Christ, not merely when he professedly treats of his work and offices, but oftentimes when he only incidentally, as it were, makes mention of his name. We notice this particularly in the passage before us, where he puts forth
all

all the powers of language to exalt his character to the uttermost.

Confining our attention to the expression in the text, we shall shew

I. What is that fulness which resides in Christ

There is in him

1. An essential fulness

[Christ, though apparently a mere man, was the first cause and last end of all things, even "God over all, blessed for ever^a." His people are said to be "filled with all the fulness of God^b;" but "in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead^c." Men are made to enjoy all the gifts and graces of God's Spirit; and, in this sense, are "partakers of the divine nature^d;" but Christ was really "God manifest in the flesh^e." The Godhead dwelt in him, not symbolically as in the temple^f, or spiritually as in us^g, but truly, "bodily^h," substantially. The fulness of the Godhead was essentially his from all eternity; nor was he any more dependent on the Father than the Father was on him; but his assumption of our nature was the result of the Father's counsels, and the fruit of the Father's loveⁱ.]

2. A communicative fulness

[He has *a fulness of merit to justify the most ungodly*. Christ, by his obedience unto death, perfected whatever was necessary for the restoring of us to the divine favour. His atonement was satisfactory; his righteousness was complete. Under the Mosaic law, there were many sins for which no sacrifice was provided: but the one sacrifice of Christ was all-sufficient; and "*all* who believe in him, are justified from *all* things^k;" his "righteousness shall be unto them, and upon them all^l;" and, however great their iniquities have been, they shall be without spot or blemish in the sight of God^m.]

He has also *a fulness of grace to sanctify the most polluted*. With him was "the residue of the Spiritⁿ." The oil that was poured out upon him was to descend to the meanest of his members^o. "He was constituted head over the church, that he might fill all things^p:" and he received gifts on purpose

^a Ver. 16. with Rom. ix. 5.

^b Eph. iii. 19.

^c Col. ii. 9. in this place it is not Θεῷ but Θεότητος.

^d 2 Pet. i. 4. ^e 1 Tim. iii. 16. John i. 1, 14.

^f Ps. lxxx. 1. ^g 2 Cor. vi. 16. ^h σωματικῶς, Col. ii. 9.

ⁱ John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10. ^k Acts xiii. 39.

^l Rom. iii. 22. ^m Eph. v. 27. ⁿ Mal. ii. 15.

^o Ps. cxxxiii. 2. ^p Eph. i. 22, 23, and iv. 10.

purpose that he might bestow them on the rebellious^a. His grace is still sufficient to support us in all temptation^r, and to sanctify us throughout in body, soul, and spirit^s. No lusts are so inveterate as eventually to withstand its influence^t; nor is any heart so vile but it shall be “purged by him from all its filthiness, and from all its idols^u.”]

It will not be presumptuous, or unprofitable, if we enquire

II. Why it pleased the Father that all fulness should reside in Christ

Many reasons might be mentioned; but the principal of them may be comprehended under the two following

1. For the honour of his own Son

[As Jesus was to become a sacrifice for us, it was meet that he should have all the honour of our salvation. Accordingly we are told, that God exalted him on purpose that at his name every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess him to be the sovereign Lord of all^x. By this appointment of Christ to be the head of vital influence to the church, all are necessitated to come to him, and to “receive out of his fulness^y,” and to live by faith upon him from day to day^z. All are necessitated to depend on him for a constant communication of grace and peace, as much as to depend on the sun for the periodical returns of light and heat. Hence, both on earth and in heaven^a, all are constrained to give him all the glory of their salvation. No one can ascribe any thing to his own goodness; seeing that all are cleansed in the blood of Christ, and arrayed in the spotless robe of his righteousness^b: nor can any glory in his own strength; since no one has any sufficiency in himself even to think a good thought^c; and much less to renew his own soul. The merit that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies, are all of him: “he is ALL, and IN ALL^d,” and he is made ALL unto us, *on purpose* that all may be compelled to glory in him alone^e.]

2. For the security of our souls

[There never was but one man to whom a stock was entrusted; and he soon (if we may so speak) became a bankrupt. And if we had grace committed to us in such a manner as to be left wholly to ourselves for the improvement of it, we should lose it again, as he did. For our more abundant

^a Ps. lxxviii. 18.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^e 1 Thess. v. 23.

^t Luke viii. 2.

^u Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^x Phil. ii. 9—11.

^y John i. 16.

^z Gal. ii. 20.

^a Gal. vi. 14. Rev. v. 12, 13.

^b Isai. lxi. 10.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^d Col. iii. 11.

^e 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

abundant security therefore the Father treasured up all fulness in his Son; that, however our broken cisterns might fail, there might be an inexhaustible fountain secured to us. In this view we are reminded, that "God has laid help upon One that is mighty^f;" and that "because he liveth we shall live also^g."

We are further told by the Apostle, that this appointment of Christ to be our head, with the consequent necessity of living by faith on him, and of receiving out of his fulness, was ordained of God on purpose that the promises might be finally secured to all the seed^h; and he himself declares, that this very constitution of things was the one ground of his assurance respecting the salvation of his soul: "Our life is hid with Christ in God: and (therefore) when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in gloryⁱ."

This passage, duly considered, **shews us clearly**

1. The excellency of faith

[How can we receive any thing from Christ except by faith? No other method can be conceived whereby we can obtain any thing at his hands. But faith interests us in all that he has done and suffered for us, and in all that he has received to communicate unto us. It is that whereby alone we can "draw water out of the wells of salvation:" it is that, in the exercise of which we may be "filled with all the fulness of God." Let all of us then cultivate this precious grace, and, as the best means of receiving every other blessing, let us pray with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith."]

2. The evil of self-righteousness

[Self-righteousness is a practical denial of the assertion in our text. It refuses to Christ the honour put upon him by the Father, and ascribes to *self* that which belongs to him alone. And shall it be thought a small evil to rob Christ of his glory? Shall it appear a light matter to thwart the eternal counsels of the Father, and to set ourselves in direct opposition to his blessed will? Let none henceforth suppose, that the trusting in our own wisdom, righteousness, or strength, is a venial offence: for surely God will be jealous for his own honour, and the honour of his dear Son; and will look with scorn on every proud Pharisee, while he will receive with boundless compassion the vilest of repenting publicans.]

3. The true nature of evangelical piety

[Vital godliness, especially under the Christian dispensation, consists in a conformity of mind to the revealed will of our

^f Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^h Rom. iv. 16.

^g John xiv. 19.

ⁱ Col. iii. 3, 4.

our heavenly Father. Now in no respect is that will more sacred than in reference to the glory designed for Christ; nor is there any thing wherein a conformity to it is more characteristic of true and eminent piety. In one word then, the true Christian is well pleased that all fulness should dwell in Christ: if he might have some fulness in himself, he would rather have it in Christ, that he might receive all from him. Every part of salvation is the more endeared to him, on account of its coming through that channel: and it is his supreme felicity in this world, as it will be also in the world to come, to owe every thing to that adorable Saviour, and to glorify him in all, and for all.

Beloved, let this be your daily experience. Let it be your delight to live upon Christ's fulness; and it shall be his delight to communicate to you all spiritual and eternal blessings.]

CCCCXCIX. THE SUITABLENESS OF CHRIST TO THE BELIEVER'S NECESSITIES.

1 Cor. i. 30. *Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

MAN is ever ready to boast and to glory before God—But God has decreed that no flesh should glory in his presence—And has so constituted his gospel as utterly to destroy all ground of glorying in ourselves—The persons, to whom he imparts the blessings of salvation, are, not the great and learned, but the poor and illiterate^a—Nor have *they* any reason to value themselves on this distinguished favour—All which they have is in and from Christ—And to Christ alone must all the glory of their salvation for ever be ascribed—For our humiliation and encouragement we shall enquire

I. Whence our need of Christ arises?

As the very name of a physician conveys to us an idea of sickness, so the names and offices of Christ necessarily impress our minds with the thought, that there is some want in us which he is commissioned to supply—We may therefore

^a Ver. 26—29.

therefore learn our need of him from those very terms, which declare what God has sent him to impart unto us—
We are

Ignorant

[It is not the poor and illiterate only that are ignorant, but also the great and learned—Every man by nature, however conversant he may be with *the letter* of scripture, is immersed in spiritual darkness—How ignorant are men *of themselves*, when they think that they have good hearts! Would any person who knew any thing of his own heart, so grossly contradict the record of God concerning him^b?—How ignorant are they of the evil *of sin*, when they can trifle with it as light and venial! Would any person form such judgment respecting *any sin*, who knew or considered what sin had done, what misery it has brought on angels, and men, yea and upon the Son of God himself?—How ignorant are they *of Christ*, when they can pass days and weeks without any admiring thoughts of his goodness, and devout acknowledgments of their obligations to him?—Though, like the Laodiceans, they may not know it, they are really “*blind*”^c.—Hence then arises our need of Christ to instruct us—We may read the Bible, and never understand it aright for want of a spiritual discernment^d—Neither men nor angels can enlighten our benighted minds—None can teach us effectually but he who created light in the material world—]

Guilty

[All, notwithstanding any difference in their outward conduct, are guilty in the sight of God—All have been disobedient to God’s law, regardless, in a very great degree, of his gospel, and opposers of the motions of his Holy Spirit—Who amongst us has not paid more attention to the body than the soul, and to time than eternity?—“Every mouth then must be stopped, and all the world must become guilty before God”—Hence therefore in another view arises our need of Christ—We never can discharge the debt we owe—Even if we should never increase it by future transgression, we could never pay one farthing of that, which has been incurred—We must therefore have a surety, or be carried to prison—But not all the angels in heaven could pay the penalty due to one sin—We therefore need one who is a sufficient “propitiation for the sins of the whole world”—]

Polluted

^b Jer. xvii. 9.

^c Rev. iii. 17.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 14. However plainly the figures be marked on a dial, we cannot discern the hour unless the sun shine; so neither can we discern the spiritual truths of the gospel, unless a light from heaven accompany the use of the written word.

Polluted

[As fallen creatures “we are all become filthy and abominable”—The chaste and sober are as truly, if not as deeply, polluted in their hearts as the more profligate and abandoned—Let any one trace the workings of pride, envy, hatred, and uncharitableness; of unbelief, impatience, and discontent; of impurity, sloth, and sensuality of every kind; and he will find reason enough to cry, “Behold I am vile”—If all have not run to the same excess of riot, none have any right to cast a stone at others—Here then again do we see our need of Christ to cleanse us—As well might an Ethiopian change his skin, or a leopard his spots, as we purify ourselves by any power of our own—If “we can do nothing of ourselves,” much less can we create in ourselves a new heart and a right spirit—This must be the work of Christ alone—He only who created the world can create our souls anew—]

Enslaved

[All are not led captive to the same sins—But there is some sin that more easily besets every person—And by *that* will he be led captive—The God of this world holds us in subjection as his vassals—And impels us to unnumbered acts of disobedience^f—On this account therefore we stand in need of Christ—None but Christ is stronger than the strong man armed^g—All endeavours of our own are easily baffled, and our strongest resolutions are as tow before the fire—It is in Christ alone that we have grace sufficient to resist our adversary—Nor can we ever be made truly free, till we be freed by the Son of God himself^h—]

In such a deplorable state it surely becomes us to enquire

II. What Christ is to the believing soul

Astonishing is the suitableness which there is in Christ to his people's necessities—He will be to every one who believes in him

Wisdom

[He will instruct the darkest and most ignorant mind—By his Spirit he will “shine into our hearts”—He will open our understandings as he did the understandings of his own disciples—He will give a spiritual discernment of spiritual truths—And such a comprehension of the things of God, as no strength of intellect, no human teaching, can ever enable us to attain—For this end he counsels us to apply to him for eye-salve that we may seeⁱ—And on this account the true knowledge

^e Jer. xiii. 23.

^h John viii. 36.

^f Eph. ii. 2.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 18.

^g Luke xi. 21, 22.

knowledge of him is ascribed to his operation upon our minds^k—Shall we not then go and learn of him who is such a meek, lowly, and effectual teacher?—]

Righteousness

[Jesus came on purpose to make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness^l—By his obedience unto death he wrought out a perfect righteousness, which shall be unto all and upon all who believe^m—In him the most guilty sinner may be accepted—In him we shall be completeⁿ—Nor will God behold a spot or blemish on that soul which is clothed with his unspotted robe^o—We are bidden to “call him, The Lord our Righteousness,” and to say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength”—Let none of us then go about to establish a righteousness of our own, but buy of him that white raiment which alone can cover our naked souls^p—]

Sanctification

[The Holy Ghost is properly our sanctifier—But it is by him that Christ works—Christ will send him into our hearts, to form us after the divine image—The corrupt principle within us shall be overcome by the power and grace of Christ—Through his mighty working we shall be made new creatures—“Nor shall sin ever more have dominion over us”—None are so habituated to sin but his grace shall be effectual in them—He will take away the heart of stone, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness^q—Let none therefore despond as though his corruptions could not be mortified—Before the power of Zerubbabel the mountain shall become a plain^r—And Israel, though a worm, shall thresh the mountains as chaff^s—]

Redemption

[The Lord Jesus will not leave his work incomplete—He will deliver his people from their great enemy, and bruise Satan under their feet—They shall triumph even over death their last enemy—Nor shall the grave be able to retain them in its bonds—Even here they shall be brought into the liberty of God's children—And at last shall reign as conquerors in heaven for evermore—This is the heritage of all the servants of the Lord—And this shall they enjoy through him who loved them and gave himself for them—]

APPLICATION

^k 1 John v. 20.

^l Dan. ix. 24.

^m Rom. iii. 22.

ⁿ Col. ii. 10.

^o Eph. v. 27.

^p Rev. iii. 18.

^q Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. and 1 John i. 9.

^r Zech. iv. 7.

^s Isai. xli. 14, 15.

APPLICATION

1. Embrace Christ

[Christ is offered to us in all these characters—Let every soul then desire an interest in him—Pray that “Christ may be made all this to your souls”—In order that he may be, seek to be found “in him”—Look not to yourselves as though you had any sufficiency in yourselves—Know that you never can have any spiritual gift but in and from Christ—Remember too that if you would receive any benefit from Christ, you must receive him *equally in all his characters*—He will never be your righteousness, if he be not your sanctification; nor will he ever sanctify you, if he be not your righteousness—“He comes not by water only, but by water and blood”¹—You must receive him too *in the order* in which he is here offered to you—He must first be your wisdom, guiding you into the knowledge of his suitableness and all-sufficiency—Then he will instantly become your justifying righteousness—After that he will progressively renew and sanctify your hearts—And lastly, he will deliver both body and soul from all the penal consequences of transgression—Seek him then with your whole hearts—And having found him, glory in him, and in him alone—]

2. Imitate Christ

[Christ becomes the entire Saviour of his people—And herein he cannot be imitated by us—But we may nevertheless exert ourselves to supply the necessities of others—We may, like Job, become “eyes to the blind and feet to the lame”²—And to this we should more especially be stimulated by the consideration of what Christ has done for us—This is the improvement which the scriptures teach us to make of the love of Christ³—And what opportunity can you have of imitating your Lord more favourable than that which is now afforded you⁴?—Surely if you have any sense of the love of Christ, you cannot but manifest it on this occasion—And the more abundant are the benefits which you have received at his hands, the more abundantly will you exert yourselves in conferring benefits on others for his sake—This is the way to profit by his example—And so doing, you shall be rewarded as good stewards of the manifold grace of God—]

¹ 1 John v. 6.² Job xxix. 15.³ 2 Cor. viii. 7. 9. 1 John iii. 16. and iv. 10, 11.⁴ Here the circumstances of the charity might be set forth, if this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*.

D. CHRIST IS ALL.

Col. iii. 11. *Christ is all, and in all.*

MEN are ever ready to value themselves upon their natural endowments, their civil distinctions, or their religious privileges; and to imagine that a pre-eminence in these things gives them some kind of claim to honour and respect, even from God himself—But nothing which a natural man can possess, will give him any such advantage over others as shall entitle him to boast, as though his salvation were in any measure of, or from, himself: the most learned “Greek” must be indebted to divine teaching as much as the unlettered “Scythian;” and the Jew that has been admitted into covenant with God by “circumcision,” be as much saved by the blood and righteousness of Christ as an “uncircumcised” or idolatrous “barbarian:” the “free-man” has no superiority above the “slave;” all stand upon the same footing with respect to salvation; all without exception are dependent upon Christ for all their mercies: in all cases, relating to all persons, and to all the circumstances of each, the creature is nothing, and Christ is all; “he is all in all”—We shall

I. Illustrate this truth

If we consult the scriptures, or our own experience, Christ will be found ALL in procuring, imparting, maintaining, and completing our salvation

1. In procuring it

[Who amongst the sons of men first *suggested* to our Lord the plan of saving our ruined race through the sacrifice of himself?—Who *assisted* him *in* performing the mighty work which he had undertaken? “Did he not tread the wine-press of God’s wrath alone?”—When he “finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness,” “there was none with him;” “he looked and there was no man; therefore his own arm brought salvation^b”—Who can *add* to the work which he has accomplished? Who can bring forth any works of supererogation or perfection that shall eke out his righteousness, or give weight and efficacy to his sacrifice?—
Surely

^a Isai. lxiii. 3.^b Isai. lix. 16.

Surely Christ alone must be acknowledged as "the author of eternal salvation"^c—]

2. In imparting it

[The state of mankind may be fitly compared to the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision^d: they are altogether incapable of exerting themselves in the way of godliness, or of performing the functions of the spiritual life—He who commanded Lazarus to come forth from the grave, and who calls himself "the resurrection and the life," must quicken them, or they will remain to all eternity "dead in trespasses and sins"—If "we choose him, and love him, it is because he has first chosen us, and loved us"^e—There is not a saint on earth that must not say, "By the grace of God, I am what I am"^f—"It is not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, that we are born, but of God"^g—Through the pride of our hearts indeed, we are too apt to boast: but "who amongst us has any thing which he has not received"^h? Who must not trace up to God both his "disposition to will, and his ability to do" what is right and goodⁱ?—Nothing but the most consummate pride can hinder us from confessing, that "salvation is, not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy"^k: and that, "if we have been saved and called with an holy calling, it has not been according to our works, but according to God's eternal purpose and grace"^l—]

3. In maintaining it

[Nothing is more evident than our inability to maintain our natural life: however careful we be in the use of means, we cannot secure our bodies against the effects of disease or accident—The preservation of our spiritual life is yet further beyond the reach of our foresight or our skill—If left by God for one moment, we shall fall—If Adam, even in Paradise, yielded to temptation, notwithstanding he was a perfect man, how much more shall we, who are full of evil?—St. Paul acknowledges that, notwithstanding all the grace he had received, he "had not in himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought"^m—As water ceases to flow when its communication with the fountain is cut off, or as light is instantly extinguished as soon as the rays of the sun are intercepted, so all spiritual life would cease in us for ever, if "*Christ, who is our life*"ⁿ, should for one instant withhold his quickening influence^o—From hence it is that we are necessitated

^c Heb. v. 9.

^e Jer. xxxi. 3. John xv. 16.

^g John i. 13.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 13.

^l 2 Tim. i. 9.

² Col. iii. 4.

^d Ezek. xxxvii. 1—3.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^k Rom. ix. 16.

^m 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^o John xv. 5. *Χωρὶς ἐμοῦ.*

necessitated to “live entirely by faith in the Son of God,” and to “receive continually out of his fulness^p”—]

4. In completing it

[While we continue in the body, we shall be as dependent upon Christ for every thing, as we have been at any period of our existence—He who has been “the author, must also be the *finisher* of our faith^q” the same “Zerubbabel who laid the foundation of this spiritual work, must finish it with his own hands, in order that, when the top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, we may cry, Grace, grace unto it for ever^r”—Indeed, it is not only to the end of life that Christ will carry on his work, but long after we have mouldered in the grave; “he will raise us up again at the last day^s,” appoint us our proper portion, exalt us to his throne of glory, and be the continued source of our happiness through all eternity^t—]

This being a truth of infinite importance, we shall endeavour to

II. Improve it

It is not a mere assent to this doctrine that will profit our souls, but the application of it to our hearts and consciences—Let us then apply it

1. For reproof

[In how strong a light does the guilt of *worldly* men appear when viewed through the medium of this truth! God assures us that no distinctions of whatever kind will effectually make us happy; and that the happiness of all must be altogether in, and through, Christ—The worldling, on the contrary, declares, by his practice at least, that the world, and not Christ, is the true source of rational enjoyment—What is this but to “make God a liar?” and shall this be deemed a light offence in the day of judgment?— — — But this subject more particularly condemns the *self-righteous*. These, instead of looking to Christ for the free, unmerited, and continued exercise of his grace, are ready to boast that they are not as other men, and to go forth in a dependence on their own strength and goodness: instead of regarding him as their entire “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” they transfer much of his glory to themselves; instead of making him their ALL, they make him almost NOTHING—Do such persons honour Christ? or can they expect to be honoured by him before the assembled universe?— — — Even *true believers* will see much cause to be ashamed, when they reflect how low their

^p Gal. ii. 20.

^q Heb. xii. 2.

^r Zech. iv. 7—9.

^s John vi. 39, 40.

^t Rev. vii. 17. and xxi. 23.

their thoughts of Christ have been, and how cold their devoutest affections towards him — — — Above all, *the ministers of the gospel*, even the most faithful amongst them, have reason to be ashamed—They know that they, who neglect Christ, neglect their *all*; and that the consequences of that neglect will be inexpressibly dreadful: should not then their “eyes run down with tears day and night for the pride” and ignorance of their people? Should they not “beseech them,” yea, and intreat God for them, with floods of tears, if that by any means they might prevail on some to embrace the Saviour? Have they not reason to tremble lest the blood of multitudes who perish should be required at their hands?—Surely they, who are ready to condemn their zeal, should rather pity them, and pray for them, and encourage their activity to the utmost—]

2. For direction

[*They who are enquiring*, what shall we do to be saved? have here the shortest and plainest direction that can be given them: if they remember that “Christ is all,” and heartily endeavour to make him *their* all, they can never perish—Their danger arises not less from their aversion to exalt the Saviour, than it does from the love of worldly and carnal lusts; yea, it is far easier to mortify any vicious habit whatever, than to bring the soul to an unfeigned acquiescence in Christ as our **ALL**: we are always wanting to retain some ground of self-preference, and self-complacency: but, if ever we be saved by him, we must lie in his hands as new-born infants, and be contented to be “washed, justified, and sanctified by him” alone” — — — *The drooping and doubting Christian* may also find in these words the very direction which he most of all stands in need of—Doubts and fears arise, either from a defective view of Christ’s all-sufficiency, or from an apprehension of our own want of meetness to participate his benefits: we wish to see ourselves purified in some measure, in order that we may be warranted to lay hold on the promises: whereas the scripture teaches us, first to lay hold on the promises *as sinners*, that “by them we may” become saints, and “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit”^x—We mean not to encourage sin of any kind; God forbid: but we must go to Christ as having nothing in ourselves, that in him we may have all—]

3. For comfort

[Doubtless, to those who determine to abide in sin, no consolation whatever can be administered, for “the wrath of God does, and ever will, abide upon them:” but to those who would

^u 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^x 2 Cor. vii. 1.

would forsake sin, though they be now *the very chief of sinners*, our text affords unspeakable comfort—They are not to heal themselves in part, and then to apply to the Physician; but to go to Christ just as they are, and to cast themselves entirely upon him—O that some might be encouraged to flee to him for refuge! for as he *must be ALL* in the very best of men, so he is *willing to be ALL* to the vilest of the human race: “him that goeth unto him he will in no wise cast out”—As for the *true believer*, the subject before us is the one ground of all his comfort: if Christ were not to be his *all*, he would absolutely despair; because he knows that “without Christ he can do nothing:” but knowing also the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of Christ, he commits himself cheerfully into his hands, “confident that he who hath begun the good work in him, will perform it to the end,” and “preserve him blameless to his heavenly kingdom”—]

γ Phil. i. 6.

DI. THE APOSTOLICAL BENEDICTION.

2 Cor. xiii. 14. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

THE priests, under the law, were appointed to bless the people ^a—

The ministers of the gospel also may consider this as a part of their office—

All St. Paul's epistles begin or end with an authoritative benediction—

That before us is more full and comprehensive than any other—

We shall endeavour to point out

I. Its meaning

Various are the senses in which these words have been understood

We shall content ourselves with stating what we apprehend to be the best—

The

^a Numb. vi. 22—27.

The “grace of Christ” is that grace which he communicates^b

[There is a fulness of grace treasured up in Christ^c—

Out of that all his people are to receive^d—

And all who depend upon it, shall find it sufficient for them^e—]

The “love of God” is a sense of reconciliation and acceptance with him^f

[For this we are prepared by the grace of Christ—

And by it we are brought to regard God as our Father, and our friend—]

The “communion of the Holy Ghost” imports the abiding influence of the Spirit

[There are sublime communications of the Spirit, which the people of God receive—

These are represented as a Spirit of adoption^g, a witness^h, a sealⁱ, an earnest of their eternal inheritance^k—

By these they are enabled confidently to depend on God, and to delight themselves habitually in him—

And by these they maintain continual fellowship with the Father and the Son^l—]

That all of these might be enjoyed by the Christians at Corinth, was the earnest wish and prayer of the apostle

[They were not gifts peculiar to a few of the most exalted saints—

They were the common privilege of “all” who truly believed—

And are to be experienced now, as well as in former ages—

We should therefore in the word, “Amen,” express our own fervent desire to partake of them—]

Having ascertained the meaning of this benediction, let us notice

II. Its importance

This will be manifest to all, if only we enquire,

1. What should we be without “the grace of Christ?”

[Beyond a doubt we should be “dead in trespasses and sins”—

There

^b If we understand it as relating to his *special favour*, it will anticipate the meaning of the next clause.

^c Col. i. 19.

^d John i. 16.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 9. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

^f It cannot import *our love to him*, because it is something which we are to receive from him.

^g Rom. viii. 15.

^h Ib. ver 16.

ⁱ Eph. i. 13.

^k Ib. ver. 14.

^l 1 John i. 3.

There is no other *source of grace*, but the Lord Jesus Christ^m—

There is no *substitute for grace* that can have equal efficacyⁿ—

There is no *life without grace* to any soul of man^o—]

2. What should we be without “the love of God?”

[There is no medium between a state of friendship with God, or of enmity against him—

If we be not objects of his love and favour, we must be of his just and heavy displeasure—]

3. What should we be without the “communion of the Holy Ghost?”

[There is no access to God but by the Holy Ghost^p—

If we be not brought to God by the Spirit, we must be afar off from him^q—

And if we are without God, we are absolutely without hope^r—

Such a state is a prelude to that which will exist for ever^s—]

Can any thing more strongly mark the importance of this benediction than such considerations?—But let us proceed to notice

III. Its excellence

In the text is comprehended all that is great and glorious

1. It unfolds to us the deepest mysteries

[All the persons in the ever-blessed Trinity sustain distinct offices in the work of redemption—

The Christian has, as it were, distinct communion with each of these divine persons—

From each he receives that which his state requires—

And from their combined influence arises his full salvation—

How unsearchable are the heights and depths of this stupendous mystery!]

2. It opens to us the most glorious privileges and blessings

[What on earth can be compared with these blessings?—

Contemplate “the grace of Christ,” by which the dead are quickened, the vile are sanctified, the weak are made victorious—

As

^m John vi. 68.

[•] Eph. ii. 5.

^r Ib. ver. 12.

ⁿ Not reason, or education, or human strength.

^p Ib. ver. 18.

^q Ib. ver. 13, 17.

^s Luke xvi. 23, 26.

As for “the love of God,” say, ye glorified saints, what that means; or, ye damned spirits, who know it only by your hopeless bereavement—

And who can declare what “the communion of the Holy Ghost” is, when the taste of it creates a very heaven upon earth?—

Would to God, that the words so often, and so carelessly repeated by us, were more deeply considered, and more richly experienced!—]

LEARN then from hence

1. The proper object of a Christian’s ambition

[Earthly honours and carnal pleasures are unworthy of his pursuit—

He should be satisfied with nothing but the full attainment of these blessings—]

2. The benefit of fervent prayer

[We may ask the smallest things of man, and be disappointed of our hope—

We may ask all that the blessed Trinity can give us, without fear of disappointment!—]

3. The misery of those who are careless about religion

[These blessings will not be bestowed unless we seek them—

And, if we possess them not, we are poor indeed—

If we die before we have attained them, it were better for us that we had never been born—]

^t Ps. lxxxix. 10.

DII. BENEFITS ARISING FROM GOD’S RETURN TO THE SOUL.

Isai. xxx. 26. *Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.*

THE dispensations of Providence, if rightly improved, are calculated to promote our spiritual welfare—The Jews derived many instructive lessons from the dealings of God with them in Egypt and the wilderness—But God here promises them more abundant knowledge and joy

joy by means of their deliverance from the Assyrian host^a—The grandeur, however, of the words before us evidently shews, that the prophet had respect to blessings, which no temporal deliverance was able to convey—We shall therefore endeavour to point out some other seasons when this promise receives its fuller accomplishment.

I. At the first reconciliation of the soul to God

The convictions of an awakened conscience are as deep wounds to the soul

[Sin, though it be honey in the mouth, becomes gall in the stomach—Peter, Judas, and David in particular, shew what “wounds” it will make in the soul^b—Nor can any one view it aright, without having his heart broken with a sense of its malignity—

But reconciliation with God heals these wounds

[The blood of Christ is that “balm of Gilead,” which never was applied in vain^c—It operates as the sight of the brazen serpent on the dying Israelites, to restore to life and vigour those, whose state seems altogether desperate^d—David, after the foulest transgressions, declared his persuasion of its efficacy to cleanse even him^e—And all who are reconciled to God through Christ experience its full effects^f—]

And this is a season, wherein the knowledge and joy of the soul are much enlarged

[Till this great event is accomplished, the views of the soul are very contracted; nor is it acquainted with any joy but what is carnal—But no sooner has this taken place, than the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines into the heart, and all his perfections are admired and adored—Now also the excellency of the gospel salvation is discovered; and the reasonableness of a life devoted to God is deeply felt—Now is a new and inexhaustible source of happiness opened to the soul; and its peace and joy flow down like a river—And all the pleasures that it ever enjoyed in the ways of sin, are no more in comparison of its present consolations, than the faint “light of the moon” to the invigorating rays of the meridian “sun”—]

But this promise has a further accomplishment

II. At

^a That this is the literal import of the passage appears from ver. 31. compared with ver. 25, 26.

^b Ps. xxxii. 1—6.

^c Jer. viii. 22.

^d John iii. 14, 15.

^e Ps. li. 7, 8.

^f Luke iv. 18. 1 Pet. i. 8.

II. At any return of God to the soul after a season of darkness and desertion

God finds it necessary sometimes to hide his face from his people, and thus to wound their souls afresh

[How the loss of God's presence afflicts a pious soul, may be seen in the lamentations and complaints, which the most eminent saints have uttered on such occasions. Job tells us, that God's arrows stuck fast in him, and that the poison of them drank up his spirit^g. And David even "roared for the disquietness of his heart." Nor are there wanting at this day many, whose experience accords with the description which that eminent saint has given of his^h—]

But the return of God binds up this breach

[The deliverance from such a state is compared by our Lord to the joy that succeeds the pangs of childbirthⁱ—Nor can its effects upon the soul be more fitly represented than in the language of the Jews on their return from Babylon^k—]

And this also is another season of peculiar instruction and comfort

[By this the soul obtains much deeper discoveries of its own corruptions^l; and more encouraging views of God's power and faithfulness^m.—The depths of Satan's devices also are more clearly discerned—And, if its joys are less ecstatic than before, they are more pure and refined—]

The full accomplishment of the text will take place

III. At the hour of dissolution

God never entirely withholds his chastening rod in this world

[The whole of this life is a state of discipline— — —]

But at death there is an end of every thing that is penal or painful

[Whatever wounds may have pained us here, death will heal them allⁿ— — —]

Then will this promise be fulfilled in its utmost extent

[What amazing discoveries will be made to the soul on its first dismissal from the body! And with what inconceivable raptures will it be transported, as soon as ever it shall enter the gates of heaven! Whatever it may have heard of the blessedness of the saints, it will surely say, that not a thousandth

^g Job vi. 4.

^h Ps. xlii. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

ⁱ John xvi. 21.

^k Ps. cxxvi. 1—3.

^l Job xlii. 5, 6.

^m Isai. xxv. 1, 4.

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 4.

thousandth part had been declared to it. Then shall those descriptions given by the prophets all be realized^o—As for the joys it experienced below, they shall appear as nothing in comparison of those it will then possess—What they tasted here was through the medium of ordinances, and mixed with frequent sorrows, and, at best, of short duration—But what they possess in heaven will be immediate, unmixed, and everlasting—]

INFER

1. They, who have never yet been wounded in their souls on account of sin, are yet strangers to all spiritual light and happiness

[They may be conversant with all the depths of philosophy, and all the pleasures of sense—But the unhumbled and unbelieving soul is yet blinded by Satan, nor has even the glimmering light of the moon with respect to spiritual concerns^p—Let such then beg of God to open the eyes of their understanding; and let them seek those convictions of sin, whereby they shall be disposed to admit, and to love, the truth—]

2. They who feel a wounded spirit, should labour to improve their convictions to the uttermost

[Too many endeavour to silence the accusations of conscience, and to drown its voice in business or pleasure—But if we knew how ready God is to heal the broken spirit, and what unspeakable benefits would ultimately flow from our convictions, surely we should cherish them with care, and improve them with diligence—Let us then not “heal our wounds slightly,” but go to the blood of Jesus^q—Then, though weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come to us in the morning,” even that “joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.”]

^o Isai. lx. 19, 20. Rev. xxi. 23. and xxii. 5.

^p 2 Cor. iv. 4. and 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^q Hos. vi. 1.

DIII. GOD WILL CONSTRAIN HIS PEOPLE TO RETURN TO HIM.

Hos. ii. 6, 7. *Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.*

THE generality of mankind are very incompetent judges of the dispensations of Providence. Indeed, for

the most part, they quite mistake their nature and tendency ; and draw conclusions from them which the Scripture will by no means justify. They suppose that prosperity is a token of divine love and approbation ; and that affliction, on the contrary, is a mark of God's displeasure. But an inspired writer assures us, that " we cannot know good or evil by all that is before us." Considering, however, that we are prone to forget God in our abundance, and that the rod of correction is the means whereby thousands are turned to God, we have reason rather to esteem affliction, at least as the more needful, if not the richer, blessing of the two. Certain it is that there are multitudes now in heaven, who owed their first serious impressions to some heavy chastisement ; and who must for ever say with the Psalmist, " It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Nor can we doubt but that the good of mankind is one principal end for which God puts the cup of sorrow into their hands.

A remarkable proof of this we have in the passage before us. The Jews were continually provoking God to jealousy, by depending on alliances with heathens, and worshipping their idols. God, ever slow to anger and delighting in mercy, used all possible methods to reclaim them. He had tried what kindness would effect, and had found no success. He now determined to take the rod ; and sent them word by the prophet, that he would punish them for their offences ; but that the end of their punishment should be to reduce them to a happier and better state : "*Therefore,*" says he, (because you are so bent to follow your own evil ways) "*behold, I will hedge up,*" &c.

In these words we see

I. What means God uses to reclaim his people

Though God could effect his purposes instantly, by a mere act of his will, yet he is pleased in general to accomplish them by means suited to the end. In reclaiming his people

1. He obstructs their ways

[In their unregenerate state they run on, like others, in the ways of sin. But when *his* time is come, he obstructs them either by *temporal calamities* or by *spiritual convictions*.

In

In the common course of events he deprives them of health, fortune, friends; or perhaps by their own imprudence brings disorders or distress upon them.

These trials, however, of themselves have only a momentary effect; and therefore he accompanies them with the secret energy of his Spirit, convincing them of their guilt and danger, and making them tremble through fear of his eternal judgments. He "meets them as an armed man," so that they dare no longer to "run on the thick bosses of his buckler."

Thus he "hedges up their way with thorns," and makes their progress in sin very difficult and uncomfortable.]

2. He disappoints their endeavours

[God saw the Jews bent on forming alliances with Egypt and Assyria notwithstanding all his warnings to renounce them. He therefore sent them into captivity in Babylon, where they could have no communications with Egypt or Assyria; and thus "built up a wall, that they could not find their former lovers."

Thus *we have our idols* which we are prone to follow, notwithstanding all the troubles or convictions that are sent to wean us from them. Perhaps *the world* is the object of our affections; and we weary ourselves in the pursuit of its honours or emoluments. God therefore secretly blasts our endeavours, as he did those of his people of old^a; and thus shuts us up as it were, unto himself, that we may seek him as our portion. Perhaps our great idol is *self-righteousness*: we desire to "establish a righteousness of our own," instead of relying simply on the righteousness of Christ. God therefore leaves us to our own feeble efforts, that, by our repeated violations of our own vows and covenants, we may be constrained to look from ourselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, if we persist in breaking through "*the hedge*," he will interpose "*a wall*;" that "when we follow after our lovers, we may not overtake them, and when we seek them, we may not be able to find them." If smaller difficulties will not answer his end, he will send greater, till he has accomplished his whole will concerning us.]

These interpositions, however, operate in a rational way; as will be seen by considering

II. The effects he produces on their minds

Where calamities are sent without grace to sanctify them, they only harden those whom they ought to reclaim.

But


^a Haggai i. 6, 9.

But when the grace of God co-operates with his providence, it works in his people

1. A sense of their *guilt* in having departed from him

[They could once sin without any fear or remorse: at most, they only viewed sin as an opposition to God's will: but, when the Spirit of God has opened their eyes, they see it as an act of spiritual adultery; and they begin to feel as a woman would, who, after having departed from a kind and loving "husband," was just returning to a sense of her duty. How would she blush at the remembrance of her conduct! how would she be ready to doubt whether her husband would ever receive her again, and whether it were possible for her ever again to be the object of his affections! Thus a soul rendered truly sensible of its obligations to God as the "husband" of his people, feels a proportionate degree of shame in having departed from him, of shame mixed with self-loathing and self-abhorrence^b.]

2. A consciousness of their *folly* in having departed from him

[It once appeared folly to serve God: but now this sentiment is reversed. Even in the days of their unregeneracy they had a secret thought, that the godly, whom they despised, were happier than themselves. But, when divinely instructed, they see that they have been "feeding upon ashes, and that a deceived heart has turned them aside^c." If ever they have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," they cannot fail of looking back with grief on the blessedness they have lost^d. They confess that "once it was better with them than now;" that, in departing from God, they "forsook the fountain of living waters;" and that, in seeking happiness in the creature, they "hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water^e."] 

3. A determination to return to him

[They no longer say, "We will follow after other lovers^f;" but, "We will return to our first husband." They view God as their rightful Lord to whom they are bound by every tie; and, with indignation against themselves for their past conduct, they say "Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name^g."

The whole of this effect is strongly exemplified in the prodigal son

[The

^b Jer. iii. 25.

^{*} Jer. ii. 13.

^c Isai. xlv. 20.

^f Ver. 5.

^d Gal. iv. 15.

^e Isai. xxvi. 13.

[The prodigal departed from his father, and spent his substance in riotous living. God, intending to reclaim him, sent a famine into the country where he had taken up his residence. (However casual this might appear, it was ordained of God for his good.) He would not regard this "hedge," or return to his father while he could get any other support. He therefore hired himself to a citizen of that place to feed his swine; and when almost famished, preferred the husks which the swine cat of, to the bread he might obtain by returning home. God seeing this obstinate reluctance in him, so ordered it, that, notwithstanding he had spent all his fortune there, no man should have pity enough to relieve his wants. At last, constrained by necessity, and stopped as by "a wall," the prodigal is at last induced to return to his father's house, where he finds a reception beyond all expectation kind and gracious. Thus misfortune upon misfortune, or conviction upon conviction, are sent to us, till, distressed on every side, and disappointed in every attempt to extricate ourselves, we are "made willing" to return to God.]

We may LEARN from this subject

1. The depravity of man

[We never seek God till we are constrained by his providence and grace to do so: and, to the latest hour of our lives, we need hedges and walls to keep us in the way of duty. What an astonishing proof is this of our utter alienation from God, yea, of our enmity against him! Let us blush and be confounded before him.]

2. The end of trials

[They "spring not from the dust," but are sent for our good. They are like the angel that met Balaam^b: and our obstinacy in breaking through these obstructions would have repeatedly subjected us to the sword of vengeance, if our God had not still exercised mercy and forbearance. Let us then "hear the rod, and him that hath appointed itⁱ."]]

3. The happiness of a religious life

[No one ever gave himself up truly to God without finding that "*his* ways were ways of pleasantness and peace." No one ever declined from him, that did not suffer loss in respect of *present* happiness, as well as of his future reward. Let all professors then "be sober and watch unto prayer;" that instead of saying, "It was once better with me than now," they may "make their profiting to appear unto all," and be enabled to say on every succeeding day, "It never was so well with me as at this present time."]]

^b Numb. xxii. 22—33.

ⁱ Mic. vi. 9.

DIV. SALVATION IS OF GOD, FROM FIRST TO LAST.

Jer. xxxii. 39—41. *I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul.*

THERE is not any thing more common than for persons, who treated with contempt God's threatened judgments, to sink under them in the most abject manner, as soon as they begin to feel them—The Jews would not be persuaded for a long season that God would ever deliver them into the hand of the Chaldeans: but when they found that his word was ready to take effect, they were overwhelmed with grief and despondency—To preserve them from running to this extreme, and to shew them that the divine judgments would be tempered with mercy, the prophet was inspired to foretel their future restoration to that very land from whence they were about to be carried captive—But it is evident that this prophecy has respect to a far greater deliverance, even to the redemption of the world from sin and Satan, and the restoration of sinners to their forfeited inheritance—A near prospect of the punishment which their sins have merited, often brings them, with a very quick transition, from presumption to despair: but, for their encouragement, God teaches them to look to him as an all-sufficient helper, and to rely on him for the carrying on of the good work wherever he has begun it—In this view of the passage we may notice

I. The means of our conversion

In our natural state we are afar off from God, going astray like sheep that are lost—In order to recover us

God puts his fear into our hearts

[While unconverted, we “have no fear of God before our eyes:” we all walk after the imagination of our own hearts, seeking happiness in various ways, according as we are led by our different inclinations or situations in life—But,

in conversion, God “gives us one heart and one way”—By these words we do not so much understand, an unity of affection and pursuit, in opposition to the multiplicity of desires with which every carnal mind is distracted (though doubtless that idea is included in them) as, that oneness of sentiment and action that pervades all, who are the subjects of divine grace—As on the day of Pentecost, so, in every age and place, Christians, as far as they are taught of God, are of one heart and mind—The prejudices of education do indeed make a difference between them with respect to some matters of less importance; and an undue stress laid upon these things too often prevents that close union and communion that should subsist between all the members of Christ’s mystical body: but, with respect to the grand point of fearing God, there is no difference among them: all, without exception, have “one heart and one way,” in that they desire above all things, and earnestly endeavour, to walk in the fear of God all the day long———]

This is to the unspeakable benefit of ourselves, and of all connected with us

[Too often are men dissuaded from entertaining this fear, lest it should prove injurious to them; but none ever received it into their hearts without looking back upon all their former life with shame and sorrow; yea, they have ever considered the season of their first submission to it as the most blessed æra of their lives; and, instead of regretting that they ever yielded to its influence, they invariably wish to have their whole souls subjected to its dominion—And as they find it thus for their own good, inasmuch as it enlivens their hopes, and purifies their hearts, so is it for the good of their children, yea, and of all connected with them. It makes them better in every station and relation of life, whether as parents or children, masters or servants, rulers or subjects: it leads them to fill up their various duties to the honour of God; and to communicate, to the utmost of their power, the same blessed disposition to all around them—]

The same divine agency, that first converted us, proves afterwards

II. The source of our perseverance

“It is not in man to direct his own steps:” our progress in the way of duty depends on

1. The engagements of God’s covenant

[God has entered into covenant with his church and people, and undertaken to preserve them from apostasy—Nor is this covenant liable to be broken, like that which he made with the Israelites in the wilderness^a: it is and will be
“everlasting,”

^a Jer. xxxi, 31, 32.

“everlasting,” because God himself engages to do all which is requisite for our support—“*He will not depart from us* to do us good ;” he may, like a wise parent, sometimes frown, and sometimes chastise ; but, while he acts in this manner, he does it for our good, no less than when he lifts up the light of his countenance upon us—He has said that, “if we break his statutes, and keep not his commandments, he will visit our transgression with the rod, and our iniquity with stripes ; nevertheless his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail ; his *covenant* will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips^b”—“*He engages further that we shall not depart from him.*” Here, doubtless, is the greater danger, seeing we have a heart “bent to backslide from him ;” and, if left by him for one moment, we should relapse into all our former sins—But he knows how to establish the wavering, or restore the fallen ; and thus to “perfect his own strength in our weakness”—He may leave us for a season, as he did Hezekiah, that we may know what is in our hearts : but he assures us, that our “steps shall be ordered by him,” and that our “light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day :” he will so “draw us, that we shall run after him ;” and so “keep us from falling, that an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”—]

2. The exertions of his power

[God speaks of himself in language accommodated to our low apprehensions of his nature, and declares that he will *exert all his power*, and *find all his delight*, in doing us good—His people, after their dismissal from Babylon, laboured under many difficulties in rebuilding their city and temple ; yet, through the good providence of God, they surmounted all—Thus shall we meet with many obstructions before we arrive at the paradise above : but God will regard us as trees of righteousness, and “will plant us in that land assuredly with his whole heart and with his whole soul”—Who then shall defeat his efforts, or disappoint his aim ? “If God be for us, who can be against us ?” In vain shall earth and hell be confederate against us ; for “hath he said, and will he not do it ? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good ?”—He will never cease to work, till he has fulfilled in us all his good pleasure, and “perfected that which concerneth us :” “he will keep us by his own power through faith unto salvation”—]

We may OBSERVE from hence

1. How suitable is the way of salvation !

[Foolish and ignorant men would be better pleased with a gospel that left them to *earn*, either wholly or in part, their
own

^b Ps. lxxxix. 31—34.

own salvation—But alas ! how ill adapted would such a gospel be to us, who are “insufficient of ourselves even to think a good thought!”—How much more suitable is the promise in the text, wherein God undertakes to do every thing in us, and for us !—Let us then receive thankfully what God offers freely—Let us embrace “a covenant that is ordered in all things and sure ;” and rejoice in serving God, who so rejoices in saving us—]

2. What effectual care is taken that we should not turn the grace of God into licentiousness !

[There are, it must be acknowledged, some who abuse this doctrine, (for what is there, however excellent, which men will not abuse?) and take occasion from it to rest in a state of worldliness and sloth—But the very promise gives us a sufficient antidote against the poison it is supposed to convey : it tells us indeed, that God will keep us from departing from him ; but it tells us also, that he will do this by “*putting his fear into our hearts*”—This destroys at once all delusive hopes ; inasmuch as it shews us, that, if we be not living habitually in the fear of God, we are actually departed from him, and consequently can have no ground whatever to expect salvation at his hands—Let the carnal and slothful professor of religion well consider this—His abuse of this promise cannot invalidate its truth ; but it may deceive his soul to his eternal ruin—Be it ever remembered, that the very same fear which God puts into our hearts in our first conversion, must continue to operate, and *that* too with increasing activity, to the end of our lives ; and, that we have no longer any reason to think our past experience to be scriptural, than while we cultivate that fear, and endeavour to “walk in it all the day long”—We do not mean that every *occasional* backsliding should subvert our hopes ; but, if ever the fear of God cease to be the leading principle in our hearts, or to stimulate us to further attainments in holiness, we may be sure that we have deceived our own souls, and that our religion is vain—May God keep us all from such a fatal delusion for his mercy’s sake !—]

DV. THE NATURE, AUTHOR, AND FINISHER OF A WORK OF GRACE.

Philipp. i. 6. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

THERE is a just mixture of hope and fear, which every Christian should cherish in contemplating his own
experience,

experience, and the state of the church of Christ. On the one hand there certainly is ground for fear, whether we judge from analogy, or from what we behold with our eyes. What multitudes of blossoms are annually cut off by frost! of those that set, how many are blighted by an eastern wind! of those that grow, how many are blown off by storms and tempests! and of those that hang upon the tree, how many, when gathered, prove rotten at the core! Thus it is seen in the religious world; many make a fair show for a little while, and then fall off from their profession: others are blighted, and come to nought: others look well for a season, but are beaten down by storms of persecution and temptation: and of those who maintain their profession to the end, how many will at last be found unsound at heart! But, if this cast a damp upon our joys, and teach us to moderate our expectations, it need not, it ought not, to rob us of all our confidence: for though sound fruit may be blown off from a tree, no sound Christian shall ever be separated from the Lord Jesus. Of this the Apostle was fully persuaded: and, under this conviction, he thanked God for the converts at Philippi, whose sincerity he had no reason to doubt, and of whose perseverance in the divine life he therefore entertained the most sanguine hopes.

To make a just improvement of his declaration before us, we shall shew

I. When a good work may be said to be begun in us

It is not an easy matter to draw the line between those high attainments of religion of which we may fall short, and yet be confident that a good work is begun; and those low attainments, which will warrant us to hope well, at the same time that they are by no means a sufficient ground of confidence. But, taking St. Paul for our guide, we trust, that we shall so discriminate, as neither to make sad the heart of the righteous, nor to countenance the delusions of the wicked. Those evidences, from whence he "*knew* the election" (and, of consequence, the perseverance also) of the saints at Thessalonica, will serve as a sure criterion whereby to judge of our own state^a. We may be assured then that a good work is begun in us, when
faith,

^a 1 Thess. i. 3—5.

faith, hope, and love, shew themselves to have been formed in our hearts; that is,

1. When our faith is operative

[That faith, which is without works, is dead; and is of no more value than the faith of devils^b: but the faith which stimulates us to resist and mortify all sin, and to be conscientious in the practice of all duties, is, beyond a doubt, the gift of God, the workmanship of an almighty agent^c.]

2. When our love is laborious

[Our “love is not to be in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth:” nor must it have respect to men’s bodies merely, but to their souls; leading us to consult their spiritual welfare to the utmost of our power, at the same time that we gladly deny ourselves to relieve their spiritual wants. The voice of inspiration assures us, that he, who exercises such love, is born of God^d.]

3. When our hope is patient

[The Christian’s hope will have much to try it; but it is to be the anchor of his soul, that shall keep him stedfast^e in this tempestuous world. He will often experience “fightings without, and fears within:” but beyond and “against hope, he must believe in hope^f,” saying, “I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day^g.” And every one who has such a lively hope, may be sure that he has been begotten to it by God himself^h.]

Where such a good work is found, we are informed

II. That the author of it will finish it

If man had been the author of such a work, the Apostle would never have been so confident that he would finish it; since no dependence can be placed on the stability of man’s virtue. But “he who hath wrought his people for this self-same thing, is Godⁱ:” and by him we are assured

1. That nothing shall be suffered to destroy this work

[If man were left to himself, temptation would overcome, and sin enslave, and Satan devour him. But nothing shall destroy him: not temptation^k, nor unbelief^l, nor Satan^m, nor
sin

^b Jam. ii. 19, 20.

^c Heb. vi. 19.

^d 1 Pet. i. 3.

^e 1 Cor. x. 13.

^f Rom. xvi. 20.

^g Phil. i. 29. Eph. i. 19. ^h 1 John iv. 7.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 18.

^j Ver. 3, 5. and 2 Cor. v. 5. and John i. 13.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 13. This refers both to the promise and the threatening that precede it.

sin itselfⁿ. His sins shall be punished till they are thoroughly repented of^o; and being subdued by grace, they shall be cast into the depths of the sea^p. Doubtless, if sin were habitually indulged, it would destroy the soul: but God engages, that it shall not have dominion over his people^q.]

2. That God himself will carry it on, and perfect it

[The path of the just is compared to the morning light on this account, that it continually proceeds towards its meridian height^r. And God assures us in the strongest manner, that none shall pluck them out of his hands^s, that they shall hold on their way, waxing stronger and stronger^t; and that though they be drooping as a bruised reed, or even offensive as smoking flax, he will not abandon them, but bring forth judgment unto victory^u. From a conviction of these truths, the apostle gloried as an invincible champion; and declared his firm persuasion, that no enemy whatever should finally prevail against him^x.]

Nor are these any points of doubtful disputation: for we learn from the Apostle

III. That we may be confident of this very thing

If we consulted only the foregoing promises, we should have abundant reason for confidence. But we may find yet further ground of confidence

1. In the nature of God

[God is wise, faithful, and unchangeable: but (with reverence be it spoken) he would seem to act inconsistently with these perfections, if he should cast off his people after he had begun the good work within them. Our Lord tells us what judgment would be formed respecting a builder, who, having at great expense begun to erect a house, should leave it unfinished^y. Shall we then suppose that God, who has purchased our souls with the blood of his dear Son, and has laid in our hearts the foundation of his spiritual temple, will at last leave that for the habitation of devils, which he has been so long forming for an habitation for himself? Besides, shall we say that God has given us so many promises in vain? or that, after having led us to rely upon them, he will forget to accomplish them? Moreover, has he chosen us to know his name, and taste his grace, and inherit his glory, and will he forsake the objects of his choice? He did not choose us because

ⁿ Ps. xxxvii, 23, 24. ^o Ps. lxxxix, 30—35. e. g. David was awakened to repentance by Nathan, and Peter by Christ.

^p Mic. vii, 18, 19. and Jer. xxxi, 33, 34. ^q Rom. vi, 14.

^r Prov. iv, 18.

^s John x, 28, 29.

^t Job xvii, 9.

^u Matt. xii, 20.

^x Rom. viii, 33—39.

^y Luke xiv, 28, 29.

because we were holy, or because he foresaw we should be holy; but that we might be holy^a. Can we think then that he will give us up to sin, instead of saving us in a way of holiness? Had he indeed been incapable of foreseeing what we should be and do, he might change his purpose on account of our having disappointed his expectations: but he “knows all things from the beginning^a,” and, because he is “a God that changeth not^b,” “whom he hath loved he will love to the end^c.”]

2. In the nature of the covenant

[The covenant made with us in Christ was the very reverse of that which was made with Israel in the wilderness. In *that*, the promises were all suspended on the faithfulness of the people: but in the Christian covenant God gives all, and we receive all^d.]

We may yet further IMPROVE this subject in a way of

1. Conviction

[A work of grace consists not in any outward change, but in an inward renovation of all our dispositions, views, and principles; it is a work “begun IN us.” Nor is it a change effected by education merely, or by any human efforts; for it is a work begun by God himself. Nor is it a mere temporary change, but progressive and permanent; for it is “carried on by him who began it.” And can we say, as in the presence of God, that an inward, supernatural, and progressive change is wrought in us? Let us examine ourselves with respect to the graces of faith, hope, and love; and let the voice of conscience be to us as the voice of God.]

2. Direction

[As every other doctrine of scripture, so this in particular, is liable to abuse, if we do not receive it for the ends, and in the manner, that God has designed. We may either think ourselves subjects of a work of grace when we have nothing but the feigned humiliation of Ahab, the partial reformation of Herod, and the hypocritical attachment of Judas; or we may be tempted to think that this doctrine supersedes the necessity of our own exertions, when it ought rather to operate as a stimulus to our endeavours. To prevent these, or any other abuses of the doctrine, let it be remembered, that the doctrine of perseverance is to be proved by persevering: and that it would be as absurd for a man living in the grossest sins, to take comfort from the promise that sin should not have dominion

^a Eph. i. 4.

^a Acts xv. 18.

^b Mal. iii. 6. Jam. i. 17.

^c John xiii. 1.

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 25—28.

dominion over God's people, as for a man to console himself with the doctrine of perseverance, while he is in a state of departure from God.]

3. Comfort

[When the heavens and the earth were made, God pronounced them "very good." But the renewing of men's souls after the divine image is a far more glorious work than the creation of the universe. It is emphatically called by God himself "a good work:" and it will evidently appear to be so, whether we consider its author, its nature, or its end. How thankful then should we be, if we experience the beginnings of it in our souls! And what a satisfaction should it be, to reflect, that God has pledged himself to carry on, and perfect it till the day of Christ! Let us then leave it to God to carry it on in his own way: let it be our care to add to our faith, virtue; and to our virtue, every Christian grace: so shall we "hold fast the rejoicing of our hope," and have an abundant entrance into the realms of glory^c.]

^c 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7, 10, 11.

DVI. THE CHURCH'S PROSPERITY.

Isai. lx. 19, 20. *The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

AS there are many passages in the prophets which admit of a mystical, as well as literal, meaning, so there are many which must be interpreted altogether in a mystical sense—There was nothing in the state of the Jews after their return from Babylon that could in any wise be called an accomplishment of the chapter before us—The whole passage can relate to nothing but the future prosperity of the Christian church—There is a time coming when the church shall exchange its despised, impoverished, persecuted state for a state of felicity and honour; when its spiritual blessings in particular shall be both permanent

≈

and

and abundant, as an earnest of that infinite and everlasting happiness which its members shall enjoy in a better world—

The text may be understood as referring

I. To the millennial period

The terms here used import, that the prosperity of the church shall one day be

1. Exalted in its degree

[The shining of the sun and moon may well be understood as expressing the greatest temporal happiness—But we are not to suppose that there will be a total privation of temporal blessings from the church: (on the contrary, there is reason to expect that its prosperity, in respect of outward things, will be greatly increased.) The positive declarations must here, as in many other passages, be understood in a comparative sense^a, and as implying, that the spiritual state of the church will be so exalted as altogether to eclipse the greatest of earthly comforts: *they* shall be lost, as it were, in the enjoyment which the saints shall have of God—This is beautifully represented as though the sun and moon hid their heads through shame^b; and it is even now realized in the experience of those who enjoy much of the light of God's countenance—What “glorying in God” there will be in that day we may conceive, if we only suppose every member of the church adopting the sentiments and language of “the sweet singer of Israel^c”—]

2. Lasting in its duration

[As the shining of the sun and moon imports prosperity, so does the withdrawing of their light imply the heaviest calamities—That the church will have no mixture of bitterness in her cup, we do not suppose: but, as, by means of her intimate communion with God, her earthly joys will be no joys, so, by the same means, her earthly sorrows will be no sorrows: they will be all forgotten, as it were, in the abundance of her exalted happiness—This effect has often arisen from fellowship with God: Paul and Silas, notwithstanding their backs were torn with scourges, and their feet were fastened in the stocks, sang praises to God at midnight^d: and many, far inferior to them in gifts, have also been enabled to “glory in tribulation”—How much more then shall this be the case when God shall take to him his great power, and reign on earth, and the graces of all his people be proportionably increased!

^a Hos. vi. 6.

^c Ps. cxlv. 1—12.

^b Isai. xxiv. 23.

^d Acts xvi. 23—25.

increased !—Surely “ their days of mourning shall be ended ;” or, if a cloud occasionally intervene for a moment, their sun shall never *set*, their moon shall never be *withdrawn* ; yea, the very clouds themselves shall only occasion the light to burst forth again with greater splendor—]

The text however will not receive its full accomplishment till we come

II. To the eternal state

Then the figurative expressions in the text will fall short of, as much as now they seem to exceed, the truth—The happiness of the church shall then be

1. In God only

[There will be no room for carnal enjoyments in heaven : there “ they neither marry nor are given in marriage ; but are as the angels of God”—While we are on earth, God communicates much happiness to us by means of his creatures : but in heaven we shall no more drink water from such polluted cisterns, but go to the fountain-head itself^e—There we shall “ see him face to face,” and behold all the brightness of his glory—There all the mysteries of his love will be opened to us, and its incomprehensible heights and depths be made plain to our shallow capacities—O what shouts of praise shall we then utter ! What glorying in God shall we then express^g ! — — —]

2. In God continually

[*Here* the very necessities of our nature required an intermission of our joy : the body itself needed to be recruited with intervals of rest : but *there* we shall “ not rest day nor night”—Our days of mourning will be so entirely ended, that we shall never have our light obscured for one single moment—There will be nothing from without to trouble and perplex us ; nothing from within to furnish matter of distress^h—We shall bask in the unclouded beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and enjoy one eternal day—Then not only our carnal, but even our spiritual, joys that we tasted below, will appear as nothing : glorious as the present state of believers is, it has no glory by reason of that which excellethⁱ : here our best frames have an alloy of sorrow, and are of short continuance : but there our happiness will be without mixture, intermission, or end—]

This

^e Isai. xxx. 26.

^f Rev. xxi. 23. and xxii. 5. “ They have no need of the sun,” &c.

^g Rev. v. 12, 13.

^h Compare Isai. xlix. 10. with Rev. vii. 15—17. and xxi. 4.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 10.

This subject cannot fail of suggesting such REFLECTIONS as follow

1. How evidently is religion a source of happiness!

[It is intolerable that men should asperse religion as a source of melancholy—What if men's sins, or mistakes, or bodily infirmities make them melancholy, is this to be imputed to religion? Is reason to be decried because all persons do not exercise it as they ought; or the sun in the firmament to be abhorred, because all do not make a just improvement of its light?—If they who despise religion would seek to attain it in their hearts, they should soon find that all creature-comforts are, in comparison of it, but as the taper before the meridian sun—As for the benefits arising from it in the eternal world, we forbear to mention them: for if it will not make men happier, even in this present state, than any thing else can do, we will be content that it shall be utterly abandoned—But we have no fears on this head: and the very people that deride it, know, that they envy in their hearts the happiness of the saints—O that all would seek their happiness in God, in God supremely, and in God only!—]

2. What a different world will this be when the promised period shall arrive!

[So eminent and universal will the piety of mankind then be, that it will appear as if all the holy martyrs were risen from the dead, and brought to live again on earth; and as though Christ himself were come down again from heaven to reign visibly in the midst of them^k—Instead of such a general neglect of God as now obtains, a supreme regard to him will universally prevail, and an holy glorying in him be heard on every side—Surely the saints will then enjoy a heaven upon earth—Nor do we apprehend this period to be very distant—O that God would hasten it! O that we could see the dawn of that glorious day!—But, if it be not permitted to us to see it, let us hope that we shall be still better employed, and be reaping the full harvest of what they will gather only the first-fruits—Let us in the mean time set our affections on things above, and, in reply to that question, Who will shew us any good? let us be ever ready to answer with the Psalmist, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us^l—]

^k Rev. xx. 4.

^l Ps. iv. 6, 7.

DVII. THE EXTENT AND CERTAINTY OF ISRAEL'S SALVATION.

Isai. xlv. 17. *Israel shall be saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end.*

AS in the dispensations of God's providence we behold a mixture of mercy and judgment, so in the records of his grace we see promises and threatenings continually interwoven—Declarations so opposite, standing in immediate contrast with each other, give to each other a double force and energy, more especially when, as in the passage before us, compared with the preceding verse, they are expressed in similar terms—In this view the promise in the text deserves particular attention—In considering it we shall shew

I. Who they are that are comprehended under the name "Israel"

We are not to limit this name to the Jews; nor even to comprehend all the Jews under it; since "all are not Israel that are of Israel^a:" It includes those

1. Who worship God

[This name was originally given to Jacob by God himself on account of his having "wrestled all night" in prayer till he obtained the blessing he desired^b—From him it passed to his natural descendants; but has in all ages more eminently characterized his spiritual seed, who, like him, "worship God in spirit and in truth"—Our Lord, seeing Nathanael, called him an "*Israelite indeed*;" and, on finding how much Nathanael was surprised by such an appellation from a stranger, assured him that "he had seen him under the fig-tree^c." Most probably Nathanael, supposing that no human eye beheld him, had been praying there to God: and our Lord, advertent to this circumstance as well as to his integrity, addressed him by a name that marked his character in both respects—Thus every true *Israhite* is frequent at the throne of grace; and God, who seeth in secret, will testify of him, *In such and such a place I saw thee lifting up thy heart to me, and imploring my blessing with thy whole soul—*]

2. Who

^a Rom. ix. 6.

^b Gen. xxxii. 24, 28.

^c John i. 47, 48.

2. Who worship God alone

[There were some among the Jews who feared the Lord, and yet served other gods^d: so amongst ourselves there are many who would be thought to fear God, while they are endeavouring to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and mammon—But Israel stand directly opposed to such characters in the context^e: they not only will not make or worship idols of wood or stone, but they will harbour no ido's in the heart: they will not provoke the Lord to jealousy by any hidden abominations^f, but labour to be “Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile”—]

Now since it is promised to such persons that they shall be saved, it will be proper to enquire

II. In what way they shall be saved

The Lord Jesus Christ is the person mentioned in the text as the author of their salvation^g: and they must be saved

1. By the merit of his blood

[Whatever integrity of heart any man may possess, or however fervent he may be in his supplications before God, he must be saved in the same way as any other sinner, and enter in at the same door with publicans and harlots—His very best services are polluted; and he needs to be cleansed from “the iniquity of his holy things” as much as from the vilest transgressions—Nor is there any other fountain opened for sin but that which was opened upon Mount Calvary: nothing but the blood of Christ can ever cleanse from sin: the holiest man that ever lived must be “accepted *in the beloved*”; “nor is there salvation for him in any other:” even Paul himself, notwithstanding all his legal and evangelical obedience, desired to be “*found in Christ*, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ^h”—And “in the same adorable Lord must *all the seed of Israel* be justified, and must gloryⁱ”—]

2. By the efficacy of his grace

[It is not by any efforts of their own that Israel are enabled to differ from others: “they are saved, not by the exercise of created power, but in the Lord their God^k”—They must all adopt the same humiliating confession, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^l”—Are they strong? it is in the Lord,

^d 2 Kings xvii. 33. and Zeph. i. 5.

^e Ver. 16.

^f Ezek. xiv. 3.

^g Compare ver. 23. with Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

^h Phil. iii. 9.

ⁱ Ver. 25.

^k Hos. i. 7.

^l Ver. 24.

Lord, and in the power of his might^m: do they gain the victory? they must thank God for giving it them through Jesus Christ our Lordⁿ—"In HIM all their fresh springs are found;" "out of HIS fulness they receive continually grace for grace:" and if this lock were shorn, they would instantly become weak as other men^o—Being fully assured of this, they evince that they are the true Israel, by worshipping God in the spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh^p—]

For their abundant consolation God declares

III. The extent and certainty of their salvation

As to the *certainty* of their salvation, no words can more fully express it, than those which are now before us

[God absolutely declares that "Israel shall be saved:" lest we should limit our expectations to some temporal benefit, he assures us that the salvation he will afford them, shall be "everlasting:" and lest we should still be slow of heart to believe, he repeats his assertion in terms as strong and energetic as language can afford, or imagination can conceive—The same truth is confirmed in every page of the sacred volume, and *that* too in the richest variety of expression, in order more effectually to engage our minds and establish our faith—And has God spoken all these things merely to deceive us? "Has he said, and will he not do it; has he spoken, and will he not make it good?"—Let this then be received as an infallible truth, that whatever may become of others, "*Israel shall be saved*;" nor shall any difficulties, any dangers, or all the conspiracies of earth and hell, ever make void this promise in any single instance to all eternity^q—]

Nor can any thing be added to enhance the *greatness* of their salvation

[It shall be so *perfect*, that there shall be nothing wanting to complete it—Their "sins shall all be cast into the very depths of the sea"—However high their expectations may be raised, they shall "never be ashamed;" nor, however strong their confidence may be, shall they "ever be confounded"—They shall appear before God with holy boldness—They may even now, as they shall also at the bar of judgment, adopt the triumphant language of the apostle, "Who is he that shall lay any thing to my charge? It is God that justifieth: who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ that died"—Yea, they may lay claim to all that God himself can give in time and eternity; and, neither in time nor in eternity, shall they be disappointed

^m Eph. vi. 10.

ⁿ Rom. vii. 25.

^o Alluding to Judg. xvi. 17.

^p Phil. iii. 3.

^q John x. 28, 29.

disappointed of their hope—Their felicity shall begin the very instant they believe in Christ; and shall be *coeval with their own existence*—]

ADDRESS

1. The idolatrous worldling

[It is not only “the maker of idols,” but he who “setteth up idols in his heart,” that is an idolater in the sight of God: if we “love and serve the creature more than the Creator,” we are as truly idolaters, as if we bowed down to stocks and stones—And do not the consciences of many testify, that their hearts are incomparably more set upon the world, than on God?—If they compare their devotion before God with their zeal about earthly things, may they not see that they differ widely from the true Israel?—Shall we then say to *them*, that they shall be “saved with an everlasting salvation?” should we not speak more truly if we were even to reverse the terms, and declare the judgments of God against them?—Yes, indeed; for though they now will scarcely admit a doubt or a fear respecting their eternal state, God has warned them, in the very words before the text, that “they shall be ashamed and confounded, all of them; they shall all go to confusion together”—But is there no way for their escape? Blessed be God, there is: if they believe in Christ, they shall yet be saved; for “there is no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*”; and his command to them is, “Look unto me and be ye saved”¹—Let them but prostrate themselves at the foot of his cross, seeking redemption through his precious blood, and they shall yet become monuments of his pardoning mercy, and his sanctifying grace—]

2. The true Israelite

[“Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord”²!—What a mercy is it to have God himself saying respecting you, Israel shall be saved!—Possibly you may meet with many troubles in your way to glory; but you need not regard them, as long as you have the promise that you shall survive them all—Perhaps like Paul, and those who were with him in the ship, you may be so tossed with tempest, as to be brought almost to despair: but God had promised that not an hair of their head should perish; and though they suffered shipwreck, yet was his word fulfilled to them: for all of them, some on boards and others on broken pieces of the ship, got safe to shore³—Thus shall it be with you also—You may, as thousands have before you, suffer the loss of all earthly comforts;

¹ Ver. 22.

² Deut. xxxiii. 29.

³ Rom. viii. 1.

⁴ Acts xxvii. 34, 44.

comforts; but God's word shall not be broken: he has promised; and he is not only able, but determined to perform—Look forward then with comfort to death and judgment, and know that that day which shall be to others the beginning of sorrows, shall be to you the commencement of eternal joy—]

DVIII. GOD'S CARE FOR HIS CHURCH.

Isai. xxvii. 3. *I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*

GOD has provided abundant consolation for his church in seasons of the greatest trial: and he calls upon her to enjoy and celebrate her privileges in “a responsive song^a,” in firm expectation of safety, amidst the most awful and desolating judgments.

The first part of the song, which is begun by Jehovah himself, leads us to shew

I. Whence the church derives her security

The church, like a vineyard, is set apart in order to a more careful cultivation

[This idea is elsewhere more fully opened by the same prophet^b: and it well illustrates the care taken to separate the church from the world at large, and the pains used to render her fruitful in the fruits of righteousness.]

At the same time she also resembles a vineyard, in that she is open to the assaults of many who would destroy her

[A vineyard, however carefully fenced in, may have its fences broken down, and its plants destroyed, if it be not watched and guarded^c. And the church is open to the incursion of numerous and potent enemies, who would soon destroy her, if she were not protected from their assaults.]

But she is preserved by an invisible, but almighty Protector

[Jehovah himself interposes on her behalf. He preserves her, as the bush in the midst of the flames, burning, but not consumed.

^a Ver. 2. should rather have been translated, “Sing ye to the beloved vineyard a responsive song.”

^b Isai. v. 1, 2.

^c Ib. ver. 5, 6. Ps. lxxx. 8—16.

consumed^d. He protects his church *in general*, that "the gates of hell may not prevail against her;" and he keeps all her members *in particular*, that none may be ever plucked out of his hand^e.]

Nor shall we tremble for her future welfare, when we consider

II. What prospect she has of continued preservation

The same Jehovah who says, "I *do* keep her," adds also, "I *will*." He promises (still keeping up the metaphor of a vineyard)

1. Culture

[In a country that had only periodical rains, pools or reservoirs of water were indispensably necessary for the preservation of the vines in a season of drought. The church too, and all the members of it, need to be watered by God's word^f, and Spirit^g. Now God promises that he will take this care upon himself, and execute the work, as it were, with his own hands. Yea, inasmuch as we need fresh supplies of grace, not only every *day*, like a vineyard, but every *moment*, (as we need the light of the sun) God suits his promise to our necessities, and tells us he will water us "every moment."]

2. Protection

[Our care in cultivating a vineyard would be in vain, unless we also protected it from those who would destroy it. Thus the church, and every individual believer, would in vain receive the culture, if it did not enjoy also the protection, of heaven. But God promises to afford his people *continual*, and *effectual* preservation. He will guard them "night and day" (for "he neither slumbers nor sleeps") and will keep them, not only from destruction, but from injury: "No weapon formed against them shall ever prosper^h."]

WE LEARN from hence

1. Where to look in the midst of *national* calamities

[God has, in this land, a remnant, over whom he watches with the tenderest care, and for whose sake we trust he will spare the whole nation. At all events we may be sure that he will provide a hiding-place for his church; so that, whatever be the fate of others, it shall not be overwhelmedⁱ. Let us not then trust in fleets and armies, but in the living God, who is omnipresent to behold, and almighty to defeat, the plots

^d Exod. iii. 2.

^e Matt. xvi. 18. John x. 29. Ps. xlv. 5.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 6. Deut. xxxii. 2.

^g Isai. xlv. 3, 4.

^h Isai. liv. 17.

ⁱ Isai. xxvi. 20, 21.

plots of our enemies; and let our supplications be made with increased frequency and fervour to him, whose past interpositions we have such abundant reason to acknowledge^k.]

2. Where to look in the midst of *personal* troubles

[That which alone we ought to desire, is, that nothing may "hurt" us. As for the pruning, which may render us more fruitful^l, it should be received with submission and gratitude. The evils that tend to our destruction, we may deprecate, with an assurance that our prayer shall be heard and answered. We need not fear the drought which occasions God to water us, nor the weapons that call forth his effectual interposition. Only let us render him fruits suited to the culture bestowed upon us; and nothing shall come upon us without necessity^m; nothing which shall not eventually work for our goodⁿ.]

^k John xv. 2.

^m 1 Pet. i. 6.

^l Ps. cxxiv. 1—6.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 28.

DIX. THE APOSTLES COMMISSION.

Matt. xxviii. 18—20. *And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

THE apostles spoke and wrote in a most authoritative manner—

They issued commands, promises, and threats, in the name of God—

We therefore naturally enquire, by what authority they acted—

The passage before us gives a most satisfactory account—

In these words of our Lord we observe

I. The authority he claimed

Jesus, as God, possessed all power equally with the Father—

But, as Mediator, he received his power from the Father—

[He

[He received it, partly, that by means of it he might execute his mediatorial office^a—

And, partly, as a reward for executing it^b—]

This power extended over heaven and earth

[Less than this would not have sufficed for the ends for which it was given—

But by this he is enabled to overrule every thing for the accomplishment of his own purpose—]

Nor is it at all diminished by the lapse of ages

[It shall indeed cease to act at the last day^c—

There will not then be any occasion for the exercise of it—

But till all the members of the church be glorified, Jesus will exert this power for their good—

And his authority will be the hope and consolation of them all—]

It was upon this that he founded

II. The commission he gave to his apostles

He had formerly sent them to instruct the Jews—

He now extends their commission to the Gentiles—

They were to *teach* all nations

[As they were to baptize men in the name of the sacred THREE, no doubt they were first to make known the persons and offices of the holy Trinity—

They were to declare “the Father,” as our offended, but reconciled, God and Father—

They were to make known “the Son,” as the sinner’s advocate and propitiation—

They were to set forth “the Holy Ghost,” as the enlightener, comforter, and sanctifier of God’s elect—]

They were to *baptize* their converts in the name of the sacred Three

[Having proselyted men to the Christian faith, they were to initiate them into covenant with God by baptism—

But though they first taught adults, and then baptized them, they reversed this order with respect to infants—

They took care, however, that in all cases the doctrine they preached should be recorded in the baptismal rite—

And that every Christian should either expressly or virtually acknowledge it—]

They were also to *instruct* their hearers in *practical religion*

[It is evident they were not to be *merely* moral preachers—
They

^a John xvii. 2.

^b Phil. ii. 8—11.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 28.

They must of necessity insist much on the offices of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—

But they were also to inculcate every moral duty—

And to enforce every obligation whether toward God or man—]

This commission was arduous—We proceed to notice
III. The promise he added for their encouragement

The apostles might well have been discouraged from attempting to execute so difficult a service

[They were, in themselves, poor, mean, and illiterate—

They had to propagate principles new, strange, detested—

They had to oppose the lusts and prejudices of mankind—

They had to bring men from sin to a life of holiness and self-denial—

And this, not only without human aid, but in opposition to all the power and policy of the world—

They could not therefore but feel themselves unfit for such a task—]

But our Lord gave them a most encouraging promise

[When Moses declined the service to which he was called, God promised to be with him^d—

Thus Christ engaged to succour his disciples in their work—

He assured them of his presence to direct, assist, and uphold them—

And to give effect to their labours—

To this promise he called their particular attention ; “ lo ” —

Nor will he fail to accomplish it to the end of the world—]

Nor was the affirmation added to it without peculiar energy

[“ Amen ” may be considered as an affirmation or a petition—

In either view it should not be overlooked—

The promise it confirms, was the solace of all the apostles—

And has been the support of all succeeding pastors—

Let every one then add “ Amen,” as importing both his wish and affiance.]

INFER

1. How clearly is the doctrine of the Trinity revealed !

[The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are here distinctly mentioned—

They are all mentioned *in the same manner*, and *for the same end*—

Whatsoever

^d Exod. iv. 15.

Whatsoever is meant by "the name" of the Father, must be understood also in reference to the Son and Holy Ghost—

And the baptizing of persons in their name must be considered as the most solemn act of worship to them—

Let none then doubt the truth or importance of this doctrine—

Let every one rather be daily worshipping the sacred Three—

And looking to them to perform their respective offices—]

2. How highly should we value the ordinances of religion! .

[Many excuse themselves from attending on public ordinances, by saying, that they are equally profited at home—

But the converting and edifying of souls is the appointed labour of Christ's ministers—

And Christ has promised his special presence with them—

It must therefore be the duty of all to attend on their ministrations—

Let us then reverence his institutes, and seek his blessing—

Thousands yet daily experience the truth of his promise—

The poor, the weak, the desponding, are enriched, strengthened, comforted—

Nor shall any that truly hunger be ever sent away empty—]

DX. BELIEVERS ARE CHRIST'S PROPERTY.

1 Cor. iii. 23. *Ye are Christ's.*

TRUE Christians, however poor in this world, are indeed the richest people in the universe—There is not any thing of which they have not the best use and enjoyment—All things temporal, spiritual, and eternal, belong to them—Yet they are not so rich in the property they possess, as they are in being themselves the property of another—The Apostle is enumerating in a climax the privileges of Christians—And having said that all things are their's, he adds, as a more exalted privilege, that they are Christ's—To elucidate this truth, we shall consider

I. Whose we were

The whole creation properly belongs to God—But mankind have alienated themselves from him—Nor,
whatever

whatever difference may have been made between us and others by the grace of God, is there any difference between us by nature—As long as we continue unregenerate we belong

1. To ourselves

[The natural man disclaims God's authority over him—And thinks himself at liberty to live to himself—This was once the state even of the apostles themselves^a—Nor is there one amongst us who was not once a rebel like unto them—Our understanding, will, and affections, we used as altogether our own—The members of our bodies too we employed wholly in our own service—Even in our religious actions we regarded self rather than God^b—With respect to all our talents of time, money, influence, &c. we said, "They are our own, who is Lord over us?"—]

2. To the world

[The world has an entire ascendancy over us by nature—We adopt its maxims, follow its fashions, and obey its dictates—The pleasures, riches, and honours of it are the idols which we worship—What more can be wanting to constitute us its vassals^d?—Our Lord himself declares, that all such persons are, not merely the friends, but the property, of the world^e—]

3. To Satan

[Satan rules in all the children of disobedience^f—He leads them captive at his will^g—Hence he is called the god of this world^h—And who amongst us has not fulfilled *his* will?—This then manifests us to have been his childrenⁱ—And, if we be not converted by divine grace, it may still be said to us, as it was to the Jews of old, Ye are of your father, the devil^k.—]

By conversion, however, we are brought back to our rightful owner

II. Whose we are

Christ is the heir and sovereign Lord of all things—Both men and devils are subject to his controul—But believers are his in a more peculiar manner—They are his people^l, his bride^m, his very membersⁿ—

1. By donation from the Father

[The Father, from eternity, chose a people for himself^o—
These

^a Tit. iii. 3.

^d Rom. vi. 16.

^e 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^k John viii. 44.

ⁿ Eph. v. 30.

^b Zech. vii. 6.

^e John xv. 19.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^l Tit. ii. 14.

^o Eph. i. 4.

^c Ps. xii. 4.

^f Eph. ii. 2.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 8, 10.

^m Rev. xxi. 9.

These he gave to Christ to be redeemed by him^p—And secured them to him by an everlasting covenant^q—To his eternal purpose we must trace the distinction made between them and others^r—And ascribe all our salvation to him alone^s—]

2. By his own purchase

[Though salvation is freely given to us, it was purchased for us at a most invaluable price—Christ gave his own life a ransom for us—The price he paid was no less than his own blood^t—This is the great subject of praise in heaven^u—Nor should it ever be forgotten by us on earth—]

3. By the drawings of the Holy Spirit

[No man, of himself, would go to Christ for salvation—All who are his, are drawn to him by the Spirit^v—It is the Spirit who quickens and renews our souls—To him alone must we ascribe the power and the glory^w—]

4. By their own voluntary surrender

[All Christ's people are made willing to be his^z—They willingly renew their baptismal covenant—And give themselves up to him at his holy table—This they consider as their reasonable service^a—Yea, they rejoice in it as their highest privilege—This is the peculiar character of all true Christians^b—]

LEARN hence

1. The Christian's character

[How different from what he himself once was, and the generality still are!— — —]

2. The Christian's privilege

[The most eminent Christians were once in as miserable a state as any—But now, how altered their condition!—How *happy* are they in comparison of what they were!—How infinitely preferable is Christ's service to Satan's!—And how rich the recompense they will receive from Christ in comparison of any the world could have given!—How *secure* too are they in the hands of Christ!—None shall be able to pluck them from him^c—They shall assuredly be kept by the Father's power^d—And shall finally participate the Saviour's glory^e—Let them all therefore rejoice, and adore their God—Nor let them

^p John xvii. 6.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 34—36.

^r 2 Tim. i. 9.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^t 1 Pet. i. 19.

^u Rev. v. 9.

^v John vi. 44.

^w Zech. iv. 6.

^z Ps. cx. 3.

^a Rom. xii. 1.

^b Jer. i. 5.

^c John x. 28, 29.

^d John xvii. 11. 1 Pet. i. 5.

^e John xvii. 24.

them regard the frowns of an ungodly world—If Christ own them, it signifies little who disowns them—]

3. The Christian's duty

[If we belong to Christ we ought to live as his people—We should devote to him ourselves, and all that we have, without reserve—This was the manifest end for which he bought us^f—Let every one then remember whose he is, and whom he is bound to serve—Nor let any one presume to alienate the Saviour's property—All that we have and are should be employed for him—Our duty is summed up in the apostle's exhortation^g—]

^f Tit. ii. 14.

^g 1 Cor. vi. 20.

D XI. GOD'S DISTINGUISHED REGARD FOR THE POOR.

James ii. 5. *Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?*

IT is a duty incumbent on all ministers to discountenance any errors, whether of faith or practice, that may have crept into the church. But when compelled by necessity to reprove what is amiss, they should shew by most unquestionable evidence that there is just occasion for censure; and, by their tender manner of reproving, they should evince that they are actuated only by a sense of duty to God, and of love to man. *St. James had seen a very shameful partiality prevailing in the church in favour of the rich, while the poor were too generally neglected and despised. Against this great evil he bears his testimony, not merely with fidelity, but with unoffending tenderness, and unanswerable wisdom. His argument is to this effect; Hath not God *chosen* the poor, and selected them as monuments of his love, and as heirs of his glory? With what consistency then can you pour contempt upon them, as though they were unworthy of the smallest attention?

In discoursing upon his words, we shall shew

I. What inheritance God has chosen for the poor

While

While man is unmindful of the poor, God has exalted them above others in respect of

1. Their present portion

[Faith is that precious gift which he has bestowed on them: and though few among the rich regret their want of it, yet is it a most inestimable blessing. The smallest portion of it is sufficient (provided it be a true and living faith) to prove their election of God^a—To secure to them the remission of sins^b—to bring peace into their conscience^c—and to sanctify their hearts^d—The smallest portion of it is a *peculiar* gift bestowed on very few^e—and one which neither men nor devils ever shall deprive them of^f—Yet God has not chosen them to enjoy a *small* portion of it, but “to be *rich* in it:” he would have them “strong in faith, not staggering at any promise^g,” but “living,” both for temporal and spiritual things, altogether “by faith in the Son of God^h,” fully assured, that all things needful shall be supplied for their bodiesⁱ, and that all things shall work together for the good of their souls^k.

The Levites were not suffered to have any inheritance among their brethren; but the Lord their God was their inheritance^l. And this, so far from being a grievance to them, was deemed their highest privilege. Thus privileged are the poor: they have little of this world; but, if they have God for their portion, they are the richest people upon earth.]

2. Their eternal inheritance

[God has provided “a kingdom for them that love him;” a kingdom worthy to be possessed by those, whom God delights to honour. And it is his will that “the poor of this world” should not only aspire after it, but consider themselves as “heirs” to it. While they are destitute, perhaps of food to eat, or of raiment to put on, he would have them like minors that are heirs to a large estate, who delight to survey the grounds which they are speedily to possess: he would have them survey all the glory of heaven, and say, “*That* is my patrimony: the instant I attain the age appointed by my Father’s will, I shall have an host of angels sent to bear me on their wings to the mansions prepared for me.”]

To vindicate the ways of God, we shall proceed to shew

II. Why

^a Acts xiii. 48.

^b Acts x. 43.

^c Rom. v. 1.

^d Acts xv. 9.

^e Isaia. liii. 1. John xii. 38. Rom. x. 16.

^f John iv. 14.

^g Rom. iv. 20.

^h Gal. ii. 20.

ⁱ Matt. vi. 33.

^k Rom. viii. 28.

^l Numb. xviii. 20. Josh. xiii. 33.

II. Why he has chosen this portion for them in particular

That God has chosen this portion for the poor is beyond a doubt

[If the Apostle had only affirmed it, no room would have been left for doubt; but he ventured to appeal even to the rich themselves respecting it, and *that* too at the very time that he was reproving them for their contempt of the poor; yea, he even grounded the reproof itself upon that very appeal. He could not possibly express more strongly his own persuasion of the truth in question. But it is capable of abundant proof both *from scripture and experience*. Who were the people that received the testimony of our blessed Lord? "Did any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believe on him^m?" Who constituted the great majority of the church in the apostolic age? St. Paul informs us; "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the *foolish*, the *weak*, the *base*, the *despised*, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that areⁿ." And we might appeal to you at this day; Who are they that crowd the churches where the gospel is preached, notwithstanding they meet with the same contemptuous treatment that the Apostle so justly complains of? Who are they that "receive the word with meekness, and have it ingrafted" in their hearts, and exemplified in their lives? are these the rich? A few there may be; but it is "to the poor chiefly that the gospel is preached^p," and it is "the common people that hear it gladly^q."]

Nor are we at a loss to assign reasons for this procedure

[God has thus distinguished the poor, in order to *stain the pride of man*. Men, if they are exalted above their fellow-creatures in wealth or dignity, are ready to conceive that they are as great in the eyes of God as they are in their own eyes. They think themselves (I had almost said) above God himself: they are too wise to learn of God, and too great to be controlled by him. God therefore pours contempt on them, as they do on him^r. He will let them see that their possessions or endowments, however great, are not a child's portion, but

^m John vii. 48.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^o How many will open their pews to a rich or well-dressed person, that would suffer a poor man, however pious or infirm, to "stand" during the whole service, without ever offering him a seat, when they had room enough to accommodate many! Yea, how many rich persons will absent themselves from the ordinances, and *lock up* their pews, to prevent their being occupied! What would St. James have said to these things? See ver. 2, 3, 4, 9.

^p Matt. xi. 5.

^q Mark xii. 37.

^r 1 Sam. ii. 30.

but only as crumbs cast to the dogs. He will render the poor as superior to them in spiritual things, as they are to the poor in temporal things: he will "lift up the beggar from the dunghill, and set him among the princes;" while he casts down the mighty from their thrones to the lowest abyss of shame and misery.

Moreover, in thus distinguishing the poor, God further designs *to magnify the riches of his own grace*. If God bestowed his favours principally on the rich, we should be ready to think that they had some peculiar claim upon him, and that his attention to them was no more than their due: or perhaps we should rather conclude, that their superior talents enabled them to unravel the divine mysteries, and to attain heaven by their own unassisted efforts. But when we see the gospel "hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes," we are constrained to acknowledge the marvellous condescension, and uncontrollable sovereignty of our God.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who despise the portion that God has chosen

[It is to be lamented that many even among the poor themselves are regardless of the "true riches." But what madness is it to reject that which would assuage all their present sorrows; and to render themselves infinitely more destitute in the next world than they are in this! O that they would accept the portion that God offers them!

The rich too almost universally despise the gospel. But how painful will their reflections be in that day when the parable of Dives and Lazarus shall be realized in them! O consider, ye are not excluded; God is willing to bestow the same inestimable blessings upon you. Seek then to be rich in faith, and heaven itself shall be your everlasting inheritance.]

2. Those who desire to possess that portion

[Blessed be God, there are some among the poor that know and enjoy their privileges. But whence is it that *they* discern what is hid from others? Had they any thing in themselves more than others; "any thing which they have not received?" No: they would never have chosen God, if God had not first "chosen" them. Let them then adore that grace which has been thus magnified towards them.

Do any of the rich enquire, What shall we do to get a share in this inheritance? Shall we cast away all our riches, and reduce ourselves to poverty? No; there is an infinitely better
and

* 1 Sam. ii. 8.

† Matt. xi. 25.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

× 1 Cor. iv. 7.

‡ John xv. 16.

and safer way; "LOVE GOD." You may give away all your goods, and be nothing profited ²: but if you "love God, the kingdom is absolutely *promised* to you." The poor cannot be saved unless they be rich in faith: and you, if you exercise faith and love towards our adorable Saviour, shall also be saved with an everlasting salvation.]

² 1 Cor. xiii. 3. *Thrice* is this *expressly* repeated in that forecited passage, 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

DXII. THE PRIVILEGES OF CHRIST'S FLOCK.

Luke xii. 32. *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

AMONG the many faculties which exalt man above the brute creation, that of being able to look into futurity is by no means the least—But while this in many instances elevates him with hope, in many other instances it depresses him with fear—Hence he is often filled with anxiety to secure the good he hopes for, and to avert the evil which he dreads—To discountenance this solicitude, and to teach men to live dependent upon God, is the scope of our Lord's discourse before us—And, in the text, he fortifies his own peculiar people against fear and anxiety, by reminding them of the distinguishing favour of God towards them, and the glorious provision he has made for them—To elucidate his words we shall enquire

I. Why the Lord's people are called "a little flock"

The metaphor of sheep is often used to characterize the followers of Christ—Ingenuity might easily suggest a variety of particulars wherein the parallel between them may be drawn—But, to limit our views within the strictest bounds of propriety, we observe that

They are called "*a flock*" principally from the peculiar regard shewn them by the Lord

[All, who love and fear God, once "went astray like sheep that are lost"—But they have been brought home by Christ, the great and good shepherd—And have been united together by him in one fold—They are kept inclosed as it were, and distinct from the world—They "hear their shepherd's voice

voice and follow him;—He “leads them into pastures” which he himself has provided for them—He administers to all their wants,” “strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, and binding up the broken^a”—The lambs he carries in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young^b—And, however they may feed in different pastures, he considers them all as under his peculiar care—]

They are called “*a little flock*” because they are but few in number

[In every age and every place their numbers have been small—They are “the few that find the narrow way”—When indeed they shall be all assembled at the last day they will be more than the stars of heaven or the sands upon the sea shore for multitude^c—But before that period they will receive an astonishing increase—The whole earth shall be overspread with them; and *that* too in successive generations for a thousand years^d—Till that day of God’s power they will be a little flock when compared with the herds of the ungodly—At present they are only “like the gleanings of the olive-tree, two or three upon the topmost branch^e”—]

Interested as we must be in what relates to them, let us enquire

II. What they have to fear

They are not exempt from the common calamities of life—In some respects they are more exposed to them than other people—They have reason therefore to fear

1. Wants

[Though man may provide for to-morrow, he cannot secure what he has provided—Hence all are so desirous of placing themselves as far as possible out of the reach of any disastrous contingencies—In making such provision the true Christian labours under many disadvantages—He cannot use those means of acquiring wealth which the generality of the world employ without any scruple—He cannot devote *all* his time, and *all* his attention to secular engagements—He dares not neglect his soul, even if he could gain the whole world by it—Moreover, he has many in the world who would be glad enough to ruin him; but few, very few, that will exert themselves much to help him forward—On these accounts he may at times be tempted to indulge excessive care, and to harbour fears of want and embarrassment—]

2. Sufferings

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 16.

^b Isai. xl. 11.

^c Rev. vii. 9.

^d Rev. xx. 4.

^e Isai. xvii. 6.

2. Sufferings

[The flock of Christ are not only subject to the trials incident to our present state, but are liable to many sufferings peculiar to themselves—They are “as sheep in the midst of wolves”—Often among themselves are found some that are “wolves in sheeps clothing”—Above all there is “a roaring lion ever seeking to devour them”—Now Christians are not only weak when opposed to Satan, but also when opposed to the world—They cannot contend with carnal weapons^f—“The servant of the Lord must not strive”—The rebuke given to Peter when fighting for his Master sufficiently ties their hands from standing in their own defence^g—Their only weapons are faith and patience—They are to conquer indeed, but it is by suffering even unto death^h—Well therefore may they entertain fears respecting these things—For if they be not well armed with the mind that was in Christⁱ, they will faint in the day of adversity—]

But the exhortation in the text leads us to enquire further

III. Why, notwithstanding their dangers, they should not fear

God has provided for them a “kingdom”

[God condescends to call himself their “Father”—And deals with them as his children—He has “prepared for them a kingdom” that is infinitely superior to all the kingdoms of this world—The glory of it cannot be expressed or conceived; nor will the duration of it ever end^k—This he has given to them for their inheritance—It is *his determination* to invest them with it, and *his delight* to preserve them for it—His almighty power is ever exercised for this purpose^l—Yea, his whole heart and soul are engaged in accomplishing his gracious intentions^m—]

This is a very sufficient antidote to all their fears

[Why should they be afraid of *want* who have God for their Father, and a kingdom for their inheritance?—Can it be supposed that he who provides for the evil and unthankful, and sustains the ravens that call upon him, will neglect his own children?—Will he, who *of his good pleasure* bestowed upon them all the glory of heaven, refuse them what is necessary for their present sustenance?—Why too should they be afraid of *sufferings*, since “not a hair of their head can perish,”

^f 2 Cor. x. 4.

^g Matt. xxvi. 52.

^h Rev. xii. 11.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 1.

^k Heb. xii. 28.

^l 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

^m Jer. xxxii. 41.

perish," "nor can even a sparrow fall to the ground, without the permission of their Father?"—If he see fit to let loose the enemy for the trial of their faith, will he not support their courage, and make them "more than conquerors?"—Besides, will not their "light and momentary afflictions work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?" "And will not a kingdom abundantly compensate all their trials?"—Surely then they should dispel all fears; and commit themselves into the hands of a faithful Godⁿ—]

ADDRESS

1. The flock of Christ

[God would have you without carefulness^o—He bids you cast all your care on him who careth for you^p—And shall God be so concerned about relieving your fears, and you not be concerned to honour him?—O chide your unbelieving thoughts, and say, Why art thou disquieted, O my soul?—Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want; Jehovah is my Father, I will not fear^q—Surely if you reflect on the promises he has made to you, it will be impossible for you ever to be cast down again—"Ye, my flock," says he, "the flock of my pasture, are men; but I am your God, saith the Lord God^r"—"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the fire, you shall not be burnt^s"—Consider, "If God be for you, who can be against you?"—O be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus^t—]

2. The herds of this world

[Shall we address you in the language of the text, Fear not? Alas! not only the scriptures, but also your own consciences, would condemn us—You may possibly have no particular cause to dread either wants or sufferings in this world, (though you cannot tell what may befall you before you die) but may you not have to "dwell with everlasting burnings," and want even "a drop of water to cool your tongue" in that world to which you are hastening?—Know assuredly, that your numbers will not screen you from the vengeance of an angry God—If you be not of those who have put themselves under the care of the good shepherd, you will be considered as goats, and be for ever separated from the flock of Christ—"He will set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats

ⁿ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^o 1 Cor. vii. 32.

^p 1 Pet. v. 7.

^q Ps. xxiii. 1, 4.

^r Ezek. xxxiv. 31.

^s Isai. xliii. 2.

^t Phil. iv. 6, 7.

See also John x. 27, 28.

goats on his left"—You will then find to your cost, that not God, but Satan was your father: and that with Satan must be your portion^u—It is not without much regret that God *now* gives you up to that misery^x—But in the last day he will find as much satisfaction, and be as much glorified, in your destruction, as in the salvation of his elect—He now complains, "Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities;" but then he will say, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries^y"—Seek then to become the sheep of Christ—Beg him to bring you home to his fold, and to feed you in his pleasant pastures—Thus shall we all become one fold under one shepherd, and feed beside the living fountains of water to all eternity—]

^u John viii. 42, 44.^x Hos. xi. 8.^y Isai. i. 24.

DXIII. THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

Zech. iv. 10. For who hath despised the day of small things?

IT is observable in the dispensations both of nature and of Providence, that the greatest things take their rise from very small beginnings—From a view of a new-born infant we might be ready to imagine that it would never be capable of any exertions: but, when its faculties are strengthened and matured, it may astonish the world with its profound wisdom, or its heroic exploits—Thus in the dealings of God towards the Jewish nation, they were frequently so reduced, as to be, to all appearance, incapable of attaining that state, which their prophets had given them reason to expect—After their restoration from the Babylonish captivity, their difficulties seemed absolutely insurmountable: but God, in the passage before us, assured them, that the very person, who had laid the foundation of their temple, should live to finish it; and exhorted them not to despise the present small beginnings; for that, in spite of every obstacle, they should have a favourable termination; the temple and city should be rebuilt, and the nation be restored, in a measure at least, to its pristine grandeur—Thus in the literal sense this promise refers to *the material temple at Jerusalem*; but it may well be applied

I. To the mystical temple which God has erected in the world

The very names of “Zion” and “Jerusalem” are often given to the church of Christ—Nor can there be a doubt, but that the history to which the text relates was a typical representation of Christ’s church, which is brought out of bondage, and erected in the midst of unnumbered difficulties—

There have been many seasons when it has been “a day of small things” with the church of God

[If we look back to the days of Noah, Abraham, Elijah, and the prophets, we shall find that the true worshippers of God were so few as to be “for signs and wonders” in the age and nation where they lived^a—After our Lord had preached for three or four years, the number of his disciples was no more than an hundred and twenty: and even at this day they are very few in comparison of those who serve mammon: they are “a little flock,” who walk in a “narrow and unfrequented way^b”—]

But we must not “despise” the church, however low it may appear

[God has promised that his church shall one day fill the world; that “all shall be righteous;” that “all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest;” and that “Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for his possession^c”—True it is that there is very little prospect of such an event at present; but “faithful is he who hath promised: who also will do it^d”—“Before our Zerubbabel the mountains shall become a plain^e;” he shall “ride on in the chariots of the everlasting gospel, conquering, and to conquer^f;” and “the knowledge of him shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea^g”—Instead therefore of despising the present low appearances, we must regard them as an earnest and pledge of that universal empire of Christ which shall in due season be erected in the world—]

The text is yet further applicable

II. To the spiritual temple which is founded by God in the hearts of his people

Believers are often called the temple of God^h: but so imperfect is their present state that it may well be said to be with them only as “a day of small things”

[In

^a Isai. viii. 18.

^b Matt. vii. 14.

^c Ps. ii. 8.

^d 1 Thess. v. 24.

^e Zech. iv. 7.

^f Rev. vi. 2.

^g Isai. xi. 9.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

[In some sense the most established believer is but in a low and despicable condition—What are any man's attainments when compared with *the law*, which is our rule, or with *Christ*, who is our pattern, or even with *Paul*, who was a man of like passions with ourselves?—But to weak believers the text may be more properly applied—They have indeed been liberated from their sore bondage, and have had the foundations of grace laid in their hearts; but alas! how slowly has the work advanced! and how many obstacles do they meet with, that weaken their hands, and discourage their hearts! often are they ready to question, whether the work be begun in them or not? and to say in despair, "There is no hope"—]

But they should not despise the operations of grace, however small

[The mode in which this part of the promise is conveyed, is worthy of notice—The interrogatory form of it puts the desponding soul, as it were, upon an enquiry, that by finding how important the day of small things is in the eyes of those who are competent to judge, it may not yield to its disquieting fears—Let the enquiry then be made; Who hath despised the day of small things? Did *the Father*, when he ran to meet the yet distant prodigal, and fell on his neck and kissed him? Does *Christ*, who "carries the lambs in his bosom," and has promised never to "break the bruised reed, though it be so unfit for his use, or to quench the smoking flax," notwithstanding there is so much in it to disgust, and so little to please, him? Do *the angels*, who, instead of waiting till the penitent becomes established, shout for joy at the very first appearances of his conversion? Does *Satan*? Does he not act precisely like the kings of Canaan, who, the very instant they found the Gibeonites had made a league with Joshua, confederated to destroy themⁱ? Yes; the moment we submit to Jesus, that roaring lion seeks, if possible, to devour us—If then they who best know the worth of true grace do not despise the very smallest portion of it, shall *we*? Shall we not rather value it, rejoice in it, adore our God for it, and take occasion from it to seek for more?—Consider *the author* of it, God; *his design* in it, to make us his habitation; *the benefits* resulting from it, present peace and everlasting glory; and shall we despise it; especially when God himself has assured us, that, "wheresoever he has begun the good work, he will carry it on and perfect it to the day of Christ^k?"—Did he notice "*some good thing*" in the heart of young Abijah^l, and will he forget you?—Let not the thought be entertained

ⁱ Josh. x. 1—5. This seems to have been a typical event

^k Phil. i. 6.

^l 1 Kings, xiv. 13.

entertained one moment; but let the weak be strong, and the faint-hearted dissipate their fears; for behold, “the temple shall be built, though in troublous times^m,” and “the headstone thereof shall be brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it”—]

To this encouraging subject we should subjoin a word or two of CAUTION

1. Do not *mistake* the day of small things

[As the wheat and the tares may be mistaken for each other in the early stage of their growth, so may good purposes and good desires be easily mistaken for the operations of saving grace—Religion may be counterfeited so well, as in some instances to deceive an apostleⁿ; and in ten thousand instances are men led from very false or equivocal appearances to fancy themselves possessed of the reality—To guard against so fatal an error, we should enquire whether the foundation be laid deep in humility and contrition; for, where this is not done, the superstructure, however beautiful it appear, will inevitably fall, and bury us in its ruins—]

2. Do not *think too highly* of the day of small things

[If we have solid grounds for believing that God has begun a good work in our hearts, we must still remember that much remains to be done: many conflicts must be sustained before we can get the victory; and “it ill becomes him who girds on the armour, to boast as one that puts it off^o”—The difficulties, which the builders of the material temple experienced, were shadows of those which we must expect in the divine life—Numberless are the devices of our subtle enemy; nor can we defeat his purposes, unless, while we build with one hand, we hold our sword in the other^p—Be not then high-minded, but fear; and, while you rejoice in what God has done for your souls, “rejoice with trembling”—]

^m Dan. ix. 25.

ⁿ Acts viii. 13, 21.

^o 1 Kings xx. 11.

^p Neh. iv. 17.

DXIV. THE SECURITY OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.

Amos ix. 9. *Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted with a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.*

THOUGH God does not see fit to preserve his people wholly from national calamities, yet he interposes, either
to

to lighten their afflictions or to sanctify them to their good—Daniel and the Hebrew youths were carried captive with their nation; yet were they eminently protected by that God whom they served: and Jeremiah, though not raised to any exalted station, was on many occasions marked as an object of God's incessant care and attention—The prophet Amos was commissioned to foretel that dispersion of Israel which began in the Assyrian captivity, and was completed at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: but the God of Abraham promised by him, that he would be mindful of "his hidden ones," and deliver them from the evils to which the profligate and secure should surely be exposed—

There are now, as well as in former ages, sifting times (if we may so speak) both to the church at large, and to the individual members of it: and the same distinguishing regard is still, though less visibly, manifested by God to his dear children; not the smallest of whom shall ever be overlooked—To illustrate this truth we shall shew

I. By what methods God sifts his people

God sees that a state of perfect ease would by no means conduce to his people's welfare; and therefore he suffers them sometimes to be agitated

1. By outward afflictions

[Persecution is the common lot of all who live godly in Christ Jesus: and this, together with other trials common to the world at large, is made use of to separate the godly from the ungodly, and to purify them from the corruptions that cleave to them in their present state—While the world smiles upon us we are too ready to seek its friendship by sinful compliances: and when we enjoy an entire freedom from troubles, we are apt to grow careless, and to relax our diligence in seeking "the rest that remaineth for us"—God therefore causes us to be "emptied from vessel to vessel, that we may not be settled on our lees"^a—]

2. By inward temptations

[By far the sorest trials, which Christians experience, are, for the most part, of an inward and spiritual nature: Satan wounds them with his fiery darts, and harasses them with many painful suggestions—That wicked fiend indeed

desires

^a Job xxxvi. 8—10. with Jer. xlviii. 11.

desires to sift them as wheat, that he may prevail against them to their destruction; but God permits him to do it for a very different end, namely, that he may root out all their self-confidence, and stimulate them to greater exertions in their spiritual warfare—This was the effect which it produced on Peter^b; and it is with the same benevolent intent that our almighty friend gives license to our adversary to make his assaults on us—Doubtless such “tossings to and fro” are very distressing to us at the time; but they are overruled for good, in that they separate us more effectually from an evil world, and render us more meet for the heavenly garner—]

Doubtless many who make a fair appearance, perish by these means: nevertheless we are assured of

II. The security of all those that are truly upright

There is an essential difference between the hypocrites and the sincere

[As chaff and corn may to a superficial observer resemble each other, so may the real and merely nominal Christian—But as there is a solidity in the corn which is not to be found in the chaff, so the truly converted person has something, which clearly distinguishes him from the most refined hypocrite: he is not contented with an appearance of religion, but seeks to possess it in truth: nor can he rest in the performance of duties; but labours to have his heart engaged in them—To be high in the estimation of men is, in his eyes, a poor matter; he would approve himself to God in all he does; nor is there any measure of perfection with which he would be satisfied, while there remained a hope and prospect of attaining more—]

Moreover, God will infallibly distinguish the true professors from the false

[Man may easily be mistaken in his estimate of characters: but God will form an unerring judgment: he discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart: he weighs the very spirits of men no less than their actions: “he needs not that any should testify of man, for he knows what is in man:” he will discover sincerity under the most unfavourable circumstances, and hypocrisy under the most artful disguise—Abijah alone of all the house of Jeroboam had *some good thing* in his heart towards the Lord God of Israel, and God did not fail to notice it with tokens of his approbation, while he poured out the vials of his wrath on all the family besides—If we were less than the least of all saints, if we were only as “smoking flax,”

^b Luke xxii. 31. compared with 1 Peter v. 8.

^c 1 Kings xiv. 13.

flax," having but one spark of grace and a whole cloud of corruption, God would assuredly observe the latent principle, and discover the workings of his own Spirit amidst all the infirmities of our fallen nature—]

Nor will he ever suffer the weakest believer to perish

[From the violence with which corn is agitated, an ignorant person would imagine that much of it must be lost with the chaff: in like manner many that are weak in faith may be ready to cry, "I shall one day perish"^d—But God pledges himself for the preservation of every the smallest grain—He represents himself under the image of a woman, who, having lost a small piece of silver, lights a candle, and sweeps diligently till she find it^e; and he assures us, that "it is not his will, that any of his little ones should perish"^f—We have no reason then to fear: for whilst he continues possessed of omniscience to discern his people, and omnipotence to preserve them, we shall be as secure amidst all our agitations, as if we were already lodged in the granary of heaven—]

INFER

1. How much are we concerned to be found sincere!

[There is a day quickly coming, when Christ, the Judge of quick and dead, shall sift and winnow us all—Nor will he merely cause a separation of the precious from the vile, but such a separation as shall be followed with endless happiness or misery^g—Should we not then diligently enquire whether we be wheat or chaff?—To what purpose is it that "the tares grow up with the wheat," and sometimes are mistaken for it, if, at the harvest, they must be separated for ever^h? So it will be of little avail to have been reputed Christians, if, the very instant we die, we are to take our portion with hypocrites and unbelievers—Let us then turn to God now with our whole hearts, that we may "have confidence before him at his coming"—]

2. How may we welcome afflictions, provided we be truly upright!

[What are afflictions but the sieve in our Father's hand, whereby he takes us from among the ungodly, and "purifies us unto himself a peculiar people?"—And shall we distrust his skill, or doubt his love?—If the countryman, instructed by him, knows how to suit his threshing-instruments to the nature of his corn, shall God be at a loss how most effectually to produce his ends on usⁱ?—Let us then leave ourselves in his hands,

^d 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. ^e Luke xv. 8.

^f Matt. xviii. 14.

^g Matt. iii. 12.

^h Matt. xiii. 29, 30.

ⁱ Isai. xxviii. 26—28.

hands, and submit cheerfully to the means, that we may at last attain the end—]

3. How important a grace is faith!

[Under the various trials with which we are harassed, it is faith alone that can keep us steadfast, or afford us any solid comfort—If we be destitute of faith, we shall be tormented with ten thousand fears: but if we be strong in faith, we shall, under all circumstances, “stay ourselves on God, and be kept in perfect peace^k”—However sensible we be of our own weakness and unworthiness, we shall expect the accomplishment of God's promise, and shall dismiss our fears, “knowing that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him^l”—May we all be enabled in this manner to trust ourselves in his hands, and to wait quietly for that salvation which he has prepared for us!—]

^k Isai. xxvi. 3.

^l 2 Tim. i. 12.

DXV. GOD'S MERCY TO THE MOST OBSTINATE SINNERS*

Isai. lvii. 17, 18. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comfort to him, and to his mourners.*

THE wickedness of man and the mercy of God mutually illustrate each other—There is no greater aggravation of sin than the circumstance of its being committed against a God of infinite goodness and compassion: nor is there any thing that magnifies the love of God more, than the unworthiness of the object towards whom that love is exercised—This observation is suggested to us by numberless passages of scripture, in which a contrasted view of man's depravity and God's mercy is presented before our eyes: nor is it ever more pertinent than when we are considering the words which we have just read—In these we may see

I. The controversy which God has with sinners

Iniquity, however secret in the commission, or specious in its appearance, is hateful and abominable in the sight of God

[There is no sin more frequently concealed from the view of those who harbour it, than covetousness—It assumes the names of prudence and œconomy; and, under the semblance of a care for one's family, is too generally regarded as a virtue—If it do not instigate us to the violation of common honesty, or totally deaden all the feelings of humanity, it is applauded by others, and serves as a foundation for self-approbation and self-complacency—But the love of money is the root of all evil^a: it is a base lust, it is the vilest idolatry^b: it sets up mammon in preference to God; and must therefore of necessity provoke the Lord to jealousy—But we are not to confine our views to this particular sin: this indeed was predominant among the Jews, as it is amongst us; but it is here mentioned only as indicating the general depravity that prevailed amongst them—]

While God notices it with abhorrence, he shews, by many visible marks, his indignation against it

[God is not an unconcerned spectator of iniquity: delighted as he is in exercising mercy, he is not inattentive to the demands of justice, or indifferent about the honour of his holiness—On the contrary, he is “wroth,” and justly wroth, with the workers of iniquity; nor does he fail to manifest his displeasure against them—He “hides himself” from them, withdrawing those gracious influences which he had at any time bestowed, and withholding those communications of light and strength, which he might otherwise have imparted to them—He “smites them” either with temporal or spiritual calamities—Perhaps he visits them with sickness in their own persons, or trouble in their families, or distress in their circumstances: and if they would enquire of God, they might find the cause of their calamities to be some hidden abomination which God is punishing^c—Perhaps the judgments are rather of a spiritual nature: he “heweth them by his prophets,” and at the same time smites them with judicial blindness and obduracy^d; he gives them over to their own delusions^e; he seals them up under final impenitence, and unbelief^f—These strokes are terrible in proportion to the insensibility with which they are received; and the less the sinner's apprehension of danger is, the more awful is the judgment inflicted on him—]

But divine chastisements, unattended with the operations of grace, never produce the desired effect

[Notwithstanding ten successive plagues, Pharaoh continued

^a 1 Tim. vi. 10.

^b Col. iii. 5.

^c See Acts xii. 23. and 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32.

^d Hos. vi. 5. Isai. vi. 9, 10. Exod. xiv. 4. • Isai. lxvi. 4.

^f 2 Thess. ii. 11. Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

tinued to harden his heart against God—Thus it is with sinners in general: they either relent not at all, or, like metal taken out of the furnace, relapse immediately into their former state of obduracy—For the most part, “though God strikes them, they will not grieve; though he even consumes them, they refuse to receive correction; they make their faces harder than a rock, and refuse to return^g”—“They are mad upon their idols; so that though, like Ezekiel’s followers, they delight to hear the word, they will not *do* it, but still yield to the corrupt bias within them^h; too many of them, instead of being reclaimed by God’s chastisements, continue, like Ahaz, to trespass yet more and more against himⁱ—]

Nor can we conceive any other way wherein this controversy can be brought to a successful issue, but in

II. The way which he takes to terminate it

One might well suppose that God, who sees iniquity in all its aggravations, should give vent to his indignation by destroying those who commit it

[On some occasions God has signally interposed to execute vengeance on the sinners of mankind^k—And it is a miracle of mercy that he endures any with such long-suffering and forbearance—When he sees both his mercies and his judgments despised, and that his endeavours to reclaim sinners issue in nothing but disappointment, we might well expect him to swear in his wrath, that such daring transgressors should never enter into his rest—]

But he determines rather to save them by an exertion of sovereign and almighty grace

[Jeremiah informs us, that, when God knew not, as it were, how to restore the backsliding Israelites, so as to put them among the number of his children, he adopted this resolution; “Thou *shalt* call me, my Father, and *shalt* not turn away from me¹.” Thus in the passage before us he says, “I have seen his ways, and (what? will destroy him utterly? No :) will heal him”—What marvellous condescension! what unbounded mercy! How should it melt the most obdurate heart!—God will apply the balm of Gilead to the consciences of sinners; “he will heal their backslidings and love them freely”—Nay, further, he will take them by the hand, and however far they may have strayed, he will bring them back unto his fold, and “lead” them in safety to his heavenly kingdom—Nor will he leave them destitute even of present
“comforts:”

^g Jer. v. 3.

^h Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

^k Numb. xvi. 31, 32. 1 Cor. x. 1—10.

¹ Jer. iii. 19.

“comforts:” the peace and happiness, which they have in vain sought for in the ways of sin, he will give in the paths of righteousness and true holiness—]

It is to be remembered, however, that he will first make them “mourn” for their transgressions.

[While sinners continue obstinate, it is not possible that they should obtain favour with the Lord—God must altogether deny himself before he can receive the impenitent—He has declared that all must repent who would not perish^m; and that it is in a way of weeping and supplication that he will lead them to himselfⁿ—It is the broken and contrite heart alone that he will not despise^o—He says, “Only acknowledge thine iniquity:” and when his time is come for subduing a sinner to the obedience of faith, he will “take away his stony heart, and give him a heart of flesh^p,” he will first “give him repentance; and then remission of sin^q”—He will cause him to become a mourner in Zion; and then will give him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^r—]

This subject may lead us to OBSERVE

1. Of what importance it is to search out the hidden corruptions of our hearts!

[Covetousness is a sin of which scarce any persons in the world acknowledge themselves guilty: nor, however much they be under the power of it, do they see any occasion for humiliation before God, provided they be free from gross and scandalous offences—But the predominance of that, or any other vile affection in the heart, may fill God with wrath against us, and cause him to hide his face from us for ever, and to smite us with his heaviest judgments—Should we not then be afraid of “speaking peace to ourselves, when there is no peace^s?”—Should we not beg of God to give us increasing views of those chambers of imagery, where ten thousand abominations lurk unseen^t? Should we not with all diligence search our hearts, to find whether there be *any* way of wickedness allowed within us^u?—Let there be an holy jealousy in every breast: let the utmost care be used; lest we deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin—]

2. How necessary is it to notice the dealings of God towards us!

[If we meet with temporal afflictions, we should regard them

^m Luke xiii. 3.

^p Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

^r Jer. vi. 14.

ⁿ Jer. xxxi. 9.

^q Acts v. 31.

^t Ezek. viii. 6—15.

^o Ps. li. 17.

^s Isai. lxi. 3.

^u Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

them as sent by God; and though they are tokens of love to his people, yet are they indications of wrath to his enemies; and, whether we be converted or not, they have a voice which it becomes us to hear with attention and reverence^x—If we are visited with spiritual judgments, if God hides his face from us in the ordinances, and withholds the influences of his Spirit, we should still more earnestly enquire, wherefore God contendeth with us^y?—Perhaps we should find that God is wroth on account of our pride, ambition, worldliness, or some other hateful lust; and that, as he would not hear the Jews, even “when they made many prayers, because their hands were full of blood,” so some cursed abomination has provoked him to withdraw from us—If we perceive no particular trial, either temporal or spiritual, we must not even then conclude that all is well, since it is the very nature of spiritual judgments to blind the eyes, and sear the conscience, and harden the heart—Of this we may be sure; that whether our outward circumstances be prosperous or adverse, they are equally calls and invitations from God; and are intended as incentives to gratitude or humiliation—Let us then both notice and improve his works of providence and grace; let us improve them by obeying him that calls, and “turning unto him that smites us”—]

3. How thankfully should we accept the present offers of his mercy.

[Now, notwithstanding all our “frowardness,” the voice of mercy sounds in our ears—But how vain will it be to wish for one such promise in the eternal world! God will not then say, “I will heal him;” but, “I have seen his ways, and will execute vengeance on him to the uttermost”—Now God would “comfort us” if we turned to him with “mourning;” but then, though we weep and wail ever so much, he will not vouchsafe to us one glimpse of his favour, or the smallest possible mitigation of our pain—Let us then entertain a grateful sense of his unspeakable kindness—Let us “turn to him with weeping and with mourning”—Let us humble ourselves in the dust before him; and pray, that, where sin has abounded, his grace may much more abound^z.]

^x Mic. vi. 9.

^y Job x. 2.

^z Rom. v. 20.

DXVI. CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS.

1 Tim. i. 15. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

IT is said of the Athenians that “they spent their time in nothing else but in telling or hearing some new thing.” This, to say the least, was a very unprofitable way of employing their precious hours: for of the reports that are most industriously circulated, many are false, many doubtful, many frivolous; and of those that are true and important, the far greater part do not properly concern us. But there is one report that has spread far and wide, in which we are all deeply interested; the *particulars of which, together with the general character of the report itself*, it is our intention to lay before you

I. The report itself

In general the report is, that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” But because of its singular importance, it will be proper that we enter into *particulars*, and tell you distinctly

1. Who Jesus Christ was

[He was a man in every respect like ourselves, sin only excepted. But he was God also: he was the only-begotten Son of God, “God of God, light of light, very God of very God.” To declare *fully* who he was, is beyond the power of any finite being: since “none knoweth the Son but the Father^a,” yet we know infallibly from scripture that he was the eternal^b, immutable Jehovah^c, God manifest in the flesh^d, God over all, blessed for ever^e.]

2. How he came into the world

[He was *born* like other men; but he was *not begotten* in the way of ordinary generation. He was formed by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of a pure virgin, that he might partake of our nature without inheriting our corruption^f. He was born under circumstances of peculiar meanness: his life also was spent in poverty and disgrace: and his death was the most cruel and ignominious that could be

^a Matt. xi. 27.

^c Heb. xiii. 8.

^e Rom. ix. 5.

^b Mic. v. 2. with John xvii. 5.

^d 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^f Luke i. 35.

be inflicted on him. But he foreknew from the beginning all that he should suffer, and yet voluntarily took upon him our nature, that he might both do and suffer all that was appointed of the Father.]

3. For what end he came into the world

[Never was there such an errand before, or since. His own creatures had ruined themselves; and he came to save them. Though it was *his* law that they transgressed, and *his* authority that they despised, and *his* yoke that they cast off; yea, though he was the one great object of their contempt and abhorrence, he came to save them. Though he knew that they would murder him as soon as ever he should put himself into their power, yet he came to save them; to save the vilest of them, not excepting those who unrighteously condemned him, or insultingly mocked him, or cruelly pierced him with the nails and spear. When there was no alternative but either that they must perish, or he come down from heaven to suffer in their stead, down he came upon the wings of love, and "saved them from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for them²." He suffered that they might go free; and died, that they might live for ever.]

That this is "not a cunningly devised fable," will appear, if we consider what is said in the text respecting

II. The character of this report

St. Paul, who had examined it thoroughly, declares that it is

1. Worthy of credit

[So strange a report as this ought on no account to be believed, unless it can be proved beyond a possibility of doubt. Credulity in a concern that so deeply involves the honour of God and the welfare of all the human race, would be criminal in the highest degree. But we need be under no apprehensions respecting the truth of this report. "It is a *faithful* saying:" it is attested by the accomplishment of prophecies the most numerous, the most minute, the most opposite and irreconcilable; of prophecies, which no human wisdom could have devised; no human power could accomplish. It has been credited by thousands who were at first most adverse to it: it has always appeared with more convincing evidence in proportion as it has been scrutinized and examined: and multitudes have propagated it at the peril of their lives, and sealed the truth of it with their blood. There is no species of
evidence

² Gal. iii. 13.

preached unto you, let him be accursed. After you have remarked the extreme force and significancy of the words, observe that the apostle denounced an anathema *twice*, even denouncing it against *himself*, should he ever be guilty of what he condemns, denouncing it even against an *angel* from heaven in the same case.

You must observe, the apostle does not always use the same vehemence when he speaks against error. In the fourteenth of the epistle to the Romans, he contents himself with calling those *weak in the faith* who would eat only herbs, and exhorts the other believers to bear with them. In the third chapter of the first to the Corinthians, he protests to those who build with wood, hay, and stubble, upon Christ the foundation, that their *work* should be burnt, but that *they* should be saved, though it should be as *by fire*. In the seventeenth of Acts, we are told, *his spirit was stirred* when he saw the idolatry and superstition of the Athenians. Elsewhere he says, *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.* In all these there is a force; but nothing like what appears in these reiterated words, *Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* *As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* Why so? because the apostle speaks here of an *essential* corruption of the Gospel, which the false apostles aimed at in the churches of Galatia; they were annihilating the grace of Christ by associating it with the Mosaic economy; they aimed at the entire ruin of the church by debasing the purity of the Gospel. In this case, the conscience of this good man could contain no longer; he stretched his zeal and vehemence as far as possible; he became inexorable, and pronounced anathemas; nothing prevented him, neither the authority of the greatest men, no, nor yet the dignity of the glorious angels: *If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed.*

XXV.

OBSERVE DIFFERENT INTERESTS.

Thus, if you are explaining the miracle which Jesus Christ wrought in the synagogue on a Sabbath-day, when he healed the withered hand in the presence of the Herodians and Pharisees, you may remark the different *interests* of the spectators in that act of our Lord Jesus; for, on the one hand, *Moses* and his religion seemed interested therein two ways: 1. This miracle was done on a *day* in which Moses had commanded them to do no manner of work. And, 2. This was done in a *synagogue* consecrated to the Mosaic worship, so that it was in a manner insulting Moses in his own house. Farther, the *Herodians*, who were particularly attached to the person of Herod, either for political reasons, or for some others unknown, were obliged to be offended; for this miracle had a tendency to prove Christ's Messiahship, and thereby (as was commonly thought) his right to the kingdom of Israel; and, consequently, this must blacken the memory of Herod, who endeavoured to kill him in his infancy. The *Pharisees* were no less interested; for they considered Christ as their reprover and enemy, and could not help being very much troubled whenever they saw Jesus Christ work a miracle. Observe the interest of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; his concern was to do good, wherever he had an opportunity, and to glorify God his Father, by confirming the word of his Gospel by acts of infinite power. The *poor afflicted man* had a double interest in it—the healing of his body, and the improvement of his mind.

Thus this action of Jesus Christ, having divers relations, becomes, as it were, a point, whence many lines may be drawn, one on this side, another on that; and hence arise the different remarks which may be made upon it.

XXVI.

DISTINGUISH.—DEFINE.—DIVIDE.

To speak properly, we *distinguish* when we consider a thing in different views. As for example, Faith is considerable,

evidence wanting to confirm it: so that it is impossible to doubt of its truth, if only we enquire into it with diligence and candour]

2. Worthy of acceptation

[There are many reports that are true, which yet are unworthy of any serious concern. But *this* is so universally interesting, and withal so precious, that it is worthy to be received by all mankind with the liveliest joy and exultation. If it be considered only as affecting the *present* happiness of men, there is no other report deserving of the smallest attention in comparison of this. None but God can tell, how many myriads of souls it has delivered from the deepest distress and anguish, and filled with peace and joy unspeakable. In truth, there is no *solid* comfort upon earth but what arises from the belief of these joyful tidings. But if we extend our views to the *eternal* felicity which the crediting of this report has occasioned; if we look at the myriads of saints that are already around the throne of God, and consider what numbers are continually adding to them from this lower world, and what an innumerable host there will be at the last day, that will have been rescued from hell, and exalted to glory *solely* through their crediting of this report, surely we shall say it is “worthy of *all* acceptation,” worthy, not merely to be credited, but to be entertained in our hearts with the devoutest gratitude and thanksgiving.]

We shall CONCLUDE with recommending “this saying” to the attention of

1. Those who have lived in a wilful course of sin

[You cannot but have some secret apprehension that “your end will be according to your ways.” How acceptable then ought these tidings to be to you! Do not despise them. Do not aggravate your eternal condemnation by rejecting them: neither put them from you, as though they were too good to be true: for Christ came to save even the very “chief of sinners;” and *you*, if you will believe on him, shall experience his salvation.]

2. Those who have been more exemplary in their lives

[Do not imagine that you are able to save yourselves: if you have not been such profligate sinners as others, still you are “sinners,” and must be saved by Jesus Christ, or not at all. You are but too apt to overlook all that Christ has done and suffered for you, under an idea that your moral and religious duties will conciliate the divine favour; and hence it too often happens, that, while “publicans and harlots enter into his kingdom, persons of your description exclude themselves from it. But know, that “there is salvation in no other;”

other:" Christ is, and must be, your only refuge, and your only hope^h.]

3. Those who have already received it into their hearts [Doubtless this report has already been a source of joy and consolation to you. But you cannot even conceive how rich a source of blessings it will be, if only you continue to reflect upon it. In it are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledgeⁱ:" it has a height and depth and length and breadth, that no finite being can comprehend^k, and that through eternal ages will afford incessant and increasing cause for wonder and adoration. Let this report then be your meditation day and night, and while we, as God's ambassadors, endeavour to propagate it with *our lips*, do you endeavour to recommend and confirm it by *your lives*.]

^h Acts iv. 12.ⁱ Col. ii. 3.^k Eph. iii. 18, 19.

DXVII. THE END FOR WHICH THE SON OF MAN CAME.

Luke xix. 10. *The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

ONE would imagine that all should be pleased with the conversion of notorious sinners: but it too often excites indignation rather than pleasure in the breasts of proud Pharisees. Zaccheus was a tax-gatherer, and most probably, like the rest in that line, was addicted to rapacity and extortion, though, perhaps, not in so great a degree as some others. He having a curiosity to see Jesus, and not being able, on account of the smallness of his stature, ran before, and climbed up into a tree near which Jesus was about to pass. Our blessed Lord in an instant converted his soul; and, calling him down from the tree, went home to dine with him. This, it seems, gave great offence to the Pharisees, who could not endure to see such a distinguishing favour conferred on so worthless a character. But our Lord vindicated his own conduct, by alleging that, however sinful Zaccheus might be, he was a descendant of Abraham; and that the very intent of his own advent in the flesh was, to seek and to save that which was lost.

To

To elucidate these comfortable words, we shall shew

I. Who this Son of man is

This, to those who beheld him in the flesh, was no easy matter to determine^a: but to us it is clear as the light. Let us consult

1. What Jesus has said of himself

[He tells us that "the Son does whatsoever the Father does;" "quickens whom he will, even as the Father does;" "has all judgment committed to him;" is to be "honoured even as the Father is; yea, that the Father is not honoured unless *he* also be honoured:" that he will "raise the dead by his voice:" that he "bath life in himself even as the Father has;" and "has authority to execute judgment also, **BECAUSE HE IS THE SON OF MAN**^b." Here he calls himself "the Son," "the Son of God," "the Son of man," evidently shewing, that these different names were of the same import, and that, notwithstanding he was a man, he possessed, and exercised, a divine power.

He speaks of the Son of man as existing in heaven before his incarnation^c, before the world was made^d, and even while, in his human nature, he was on earth^e.

He declared that the Son of man had a power to dispense with the sabbath^f, and even to forgive sins^g; and when accused of being guilty of blasphemy for arrogating such power to himself, he reasserted his claim to that divine prerogative, and wrought a miracle in confirmation of it. Finally, he foretold that "the Son of man would come again in *his own* glory, with *his* holy angels^h:" and he bade his disciples "watch and pray, that they might be *worthy to stand before* the Son of manⁱ."

Put these words into the mouth of Peter, or Paul, or any creature, however exalted, and they will appear arrogant, and blasphemous, in the extreme.]

2. What his disciples have said of him

[The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "When God bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him:" and again, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever:" and again, "What is man,

^a When he spoke of his approaching crucifixion, and yet of drawing all men to himself, his hearers could not conceive how such opposite things could be affirmed of the same person, the one indicating him to be a man, the other, to be God. Hence they ask him, "Who is this Son of man?" John xii. 32—34.

^b John v. 19—27.

^c John vi. 62.

^d John xvii. 5.

^e John iii. 13.

^f Mark ii. 28.

^g Luke v. 20—24.

^h Matt. xxv. 31.

ⁱ Luke xxi. 36.

man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest *him* a little (or, for a little time) lower than the angels^k." What can all this mean, but that he was infinitely superior to angels in his pre-existent state, but was made lower than them for a little while, for the great purposes of our redemption?

But St. Peter speaks in terms that cannot well be misunderstood. Our Lord put this question to his disciples; "Whom do men say that I, *the Son of man*, am? And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, some Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord immediately replied, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven^l." Now if Peter meant only to say that he was a good man, or a prophet, what was there in that which he might not see and know without any particular revelation of it to his soul?

St. Stephen is yet more strong and decisive: for when he was "full of the Holy Ghost," he said, "I see the heavens opened, and the *Son of man* standing at the right hand of God:" upon which his hearers, filled with indignation, stoned him, calling upon God, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit^m." Now is it not utterly unaccountable, that a man full of the Holy Ghost, when favoured with a vision of God, and of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, should, in the very hour of death, address himself to Jesus, and not unto the Father, and *that* too almost in the very words that Jesus himself had used when addressing his heavenly Father, if Jesus were not higher than any created being? If he did not see that the Son of man was also the Son of God, yea, "God over all," equal with the Father, he was deservedly stoned to death, as the vilest blasphemer that ever lived upon the earth.

Who can see the disciples of our Lord paying him such honour, and doubt what ideas they annexed to that lowly title, "the Son of man?"]

4. What his enemies said of him

[There can be no doubt but that *they* understood the terms "Son of man," and, "Son of God," to be equivalent, and that, when used in their highest sense, they denoted equality with God himself. When our Lord stood before the supreme council of the Jews, he said to them, "Hereafter shall *the Son of man* sit on the right hand of the power of God."

Upon

^k Heb. i. 6, 8. and ii. 6, 7.

^l Matt. xvi. 13—17.

^m Acts vii. 56, 59.

Upon which they all exclaimed, Art thou then *the Son of God*? to which he answered, "Ye say truly, that I amⁿ."

On another occasion we are told, that the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also, "that God was his Father, *making himself equal with God*^o."

But the strongest testimony of all is, that his enemies actually put him to death for calling himself the Son of man. When the witnesses that appeared against him, agreed not in their testimony, the high priest asked him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see *the Son of man* sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." In these words he evidently referred to that glorious prophecy of Daniel, where *the Son of man* is represented as receiving from the Father an universal and everlasting dominion^p. Instantly the high priest rent his clothes, and said, "What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: What think ye? And they all condemned him to be worthy of death^q." Now, if the name "Son of man" did not import that he was God also, why did not our Lord rectify their mistake, and inform them that he did not intend to arrogate divine honour to himself, or to insinuate that he was any more than a common prophet? By this he would have invalidated in an instant the charge of blasphemy, and have obliged them either to release him, or to find some other pretext for putting him to death. But our Lord knew that they were right in their interpretation of his words; and therefore he submitted in silence to the sentence that was dictated by their blind infuriated zeal^r.]

It will be found an easier task to shew

II. For what purpose he came into the world

In our Lord's assertion respecting this, we cannot fail to notice

1. The humiliating description which he gives of the human race

[Every living man is characterized by this description, "*That which was lost.*" All are "*by nature children of wrath:*"

ⁿ Luke xxii. 69, 70.

^o John v. 18.

^p Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^q Mark xiv. 61—64.

^r Thus it fully appears that "the Son of man" is none other than "*God manifest in the flesh.*" And though there are many passages that more *directly* prove this *point*, yet are these peculiarly strong, inasmuch as they prove the *divinity* of Christ from things which are spoken of him under that title, which most of all denotes his *humanity*.

wrath[†]:" and *by practice* they have aggravated their guilt and condemnation a thousand-fold. To understand the full import of this word, "LOST," let us reflect on the state of those that are already in hell, their guilt, their condemnation by the law, their banishment from the divine presence, their inconceivable and irremediable misery, then we shall see *our own* state, with this only difference; that *we* are yet on mercy's ground, and may have our sentence reversed, and our misery prevented; whereas *they* are gone beyond redemption: *they* are criminals already executed; and *we* are under the same sentence, uncertain whether we shall not the very next hour be called forth for execution, but with a pardon offered us on certain terms. O that we could realize this awful thought! — — —]

2. The explicit declaration which he makes of the intent of his coming

[We should never have sought him: we are like a *lost* sheep, that never traces back its steps to the fold it has deserted. He therefore came to "*seek*" us. However solicitous we had been to avert the wrath of God, we never could have done it by any means within our own power. He therefore came to "*save*" us; to save us by his blood from the guilt of our sins; to save us by his Spirit from the power and pollution of them.

To form a just idea of our state by means of his advent, let us once more consider the state of those in hell. Let us suppose that he went down to hell itself, and there proclaimed liberty and salvation to those who would believe in him: the state of his auditors there would exactly represent our state: and if we do not take the same interest in the glad tidings that they would, it is because we do not *feel* ourselves so utterly *lost* as we really are.

But whether we will believe it or not, this is our state, and to deliver us from it was the great end of his advent. It was for this, that the Son of God humbled himself to become a son of man; and, if we will believe in him, he will exalt us children of men, that we may be "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty[†]."]

APPLICATION^u

1. To those who deny that they are utterly lost and undone

[Produce one person that is not wholly lost, and we will shew

[†] Eph. ii. 3.

[†] John i. 12.

^u The latter part of the subject is so plain and easy, that the youngest Minister can be at no loss to illustrate it.

shew you one that has nothing to do with Christ, any more than Satan himself has. It was only them that are *lost* that Christ came to seek and save. Let proud self-justifying sinners consider this.]

2. To those who desire to obtain salvation

[The person that came to seek and save you was fully equal to the task. He was God as well as man; and therefore there can be no want of efficacy in his blood to pardon, or in his grace to sanctify, you. Trust in him, and he will prove himself able to save you to the very uttermost.]

DXVIII. HELP IN CHRIST FOR SELF-DESTROYED SINNERS.

Hos. xiii. 9. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help.*

THE great mass of nominal Christians need to be informed respecting their state by nature, and the means by which they are to be delivered from it—And they who have a theoretical acquaintance with these things, yet need to be put frequently in remembrance of them, in order that they may be more abidingly influenced by the consideration of them—In the words of our text, all mistakes on these points are clearly rectified; and we are told on the authority of God himself, that

I. Man's destruction is of himself

Whatever we may imagine to the contrary, there are multitudes of the human race eternally destroyed^a—Their destruction too is altogether of themselves: for

1. They will walk in the way that leads to it

[God has told them plainly that eternal misery must be the fruit of sin and impenitence^b—Yet men will continue to disregard the warnings of God, and to practise the things which are displeasing to him!—What then must become of them, if there be any truth in the word of God? or whom must they blame, when they feel the judgments which they would not fear?—The man, who by a poisonous draught, or by any other means, puts a period to his life, is not more
the

^a Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^b 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Luke xiii. 3.

the author of his own death, than these are of their own destruction—]

2. They will not use the means which God has prescribed for their escape

[God has graciously opened a way for the salvation of a ruined world : he has sent his only dear Son to die for sinners, and his good Spirit to instruct and sanctify them—But men will not seek to be washed in the Redeemer's blood : they will not pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit : they will not cordially accept the salvation offered them—They are so intent on their worldly business or pleasure, that they will not afford time for spiritual employments—Is it not then utterly their own fault if they perish ?—A man, who having taken a poisonous draught, whether intentionally or not, would be justly considered as the author of his own death, if he obstinately refused an antidote that was tendered to him : and so must they be considered as destroying themselves who neglect the means which God has provided for their escape—]

3. They make use of every thing ultimately to ensure their own destruction

[Whether they look *upwards to God*, or *around them to the world*, or *within them to their own experience*, they turn every thing into an occasion of fostering their own delusions, and of lulling themselves asleep in a fatal security ‘———’]

But

* This truth will be seen in the most striking point of view, by the following concise statement. Men take this occasion

1. From God himself

From his *perfections*—

From his sovereignty ; “ If he will not give me his grace, how can I help myself ? ”

From his mercy ; “ God is too merciful to condemn any man.”

From his *providence*—

If it be indulgent ; “ These blessings are proofs of his love.”

If it be afflictive ; “ I have my sufferings in this life.”

From his *grace*—

“ He gave his Son to die for me ; therefore I have nothing to fear.”

2. From the world around them

From the *godly*—

If they are consistent ; “ They are unreasonably precise.”

If they are inconsistent ; “ They are hypocrites ; they are all alike ; I am as good as they ; only I make less talk about religion.”

From the *ungodly*—

“ I can never think that so many are wrong, and so few right.”

3. From

But though man's destruction is of himself, we must not suppose that his salvation also is of himself: no;

II. His salvation is of God alone

If we enquire who it is that thus arrogates to himself the exclusive power of saving sinners, we shall find that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is "king" in Sion^d, "besides whom there is no Saviour^e," and who invariably claims this as his unalienable prerogative^f.

1. There is help for us in no other

[Who besides him could possibly *make atonement for our sins*? Man himself could never satisfy divine Justice— — Nor could all the angels in heaven offer unto God a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of men— — None but He who was "Jehovah's Fellow" was equal to the task of expiating transgression, and effecting a reconciliation between God and man^g— — —

Who besides him could *rescue us out of the hands of our spiritual enemies*? He is that stronger man, who alone can vanquish our mighty adversary, and deliver us from our sore bondage^h— — —

Who besides him can *teach us the way of salvation*ⁱ?—or *incline us to seek after it*^k?—or *render our endeavours effectual*^l?—

We may truly say then, that as there is no other foundation on which to build our hopes^m, so neither is there any other name

3. From their own experience

If they have been corrupt; "Why did God give me these passions?"

If they have been moral; "I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

If they are learned; "Cannot I understand my bible without divine illumination?"

If they are unlearned; "My ignorance is excusable; I am no scholar."

If they have been neglectful of religious duties; "I have done no one any harm."

If they have been observant of religious duties; they put their formal services in the place of Christ, and consider them as decisive evidences of their conversion.

Thus instead of arguing from these topics so as to stimulate their exertions, they derive encouragement from them all to continue in their sins.

^d Ver. 10. with Matt. xxi. 5. and Acts v. 31. ^e Ver. 4.

^f Isai. xlv. 22. with Matt. xi. 28. and John vii. 37.

^g Ps. lxxxix. 19. with Heb. x. 4—10.

^h Luke xi. 21, 22.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 27.

^k Phil. ii. 13.

^l John xv. 5.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 11.

name or power whereby we can be savedⁿ? “Christ is ALL, AND IN ALL.”]

2. In him there is help sufficient

[There is nothing wanting in sinful man, which is not abundantly supplied in Jesus Christ. In him there is wisdom to direct the most ignorant^p,—merit to justify the most guilty^q,—grace to sanctify the most polluted^r,—and strength to render even the weakest of the human race a conqueror, yea, “more than conqueror,” over all his enemies^s.—He is furnished of God for this very end^t, and appointed of him to this very office^u, and is in every respect “able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him^x”—]

ADDRESS

1. The ignorant

[Too many, alas! are altogether ignorant of their undone state, and still more so of the guilt attaching to them as the authors of their own misery—But whether we know these things or not, it is an indisputable fact that we have destroyed ourselves, and that there is no possibility of recovery for us but in and through Christ. Let us then seek instruction on these infinitely important subjects, lest we “perish for ever for lack of knowledge^y”—]

2. The self-righteous

[Persons who look for acceptance in any other way than through the Lord Jesus Christ, must of necessity imagine, either that they are not self-destroyed, or that there remains in them some sufficiency to help themselves. But so destitute are we of all help in ourselves, that, if a good thought would cancel all our past iniquities, and open the kingdom of heaven to us, we could not supply it^z.—If ever we would partake of the felicity of heaven, we must renounce all self-dependence, and look for our help in Christ alone^a.—]

3. The desponding

[When men begin to see their perishing condition, and to feel a consciousness that they have been the authors of their own ruin, they often distress themselves with apprehensions that their state is irremediable—Now the text affords a complete antidote to all desponding fears: in it God addresses himself

ⁿ Acts iv. 12.

^o Col. iii. 11.

^p Matt. xi. 29.

^q Acts xiii. 39.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^s 2 Cor. xii. 9. Phil. iv. 13.

^t Isai. lxi. 1.

^u 1 Cor. i. 30.

^x Heb. vii. 25.

^y Hos. iv. 6.

^z 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^a Rom. ix. 30—33.

himself immediately to the self-ruined sinner, and says to him, "I am **THY** help"—Whatever guilt therefore any one may have contracted, and whatever cause he may have to reproach himself, let him only consider who it is that says to him, "In **ME** is thy help," and he may instantly dismiss his fears—Let him "be strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and he shall find that, "before Zerubbabel the mountains will become a plain"^b—]

^b Isai. xl. 27—31. Zech. iv. 7.

DXIX. THE MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD.

Isai. lvii. 15. *Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

THERE is nothing more vain than creature-confidence: it is sure to provoke the displeasure of God, and ultimately to disappoint ourselves—On the contrary, an humble affiance in the Lord will secure to us his effectual aid: it will avail for the weakest of the human race, and prove sufficient under the most arduous circumstances—The testimonies of scripture to this effect are numerous and decisive^a—In the passage before us God reproves the Jews for forming alliances with heathens; and, having derided their vain hopes, and declared the security of those who should trust in him, issues a solemn proclamation for the direction and comfort of his church in all ages; "Thus saith," &c.

In these words we behold

I. The character of God

The perfections by which God is pleased to characterize himself in this place were peculiarly calculated to expose the folly of those whom he was reproving, and to dispel the fears of those whom he designed to comfort—He mentions

1. His

^a Jer. xvii. 5—8.

1. His majesty

[In delineating the greatness of any created being, we are enabled to convey some just ideas by comparing one thing with another—But in speaking of the Deity there is no room for comparison : the universe is but as an atom, and the whole period of its existence but as a point, before him—He is not only high and lofty, but exclusively “the high and lofty ONE”—He fills all space ; he exists through an unsuccessive eternity—In attempting to declare him we do but “darken counsel by words without knowledge”—There are indeed in scripture some representations given us, whereby we may attain such knowledge of him as our weak capacities are able to receive^b—But it is very little that we can conceive of him though all the images in heaven and earth were exhibited in their brightest colours and in the most energetic language—The scripture itself tells us that “his greatness is unsearchable^c ;” nor can we sum up our knowledge of him better than in those expressive words of Moses, “From everlasting to everlasting thou art God^d”—]

2. His holiness

[The “name” is that whereby any person is known, and, as applied to God, comprehends every thing whereby he is known to men—The perfections of his nature, the works of his hands, the dispensations of his providence, and the declarations of his grace, all are holy^e—And as he is holy in himself, so he cannot endure any thing which is defiled by sin ; “he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity^f”—Indeed holiness is the very perfection that stamps a worth and excellence on all the other attributes of the Deity : without holiness his wisdom would be craft, his power tyranny, his mercy a weak, indiscriminate, or partial favour—Glorious as he is in every perfection, he is declared more especially to be so in holiness^g ; and the angels in heaven make it the more immediate subject of their incessant praises^h—God himself is pleased to distinguish this perfection in a peculiar manner by making it the pledge of his fidelity in a most solemn oathⁱ—Nor does he less surpass all created beings in holiness than he does in greatness and majesty : “There is none holy as the Lord,” says the scripture^k ; and again, “Thou ONLY art holy^l”—]

But,

^b Isai. xl. 12, 15, 17, 22. lxxvi. 1. Ps. civ. 1—3. 1 Kings vii. 27. Jer. xxiii. 24. ^c Ps. cxlv. 3. ^d Ps. xcix. 2.

^e Ps. cxv. 17. His hiding of his face occasionally, even from his dearest people, is no exception to this. See Ps. xxii. 1—3.

^f Hab. i. 13. ^g Exod. xv. 11. ^h Isai. vi. 3. Rev. iv. 8.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 35. ^k 1 Sam. ii. 2. ^l Rev. xv. 4.

But, notwithstanding he is so great, that “the heaven of heavens cannot contain him,” and so holy, that “the very heavens are not pure in his sight,” yet will he “humble himself to behold the things in heaven,” and to “dwell with men on the earth”—This will appear by considering

II. The objects of his love

After the description which he has given of himself we shall not wonder that the great objects of his regard are

1. The holy

[Heaven is a region of holiness, in which not even the angels, after they had transgressed, were suffered to dwell—All that remain there are holy as God is holy—The saints too that are around the throne are all “equal to the angels themselves^m”—Once indeed they were defiled by sin; but they were washed from their sin in the fountain of Christ’s blood; and were renewed after the divine image by the Spirit of their God—Amongst these God “dwells in the high and holy place;” and though “their righteousness cannot profit him,” yet he accepts the tribute of their praise, and scatters amongst them in rich profusion the tokens of his love—The cup of every one amongst them overflows with joy; and the “weight of glory,” with which their heads are crowned, is commensurate with their ability to sustain it—Hence is heaven justly called, “The habitation of his holiness and his gloryⁿ”—]

2. The humble

[As God loveth holiness where it is perfect, so he loves the desire after it where it is yet imperfect—“The humble” are they who have a just sense of their weakness and sinfulness; and “the contrite” are they who deeply bewail their state before God—Not that they mourn *merely* on account of the judgments they dread; but *principally* on account of their having so debased their own souls, and so “grieved the good Spirit of their God”—Yea, if they be truly humble, they most of all loath and abhor themselves, when they are most assured that God is pacified towards them^o—Such penitents, whatever they may have been in past time, are no less the objects of God’s favour than the angels themselves; yea, if there were but one such person to be found on the face of the whole earth, God would fix his eyes on him with pleasure and complacency^p—He would listen to his groans with parental tenderness,

^m Luke xx. 36.

^o Ezek. xvi. 63.

ⁿ Isai. lxiii. 15.

^p Isai. lxvi. 2.

tenderness, and treasure up his tears in his vial, as the most valuable monuments of true contrition⁹—He would bind up the wounds which sin had made, and pour the oil of joy and gladness into the disconsolate soul—Well he knows that nothing but his presence with the soul will fully satisfy its desires, or answer the purposes of his love: on this account he will lift up the light of his countenance upon it: as he formerly dwelt in the tabernacle by the *visible* symbols of his presence, so will he condescend to dwell *invisibly* in the contrite heart, making it his habitation, on purpose “that he may revive” and comfort it—]

This subject will enable us to rectify some MISTAKES, which very generally obtain in the Christian world

1. That God is pleased with those who are pleased with themselves

[It is common for moral and sober persons to think that God entertains as high an opinion of them as they do of themselves; and to despise the poor and contrite as weak enthusiasts—But what warrant have they for their presumptuous confidence? Can they find any declaration of God in *their* favour? Has he ever said that he would dwell with *them*?—Even in heaven there are no self-admiring thoughts entertained either by men or angels^r; how much less then can there be any ground for such a disposition on earth!—The scripture tells us, it was not the proud Pharisee, but the self-condemning Publican that “went down to his house justified”—And to all eternity will it be found true, that “he who exalteth himself shall be abased, and that he alone who unfeignedly humbleth himself, shall ever be exalted”—]

2. That a consciousness of guilt is a ground for concluding, that God is our enemy

[Sin doubtless renders us obnoxious to the divine displeasure: but it is sin unrepented of, and not merely sin committed, that shall condemn us—“The broken and contrite heart God will not despise^s”—And the more contrite we are, the more reason we have to hope that God is reconciled towards us—But there are some, who, contrasting their own meanness and sinfulness with the majesty and holiness of God, are ready to say, There is no hope—Let not such persons however be discouraged; for “though God be high, yet will he

⁹ Ps. lvi. 8.

^r The cherubim veil their faces and their feet while they serve God, Isai. vi. 2. And the glorified saints cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, as unworthy of the honour conferred upon them, Rev. iv. 10, 11.

^s Ps. li. 17.

he have respect unto the lowly ^t ;” yea, he not only *will* dwell with such persons, but actually *does* dwell with them : this is God’s own assertion in the text ; and it is our duty, as well as our privilege, to believe him—]

3. That the exercise of serious and deep repentance will deprive a man of all the comforts of life

[Repentance will doubtless deprive us of all pleasure in sin : but is there no other source of happiness than sin ?—May not all the gratifications of sense, and all the comforts of society, be enjoyed in a way of righteousness, as well as in the ways of sin ?—But even supposing we were deprived of these, would not the presence of God in our souls compensate for the loss of them ?—Is it nothing to have God “ manifesting himself to us as he does not unto the world,” yea, “ dwelling in us, and reviving us ” with the consolations of his Spirit ?—Or does a man stand in need of a taper, while he enjoys the light of the meridian sun ?—Away then with all ungrounded jealousies on this head—Let us seek to *experience* the comforts of religion, instead of ignorantly asserting that there are none to be found—And, instead of reprobating the communications of grace and peace to the soul as enthusiastic and absurd, let us pray that we ourselves may be “ the temples of the Holy Ghost,” “ the habitation of God through the Spirit ” for ever and ever—]

^t Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

DXX. THE POOR AND CONTRITE THE OBJECTS OF GOD’S FAVOUR.

Isai. lxvi. 2. *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

IT often happens that accidental distinctions serve men as grounds of confidence towards God—

Many found their hopes on a better basis than Micah did ^a—

The Jews in particular thought themselves assured of the divine favour because of God’s residence in their temple ^b—

But

^a Judg. xvii. 13.

^b Hence that common boast among them, Jer. vii. 4.

But God shews them the folly of their notions ^c—

And declares the character of those, who alone shall be considered by him with any favourable regard

I. Who are the objects of the divine favour

Men choose for their companions the rich and gay—

But those, whom God regards, are of a very different character—

1. They *feel themselves destitute of all good*

[It is not temporal, but spiritual poverty, that distinguishes God's people—

They have discovered their total want of spiritual wisdom ^d—

They are constrained to acknowledge that they have no *righteousness* of their own ^e—

And that they are “without strength” for obedience ^f—

They unfeignedly adopt the language of St. Paul ^g—

Nor do they hope for mercy but as the *free gift* of God ^h—]

2. They *bewail the many evils they have committed*

[They have been made to see that sin is hateful to God—
And they have felt the bitterness of it in their own consciences—

They know experimentally the sensations of David ⁱ—

They loathe themselves for all their abominations ^k—

Nor are their convictions merely occasional or transient—

They are *habitually* of a tender and “contrite spirit”—]

3. They *pay a reverential regard to every word of God*

[They dare not say like the idolatrous Jews ^l—

They rather resemble the man after God's own heart ^m—

If the word be preached, they “receive it as the word, not of man, but of God”—

They hear the *threatenings* like the meek Josiah ⁿ—

They attend to the *promises* with an eager desire to embrace them—

To

^c Ver. 1, 2. The import of which is, How can you think that I, an infinite Being, who myself created those things of which you boast, can be allured by an earthly structure to continue my presence among you, if you persist in your evil ways?

^d Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

^e Isai. lxiv. 6.

^f Rom. v. 6. 2 Cor. iiii. 5.

^g Rom. vii. 18.

^h They say not, like the servant, Matt. xviii. 26. but desire to experience the clemency shewn to insolvent debtors, Luke vii. 42.

ⁱ Ps. xxxviii. 4, 6, 8.

^k Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

^l Jer. xlv. 16.

^m Ps. cxix. 161.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 19, 27.

To every *precept* they listen with an obedient ear ^o—]

These, though generally considered by the world as weak and superstitious, are not overlooked by the Supreme Being

II. The peculiar regard which God shews them

The “eyes of God are in every place beholding the evil and the good”—

But he “looks to” *these*, in a far different manner from *others*—

This distinguishing favour implies

1. Approbation of them

[From the proud and self-sufficient God turns his face ^p—

But he “despises not the broken and contrite in heart” ^q—

Though so exalted in himself, he will not disdain to notice them—

His approbation of such characters stands recorded for ever ^r—

His reception of the prodigal is an eternal monument of the regard he will shew to *every* repenting sinner—]

2. Care over them

[Wherever they go, his eye is upon them for good ^s—

He watches them in order to deliver them from danger ^t—

He watches them in order to comfort them in trouble ^u—

He watches them in order to relieve them in want ^x—

He watches them in order to exalt them to happiness and honour ^y—]

3. Delight in them

[There are none on earth so pleasing to God as broken-hearted sinners—

Their sighs and groans are as music in his ears ^z—

Their tears he treasures up in his vial ^a—

He dwells with them as his dearest friends ^b—

He rejoices over them as a people in whom he greatly delights ^c—

He saves them *here* by the unceasing exercise of his power ^d—

And reserves for them *hereafter* an inheritance in heaven ^e—]

Nor

^o Like Cornelius, Acts x. 33. and Paul, Acts xxii. 10. yea, the angels in heaven, Ps. ciii. 20.

^p James iv. 6.

^q Ps. li. 17.

^r Luke xviii. 13, 14.

^s 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

^t Ps. xii. 5.

^u Ps. cxlvii. 3.

^x Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^y 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^z Ps. cii. 19, 20.

^a Ps. lvi. 8.

^b Isai. lvii. 15.

^c Zeph. iii. 12, 17.

^d Ps. xxxiv. 15, 18.

^e Matt. v. 3.

Nor shall the fewness of such characters render them at all less the objects of God's regard

[It must be acknowledged that they are but few—

But if there were only *one* in the whole world, God would find him out^f—

Not all the splendor of heaven, nor all the acclamations of angels, should for a moment divert God's attention from him—

Though he were despised by all the human race, yet should he be amiable in the eyes of his Maker—

Nor should he want any thing in time or eternity—

Never shall that declaration in any instance be falsified^g—]

INFER

1. How should we admire the condescension of God!

[If we view only the material world we may well stand astonished that God should regard such an insignificant creature as man^h—

But, if we contemplate the majesty of God, we cannot but exclaim with Solomonⁱ—

Let then the declaration in the text lead our thoughts up to God—

Let us adore him for so clearly describing the objects of his favour—

And let us express our admiration in the words of David^k—]

2. How should we desire to attain the character that is pleasing to God!

[The poor and contrite are *exclusively* beloved of God—

If he look on others, it is only as he did on the Egyptians^l—

And how dreadful must it be to have *such* an enemy!—

But how delightful to have an *almighty, omnipresent* guardian!—

Above all, how awful must it be to have *him turn his face from us* in the day of judgment!—

Let us then endeavour to humble ourselves before God^m—

And rest assured that the promised mercy shall in due time be fulfilled to usⁿ—]

^f "To this *man*, &c. even to *him*," &c.

^h Ps. viii. 3, 4.

ⁱ 1 Kings viii. 27.

^l Exod. xiv. 24, 25.

^m Isai. ii. 11.

^g Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

^k Ps. cxlii. 5—8.

ⁿ James iv. 10.

DXI. TRUE HAPPINESS STATED.

Luke vi. 20—26. *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full; for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you; for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

MEN who dislike the doctrines of the gospel are no less averse to its precepts —

They may both approve and practise heathen morality—

But the morality of Jesus will appear to them unamiable and precise

The words before us will fully establish this assertion*—

They lead us to consider

I. The false notions which the world entertains of happiness

Many have been the speculations of philosophers on this subject—

But there are general views in which the world at large are agreed

[They think that wealth must of necessity conduce much to our happiness—

They think that a freedom from care and trouble will greatly augment it—

They think that an easy access to pleasurable amusements and carnal enjoyments will abundantly promote it—

And,

* It should be observed that this passage has no direct reference to the deeper mysteries of our religion: it is altogether of a practical nature: and the terms are so full, that they scarcely need any elucidation, while they are at the same time so plain as to be almost incapable of perversion.

And, above all, that universal respect and honour will complete it—]

These views, however, are very erroneous

[We deny not but that these sources of enjoyment afford a present gratification—

Nor do we say that wealth, or ease, or pleasure, or reputation, may not be very innocently enjoyed—

But it is a great mistake to think that happiness consists in these things—

Or that, if possessed in ever so great abundance, they would compensate for the want of spiritual blessings—

There are riches of far greater value than the wealth of this world—

Nor can any one possess *those*, who is very solicitous about *this*^b—

None can know his need of divine grace, and not pant after it^c—

In such indigent creatures a Laodicean state is abominable^d—

Moreover, God calls men to mourn and weep for their sins^e—

Is it desirable then to possess a light and vacant mind?—

Such too is the enmity of the world against God, that it is not possible to retain the friendship of both at the same time^f—

Should we then consider human estimation as of transcendent value?—

Surely these things may shew us how erroneous the world's judgment is—]

Nor is there any delusion more fatal

[Our Lord could not be mistaken in his judgment—

Yet he denounces the heaviest woes against the rich, the full, the gay, and the respected—

And distinctly assigns his reason for each denunciation—

They who are occupied with carnal gratifications, make no provision for their eternal welfare—

Hence, when bereft of the things of this life, they will be for ever destitute—

Having had their portion *now* with the men of this world, they will participate in their lot *hereafter*—

We may see these truths realized in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus^g—]

Having

^b Matt. xiii. 44.

^c Ps. xlii. 1.

^d Rev. iii. 16, 17.

^e James iv. 9, 10.

^f James iv. 4.

^g No flagrant evil whatever is imputed to the rich man. He was not wholly destitute even of liberality, since Lazarus received his daily

Having exposed error, we would establish truth, by shewing

II. The representations of happiness given us in the scriptures

Poverty, dissatisfaction, sorrow, and contempt, are, it must be confessed, not pleasing in themselves—

Nor indeed does any blessing necessarily attach to them—

But under certain circumstances they may be a desirable portion

[Poverty and sorrow often have been, and still are endured for Christ's sake—

Nor is there any thing more common than for his servants to be reviled and despised for their fidelity to him—

It should seem indeed that the world could not hate and execrate those, whom God esteems and declares blessed—

But the treatment which the prophets, and Christ, and his apostles, met with, proves the contrary—

If we then be treated like them, we have no reason to be dejected—

Yea rather, we may consider it as an honour conferred on us by God^h—]

In a spiritual sense, poverty, hunger, &c. are great blessings

[No doubt there is a spiritual meaning also in our Lord's wordsⁱ—

And what so desirable as to feel our need of Christ?—

And what so desirable as to be hungering after his righteousness?—

And what so desirable as to be mourning for our corruptions?—

And what so desirable as to endure shame for his sake^k?—

They who experience most of this state, find most delight in it—

They are most fortified against the incursions of worldly sorrow—

And most abound in spiritual consolations—]

And all who now submit to the pressure of spiritual afflictions, shall be abundantly recompensed in the eternal world

[In

daily subsistence from his table. The reason of his condemnation was, that, while he abounded in wealth, ease, pleasure, and honour, he wept not for his sins, nor hungered after the blessings of grace and glory.

^h Phil. i. 29.

^k Acts v. 41.

ⁱ Compare Matt. v. 3, 4.

[In heaven there is enough to repay all our labours—
The riches of glory will compensate for all present losses—
The fulness of joy in those blest abodes will satiate the
hungry soul—

The inconceivable delights will far outweigh our transient
sorrows^l—

And the honour which God will put upon us in the society
of saints and angels, will make us forget our short-lived
disgrace—

Christ, the true and faithful witness, has repeatedly affirmed
this—

And he who declares such persons blessed, himself will
make them so—]

ADDRESS

1. The mistaken votaries of this world

[All profess to seek after happiness—

But how many mistake the shadow for the substance—

We may even appeal to you to declare who are truly
blessed^m—

O that we would take eternity into our estimate of present
things!—

O that we would cease from circulating our fatal errors!—

And acquiesce in the unerring declarations of God!—

We can easily see, that a man who should drink a palatable
but poisonous draught, would be no object of envy—

Let us be persuaded then that momentary delights can never
constitute us blessed—

He alone is happy, who is happy for eternity—]

2. The humble followers of Jesus

[Let not your hearts envy the prosperity of sinnersⁿ—

Remember that you are the only blessed people upon
earth—

Your very griefs and sorrows are grounds of self-congratu-
lation—

The time is shortly coming, when men's apparent states
will be reversed—

Then will be fulfilled that glorious prophecy of Isaiah^o—

Be content then to “fill up the measure of Christ's suf-
ferings”—

And take for your comfort that delightful promise^p—]

^l 2 Cor. iv. 17. ^m Comment on the text according to the
world's views; “Woe to you poor, &c. : but no woes to you that are
rich, &c. ; *ye* are blessed :” Who would endure such a comment?

ⁿ Ps. xxxvii. 1, 2.

^o Isai. lxxv. 13, 14.

^p Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

DXXII. SOWING IN TEARS.

Ps. cxxvi. 5. *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*

THIS seems to be a general truth founded on the experience of those who returned from the Babylonish captivity, and the correspondent experience of all who return from the bondage of sin and Satan. The Israelites, like Peter liberated from his prison, were so astonished at their deliverance, that it seemed to them more like a dream than a reality. The very heathens themselves wondered at it, and ascribed it to the influence of Jehovah, as also the Israelites did with joy and gratitude, taking occasion from it to implore the speedy and perfect restoration of all their tribes^a. Such also are the wonder and joy occasioned by the conversion of a soul to God; and such are the desires which instantly vent themselves in fervent petitions for complete deliverance. But as among the captive Jews, so in the enslaved soul, a season of sorrow precedes the time of emancipation. Nevertheless it shall be found universally true, that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Let us enquire

I. What we are to understand by sowing in tears?

“The sorrow of the world worketh death;” and therefore cannot be that to which the promise is made. To sow in tears implies

1. A painful recollection of past sins

[We are all sinners from our earliest youth: and every sin we have ever committed, is as fresh in the remembrance of the Deity as if it had been committed this very hour. Nor should we think the less of our sins because they have been long passed: on the contrary, we should view them with all the shame and sorrow that they excited in our bosoms the very instant that our consciences first accused us. Like God's people of old, we should be bowed down greatly in the recollection

^a Ver. 1—4. The rain which descended in torrents on the southern or hilly country of Judea, often filled the valleys with rapid streams, which quickly passing away as soon as the rain ceased, the rivers were suddenly transformed into verdant fields. Thus sudden and perfect the Israelites desired their restoration to be.

recollection of them^b, and earnestly intreat, with David, that God would not call us into judgment for them^c.]

2. A penitent concern for present infirmities

[The very best of men has much within him to mourn over. It is but in part that any of us are renewed. Many are the corruptions that yet work within us; and the very imperfection of our prayers and praises is enough to make us go mourning all the day long. St. Paul found so much conflict in his soul by reason of his indwelling corruptions that he exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am^d;" and groaned earnestly for death as the season when he should be freed from all the imperfections of his nature, and serve, as well as enjoy, God with unabated ardor^e. Thus should we also "go softly before God in the bitterness of our souls^f," and loathe ourselves before him in dust and ashes^g.]

3. An overwhelming sense of God's goodness

[Nothing is more characteristic of true piety than this. Every day and hour we have reason to adore the divine goodness. What patience does God exercise towards us under all our backslidings! What readiness does he manifest to return to our souls the very instant we return to him, yea, often revealing himself to us, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts, when we had no reason to expect any thing but some heavy token of his displeasure! The Psalmist, impressed with such views of God, exclaims, "O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men^h!" But the most striking example of this frame of mind is afforded us by the poor woman, who, to express her love and gratitude, kissed the feet of her Saviour, and washed them with floods of tearsⁱ. Would to God that such were the state of our minds, and that we might ever be found, as to our souls at least, in that posture!]

Omitting many other grounds of weeping, we proceed to enquire

II. What encouragement we have to weep

To those who sow their corn, there is but one harvest: but to those who sow in tears there are two

1. We shall reap in this world

[God will not despise the broken and contrite heart^k: on the

^b Ps. xxxviii. 3—8. Jer. xxxi. 19. and iii. 25. Ezek. xvi. 63.

^c Ps. xxv. 7.

^d Rom. vii. 14—24.

^e 2 Cor. v. 4.

^f Isai. xxxviii. 15.

^g Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.

^h Ps. xxxxi. 19.

ⁱ Luke vii. 38.

^k Ps. li. 17.

the contrary, "he will hear the voice of our weeping:" tears, when flowing from a contrite soul, have an eloquence which he cannot resist. He will speak peace to the soul: he will blot out its transgressions as a morning cloud¹. He will cause the light of his countenance to shine upon it; and will give unto it a spirit of adoption, whereby it shall cry with confidence, Abba, Father^m. And will not such a harvest recompense an hundred years of weeping? Look but at the state of the prodigal, and see him, after his short seed-time of weeping, welcomed to his father's house, and feasting with him on the fatted calf; was he not well repaid? had he any reason to regret his tears of penitence? Thus then shall it be with us *in this world*, provided we be content to sow in tears: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy shall come in the morningⁿ."]

2. We shall reap also in the world to come

[All that the penitent soul enjoys in this world is but an earnest of what it shall hereafter possess. There is "a full reward^o," an "everlasting life^p," which shall be reaped as the fruit of what we now sow. The tears we shed are all treasured up with care in the vial of our heavenly Father: every sigh, and every groan, shall be remembered before him: and shall add to that abundant and eternal weight of glory which we shall then receive. And who can estimate those "sheaves which we shall then bring with us?" How will all our sorrows vanish in an instant, and be turned into unutterable joy^q! Let us then look forward to that time, and "not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."]

ADDRESS

1. To those who have never known any seed-time like this

[Is there not occasion enough for you to weep? Think how you have neglected your God and Father; how you have trampled on the blood of Christ your Saviour; and how you have resisted the motions of the Holy Spirit on your hearts! Think too, how you have made the very consideration of God's mercy and forbearance an occasion of more boldness in transgressing against him! This, independent of any gross acts of sin, is sufficient to make your head a fountain of tears to run down day and night for your iniquities. "Be afflicted then, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up^r."]

2. To

¹ Luke vii. 47, 48, 50. ¹ John i. 9.

² Ps. xxx. 5. ^o 2 John 8.

³ Isai xxx. 10.

^m Jer. xxxi. 9, 20.

^p Gal. vi. 8.

^r Jam. iv. 9, 10.

2. To those who are daily sowing in tears

[Possibly, some may be discouraged, because they do not reap so soon as they expected. But, if this be the case, let them examine whether they do indeed "sorrow after a godly sort:" and, if they have the testimony of a good conscience in this respect, let them wait patiently, as the husbandman^s, for "*doubtless they shall come again with rejoicing:*" joy and gladness are sown for them, and shall spring up in due season^t. Let them be contented to "*go on their way*" weeping, even though the way be ever so long; for tears are a seed "precious" unto God, and they shall bring a glorious harvest at the last.]

^s James v. 7.^t Ps. xcvi. 11.

DXXIII. THE BLESSEDNESS OF FEARING GOD.

Ecc. viii. 12. *Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God.*

NOTHING certain can be determined respecting God's favour from the outward dispensations of his providence^a—

The wicked seem on the whole to prosper more than others^b—

Nevertheless the godly are by far the happier persons^c—

It is of them only that the assertion in the text can be made—

We propose to shew

I. Who they are that fear God

This, we may suppose, would be a point easy to be determined—

But, through self-love and Satan's devices, many mistake respecting it—

The characters described in the text may be distinguished by the following marks

1. They stand in awe of God's judgments

[Once they disregarded the displeasure of the Almighty^d—
They

^a Ecc. ix. 1.^b Ps. lxxiii. 5, 12.^c Ps. lxxiii. 15.^d Ps. x. 5.

They would not believe that his threatenings would be executed—

But now they have learned to tremble at his word^e—
Awakened by his Spirit, they exclaim with the prophet^f—
The scriptures uniformly represent them in this light^g—]

2. They embrace the salvation offered them

[In their natural state they felt no need of a physician^h—
They saw no suitableness in the remedy which the gospel offered themⁱ—

Their pride would not suffer them to submit to its humiliating terms^k—

But now they gladly embrace Christ as their only Saviour—

They flee to him, as the murderers did to a city of refuge—

This is the description given of them in the inspired volume^l—]

3. They endeavour to keep all the commandments

[If ever they obeyed God at all, they served him only to the extent the world would approve—

Where the lax habits of mankind forbade their compliance with the divine command, they were afraid to be singular—

But they dare not any longer halt between God and Baal—

They have determined, through grace, to follow the Lord fully—

The language of their hearts is like that of David^m—

This was the very ground on which God concluded that Abraham feared himⁿ—]

These marks clearly distinguish those who fear God from all others

[The *formal Pharisee* has never felt his desert of condemnation^o—

The *merely awakened sinner* has never truly embraced the gospel^p—

The *hypocritical professor* has never mortified his besetting sin^q—

It is *the person alone, who fears God*, that unites in his experience a dread of God's wrath, an affiance in Christ, and a love to the commandments—]

Such persons, notwithstanding appearances, are truly blessed

II. In

^e Isai. lxvi. 2.

^h Rev. iii. 17.

^k Rom. x. 3.

ⁿ Gen. xxii. 12.

^q Acts viii. 23.

^f Isai. xxxiii. 14.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 23.

^l Heb. vi. 18.

^o Luke xviii. 11.

^g Acts xvi. 29. and

Ps. cxix. 120.

^m Ps. cxix. 5, 6.

^p Acts xxiv. 25. and
xxvi. 28.

II. In what respects it shall be well with them

They are not exempt from the common afflictions of life—

They have in addition to them many trials peculiar to themselves—

Yet it goes well with them

1. In respect of temporal good

[They have a peculiar enjoyment of *prosperity*—

The ungodly find an emptiness in all their possessions^r—

But the godly have not such gall mixed with their comforts^s—

They have also peculiar supports in a season of *adversity*—

The wicked are for the most part miserable in their affliction^t—

If kept from murmuring, it is the summit of their attainments—

But the righteous are enabled to glory in tribulation^u—

And cordially to approve of God's dispensations towards them^x—]

2. In respect of spiritual good

[They possess a peace that passeth all understanding—

They are filled with a joy utterly unknown to others^y—

The work of sanctification is gradually carried on within them^z—]

As they approach towards death they grow in a meetness for heaven—

And are serene and happy in the near prospect of eternity^a—]

3. In respect to eternal good

[Who can set forth their felicity in the eternal world?—

Who can even conceive the weight of glory preparing for them?—

How will their faith be lost in sight, and their hope in enjoyment!—

Then indeed will that truth be seen and felt by them^b—]

These things are far from being “cunningly devised fables”

III. What

^r Job xx. 22.

^s Prov. x. 22. 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^t Eccl. v. 17.

^u Rom. v. 3.

^x 2 Kings xx. 19.

^y Prov. xiv. 10.

^z 2 Cor. iv. 16.

^a Ps. xxxvii. 37.

^b Ps. cxliv. 15.

III. What assurance we have that it shall be thus well with them

No truth whatever is capable of clearer demonstration—

The topics from whence it might be proved are innumerable—

We shall however confine ourselves to three

1. The fitness of things requires it

[No man can seriously think that there is one portion to the righteous and the wicked—

There is no well-ordered government on earth where this is the case—

Much less can we suppose it possible in the divine government—

To imagine such a thing, is to strip the Deity of all regard to his own honour—

We may be sure that there shall be a distinction made in favour of his servants^c—]

2. The promises of God insure it

[All *temporal* good is expressly promised to those “who fear God^d”—

All *spiritual* good also is given them as their portion^e—

Yea, all *eternal* good is laid up for them as their unalienable inheritance^f—

All the promises are made over to them in one word^g—

Can any one doubt a truth so fully established?—]

3. The experience of all that ever feared God attests it

[Who ever found it unprofitable to serve the Lord^h?—

What truly devoted soul was ever forsaken by himⁱ?—

Who ever complained that the means, by which he was brought to fear God, were too severe?—

Or that any affliction, that increased and confirmed that fear, was too heavy?—

David indeed did at one time question the position in the text—

But on recollection he condemned himself for his rashness and ignorance—

And acknowledged that his vile suspicions contradicted the experience of God's children in all ages^k—]

On these grounds we “assuredly know” the truth declared in the text

[We

^c Mal. iii. 18.

^f Ps. ciii. 17.

ⁱ Isai. xlix. 15.

^d Ps. xxxiv. 9.

^g 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^k Ps. lxxiii. 12—15, 22.

^e Ps. xxv. 12, 13.

^h Jer. ii. 31.

[We do not *surmise it* as a thing *possible*—
 We do not *hope it* as a thing *probable*—
 We *absolutely know it* as *infallibly certain*—
 We are not surer of our existence than we are of this truth—
 Without hesitation therefore we deliver our message¹—
 O that the word may sink deep into all our hearts!—
 And that we might from experience unite our testimony to
 Solomon's^m—]

We beg leave to ask, whether they who fear *not* God, have any such assurance in their favour?

[We are aware that they will entertain presumptuous hopes—

And that, in opposition to God's word, they will expect happiness—

But does the boldest sinner dare^a affirm that he *knows* it shall be well with him?—

His conscience would instantly revolt at such falsehood and blasphemy—

Let those then, that fear not God, stand self-condemned—

Let them flee unto their God and Saviour with penitence and faith—

Let them so live as to preserve the testimony of a good conscience—

And then, however enlarged their expectations of good may be, they shall never be disappointedⁿ—]

¹ Isai. iii. 10, 11.

^m Prov. xxviii. 14.

ⁿ Isai. xlv. 17.

DXXIV. ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

Rom. viii. 28. *We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

TRUE believers have the greatest encouragement to draw nigh to God—

They have supernatural assistance when pouring out their hearts before him—

And are assured by God himself that their prayers shall be heard—

Yea, sometimes, like the Israelites in Egypt, the more
 N 3 they

they renew their requests, the more they find their burthens increased^a—

Hence, like them, they are also sometimes ready to murnur and despond^b—

But, by grace they are enabled to wait patiently the Lord's leisure—

And invariably, in the issue, the clouds which they so much dreaded, burst in blessings on their heads—

This St. Paul declares to be the experience of all true believers—

His words lead us to shew

I. The character of true Christians

Christians are sometimes described in the scriptures by their regard for God, and sometimes by God's regard for them—

The text leads us to speak of them in both points of view

1. Their regard to God

[The "loving of God" is a character peculiar to true Christians—

Others are represented rather as "haters of God," and enemies to him in their minds^c—

But they who are partakers of his grace, have their natural enmity removed—

They behold his excellency, and are sensible of their obligations to him—

Hence they love him, and strive to love him with their whole hearts—]

2. God's regard for them

[Their regard for him sprang not from any good dispositions in themselves—

It resulted purely from the manifestations of God's love to them—

He formed "purposes" of love to them from all eternity^d—

In due time he "called" them by his grace, and made them his people—

And this distinguishing favour is the true source of their love to him—

To this effect both our Lord and his beloved apostle testify^e—

To

^a Exod. v. 6—8.

^b Ib. ver. 20, 21.

^c Rom. i. 30. Col. i. 21.

^d Jer. xxxi. 3.

^e John xv. 16. 1 John iv. 19.

To the eternal purposes of God therefore, and not to the inclinations of our carnal minds, must all the good that is in us, be traced—]

To persons of this description the apostle announces

II. Their privilege

It is under sufferings that the superiority of the Christian's state is to be seen to the greatest advantage—

Of them the apostle speaks; and declares that, of whatever kind they be, they shall work for the good of them that love God

[The Christian may be called to bear the heaviest *afflictions*—

But they shall bring him to consideration, stir him up to prayer, wean him from the world, and lead him to seek his rest above— — —

He may be assaulted also with the most distressing *temptations*—

But these will shew him the evil of his heart, and the faithfulness of his God—

They will also teach him to sympathize with his tempted brethren—

Even *death* itself will be among the number of the things that shall prove beneficial to him—

This is the most formidable enemy to fallen man—

It cuts him off from all means and opportunities of salvation, and seals him up under endless and irremediable misery—

But to a true Christian it is a most invaluable treasure^f—

It puts a period to all his sorrows and temptations, and introduces him to the immediate, everlasting enjoyment of his God—]

Nor need we doubt of this blessed truth

[The apostle speaks of it not as a matter of conjecture, but of certainty—

As he knew it, so may “we know” it, from the declarations and promises of God^g—

Both David and Paul have attested it also from their own experience^h—

Nor is there any Christian in whom it has not been realized—

It is not however *singly* or *separately* that all things work for good, but as taken “*together*” in a collective view—

Separately considered, many things may have wrought for evil, by producing sinful tempers or actions—

But

^f 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^g Ps. xxv. 10.

^h Ps. cxix. 71. Phil. i. 19.

But when viewed as connected with *all* their effects and consequences, the most untoward circumstances will be found to have wrought for good—]

This subject naturally suggests

1. A rule whereby to judge of our election of God

[Our election of God can be known only by its effectsⁱ—

To ascertain it, we must enquire whether we have been *called* by his grace—

And whether, in consequence of that call, we *love God* supremely?—

If we experience these effects, we may safely conclude, that God has entertained eternal purposes of love towards us—

But if we trace not these effects, our pretensions to an interest in his electing love is a fatal delusion—

Let them, in whom these evidences are found, rejoice; but rejoice with trembling—]

2. A ground of consolation for the afflicted

[Afflictions are not at the present joyous, but grievous—

And under them we are ready to say, “All these things are against me”—

But the scripture tells us, that “the trial of our faith is precious^k”—

Let the afflicted then consider what “good” may be accruing to them—

Their troubles may be working so as to discover, prevent, punish, or destroy *sin*— — —

Or they may be working to impart, exercise, strengthen, or perfect *grace*— — —

What reason, in either case, have the afflicted to take comfort!—

We think little of inconveniencies if they do but promote our *temporal* interest—

Should we then be averse to any trials that may tend to our *spiritual* advantage?—

Let us wait to see “the end of the Lord,” and be solicitous rather about our future benefit, than our present ease—]

3. A strong incentive to love and serve God

[Things are never represented as working for the good of the wicked—

On the contrary, their *temporal* blessings are often cursed to them—

Yea, even spiritual blessings only aggravate their guilt and condemnation^l—

Christ

ⁱ 1 Thess. i. 4, 5.

^k 1 Pet. i. 7.

^l 2 Cor. ii. 16.

Christ himself proves, not a Saviour, but a stumbling-block to them^m—

But for God's people, all things, sin excepted, work for good—

Should they not then love him for such distinguishing mercy?—

Can they ever do enough for him, who so marvellously overrules all events for them?—]

^m 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

DXXV. THE CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY.

Ps. xci. 14—16. *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.*

THE Scriptures are the charter of the Christian's privileges—They contain the most minute and accurate description of his character, and set forth, in all the variety of expression that language can afford, the blessings he enjoys—The declarations concerning him in this Psalm may certainly be interpreted as relating to the Messiah, because when a passage out of it was applied to Christ, he did not deny its reference to himself, but shewed with what limitations the passage was to be understood^a—That it refers also to the church cannot admit of doubt—Throughout the whole of it the character and blessedness of God's people are delineated; but with peculiar force and beauty in the concluding verses—In discoursing upon them we shall consider

I. The character of God's people

They "know the name" of God

[The name of God as proclaimed by himself, is recorded in the scriptures^b—And the Christian has a view of him as possessed of those very perfections which are there ascribed to him

^a Compare ver. 11, 12. with Matt. iv. 6, 7.

^b Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

him—He particularly sees these perfections harmonizing, and glorified, in the person of Jesus—Or, if he be not perfectly clear in his views of these things, he at least is sensible that the divine mercy flows only in one channel, and can be imparted only through the atoning blood of Jesus—]

They so know him as to “set their love upon him”

[It is not a mere speculative knowledge that Christians possess, (in *this* the ungodly may far surpass them) but such a practical knowledge as influences their heart and life—They feel an interest in every perfection of the Deity—The justice and holiness of God are as amiable in their eyes as his love and mercy—From what they know of him they are constrained to love him, yea, to “set their love upon him,” with intenseness of desire and fixedness of affection—]

They wait upon him in continual prayer

[Others may keep up an outward form of devotion, or even be exceedingly earnest in prayer on some particular occasion—But they alone can maintain a real intercourse with the Deity, who have been taught by the Holy Spirit both to know and love him—When they have been thus enlightened and renewed, they will feel the necessity, and taste the sweetness, of secret prayer, and will account it their highest honour and happiness to have access unto their God at the throne of grace—Nor will they ever be satisfied with the worship they offer, if they do not “worship him in spirit and in truth”—]

In perfect correspondence with their character will be found

II. Their privileges

There is nothing good which shall be withheld from them in time or eternity—God will vouchsafe to them

1. Answers to prayer

[They who offer their petitions only in a formal manner, never expect an answer to them—They conceive that all testimonies from God respecting the acceptance of our prayers are chimerical and enthusiastic in the extreme—But God is at no loss to impart to his people a clear and lively sense of his approbation—He most assuredly will answer them, though not by tokens that may be heard or seen, yet by sensible communications, and effectual interpositions—Are they laden with guilt? their burthen shall be removed, and they shall be filled with peace and joy—Are they bowed down under trials and temptations? they shall be strengthened by his grace, and be made more than conquerors over all—And though they cannot infallibly conclude from any feelings of their mind that God has answered their prayers, yet their feelings, in conjunction with

with the effects produced by them, will enable them to ascertain it, at least sufficiently for their own encouragement"—]

2. Deliverances from trouble

[The people of God are exposed to trouble no less than others—But they are supported under them by the presence of their God—As the Son of man walked with the Hebrew youths in the furnace, so will he with all his afflicted people; nor shall a hair of their head be singed—As a refiner he will carefully watch over every vessel, moderating the heat that would injure it, and bringing out the vessel as soon as his purposes in submitting it to the fire have been fully answered—This is twice declared in the text; and in due season shall it be experienced by every believer—]

3. Present honour

[The saints are for the most part loaded with contempt and ignominy—Yet the very persons who persecute them most, have frequently, like Herod, an inward reverence for them in their hearts—But, however they be treated by the ungodly, they are universally respected by the saints—The very angels account it their honour and happiness to minister unto them—And even "God himself is not ashamed to be called their God"—They are already exalted to the rank and dignity of God's children; they are made "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ"—]

4. Everlasting glory

[How far length of days is to be expected as the reward of piety under the gospel dispensation, we cannot absolutely determine—But the true Christian will be "satisfied with his life," whether it be long or short—He does not wish for the termination of it merely because he is dissatisfied with his present state, but because he longs for his inheritance—As soon as he has finished his appointed course, God will shew him his full salvation—He will cause him to behold all its glory and enjoy all its blessedness—He will give him a life which will fully satisfy his most enlarged desires—He will say to him, See the kingdom that was prepared for thee from eternity; take possession of it as thine own, and inherit it for ever^d—]

INFER

1. In how pitiable a state are the ignorant and ungodly world!

[Being ignorant of God, and destitute of any real love to him, they have no part or lot in his salvation—They are
strangers

^c Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

^d Matt. xxv. 34.

strangers to all those sublime pleasures, which are communicated to God's peculiar people--The witness of the Spirit, and many other unspeakably precious tokens of the divine favour, are withheld from them--If they be in trouble, they have no heavenly consolations to support them--They may have the wealth of this world, and the honour which cometh of men; but they can expect no salvation from God, nor any thing but shame and everlasting contempt^e--O that they were wise and would consider these things!--]

2. How plain and simple is the duty of God's people!

[The privileges before mentioned, are all bestowed on us *because* we love and seek the Lord--Not that our services are *meritorious* and can claim a "reward of debt;" but God has appointed these as means, in the use of which we shall attain the end--Would we then have more abundant tokens of God's favour here, and secure a still richer inheritance hereafter? Let us study to "grow in the knowlege of him," and in a more fervent and fixed love towards him--Let us wait upon him more earnestly and with greater constancy in prayer--Thus shall his blessings infinitely exceed our highest expectations, and be enjoyed by us when the fleeting vanities of time shall be no more--]

^e Dan. xii. 2.

DXXVI. THE PRIVILEGE OF THOSE WHO LIVE NEAR TO GOD.

Deut. xxxiii. 12. *Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long.*

AS God was pleased to communicate to some in former ages the knowledge of future events, so he frequently imparted to them the spirit of prophecy in a more abundant measure, about the time of their death. Thus Isaac and Jacob were peculiarly inspired at that season to foretel the things which should befall their children. Thus Moses also, when about to be gathered to his fathers, was commissioned to declare the states and circumstances of all the different tribes after their entrance into Canaan. Of Benjamin he foretold, that his tribe should

S

be

be situated close to the place which God had chosen for himself^a; and that his proximity to the Lord's immediate residence should be to him a source and occasion of the richest benefits.

If it be considered how comprehensive many of the prophecies are, and how the apostles themselves continually apply them to the general circumstances of the church of Christ, we shall not be thought to put a force upon the text, while we take occasion from it to set forth

I. The state of God's people

The situation of the tribe of Benjamin may serve at least as an emblem to represent the state of "God's beloved." They are "a people *near unto God*:"

1. They maintain a sense of the divine presence

[They not only cannot, like the generality, live "without God in the world," or rest, as many professors of religion do, in a round of formal duties. They are sensible that "God searcheth the heart and trieth the reins." They long to have a conviction of this fastened upon their minds, and to see, as it were, on every place this inscription written, "Thou God seest me." They do not harbour secret sin because it is invisible to man; but, assured that "the darkness is no darkness with God," and that he beholds the very counsels of the heart, they strive to "set him ever before them;" and to "walk in his fear all the day long."]

2. They walk in dependence on the divine aid

[They are scarcely more conscious of their own existence, than they are of their utter insufficiency for any thing that is good. They have so often failed through their reliance on their own strength, and they feel such a proneness to every species of iniquity, if left one moment to themselves, that they are compelled to cry to their God for help. And, if they were not sure that "the grace of Christ is sufficient" for all who trust in it, they would utterly despair of holding out unto the end. Hence their continual prayer is, "Hold thou me

^a This was remarkably fulfilled: for Mount Zion, whereon the temple was built, belonged to Judah: but the remainder of Jerusalem, and almost the whole of Mount Moriah (of which Mount Zion was a part) belonged to Benjamin: so literally true was it, that God, the head of all the tribes, "dwelt between the shoulders of Benjamin." And this very circumstance occasioned the tribe of Benjamin to adhere to Judah, when the other ten tribes, under Jeroboam, apostatized from the worship of Jehovah.

^b Ps. cxlviii. 14.

me up, and I shall be safe:" and God imparts to them his promised assistance^c.]

3. They delight in doing the divine will

[The "commandments of God are not grievous" to them. Their only grief is, that they do not obey them with greater readiness and joy. Not but that they often find the workings of an evil principle, that would bring them back again into captivity to sin and Satan: but, through the operation of the blessed Spirit, they are enabled to get the victory over their corrupt nature, and both to obey the law outwardly, and to "delight in it after their inward man^d." They would gladly do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven, without reluctance, without weariness, and without reserve.]

There doubtless is a great difference between the attainments of different saints: yet this is, *on the whole*, the state of all; and that they are blessed in it will appear by considering

II. The privileges they enjoy by means of it

While the saints thus live nigh to God, God "keeps them in safety," and covers them

1. From the curse of the law

[We might speak of their deliverance even from *temporal* evils; since they have none which are not sanctified to their souls, and made blessings in disguise^e. But respecting *spiritual* evils we are warranted to speak with the fullest confidence. The saints may, it is true, be left to dread the wrath of God^f: but it shall never come upon them^g. While they are endeavouring to walk in communion with God, in dependence on him, and obedience to him, they have nothing to fear. God has pledged himself, that they shall never perish^h.]

2. From the assaults of Satan

[Satan will indeed exert all his power to destroy them; but he shall not finally prevail against them. He may "buffet them," and cast "his fiery darts" at them; but he is a vanquished enemy; and shall, ere long, be bruised under the feet of even the weakest saintsⁱ. Like the kings whom Joshua subdued, all the powers of hell shall one day be brought out of their dungeons, to receive, from the very lips of those whom now they persecute, the sentence they so justly merit^k.]

3. From

^c Zech. x. 12. Isai. xxvi. 3.

^d Rom. vii. 14—25.

^e Job v. 19—24.

^f Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^g Rom. viii. 1.

^h Isai. lv. 7. John x. 27, 28.

ⁱ Ps. xci. 1—3. Jam. iv. 7. Rom. xvi. 20.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 3.

3. From the power and prevalence of sin

[Notwithstanding “the law of sin in their members,” God’s promise to all his people is, that “sin shall not have dominion over them”¹.] As by the operation of fire on the hearth we may see what it would effect, if suffered to extend itself over the whole house, so by the working of sin in our hearts we may clearly see, to what a state we should quickly be reduced, if God should suffer it to rage with all its force. But he fulfils his word: and though thousands of times we have been, as it were, on the very brink of falling, God has interposed by his providence or grace to preserve our souls: and we remain to this day living monuments of his almighty power, and unchanging faithfulness.]

EXHORTATION

1. Let us seek to become “the beloved of the Lord”

[We account it no small happiness to be beloved of our fellow-creatures; but how much more to be beloved of the Lord! Whose favour is comparable to his? whose so honourable, so permanent, so beneficial^m? Let us then go to him in the name of Jesus; *for whose sake* we shall be admitted to his favourⁿ, and be “blessed by him with all spiritual blessings.”]

2. Let us endeavour to live more and more near to God

[It is our privilege to dwell in God, and to have God dwelling in us. We might “walk with God,” as Enoch did, and though not visibly, yet really, converse with him as our friend^o. And what greater encouragement can we desire, than that which the text affords? Others may fall; but we shall be “covered, and kept in safety^p :” others may apostatize to their perdition; but we shall be preserved through faith unto salvation^q.]

¹ Rom. vi. 14.^m Ps. lxxiii. 3.ⁿ John xiv. 21.^o 1 John i. 3.^p Isai. liv. 17.^q 1 Pet. i. 5.

DXXVII. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH.

Neh. viii. 10. *The joy of the Lord is your strength.*

THE preaching of God’s word is a very ancient ordinance—

In the context we have a description of the manner in which Nehemiah conducted it—

These

These means of instruction were useful in that day—
 Nor are they less necessary in every place and age—
 People need, not only reproof for what is wrong, but
 direction in what is right—

The Jews wept bitterly at the hearing of the law—
 But Nehemiah corrected their sorrow as ill-timed—
 And exhorted them to rejoice in God, who had done
 so great things for them—

I. What reason we have to rejoice in the Lord
 God is often said to rejoice over his people^a—

But the joy here spoken of must be understood rather of
 that which we feel in the recollection of God's goodness
 towards us

The Jews at that season had special cause for joy in
 God

[They had been miraculously delivered from Babylon—
 This temple had been rebuilt in twenty years, and the
 worship of God restored—

And now, after seventy years more, the wall of the city
 was finished—

They had been enabled to surmount innumerable dif-
 ficulties^b—

They had prospered, even to a miracle, in their endea-
 vours^c—

These were tokens of the divine favour, and pledges of its
 continuance—

They were therefore called upon to rejoice with gratitude
 and confidence—

Nor was their sorrow, however just, to exclude this joy—]

Such reason also have all the Lord's people to rejoice
 in the Lord

[They have experienced a redemption from sorer cap-
 tivity—

And been delivered by more stupendous means—

Every day's preservation too is, as it were, a miracle—

Yet the work of their souls is carried on in spite of
 enemies—

Yea, is expedited through the means used to defeat it—

Surely then they should say, like the church of old^d—

Moreover, these mercies are pledges and earnest of yet
 richer blessings—

They may well confide in so good and gracious a God—

They

^a Zeph. iii. 17.

^c Ch. vi. 16.

^b Ch. iv. 17.

^d Ps. cxxvi. 3.

They have indeed still great cause for sorrow—
Yet is it their duty to “rejoice *always* in the Lord^c”—]

To promote and encourage this, we proceed to shew

II. In what respects this joy is our strength

We are as dependent on the frame of our minds as on the state of our bodies—

Joy in God produces very important effects

1. It disposes for action

[Fear and sorrow depress and overwhelm the soul^e—

They enervate and benumb all our faculties—

They keep us from attending to any encouraging considerations^g—

They disable us from extending relief to others^h—

They indispose us for the most necessary dutiesⁱ—

We cannot pray, or speak, or do any thing with pleasure—

On the contrary, a joyous frame exhilarates the soul^k—

David well knew the effect it would produce^l—

And every one may safely adopt his resolution^m—]

2. It qualifies for suffering

[When the spirit is oppressed, the smallest trial is a burthen—

In those seasons we are apt to fret and murmur both against God and man—

We consider our trials as the effects of divine *wrath*—

Or, overlooking God, we vent our indignation against the instruments he uses—

But when the soul is joyous, afflictions appear lightⁿ—

How little did Paul and Silas regard their imprisonment^o!—

How willing was Paul to lay down his very life for Christ^p!—

This accords with the experience of every true Christian^q—]

APPLICATION

1. Let us not be always brooding over our corruptions

[Seasonable sorrows ought not to be discouraged—

But we should never lose sight of all that God has done for us—

It is our privilege to walk joyfully before the Lord^r—

If

^c Phil. iv. 4.

^f Isai. lvii. 16.

^g Exod. vi. 9.

^h Job ii. 13.

ⁱ Luke xxii. 45.

^k Prov. xvii. 22.

^l Ps. li. 12, 13.

^m Ps. cxix. 32.

ⁿ Heb. x. 34. & xii. 2.

^o Acts xvi. 25.

^p Acts xx. 24.

^q Rom. v. 2, 3. and

^r Ps. cxxxviii. 5. & cxlix. 5. & lxxxix. 15, 16. 2 Cor. vi. 10.

If we abounded more in praise, we should more frequently be crowned with victory ^s—]

2. Let us carefully guard against the incursions of sin

[It is sin that hides the Lord from our eyes ^t—

Joy will not consist with indulged sin ^u—

Let us then “mortify our earthly members” and our besetting sins—

Let us be girt with our armour while we work with our hands ^x—

Nor ever grieve the Spirit, lest we provoke him to depart from us—]

3. Let us be daily going to God *through Christ*

[If ever we rejoice in God at all, it must be through the Lord Jesus Christ ^v—

It is through Christ alone that our past violations of the law can be forgiven ^z—

It is through Christ alone that the good work can be perfected in our hearts ^a—

And, since “all things are *through* him, and *from* him, let them be *to* him also ^b”—]

^s 2 Chron. xx. 21, 22.

^t Isai. lix. 2.

^u Ps. lxvi. 18.

^x Neh. iv. 17, 18.

^y Rom. v. 11.

^z Col. i. 20.

^a Heb. xii. 2.

^b Rom. xi. 36.

DXXVIII. GOD'S PATHS ARE MERCY AND TRUTH.

Ps. xxv. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.*

IT has often been observed, that there is in the world an indiscriminate distribution of good and evil, without any respect to men's moral characters. And this is confirmed by Solomon, who says, All things come alike to all, neither knoweth any man love or hatred by all that is before him. This, however, must be understood with certain limitations and restrictions: for, as in chemical preparations one ingredient will entirely change the qualities of the thing prepared, so in the dispensations of Providence will one single ingredient wholly change their nature, while, in appearance, they remain the same.

God often sends temporal blessings to his enemies in anger, as he raised up Pharaoh to a throne, for the purpose of displaying in him the power of his wrath. On the contrary, the bitterest cup that he puts into the hands of his friends is mixed with love. The eye of faith therefore will discern a most essential difference, where sense and reason can see none: it will see, that however God may load the wicked with benefits, he is angry with them every day; and that however he may visit the righteous with the rod, "all his paths are mercy and truth unto them." To elucidate this truth, let us consider

I. The character of the godly

Among the numberless marks whereby the godly are described in scripture, there is not any more deserving of our attention than those before us

1. They keep God's covenant

[The covenant here spoken of cannot be the covenant of works, because no man is able to keep that, seeing that it requires perfect and unsinning obedience. We understand it therefore as relating to the covenant of grace, wherein God undertakes to give us pardon, holiness, and glory, for the sake of his dear Son, who is the Mediator of it, and in whose blood it is ratified and confirmed^a.

Now this covenant every godly person "keeps." He embraces it gladly, being well persuaded, that if the tenor of it were not precisely what it is, he could have no hope. If the covenant required the performance of certain conditions on his part, without providing him with strength to perform those conditions, and pardon for his innumerable failures and defects, he would sit down in despair. But seeing that "the covenant is ordered in all things and sure," and that Jesus, the surety of it, has guaranteed to God the accomplishment of its demands, and to us the enjoyment of its blessings, every believer rejoices in it, and cleaves to it stedfastly with his whole heart.]

2. They keep God's testimonies

[While the believer is thus attached to the gospel covenant, he does not relax his obedience to the law. On the contrary, whatever God has testified to be his will, *that* the believer labours to fulfil. He would not wish to live in sin, though he might do it with impunity: nor does he account
one

^a Compare Jer. xxxi. 31—34. with Heb. viii. 10—12.

one of the commandments grievous : but rather he esteems them all concerning all things to be right^b. His complaints are not against the law as too strict, but against his own heart, as treacherous and vile. With respect to the testimonies of God, he says, with David, "I claim them as mine heritage for ever ; yea, they are the rejoicing of my heart ; they are sweeter to me than honey and the honey comb."

Such, in other parts of God's word, is the description given of the godly^c. We should therefore enquire into our faith and practice, in order that we may ascertain our real character. For if we are harbouring self-righteousness on the one hand, or hypocrisy on the other, we have no part in this covenant, nor any interest in its blessings. Whether we reject the covenant or dishonour it, we are equally destitute of grace, and equally obnoxious to God's displeasure. To have a good evidence of our acceptance with God, we must trust as simply in the covenant as if *no* works were required ; and be as earnest in the performance of good works, as if works *only* were required.]

Having delineated the character of the godly, let us next consider

II. The dealings of God towards them

It might be supposed that persons so pleasing to God should never suffer affliction : but the contrary is true, as appears, not only from the declarations of scripture^d, but from the experience of all that have been most favoured of God^e. But all God's dealings towards them are

1. Mercy

[There are no dispensations, however afflictive, which are not sent to them for good. They are all mercy in their *source*, their *measure*, their *end*. Whence do they spring, but from the love of God ? for, "whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." And are they not all mercifully tempered as to their number, weight, and duration ? Has there not "with every temptation been opened also a way to escape," or "strength given according to our day^f ?" And have they not all wrought for good, to wean us from the world, to purge away sin, to exercise and increase our grace, to give us the comfort of grace bestowed, and God the glory of it ? Is there one of us who must not confess, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted ?" And shall we not

^b Ps. cxix. 128.

^c Isai. lvi. 4, 5. Ps. ciii. 17, 18.

^d Zeph. iii. 12. Ps. xxxiv. 19.

^e Job, David, Paul, and above all, Christ himself.

^f Heb. xii. 6. Deut. xxxiii. 25.

not say that they have been rich mercies, when we find what a weight of glory our light and momentary afflictions have wrought out for us ?]

2. Truth

[Truth has respect to the performance of promises. Now afflictions are expressly promised as much as salvation itself^g. When therefore they come, we should regard them as the accomplishment of God's word, wherein he has said, that he will withhold no good thing from us. It was in this light that David viewed them, when he said, I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou *in faithfulness* hast afflicted me^h. And it is in consideration of this, that we are taught to consider, not merely life with all its comforts, but even death also with all its antecedent evils, as a treasure given us by God'.]

INFER

1. How excellent a grace is faith !

[It is faith, and faith only, that can enable us to view God's dispensations in this light. If we are weak in faith, we shall be easily drawn to fretfulness and murmuring ; but if we are enabled to see the hand of God in our trials, they will all administer occasions of joy and gratitude. Faith is the philosopher's stone, that turns all to gold, and enables us to glory in that, which, to flesh and blood, is a source of sorrow and disquietude. Let us then cultivate this grace, and keep it in continual exercise : and, if any thing occurs, the reasons of which we cannot immediately comprehend, let us content ourselves with saying, What I know not now, I shall know hereafter.]

2. How resigned should the believer be under all his troubles !

[Nothing can come to him which is not the fruit of God's mercy and truth. Not so much as a hair can fall from his head but by divine appointment. Believer, art thou sick and in pain ? God knows that health and ease would have been prejudicial to thy soul. Hast thou sustained some heavy loss ? God sees, perhaps, that the thing which thou hast lost might have been a weight about thy feet, and have retarded thee in running thy race. Art thou persecuted by the world, or tempted by Satan ? It is a discipline whereby God is preparing thee for future victories, and everlasting triumphs. These may be mercies in disguise ; but they are mercies notwithstanding ;

^g Jer. xxx. 11.

^h Ps. cxix. 75.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

withstanding; and therefore should be received with resignation, and improved with diligence.]

3. How lamentable is the state of unbelievers !

[While we disregard God's covenant, and his testimonies, we neither enjoy any mercy, nor have an interest in any promise. On the contrary, our very blessings are cursed to us, and every threatening in God's word is in full force against us. Moreover our troubles are pledges and earnest of infinitely heavier calamities, that shall come upon us in the eternal world. Let us then, if we be yet in unbelief, embrace the covenant of grace, and set ourselves diligently to keep the testimonies of our God. So shall the blessings of the covenant flow down upon us, and we shall know by happy experience, that "the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth from generation to generation."]

DXIX. THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO OBEDIENCE.

John xiv. 15—17. *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

IT has pleased God to unite man's happiness with his duty, and to ordain, that the paths of righteousness alone should be paths of pleasantness and peace. Hence our Lord, in his last discourse, wherein he laboured more abundantly to comfort his disciples, insisted on obedience to his commandments as the best proof of their attachment to him, and the best means of securing blessings from above: yea, when he was informing them how richly the loss of his bodily presence should be overbalanced by the indwelling of the Spirit in their hearts, he first reminds them, that this benefit was inseparably connected with holiness of heart and life.

In discoursing on his words, we shall consider

I. Our Lord's command

Our Lord requires all his people to keep his commandments

[His people are released from the law *as a covenant of works*, so that it shall have no power to condemn them; but they are as much as ever subject to it *as a rule of life*. To imagine the contrary is a dangerous delusion; a sentiment directly opposite to the whole tenor of the gospel. St. Paul, while among the Gentiles, paid no regard to the Mosaic law, in order that he might have the freer access to them for their good: yet, though he was without law in this respect, "he was not without law to God, but under the law to Christ^a." So he tells us with respect to the moral law, that our connexion with it is dissolved, as that of a wife is, when her husband is dead. Nevertheless the dissolution of that connexion is only in order to our being "married to Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto God^b." It is evident therefore that the command here given is equally binding upon all.]

The manner in which our Lord urges his command is worthy of particular notice

[He did not intend to question the love of his disciples; for they could all have appealed to him, as Peter afterwards did, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee." But they were now sorrowing, because of his approaching separation from them: and, as this indicated nothing more than a mere carnal affection, he tells them that there was a far better way of manifesting their love to him, even by keeping his commandments. Indeed, whatever evidences of love to Christ a man may have in his bosom, there is only one way in which he can demonstrate it to the world; he must shew it by his fruits. Moreover, though the most secret motions of love will not be unnoticed in the day of judgment, the chief stress will be laid on those outward proofs of it which we have given in our actions. St. John, speaking of the nature of true love, says, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." He does not mean by this to say, that love and obedience are *the same*, but he must be understood to say, that they are *inseparable*: nor can his assertion admit of one moment's doubt; for love without obedience is dissimulation; and obedience without love is mere servile drudgery. To us therefore does our Lord speak as well as to his immediate disciples, enjoining us to "love him, not in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth^c."]

This command of our Lord can never appear grievous, if we duly consider

II. The

^a 1 Cor. ix. 21,

^b Rom. vii. 4.

^c 1 John iii. 18.

II. The promise with which he enforces it

The promise, though suited to the immediate state of his disciples, extends equally to all his followers

[He assures his disciples, that, though absent from them, he would not be forgetful of their interests: on the contrary, he was going to transact their business, and to intercede with the Father on their behalf. Moreover, he predicts the certain and glorious success of his petitions, and tells them, that the Father would send them another, and an abiding, Comforter. *He* had been their comforter hitherto in all their trials; but, as he had already been sometimes absent from them, so now he was about to withdraw himself altogether; and *that* too, at a time, when their love and obedience to him would subject them to far heavier trials than ever they had yet endured. But they had no need to fear; for he would send them the Holy Ghost, whose office, and whose continual care, it should be to comfort and support their souls.

And does he not appear in the presence of God for *us* also? And is not that blessed Spirit also the Comforter of all God's children? Doubtless then the promise is to *us* also, and our children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call^d.]

And how strongly does it enforce the injunction before given!

[What if the disciples should be called to endure trials for him? could they feel any reluctance, when they considered how he was engaged for them, and what unspeakable blessings he had obtained for them? Could they want any thing, when they had this Comforter with them? or need they fear any thing, when they were assured of his almighty succour and support? True, they might lose their possessions, their liberty, and their very lives; but none could rob them of this Comforter: on the contrary, "the more their afflictions abounded, the more should his consolations also abound" towards them.

And what greater incentive to obedience can we have? Surely nothing should be thought hard either to do or suffer, when we have a prospect of such consolations and such supports. And indeed, experience proves, that when this Comforter reveals himself in our hearts, the most arduous duties are easy, and the most bitter sufferings an occasion of joy.]

But, to discover more fully the force of our Lord's argument, let us consider

III. His

^d Acts ii. 38, 39.

III. His further explanation of the promise

Our Lord expatiates upon the character of the promised Comforter

[Without fuller information, the disciples would have been utterly at a loss: for who could compensate to them the loss of their Master's presence? Where could they find a creature in earth or heaven that was possessed of half his qualities? To remove their difficulties our Lord tells them, that the Comforter was none other than "the Spirit of truth," who had spoken in all the prophets, and who was, together with himself and his heavenly Father, the true and living God^e. He informs them also that the gift of this Comforter was a peculiar and most distinguished privilege; for that "the world neither knew him, nor were able to receive him:" yea, further, that this gift was not *external* or *perishable*, like the gifts of Providence, but *internal*, dwelling in them, and *everlastingly abiding* with them.

This shews us the extent of our privileges also, and the distinguishing favours, which, as believers, we enjoy. The world neither sees nor knows the Holy Ghost: they doubt perhaps whether there be any Holy Ghost, or at least, whether *we* are ever to expect his influences on our souls. Moreover, as they are destitute of humility and faith, they are under a *moral* incapacity to receive this Comforter; if not, in the more ordinary influences of *conviction*, yet certainly in the sublimer influences of *consolation* and *joy*. But we must deny the Bible itself, and contradict the prayers which we offer daily in the liturgy, if we deny the indwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. The miraculous operations of the Spirit have ceased long ago: but his comforting and sanctifying operations are as much to be expected now, as at any period since his descent on the day of Pentecost.]

Nor is this explanation destitute of considerable weight as enforcing the injunction before given

[What must the disciples say in the midst of any trials or difficulties? Could they for one moment repine? Surely they would rather glory in tribulations for Christ's sake. They would necessarily argue thus: "How highly are we privileged! how wonderfully are we made to differ from the world around us! Is there no less than a divine Person sent down to dwell in us as our Comforter? Have we a Comforter, whom none but a chosen few are qualified to receive? Is this marvellous

^e He does not speak here of the Holy Ghost as a mere *quality*, or *operation*; but as a distinct *person*: he calls him, not a *Comfort*, but a *Comforter*; and yet more fully characterizes him as a *person* in the words following.

vellous gift bestowed upon us in answer to our Lord's prevailing intercessions? And shall we not testify our love to him? Has he done such things for us unasked; and shall we not do for him the things which he commands?"

Such then are the sentiments which we should adopt, and such the conduct we should pursue. Nor can we fail to do so, if we only bear in mind, that, though our obedience cannot *merit* the divine favour, it is necessary to the enjoyment of it: and that the consolations of the Spirit will ever be proportioned to the *practical* regard we shew to Christ.]

INFER

1. How wide is the difference between the believing and the unbelieving world!

[Many think that there is little difference between the followers of Christ, and others, except as it may be manifested in a foolish and needless singularity. But, if there be any truth in the promise before us, there is a most tremendous difference between the two characters: the one is benefited by the Saviour's intercession; the other not: the one has received the Holy Ghost; the other not: the one has an experimental acquaintance with the Spirit of truth; the other knows scarcely any thing about the Spirit, and even feels averse to what he does know: the one has the Spirit dwelling in him as a comforter; the other, instead of experiencing his consolations, cannot even receive them: the one has all the persons of the ever-blessed Trinity interesting themselves on his behalf; the other has God, even Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for his enemy. The world may ridicule these things as enthusiasm if they will; but they are the true sayings of God. Nor can we hope ever to dwell with God in heaven, unless he first dwell in us, by his Spirit, on earth. The Lord grant that we may all lay to heart, and improve, these momentous truths!]

2. How vain are all professions of love to Christ, if we do not manifest our love by our works!

[It is to little purpose that we profess to rely on Christ's death and intercession, or to have experienced the consolations of God's Spirit, if our lives correspond not with our professions. That word of God will most assuredly be found true at last, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Let all then, whether professors or profane, consider this, and seek to have the very thoughts of their hearts captivated to the obedience of Christ.]

DXXX. CHRIST'S WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVE SINNERS.

John vi. 37. *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.*

IT is a pleasing reflection that there is a people secured to Christ, who, having been given to him by the Father, shall, each in his appointed time, "be gathered unto Shiloh," to be the fruits of his travail, and the spoils of his victory. This pleasure however would be greatly damped, if we believed, that there were any infallibly, and from eternity, given over to perdition, who should be sent into the world for no other purpose than to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to fit themselves for the place, to which they had been doomed by an eternal and irreversible decree. We confess that we cannot so draw the line between præterition and predestination, as to satisfy in all cases a cavilling, or perhaps a scrupulous, mind: but the same difficulties occur, if we attempt to mark the distinct boundaries of free will, and free grace; or to shew how the existence of sin could ever consist with the holiness of God. This however is not our province: we must leave to God to reconcile the difficulties that occur; and receive the truths he declares, not because we can comprehend every thing respecting them, but because they are revealed by an unerring God. That some are secured to Christ appears from hence, that, if they were not, it might eventually happen, that none might come to him, and consequently, that he might shed his blood in vain. We are not however left to found this sentiment on any uncertain reasonings of our own; since our Lord himself, in the very words before the text, says, "All that the Father hath given me, shall come to me." But are all others therefore of necessity sealed up unto perdition? no; for he adds, "And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

To improve this blessed declaration, let us consider

I. What we should come to Christ for

[*In general*, we answer, that we must come to him for every thing; since all fulness is treasured up in him, on purpose that we may receive out of it according to our necessities. But *more particularly*, we must come to him for *pardon*,
which

which we all need—which we cannot otherwise obtain—and which he is exalted to give^a—We must come for *peace*, since all peace, derived from other quarters, is delusive—and he, as the Prince of peace, has promised to bestow it^b—We must come for *strength*, since without him we can do nothing^c, and by him, every thing^d; and St. Paul himself applied to him in prayer, and obtained from him, as we also shall do, grace sufficient for him^e.—Lastly, we must come to him for *eternal life* and glory; since he frequently claims it as his prerogative to give it^f, and will surely be the author of it to all them that obey him^g.]

II. In what manner we should come to him

[Of course, our Lord meant not that we were to approach him with our bodies; since many thronged him, and pressed upon him, who nevertheless were cast out. It is therefore, not to the motion of our bodies, but to the frame of our minds, that we are to have respect, when we come unto him. We must come unto him *empty*. If, like the Laodiceans, we think ourselves rich and increased with goods^h, our application to Christ will be vain and fruitlessⁱ—We must be deeply convinced of our own guilt and helplessness; and be thoroughly persuaded that we must perish if he receive us not. We must be like the prodigal, when dying with hunger, or like the disciples in jeopardy, crying, Save, Lord, or we perish^k—Moreover we must come *believing*. This is more particularly intended by our Lord, the words “coming” and “believing,” being perfectly synonymous^l. To come filled with unbelief, would be to insult, rather than to honour him. We should be convinced of his suitableness to our necessities, his sufficiency for our relief, and his willingness to receive us. We must regard him as the only way to life, the only door of hope^m. We must believe in him as appointed of God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemptionⁿ; and then we shall find by happy experience that he is “able to save us to the uttermost.”]

III. The encouragement we have to come to him

[Though our Lord sometimes delayed answering the requests of those who came to him in the days of his flesh, he never finally refused any. Thus, though he may not instantly manifest his acceptance of us, he will not reject any who *thus* come

^a Acts v. 31.

^b Isa. ix. 6. John xiv. 27. Eph. ii. 17.

^c John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^d Phil. iv. 13.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^f John x. 28.

^g Heb. v. 9.

^h Rev. iii. 17.

ⁱ Luke i. 53.

^k Matt. viii. 25.

^l Ver. 35.

^m John xiv. 6. and x. 9.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 30.

come unto him. No *past iniquities* shall cause him to reject us. This is evident from many strong and express declarations of prophets^o, of apostles^p, of Christ himself^q. If it be thought that the sin against the Holy Ghost is an exception, let it suffice to say, that no man, who desires to find acceptance through Christ, can possibly have committed that: since he would in that case have been given over to judicial blindness and obduracy, and consequently, would have continued altogether regardless of his eternal welfare. The same may be proved from manifold instances, wherein the vilest of the human race have found acceptance with him. We need only look at Manasseh^r, David^s, and above all at the apostle Paul, who was in this particular intended for a pattern^t, and this blessed truth will be established beyond a possibility of doubt. Nor will *any present infirmities* cause our Lord to reject us. For his disciples, long after they had found acceptance with him, betrayed manifest symptoms of pride^u, revenge^x, and cowardice^y; and Peter, whose misconduct was by far the most glaring, received by far the most striking tokens of our Lord's regard^z. We say not this to encourage sin, but to illustrate the tender mercies of HIM, who carries the lambs in his bosom, and who, instead of breaking the bruised reed, will bring forth from it the sweetest melody^a.]

ADDRESS

1. Those that are afar off from Christ

[Can it be supposed, that, if we will not go to Christ, we can ever participate his benefits? Doubtless we cannot: if we keep at a distance from him in this world, there will be an "impassable gulf between us" in the world to come. Let us remember then, that we *must* go to him or perish. Let not any one object, I *cannot* go: for the truth is, we *will* not^b. Yet, notwithstanding our past obstinacy, we *may* go to him, with a full assurance that he will *in no wise* cast us out. Let us not then delay, lest death seize us, and the door of mercy be shut for ever.]

2. Those who are coming to him

[We are told of one in the gospel, whom, when coming to our Lord, the devil cast down, and tare, and left to appearance, dead^c. Such enmity will Satan discover against us

^o Isai. i. 18.

^p Acts x. 43. and 1 John i. 7.

^q Matt. xii. 31.

^r 2 Kin. xxi. 16. with 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9. 12, 13.

^s 2 Sam. xii. 9, 13.

^t 1 Tim. i. 16.

^u Mark ix. 33, 34.

^x Luke ix. 54.

^y Matt. xxvi. 56.

^z Mark xvi. 7. &

^a Isai. xl. 11. and xlii. 3.

John xxi. 15—17.

^b John v. 40.

^c Mark ix. 20, 26.

us also as soon as ever we attempt to come to Christ. He will raise every obstacle in his power: he will assault us by "fightings without, and fears within." But the more earnest he is in his endeavours to draw us from Christ, the more determined let us be in going to Christ: so shall we most effectually defeat his malice, and secure beyond a doubt our own salvation.]

3. Those who have come to him

[Whence is it that so great a difference has been put between you and others? Is it that you were *of yourselves* more inclined to good, and that you made yourselves to differ^d? No: you were once as far from God as any; nor had the smallest inclination to seek him till God gave you the will^e; nor could you then have come to Christ, except the Father had drawn you by his almighty power^f. Be careful then to give all the glory of your salvation to God alone. And remember that you are still to be coming to Christ every day you live^g. "All your fresh springs are in him;" and "out of his fulness you must continually receive." Live then a life of faith on the Son of God; and the communion, which you enjoy with him on earth, shall soon be perfected in the realms of glory.]

^d 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^f John vi. 37.

^e Phil. ii. 13.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

DXXXI. THE EFFECTS OF DILIGENCE IN RELIGION.

Hos. vi. 3. *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.*

THEY, who are strongly attached to human systems, are apt to set divine truths at variance with each other, and to wrest some from their plain and obvious meaning, in order to reconcile them with others more agreeable to their sentiments. But they, who receive the word of God as little children, will find a harmony in passages, which at first sight appear contradictory, and will derive equal benefit from the contemplation of them all. Some imagine that if our salvation depend wholly on the free and sovereign grace of God, there can be no need for

for exertion on our part. Others, on the contrary, argue, that if our salvation be to be effected by means of our own endeavours, it cannot be dependent on divine grace. But these apparently opposite assertions are not made only in different and detached passages, but oftentimes in the very same passage. Our Lord, for instance, exhorts us to labour for the meat that endureth unto eternal life, at the same time that he says, the Son of man will give it us. And St. Paul bids us work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and yet assures us in the very same sentence, that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do. Thus the prophet represents those who are returning to God, as encouraging themselves with the thought, that though they could no more accomplish their end by their own exertions than they could command the sun to shine, or the clouds to pour down their waters, yet, if they persevered in the use of God's appointed means, they could not but succeed.

The effects of diligence in religion are here

I. Plainly stated

The great object of our attention should be, to gain the knowledge of Christ

[Many see no occasion at all for diligence in the pursuit of heavenly things. Others, who confess the need of constant exertion on our part, yet propose to themselves a wrong end in their labours; having no higher view than to establish a righteousness of their own. But to know Christ and him crucified is the one mean of eternal life, in comparison of which every thing else is as dung and dross^a. It is not however a mere speculative knowledge of him that is thus excellent (for we may possess that, and have the heart as unsanctified as ever) but an experimental knowledge of him, that brings the soul into a close union and abiding fellowship with him, and a transforming knowledge, that changes us into his blessed image in righteousness and true holiness^b.]

This should be sought with unremitting diligence

[It cannot be attained without frequent and serious meditation. It does not indeed, like other studies, require intenseness of application, scope of thought, and strength of intellect: it requires only that we enter into our own bosom, that we consult the records of conscience, that we apply to
our

^a Compare John xvii. 3. 1 Cor. ii. 2. Phil. iii. 8.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 18.

our souls the threatenings and promises of the scripture, and that we live in the daily exercise of faith and prayer. This is easily compatible with any lawful pursuit; and so far from distracting the mind, and incapacitating it for action, it will give direction and energy to all our faculties. We must not however imagine that it is the work of a day, a month, or a year; it is the work of our whole lives. If at any time we think we have attained, and are already perfect, we may be well assured that we have hitherto studied to little purpose. St. Paul, after preaching the gospel twenty years, still desired to know Christ more fully^c: and so infinitely does that of which we are ignorant, exceed that which any man can know in this life, that he says, If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know^d. We must therefore “follow on” in the use of God’s appointed means, nor ever relax our diligence till we see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known.]

Nor shall such means be used in vain

[It will be invariably found, that, while “the idle soul suffers hunger, the diligent soul shall be made fat.” No person shall be disappointed for want of talents; for men shall make a proficiency, not in proportion to their abilities, but in proportion to their willingness to learn of God, and to practise what they already know^e. God, who alone can instruct us in this knowledge, will “reveal even to babes and sucklings the things that are hid from the wise and prudent.” “The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way.” “If only we cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding, if we seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures,” we need not fear on account of any imagined incapacity; for God has said, “Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding^f.”]

This encouraging truth is yet further

II. Beautifully illustrated

There is a beauty peculiar to the Hebrew poetry, and very frequently occurring in the prophetic writings, that important truths are amplified with figurative illustrations, and that sublime metaphors are explained by simple declarations. In the passage before us, that which is first proposed in plain language, is afterwards confirmed in

two

^c Phil. iii. 10, 12.

^e Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^d 1 Cor. viii. 2.

^f Prov. ii. 6.

two most instructive similes, each of them affording a more precise view of the manner in which the promise itself shall be fulfilled.

The simile taken from the return of day, intimates, that our success shall be *certain* and *gradual*

[Nothing but the utter dissolution of the universe shall ever stop the succession of day and night; so that the stated returns of light may be considered as a fit emblem of *certainly*. Indeed, God himself sets forth the immutability of his covenant by this very figure; "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant." Thus certainly shall light arise upon our benighted souls, provided we really desire to behold it^b: in a time of darkness we may cry, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me:" but, as the sun, even at midnight, is hastening towards us, though unseen, so are "the goings forth of our God *prepared*," decreed, and ready to appear. Let us but "wait, as those who watch for the morning;" and our gloom shall soon be dispelled; and "the Sun of righteousness shall arise upon us with healing in his beams."

Nevertheless we must not expect that we should discern every thing at once: our progress will be *gradual*. The sun does not arise in an instant: there is first a little glimmering dawn; then the gilded clouds begin to wear a brighter aspect; and at last they are dissipated by the rising sun: the sun itself also rises higher, and shines brighter in the heavens, till it arrives at its meridian. Thus it is with the knowledge of Christ in the soul: the first views which the enquiring soul obtains are faint and confused; yea, perhaps, as in the early dawn, things may assume a monstrous and distorted shape: we may "behold men, as trees, walking." But gradually the mists shall be dispelled from our eyes; our organs of vision shall be purged from their film; and the glorious object, whom we desire to behold, shall be revealed to our view. But, while we are here below, we shall "see him only, as in a mirror, darkly:" we must wait till we arrive above, before we can fully "see him as he is."]

The simile taken from the return of showers after drought, intimates, that our knowledge shall be *refreshing* and *fructifying*

[What can be more *refreshing*, than rain to the parched ground? How does the face of nature soon testify its gladness by

^a Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21.

^b Isai. lviii. 8, 10.

by an universal smile! Yet is this but a very faint resemblance of that joy and gladness, which the soul experiences through seasonable communications of divine knowledge. Let us figure to ourselves a prodigal reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, and doubting whether so vile a wretch shall ever find acceptance with his offended Father; and, while trembling with a dread of his displeasure, surprised with the tenderest expressions of his love: will not this be a season of refreshing to his soul? Will he not instantly “put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness?” Will it not be to him “as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land?” Thus shall it be with all who follow on to know the Lord; they shall have “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

Nor shall the knowledge acquired be *unproductive of solid fruits*. As “the former rain” prepared the ground for the seed, and caused the seed that was cast in, to vegetate; and “the latter rain” ripened and matured the grain, and made it fit for the sickle (both being essentially necessary, and abundantly productive;) so shall the knowledge of Christ be to the soul; it shall come “like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth¹.” After long drought, the clouds may, almost without a metaphor, be said to “drop fatness;” and the knowledge of Christ, long and eagerly desired, shall make “the desert to blossom as the rose;” yea, “it shall make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert as the garden of the Lord.” “Instead of the brier shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorny bush shall grow up the myrtle-tree²;” and the once barren soul shall be “fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness to God’s praise and glory.”]

We may SEE from hence

1. Whence it is that mankind in general are so ignorant of Christ

[The record of God concerning Christ is this; “He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.” This is plain, express, and immutable. Yet, alas! the generality, instead of labouring above all things to attain the knowledge of Christ, will bestow no pains whatever upon it. There is no other knowledge that they profess to have without study: but *this* they think they possess almost by intuition. Hence, notwithstanding it is infinitely more important than any other, they continue wholly ignorant of it: they are satisfied with giving a general assent to Christianity

as

¹ Ps. lxxii. 6.

² Isai. lv. 10—14.

as true, while they discern nothing of its beauty, and taste nothing of its excellence. If this knowledge were unattainable, then men would have some excuse, seeing that they would labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought. But God has promised success to persevering diligence; "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." Let us not then give way to pride or indolence: but let us search the scriptures with an humble, teachable spirit, and beg of God to enlighten the eyes of our understanding: so shall we be "guided into all truth," and be made "wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."]

2. Whence it is that they, who have attained some knowledge of Christ, are not made more holy, and more happy by it

[To maintain a steady uniform course is no easy matter. To follow on, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before, requires more humility and zeal than the greater part even of real Christians possess. Hence their attainments in joy and holiness are small, in comparison of what they might possess. Instead of minding uniformly the one thing needful, they suffer themselves to be distracted with worldly cares and pleasures. Instead of resisting their adversary, they yield to him; and give way to desponding thoughts, when they should renew their exertions with more abundant diligence. If they followed on as they ought, their success would not only be certain and gradual, but would be accompanied with a proportionable increase of joy and holiness. Let us not then turn aside to earthly vanities, or waste our time in fruitless lamentations and complaints; but let us "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" that so our "path may be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."]

DXXXII. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEADING DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL.

Acts x. 43. *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

FOR the space of two thousand years the knowledge of the true God was confined to one nation. But from the beginning it was God's intention in due time to reveal himself to the Gentiles also, and to incorporate them with the Jewish church. This was frequently

declared by the prophets^a, and insisted on by our Lord^b: yet such was the force of prejudice, that the Apostles themselves, notwithstanding the instructions they had received from their divine Master, and the express commission given them to preach the gospel to every creature^c, could not conceive that the partition wall was to be broken down. For six years after the day of Pentecost they continued to preach to Jews only; and when they heard that Peter had gone to speak to a Gentile they were filled with indignation, and called him to an account for what they deemed a most unwarrantable proceeding^d.

It had been foretold to Peter, that he should have the keys of the kingdom of heaven^e, or of the gospel dispensation. He had already opened the door to the Jews on the day of Pentecost^f: and now he was sent of God to open it to the Gentiles. The manner in which his doubts were removed will be noticed in another place: at present we observe, that his high commission was executed in the ever-memorable words which we have just read: in elucidating which, we shall consider

I. The doctrines contained in them

The Apostle's address to his Gentile audience was concise; but it was clear and energetic. The two leading points in which all men need to be informed were laid down with precision, namely, that salvation is

1. Through Christ as the author

[To see the force and propriety of the Apostle's words, we must consider the occasion of them, and the character of the person to whom they were addressed.

The person who had sent for him was "Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band^g." He was a Gentile, but had renounced idolatry, and was a worshipper of the true God. He was singularly pious and "devout:" he was extremely liberal even to that very "people" who held him in abhorrence: and he was careful to bring up his family also in the fear of God. This man, on a day that he had set apart for solemn fasting and prayer^h, was visited by an angel, who directed him to send for Peter to shew him the way of salvationⁱ.

Now

^a See Rom. ix. 25—27. and x. 18—20. ^b Matt. viii. 11, 12. and

^c Matt. xxviii. 19. and Mark xvi. 16. ^d John x. 16.

^e Matt. xvi. 19. ^f Acts xi. 2, 3. ^g Acts ii. 14, 38, 41.

^h Acts x. 1, 2. ⁱ Ib. ver. 30. It is not improbable that he was engaged in prayer with his family at the very time God sent the angel to him. Compare τῷ οἴκῳ in ver. 2. and ver. 30.

^j Ib. ver. 32.

Now it was to *this man* that Peter spake, when he said, that remission of sins was to be obtained “through the name of Christ.” We must therefore understand him as saying, that, however Cornelius might be a worshipper of Jehovah, and not of idols; however sincerely he might fear God, however eminent he might be in respect of abstinence and devotion, of liberality and attention to the spiritual welfare of his family, salvation was not to be obtained by any of these things *under the gospel dispensation*, but was to be sought through the name and merits of Jesus Christ. Christ was sent to make atonement for our sins, and to reconcile us unto God; and through him *only*, through him *exclusively*, we must find acceptance with God.]

2. By faith as the means

[Here again our best illustration of the subject will be from the context. Had Peter simply told Cornelius that he must seek remission of sins through the name of Christ, Cornelius might have thought, that he was to recommend himself to Christ by the very means which he had hitherto used to recommend himself to God, namely, by prayer, almsdeeds, &c. St. Peter prevents the possibility of such a mistake, by telling him, that “whosoever *believeth* in Christ shall receive the remission of sins;” not, whosoever *obeyeth* him, but whosoever *believeth* in him. This shewed Cornelius that he must come to Christ *as a sinner*, to obtain the remission of his sins freely through his blood and righteousness: that he must not bring his own good deeds with him to purchase this blessing, but must receive it “without money and without price^k.”

We do not mean to say, that Cornelius could be saved if he lived in wilful disobedience to God; but, that he was neither to be accepted of the Father *for the merit of* his obedience, nor to obtain an interest in Christ *on account of* his obedience: the *meritorious* cause of his salvation must be the death of Christ, and the *instrumental* cause, or means, of his salvation must be a reliance on Christ. His obedience must *follow* the remission of sins *as a fruit and effect*; but it must *not precede* the remission of sins in any wise *as a cause*.]

In the text we may yet further notice

II. The importance of those doctrines

We can scarcely conceive any thing more strongly marked than this.

1. All the prophets bear witness to them

[All the prophets are not equally full and explicit upon this subject; but we have the assurance of God himself that they

^k Isai: lv. 1.

they were unanimous in their opinions upon it, and that they all bear testimony to these blessed truths. Consult Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Joel, and ask them how we are to obtain remission of sins? they will all say, CHRIST must be your righteousness¹: it is HE alone that can make an end of sin^m: call therefore upon HIMⁿ; look unto HIM; glory in HIM: there is no Saviour besides HIM^o.

What greater proof can we have of the importance of these doctrines, than that which arises from this harmony and concurrence of so many prophets, who lived at periods so distant from Christ and from each other?]

2. God wrought many miracles, in order to draw men's attention to them

[In the first place he sent an angel to Cornelius, to inform him where he might find a minister capable of instructing him in these points. Then he vouchsafed a vision to Peter, in order to remove his scruples about going to him; and, to render it the more effectual, he renewed that vision thrice^p. Then when the messengers were come from Cornelius, and Peter was yet doubting what his vision should mean, the Holy Ghost himself spake to him, and bade him go, doubting nothing^q.

Can we suppose that all this had respect to a matter of indifference, or of trifling import? or indeed that any thing but that which was essentially necessary to the salvation of every man was the ground of such singular and repeated interpositions?]

3. The Holy Ghost himself set his seal to the truth of them

[While Peter was delivering the very words of the text, the Holy Ghost fell on the whole company, both Jews and Gentiles, as he had done on the Apostles six years before^r. By this he set his seal to the truth of what was delivered. And it is an indisputable fact, that no other doctrine is ever made effectual to the conversion of men; and that wherever these doctrines are preached with fidelity, there sinners are converted from the error of their ways^s: the Holy Ghost bears testimony to the word delivered; and, though he imparts not to any his miraculous powers, he does enlighten the minds of men, and sanctify their hearts.

What shall we say then? that the doctrines, thus attested, were of small importance, and, that it is of little consequence whether we receive or reject them?]

4. No

¹ Jer. xxiii. 6.

^m Dan. ix. 24.

ⁿ Joel ii. 32. with

^o Isai. xlv. 22—25. and xliii. 11.

Rom. x. 11. 13.

^p Acts xi. 5—10.

^q Ib. ver. 12.

^r Ver. 44. & ch. xi. 15.

^s Jer. xxiii. 22.

4. No man, *under the gospel dispensation*, can be saved, unless he cordially receive them

[What might have been the eternal state of Cornelius, if he had been out of the reach of the gospel, it is needless for us to enquire. He lived in an age when the gospel was preached, and might, notwithstanding the prejudices of the apostles, have been admitted to a participation of all its blessings, by submitting to circumcision first, and afterwards to baptism, provided he had really believed in Christ. There is reason therefore to fear that, notwithstanding his eminent attainments in natural religion, he could not have been saved without faith in Christ; because the angel that bade him send for Peter, informed him, that Peter should “tell him *words whereby he and all his house should be saved*.” And when the apostles heard of his conversion to Christ, they exclaimed, “Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted *repentance unto life*.” If then so devout, so abstemious, so charitable, so zealous a worshipper of the true God, needed to believe in Christ in order to obtain the remission of his sins, how much more must we, who possess not half his virtues! Even the apostle Paul, who was, “as touching the righteousness of the law, blameless,” “counted it all but loss for Christ^x :” moreover, he renounced his evangelical, no less than his legal, righteousness, that he might be accepted through Christ alone^y. We therefore may be well assured, that we must do the same: for in his conduct with respect to this, he has given us an example which all must follow, if they would obtain salvation.

How strongly does this thought illustrate and confirm the importance of the doctrines contained in the text!]

5. Every person who truly receives them, shall certainly be saved

[Here the text is plain and express. The word “who-sover” is of unlimited import: there is no exception: whether a man be a Jew or a heathen; whether he have been more or less wicked; whether he have a longer or a shorter time to live; whether he have a deeper insight into the mysteries of the gospel, or be but just initiated into its fundamental truths; he shall assuredly receive through Christ the remission of his sins, the very instant he is enabled to believe in Christ. Whoever he be that desires to obtain salvation, there is but one direction to be given to him, and that is the direction given by Peter to Cornelius, and by Paul to the affrighted jailor;

^t Acts xi. 14.

^x Phil. iii. 6, 7.

^y Ib. ver. 18.

^y Ib. ver. 8, 9.

jailor; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved^z."

To occupy any more of your time in shewing the importance of the doctrines in the text, is superfluous. If it be not demonstrated by the foregoing considerations, we despair of ever establishing the simplest truth that can be proposed.]

APPLICATION

[Nothing remains for us now, but to bring the doctrines home to our own hearts and consciences, and to intreat our God, that they may be made subservient to our eternal welfare.]

^z Acts xvi. 30, 31.

DXXXIII. THE REWARD OF OBEYING THE GOSPEL.

James i. 25. *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

A PROFESSION of religion without the practice of it will avail us little—

Obvious as this truth is, it needs to be frequently insisted on—

Even in the apostle's days there were many who "professed to know God, while in works they denied him"—

St. James wrote his Epistle with a more immediate view to such persons—

He tells them plainly that they only "deceive their own selves"^a—

But affirms with equal confidence that the practical Christian shall be blessed—

We shall consider

I. The apostle's description of the gospel

The gospel is generally thought to be a mere system of restraints—

But it is, in truth, a "law of liberty"

[It finds us under a worse than Egyptian bondage—

And

^a Ver. 22.

And proclaims liberty from our oppressive yoke^b—

It offers pardon to those who are under the condemnation of *the law*—

And freedom from *sin* to those over whom it has had dominion—

It rescues us from the captivity in which *Satan* has held us—

It breaks the fetters whereby *the world* has retained its ascendancy over us—

And opens a way for the unrestrained observance of holy duties—

It is to captive sinners, what the jubilee-trumpet was to the enslaved Jews^c—

And effects for the imprisoned soul what the angel wrought for Peter^d—

This liberty however it proclaims with the authority of a “law”—

It does not merely offer what we may alter or reject—

It is properly called by the apostle “the law of faith”—

It prescribes the only possible method of obtaining salvation—

It declares that all attempts to find out another will be vain^e—

And it enjoins us to embrace this at the peril of our souls^f—]

It is justly called a “perfect” law of liberty

[Nothing can be *added to it* to render it more effectual—

Neither ceremonial nor moral duties can at all improve Christ’s finished work^g—

It will be utterly made void also, if any thing be *taken from it*—

The blood of Christ, not any work of ours, must be regarded as *the price* of our redemption^h—

And the liberty itself must be received as *the gift of God through faith*ⁱ—

The gospel is perfect also with respect to its effects upon the conscience—

The Mosaic sacrifices were little more than remembrances of sins^k—

But in the gospel we have a sacrifice that takes away our sin^l—

The soul, once purged by the Redeemer’s blood, is cleansed for ever^m—

And,

^b Isai. lxi. 1.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^d 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^e John i. 29.

^f Lev. xxv. 9, 10.

^g 1 John iii. 23.

^h Eph. ii. 8.

ⁱ Acts xii. 7—10.

^j Gal. v. 2, 4.

^k Heb. x. 3.

^l Heb. x. 14.

And, once freed by his almighty grace, is free indeed !ⁿ—]

This beautiful view of the gospel will easily account for

II. The regard which the Christian pays to it

A man immured in a dungeon, would not treat with indifference a proclamation of pardon—

Nor can he, who is in earnest about salvation, disregard the gospel—

He endeavours to understand it

[He does not inspect it to gratify a foolish curiosity—

He searches into it with care and diligence—

Like the Beræans of old, he maturely weighs its declarations^o—

And “proves all things in it, that he may hold fast that which is good”—

Even the angels themselves desire to investigate its mysteries—

Much more does he, who feels so great an interest in its contents—

Nor does he do this in a transient manner, but with persevering diligence^p—]

He labours also to obey it

[What he hears or reads is not suffered to escape his memory—

He at least “gives earnest heed to it, lest at any time he should let it slip”—

He cannot be satisfied to “see his face in a glass, and presently to forget what manner of man he was”—

He desires to have the word engraven on his heart, and transcribed into his life—

When he hears of liberty, he feels a solicitude to obtain it—
Or,

ⁿ John viii. 36.

^o Acts xvii. 11.

^p It is worthy of observation that as St. Peter, speaking of the angels, uses the word *παρακύψαι* in reference to the bending posture of the cherubims that were over the ark, 1 Pet. i. 12.; so St. James, speaking of the Christian, uses both *παρακύψας* and *παραμείνας*, in reference to the continuance of the cherubims in that posture. The ark was an eminent type of Christ; in it was contained the law; and over it was placed the mercy-seat: overshadowing all, were the cherubims of glory; Heb. ix. 4, 5. These things were typical of evangelical truths; Heb. x. 1. They represented God as reconciled to us through Christ, by whom the law was kept inviolate: compare Ps. xl. 7, 8. with Heb. x. 7. And the cherubims represented, not angels only, but men also, as contemplating and searching into this stupendous mystery.

^q Ver. 23, 24.

Or, having obtained it, he strives to honour his almighty deliverer—

He is well aware that his pretensions to faith must be supported by a suitable life and conversation^r—

And it is his determination, through grace, to shew forth his faith by his works—]

Nor does he find it in vain to serve God

III. The reward which he insures to himself thereby

The world suppose that the service of God is irksome and unprofitable—

But the Christian can attest the contrary from his own experience

In the very act of obeying, he finds a rich reward

[He can adopt, in reference to the law, the declaration of St. Paul^s—

However strict the commandments be, he does not account them grievous^t—

On the contrary, he feels “the ways of religion to be pleasantness and peace^u”—

His deliverance from impetuous passions is no small source of happiness—

His exercise of benevolent affections greatly tranquillizes his mind^x—

The testimony of his own conscience is a rich and continual feast^y—

Moreover God himself will vouchsafe to him delightful tokens of his approbation—

He will shed abroad his love in the hearts of his faithful servants—

He will lift upon them the light of his applauding countenance—

And “seal them with the spirit of promise, as the earnest of their inheritance”—

Thus, in the most literal sense, is that expression realized^z—

And the description, alluded to in the text, is abundantly verified^a—]

A still more glorious recompence also awaits him in the future world.

[Many are extremely cautious of asserting this truth—

They are afraid lest they should be thought to be advocates for the doctrine of human merit—

But

^r Jam. ii. 17—20.

^u Prov. iii. 17.

^z Ps. xix. 11.

^s Rom. vii. 22.

^x Isai. xxxii. 17.

^t 1 John v. 3.

^y 2 Cor. i. 12.

^a Ps. i. 1—3.

But there is no truth more clear than that our works shall be rewarded ^b—

Nor does this at all interfere with the doctrines of grace—

Our persons and our services are equally accepted through Christ ^c—

And our happiness will be altogether the gift of God for his sake—

But our works will assuredly be the measure of our reward ^d—

And we may with propriety be stimulated by the hope of a future recompence ^e—

Let the Christian then know, that not the meanest of his services shall be forgotten ^f—

But that his weight of glory shall be proportioned to his services ^g—]

ADDRESS

1. The inconsiderate hearers

[It is obvious that many hear the word without receiving any saving benefit—

This is owing to their own carelessness and inattention—

They are like the way-side hearers, from whom Satan catches away the word ^h—

But such hearers do not merely lose the blessings which the faithful Christian obtains—

If the word be not “a savour of life, it becomes a savour of death, to their souls”—

O that all would remember the admonition once given to the Jews ⁱ—

Thus should they know the truth, and the truth should make them free ^k—]

2. The practical hearers

[You have been brought from bondage to liberty, from darkness to light—

And, doubtless, you experience the blessedness of doing the will of God—

“Stand fast then in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free”—

“And be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage”—

Shew that you consider God’s service as perfect freedom—

Seek to have your very “thoughts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” ^l—

Thus shall your “peace flow down like a river”—

And abundant treasures be laid up for you in the heavenly kingdom ^m—]

^b Rom. ii. 6.

^c Heb. xi. 26.

^d Matt. xiii. 19.

^e 2 Cor. x. 5.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^g Matt. x. 42.

^h John xii. 48.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^j 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^k John viii. 32.

^l Matt. vi. 20.

DXXXIV. THE PRIVILEGE OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

Rom. viii. 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

TO establish that fundamental doctrine of our religion, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, is the main scope of this epistle. Having argued the point, and shewn that the objection of its encouraging men to sin, was without any real foundation, the apostle sums up the whole in the words before us; and declares, as the just inference from his preceding arguments, that the believer in Christ, who acted agreeably to his profession, had nothing to fear from the condemnation of the law.

In order to confirm this blessed truth, we shall open to you

I. The character of Christians

In the text, Christians are described

1. By their state

[The “being in Christ Jesus,” is an expression importing two things, namely, an interest in Christ’s merits, and an union with his person. Now it is by this term that Christians are described in the text: nor could they be more justly characterized by any terms whatever.

They are interested in Christ’s merits: assured that they neither have, nor ever can have, any thing in themselves whereby they may be justified before God, they desire, with St. Paul, to be *found in Christ*, not having their own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith in Christ ^a.

They are also united to Christ’s person: they have been cut off from their old stock, and been engrafted into Christ by faith ^b; and are thus become one body ^c, yea, one spirit, with Christ ^d. Agreeably to this idea, Christ repeatedly speaks of them as branches of him, the living vine, and as made fruitful solely by their *abiding in him* ^e.]

2. By their conduct

[The apostle asserts *negatively*, that “*they do not walk after the flesh.*” He does not intend merely to say, that they do

^a Phil. iii. 9.

^b Rom. xi. 17.

^c 1 Cor. xii. 27.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^e John xv. 1—7.

do not indulge themselves in gross wickedness (for this may be said of many, who are far enough from being Christians) but that they do not yield to the carnal principle within them, which would stimulate them to seek the ease and interest of the body in preference to the welfare of their souls.

He next affirms *positively*, that “*they do walk after the Spirit.*” They have within them a new and spiritual principle, which, in direct opposition to the flesh, instigates them to the pursuit of heavenly objects^f. This principle is infused into them by the Holy Ghost, whose mind they search into, and whose will they study to obey. They resist the motions of the flesh, however pleasing, and comply with those of the spirit, however difficult and self-denying.]

Such is their *complex* character. They seek to be found in Christ, as much as if they were altogether regardless of good works; and yet are as diligent in the pursuit of holiness, as if they expected salvation by their own merits.

It will be proper to pause awhile here, and to enquire, *Are we such Christians?* — — —

It is greatly to be feared that the number of such Christians is very small amongst us. Yet, as we trust there are some, we shall proceed to set forth

II. Their privilege

“There is no condemnation to them”

[We know the meaning of condemnation when applied to men under sentence of death. Such is the precise import of the term in this place. The law has passed a sentence of death on every transgressor; and consequently, every sinner that is under the law is doomed to death^g. But the Christian is not under the law: the law with respect to him is abrogated and annulled^h: he is under another covenant, the covenant of graceⁱ: and therefore there is, not only no death awaiting him, but no sentence of death gone forth against him^k. There is “*now*” at this time no condemnation to him, since “*what the law saith, it saith to those, and to those only, who are under the law*”^l.]

We say not, that there is no *ground* of condemnation to the Christian: for he is a weak and sinful creature; and, if God should enter into judgment with him, he must be condemned every hour, every moment. But God views him as “*in Christ Jesus*”^m, as washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness;

^f Gal. v. 17.

^h Rom. vii. 6.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 19.

^g Ezek. xviii. 20. Gal. iii. 10.

^k Rom. vi. 14.

^j John v. 24.

^m Eph. i. 6. Col. ii. 10.

righteousness; and *therefore* as standing before him without spot or blemishⁿ.]

How glorious a privilege is this!

[We may easily conceive the different feeling of one who has been condemned to die, and another (perhaps the greater criminal of the two) that has been just acquitted. Precisely such a difference, only in an infinitely higher degree, subsists between some and others of this assembly. While there is nothing, either in retrospect or in prospect, which must not fill the unconverted man with terror, the Christian may look back on his past iniquities with an assurance that they are all forgiven; and may look forward to death and judgment with a confident expectation, that his righteous Judge will bestow upon him a crown of righteousness, and glory^o. Let this thought be duly pondered; and we shall never rest till we have attained the Christian character.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are merely nominal Christians

[Criminals commit iniquity, in hopes that they shall not be discovered; or, if discovered, not condemned; or, if condemned, not executed. And, though frequently overtaken, they sometimes elude all the means used for their detection. Thus men hope for impunity in a neglect of God, and of their own souls: but their "sin is sure to find them out." They cannot hope to escape condemnation; for, as *the text itself intimates*, so it is elsewhere expressly said, "*they are condemned already*^p," and "*the wrath of God*" at this very moment "*abideth on them*^q." They are like men shut up in prison, and confined there till the time appointed for their execution. Would to God we could all realize this thought! There is indeed yet one way for them to escape: and this is, to cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. If only they do this, and prove by their future conduct that they are sincere, they shall assuredly find mercy, and never come into condemnation any more. Let careless sinners consider this, and "flee from the wrath to come."]

2. Those who profess to be Christians indeed

[Some there are, who, while they are panting after holiness, are fearful lest they should perish, because they cannot entirely prevent the workings of corruption within them. But the very passage before us supposes that they still have a carnal principle in their hearts: and that, if they resist its operations so as not to "walk after" it, they are partakers of the
privilege

ⁿ Eph. v. 27.

^p John iii. 18.

^o 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^q Ib. ver. 36.

privilege before mentioned. Let such then take to themselves the comfort that God has designed for them.

But there are others, who are ready to boast of their security in Christ, while they live under the habitual influence of a carnal and worldly spirit. Let such persons know, that God will judge of "the tree by its fruit:" and that, if they thus "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of," they are in God's sight the worst of criminals, and their doom will be proportionably severe^r.]

^r Matt. xxiv. 51.

DXXXV. GOD'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Zech. xiii. 9. I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.

AFFLICTION is the lot of mankind in general, and more especially of those who fear the Lord, who are all, in their measure, "predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ," as well in sufferings as in glory—In the context we are told what Christ would have to endure, when once he should become incarnate; "Awake, O my sword, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd." It is true, that Christ was to make satisfaction for sin by his sufferings and death; and *in that view* there is no occasion for us to "drink of his cup:" but it is true also that "he learned obedience, and was made perfect, by the things which he suffered;" and these ends are no less necessary to be accomplished in us; nor can they be effected in any better way—On this account God has determined to "bring the third part through the fire;" that so he may fit them for the fuller enjoyment of himself both in this world, and the world to come—

The text informs us how God deals with his people

I. In respect of trials

The people of God are but a small remnant

[Perhaps

[Perhaps the text may refer to that period when the Christian church was to be delivered from the destruction which was coming on the Jewish nation—At that time they were very numerous in Judea, and might, in general terms, be represented as a “third part”—But in every age and place they have been comparatively a “little flock,” or, as the apostle calls them, “a remnant according to the election of grace”—Even in one of the most distinguished churches in the apostolic age we read that there were “but few who had kept their garments undefiled:” and, if those who bear the Christian name at this day were tried by the standard of God’s word, the number of true disciples would be found very disproportioned to the collective body—]

But, whether few or many, they are all “brought to God through the fire”

[It is no uncommon thing for persons to receive their first serious impressions by means of some afflictive dispensation: many must say with David, “Before I was afflicted I went astray”—But, in whatever way they are converted to God, they seldom continue long in his service without experiencing some temporal or spiritual affliction—God, who is a wise Physician, knows what is most conducive to the health of our souls—He sees that there is much “folly bound up in our hearts, and that nothing but the rod of correction can effectually drive it out”—He sees it necessary “to try us, as gold, and to purify us as silver,” that we may both manifest what we are, and become what we should be—If we be only superficial Christians, who, like “the stony-ground hearers, have no root in ourselves,” we shall “be offended as soon as tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word:” but if we be “Israelites indeed,” “the trial of our faith, which is much more precious than of gold, which, though it stand the trial of fire, yet perisheth at last, will be found to praise, and honour, and glory in the day of his appearing^a”—Besides, the very best have much amiss within them, which escapes their notice, till “God counsels them in the night-season” of affliction, and discovers to them the hidden abominations of their hearts—On this account especially the saints have testified with one consent that they have found it “good to be afflicted;” and have seen reason to bless God more for their heaviest trials, than for their richest comforts—]

That their trials however are not unmixed, will appear by considering how God deals with them

II. In

^a 1 Pet. iv. 12. and i. 6, 7.

II. In respect of enjoyments

If the Christian has much "bitterness of heart," with which others are unacquainted, so has he also much "joy, with which a stranger intermeddleth not"—He enjoys

1. Communion with God

[Before he was converted he knew nothing of fellowship with a reconciled God and Father—He performed perhaps many outward acts of worship, but never prayed from his inmost soul—He felt not the greatness of his wants; he knew not the excellency of spiritual attainments; he was not persuaded of the efficacy of prayer: no wonder therefore that he never cried to God in earnest, and consequently, that he never obtained an answer to his prayer—Not even Paul himself, notwithstanding all his zeal, had ever prayed aright, till Christ appeared to him in his way to Damascus^b—But the true Christian is enabled to "pour out his soul before God:" and to him is that promise fulfilled; "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear^c"—Often does he go to God weak, weary, or disconsolate, and return from a throne of grace strengthened with might, and filled with peace and joy—

Nor is this happy state a little promoted by his trials—When he is long at ease, he is too apt to relax his exertions, and to rest in a cold and carnal frame: but afflictions drive him to his God, and necessitate him to wrestle in prayer till he obtains the desired aid^d—]

2. Confidence before God

[God is unspeakably gracious to the soul that seeks him—He will not only answer the prayers of his people, but will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and give them such tokens of acceptance with him, as, in effect, to say to them, "Thou art mine"—He will "seal them with the holy spirit of promise," and set his mark upon them in such a manner, that they themselves may know their relation to him—Moreover, by these manifestations of his favour he will embolden them to claim him as their God—Like the church of old they shall make their boast of him; "My beloved is mine, and I am his," "This God is my God for ever and ever^e"—

This assurance too, no less than their fellowship with God, is advanced by means of afflictive dispensations—Their tribulation makes them apply to God for patience; the acquisition of patience gives them an experience of his truth and faithfulness; and this experience begets a lively hope^f, yea, oftentimes an

^b Acts ix. 11.^c Isai. lxx. 24.^d Gen. xxxii. 24—26.^e Song ii. 16. Ps. xlviii. 14.^f Rom. v. 3, 4.

an unshaken confidence in God, which is as “an anchor of their souls both sure and stedfast”—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are but little conversant with trials

[Doubtless it is a mercy to be free from troubles, because “they are not joyous at the present, but grievous”—But what do you find to have been the effect of this exemption? Have you not, like Jeshurun, “waxed fat and kicked?” “When you have eaten and been filled, have you not forgotten the Lord your God?”—Do you not find that your corruptions are unmortified? Are you not conscious that you have never yet experienced that exalted state of communion with God, and of confidence before him, which it is both your privilege and your duty to enjoy?—Guard then against these pernicious effects of ease; for the prosperity of fools, as we are told, will destroy them^b—Let the attainment of an holy and heavenly frame be desired by you far more than any temporal comfort—In a little time all present things, whether pleasing or painful, will come to an end: and then they only will be found happy, who sought an interest in Christ, and “had the Lord for their Godⁱ”—]

2. Those who are “tossed with tempests and not comforted”

[Though God brings his dearest children into the fire, he does not leave them there; he engages to bring them “through” it—While they are yet in it, he will be with them, that they may not be burned^k: yea, “he will sit by them as a refiner and purifier of silver,” to watch the process which he has ordained for their good^l—He knows what heat is requisite for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes; and, when their dross is purged out, he will bring them forth as “vessels of honour meet for their master’s use^m”—Be patient then under your trials, knowing from whom they proceed, and for what blessed ends he has appointed them: and be rather solicitous to have your troubles sanctified than removed—Only let them drive you to a throne of grace, and not, as they too often do, discourage you from drawing nigh to God—Let them make you more earnest in seeking an assured confidence in his love, and an increasing meetness for his glory—Then shall you in due time be numbered with those blessed spirits, “who came out of great tribulation, and made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb”—Nor need you fear but that the “eternal weigh. of glory” which you shall possess, shall abundantly compensate “the light and momentary afflictions” which you endured in the way to it—]

^g Deut. viii. 10—14. & xxxii. 15. ^h Prov. i. 32. ⁱ Ps. cxliv. 15.

^k Isai. xliii. 2.

^l Mal. iii. 3. ^m Job xxiii. 10.

DXXXVI. GOD'S SYMPATHY WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Zech. ii. 8. *He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye.*

GOD makes use of the wicked as his rod wherewith to chastise his own children—But while he accomplishes his own gracious ends with respect to them, he is not indifferent to the conduct of his agents, who unwittingly fulfil his will; he notices their motives, and will call them into judgment for the dispositions they have manifested^a: and because they exceed their commission, and seek the destruction rather than the benefit of his people, he will vindicate the cause of the oppressed, and recompense upon their own heads the wickedness of their oppressors^b—This assurance the Prophet gave to those who yet remained in Babylon after that the greater part of the captive Jews had returned to Jerusalem: he exhorted them instantly to come forth from that wicked city; for that God had tenderly sympathized with them in the midst of all his chastisements, and had determined to visit with very signal judgments the Babylonish nation, for the needless and excessive severities they had exercised towards them^c—

From these remarkable words we may observe

I. God sympathizes with his people in all their troubles

No terms can more strongly convey this idea than those used in the text

[The eye is the tenderest part of the whole body; it not only is susceptible of injury from the smallest accident, but it feels most acutely any injury it may sustain—What exquisite concern then must God feel for his people, when their afflictions pierce him in so deep a manner; yea, when even that, which is but as a slight “touch” to them, inflicts on him so severe a wound!—Can our imagination conceive a more expressive image, a more astonishing declaration?—]

Nor is there any truth more abundantly confirmed in the holy scriptures

[Look

^a Isai. x. 5, 6, 7, 12.

^b Isai. xlvii. 6—9.

^c Zech. i. 15. and ii. 6—8.

[Look we for *examples* of it? how pitifully did he regard the afflictions of his people in Egypt^d, and how was "his soul grieved for the misery of Israel" (though they were but ill-deserving of such mercy) when the Ammonites came up to fight against them^e!—Nor does he sympathize with them under temporal troubles only, but still more under spiritual afflictions—When Ephraim bemoaned his guilty state, how attentively did God listen to his complaints, and how compassionately did his bowels yearn over him^f!—Look we for *promises* of similar regard? how does God represent himself to us as "the comforter of them that are cast down," yea, as a "God of all comfort^g!" He calls himself the "God that pleadeth the cause of his people^h:" He assures us that he pitieth them even as a father pitieth his own childrenⁱ, and he illustrates his compassion by the most tender image that the whole universe affords, even by that of "*a mother dandling upon her knee her sucking child*," and striving by all possible methods to soothe and please it^k—Nor is he ever more ready to hear and answer our petitions, than when we plead like the church of old, "Where is thy zeal, and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained? doubtless thou art my father, though Abraham be ignorant of me, and Israel acknowledge me not^l"—]

This truth, glorious as it is, is far from comprehending the full extent of God's love to his people; for

II. He has communion with them in all their interests

God considers himself as altogether *one* with his people

[There is an union subsisting between him and them; yet not merely such as exists between an husband and wife, or a vine and its branches^m, but one far closer; for he is the head, and his people are his membersⁿ; he dwelleth in them, and they in him^o; he is one with them, and they with him; in short, they are so united, as to be one body^p and one spirit with the Lord^q—And when our Lord himself was pleased to illustrate this subject, in order, if possible, to convey to us some adequate idea of it, he set forth the union of the different persons of the Godhead as the truest pattern of that which subsists between himself and his people^r—]

Hence

^d Acts vii. 34.

^e Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

^h Isai. li. 22.

^k Isai. lxvi. 12, 13.

^m Rom. vii. 4. John xv. 1.

^o 1 John iv. 12—16.

^q 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^e Judg. x. 16.

^g 2 Cor. i. 3. and vii. 6.

ⁱ Ps. ciii. 13.

^l Isai. lxiii. 15, 16.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^p 1 Cor. xii. 12, 27.

^r John xvii. 21.

Hence he participates in every thing which relates them

[Are any of them relieved? he acknowledges the kindness as shewn to *him*^s—On the other hand, are they despised? he does not scruple to declare, that he will consider himself as the object of that contempt which is poured on them^t—We have a memorable example of this in the account which St. Paul gives us of his own conversion: he was going with a commission to Damascus to extirpate, if possible, the Christian name: and, if he had been asked, Who were the objects of his rage? he would doubtless have branded the Christians with some name of reproach, and affirmed, that he was treating them as they deserved: little did he think that the Lord of Glory himself was the person at whom his shafts were hurled: but Jesus stopped him in his mad career, and asked, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?”—Thus at this day every thing done to the Lord’s people is done to God himself; or, as the text expresses it, Whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye—]

Nor is his a mere inactive sympathy; for

III. He will avenge every injury done to them

Often has he interposed to rebuke and confound their enemies

[What signal vengeance did he take on the Egyptians in ten successive plagues, and in the destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea!—And with what righteous severity did he *command* the Israelites to blot out the very remembrance of Amalek from under heaven, on account of the cruelties they had exercised towards them forty years before^u!—Nor is it injurious treatment only that God notices, but even a neglect to succour them: he denounceth the bitterest curses against Meroz for refusing to help them, and bestows the highest encomiums on Jael for her exertions in their favour^v—Indeed the Jews at this hour are a living monument of the indignation which God will manifest against all who hate his Christ, and persecute his people—]

And he will still plead their cause against all that injure them

[Doubtless “the blood of his saints is as precious to him” as ever—And, he accounts his own justice and holiness as pledged to render tribulation unto their persecutors^w—He makes use of this as an argument why his people should forbear to

^s Matt. xxv. 40.

^t Luke x. 16.

^u Acts ix. 4.

^v Deut. xxv. 17—19.

^w Judg. v. 23, 24.

^x 2 Thess. i. 6.

to avenge their own cause, namely, that vengeance will one day be executed on their enemies by himself, and that too in a more equitable and more effectual manner than it could be by an arm of flesh ^a—Nor will he punish only the positive evils that may be inflicted on them; he will mark also an inattention to their wants, and treat as despisers of himself, those, who did not actively administer to their necessities ^b—]

INFER

1. How low are our conceptions of God's love to man!

[How little are any of us able to realize the idea in the text! how little can we comprehend the heights and depths of such unsearchable love!—Still is he dealing with us as with his people of old ^c—Yet we, like little infants, are almost *unconscious* of our Father's love—But O that every heart might “praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!”—]

2. How tender ought to be our concern for God!

[In general we think but little of his honour in the world—But shall he be so mindful of us, and we be forgetful of him? Shall he be so concerned for our welfare, and we be indifferent about his glory ^d—Shall not sin, the accursed thing which he hates, be a source of pain and anguish to our minds? Could we pierce the eye of an earthly parent, and be unconcerned about it?—O let us feel our obligations to God, and labour to requite his kindness by a suitable deportment—And, while we intreat him to keep us as the apple of his eye ^e, let us keep his “law as the apple of our eye ^f,” and, “whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, do all to his glory ^g”—]

3. How strong a motive have we to beneficence!

[If God be so sensible of any injuries we receive, surely he cannot be regardless of any benefits conferred upon us; if he avenge the one, surely he will also reward the other—Nor is this an uncertain deduction of human reason: he himself tells us, that at the last day every kindness that was shewn to us shall be recorded as shewn to himself, and a suitable recompence be awarded for it ^h; nor shall even a cup of cold

^a Rom. xii. 19.

^b Matt. v. 41, 42.

^c Deut. xxxii. 9—12, and Isai. lxiii. 9.

^d See the conduct of Moses, Exod. xxxii. 11—13, and of Joshua,

^e Ps. xvii. 8.

^f Prov. vii. 2.

[Josh. vii. 9.

^g 1 Cor. x. 31.

^h Matt. xxv. 34, 35

cold water given to one of his disciples lose its rewardⁱ—Shall not then this thought stimulate us to acts of beneficence? Can I, in administering to the poor, relieve my God? Can I assist him, who, as my great High Priest, is so tenderly touched with the feeling of all my infirmities^k? O let no opportunity then be lost; nor let me ever think much of any thing that I can do for such a tender Friend, such an adorable Benefactor!—]

ⁱ Matt. x. 42.^k Heb. iv. 15.

DXXXVII. THE REWARD OF HOLINESS.

Rev. iii. 4. *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*

THERE will doubtless be a wide difference between the states of different men in the eternal world: eternal happiness or misery being awarded to them according to their conduct in this present life. This agrees with the whole tenor of Scripture; and is particularly declared, in the words before us, for the comfort of the godly in the Church of Sardis. In our Lord's address to them we may observe

I. His testimony respecting them

It is no easy matter to keep our garments clean in the midst of a defiling world

[Sin is that which fixes the foulest stain upon the soul, and to which we are exposed every moment of our lives. There is no situation, whether of health or sickness, of affluence or poverty, which does not bring with it some peculiar temptations: nor any object, which, through the influence of Satan, and the deceitfulness of our own hearts, may not become a snare to us. Surely we may almost as well hope to walk in a miry place, and in the midst of a bustling crowd, without soiling the purest garment, as to sojourn for any time in such a world as this without contracting defilement to our souls.]

Yet are there some in every place, who, amidst abounding iniquities, are enabled to keep themselves pure

[The Church of Sardis had greatly declined in spirituality
and

and vital godliness. Many had "a name to live," but the greater part were either still "dead" in trespasses and sins, or had relapsed into a state of extreme deadness and formality. But the heart-searching God beheld a few amongst them, who maintained the life and power of religion in their souls; and who, if they could not avoid every spot of sin, yet, on the whole, kept their garments free from any great or habitual pollution. The state of the Church at this time very much resembles that of Sardis; little but the name and profession of Christianity is to be seen: But, we trust, there are a few, respecting whom God can testify, that they act up to the spirit of their profession, and, in spite of all the terrors of persecution, or the allurements of sense, preserve, on the whole, a conscience void of offence towards God and man.]

That such are distinguished objects of God's favour will appear from

II. His promise to them

God will not suffer his faithful people to go unrewarded. He here assures us, that

There is not only a certain connexion, but a peculiar correspondence between the exercise of religion, and its reward

[The "walking with Christ in white" garments may refer either to the priestly garments which were worn, when they ministered before the Lord, or, rather, to those with which conquerors were adorned in the day of their triumph. This latter idea seems most appropriate to the context^a, and is confirmed by the representation given us of the church triumphant^b. But in either view the correspondence is clear, and the illustration beautiful. Have the saints purified themselves in order that they may serve God acceptably on earth? They shall be made holy as God himself is holy, that they may be fit to serve him in his temple above. Have they, under the Captain of their salvation, subdued their spiritual enemies; they shall "walk *with him* in white," partaking of *his* triumphs, while they reap the fruits of *their own*.]

In some sense, the exercise of religion is also the *ground* of its reward

[Doubtless, the *meritorious* ground of salvation must be found in Christ alone. It is not possible for us to *merit* a reward at the hands of God; because, "if we had done all that was commanded us, we should be only unprofitable servants." But the solemnities of the day of judgment being intended for the displaying of the perfect equity of the Judge^c,
he

^a Ver. 5.

^b Rev. vii. 9, 10.

^c Rom. ii. 5.

he has told us, that he will then declare our conscientious discharge of our duty, or our neglect of it, to be the ground and reason of his sentence^d. By this means it will be manifest to all, that there is a suitableness between every man's doom, and his own proper character. They who are adjudged to happiness will appear "*meet*" for the inheritance of the saints in light^e;" and they, who are consigned over to misery, will appear to have "*fitted themselves for the destruction*" that comes upon them^f.]

INFER

1. What need have we to guard against self-deception!

[They who professed Christianity at Sardis, most probably thought themselves to be Christians indeed: their having dared to avow themselves followers of Christ in that persecuting age, would seem to them a sufficient reason for concluding themselves interested in his salvation. But God saw, and testified, that, amongst them all, there were but few whose hearts were upright, or whose conduct warranted them to expect his favour. What then shall we say respecting the generality of Christians in this day, when all are educated in the faith of Christ; Are not many, very many, "*dead while they have a name to live?*" And, in proof of it, Are they not continually defiling their garments with allowed sin? No doubt they are. Let us then beware lest we be satisfied with the profession of Christianity; and let us look to it, that we bear the image of Christ, and walk as he walked.]

2. What encouragement have we to be circumspect in our conduct!

[We cannot indeed keep our garments clean, if we do not maintain a constant watchfulness and dependence upon God. But what greater incentive to diligence can we desire, than that contained in this promise? Can we contemplate the reward, and grudge the labour necessary to secure it? Can we behold the honour which God himself puts upon our poor attainments, and not exert ourselves to the utmost to increase them? May we possess a meetness for all the glory of heaven, yea, can we obtain from the very lips of our Judge an acknowledgment that "*we are worthy,*" and shall we not take heed to our ways, and "*keep ourselves unspotted from the world?*" Let us then "*make our garments white in the blood of the Lamb;*" and labour diligently to preserve them so, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God^g."]

^d Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^f Rom. ix. 22.

^e Col. i. 12.

^g 2 Cor. vii. 1.

DXXXVIII. ALL NEEDFUL SUPPLIES THROUGH CHRIST.

Phil. iv. 19. *My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.*

AS it is a pleasing reflection to a generous man, that the object whom he relieves will have his condition meliorated, so is it a most delightful thought to a grateful mind, that there is One both able and engaged to recompense our benefactors—Were it not for this consideration, the reluctance which many feel to be burthensome to their friends, would scarce suffer them to accept the most needful assistances: but this hope both enhances the value, and gives zest to the enjoyment, of every kindness we receive—Such was the apostle's experience, when his necessities had been relieved by the Philippian church: he would have been well content to have wanted their present, as far as it related to his own comfort; but, as it was profitable to the donors themselves, he ‘desired fruit that might abound to their account’^a—Having declared on what grounds he was so well pleased with their gifts, he assured them, that God would be mindful of all their wants, and abundantly supply them in the hour of need—

To enter fully into the scope of his words, we should enquire

I. When are we authorized to call God *our* God?

It is not every claim that presumptuous sinners take upon them to advance, that will be found authorized in the holy scriptures; for our Lord himself assured many that Satan was their father, at the very time that they called themselves the children of God^b—But we may justly consider God as standing in this relation to us

1. When we are born again of his Spirit

[While we continue in our natural state, we are enemies to God, and God is an enemy to us—But when we are begotten by the word and Spirit of God, we are privileged to consider ourselves as his children, and to cry to him, Abba, Father—]

2. When

^a Phil. iv. 17.

^b John viii. 41, 44.

^c John i. 12. Gal. iv. 6.

2. When we have devoted ourselves to his service

[If we would know "whose we are," we must enquire, "whom we serve?" for "to whomsoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are, whom we obey"—If our consciences testify that we have solemnly dedicated ourselves to God, we may boldly say with David, "O God, thou art *my* God"—We may be sure that our "Beloved is ours, when we are his"—]

When this point is satisfactorily settled in our minds, we may with more comfort enquire

II. To what extent we may expect communications from him?

That God who pours out his benefits upon the evil and unthankful, is far more abundant in kindness towards his own children—He will give us

1. According to our necessities

[If we desire temporal things, "we shall want no manner of thing that is good"—If spiritual blessings be sought after, there is not any thing we can need, which shall not be bestowed upon us in the time and measure that infinite wisdom sees to be best for us—Are we wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? He will both suit his gifts to our necessities; and make the very depth of our misery the measure of his own mercy—]

2. According to the riches of his own grace

[Let us survey all the tokens of his bounty on earth, and contemplate all the expressions of his love in heaven; let us go farther, and consider the incomprehensible fulness of all the good that is in him as the fountain; and *then* shall we find the true measure of his liberality to his children—If any partake of his goodness in a lower degree, it is, "not because they are straitened in him, but because they are straitened in their own bowels"—]

That none may lose these blessings through ignorance, we proceed to state

III. By what channel they shall be conveyed to us

With man in innocence God communed face to face: but, whatever he bestows upon us in our fallen state, he communicates it

1. Through Christ as our mediator

["God in himself is a consuming fire;"] nor is it possible
for

^d Rom. vi. 16.

^e Rev. iii. 18.

for us to approach him but through Jesus our mediator—Neither our piety towards him, nor our liberality towards his saints, can render him our debtor, (yea, rather, the more we do for him, the more we are indebted to him); if we receive any thing from God, it must come as the purchase of Christ's blood, and as the consequence of his prevailing intercession—]

2. By Christ as our head

[It is "in Christ that all fulness dwells"—He has "received gifts for the rebellious," and imparts them to whomsoever he will: and it is "out of his fulness that we must receive"—He is the head of the church, and his people are his members; and as every member is nourished by its union with the head, so it is by grace derived from him that we are to increase with the increase of God^f—]

This important subject may TEACH us

1. Contentment in ourselves

[What cause can he possibly have for discontent, who has God for his God, and an express promise that all his need shall be supplied?—What if he have not all that flesh and blood might desire, shall he repine? Surely he should say with the apostle, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content^g"—We are like minors at present, and limited to the measure which our Father sees best for us: but in due time we shall receive the full inheritance—]

2. Liberality to others

[God condescends to acknowledge all that is given by us in charity as "lent to himself;" and he pledges himself to "repay it"—He even prescribes the honouring of him with our first-fruits, as the means of securing to ourselves an abundant harvest, and of laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life^h—We must not indeed suppose that our alms-deeds can *merit* any thing at the hand of God—Nevertheless, if they be a free-will offering, they are "an odour to him, and a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour"—Let then the bounty of God to us, whether experienced or expected, be a motive for liberality to our fellow-creatures—And let us gladly of our abundance minister to their necessities, that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus—]

3. Dependence on God

[God has not only engaged to give his people whatsoever
they

^f Col. ii. 19.

^g Ver. 12.

^h Prov. iii. 9, 10. with 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

they need, but on many occasions has interposed in a miraculous manner to fulfil his word—And, rather than violate his truth in any instance, he would feed us with bread from heaven, and water from a rock; he would make the ravens to bring us meat, or our barrel and cruise to supply us with an undiminished store—He has said that “the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the expectation of the poor perish for ever”—Let us then never doubt his word; but expect that he will supply us daily with daily bread—Let us trust in him both for body and soul; and, in whatever temporary straits we be, let us rest assured that there is “much goodness *laid up* for them that fear him,” and that “he will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think”—]

DXXXIX. PROMISES TO THE UPRIGHT.

Ps. lxxxiv. 11. *The Lord God is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

THE choice which every true Christian makes, affords matter of astonishment to the ungodly world—He prefers a life of godliness, with all the odium attached to it, before all the pleasures and honours which he could possibly enjoy in the ways of sin—They, who look no further than to the concerns of time and sense, are amazed that so many sacrifices should be made without any *visible* recompense—Doubtless the choice of Moses must have been deemed absurd in the palace of Pharaoh^a; as that also, which David deliberately made, must have been among his ungodly courtiers—But the reason assigned for it was sufficient to justify him in the eyes of every rational being^b—

His words lead us to shew

I. The character of true Christians

Though integrity in our dealings with man is an essential part of true uprightness, yet it is far from being the whole of what is comprehended in that term—Many act honestly

^a Heb. xi. 24—26.

^b “*I had rather,*” &c. “*For,*” &c.

honestly from a mere sense of honour, while they pay no regard at all to their duties towards God—But sincere Christians act in a very different manner—

They search out their duty diligently

[A child of God will not conclude hastily that he knows his duty—He is aware of the deceitfulness of sin, and the wickedness of his own heart—He knows that, if he blindly follow the dictates of an unenlightened conscience, he may commit murder itself under the idea of doing God service^c—He therefore desires to have his judgment informed—For this end he reads the holy scriptures, and begs the Spirit of God to guide him into all truth—He is glad of instruction and reproof from his fellow-creatures, that he may be preserved from error—And the one desire of his heart is, to be freed from every undue bias, and to fulfil in all things the will of God—]

They perform it uniformly

[Every true Christian labours to do unto others as he would have others do to him—But he does not rest satisfied with this—He strives to maintain the mastery over all his motives and principles of action—He endeavours to have his tempers regulated according to the word of God, and the example of his Lord and Saviour—He moreover watches unto secret prayer—He lives a life of communion with God, and of dependence on God—He would not make any exceptions or reserves—He longs to be free both from partiality and hypocrisy—And desires rather to descend from a throne to the place of a door-keeper in God's house for the maintenance of his integrity, than to rise from the place of a door-keeper to a throne through the smallest violation of his duty^d—He says with David, I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way^e—And with him also he prays, “O that my ways may be directed to keep thy statutes^f!”—]

What delight God has in such characters we may see, if we consider

II. What God is to them

There is scarcely any thing noble or useful in the sphere of nature or of art, which is not used to illustrate the goodness of God towards his people—To the upright he will be

1. A sun

^c John xvi. 2. Acts xxvi. 9.

^e Ps. cxix. 128.

^d Ver. 10.

^f Ib. ver. 5.

1. A sun

[How welcome is the sun to one who has been groping his dubious way during a long and dreary night^r—His path is now made clear, and he is enabled to avoid the stumbling-blocks which before obstructed his progress—Nor are its beams less refreshing to his body, than its light is useful to his feet—He now shakes off the anxieties and cares with which he was before disquieted—He feels his spirit exhilarated; and prosecutes his journey with ease and pleasure—Thus does God arise on those who have been sincerely occupied in doing his will—He causes light to arise in the darkness^b—Even when they were in darkness, he was a light unto themⁱ; but now he dispels all the clouds, and shines upon them with healing in his beams^k—How sweet the change when the light of God's countenance is thus lifted up upon them!—How plain is now the way of duty, which before was dark and intricate! And how pleasant is it to “run the way of his commandments, now that their feet are set at liberty!”—]

2. A shield

[The more upright they are, the more will Satan and the world combine against them—Men will strike at them with the sword of persecution; and Satan will cast at them the fiery darts of temptation—But God will “compass them with his favour as with a shield”—If they be wounded, he will heal them again, and overrule their momentary pain for their far greater advantage—As for their head, he will surely protect it in the day of battle—He will perfectly secure them from every fatal blow—Nor shall any weapon, that is formed against them, be ever suffered finally to prosper^l—]

Whilst God himself thus becomes their light and protection, he informs us further

III. What he will do for them

He will give them grace

[Certain it is that he must have given them grace before, or else they never would have been able to attain to real uprightness—But, as their conflicts increase, he will give them *more* grace^m—As particular occasions call for it, he will give them *seasonable* grace, even in the very time of needⁿ—And if their temptations should exceed all that ever were experienced by man, he will give them *grace sufficient*^o—

My

^r This metaphor must not be taken in its full extent, but only in reference to a traveller.

ⁱ Mic. vii. 8.

^m James iv. 6.

^k Mal. iv. 2.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 16

^b Ps. cxii. 4.

ⁱ Isai. liv. 17.

^o 2 Cor. xii. 9.

My grace is sufficient for thee, is his word to every soul, however buffeted by Satan, or ready to sink under the violence of his assaults—They shall receive continually out of Christ's fulness, even grace for grace—]

He will give them glory

[His favours to them shall not terminate with their present state of existence—He will not only make them more than conquerors *here*, but will give them an unfading crown of righteousness and glory in a better world—Whatever felicity the angels enjoy in heaven, that shall his saints also participate—And as our first parents were banished from the tree of life for yielding to the tempter, so shall they, who resist and overcome him, be admitted to the tree of life that grows in the midst of the paradise of God, and shall go no more out for ever^p—]

Nor will he withhold from them any thing that is truly good

[Were wealth and honour good for them here below, they should possess it—If God withhold those things from his people now, he does it because he knows that they would not, on the whole, be good for them—He that gave his own Son to die for them, will assuredly give them all other things that will promote their welfare—They shall never want any thing for body or soul, for time or eternity—]

INFER

1. How truly blessed are they who are upright before God!

[This is the Psalmist's own reflection^q—He varies indeed the *term* by which he describes the people of God; but his *meaning* is the same; for none can be upright except those who trust in him, because nothing but the grace of God can make them so: nor do any trust in him without receiving that grace which shall make them upright—The manner in which he expresses his reflection, is worthy of notice; he does not merely *assert* a fact, or *appeal to men* for the truth of it, but *appeals to God himself* respecting it—How strong must have been the conviction of it in his mind!—And can any thing be more clear?—To have the LORD GOD himself for their light and defence, and to have all the blessings of grace and glory ensured to them by the unalterable promise of JEHOVAH; what can they have more?—Let every upright soul then rejoice; for he is and shall be blessed—And let all be

^p Rev. ii. 7.

^q Ver. 12.

be stirred up to walk worthy of their high calling—So shall God be glorified in them; and they, ere long, shall be glorified with him for evermore—]

2. In what a pitiable state are the generality of mankind!

[There are many who are honest and just even among the heathens—But, alas! the generality labour not in earnest to find out their duty; nor do they know any thing of that unreserved devotedness to God which characterizes the true Christian—Is God then a sun to *them*? Is he not rather a cloud of darkness to them, or rather, I should say, a consuming fire?—Is he a shield to *them*? Is he not rather an irresistible adversary?—Will he give *them* grace and glory? Shall he not rather visit them with wrath and fiery indignation?—Will he withhold from *them* no good? Is there not rather a time shortly coming when they shall not have so much as a drop of water to cool their tongue?—O that men would consider this!—Surely their state calls for much compassion—Let every one lay this to heart—Let every one seek to be found “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”—And let it be the one ambition of us all to be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless^u—]

^r Exod. xiv. 20. Heb. xii. 29.

^s Matt. v. 25.

^t Rom. ii. 8.

^u 2 Pet. iii. 14.

DXL. THE CHRISTIAN'S PATH COMPARED TO THE LIGHT.

Prov. iv. 18. *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

HABITS, of whatever kind, are strengthened by exercise—

The more congenial they are with our natural feelings, the more easily are they confirmed—

Hence the wicked, without any express purpose on their part, are daily more and more riveted to the world and sin—

The righteous too increase in love to the ways of God in proportion as they endeavour to fulfil his will—

They

They have indeed a bias, which, if they were left to themselves, would soon turn them aside—

But God will not leave them destitute of needful succour—

He pledges himself that their path shall resemble the shining light—

This is found true by happy experience—Their path is

I. Beautiful in its appearance

The rising sun is as beautiful an object as any in the whole creation

[At its approach it tinges the distant clouds with light—

On its first appearance it gilds the summits of the woods and mountains—

Then, dispelling all the shades of night, it illumines the whole horizon—

How delightful is this to every one that beholds it^a!—]

Thus is the path of the righteous exceeding beautiful

["The just" are they who are renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God—

Their path *in the very outset* is beautiful to behold—

Their simplicity of mind, and teachableness of spirit, endear them to us—

Their lowliness and humility attract the notice of the very angels themselves^b—

The fervour of their love engages both our admiration and esteem—

The very shades in their character serve as a contrast to shew the excellence of the change that has passed upon them—

As they proceed their graces are more matured—

Their course is justly described by the Apostle Paul^c—

Surely such a conduct must be beautiful in the eyes of God and man—

They are justly spoken of as "beautified with salvation^d"—

They even reflect a lustre upon the gospel itself^e—]

While their path is so amiable, it resembles the light further, in that it is

II. Beneficial in its influence

The sun does not shine with unproductive splendor

[It enables the several orders of men to return to their respective callings—

In

^a Eccl. xi. 7.

^b Luke xv. 10.

^c Phil. iv. 8.

^d Ps. cxlix. 4.

^e Tit. ii. 10.

In the darkness they could not go without stumbling ^f—

But now they follow their occupations without fear or difficulty—

The productions of the earth also feel the genial influence of the sun—

And are matured by means of its invigorating beams—]

Nor is the Christian unprofitable in his course

[The wicked are stumbling on every side of him ^g—

But the Christian affords a light to the benighted souls around him ^h—

He shines in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ⁱ—

He is an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men ^k—

The account given of Job, describes his course, as far as his situation and circumstances will allow ^l—

Thus by his conduct he puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men ^m—

He even wins some, perhaps, whom the word alone would never have converted ⁿ—

And causes many to glorify his heavenly Father ^o—]

The comparison yet further holds, in that the path of the just, like that of the sun, is

III. Constant in its progress

The sun invariably pursues its wonted course

[From the instant it rises, it hastens toward the meridian—

Sometimes indeed its splendor is intercepted by clouds—

And sometimes it may be partially, or even totally eclipsed—

Still, however, it proceeds in its appointed path—

And is sure to arrive at its meridian height—]

The Christian too goes forward towards perfection

[He never rests as though he had attained the summit ^p—

He determines to be ever pressing forward for higher attainments ^q—

He may indeed for a season be involved in clouds—

Yea, perhaps, he may through the violence of temptation, suffer an eclipse—

But if he be really “just” and upright, his light shall break forth again—

God has insured this by a solemn promise ^r—

Jeremiah

^f John xi. 9, 10.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 15.

^p Phil. iii. 12.

^k Prov. iv. 10.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

^q Ib. ver. 13, 14.

^h Matt. v. 14.

^j Job xxix. 11—16.

^o Matt. v. 16.

^r Job xvii. 9.

Jeremiah illustrates it by the very allusion in the text^a—

Nor is this progress the privilege of some only^t—

David speaks of it as belonging to Israel of old^u—

Paul represents it as enjoyed by every true Christian^x—

And Peter shews us whence this stability proceeds^y—

None indeed arrive at absolute perfection in this life^z—

But soon the just will be changed into Christ's perfect image^a—

And shine above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever^b—]

IMPROVEMENT

1. For conviction

[We are in a world that lieth in darkness and the shadow of death—

And, if we be Christians indeed, we are shining as lights in a dark place—

Do our consciences testify that this is the case with us?—

Are we examples of holiness to those of our own age and rank?—

Do we reprove all works of darkness, instead of having fellowship with them^c?—

If not, how can we ever be numbered among the just?—

Shall we say that we once were such, but are now under a cloud?—

Or that our light is at the present eclipsed?—

Let us beware lest we prove only as a fleeting meteor—

Our light must be steady and increasing, like that of the sun—

The tree is known by its fruit; and the just by their light^d—

And a false profession will deceive us to our eternal ruin^e—]

2. For consolation

[There are many true Christians who do not enjoy much comfort—

And the darkness of their minds sometimes makes them doubt whether they be upright before God—

But they often write bitter things against themselves without a cause—

Distress, whether temporal or spiritual, argues nothing against our integrity—

Job

^a Jer. xxxi. 33—37.

^u Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

^y 1 Pet. i. 5.

^t Phil. i. vi. 7.

^x 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^z 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.

^a 1 John iii. 2. Phil. iii. 21.

^b Dan. xii. 3. and Matt. xiii. 43.

^c Eph. v. 11.

^d Eph. v. 8.

^e 1 John i. 6. and ii. 9, 11.

Job never shone brighter than in his trouble; nor Christ, than in the depths of his dereliction—

Let him then that is in darkness, stay himself upon his God^f—

It is to such persons that God sends us with words of comfort^g—

To them in particular is that delightful declaration addressed^h—

Wait then the Lord's leisure, ye afflicted souls, and trust in him—

Soon shall your "light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day"—

Nor will God be glorified less in your patience, than in more active services—]

^f Isai. l. 10.

^g Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^h Isai. liv. 7—10.

DXLI. GOD'S CARE FOR THE RIGHTEOUS.

Prov. x. 3. *The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish.*

GOD, who is the author and giver of all good, dispenses his blessings no less to the evil and unjust, than to the good and just. But he promises to those who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, that all other things shall be added unto them. To this effect he speaks also in the passage before us. But though this be the primary import of the text, we must not exclude its relation also to the concerns of the soul.

To elucidate this blessed promise, we shall shew

I. What reasons the righteous have to apprehend that their souls may famish

A sense of weakness and of guilt may greatly discourage them: for

1. They cannot secure provisions for themselves

[The word of God, and Christ in the word, is the proper food of the soul: and, if a person can read, he need not be wholly destitute. But it is by the public ministration of the word that God principally confirms the souls of his people. Now in many places where Christ should be preached, his name is scarcely heard; and, instead of children's bread,

little is dispensed besides the husks of heathen morality. Even where some attention is paid to Christian doctrines, there is often much chaff mixed with the wheat; and "the trumpet that is blown, gives but an uncertain sound." Those therefore who by reason of distance, or infirmity, or other insurmountable obstacles, cannot have access to the purer fountains of truth, have great reason to fear that their souls will famish.]

2. They cannot, of themselves, feed upon the provisions set before them

[Where all the treasures of the gospel are fully opened, it is God alone that can enrich any soul by means of them: even "Paul may plant, or Apollos may water, but it is God alone that can give the increase." The very same word is often made a peculiar blessing to one, that was altogether useless to another. God reserves the times and the seasons in his own hands; and "gives to every one severally as he will." When therefore the righteous hear of the effects wrought on others, and feel conscious that they themselves reaped no benefit from the word, they are ready to fear that their souls will famish even in the midst of plenty.]

3. They well know that they deserve to be utterly abandoned by their God

[It is not only for their sins in general, that the righteous find occasion to humble themselves before God, but more particularly for their misimprovement of divine ordinances. Perhaps there is not any other more fruitful source of self-condemnation to the godly than this. When therefore they see how many opportunities of improvement they have lost, and how much guilt they have contracted by their deadness and formality in the worship of God, they are sensible that God may justly "remove their candlestick," and leave them to experience "a famine of the word."]

But lest a dread of famishing should oppress the minds of the righteous, we shall proceed to shew

II. What grounds they have to hope, that God will never suffer such a melancholy event to happen

However great the grounds of fear may be which the righteous feel within themselves, they have abundant reason to "encourage themselves in the Lord their God"

1. He has bountifully provided even for the ungodly

[The gospel is "a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined;" and God has "sent out into all the highways and hedges to invite the poor, the halt,

the lame, and the blind," and has commissioned his servants to compel men, by dint of importunity, to accept his invitation. Now has he shewn such concern for the wicked, and will he disregard the righteous? Will he not rather "cause the manna to fall around their tents," and "the water to follow them" through all this dreary wilderness? Yes; he would rather send a raven to feed them, or sustain them by a continued miracle^a, than ever suffer their souls to famish.]

2. He is peculiarly interested in the welfare of the righteous

[The righteous are God's "peculiar treasure above all people;" they are even "his sons and daughters." If they were left to perish, Jesus would lose the purchase of his blood, and the very members of his body. And can we imagine that God will be so unmindful of them as utterly to forsake them? Did he not on many occasions vouchsafe mercy to his chosen people *for his own name sake*, when their backslidings had rendered them fit objects of his everlasting displeasure? Thus then will he still be actuated by a regard for his own honour, and "not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people^b."] .

3. He has pledged his word that they shall never want any thing that is good

["Exceeding numerous, great, and precious are the promises which God has given to his people." "He will supply all their wants, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus: he will give them grace and glory; and will withhold no good thing:" their souls "shall be even as a well watered garden:" "bread shall be given them; and their water shall be sure." And will he violate his word? he may leave his people in straits, as he did the Israelites of old: but it shall be only for the more signal manifestation of his love and mercy towards them. Let them only trust in him, and he "will never leave them, never, never forsake them^c."] *

We shall CONCLUDE with a word

1. Of reproof

[It is certain that many do not "make their profiting to appear" as they ought. To such therefore we must say, "Wherefore art thou, being a king's son, lean from day to day^d?" Why art thou crying continually, "Woe is me, my leanness, my leanness^e!" when thou shouldest be "growing up as the calves of the stall^f?" Some part of the blame perhaps may

^a 1 Kings xvii. 6, 14.

^c Heb. xiii. 5.: see the Greek.

^e Isai. xxiv. 16.

^b 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^d 2 Sam. xiii. 4.

^f Mal. iv. 2.

may attach to him who dispenses the ordinances among you, as wanting more life and spirituality in his ministrations; yet even this would be no excuse to you, since if your hearts were more spiritual, God would render your mean fare as nutritious as the richest dainties^g. If God should even "give you your desire, yet would he also send leanness into your souls^h," while you continued to loathe the heavenly manna. Learn then to come with more eager appetite — — — Be more careful to digest the word afterwards by meditation and prayer — — — And look, not so much to the manner in which the word is preached, as to Christ in the word; since HE is that bread of life which alone can nourish your souls; and which, if eaten by faith, will surely nourish them unto life eternalⁱ — — —]

2. Of consolation

[Some may put away from them this promise, under the idea that they are not of the character to whom it belongs. Now, though we would by no means encourage any to apply the promises to themselves in a presumptuous manner, and thereby to deceive their own souls with ungrounded expectations, yet we would not that any should refuse the consolation that properly belongs to them. Suppose then that any cannot absolutely number themselves among the righteous, yet, "if they hunger and thirst after righteousness, they are blessed, and shall be filled^k." This is the word of God to their souls; and we would have them expect assuredly its accomplishment in due season — — — Let them "desire the sincere milk of the word, and they shall grow thereby^l" — — —]

^g Dan. i. 12—15.

ⁱ John vi. 51.

^k Matt. v. 6.

^h Ps. cvi. 15.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 2.

DXLII. THE BENEFIT OF EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

Prov. xvi. 23. *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.*

THE depths of human science can be explored by few, because few have either leisure or ability for learned investigations—The same observation is true with respect to theology also, considered as a science: a very considerable knowledge both of history and ancient languages is required, in order to a full understanding of the various
branches

branches of sacred literature—But the spiritual and most essential parts of divine knowledge are totally distinct from these subjects ; nor is that species of erudition, which the learned only can possess, at all necessary for the obtaining of a clear and accurate acquaintance with them—There are two books, if we may so speak, and two alone, which we need to know ; and they are, the Bible and our own hearts—Till the latter be opened to our view, the former will be only “ a sealed book :” but a discovery of our own hearts will throw an astonishing light upon the sacred oracles ; and make innumerable passages, which once seemed obscure and inexplicable, so plain, that “ he who runs may read ” and understand them—To this effect Solomon speaks in the words before us ; in elucidating which we shall enquire

I. Who are here meant by “ the wise ? ”

Solomon certainly did not intend to limit his assertion to those who were possessed of literary attainments

[Human knowledge, when sanctified by grace, is a valuable instrument in the hands of its possessor, inasmuch as it will qualify him for discharging many duties, which, without it, he would not be able to fulfil—Moses, by being “ learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” was better fitted to stand forth as the deliverer of Israel : and Paul, notwithstanding he declined using “ the words of man’s wisdom,” was the better furnished for his work by his learned education, and his uncommon proficiency in the studies of his age and nation—Nevertheless it is not such learning that will form our minds to true wisdom—On the contrary, if unsanctified, it will be as inimical to religion as even the most inveterate lusts would be—The more we have of it, the more will “ the things of the spirit appear foolishness unto us ;” and the greater will be our backwardness to seek that spiritual “ discernment ” which alone can qualify us to judge of them aright^a—And it is on this very account that God so often pours contempt upon it and confounds it^b—]

Nor was it of persons eminent for worldly prudence that Solomon spake

[There can be no doubt but that true wisdom will make us prudent, for the voice of inspiration says, “ I wisdom dwell with prudence^c—But there are many who are “ prudent in their own sight,” and in the eyes of the world, who are

^a 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^c Prov. viii. 12.

^b 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

are considered by God as altogether destitute of wisdom^d—The rich man who had so judiciously cultivated his grounds as to obtain large crops, and who, to preserve the produce, enlarged his storehouses, would have been accounted prudent by the world; but God gave him most deservedly the appellation of a fool; “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee^e”—]

The persons characterized in the text as wise, are they who are endued with heavenly wisdom

[Some there are, whose “eyes have been enlightened” by the spirit of God, and whose hearts are regulated by his lively oracles—They have been taught of God to know their own state, and have been formed to a disposition and temper suited to their real character^f—These are the wise, the only wise in the sight of God—And they are truly wise, even though they should be the most illiterate upon earth—We do not hesitate to say that the fishermen of Galilee possessed more true wisdom than all the heathen philosophers that ever existed—]

Their superiority to others will soon appear, if we enquire

II. What are those subjects of which they are so well able to speak?

Their spiritual views do not at all qualify them to speak on matters of science and philosophy—But there are many things relating to Christian doctrine and experience, of which they can speak more truly, and more accurately, than any other people upon earth

1. On the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart

[This is a subject with which they are well acquainted; nor are they afraid of declaring it in its full extent—They have found on ten thousand occasions how fatally their heart has deceived them, what false glosses it puts upon any thing which it is desirous to retain, and what specious pretexts it will suggest for rejecting any thing that is distasteful to flesh and blood—They have seen the deep-rooted enmity of their hearts against God, their aversion to all holy exercises, and their proneness to do every thing that was evil—In speaking on these points, they speak not by hearsay, or according to a received system, but according to the word of God, confirmed as it has been by their own experience^g—]

2. On

^d Isai. v. 21.

^f Eph. i. 17, 18.

^e Luke xii. 20.

^g Jer. xvii. 9.

2. On the suitableness and excellency of the salvation provided for us

[They no more doubt that they need a Saviour, or that the Saviour provided for them is exactly such an one as they want, than they doubt their own existence—They know full well that they could not fulfil the law; they know also that Christ has satisfied all its demands by his obedience unto death; and that by believing in him they shall be interested in all that he has done and suffered—They perceive that in this way of salvation God gives all, and we receive all: and though the pride of their hearts formerly revolted at this, they are now disposed, not only to acquiesce in it, but to thank and adore God for so gracious a dispensation—]

3. On the way in which sinners are brought to the knowledge of Christ

[Here they can point out, as in a map, the country, which they themselves have travelled over—They have been convinced of sin; they have seen the refuges of lies which they fled to in succession, one after another, till God sent home the law in all its spirituality to their hearts—They have thus been made to despair of saving themselves, and have, like the wounded Israelites, looked simply to him that was lifted up upon the cross—And though there is a great variety in the experience of different persons with respect to these things, yet these are the general outlines in which all true Christians are agreed; and therefore they can speak of them with truth and certainty—]

4. On the nature of the spiritual warfare

[They are daily engaged in maintaining a conflict with sin and Satan—They have within them the two principles of^a flesh and spirit, which are continually struggling, as fire and water, to subdue each other^b—They know the discouragements and fears with which the Christian is assailed, and the consolations and joys with which he is revived—Nor are they “ignorant of Satan’s devices,” having often “withstood his wiles,” and “repelled his fiery darts”—On these subjects their mouth is taught, and there is learning added to their lips—]

The world are often struck with this fact, and ask with amazement

III. Whence it is that they have attained this knowledge?

Experience,

^a Gal. v. 17.

Experience, under God, is the best teacher ; and it is from experience that they know these things

[They derive not their knowledge from books ; for many either cannot read, or never have studied the writings of men upon those subjects—Nor have they received their instructions from man : for though God taught them by man, yet God alone made the word effectual to open their eyes ; and the very truths perhaps, which they had heard frequently before without any profit, are suddenly applied to their souls, and made the power of God to their conviction and salvation—In short, it is not merely in their heads, but in their hearts that they know these things ; and in speaking of them they can say with the apostle, “What our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the word of life, the same we declare unto you”—]

Hence it is that *their* knowledge of these things is so superior to that of others

[Others cannot comprehend any one of the foregoing truths—If they should attempt to speak of them, they would only expose their own ignorance—Yea, though they may write well on the theory of religion, they are totally in the dark with respect to the nature of Christian experience—The poorest and meanest of God’s people have incomparably greater penetration in these things than the wisest philosopher—This is plainly declared by the apostle, “He that is spiritual judgeth all things ; yet he himself is judged of no man¹”—It is confirmed also by that expression of Solomon, “The rich man is wise in his own conceit ; but the poor man that hath understanding searcheth him out² ;” that is, discovers his ignorance, and is able to rectify his errors—As a man who has experienced any great pleasure or pain has a juster idea of what he has felt, than another has who only speaks of such things by hearsay ; so, in a far higher degree, has the experienced Christian a clearer insight than others into divine truths, because he has the archetype and image of them in his own heart—]

APPLICATION

1. Let none attempt an excuse for their ignorance by saying that they are no scholars

[Nothing is more common among the lower classes of mankind than to offer this as an excuse for their ignorance—But such excuses are vain—God has told us that he has chosen *them* in preference to the rich and learned¹, and that he has revealed to *them* what he has hid from the wise and prudent

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 15.

² Prov. xxviii. 11.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

prudent^m—Let the blind then pray that they may receive their sight; so shall they “understand all thingsⁿ,” and be made “wise unto salvation^o”—]

2. Let us improve our conversation with each other for the purpose of spiritual edification

[Too apt are we to trifle away our precious hours—But the tongue of the wise is justly compared to choice silver that enriches, and to a tree of life that nourishes us with its precious fruits^p—Our words, if rightly ordered, might “administer grace” to each other—Let us then endeavour to obtain “the tongue of the learned, that can speak a word in season unto him that is weary^q”—Thus, we may “speak profitably out of the abundance of our hearts,” and approve ourselves truly “wise by winning souls” to God^r—]

^m Matt. xi. 25.

ⁿ Prov. xxviii. 5.

^o 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^p Prov. x. 20.

^q Isai. l. 4.

^r Prov. xi. 30.

DXLIII. CHRIST'S POWER TO SUCCOUR THE TEMPTED.

Heb. ii. 18. *In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*

THERE was in various respects a necessity for Christ's humiliation: on our part, that, an atonement being offered for us, we might find favour with God: on God's part, that his justice might be satisfied, and his law be magnified: and on the part of Christ himself, that he might be qualified for the discharge of his mediatorial office. This, having been expressly asserted in the preceding verse, is further intimated in the words we have just read; which lead us to consider

I. The temptations of our Lord

Great and manifold were the trials which our blessed Lord sustained

1. From men

[Though in his infancy he grew up in favour with men as well as with God, yet from his first entrance on his public ministry, he was an object of universal abhorrence^a. He endured

^a Isai. xlix. 7.

endured all manner of contradiction from all ranks and orders of men: they cavilled at his words, misrepresented his actions, reviled him as an impostor, and a confederate with the devil, and, at last, apprehended, condemned, and crucified him.]

2. From devils

[These assaulted him with fiery temptations in the wilderness, urging him to distrust, presumption, and idolatry. They attacked him with fresh vigour in the garden, when the powers of darkness combined all their force against him: and they made their last efforts against him on the cross; when, though "triumphed over and spoiled by him," they succeeded in "bruising his heel," and in bringing him down to the chambers of death.]

3. From God

[When he stood as the surety of sinners, God exacted of him the utmost farthing of our debt. It was the Father who put the bitter cup into his hands, who laid the tremendous load of our iniquities upon him, and "bruised him," that the fragrance of his offering might ascend up as incense with acceptance before him^b.]

From these sufferings of his, arises

II. His ability to succour his tempted people

All his people, like him, are persecuted by men, assailed by devils, and chastised by God. But Jesus is able to succour them: he has a sufficiency

1. Of power and strength

[He has all power committed to him, yea, all fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him. He can bind the strong man armed, and rescue from him his wretched captives. There is nothing impossible with him; and the weaker his people are, the more shall "his strength be perfected in their weakness." Every one of them may say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."]

2. Of wisdom

[As he has "power to deliver the godly out of temptations," so can he defeat all the plots of their adversaries, and take even Satan himself in his own devices. He sees every weapon that is formed against them, and knows the day and hour that their enemies set themselves against them^c. He discerns also the best time and manner in which to afford his aid,

^b Compare Isai. liii. 10. with Exod. xxx. 36.

^c Jer. xlix. 30.

aid, and so to proportion it to our necessities, as both to secure us the victory, and himself the glory.]

3. Of pity and compassion

[He wept on account of the afflictions of his friends when he was on earth: nor will he forget to pity us, now that he is in heaven. "The very apple of his eye is wounded, whenever any of his dear people are touched." "In all their afflictions, he is afflicted; and as, in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and bare them, and carried them all the days of old," so does he now, being "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and sympathizing with us in all our troubles ^d.]

Having noticed his temptations, and his ability to succour us under ours, it will be proper to shew

III. The dependence of the latter on the former

As God, he of necessity possessed every perfection: but, as man, and mediator, he learned much from his own experience. By his own temptations

1. He learned *our need of succour*

[He himself, under his own grievous sufferings, "prayed to God with strong crying and tears, and was heard," and strengthened from above ^e. Hence then he knows how much we must need assistance under our trials, and how certainly we must faint, if we be not supported by his almighty power.]

2. He acquired *a right to succour us*

[We are bought by him with the inestimable price of his own blood. And it was agreed with him in the covenant of redemption, that, "if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands ^f." Having then paid the price, he has a right to us as "his purchased possession;" and has therefore a right to convey to us whatever may be needful for the salvation of our souls.]

3. He attained *a disposition to succour us*

[We are assured that "he learned obedience by the things that he suffered ^g." Now, as obedience consists entirely in love to God and man, sympathy, which is the highest office of love, must of necessity have been learned by him, together with every other part of his duty. And how perfectly he had learned it, his address to the persecuting Saul declares; "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And it is worthy of obser-
vation

^d Isai. lxiii. 9.

^e Heb. v. 7. with Luke xxii. 42, 43.

^f Isai. liii. 10.

^g Heb. v. 8.

vation that the apostle ascribes his sympathy to this very cause^h. Nay, further, he observes, that there was a necessity for him to be made like unto us in all things, *in order that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God*ⁱ.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are conflicting with temptations

[However severe your outward or inward trials may be, you have the comfort to reflect, that Christ endured the same before you, and is able to afford you effectual succour. Think not then your difficulties peculiar, or insurmountable; but “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”]

2. Those who are yielding to their temptations

[Excuse not your compliances by pleading the frailty of your nature; for “Christ is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you having always all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work^k.” Continue not then under unmortified tempers, or criminal neglects; but call on the Lord, who “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, make also a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it^l.”]

^h Heb. iv. 15.

^k 2 Cor. ix. 8.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 17.

^l 1 Cor. x. 13.

DXLIV. THE SECURITY OF GOD'S TEMPTED PEOPLE.

1 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.*

WE are ever prone to run into the opposite extremes of presumption and despair—To check the former, we should reflect upon the manifestations of God's wrath; and to avoid the latter, we should bear in mind the promises of his mercy—With this view St. Paul sets before the Corinthian church the judgments that had been executed on the Israelites in the wilderness; but lest they should turn his warnings into an occasion of despondency,

he assures them, that God himself had engaged to keep all who diligently sought him, and humbly relied upon him—

His words naturally lead us to point out

I. The temptations of God's people

Many, doubtless, are the temptations with which the godly are beset

[It seems from the preceding context that the word "temptation" is to be understood in its most extended sense, as comprehending every thing which might endanger their stedfastness in the ways of God—The *world* strives to ensnare them both by terrors and allurements—The *flesh* strongly inclines them to gratify its appetites: and *Satan* labours incessantly to beguile them by his wiles and devices— — —]

But the temptations of all are such only as others experience in common with themselves^a

[All are ready to suppose that there are none tempted like them: but if we knew the experience of others, we should find that, "as face answereth to face in a glass, so does the heart of man to man"— — — All indeed are not tempted exactly in the same manner or the same degree (for there are temptations peculiar to men's age and condition in life) but there are none so singularly tried, but that there are many others in similar circumstances with themselves—And the ascertaining of this point often affords much consolation and encouragement to tempted souls—]

Nor are there any trials so great but that believers may be confident of

II. Their security in the midst of them

God himself is interested in their behalf; and they may safely rely on

1. His power

["That they may not be tempted above that they are able," he will *proportion their trials to their strength*—Are they at present too weak to endure hardship? He will delay its approach^b: or, if he permit it to come upon them, he will weaken its force^c: and, if they be likely to faint under it, he will shorten its duration^d— — — If he do not see fit in any of these ways to lighten the temptation, he will *proportion their strength*

^a Ἀνθρώπινος may signify also *proportionable to human strength*: but the common translation seems perfectly just.

^b Exod. xiii. 17.

^c Ps. lxxvi. 10. and Isai. xxvii. 8.

^d Ps. cxxv. 3. and Isai. lvii. 16.

strength to it, so that, if there be not a way to escape, they at least “may be able to bear it”—This he effects sometimes by communicating more abundant grace^e, and sometimes by filling them with the consolations^f of his Spirit, and giving them near prospects of the glory that awaits them^g—Thus will he “keep them *by his power* unto everlasting salvation”—]

2. His faithfulness

[No man, however eminent, could stand, if left to himself: Satan would sift us as wheat, and scatter us as chaff^h—But God has promised that “he will keep the feet of his saints;” that “sin shall not have dominion over them;” that “none shall pluck them out of his hands;” that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against them”—“Nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail:” “He is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent”—He has exhausted all the powers of language in labouring to persuade us of this truth, That he will never forsake his peopleⁱ—And they may safely rest on him “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are conflicting with temptation

[What a blessed promise is that before us! What can God himself say more for your encouragement? Dry up your tears: know that as your day is, so shall also your strength be: “there are more for you than against you:” trust therefore in him, who “knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and is able both to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^k”—But do not say, “God will keep me, and therefore I will rush into temptation:” such an abuse of his mercy as this would surely bring with it the most tremendous evils—We are to trust God when in trouble; but not to tempt God by exposing ourselves to danger without a cause—]

2. Those who are yielding to temptation

[The generality complain, “That they cannot resist temptation,” and yet they venture continually into those very scenes which most endanger their virtue—What hypocrisy is this! If flesh and blood be, as they justly acknowledge, so weak and frail, why do they not flee from *the occasions* of sin? And why do they not cry unto God for help:—Let all know that

^e 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^f 2 Cor. i. 4, 5.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17.

^h Luke xxii. 31.

ⁱ Heb. xiii. 5. Here are no less than five negatives in the Greek.

^k 2 Pet. ii. 9. and Jude 24.

that their impotency is no just excuse; that all shall receive succour if they will but seek it; and that "God's strength shall be perfected in their weakness"¹—But if we will not repent of our sins and turn unto God, the power and faithfulness of God are engaged against us, and will be glorified in our everlasting destruction—]

¹ Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15, 16.

DXLV. THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE IN AFFLICTION.

² Cor. iv. 17, 18. *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

THE Christian in every state, whether of prosperity or adversity, differs widely from the unconverted world—While others are elated by the one and depressed by the other, he is kept in an equable frame of mind—As he does not place his happiness in earthly things, he is not much affected either with the acquisition or the loss of them—He is thankful for success, but not overjoyed, as though some great thing had happened unto him; and is patient in tribulation, knowing that in the issue it shall work for his good—To this effect the apostle speaks in the text, in which he assigns the reason why, notwithstanding the greatness of his afflictions, he was kept from fainting under them—And his words afford us a proper occasion to consider

I. The objects of a Christian's pursuit

The account which St. Paul gives of himself is characteristic of every true Christian—

His chief aim is to attain things that are invisible

[By "the things which are seen" we understand every thing which relates merely to the present world, which the apostle comprehends under three names, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life"—By "the things which are not seen" must be meant the love and favour of
of

of God, the renovation of our inward man, the glory and felicity of heaven—The latter of these are the objects towards which the Christian turns his principal attention—Not that he neglects the concerns of this world; this would be absurd and criminal—But his great end and aim^a is to obtain an inheritance beyond the grave—Even while he is most actively employed in secular concerns, he looks through them all to this grand object, and labours incessantly to secure it—]

To this he is led by the transitoriness of earthly things

[The things of this world perish with the using—If they be not withdrawn from us, we must soon be taken away from them—Nor will so much as one of them remain to be enjoyed in the future world—But spiritual things remain for ever—If we secure the love of God now, it shall abide with us to all eternity—An interest in the Redeemer's merits, and a title to all the glory of heaven, shall never be taken away from us—Death, so far from terminating our enjoyments, will bring us to the full possession of that glory, of which our present foretastes are an earnest and pledge—The Christian, seeing the infinite disparity between these things, determines to make invisible things the supreme objects of his regard, and comparatively disregards all that can be offered to the eye of sense—]

In this pursuit he is aided by his afflictions, as will appear, if we consider

II. The effects of his troubles

The Christian has troubles as well as others

[The very conduct he observes with respect to temporal things has a tendency to involve him in trouble—The world cannot endure to see their idols so disregarded, and their conduct so reproached—One would have supposed from the account given us of his sufferings, that Paul must have been the vilest miscreant that ever lived^b—But the more we resemble him in holiness, the more shall we resemble him in sufferings also—Our enemies indeed will not professedly persecute us for our holiness—They will assign some specious reason—Elijah shall be called “The troubler of Israel;” Paul, “The man who turns the world upside down;” and Christ shall be punished as a blasphemer and an enemy to civil government—But the same reason obtains with respect to all, The world cannot endure the light of their example^c—]

These

^a This seems to be the import of *σκοπούται*.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

^c John xv. 19.

These troubles however shall work for his good

[They “are not in themselves joyous, but grievous”—But they tend to refine his soul, and to fit him for glory—Yea, inasmuch as these sufferings constitute a part of the obedience required of him, they bring with them a correspondent reward^d—In this view they are mentioned in the text as highly beneficial—They work for the faithful Christian a reward of glory; “a weight of glory” as great as his soul is able to sustain, and as durable as eternity itself—In comparison of this, the apostle calls his troubles light and momentary, yea, not only light, but lightness itself—And intimates, that, if hyperbole were heaped upon hyperbole, it would be impossible for language to express, or for imagination to conceive, the greatness of that glory which his afflictions wrought for him^e—]

The preceding subjects being, to appearance, so remote from each other, it will be proper to mark

III. The connexion between them

Afflictions do not necessarily produce this effect

[In too many instances the effect that flows from them is altogether opposite—Instead of purifying the soul, they fill it with impatience, fretfulness, and all manner of malignant passions—And instead of working out a weight of glory for it, they serve only to prepare for it a more aggravated condemnation—“The sorrow of the world,” saith the apostle, “worketh death^f”—]

It is only where the pursuits are spiritual, that sufferings are so eminently beneficial

[If the mind be set upon carnal things, it will be cast down when it is robbed of its enjoyments—It will say, like Micah, “I have lost my gods, and what have I more?”—But the soul that affects heavenly things will be comforted with the thought that the objects of its desire are as near as ever—“While it looks at things invisible,” it will be quickened in its pursuit of them—It will be made to feel more sensibly the vanity and insignificance of earthly things, and be urged more determinately to seek “a kingdom which cannot be moved”—Every fresh trial will make it long more and more for the promised rest—And the storms which menace its existence, will thus eventually waft it with more abundant rapidity towards its desired haven—]

INFER

1. How infatuated are the generality of mankind!

[It is but too evident that the generality of the world are seeking

^d 2 Tim. ii. 12.

^f 2 Cor. vii. 10.

^e This is implied in the original.

seeking earthly things, while they who are pressing forward in pursuit of heavenly things are comparatively few in number—What a melancholy proof is this of their blindness and folly!—Who is there that, however much he may have gained of this world, has not found it all to be vanity and vexation of spirit?—What comfort has any one derived from earthly possessions in an hour of deep affliction?—And what benefit will accrue from them in the eternal world?—Say, thou libertine, thou worldling, or thou false professor, what has the world done for thee? And what hast thou of all that is past, except shame and remorse in the remembrance of it?—Who does not acknowledge the truth of these observations the very instant he begins to have a prospect of the eternal state?—Yet, so infatuated are we, that though every successive age has seen the folly of such conduct, they have trodden the same delusive path, according to what is written, “This their way is their folly, and yet their posterity approve their saying”—Let us, however, awake from our slumber—Let us not so regard the things that are visible and temporal, as to forget that there are things invisible and eternal—Let us live and act as for eternity—Let us read, and hear, and pray, as for eternity—In this way we shall remove the sting from all present afflictions, and secure “an inheritance that fadeth not away”—]

2. How blessed is the true Christian!

As there is no state, however prosperous, in which an unconverted man is not an object of pity, so there is no state, however afflictive, wherein the Christian may not be considered as a happy man—However severe or long-continued his troubles may be, they appear to him but light and momentary—And however they may be productive of present pain, he has the consolation of knowing that they work for him a weight of glory, which will infinitely overbalance all that he can endure in the body—“Who then, or what, can harm him, while he continues thus a follower of that which is good?”—Surely, even in this present world the Christian has incomparably the best portion—What he will enjoy hereafter, when he shall come to the full possession of his inheritance, it is needless to say—We can have no doubt but that the invisible realities will be found a very sufficient recompence for all his zeal and diligence in the pursuit of them—Let us then keep those realities in view—And the nearer we come to the goal, let us be the more earnest in “running the race that is set before us”—]

DXLVI. THE VICTOR'S REWARD.

Rev. iii. 21. *To him that overcomeih will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*

THE hope of profit or of honour is that which produces industry among all classes of the community—It prompts the philosopher to consume the midnight oil in study; the merchant to risk his property on the tempestuous ocean; and the soldier to brave the dangers and fatigues of war—The same principle may well be extended also to spiritual concerns, and animate the Christian in the pursuits of religion—His reward is infinitely greater than any which this world can afford, and may therefore justly stimulate him to the most indefatigable exertions—The utmost that the labours of man can attain on earth, is, a royal title and a temporal kingdom—But the Christian victor has a crown of glory laid up for him, and a participation of that very kingdom, which is possessed by Christ himself—The Judge of quick and dead pledged himself to bestow this reward on all his faithful followers—His words lead us to consider

I. The Christian's character

Every Christian is by profession a soldier; he has enlisted under the banners of Christ; and fights till he has vanquished all the enemies of his soul—

The world is not able to detain him in bondage

[As for the *pleasures* of the world, they have no charms for any person who knows the value of his own soul—It requires scarcely any more self-denial to renounce them, than for a philosopher to put away the toys of childhood—A regard for its *honours* is not so easily overcome—The Christian would gladly at first retain his reputation among his former acquaintance; and sometimes perhaps makes undue sacrifices rather than forfeit his good name—But when he finds how impossible it is to be faithful unto God without incurring the censure of the ungodly, he learns at last to bear “the reproach of Christ,” and to “rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake”—The *interests* of the world still subject him to many and strong temptations even after that he has both done and suffered much for Christ—But when he has weighed both the world

world and his own soul in the balance of the sanctuary, he determines to forego every interest rather than endanger his eternal salvation—Thus he evinces that “he is born of God by overcoming the world^a”—]

The flesh also gradually loses its ascendancy over him

[Our inbred corruption is a more powerful enemy than the world, inasmuch as it is nearer to us, and ever with us—But the Christian maintains a conflict with it—He never is so perfect in this world but that he still carries about with him “a body of sin and death”—“The flesh lusts against the Spirit” to the latest hour of his life—But if any unhallowed appetite arise, he resists it to the uttermost, and will in no wise yield to its solicitations—If a temper, contrary to the will of God, work in his bosom, he will mortify and subdue it—Perhaps in nothing does the flesh get more advantage over him than in spiritual sloth; but he still encounters it daily, and labours more and more to attain an habit of activity and vigilance—Thus “through the Spirit he mortifies the deeds of the body,” and “crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts^b”—]

Nor can *the devil* with all his hosts prevail against him

[Satan is yet a greater adversary to the Christian than even flesh and blood—But the good soldier will not turn his back—He “girds on the whole armour of God,” and “goes forth in the strength of the Lord God”—Satan, like Pharaoh, (of whom he was the perfect archetype) casts every impediment in his way, and multiplies his thoughts of this world, to divert his attention from a better^c—When he cannot prevail to keep the Christian from the path of duty, he will endeavour, like that hardened monarch, to limit him in the prosecution of it^c—When that fails, he will contrive, if possible, to lead him astray, and to fix his attention on controversy, or politics, or something of inferior concern—When that will not succeed, he will labour either to “puff him up with pride, and thus bring him into the condemnation of the devil;” or to cast him down with despondency, and thus cause him to desist from his purpose—But the Christian repels all his fiery darts, “resists him manfully till he makes him flee,” and finally “bruises him under his feet” as a vanquished enemy—This accords with the description given by St. John, “Young men, ye have overcome the wicked one^f”—]

After having successfully maintained his conflicts the Christian receives

II. His

^a 1 John iv. 4.

^b Rom. viii. 13. Gal. v. 24.

^c Eph. vi. 12.

^d Exod. v. 6—9.

^e Exod. viii. 25, 28, & x. 11, 24.

^f 1 John ii. 13.

II. His reward

As a view of the recompence that awaits us cannot fail of animating us in our warfare, it will be proper to contemplate it with care—

Our Lord declares in terms the most glorious that can be conceived

[Christ is seated in heaven on a throne of glory—But he does not occupy that throne alone; he admits his victorious followers to a participation of it—Nothing less than this is deemed a sufficient reward for them—It were an unspeakably great reward, if we were only permitted to behold him upon his throne; but he assures us that we shall be exalted to sit thereon together with him, and thus to share both his honour and felicity—Such honour have all his saints; and he, as the arbiter of life and death, pledges his word, that he himself will bestow this reward upon them—How blessed then must they be! how poor a recompence would earthly kingdoms be in comparison of this!—]

His illustration of his promise greatly elucidates its import

[Christ was once conflicting with his enemies, just as we are—But he overcame them on the cross, triumphed over them in his resurrection, and led them captive in his ascension; and is now set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high—Let us view him then on his Father's throne, and we shall see what glory is reserved for us—Like him, *we shall rest from our labours*; never harassed more either by sin or sorrow—*We shall dwell in the immediate presence of him whom we love*; no longer viewing him at a distance, by the eye of faith, through the medium of the word; but beholding him face to face, seeing him as we are seen, and “knowing him as we are known”—*We shall moreover receive all the happiness of which our natures are capable*—He who was once a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief as his constant companion, now enjoys all the blessedness of the Godhead—In this we shall resemble him as far as any thing finite can resemble what is infinite—Our capacities of happiness will be enlarged beyond our highest conceptions, and every one will be as blessed as his capacity will admit of—Nor is Christ's exaltation merely a *pattern* of ours—He is our forerunner—And the exaltation of the head is a *pledge and earnest* that all the members shall in due time be glorified together with him—]

APPLICATION

[If such be the felicity of all Christian soldiers, Who will not enlist under the banners of Jesus?—Who will not join himself to the captain of our salvation, and give up his name
to

to be enrolled among “the worthies of our David?”—Let all of you, my brethren, flock to his standard, “like doves to their windows”—Gird on your spiritual armour, and go forth to the fight—You have a Commander who cannot only lead you and direct you in the battle, but can shield your heads, and heal your wounds, and strengthen your arms, and insure you the victory—Soldiers, “quit yourselves like men; be strong”—“Fight the good fight of faith,” and trust in him for a successful issue of your conflicts—It is but a little time that you shall have to engage; and though you go forth only with a sling and a stone, Goliath shall fall before you—Only go forth in dependence upon your God, and you have nothing to fear—But O! what have you not to hope for? What blessed triumphs! What glorious spoils! What everlasting shouts of victory!—Look at those who have gone before you in the combat; see them on their thrones, crowned with crowns of righteousness, and shouting with shouts of triumph—Soon, very soon, shall you be numbered amongst them—Let none of you then turn your backs—“If any man turn back,” says God, “my soul shall have no pleasure in him^g”—Fight on a little longer, and you shall not only be conquerors, but “more than conquerors”—The completest victories that an earthly hero can gain, will afford him matter for weeping as well as for joy—But your victories shall be unalloyed with sorrow, and crowned with everlasting gladness—“War then a good warfare,” and fight till you overcome—So shall you receive your promised recompence, and reign with your God for ever and ever—]

^g Heb. x. 38.

DXLVII. THE FELICITY OF THE GLORIFIED SAINTS.

Rev. vii. 14—17. *These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

THE more light and knowledge God has communicated to us, the more ready shall we be to confess our ignorance,

ignorance, and to receive instruction from those, who are qualified and appointed to teach us. Unsanctified knowledge indeed will puff us up with conceit; but that which comes from God, will lead us to God with deeper humility. The apostle John was distinguished above all the apostles by special tokens of his Master's favour; insomuch that he was called "The disciple whom Jesus loved." Nor was he less distinguished by the multitude of revelations that were given to him. In the chapter before us he records a vision which he had of the heavenly world, wherein he saw all the hosts of heaven, and heard the anthems which they sang before the throne of God. Being interrogated by one of the celestial choir respecting the persons whom he had seen, Who they were? and, Whence they had come? he modestly declined offering any opinion of his own; and, in hopes of obtaining information from him, confessed the superior intelligence of this divine messenger. The desired information was immediately imparted: he was told, in the words we have just read, *Whence they came; how they came thither; and the nature and extent of their felicity.* Taking this therefore as the distribution of our subject, we shall shew, respecting the glorified saints,

I. Whence they came

[Perhaps the persons, whom the apostle saw, were those who had suffered martyrdom for the sake of Christ^a. But "it is through much tribulation that every one must enter into the kingdom of heaven." Persecution indeed does not rage equally at all times, or affect all in an equal degree: but "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer it." It is necessary that they should endure it, not only to prove the sincerity of their faith, but to accomplish, in many other respects, the gracious purposes of God towards them. Besides, there are numberless other troubles, which are peculiar to the true Christian, and are more afflictive than the most cruel persecution. The temptations of Satan are often like fiery darts that pierce the soul, and enflame it with a deadly venom. The body of sin and death, which even the most exalted saints carry about with them to the latest hour of their lives, often drew from the apostle tears and groans, which his bitterest enemies never could extort. He could rejoice and glory in the sufferings which *they* inflicted; but a sense of his in-
dwelling

dwelling corruptions broke his spirit, and humbled him in the dust. There is yet another source of tribulation, which, when opened, overwhelms the soul with inexpressible anguish. The hidings of God's face were the chief ingredient of that bitter cup, which so distressed our adorable Saviour, that his "soul was sorrowful, even unto death." Nor are any of his followers so highly privileged, but they at times cry out by reason of dereliction, and feel a grief too big for utterance. Hence then may it be said of all that are in heaven, That they came thither through much tribulation; or, as it is spoken by the prophet, That "the third part, the chosen remnant, are brought through the fire^b."

But as they are a remnant only who partake of that glory, while by far the greater part are left to perish in their sins, it will be proper to enquire,]

II. How they came thither

[Though tribulation is the way to heaven, and, when suffered for the sake of Christ, is the means of advancing us to higher degrees of glory, or, as the Apostle says, "worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," yet is it by no means meritorious in the sight of God: if our trials were ever so great, ever so long continued, and ever so patiently endured, they would not expiate our guilt, or purchase the remission of one single sin. Nor is repentance, however deep, at all more available for the removal of our guilt. As well might the Ethiopian hope to change his complexion, or the leopard to wash away his spots in water, as we to cleanse our souls from the stains they have contracted, even though we could bathe them in rivers of tears. But though neither the tears of penitence, nor the blood of martyrdom, can avail for the washing of our robes, "there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," a fountain in which "sins of a crimson dye may be made white as snow." The blood of the Lamb of God was shed for this very purpose, and is ever effectual for this end. And if we could ask of every saint that is in heaven, How came you hither? Whence had you this white robe? there would be but one answer from them all; all without exception would acknowledge that "their own righteousnesses were as filthy rags;" and that they "washed them white in the blood of the Lamb." This is noticed in the text as the express reason of their being exalted to glory; they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God. And, if ever we would go thither, we must go in the same way, and "be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but his."

That

^b Zech. xiii. 9.

That we may be stirred up to seek a participation of their privileges, let us consider,]

III. The nature and extent of their felicity

While we are in this world we can form but very inadequate conceptions of what is passing in heaven. But respecting the glorified saints the text informs us, that

1. They serve God

[Heaven is not a scene of inactivity, but of constant diligence in the service of God. As God dwelt visibly in the temple, and the chambers of the priests surrounded him on every side; and as the priests ministered before him in white garments, all in their courses attending upon him by day and by night, so he is represented as seated on his throne in heaven; and all his saints being made priests unto him, they surround his throne clothed in white robes, and minister unto him, not in rotation, but all together, with incessant watchfulness. They once were prevented by their infirmities, and by the very necessities of nature, from glorifying him so continually as they would have wished; but now their powers are enlarged, and they can serve him without weariness and without distraction. Now also they have a freedom from every thing that could at all abate their happiness in his service. When they were in the flesh they had many wants yet unsupplied, and many trials that were grievous to flesh and blood. If they had lost their desire after earthly things, yet they hungered and thirsted after God, and felt many painful sensations by reason of their distance from him. But now every trial is removed: the sun of persecution no longer lights on them; nor do the fiery darts of Satan any longer wound their souls^c. Hence their *services* are *unintermitted*, and their *happiness is unalloyed*.]

2. God serves them

[Both the Father and Christ delight to minister to their happiness. The Father has long “pitied them, as a parent pities” his dear afflicted infant; and, rejoicing with them in the termination of their trials, now “wipes the tears from their eyes,” and receives them to his everlasting embraces. The Lord Jesus too, who, though on his throne, is yet “as a Lamb that has been slain,” delights to minister unto them^d. Once, as the great shepherd of the sheep, he sought them out, and brought them home on his shoulders rejoicing, and fed them in green pastures, and made them to lie down beside the still waters. The same office does he still execute in heaven, where his widely scattered flock are collected as, “one fold under

^c Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

^d Luke xii. 37.

under one shepherd.*” There he feeds them in far richer pastures than they ever saw below, and “leads them from the streams, to the living fountains,” of consolation and bliss. Incessantly does he give them brighter discoveries of all the divine perfections as harmonizing, and as glorified, in their salvation; and incessantly does he refresh them with the sweetest tokens of his love, and the most abundant communications of his joy.]

INFER

1. How patient should we be in all our tribulations!

[Tribulation is but the way to our Father’s house: and can we repine at the difficulties of the way, if we only consider whither it is leading us? Besides, while every trial brings us nearer to our journey’s end, it leaves one less trial to be endured. “Be patient then, and hope to the end.”]

2. How earnest should we be to obtain an interest in Christ!

[Nothing but his blood can cleanse us from sin; nor can we ever be admitted to the marriage-supper without a wedding garment. Let us go then to the fountain; let us wash and be clean.]

3. How diligent should we be in seeking heaven!

[Will not the blessedness of heaven repay us? Will it not be time enough to rest when we get thither? Let us then press forward with all our might.]

* John x. 16.

DXLVIII. THE STABILITY OF THE PROMISES.

2 Cor. i. 20. *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God by us.*

MANKIND in general discover much versatility in their spirit and conduct—

They form purposes and rescind them according as they are influenced by carnal hopes or fears—

But the gospel teaches us to lay our plans with wisdom, and to execute them with firmness—

A light, fickle, wavering mind, if not incompatible with, is at least unworthy of, the Christian character—

St.

St. Paul had been accused of “lightness” for not paying his intended visit to Corinth—

It is probable too (as appears by his apology) that his enemies had thrown out insinuations against his doctrine also, as though it could not be depended upon—

He thought such charges extremely injurious to his person and ministry—

He therefore first affirms that his doctrines had been uniform—

And next appeals to God, that there had been the same uniformity in his conduct also^a—

In speaking of his doctrine he digresses a little from his subject—

But, what he says of the promises, is worthy of peculiar attention—

It suggests to us the following important observations

I. All the promises of God are made to us in Christ Jesus

God has “given to us exceeding great and precious promises”

[He has engaged to bestow all which can conduce to our *temporal* welfare—

All too, which can promote our *spiritual* advancement—

To this he has added all the glory and felicity of heaven itself—

Such are the benefits annexed by God himself to real godliness^b—]

But all these are given to us only in Christ Jesus

[Man, the instant he had sinned, was exposed to the wrath of God—

Nor could he any longer have a claim on the promises made to him in his state of innocence—

But Christ became the head and representative of God’s elect—

With him God was pleased to enter into covenant for us^c—

And to give us a promise of eternal life *in him*^d—

Our original election of God, our adoption into his family, with every blessing consequent upon these, were confirmed to us *in him*^e—

Hence,

^a Ver. 23. He assures them that he had delayed his journey, not from fickleness of mind, but from tenderness to them.

^b 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^c Heb. viii. 6.

^d 2 Tim. i. 1.

^e Eph. i. 3, 4, 5, 11.

Hence, in the text, it is *twice* said, that the promises are *in him*—

And, in another place, that they were made before the existence of any human being^f—

Even when the covenant was apparently made with Abraham, Christ was the true seed in whom alone it was confirmed^g—]

From this circumstance they derive all their stability

II. In him they are all firm and immutable

The terms “Yea and Amen” import stedfastness and immutability—

Now the promises cannot fail unless they be either revoked by God, or forfeited by man—

But God will not suffer them to fail by either of these means

He himself will not revoke them

[Some of his promises are *absolute* and others *conditional*—

The *conditional* are suspended on the performance of something by man—

The *absolute* are made without respect to any thing to be done by us^h—

If the former fail, it is not so properly a breach of promise, as an execution of a threatening implied in itⁱ—

The latter never have failed in any one instance—

Nor can one jot or tittle of them ever fail to all eternity—

This is declared in various passages of holy scripture^k—

God’s word, like his nature, has “no variableness or shadow of turning”—

He confirmed his promises with an oath, in order that we might be more assured of the immutability of his counsel^l—

Hence it is expressly said, that “the promise is sure to all the seed^m”—]

Nor will he suffer his people to forfeit their interest in them

[Doubtless his people, as free agents, are capable of apostatizing from the truth—

Yea, they are even bent to backslide from himⁿ—

And,

^f Tit. i. 2.

^g Gal. iii. 16, 17.

^h Such are the declarations respecting the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, together with the consequent calling of the Gentiles, and the salvation of all that from eternity were given to Christ, John xvii. 6.

ⁱ This is the true import of what God says, Numb. xiv. 34.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 22. Isa. liv. 10. Jer. xxxi. 35—37. and xxxiii. 25, 26.

^l Heb. vi. 17.

^m Rom. iv. 16.

ⁿ Hes. xi. 7.

And, if left to themselves, they would inevitably fall and perish^o—

Hence they are bidden to take heed lest they come short of the promised blessings^p—

St. Paul himself felt the need of much labour and self-denial to prevent his becoming a cast-away^q—

Nevertheless these truths are not at all inconsistent with the doctrine insisted on—

It is by the fear of falling, that God keeps us from falling^r—

And he will keep us by his own power unto final salvation^s—

Of this St. Paul was as confident as of any truth whatever^t—

Nor is there any other truth more abundantly confirmed in scripture^u—

God will indeed punish his people for their declensions^x—

But, instead of casting them off, he will reclaim them from their errors^y—

If it were not thus, not one only, but all of those, who had been given to Christ, might perish—

God however will effectually prevent this^z—

And the weakest of his people may join in the apostle's triumph^a—]

This doctrine is far from being a matter of speculation only

III. In their accomplishment God is glorified, and the ends of our ministry are answered

The promises, as recorded in the scriptures, are the foundation of our hopes—

But it is by their accomplishment alone that the effects attributed to them are produced—In *that*

1. God is glorified

[Every perfection of the Deity is interested in the accomplishment^a of his word—

The *mercy* and *love* of God have given us the promises—

His *truth* and *faithfulness* are pledged to fulfil them—

His almighty *power* is engaged to execute whatever his goodness has given us reason to expect—

Were his promises to fail of accomplishment, these perfections would be all dishonoured—

But

^o Isa. x. 4.

^p Heb. iv. 1.

^q 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^r Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^s 1 Pet. i. 5.

^t Phil. i. 6.

^u Rom. xi. 29. John x. 28, 29.

^x Ps. lxxxix. 30—32.

Ps. lxxxix. 33—35.

^z Matt. xviii. 14.

Jer. xxxii. 38—41.

^a Rom. viii. 38, 39

But when they are fulfilled, these perfections are all glorified—

Justice itself is made to harmonize with truth and mercy^b—
And matter is furnished for endless praise and adoration—]

2. The ends of our ministry are answered

[The great ends of our ministry are to convert, edify, and comfort immortal souls—

In pursuance of these, we set before men those promises which are most suited to their respective conditions—

And assure them that their affiance in those promises shall bring them the blessings they desire—

When therefore the contrite are brought to experience rest in Jesus, when the afflicted are comforted, the backsliding reclaimed, or the wavering established, then the great ends of our ministry are so far answered with respect to them—

The truth of God in his promises is then made to appear; the benefits contained in them are enjoyed by our fellow-creatures; and our labours receive their richest recompence—]

APPLICATION

[The scripture speaks of some as “heirs of promise,” and others as “strangers from the covenant of promise”—

Let us enquire to which of these characters we belong—

Have we renounced every other hope, and rested simply on the promises made to us in Christ?—

And are we living in the earnest expectation of their full accomplishment?

Have we so embraced them as to shew that we are seeking another country^c?—

Let us not mistake our true and proper character—

If we be *strangers from the covenant of promise*, we are without Christ, and without hope^d—

The threatenings, and not the promises, belong to us—

And they will infallibly be executed upon us in due season—

O that we might now flee for refuge to the hope set before us!—

But if we be “*heirs of promise*,” happy are we beyond all expression—

Every promise of God, temporal, spiritual, or eternal, is made to us—

Let every one then of this description be filled with consolation^e—

Let them also be followers of those, who now inherit the promises^f—

May

^b Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^c Heb. xi. 13, 14.

^d Eph. ii. 12.

^e Heb. vi. 18.

^f Ib. ver. 12.

May it never be said of them, that they glorify God by their faith, but dishonour him by their works!—

The promises are given, not merely to save, but to sanctify, the soul^g—

Treasure up then, brethren, those inestimable pledges of God's love—

And let them operate according to the direction given you^h—]

^g 2 Pet. i. 4.

^h 2 Cor. vii. 1.

EXAMPLES.

DXLIX. OF FOLLOWING GOOD EXAMPLES.

Phil. iii. 17, 20. *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample . . . for our conversation is in heaven.*

GREAT is the force of example, either to vitiate or improve the morals of those around us. There are few, even of real Christians, who do not, in some considerable degree, yield to its influence. The church at Philippi was, on the whole, distinguished for its attainments: yet even there, hypocrisy was found, and error had its advocates. The example of some worldly and sensual professors was likely to prove extremely injurious: while therefore the apostle declares his grief occasioned by their misconduct, he exhorts the church to unite in following rather the example that he had set them, and to notice with approbation all who conducted themselves agreeably to his advice.

The words that are in ver. 18 and 19. being included in a parenthesis, those which are united in the text are properly connected with each other. In discoursing on them, we shall consider

I. The apostle's example

St. Paul considered himself as a citizen of heaven ^a

[To be a citizen of Rome was deemed a high honour; and it was an honour which Paul possessed by virtue of his being a native of Tarsus, on which city this privilege had been conferred ^b. But Paul's name was enrolled in a more glorious city, even in heaven itself ^c. He belonged to the society of
saints

^a Πολίτευμα ἡμῶν might have been translated *our citizenship*.

^b Acts xxii. 28.

^c Luke x. 20.

saints and angels, who were united under Christ, their common head^d: and he had a communion with them in all their honours, their interests, and their enjoyments^e.]

In the exercise of his rights, he had his daily converse in heaven

[As a person is daily conversant with that society to which he belongs, maintaining fellowship with them, and ordering his life according to their rules, so the apostle lived, as it were, in heaven: his thoughts and affections were there continually: and he was emulating those around the throne by his constant endeavours to glorify God, and by walking habitually in the light of his countenance.]

While he mentions his example, he shews us

II. The use that we should make of it

We should imitate him ourselves

[We are already joined to the society in heaven^f, provided we be united unto Christ by faith: and it behoves us to “walk worthy of our high calling.” Though we are *in* the world, we are not to be *of* it. “We have here no continuing city:” we are to be in this world as pilgrims only and sojourners: we must ever consider ourselves as strangers and foreigners, who, though living on earth, are indeed fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God^g. If we were travelling in a foreign land, we should regard the concerns of that land rather as objects of curiosity, than as matters in which we felt any deep interest: whereas the affairs of our own country, where our estates were situated, and our relations lived, would be regarded by us as matters of great moment. Thus should we be indifferent, as it were, to all the vanities of this life, and be wholly intent on our spiritual and eternal interests. We should be maintaining communion with our head in heaven^h, and growing up into a meekness for the exercises and enjoyments of the invisible world.]

We should also “mark those who” do imitate him

[All of us should uniteⁱ in following his example, and emulate each other in his holy employment. And, when any make higher attainments than ourselves, we should not be ashamed to imitate them: *we should observe^k particularly what it is wherein they excel us, and how it is that they have been enabled to outstrip us.* We should endeavour to encourage them; and together with them to press forward towards perfection^l.]

We

^d Eph. i. 10. & iii. 15.

^e Eph. ii. 19.

^k Σκοπεῖτε.

^f Eph. ii. 6.

^h 1 John i. 3.

^g Heb. xii. 22, 23.

ⁱ Συμμεμεταί.

^l Prov. xv. 24.

We may make USE of this subject

1. For reproof

[How widely do the greater part of Christians differ from the apostle! Nor is it only the profane, or the formal, that are condemned by his example, but even the godly also. Let all of us then be ashamed of the low sense we entertain of our privileges, and of the coldness with which we prosecute our eternal interests. Let us seek to have our views and dispositions more conformed to those of the saints of old; that at the second coming of our Lord we may behold him both with confidence and joy^m.]

2. For encouragement

[It is not to apostles that these attainments are confined: they were common to many others in the church at Philippi, who, together with the apostle, are proposed as patterns unto us. Let none then imagine that this blessed state is beyond their reach; but rather let all aspire after it, as the one object of their ambitionⁿ. Let all seek to know what a gloriously rich inheritance^o they are even now permitted to enjoy; and, having by faith gained access into this grace, let them stand in it, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God^p.]

^m Ver. 20, 21. with 1 John ii. 28.

^o Eph. i. 18.

ⁿ Ver. 13, 14.

^p Rom. v. 2.

DL. CHRIST'S EARLY HABITS.

Luke ii. 49—51. *And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.*

THE prophets and apostles of old are proposed to us as examples in a variety of respects: but we are to follow men no further than they themselves followed Christ. Christ is the great pattern, to which all are to be conformed: and so fully is his character delineated in the holy scriptures, that we can scarcely ever be at a loss to know either what he did, or what he would have done, in any circumstances of life. The account we have indeed of his early days is very concise. There is little related

of him to gratify our curiosity, but enough to regulate our conduct. The only authentic record which we have of the transactions of his childhood, is that before us: in discoursing upon which we shall notice

I. His piety towards God

His parents had carried him up at twelve years of age to Jerusalem, whither all the males were obliged to assemble thrice in the year. After the paschal solemnities were completed, his parents set out on their journey homeward, and proceeded for one whole day, concluding that Jesus was in the company together with them. In the evening, to their great surprise, they sought for him in vain among all his kin-folk and acquaintance; and therefore they returned the next day with their hearts full of sorrow and anxiety to Jerusalem, to search for their beloved child: but there they could hear no tidings of him all that night. Prosecuting their enquiries the third day, they found him at last, conversing with the doctors in the temple. Joseph being only his reputed father, left the task of reproving him to Mary his mother. She, gently chiding him for the distress he had occasioned them, received from him the reply which we have just read; in which he vindicated his conduct, from the superior obligations which he owed to his heavenly Father, and shewed, that her anxieties had arisen from her own ignorance and unbelief.

In his answer to her, he intimated

1. That his duty was his delight

[This was probably the first time that he had ever been at Jerusalem since he was quite an infant: and he was solicitous to improve to the uttermost the opportunity which this season had afforded him, of cultivating divine knowledge, and “increasing in heavenly wisdom.” Not wearied with the seven days that he had spent in spiritual exercises, he was happy to prolong the time, and to sit among the doctors (not with dictatorial forwardness, but with the modesty of a child) to answer any questions that were put to him, and to ask for information on those points, in which he found himself not yet sufficiently instructed². It was in the use of such means as these that the indwelling Godhead gradually irradiated his mind, and trained him up for the office, which at a more advanced age he was

to

² Ver. 41—47.

to fulfil. This was "the business to which his heavenly Father had called him" at this time; and it was the delight of his soul to execute it: nor was he responsible to his earthly parents for overlooking on this occasion that attention to their feelings, which, in less urgent circumstances, he would have gladly shewn.]

2. That she, from observing his early habits, must have known it

[Mary, knowing from whence Jesus was, and what signal protection his heavenly Father had hitherto afforded him, and how great an office he was destined to execute, should have felt no fears for his safety, since he could not but be secure under his Father's care, though withdrawn from her's. Nor should she have doubted where to find him; since he had manifested on all occasions such delight in his Father's house^b, and in his Father's work. This appeal to her knowledge of him, though it does not open to us any particulars of his life, gives us an important insight into the general tenor of it: and though *she* could not at the time apprehend his meaning, we, with the additional light that we enjoy, see the full force of his interrogations.]

To obviate any misconstruction of our Lord's conduct, and to prevent it from being erroneously drawn into a precedent for others, the Evangelist proceeds to record

II. His dutifulness to his parents

If fuller information had been given us respecting the behaviour of Christ from his earliest infancy to the age of thirty, we should have been enabled to illustrate this part of our subject in the most pleasing and satisfactory manner. But as God has been pleased to draw a vail over the whole of that period, it would be absurd for us to launch out into the boundless regions of conjecture. In knowing that "he was subject to his parents," we know sufficient: we know that a reverence for their persons, an obedience to their authority, a zeal in testifying his love to them, and whatever else is comprehended in the whole circle of filial duty, was manifested by him without intermission and without alloy. Satisfied with this, we shall leave the matter where God has left it, and dismiss this part of our subject without any further attempt to elucidate and explain it.

We

^b 'Εν τοῖς τῷ πατρὶς μου.

We shall conclude with an ADDRESS

1. To parents

[Though the conduct of Jesus is the more immediate subject of our present enquiry, yet is it so involved in this instance with the conduct of his parents, that we should be inexcusable if we did not embrace this opportunity of addressing ourselves to *you*. His parents carried him up with them at twelve years of age, that he might be early initiated into those mysteries of religion which it is the duty and happiness of all to be acquainted with. Are you shewing the same attention to the spiritual welfare of your children? We ask not whether, if you had lost a child, and knew not where it was, you would seek after it with anxiety? We readily give you credit for all the natural feelings; and we rejoice that, in the absence of a higher principle, these are left in such strength to regulate your conduct. But you have far more important duties to your children than the care of their mere temporal welfare: their souls are committed to you; and you will be responsible for them in the day of judgment exactly as your minister will be for your souls. Say then before God, whether you make it your chief care to bring them to God? and whether your whole behaviour towards them be suited to this end? You complain perhaps of your children's frowardness: but enquire whether it be not owing to your inattention or mismanagement? If so, consider how Eli's negligence in this respect was punished by God^c; and beware lest your children say to you, as Hophni and Phinehas may to him, in the day of judgment, "It was owing to you, in part, that I perished." May God impress this solemn thought upon the minds of all, and especially of those who profess godliness; that every one, like Abraham, may seek the best interests of his household^d, and say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord^e!"]

2. To young people

[It is not to little children alone that this subject is applicable, but to all who are under the authority of parents or governors, whatever be their age or condition in life.

Persons in early life are ready to think that it will be time enough at some future period to serve the Lord: hence they defer the work of religion from infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to middle life, or to old age; till at last they die in ignorance and sin. O remember, you cannot seek the Lord too early, or too earnestly.

But

^c His sons, his daughter in law, and himself, with thousands of Israelites, were consigned to death; and the ark of God given up into the enemies' hands, 1 Sam. iv. 1—22.

^d Gen. xviii. 19.

^e Josh. xxiv. 15.

But in these days of insubordination it is but necessary that we remind you also of your duty to your parents and governors. Think not that you are at liberty to be wilful, froward, disobedient: no; the stubborn child was ordered by God himself to be stoned to death^f: and if in this world God marked so awfully the wickedness of disobedient children, doubtless God will visit it with far more tremendous judgments in the world to come.

You must resemble Jesus in both parts of his character, combining piety towards God with dutifulness towards man. Neither of these will avail you any thing if separated from the other: but their united exercise will, if we may so speak, conciliate the favour both of God and man^g.]

3. To all present

[There is one circumstance in our Lord's conduct deserving of universal attention. He acted under a conviction that his duty to God was paramount to every other consideration: and his answer to his mother strongly conveys this idea. Let us apply it to ourselves. If our parents or governors encourage our religious impressions, it is well: let us be thankful for their aid. But if they set themselves against religion, then let us remember that we have a heavenly Father, whose house we *must* frequent, and whose business we *must* transact. And if the commands of God and of man come in opposition to each other, then must we obey God rather than man^h: yea, we must hate both father, and mother, and our own lives also in comparison of Christⁱ. We must be prepared to sacrifice all for Christ; but "*we must give a reason of our conduct with meekness and fear*"^k.]

^f Deut. xxi. 18—21.

^g Ver. 52.

^h Acts v. 29.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 26.

^k 1 Pet. iii. 15.

DII. CHRIST'S HUMILIATION.

Phil. ii. 5—8. *Let the same mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

ONE of the strongest characteristics of our fallen nature is selfishness. The one desire of an unregenerate man is to gratify self. Even those actions, in which he

seems to have most respect to God or to his fellow-creatures, will, if carefully examined, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, be found to have self for their principle, and self for their end. This disposition being so deeply rooted in the heart, we cannot but expect that it should operate to a certain degree, even after the evil of it is discerned, and after its allowed dominion has ceased. Doubtless there were many pious Christians in the Philippian church, as well as Timothy : yet St. Paul complained that all of them, excepting him, were in some degree under the influence of a selfish spirit, and “sought their own things rather than the things of Jesus Christ.” Against this thing therefore he cautioned them in a most affectionate manner ; beseeching them, with all earnestness, to “fulfil his joy,” in “being all of one accord and of one mind ;” exhorting them to “esteem others better than themselves ;” and “not to look every man on his own things, but also on the things of others.” To give the greater weight and efficacy to his exhortations, he then reminded them of the conduct of Christ towards them, and recommended it as the best pattern for their conduct towards each other : “Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

The words of the apostle lead us to consider the humiliation of Christ in a twofold view—*As a fact to be believed*, and *as a pattern to be imitated*.

First, Let us consider it *as a fact to be believed*.

The two leading steps of Christ's humiliation were, his *incarnation* and his *death*.

Previous to *his incarnation*, he existed in a state of inconceivable glory and bliss. He “had a glory with the Father before the worlds were made.” He “was in the bosom of the Father” from all eternity. He was “the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.” It was in and by him that God, on various occasions, appeared to men ; and hence it is that the apostle calls him “the Image of the invisible God ;” not only because he bore a peculiar resemblance to the Deity, but chiefly because the Godhead, which was never seen in the person of the Father, ~~was~~ seen by many in the person of Christ. We are informed, in the text, that
Christ

Christ was not only in the form of "God," but that "he thought it not robbery to be equal with God," or, as the words more strictly mean, to be *as God*^a. He assumed to himself all the titles, attributes, and perfections of the Deity. He claimed and exercised all the divine prerogatives. He performed by his own power all the works which are ever ascribed to God. And in all this he was guilty of no presumption; because he was truly 'One with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.' To understand the apostle as saying, that Christ, while he was only a mere man, did not think of the robbery of being equal with God, is to represent him as commending a creature for his humility in not aspiring to an equality with God; a greater absurdity than which could not enter into the human mind. As Christ, when he took upon himself "the form of a servant," became really man, so when, previous to his incarnation, he was "in the form of God," he was really and truly God. To this the scriptures bear ample testimony: they declare that before he was "a Child born and a Son given, he was the mighty God," even "God over all, blessed for ever." And therefore, when he became incarnate, he was "God, manifest in the flesh;" he was "Emmanuel, God with us."

But this glory he, in infinite condescension, laid aside. Not that he ceased to be God; but that he veiled his Deity in human flesh. As, previous to his descent from mount Tabor, he divested himself of those robes of majesty wherewith he was then arrayed; so, for the purpose of sojourning among men, he *emptied himself*^b of all his divine splendor, either hiding it altogether from human eyes, or only suffering a ray of it occasionally to beam forth for the instruction of his disciples; that, while others saw him but as a common man, *they* might "behold his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father." He did not, however, assume our nature in its primæval state, while yet it bore the image of its Maker; but in its fallen state, encompassed with infirmities: "he was made
in

^a The Greek is not ἵσων τῷ Θεῷ as in John v. 18, but ἵσα which means *as*. This is unanswerably shewn by the references which Dr. Whitby on the place has made to passages in the Septuagint, where it is so translated.

^b ἐκένωσε ἑαυτὸν.

in the *likeness of sinful flesh*;" and was "in all points like unto us, sin only excepted."

But there was yet a lower state of degradation to which our blessed Lord submitted for our sakes, which also is mentioned in the text, and which was the very end of his incarnation; "being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto *death*."

When our Lord vouchsafed to take our nature into an immediate union with himself, he became from that moment subject to the law, even as we are. More especially, having substituted himself in the place of sinners, he was bound to fulfil the precepts which he had broken, and to endure the penalties which we had incurred. He was to be the servant of God in executing his Father's will; and the servant of man, in performing every duty, whether of obedience to his earthly parents, or of subjection to the civil magistrate. He knew from the beginning how arduous a course he had to run: he beheld at one view all that he must do, and all that he must suffer, in order to accomplish the purposes of his mission; and yet he freely undertook our cause, saying, "I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." And with the same readiness did he persevere "even unto death." When the extremity of his sufferings were coming upon him, he implored indeed the removal of the bitter cup, provided it could be removed consistently with his Father's glory and man's salvation. But this he did, to shew that he was really man; and to instruct his followers how to demean themselves in seasons of deep affliction. By this we see, that it is our privilege to make our requests known to God, and to implore such a mitigation of our troubles as shall render them more supportable, or such an increase of strength as may enable us to endure them. Cheerfully however did he resign himself to the will of his heavenly Father; and though twelve legions of angels were at his command to deliver him, yet did he continue fixed in his purpose to give his own life a ransom for us. Notwithstanding the death of the cross was the most painful and ignominious of any, yet to that did he submit for us; nor did he cease from filling up the measure of his sufferings, till he could say, "It is finished."

This

This then is the fact affirmed by the Apostle ; a fact, which we should have considered as absolutely incredible, if God himself had not plainly declared it, and confirmed his testimony by the most indubitable evidence. We are now therefore warranted to affirm, that " it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation." And though the frequency with which it is mentioned, causes it in too many instances to be heard without any emotion, sure we are, that the more it is contemplated, the more it will fill us with wonder and amazement. If we would but consider that the God of heaven and earth assumed our sinful nature, and died the accursed death of the cross, in order to redeem us from death and hell ; if we would but suffer this thought fully to occupy our minds, methinks we should become like those in heaven, who cease not day and night to make it the grand subject of their united praises.

Secondly. The more immediate view with which the Apostle introduced the subject of our Lord's humiliation, to which we also wish at this time to draw your attention, was, that he might set it before the Philippians *as a pattern to be imitated*.

It is not possible for us in all respects to imitate this bright original, since we have no glory which we can lay aside ; nor is it optional with us whether we will become subject to the law or not. But, though we cannot perform the same *act* that Christ did, we may " have the same *mind* which was in him : " and beyond all doubt we ought to resemble him in these two particulars ; *in feeling a tender regard for the welfare of men's souls* ; and *in being ready to do or suffer any thing for their good*.

1. *We should feel a tender regard for the welfare of men's souls.* When, in consequence of the fall of man, there remained no possibility of his restoration to God's favour and image, by any thing which he could either devise or execute, this blessed and adorable Saviour looked upon us with pity : his bowels yearned over us ; and though he had not interested himself on behalf of the angels that sinned, yet, he determined to interpose for us, and by a marvellous effort of his grace to save our souls alive. Let me ask then, what is now the state of the heathen world ? Is it not that very state to which the whole

whole race of man was reduced by the transgression of Adam, and by their own personal iniquities? They are under a sentence of death and condemnation. They know of no way of reconciliation with God. Being without Christ, they are altogether without hope. And though we will not presume to say that *none* of them are saved; yet we must affirm that their condition is most pitiable, and that the notions which obtain in the world respecting the extension of God's mercy to them, are awfully erroneous. For if they can be saved without Christ, why could not *we*? And then why did Christ ever come into the world? If it be said, that Christ has purchased mercy for them though they know him not, then we ask, Why did the Apostles go forth to preach to the Gentile world? Why did they submit to such numberless hardships and labours at the peril of their lives, to bring the heathen into the fold of Christ, if they thought that they could attain salvation in their present state, or that any considerable number of them would be saved? The Apostles knew little of that which we falsely term, charity. They believed that "there was no other name given among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ:" and therefore they felt towards the heathen world as they would have done towards a crew of mariners perishing in the ocean: they went forth at the peril of their own lives, willing to endure any thing themselves, if they might but succeed in saving some of their fellow-creatures. Ought not we then in like manner to compassionate the heathen world? Should not "our head be waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" for their perishing condition? What infidelity must there be in our minds, or what obduracy in our hearts, if we can look upon their state without the tenderest emotions of pity and grief!

2. But to our compassion we must add also *a willingness to do and suffer any thing for their good*. When our blessed Lord beheld our misery, he flew from heaven on the wings of love to succour and relieve us. And though in order to effect his purpose he must disrobe himself of his majesty, and become like one of us, a poor, weak, necessitous creature, yea, and in our nature must submit to death, even the accursed death of the cross; he accounted
nothing

nothing too valuable to forego, nothing too painful to suffer, in order to rescue us from destruction. He undertook even to be "made a curse for us," in order "to redeem us from the curse of the law." Thus should we not rest in listless wishes for the good of the heathen, but exert ourselves to the utmost to save their souls. What if we cannot all go forth like the Apostles; cannot some of us give liberally of our substance in order to provide them the means of instruction? cannot others afford their time and attention in order to concert measures for the establishing and conducting missions? Cannot others testify their readiness to devote themselves to this great work, saying, like the prophet Isaiah, "Here am I, send me?" But in the disposition to fulfil this last, this most essential and urgent, duty, there is amongst us a general, a lamentable deficiency. After enquiries made in every part of England, none have as yet been found by us, endued with that union of talents and of zeal which is requisite for the work. Many, who in some respects appear fit for the office of missionaries or catechists, are so fond of their ease and worldly comforts, so fearful of encountering difficulties and dangers, so ready, like Moses, to plead their want of fitness, when their backwardness, it is to be feared, arises rather from cowardice or sloth; that there is danger lest the ardour of those who are zealous to promote the object of missions should be damped, through a want of opportunity to exert itself with effect. It is true, (and blessed be God it is so!) that of late years several societies have arisen to promote this glorious work: and fears have been entertained, lest one should interfere with another. But what are the efforts of all of them combined, when compared with the demand there is for such exertions? If the millions of heathens who are yet in darkness be considered, the endeavours used for their instruction, are scarcely more than as a drop to the ocean.

It may be said perhaps, Why are we to waste our strength upon the heathen? Is there not scope for the labours of all at home? I answer, It is well for us that the Apostles did not argue thus: for if they had not turned to the Gentiles till there remained no unconverted Jews for them to instruct, the very name of Christ would probably long since have been forgotten among men. We confess

there are great multitudes in our own land as ignorant as the heathen: but yet they have the Bible in their hands; and there are in every part of the kingdom, some who are both able and desirous to instruct them. However ignorant therefore, or abandoned, thousands are amongst us, there is hope respecting them, that sooner or later their feet may be guided into the way of peace. But as for the heathen, what hope can there be respecting them? for "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how can they hear without a preacher?" Besides, the more our love abounds towards the heathen, the more will "the zeal of others be provoked" for the salvation of our neighbours; and the more confidently may we hope for the blessing of God upon their pious endeavours.

Let then all such excuses be put away; and let all exert themselves at least in prayer to the great "Lord of the harvest," and intreat him day and night "to send forth labourers into his harvest."

To enforce what has been said, we would call your attention to some additional considerations.

Consider then first, *what would have been the state of the whole world, if the same mind had been in Christ that is in us?* Had he been as indisposed to effect the salvation of mankind as we are to promote that of the heathen, would he have left his glory for them, would he have relinquished all the blessedness which he enjoyed in the bosom of his Father? would he have debased himself to such a degree as to take upon himself their fallen nature? would he have substituted himself in their place, and borne all their iniquities in his own person, and have become a curse for them? for them who, he knew beforehand, would murder him as soon as they should have it in their power? *No—Then* where would Adam, and all the generations that have passed in succession to the present hour, have been at this moment? They would all, without one single exception, have been wailing and gnashing their teeth in hell: and all future generations to the end of time would have lived only to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to receive at last their tremendous doom. But, adored be his name! he "looked not on his own things so much as on the things of others:" and, in
consequence

consequence of his self-denying exertions, millions are already before his throne and myriads, countless as the sands upon the sea shore, shall yet be added to their number, to be monuments of his love, and heirs of his glory. Shall we then any longer persist in our supineness? Shall we not rather exert ourselves to the utmost to imitate his love?

Consider next, *how we are indebted to the benevolence of our fellow-creatures.* We forbear to notice the kindness of the apostles, because they were expressly commissioned to preach the gospel to every creature, whether of their own, or of any other nation. We will rather advert to an instance more immediately parallel to our own case. For many centuries after Christianity was promulged, our ancestors were bowing down to stocks and stones; as we ourselves also should have been, had not some pious Christian come, at the peril of his life, to bring us the glad tidings of salvation. Suppose he had argued, as we are apt to do, ‘What can I do among that savage race? There are people enough of my own country to occupy all my care; and I may fulfil my duty to God among them, without encountering all the difficulties, and exposing myself to the dangers, which I must expect to meet with in such an undertaking.’ How awful, in that case, would have been our present condition! O Christians! think of all that you enjoy in Christ Jesus, your present consolations, your future prospects; think of these things, and say, ‘I owe all, under God, to him who first set his foot on our inhospitable shores, to shew unto us the way of salvation: his example stimulated others; and thus “the handful of corn that was scattered on the tops of the mountains, has grown up like the woods of Lebanon, or the piles of grass upon the earth.”’ Blessed, for ever blessed, be God for his labours of love! Who can tell then what may arise from the labours of one society, or even of a single individual? We may not see very extensive benefits in our day: and probably this was the case with respect to him who first visited Britain. But could he now behold from heaven the fruit of his labours, how would he rejoice! would he think that he had exercised too much self-denial, or patience, or diligence, in the cause of God? Would he repent of his exertions? Would he

not rather repent that he had not stepped forward sooner, and been more earnest in this blessed work? Be ye then in earnest, my beloved brethren. We have lost too much time already; and millions, though unconscious of their wants, are now crying to us, as it were, "Come over to India—to Africa—and help us." O that a holy zeal might this day inflame our breasts; and that we might requite the labours of those who have instructed us, by endeavouring to extend the benefits derived through them, to the remotest corners of the earth!

Consider further, *how kindly Christ will accept such labours at your hands.* He tells us respecting things of a mere temporal nature, that what we have bestowed on others for his sake, he will accept as conferred on himself; "I was hungry, and ye fed ME; naked, and ye clothed ME; sick and in prison, and ye visited ME." And will he not much more acknowledge himself indebted to us for the spiritual blessings we confer on others? "I was in darkness, and ye enlightened ME; I was far from God, and ye brought ME near; I was perishing, and ye saved ME." O what a thought is this! how animating! how impressive! Are there any amongst us that will not seek such an honour as this? Stir up yourselves then, my brethren; and let us all join with one heart to secure at least this testimony from our blessed Lord, knowing assuredly that "we shall receive our reward," not according to our success, but "according to our labour."

Lastly. Consider, *how necessary it is to resemble Christ, if ever we would participate his glory.* It is not by our profession that we shall be judged in the last day, but by our true character exhibited in our practice. Think not that the formal, the careless, the supine, shall meet with tokens of God's acceptance: it is the man who abounds in "works and labours of love for Christ's sake," who shall be honoured with the approbation of his Judge. It is not he who bears the name of Christ, but who has within him the *mind* of Christ, who shall be counted worthy to dwell with him for ever. He himself tells us, that "not he who merely says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of our Father which is in heaven."

If then ye cannot be moved by more ingenuous considerations,

considerations, reflect on this: and tremble, lest after all your profession of Christianity, you prove only as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Let those whose consciences condemn them for their past inactivity, cry mightily to God for the pardon of their sins, and the renovation of their souls. And may God pour out upon us this day a spirit of faith and love; that we may feel a holy ambition to engage in his service: and may all the endeavours, whether of this or any other society, be abundantly blessed, to the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and to the salvation of many souls! Amen, and Amen.

DLII. THE GRACE OF CHRIST.

2 Cor. viii. 9. *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty might be rich.*

THE excellence of Christianity with respect to the mysteries it reveals, and the precepts it inculcates, is generally acknowledged; but few see it with respect to the motives by which it enforces the performance of our duty. But in this last respect it differs as widely from all other religions as in either of the former; and claims an undoubted superiority over all the dogmas of philosophy, and over Judaism itself. The love of Christ in dying for us is not merely proposed as a tenet to be believed, but is urged as the most powerful, and indeed the only effectual, argument for the quickening of us to an universal and unreserved obedience. This was the consideration by which St. Paul enforced his exhortations to liberality when writing to the Corinthian church: and it will be universally operative, wherever it is understood and felt.

In discoursing on this subject we shall not enter in a general way into our fall, and our recovery by Christ, but shall endeavour to illustrate that one point set forth in the text, namely, *the grace of Christ in the work of redemption*. There are four distinct considerations in the text, every one of them reflecting light upon this point, as so many mirrors uniting their rays in one common focus. These we shall view in their order:

I. The pre-existent state of Christ

[In the text we are told, "He was rich." This idea when applied to our fellow-creatures we can easily understand: but who can comprehend it when applied to Christ? What adequate conception can we form of his *glory* or *felicity*? He was from all eternity "in the bosom of his Father^a," and was "daily his delight^b." He had a communion with the Father in all that he knew^c, in all that he did^d, in all that he enjoyed^e. He had a most perfect Oneness with the Father^f, possessing in himself all the fulness of the Godhead^g, and receiving together with him the adoration of all the angels in heaven^h. Such was the glory which Christ had with the Father before the world was brought into existenceⁱ. Nor was he capable of receiving any addition either of honour or of happiness from his creatures^k. He would have been equally great and glorious though no creature had existed either in earth or in heaven to behold him^l; or though all who transgressed against him should perish for ever. Yet such was his love, that in the midst of all his blessedness he thought of us, and undertook our cause, and engaged to become our substitute and surety^m.

How infinitely does this "grace" transcend our highest conceptions! Indeed we do but "darken counsel by words without knowledge," when we attempt to speak on this mysterious subject.]

II. The humiliation to which he submitted

[It was a marvellous act of grace that he should condescend to form creatures, and to give them a sight of his blessedness and glory. But that he should notice them after they had left their first estate, and despoiled themselves of their original righteousness, this was an act of condescension which we should have deemed impossible, if he had not actually evinced by his conduct that it could be done. But who would believe it possible that he should stoop so low as to take our nature upon him? Yet even that he did; and *that* too, not in its primitive state, but in its present fallen state, subject to numberless infirmities and to death itself. He was "made in the likeness of *sinful* fleshⁿ," and was in all things like unto us, sin only excepted^o. Nor did he assume even our fallen nature in its highest condition: he was born, not in a palace, but a stable; he spent his life, during the first thirty years, in the low occupation of a carpenter; and, for the four last years,

^a John i. 18.

^d John v. 19.

^g Col. ii. 9.

ⁱ John xvii. 5.

^m Ps. xl. 7, 8.

^b Prov. viii. 30.

^c John xvii. 10.

^h Isai. vi. 3. with John xii. 41.

^k Ps. xvi. 2.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 3.

^e Matt. xi. 27.

^f John x. 30.

^l Job xxii. 2.

^o Heb. ii. 17. and iv. 15.

years, he was often destitute of the common necessities of life, yea, even of a place where to lay his head^p. He was aware that he should meet with nothing but contempt and persecution from men; and yet he submitted to it for their sakes. But even this, great as it was, by no means reaches to the full extent of his debasement: No: he put himself in the place of sinners, that he might endure the curse due to their iniquities^q: he submitted to bear the assaults of Satan, and the wrath of God^r. If therefore we would form a just idea of his humiliation, we must visit the garden of Gethsemane, and see him bathed in a bloody sweat, and hear him "making supplication to his Father with strong crying and tears," for the removal of the bittercup^s: we must then follow him to Calvary, and hear his bitter complaints under the depths of dereliction^t, and behold him in the midst of inexpressible agonies of soul and body, dying the accursed death of the cross: and lastly, we must view him imprisoned in the grave under the sentence of the law, of that law which doomed us all to everlasting death^u. Here, here was humiliation, such as filled all heaven with wonder; here was poverty, such as never can be comprehended by men or angels.

In this view the apostle elsewhere describes the grace of Christ, contrasting the dignity of his pre-existing state with the state he assumed, and the degradation he endured^x. O that we might have worthy conceptions of it, and be enabled in some poor measure to comprehend its unexplored heights, its unfathomable depths^y!]

III. The objects for whom he interposed

[It was not for angels, the highest order of created beings, that Jesus interested himself, but for man: he passed by *them*, and deigned to notice *us*^z. But was there any thing in us more than in them, to recommend us to his regard? No: we were destitute of any the smallest good; and full of all imaginable evil^a. There was not a faculty of our souls that was not debased by sin, nor a member of our bodies that was not polluted with iniquity^b. We were even haters of God himself^c; and so full of enmity against him, that we were actually incapable of obeying any of his laws^d, and as far as our influence or example could prevail, we strove to banish him from the world^e.

Our

^p Matt. viii. 20.

^q 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^r Is. lii. 10.

^s Luke xxii. 44. Heb. v. 7.

^t Matt. x. vi. 46.

^u Gal. iii. 13.

^x Phil. ii. 6—8.

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19

^z Heb. ii. 16.

^a Jer. xvi. 9. Gen. vi. 5.

^b Rom. iii. 10—18.

^c Rom. i. 30.

^d Rom. viii. 7.

^e Rom. i. 28. Eph. ii. 12 and Ps. xiv. 1.

^f No God, Mat. 28.

I wish there were none.

Our misery too was as great as our wickedness. We were under sentence of condemnation, and exposed to all the curses of the broken law: "the wrath of God abode upon us;" and nothing remained but that the thread of life should be cut, and we should have been miserable in hell for evermore. Yet such was his compassion that he interposed for us, and became our mediator with God, our "advocate with the Father." How wonderfully does this enhance the grace he has manifested! It would be a marvellous effort of love, if a king should put himself in the place of a condemned rebel, and suffer the sentence of the law in his stead: but for the Creator himself to become a creature, that he might suffer in the place of those who deserved nothing but death and hell, well may this be termed "the exceeding riches of his grace," the very masterpiece of divine love¹]

IV. The state to which, by that interposition, he exalts us

[If he had procured a remission of our sentence, and the favour of annihilation, what a mercy would it have been! and what a mercy would the devils account it, if they could obtain such a favour at his hands! But this would not satisfy our adorable Saviour: he had far higher views in undertaking for us: he determined to restore us to a state of reconciliation with God: to renew our nature, and thereby fit us for the enjoyment of God. Moreover, to all the blessings of grace and peace he determined finally to add that of everlasting glory. He determined, not merely to remove our poverty, but to make us "rich." And in order to see how rich he makes his people, contrast for one moment the state of Dives in hell, crying in vain for one drop of water, and Lazarus enjoying all the fulness of God in Abraham's bosom: such are the riches he designs for us: to procure them for us was the very end of his incarnation and death: nor will he ever relinquish those whom he has purchased with his blood, till he makes them "joint-heirs with himself," and puts them into possession of that "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and never-fading." In a word, he became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh², that we might be one spirit with him³. He emptied himself of his glory⁴, and descended, as it were, to the lowest hell, that he might "pluck us as brands out of the burning," and exalt us to the throne from whence he came⁵.

Such, such was the grace of Christ: it was infinitely more than words can express, or than imagination can conceive.]

By

¹ Eph. ii. 7. Rom. v. 8.

² ἐκέσωσε Phil. ii. 7.

³ Eph. v. 30.

⁴ κενώ. Rev. iii. 21.

⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

By way of APPLICATION we enquire

1. What "know" you of this *as an historical fact*?

[Many there are who strenuously oppose the whole of this representation: denying the truth of Christ's divinity, and the reality of his atonement, the depth of our fall, and our dependence on him for salvation, they assert, that Christ was a mere man; that he died only as an example; that we are neither so vile nor so helpless as has been supposed; and that we are to be saved by our own works. Alas! what an exposition must such persons give to the words of our text! How must they weaken, or rather annihilate, the grace of Christ!

But there are thousands of others, who, while they call themselves Christians, are wholly ignorant of the grace of Christ; not that they systematically oppose it; but they never at all consider it — — —

O let such persons blush at their ingratitude, and tremble for the miseries that must come upon them! Let them seek instruction in this greatest of all subjects, and beg of God to open their understandings that they may understand it.]

2. What "know" you of it *as an influential principle*?

[*It is in this peculiar view that the grace of Christ is mentioned in the text.* Wherever the grace of Christ is known, it cannot but operate; and *that too in proportion to the discovery we have of it.* It will infallibly excite us to *adore the love of Christ, to fulfil his will, and to imitate his example.* No man ever felt more love to Christ, or served him with more zeal, or exercised more self-denial for the good of his fellow-creatures, than St. Paul. In indefatigable labours and cheerful sufferings he had no equal. And he himself tells us what it was that animated him in all his course: "the love of Christ," says he, "constraineth us." How then does it operate on *us*? Are we so impressed with an admiration of Christ's love as to magnify him with thanksgiving? Are we so constrained by it, as to devote ourselves to him without weariness and without reserve? And have we learned from it to sacrifice, not superfluities only, but many of our comforts also, in order to supply the necessities of the poor*?

Let us never rest in a mere theoretical knowledge of these great and fundamental doctrines, but improve them to the regulating of our own conduct, and to the glorifying of him who bought us with his blood.]

* If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, it would be proper to open here the peculiar situation of those for whose relief the Sermon was intended; and to shew how small a matter we require from our auditors, in comparison of that which Christ has voluntarily done for them.

DLIII. THE NATURE AND ENDS OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

1 Pet. iii. 18. *Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*

“SUFFERINGS, of whatever kind, are not in themselves joyous, but grievous :” nevertheless they may on some occasions become a source of joy and triumph. If, for instance, they be inflicted for righteousness sake, and we have the testimony of our conscience that we suffer for well-doing, we may then unfeignedly rejoice in them, as on other accounts, so especially because they render us conformable to our Lord and Saviour. This thought was suggested by St. Peter as a rich source of consolation to the persecuted Christians of his day : nor can we have any stronger incentive to patience and diligence in every part of our duty, than the consideration of what Christ has done and suffered for our sake.

The words before us lead us to contemplate

I. The nature of Christ's sufferings

We speak not of their *quality* as corporeal, or spiritual, but of their nature as described in the text. They were

1. Penal

[Some affirm that the sufferings of Christ were only to confirm his doctrine, and to set us an example : but these ends might have been equally answered by the sufferings of his apostles^a. But they were the punishment of sin : and the wrath of God due to sin, was the bitterest ingredient in them. We had merited the curse and condemnation of the law : and he, to deliver us from it, “*became a curse for us*”^b. “He suffered *for sins* ;” and though his punishment was not *precisely the same* either in quality or duration, as ours would have been, yet was it *equivalent* to our demerit, and satisfactory to the justice of an offended God.]

2. Vicarious

^a If there was nothing penal in our Lord's sufferings, his example was not near so bright as that of many of his disciples ; since he neither met his sufferings with so much fortitude, nor endured them with such triumphant exultation, as many of his followers have since done. But if they were the penalty due to sin, his *apparent inferiority* is fully accounted for.

^b Gal. iii. 10, 13.

2. Vicarious

[It was not for any sin of his own that Jesus was cut off^c; he was "a Lamb without spot or blemish^e," as even his enemies, after the strictest scrutiny, were forced to confess^f. He died, "the just *for*, and in the room of, the unjust:" the iniquities of all the human race were laid upon him^g; he was wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities, and the chastisement he endured was to effect *our* peace^h. He, who was innocent, became a sin-offering for us, that we, who are guilty, might be made righteous in himⁱ.]

3. Propitiatory

[The death of Christ, like all the sacrifices under the Jewish law, was an atonement for sin. It is continually compared with the Jewish sacrifices in this view^k. We say not, that the Father hated us, and needed to have his wrath appeased by the interposition of his Son, (for the very gift of Christ was the fruit of the Father's love^l) but we say, in concurrence with all the inspired writers, that when it was necessary for the honour of the divine government that sin should be punished either in the offender himself, or in his surety, Christ became our surety, and by his own death made a true and proper atonement for our sins, and thus effected our reconciliation with God^m. On any other supposition than this, the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd, and the writings of the New Testament are altogether calculated to deceive us.

From considering the nature of our Lord's sufferings, let us proceed to notice

II. The end of them

His one great design was to bring us to God:

1. To a state of acceptance with him

[We were "enemies to God in our minds by wicked works;" nor could we by any means reconcile ourselves to God: we could *not by obedience*; because the law required perfect obedience; which, having once transgressed the law, we could never afterwards pay: *nor could we by suffering*, because the penalty denounced against sin was eternal, and consequently, if once endured by us, could never be remitted. But, when it was impossible for us, to restore ourselves to God's favour, we were reconciled to him by Christ's obedience unto

^c Dan. ix. 26.^d 1 Pet. i. 19.^e John xviii. 38. & xix. 6.^f Ὑπὲρ, this imports substitution. See Rom. v. 7. in the Greek.^g Isai. liii. 6.^h Ib. ver. 4.ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 21.^k Heb. passim.^l 1 John iii. 16.^m Eph. v. 2. and 1 John ii. 2.

unto deathⁿ, and to effect this reconciliation was the very end for which he laid down his life^o.]

2. To the enjoyment of his presence

[The holy of holies was inaccessible to all except the high priest; nor could even he enter into it except on the great day of annual expiation^p. But at the very instant of our Lord's death, while the Jews were worshipping in the temple, the vail was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the most holy place was opened to the view of all^q. This was intended to declare, that from thenceforth all might have the freest and most intimate access to God^r. All are now made priests unto God^s; and, in this new and living way, may come to his mercy-seat to behold his glory, and to enjoy his love^t.]

3. To the possession of his glory

[It was not only to save us from condemnation, but to exalt us to everlasting happiness, that Jesus died. The salvation which he procured for us, is a "salvation with eternal glory^u." The robes in which the celestial spirits are arrayed, were washed in his blood^x; and all the ransomed hosts unite in ascribing to him the felicity they enjoy^y. Nothing short of this could answer the purposes of his love^z; and the accomplishment of this was the ultimate end of all he suffered^a.]

Before we conclude this subject, let us CONTEMPLATE

1. How great is the love of Christ to our fallen race^b!
2. How cheerfully should we endure sufferings for his sake^c!
3. How inexcusable will they be who continue still at a distance from their God^d!

ⁿ Col. i. 21, 22. Rom. v. 10. ^o Eph. ii. 16.

^p Heb. ix. 7, 8. ^q Matt. xxvii. 50, 51. ^r Eph. ii. 13, 18.

^s Rev. i. 6. ^t Heb. x. 19—22. and xii. 18—24.

^u 2 Tim. ii. 10. ^x Rev. vii. 14. ^y Rev. v. 9, 10, 12.

^z John xvii. 24. ^a Heb. ii. 9, 10.

^b Who would do any thing like this for a fellow-creature? Rom. v. 7, 8.

^c Compare ver. 14. with the text, and Heb. xiii. 12, 13. and Acts v. 41.

^d John xv. 22. *a fortiori*, and Heb. ii. 3.

DLIV. CHRIST'S COMPASSION TO LOST SINNERS.

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.*

IN profane history we are often called upon to admire the actions of conquerors, and of heroes. But most of the feats proposed for our admiration serve rather to evince the depravity of our nature; and are calculated only to excite horror and disgust in a well-instructed mind. Perhaps, of real magnanimity, the world never yet witnessed a more glorious instance than that before us; wherein we behold the Saviour of mankind weeping over his blood-thirsty enemies, and most pathetically lamenting their invincible ignorance and unbelief. To enter fully into the scope of his words, it will be necessary to consider them

I. In reference to Jerusalem

The Jews had long been the most favoured nation under heaven

[They had had the oracles of God committed to them, when the rest of the world were left to the suggestions of unenlightened reason. The way of life and salvation was exhibited to them in their daily sacrifices, and more especially in those offered annually on the great day of atonement. They had been taught by a long succession of prophets, who were divinely qualified and commissioned to make known to them the will of God. Above all, they had now been privileged to hear the Messiah himself, and to see all his doctrines confirmed with the most numerous, most stupendous, and most unquestionable miracles. These were such advantages for the obtaining of eternal life as none others ever enjoyed, and such as must have proved effectual, if Satan had not blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts.]

But they were now speedily to be given over to the judgments they had merited

[They had in no respect rendered unto God according to the benefits received from him. On the contrary, they had made void the law, and established their own traditions as of superior obligation. Instead of hearkening to the prophets, they persecuted them unto death; and instead of yielding

yielding to the wisdom and authority of the Messiah, they imputed his miracles to a confederacy with the devil, and incessantly plotted to take away his life. Within the space of four days they were to fill up the measure of their iniquities by effecting their murderous purposes: and wrath was in due time to come upon them to the uttermost for all the righteous blood that they had spilled, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Christ and his apostles. They were to be given up to judicial blindness and obduracy; and the whole nation were to suffer such calamities from the hands of the Romans, as never had been endured by any nation since the foundation of the world: and all this was but an earnest of infinitely heavier judgments, which were to abide upon them for ever and ever.]

Our Lord, foreseeing their impending miseries, was filled with compassion towards them

[He might well have spoken to them in those terms of indignant triumph, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" But he had far other thoughts on this occasion: knowing the full extent of the miseries that were coming on them, his bowels yearned over them. Nor did he only pity them as one possessed of human passions, but as their Mediator, who had come from heaven to seek and save them. Perhaps too the thought that he should one day be their Judge, and be necessitated to pass the awful sentence of condemnation on their souls, oppressed, and, for a moment, overwhelmed his spirit. Often had he already travailed, as it were, in birth with them, and now he was about to lay down his life for them; but, except to a little remnant, his efforts would be in vain: with respect to far the greater part of them, the things belonging to their peace were about to be hid from their eyes: yet if even at that hour they would have repented, he would gladly "have gathered them, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." But, alas! they would not; and he foresaw moreover that they never would: and therefore, despairing of ever bringing them to happiness, he looked on them with the tenderest emotions of pity, and with a flood of tears poured forth this pathetic lamentation.]

Nor could the circumstances he was in at all divert his attention from them

[He was surrounded by vast multitudes of people, yet was he not ashamed to stop the procession, and to weep before them all. They were all crying "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest;" yet was he deaf to their acclamations and hosannas. He foresaw all the conflicts which he was about to sustain, and the agonies he was speedily to suffer for

for

for the satisfying of divine justice; yet was he altogether insensible to his own concerns, and occupied about the welfare of his most inveterate enemies. Who but God could have possessed so great a mind, or manifested such unbounded compassion?]

But, not to confine these things to the Jews, let us consider them further

II. In reference to ourselves

Peculiar as these circumstances were, they were both written for our admonition, and intended to represent the compassion which Jesus yet bears towards us.

We, like the Jews, have had a day of grace afforded us

[The things belonging to our peace have been plainly revealed to us, and, we trust, faithfully declared amongst us. The way of acceptance through the atoning sacrifice of Christ has incessantly been pointed out in the written word, in the offices of our liturgy, in the administration of the sacraments, and in the preached gospel. Moreover the Holy Spirit has often striven with us to bring us to repentance; but, with respect to very many amongst us, the means have hitherto been used in vain. There are yet too many unacquainted with their depravity, and unsolicitous about an interest in the Saviour. Deeply as their eternal peace is involved in these things, they are ignorant of them, if not in theory, at least in their practical and sanctifying efficacy.]

With respect to many, this day of grace is quickly drawing to a close

[Certain it is that, even while we are yet possessing the outward means of grace, the inward power, that alone can render them effectual, may be withdrawn. God plainly warns us that "his Spirit shall not alway strive with man:" and that by continuing to resist the Holy Ghost, we may not only "grieve" and "vex" him, but may ultimately "quench" his sacred motions. And how inexpressibly dreadful is the state of one, concerning whom God has said, "He is joined to idols, let him alone!" If once this sentence be pronounced, the things belonging to our peace will be as effectually hidden from our eyes, as if we were cut off out of the land of the living; and we shall live henceforth only to add sin to sin, and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." But at all events as soon as death comes, our day of grace must terminate; and if we have lived all our days ignorant of Christ and his salvation, we have then no more hope of mercy than the fallen angels. And how many are there, not only of the aged and infirm, but also of the young and healthy, against whom

whom death has already pointed his dart, and whose speedy dissolution is foreknown to God !]

And may we not suppose that Jesus is now looking, as it were, upon them with tender compassion ?

[He has not now indeed the same susceptibility of grief and sorrow which once he had : but does he not long for the salvation of sinners as much as ever ? Does he not look on some, whose day of grace is nearly passed, and say, “ O that thou mightest know, *at least in this thy day*, the things that belong unto thy peace ? ” Does he not behold even the proudest Pharisee, and the most abandoned profligate, and without excluding either of them from his mercy, say, O that *thou, even thou*, wouldest turn unto me, that I might save thee ! Yes surely, his address to every sinner is, “ Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? ” Let us suppose for a moment that he were to come into this assembly, and to look round about upon us all ; what would be the feelings of his benevolent heart ? Methinks, when he beheld so many ignorant of his salvation, and perishing in the midst of mercy, he would burst into a flood of tears. A sight of so many, who by disease or accident will soon be hurried into the eternal world, while yet they are unprepared to meet their God ; a sight of so many continuing gay and thoughtless, or careful only about this present world, would pierce him with the deepest sorrow, and extort from him a lamentation similar to that before us. Yea, at this moment is he inspecting all our hearts, and, as far as his situation admits of it, is grieved on our account : nor can all the anthems of saints around the throne so occupy his attention, as to make him regardless of our deplorable condition.]

Let us then see the folly of an inconsiderate and careless state

[Perhaps many in that day might wonder at this exercise of Christ's compassion, and consider his weeping over the people as a mark of folly and extravagance ; and many at this time, if they should behold a servant of Christ expressing a concern for immortal souls in the same way, would laugh at him as a weak enthusiast. But who that knows the value of a soul, and sees in what a delusive security the generality are living, must not confess, that there is just occasion for all the compassion we can exercise, and all the zeal we can put forth ? Can we imagine that Jesus would have felt so much, or given such vent to his feelings on this occasion, if there had not been sufficient reason for it : suppose we knew for certain, that one amongst us had lost his day of grace ; would it not become us all to weep over him ? Let us then learn to weep for ourselves ; and seek the things belonging to
our

our peace, lest they be speedily, and for ever, hid from our eyes.]

Let us also acknowledge the blessedness of a converted state

[If our Lord wept over the ignorant and ungodly, we may well conceive that he would rejoice over those who are divinely instructed, and walking in the way of godliness. Indeed he has represented himself as the shepherd rejoicing over his recovered sheep, and the father over the returning prodigal. He has even said, "He will rejoice over us with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over us with singing." Surely then neither is *this* without a cause: there must be real reason for joy, if Jesus himself rejoice over us. A soul enlightened, sanctified, and saved! O, what cause for joy! Who that knows the temporal, and much more the eternal, judgments that fell upon the great body of the Jewish nation, would not incomparably prefer the state of those, who are persecuted unto death, before that of their proud oppressors? Let us then improve "this our accepted time, our day of salvation." Let us be earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold of eternal life: so shall we have reason for triumph, though in the most afflictive circumstances; and shall rejoice for ever in the presence of our God, when all others shall be "cast into that lake of fire, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."]

DLV. GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Deut. xxxii. 9—12. *The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste-howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.*

THE declarations of God in his word are the principal source from whence we derive our knowledge of the Deity. But much may be learned also from the dispensations of his providence, both from those which are recorded in the inspired volume, and those which pass daily before our eyes: nor can we more profitably employ

our thoughts than in meditating on his dealings towards the church in general, and ourselves in particular. This Moses recommended to the Israelites just before his final departure from them. He assured them that God, as far back as the Deluge, had appointed the boundaries of the different kingdoms, with an express reference to the children of Israel; and that he had assigned to Canaan, that accursed son of Noah, and to his posterity, the land which he had marked out for his chosen people, and which they, in pursuance of his will, were now about to possess^a. And, with respect to themselves in particular, he had conducted them with astonishing kindness and condescension from their first entrance into the wilderness to that present moment.

His words on that occasion will naturally lead us to consider

I. God's regard for his people

God has chosen his people from eternity

[This is the first idea which arises from their being called "the *lot* of his inheritance." The land of Canaan was to be divided by lot, that God might *choose* and appoint the inheritance of every tribe. Thus he had *chosen* them out of all the nations upon earth, not because they were more numerous or more holy than others (for they were the fewest of any, and, from first to last, a stiff-necked people) but simply of his own sovereign will and pleasure: "he loved them, because he would love them^b."

And is it not in the same sovereign way that he has chosen us? Has he not "loved us with an everlasting love," even before the foundation of the world^c, and called us of his own purpose and grace, without any respect to our works either past or future^d? Surely to every one of Christ's disciples must it be said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you^e."]]

He esteems them as his peculiar property

[All things, in some sense, belong to the Christian^f; but his hereditary portion is distinguished by him from all other lands as that to which he has a peculiar claim. Thus the whole universe belongs to him who formed it; but his people

^a Ver. 7, 8.

^b Deut. vii. 6—8. and x. 14, 15. When he first revealed his choice of them, they not only did not exist, but, *humanly speaking*, it was impossible they ever should exist, Gen. xvii. 16—19.

^c Jer. xxxi. 3. and Eph. i. 4.

^d 2 Tim. i. 9.

^e John xv. 16.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 22.

people are "his portion," and his "peculiar treasure^g;" he has set them apart for that purpose^h; and he considers them in this viewⁱ. They are to him like the first-ripe fig^k, which is seized with avidity as a precious morsel, and is devoured as soon as ever it is plucked from the tree^l.]

He expects a revenue of glory from them

[God is *passively* glorified even by those who are the farthest from any design to honour him. But he has formed his people that they may *actively* promote his glory in the world^m. Were it not for these, he would soon be forgotten upon earth; nor would receive any more glory from fallen man than he does from the apostate angels. But these confess him with their lips, and honour him in their lives. In this view therefore they are dear unto him, even as an inheritance to its owner, who derives from it his daily subsistence, and an abundant revenue.]

The greatness of his regard for his people appears from

II. His care over them

This is represented in the text as

1. Seasonable

[God, having brought his people out of Egypt, took them under his especial care in the wilderness, where it was not possible for them to subsist by means of human efforts, and where, without such interposition, they must have speedily perished, either from the assaults of noxious animals, or the no less fatal effects of drought and famineⁿ.

And may not this fitly characterize the state of the unregenerate? Surely they are "in a desert land," where is no provision for their souls; and "in a waste-howling wilderness," where nothing but destruction and eternal misery awaits them^o. In this state are men, when God first reveals himself to them, and takes them under his care^p: and it is to his gracious interposition they owe it, that they were not utterly consumed^q.]

2. Extensive

[God "led about" his people from place to place: the pillar and the cloud never forsook them for the space of forty years^r. "He instructed them" by his revealed will, his instituted

^g Exod. xix. 5.

^h Ps. cxxxv. 4.

ⁱ Isai. xxviii. 4. See Bp. Lowth's note upon it.

ⁿ Deut. viii. 15. Jer. ii. 6.

^p This is strongly described under another figure, Ezek. xvi. 4—6.

^q Lam. iii. 22.

^h Lev. xx. 26.

^k Hos. ix. 10.

^m Isai. xliii. 21.

^o Ps. cvii. 4, 5.

^r Exod. xiii. 21, 22.

stituted ordinances, his holy Spirit^s: "he kept them as the apple of his eye" from every danger, so that no evil came to them, unless when it was immediately sent by him as the punishment of their transgressions^t.

Thus does he also take care of all our concerns. He guides us in a mysterious way by his good providence, and causes us, if at any time we are turning to the right hand or to the left, to hear a voice behind us saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it^u." He causes the light of his truth to shine into our hearts^x, and reveals even to babes the things which are hid from the wise and prudent^y. And how marvellously does he keep us, insomuch that notwithstanding our warfare has been against all the principalities and powers of hell, "there lacketh not one" of those, who have truly fought under the banners of their Lord^z. Whatever has been wanting, either of direction or support, has been invariably communicated in the hour of need.]

3. Affectionate

[How beautiful an image is here presented to our view! Conceive the eagle fluttering over her young to shew them how to use their wings, and stirring them up from their nest in order that they may attempt to fly, and darting under them with incredible swiftness, if she perceive them unequal to the task, in order to bear them up again to their nest on her own wings: what a picture does this give us of the assiduity and tenderness with which God instructed his people in the wilderness! And how admirably does it illustrate his care of *us*! Strange to say, he has taught us by his own example; for he has become a man, that he might shew us how man ought to walk. He has also stimulated us by his Spirit, when we have been backward to exert the feeble powers we possessed. And, if at any time he has seen us ready to fall, with what alacrity has he come to our aid, and borne us, as it were, on his own pinions to a place of safety! Thus has he trained us for high and heavenly flights, and, with inexpressible tenderness, watched over us for good.]

4. Unrivalled

[Not one among the gods of the heathen rendered him any assistance in the preservation of the people. All that God wrought, he wrought "alone^a."

And who is he that can pretend to rivalry with God in the care of *us*? Yea, who is there that can claim the smallest share in his honour? who has taught us? who fed us? who kept

^s Neh. ix. 19, 20.

^u Isai. xxx. 21.

^y Matt. xi. 25.

^t Ib. ver. 21.

^x 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^z Numb. xxxi. 49.

^a Deut. i. 31.

kept us? Many indeed, as Moses was, have been instruments in God's hands: but, of themselves, they contributed no more than the rod of Moses, or than the rams' horns in the fall of Jericho. God is the sole "author of every good and perfect gift^b;" and to him alone must all the glory of our salvation be referred^c.]

INFER

1. How fixed and fervent should be our love to Christ^d!
2. How simple and entire should be our dependence on him^e!
3. How active and uniform should be our zeal in his service^f!

^b James i. 17.

^c 1 Cor. i. 31.

^d It was CHRIST who led his people through the wilderness. Compare Exod. xxiii. 20, with 1 Cor. x. 9. and Heb. xi. 26: and doubtless he is the preserver of his people now, Eph. i. 22, 23.

^e Prov. iii. 3—5.

^f 1 Sam. xii. 24.

DLVI. PRESERVATION FROM SIN MORE DESIRABLE THAN DELIVERANCE FROM AFFLICTION.

John xvii. 15. *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*

WE admire the solicitude which a dying parent expresses for the future and eternal welfare of his children—

Nor can we easily shake off the concern, which such a spectacle creates in our minds—

Such a scene, but incomparably more affecting, is here presented to our view—

The Saviour of the world was unmindful of his own impending sorrows—

And was altogether occupied with the concerns of his church and people—

Having given his last instructions to his disciples, he poured out his soul in prayer for them—

One of the principal subjects of his prayer is specified in the text—

We shall consider

I. Why he did not pray for their removal from the world

He had just declared that the world hated his disciples—

Hence we might suppose that he should wish them to be taken out of the world—

And many reasons might have been urged by him to enforce such a request

[God had often taken away his beloved people in a signal manner^a—

He speaks of a sudden removal in evil times as a favour to them^b—

He would hereby manifest his indignation against the world for crucifying his Son—

And our Lord might then have carried his disciples with him as trophies—

Nor can we doubt but that such a measure would have been extremely pleasing to his disciples—]

But on the whole such a petition would have been inexpedient

1. On account of the world

[The disciples were to be the instructors of mankind^c—

And to be living examples of true piety^d—

They were also to intercede on behalf of their fellow-creatures—

But, if they were taken away together with our Lord, their commission could not be executed—

And the world would lose the benefit of their instructions and prayers—

What an inconceivable loss would this have been both to Jews and Gentiles!—

Yea, in what a state of ignorance should we ourselves have been at this moment!—]

2. On God's account

[The disciples were to be, like the dispossessed Gadarene, monuments of God's mercy^e—

They were to exemplify in their own persons the all-sufficiency of divine grace under every situation—

They were to be instruments also whereby the eternal counsels of the Deity were to be accomplished—

Their removal therefore would have robbed God himself of his glory—]

3. On

^a Heb. xi. 5. 2 Kings ii. 11.

^c Matt. xxviii. 19.

^b Isai. lvii. 1.

^d Matt. v. 14.

^e Luke viii. 39.

3. On account of the disciples themselves

[They would have been glad to have accompanied their Lord—

But it would not have been for their advantage at that time—

Their reward was to be proportioned to their labours and sufferings^f—

If they had been taken away at that time they had done but little for God—

Consequently they would not have possessed so bright a crown as they now do—

How glad are they *now* that their abode on earth was prolonged!—]

The request which our Lord offered for them was far better

II. Why he prayed that they might be kept from the evil of it

Satan is by way of eminence called “the evil one”—

He is incessantly plotting the destruction of God’s chosen people^g—

And our Lord might have respect to their preservation from him^h—

But he rather refers to the moral evil that is in the world—

And there was good reason why he should pray for their deliverance from *that*

1. The temptations they would have to encounter were innumerable

[Their poverty might beget impatience and discontent—

Their persecutions might provoke them to retaliation and revenge—

Their incessant danger of a violent death might tempt them to apostasy—

They were to have innumerable trials from without, and from within—

How needful then was it that they should have an almighty keeper!—]

2. They

^f 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^g 1 Pet. v. 8.

^h Ἐκ τῆς πονηρίας—Satan is often called ὁ πονηρὸς, Eph. vi. 16. and 1 John v. 18.

2. They were utterly unable of themselves to withstand the smallest temptation

[The disciples were altogether men of like passions with ourselves—

Nor had they any more sufficiency in themselves than the weakest of us ⁱ—

The most confident of them fell, as soon as he boasted of his strength ^k—

Almighty power was *then*, as well as *now*, necessary to keep any man from falling ^l—

How kind then was our Lord's solicitude to interest his Father in their behalf!—]

3. Their fall would be attended with the most pernicious consequences

[It would open the mouths of their adversaries, and cause them to blaspheme ^m—

It would utterly destroy all hopes of success in their own ministry—

And, even if they should be recovered, and saved at last, they would be deprived of a great part of their reward ⁿ—

How necessary then, and how gracious was our Lord's request!—]

INFER

1. How unlike are the generality of men to Christ!

[Christ, when he foresaw the trials his disciples would endure, did not deprecate one—

His thoughts were occupied only about their eternal interests—

We, on the contrary, are more intent on our present ease—

In seasons of deep affliction we lose sight of the ends for which our trials are sent—

And are ready to wish for death, only that we may be freed from our present troubles—

Even good men have sometimes fainted thus in the day of adversity ^o—

But let us learn from the example of our Lord and Saviour—

Let us chiefly deprecate the incursions of sin—

Let us remember that there is no evil to be compared with *that*—

And let us welcome any affliction which may help to purge us from our dross—]

2. What

ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^l Jude 24, 25.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 15.

^k Matt. xxvi. 33, 35, 74.

^m 2 Sam. xii. 14.

^o 1 Kings xix. 4. Job iii. 21.

2. What a mercy is it that we have a gracious advocate in heaven!

[We often “know not what to ask for as we ought”—

And are ready to offer up such foolish petitions as the two disciples once did ^p—

But we may commit our requests to our mediator and intercessor—

And through him we shall be sure to obtain such blessings as we need—

The prayer offered in the garden prevailed for all his disciples—

And it yet prevails for all who believe on his name ^q—

Every moment of our preservation from sin is an answer to that prayer—

Nor will God cease to answer it even to the remotest period of time ^r—

Let us then be thankful that we have such an advocate with the Father—

Let us labour most for that, which he saw to be so necessary for us—

And let us offer for ourselves the petitions which he presented to God on our behalf—]

^p Mark x. 37.

^q John xvii. 20.

^r 2 Thess. iii. 3.

DLVII. CHRISTIANITY INTENDED TO PROMOTE OUR HAPPINESS.

John xv. 11. *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

THOUGH every possible perfection was exhibited in its brightest colours in the person of our Lord, yet the most striking feature of his character was benevolence—Like the sun in its course, he diffused blessings wherever he went, and laboured with indefatigable zeal to promote the good of mankind—By his discourses as well as by his miracles he sought to advance the happiness of his followers—In the passage before us he assures his disciples that this was the one end of the instructions he had given them—That we may improve this gracious declaration, let us enquire

I. What things he had spoken to them

We

We do not apprehend that he refers to his discourses in general, but to the things which he had been just uttering—

The *doctrinal* part of what he had spoken related to their union with him

[He illustrates their union with him by the similitude of a vine and its branches; and informs them that their fruitfulness in good works depended entirely upon their receiving of grace from him ^a—This is the most sublime, and the most important doctrine of our holy religion—It is, alas! too commonly overlooked even by those who think themselves well versed in the truths of Christianity—It does not so much as enter into the mind of Christians in general—They have no idea what is meant by an union with the Lord Jesus Christ—They have some general notion that we are to be saved by him; but, in what *manner*, they know not—But this doctrine cannot be too attentively considered, seeing that it is the very corner-stone of our religion, the one means of procuring us an interest in Christ, and the only method by which we can derive any blessings from him—]

The *preceptive* part directed them how to secure the full advantages of that union

[Some might possibly infer from the foregoing representation, that the disciples of Christ were secure by virtue of their union with him, even though they should not exert themselves at all in the way of duty—He therefore cautions his disciples against any such mistake—He bids them to “abide” in him by the continual exercise of faith, and to approve themselves to him by a diligent observance of his commandments ^b—These injunctions mark the duty of all his followers—If on the one hand we must not depend on ourselves, but receive continual supplies of grace out of his fulness; so neither on the other hand are we to be supine as though we had nothing to do—We must go to him in fervent prayer; rely upon him with unshaken affiance; and labour to serve him with our whole hearts—]

After having delivered these instructions our Lord condescended to declare

II. For what end he spake them

The slightest alteration in our translation of the text will both remove an appearance of tautology, and suggest some very important reflections ^c—

Our

^a Ver. 1—6.

^b Ver. 4. 10.

^c Construe *ἐν ἑμῷ* with *ἡ χάρις ἡ ἐμὴ*.

Our Lord desired to confirm the joy that he and his disciples mutually communicated and received

[Our Lord rejoiced exceedingly in his disciples, even as a bridegroom over his bride^d—His delight in all his people is as great as language can possibly express^e—As a mother forgets her pangs when she beholds her first-born, so is our Lord satisfied with the travail of his soul, when he beholds those whom he has redeemed with his blood^f—The prospect of saving them was his great support when he endured all the shame and misery of crucifixion^g—Now, if his disciples should turn back from the faith, his soul can have no more pleasure in them^h—But he is not willing to resign this happiness, and to feel all the painful sensations which their apostasy would occasion—He wept even over his blood-thirsty enemies; how much more would his soul be filled with anguish if any of his elect were left to perish?—To guard effectually against this calamity, he shewed to his disciples, and left on record for our instruction, both the privilege and the duty of all his followers—

As he rejoices in his disciples, so do they in him—It is the most distinguishing feature of true “Christians, that they rejoice in Christ Jesusⁱ”—Some are so highly favoured that they rejoice in him with an unspeakable and glorified joy^k—Nor would Jesus wish them ever to lose that joy—He would rather that what they now possess should be perfected in heaven—But, alas! how would it all vanish in an instant, if by any means they should be “moved from their stedfastness!”—That they might never thus “cast away the rejoicing of their hope,” but “hold it firm unto the end,” and finally “obtain a full reward,” he opened to them whatever might conduce to the comfort of their minds or the encouragement of their souls—]

His instructions were admirably calculated to promote this end

[What could be more encouraging to his disciples at that time, or indeed at any time, than to know that there was a fulness of grace treasured up for them in him?—What more consoling than to know that they were united to him as branches to a vine?—How trivial would they think any losses that they might sustain, or any trials they might endure, when they had such provision and security in Christ Jesus!—The caution also that was given them would of necessity operate

^d Isai. lxii. 5. See other figurative representations, Luke xv.

^e Isai. lxy. 18, 19. Zeph. iii. 17.

[4, 9, 24.

^f Isai. liii. 11.

^g Heb. xii. 2.

^h Heb. x. 38.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 3.

^k 1 Pet. i. 8.

operate to make them watchful—Thus would they be preserved both from open and secret declensions, and “be to their Lord for a praise, and for an everlasting name that should not be cut off¹”—]

INFER

1. How erroneous is the idea that religion tends to make us melancholy!

[A religious person may have a constitution that inclines to melancholy as well as any other person—Or he may be rendered melancholy by mistaken views of religion—But let not the blame in either of these cases attach to religion—We are assured that the gospel, so far from producing such an effect, is “glad tidings of great joy to all people”—it enjoins us all to “rejoice in the Lord always”—And, where it is best understood, and most experienced, namely, in heaven, the most exalted joy abounds universally without the smallest intermission—Let then this prejudice be for ever banished—And let Christians be careful so to walk in delightful fellowship with Jesus, as to shew to the world that his yoke is easy and his burthen light—]

2. How precious ought the scriptures to be in our eyes!

[It is in them that Jesus, being dead, yet speaketh to us—And if we will attend to his instructions, they will “make us wise unto salvation”—The intent of every word he there utters, is, to secure us to himself, and to make us eternally happy with himself in heaven—Why then do we not love the scriptures more?—Why do we give such a decided preference to books of human composition, yea, perhaps to plays, or novels, or the common publications of the day?—Let us no longer treat with such indignity that sacred volume—“Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom^m”—And let us like the prophet, eat it, that it may be the joy and rejoicing of our heartⁿ—Especially let us regard what it speaks of our union with the living vine—Let us seek to be ingrafted into Christ; that, deriving sap and nourishment from him, we may be fitted for every good work, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal—]

¹ Isai. lv. 13.

^m Col. iii. 16.

ⁿ Jer. xv. 16.

DLVIII. CHRIST'S DILIGENCE IN SERVING GOD.

John iv. 34. *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

OUR blessed Lord throughout his whole life, was the most illustrious pattern of condescension to man and of fidelity to God. Both these dispositions were eminently displayed in the history before us. Notwithstanding he was already exhausted with a long and fatiguing journey, he had been labouring for the salvation of a most abandoned adulteress: and when urged to intermit his exertions for a little while in order to recruit his strength by some necessary refreshment, he declared, that food was not so delightful to a famished body, as the prosecuting of the great ends of his ministry was to his soul.

From his words we shall take occasion to

I. Consider our Lord's example

Jesus, in his human and mediatorial capacity, was the Father's servant. And the work assigned him was, to reveal in a more perfect manner the will of God, and to save mankind by his own obedience unto death.

In this work he engaged

1. With fervent affection

[Nothing could exceed the delight with which he *undertook* this arduous task^a; nothing the zeal with which he *accomplished* it^b. Whether we view his private addresses to God^c, or his public ministrations among men^d, we shall see that in him was that prophecy accomplished, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up^e."]

2. With indefatigable diligence

[From the commencement of his ministry to the end of it not a day was unemployed. Frequently, after having laboured all the day, he spent the night in prayer, and resumed his labours with the returning light. Like the sun in the firmament, he proceeded in one steady course through all the cities, towns, and villages; nor ever ceased from his work, till he could say, "It is finished."]

3. With

^a Ps. xl. 7. 8.

^b Luke xii. 50.

^c Heb. v. 7.

^d He was filled with joy at the least prospect of success, ver. 35. and he grieved and wept when he could not succeed, Mark iii. 5. Luke xix. 41.

^e John ii. 17.

3. With undaunted resolution

[What "continual opposition" did he endure! He was truly "a sign spoken against," or a butt of contradiction^f. There was not any thing however perverse, scandalous or contemptuous, but his ears were assailed with it from day to day. From the very first discourse he uttered till the hour of his crucifixion, his enemies never ceased to seek his life^g. Yet did he persevere in the face of every danger, and at last complete his obedience, by surrendering up his life upon the cross.]

That we may profit from this great example, we will

II. Propose it for your imitation

We also have a work to do for God

[Our work is great; but O! how different from that which was committed to our Lord! We have not to satisfy the demands of justice, or to endure the wrath due to sin: blessed be God! *that* was the Redeemer's work; and it has been finished by him on our behalf. The work which we have to do is to believe in Christ^h, and, from a sense of his love to us, to devote ourselves unreservedly to his serviceⁱ.]

Let us then engage in it

1. Heartily

[*"Whatever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our might^k."* A lukewarm service is unacceptable, yea, hateful, to God^l. Let us then first labour to know the will of God, and then endeavour to do it with our whole hearts. Let us be "fervent in spirit, while we serve the Lord^m."]

2. Uniformly

[It is not an occasional act of zeal that will please God, but a steady, conscientious, uniform discharge of our duty. Our spirit, alas! is often faint; and even, when "the spirit is willing, our flesh is weak." But we must counteract our sloth, and "give all diligence to make our calling and election sureⁿ."]

3. Courageously

[We shall surely meet with reproach and persecution, if we set ourselves in earnest to serve the Lord^o. But let us "remember him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself^p." Woe be to us if we draw back through the fear of man^q. We must hate, not only father and mother, but

^f Luke ii. 34.

^l Rom. xii. 1.

^m Rom. xii. 11.

^p 1 Pet. xii. 3.

John xi. 8.

^k Eccl. ix. 10.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 10.

^h John vi. 29.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 15, 16.

^o 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^q Heb. x. 38.

but even our own life also, if we would be Christ's disciples^r. Let us then "take up our cross daily" after Christ's example, and "suffer with him, in order that we may be also glorified together^s."

ADDRESS

1. Those who are unconcerned about the work of God

[Has not God appointed you a work to do; an ought you not to have begun it long ago? Is it expedient to leave it to a dying hour? What if you should die before it is finished? O, begin instantly; for the "night cometh, wherein no man can work."]

2. Those who do his work deceitfully

[God has pronounced such persons accursed, no less than if they did nothing for him^t. His service must be your "meat" and drink; the joy of your souls, and the business of your lives. See then that ye "approve yourselves to God as servants that need not be ashamed^u."]

3. Those who are in a measure conformed to their Saviour's image

[Bless your God, who has thus far enabled you to serve him. But O! think how much you fall short of your heavenly pattern! Forget then what is behind, and press forward for that which is before you^x: so shall you in due season "rest from your labours," and be welcomed as good and faithful servants to the joy of your Lord^y.]

^r Luke xiv. 26.

^s Rom. viii. 17.

^t Jer. xlviii. 10.

^u 2 Tim. ii. 15.

^x Phil. iii. 13—15.

^y Matt. xxv. 21.

DLIX. CHRIST'S DILIGENCE IN BENEFITING MAN.

Acts x. 38. *Who went about doing good.*

THERE are many principles in the human heart, that are capable of calling forth all the energy of our minds, and all the exertion of our bodies: but it is to be lamented that these principles, being evil in their nature, are, for the most part, destructive in their tendency. Ambition and the love of filthy lucre have operated in every age to the production of efforts that have excited the wonder and admiration of the world. But rarely has such zeal
been

been found on the side of virtue. One however has appeared on earth whose only object was to do good ; and whose labours were never equalled by mortal man. He was steady and uniform in his course, like the sun in its orbit ; and, like that bright luminary, diffused the richest blessings wherever he came. This man was Jesus of Nazareth ; of whom the apostle justly says in our text, " He went about doing good."

We shall

I. Confirm this record from the history of Jesus

That we may contract our subject within proper limits, we will confine our attention to three things, that are peculiarly worthy of notice :

1. His condescension

[The great and mighty of the earth, however disposed to benefit mankind, are almost inaccessible to the poor ; who must come often, and wait long, and get richer persons for their advocates, and, after all, be dismissed without having obtained the full object of their wishes. But Jesus gave liberty to all to come unto him : their poverty did not excite his contempt ; nor the loathsomeness of their disorders his disgust. He suffered them to throng him on every side, and to touch him. Not even their moral depravity caused him to stand aloof from them. On the contrary, he sought out the poorest, the most miserable, and the most depraved ; as though he had determined to honour those most, whom the rest of the world most disregarded and despised.]

2. His diligence

[From the time that our Lord entered on his ministry to the very hour of his crucifixion, there was not a single day, wherein he was not actively engaged in doing good both to the bodies and the souls of men. " It was his very meat and drink to do the will of God " in this respect. He staid not at home that persons might come to him ; but he himself went through all cities, towns, and villages, in order to administer instruction and comfort to " those who lay in darkness and the shadow of death." Sometimes when he had spent the whole night in prayer he would return to his labours, without regarding the calls of nature for rest and refreshment ; inso-much that his friends were ready to blame him as transported with zeal beyond all the bounds of reason and propriety^a.

The scope of every thing that he either said or did, was to benefit

^a Mark iii. 21. "Οτι ἰξίση, see Doddridge in loc.

benefit mankind. Whether his discourses savoured of affection or severity, and whether his miracles were more or less benevolent in their immediate aspect, his design was invariably the same; namely, to prepare men for the reception of his truth, and the enjoyment of his salvation^b.]

3. His self-denial

[It was no small self-denial that he exercised in undergoing so many labours, and submitting to so many privations, even of food to eat, and of "a place where to lay his head." But there was another species of self-denial, far more painful in its nature, and distressing in its operation, which yet he had to endure every day and hour. In the midst of all his exertions for the good of men, his words were made a ground of cavil and dispute; his condescension was interpreted as a participation in the vilest crimes: and his very miracles were construed into a confederacy with the devil. This was the way in which his benevolence was constantly requited. His unwearied labours for the honour of God, and the benefit of mankind, procured him only the reputation of an impostor, a blasphemer, a daemoniac. Yet under all these circumstances, and well knowing that, instead of being improved by time, they would terminate in his death, he persevered in seeking the salvation of his very enemies, and at last "gave his own life a ransom for them."]

It being needless to confirm this record by any further testimonies, we shall

II. Deduce from it some important observations

Here also we must be content to notice only two or three things out of multitudes that obtrude themselves upon our minds.

1. The divine mission of Jesus is clear and indisputable

[Our blessed Lord frequently appealed to his works as the clearest evidence of his Messiahship^c: and indeed they were so in a variety of views. They were precisely such as had been predicted by the prophets as characteristic of the Messiah's reign; and therefore they must be considered as establishing his claim to that office. Besides, they were such as no man could work unless God were with him. Now can we conceive it

^b His menaces in Matt. xxiii. were to reclaim the Pharisees: and his suffering the devils to destroy the swine, was to shew how great a mercy it was to be delivered from their power.

^c John x. 38.

it possible that God should conspire with an impostor to deceive mankind? That he might in some particular instances permit something preternatural to be wrought for the hardening of an obstinate and incorrigible opposer, is possible enough^d: but the nature and number of Christ's miracles, together with the scope and tendency of all his discourses, shews that this idea is wholly inadmissible in the case before us. Nor indeed can it be imagined, that a person whose character and conduct resembled that of Christ, should, without any other prospect than that of infamy in life, and misery in death, carry on an imposture for the sole purpose of deceiving and ruining mankind.

Let us then behold the life of Jesus, and doubt his Messiahship if we can.]

2. Jesus is at this instant both able and willing to "do good" to us

[When Jesus left this world, he did not cease to possess almighty power: on the contrary, he began to exercise it in the most unlimited extent. He still continued to work miracles through the instrumentality of his apostles. Was Eneas healed? "Eneas," says the apostle, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole^e." Jesus Christ himself, many years after his ascension, told his beloved disciple, that he had "the keys of hell and of death," or, in other words, the power over both the visible and invisible world. Yea, he comes amongst us as truly by the preaching of his gospel, as ever he did among the Jews by his bodily presence: he comes to seek out the most miserable and unworthy objects, that on them he may bestow all the blessings of grace and glory. All of us may have access to him, and pour our complaints into his bosom, and obtain from him the mercies we stand in need of. If only we can by faith touch, as it were, the hem of his garment, our most inveterate corruptions shall be healed. Let us but be thoroughly persuaded of this truth, and "virtue shall come forth from him to heal us all,"]

3. Every true Christian will resemble Christ in doing good

[Though some things which our Lord both said and did, are not proper for our imitation, because they were peculiar to his office, yet many things were done by him on purpose that they might be imitated^f; and, in respect of the general tenor of

^d This was the fact with regard to Pharaoh's magicians. They could bring *some* plagues, but not remove *any*: so careful was God to shew that "whereinsoever his enemies dealt proudly, he was above them."

^e Acts ix. 34.

^f John xiii. 14, 15.

of his conduct, it is our bounden duty to follow him ^g. A delight in doing good must above all things evidence itself in all his people. We might as well think ourselves his disciples while committing the grossest crimes, as while living in an habitual want of benevolent affections. Our Lord himself has warned us, that the issue of the final judgment will depend on this very point. If for his sake, we have abounded in every good word and work, we shall be received by him with plaudits; but if not, we shall be banished from him with tokens of his heaviest displeasure^h.

Let all of us then approve ourselves his true disciples by our resemblance to him in condescension, diligence, and self-denial. By nothing will he be so much glorified, or our sincerity evinced, as by this. O that we might all be henceforth known by this character, *They go about doing good!*]

^g 1 John ii. 6.

^h Matt. xxv. 34—46.

DLX. CHRIST'S CONDESCENSION.

John xiii. 12—15. *So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me, Master, and Lord: and ye say well: for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

THERE are some fanciful interpreters of scripture, who find mysteries in every thing; while others, who affect a supereminent regard for man's reasoning powers, banish mysteries altogether, and say, "Where mystery begins religion ends." These are equally distant from the true method of interpreting the sacred oracles; and are almost equally adverse to the interests of religion: the former bring the truth into contempt; the latter utterly discard it. The proper medium evidently is, to follow the direction which the scripture itself gives us. The fundamental doctrines of the gospel are professedly mysterious, even "the wisdom of God in a mystery." There are many of the historical parts also, to which a mystical interpretation is given by the inspired writers: and, of the

actions of our Lord there are some, into which a deeper insight is given us than into others; to which therefore we may safely assign a more mysterious import. The action referred to in the text was very significant, and may, with the greatest propriety, be considered

I. As illustrative of his character

[No one can behold Jesus washing his disciples feet, without feeling a reverence for his august character: and the more we contrast his dignity with their meanness, the more are we constrained to admire his condescension and love.

But we shall have a very partial and inadequate view of this action, if we regard it merely as a single and detached instance of humility. To understand it aright, we must see it as exhibiting in a very lively manner his *general* character.

What a beautiful illustration does it give us of *his incarnation!* Behold him laying aside his robes of majesty, and clothing himself in our flesh, and coming, “not to be ministered unto, but to minister” to our guilty race^a!

How aptly does it represent to us the whole tenor of *his life!* From the cradle to the grave his humility was uniformly conspicuous. Born in a stable, and of mean parents, he wrought at the trade of a carpenter till the age of thirty: then submitting to baptism, as though he had been a sinner, he entered on his ministry, and prosecuted it in the midst of temptations, of want, and ignominy, till his obedience was consummated in the accursed death of the cross. And to all this he condescended for our benefit, for our salvation.

Nor does this action less fitly characterize him in *his present exalted state*. “Though he is high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly^b,” though “he is that high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, yet will he dwell with him that is of an humble and contrite spirit^c.” There is no one upon earth so mean and vile, but this exalted Saviour is ready to visit him, to dwell with him, and to minister unto him^d: nor is there any office which he will not gladly execute for the good of our souls.

Even the character he will sustain *among the glorified saints in heaven* is also represented in this significant action: for though he will ever be the head of his people, yet will he gird himself as their servant, and minister unto them in the most humble and affectionate manner, while they are partaking of the feast which his heavenly Father has provided for them^e.

How admirable does this action appear when considered in this

^a Phil. ii. 6—8.

^b Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

^c Isai. lvii. 15.

^d John xiv. 23.

^e Luke xii. 37.

this extensive view! and in what endearing light does it exhibit our blessed Lord!]

But this action is further to be considered

II. As emblematical of his work

[Our blessed Lord himself shews us that there was a mystical signification in what he did to his disciples: for, when he had washed them, he asked them, Know ye what I have done unto you? for which question there could have been no room if there had been nothing mysterious in the transaction. He also said to them, "Ye are clean; but not all;" because the traitor, though washed equally with the rest, was yet under the power and guilt of all his sins^f.

So particularly were the circumstances of this event ordered and overruled, that they marked in the most striking manner *the nature, the necessity, and the excellency* of that work which Christ came to accomplish.

Its nature is declared: for he came to wash men from the guilt of sin by his blood, and from the pollution of it by his Spirit. In this very view the prophet spake of him long before as a fountain that should be opened to cleanse men from their sin and uncleanness^g: and the apostles represent the great end of his incarnation and death to have been, "to sanctify and cleanse the church with the washing of water, by the word^h."

Peter's inconsiderate, though well-meant, opposition to his Master's will, gave occasion for that solemn declaration, whereby our Lord has made known *the universal necessity* of submitting to him, and to the method prescribed by him for the salvation of our souls. His words may be applied to every child of man, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me:" there is no other way whereby we can obtain a saving interest in Christ: we must be washed in his blood; and we must be sanctified by his Spirit: "he came not by water only, but by water and bloodⁱ;" and we must experience the virtue of both, if ever we would participate the blessings of his kingdom.

The vehemence of the same loquacious disciple was yet further overruled for the making known *the excellency* of Christ's work. When told that he *must* submit, he exclaimed, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Our Lord informed him, that, as a person who has been bathing, needs no more than to wash his feet from the defilement they have contracted in coming from the bath; so they who have been washed by his blood and Spirit, need a partial purification indeed every day and hour, on account of the defilement they contract

^f Ver. 11.

^g Zech. xiii. 1.

^h Eph. v. 25, 26.

ⁱ 1 John v. 6.

contract every step they take in this polluted world ; but they never will need the same universal cleansing as before^k, seeing that they are purified from all their former guilt, and are “ renewed in the spirit of their minds : ” in respect of such an universal washing, “ he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified^l. ”]

We shall have a very incomplete view of this action, unless we still further consider it

III. As explanatory of his will

[A declaration to this effect is made by our Lord himself. He tells us that he intended, in what he now did, to set an example to all his disciples ; and to teach them, that they should *not affect a superiority above each other ; that they should rather delight themselves in all offices of love ; and that they should account nothing too humiliating or self-denying, if by any means they might promote each other's welfare.*

The disciples had been disputing which of them should be the greatest : and he had told them, that they ought not to resemble the Gentiles, who loved to have pre-eminence, and were applauded in proportion as they gained an ascendant over others : on the contrary, *they* should measure their honours by the degree in which they stooped for the good of others, and by the exertions they made in administering to their fellow-creatures^m. How happy would it have been for the church, if all its ministers, and all its members, had attended to this rule ! How happy if, instead of being “ lords over God's heritage,” they had submitted themselves one to another in the fear of Godⁿ, and striven only, who should be least of all and servant of all !”

To abound in offices of love is an ambition infinitely more worthy of the followers of Christ. Love is the fulfilling of the law : love is that which above all things characterizes the true Christian : love is the image of God upon the soul : love is the antepast of heaven. To inculcate the necessity of love, to exemplify it in his own conduct, to impress it on the hearts of his disciples, and to stir them up to a holy imitation of his example, were the more immediate objects of our Lord's solicitude : nor will our admiration of his conduct profit us at all, if it have not this effect on our hearts and lives.

In many instances much self-denial is required, in order to impart any substantial benefit to our fellow-creatures. The visiting of the sick, especially when poverty and disease combine to render our access to them unpleasant, is an irksome task to them whose hearts are not penetrated with love to God and man. This indeed is less felt when humanity stimulates

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^k Ver. 10.

^l Heb. x. 14.

^m Luke xxii. 24—27

ⁿ 1 Pet. v. 3. 5.

us to assist in the recovery of their bodies; but when we have no view but only to benefit their souls, *then* to instruct them, *then* to pray with them, *then* to repeat our visits, when perhaps we see scarce any prospect of doing them good, or any desire in them to receive benefit; and *then* to persevere in our endeavours, when they madly say, like Peter, "Thou shalt never wash my feet;" *this* is the love we are called to manifest; and in comparison of this, the most liberal bestowment of alms is as nothing: it is far easier to give away thousands of silver and gold, than to spend our lives in such acts of kindness to man, and of zeal for God. But *this* is to "love others as Christ has loved us," and "to do to others as Christ has done to us:" and to exercise less love than this, is to "love in word and in tongue only, instead of loving in deed and in truth."^o]

To contemplate the whole, our Lord suggests a suitable
IMPROVEMENT

[It is intimated that *some know these things, but do them not*; but that *others both "know and do them."* To both of these characters we would present a distinct address.

How lamentable is it that any should know the character of Christ, and profess to experience the benefits of his salvation, while yet they bear no resemblance to him in their spirit and conduct! Alas! whatever they may imagine, "they have no part with him;" without a conformity to him in the unfeigned exercise of love, we are only as sounding brass, or as tinkling cymbals^p.

To those who delight in every office of love we say, "Happy are ye:" for it is a most unquestionable truth, that the more lowly we are in our own eyes, the higher we are in God's; and the more we delight in doing good to others, the more richly will the blessing of God rest upon ourselves^q.]

^o 1 John iii. 17, 18.

^p 1 Cor. xiii. 1. Jam. i. 27.

^q Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

DLXI. CHRIST A MEEK AND LOWLY TEACHER.

Matt. xi. 29. *Learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

EVERY office which Christ sustains in the œconomy of redemption, is replete with encouragement to sinful man. His sufficiency as our great High Priest to make

atonement for us, and his power as our King to subdue our enemies, are subjects of frequent meditation, and sources of unspeakable comfort, to the true Christian. His prophetic office, especially as exercised towards ourselves, is less considered by Christians in general, though it is equally necessary for us, and no less conducive to our eternal welfare. In a preceding verse our Lord has told us, that none can know the Father, except they to whom the Son should reveal him; and, in the words before us, he invites all to come and learn of him the mysterious truths, which, though already recorded in the written word, cannot be apprehended aright, unless he unfold them to us, and enable us to understand them.

In these words we may discern

I. Our duty

Christ having undertaken to teach us the way of safety, and the way of duty, we should learn of him

1. With the teachableness of children

[Children receive with the most implicit submission whatever their teachers tell them. Thus should we learn of Christ: we should not bring our own preconceived notions to the scriptures, or presume to try the mysteries of revelation at the bar of our own corrupt reason; but we should believe whatever God has spoken, and receive it simply on the authority of the speaker. Nor should the opinions of the wisest philosopher be of any weight with us, if they be clearly contrary to the voice of inspiration ^a.]

2. With the diligence of students

[They who have a thirst for knowledge, are almost constantly employed in deep thought, and laborious investigation. Nor do they account any pains too great, if only they can gain that eminence and distinction, which superior attainments will ensure. Thus should we be occupied in pursuit of divine knowledge; reading the word, "searching into it as for hidden treasures," meditating upon it day and night, and praying over it for divine illumination. While others are careful, and cumbered about many things, we should be sitting at the feet of Jesus ^b, and embracing all opportunities of religious instruction, whether in public or in private.]

3. With the obedience of devoted followers

[Earthly knowledge may be merely speculative: divine knowledge *must be* practical; it is of no use at all, any further than

^a Isai. viii. 20.

^b Luke x. 39—42.

than it purifies the heart and renews the life. Whatever we find to be the mind and will of God, that we must do without hesitation, and without reserve. As the reasonings of men are to be disregarded when opposed to the declarations of God, so are the maxims of men to be set at nought, when by adopting them we should violate a divine command. One single word, confirmed with **THUS SAITH THE LORD**, should operate more powerfully to the regulating of our faith and practice, than the sentiments and customs of the whole world combined.]

The description which our Lord has given us of his own character, shews what abundant provision is made for

II. Our encouragement

Our Lord's words are not to be understood as an exhortation to learn meekness and lowliness from his example, but as a reason why we should cheerfully submit ourselves to his teaching. In this view they are very encouraging: they imply that

1. He will condescend to our ignorance

[Those who are proficient in deep knowledge, cannot bear the drudgery of teaching children the first rudiments of language. But Jesus, who is able to instruct the highest archangel, is yet willing to take, as it were, under his tuition the most ignorant of mankind. As, in the days of his flesh, "he spake the word to men as they were able to bear it," so now will he give us "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little." When his own disciples forbade people to bring their children to him, under the idea that his time ought not to be occupied with persons so incapable of benefiting by his instructions, he rebuked them, and desired that all, of whatever age or description, might have the freest access to him^d; being as willing to adapt himself to the capacity of a child as to the more enlarged understandings of the Scribes and Pharisees.]

2. He will bear with our dulness

[Human teachers are but too apt to feel irritation from the stupidity of their disciples. But Jesus, who has infinitely more to bear with than we can have, is ever patient, and ready to renew yet again and again the lessons that he has given us a thousand times. Scarcely any persons can be conceived more dull of understanding than his own disciples, who, after he had been teaching them for nearly four years, were yet ignorant of the necessity of his death, of the ends of his resurrection, and of the spiritual nature of his kingdom. He was constrained

^c Isai. xxviii. 10.

^d Mark x. 13, 14.

constrained sometimes to complain of them in this very view; "Are ye also yet without understanding ^e?" Nevertheless he continued to teach them, till he had initiated them fully into all the mysteries of his kingdom. And thus will he do to the most ignorant of men; he will "open their understandings^f," and "guide them into all truth^g."]

3. He will encourage our feeblest efforts

[It not unfrequently happens, that they who are slow of understanding, are altogether driven to despondency through the impatience of their teachers. But Jesus is all meekness and lowliness: and, however weak our efforts be, provided only they be sincere and humble, he will bless them with a measure of success, and with manifest tokens of his approbation. We may appeal to the experience of all, in confirmation of this truth: who ever sought instruction from him in a way of reading and prayer, without finding his mind gradually opening to an apprehension of the truth? Has not Jesus shewn, if we may so speak, a partiality for the poor and weak, revealing to them what he has hidden from the wise and prudent^h; confounding thereby the wisdom of the wiseⁱ, and securing to himself the glory of his own work? Yes; in reference to the illumination of the mind, as well as to any thing else, we may say, "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory^k."]

But, in addition to the encouragement which his condescension affords us, we have a further inducement to learn of him, from the consideration of

III. Our reward

An attention to the instructions of earthly monitors is productive of no little benefit. But if we diligently learn of Christ, our advantages will be greater than we can well conceive: we shall find benefit to our *souls*; we shall obtain "rest"

1. From the uncertainty of conjecture

[Mankind in general are in a state of doubt respecting the most important of all concerns: though they may assent to the principal truths of Christianity, they feel no assurance respecting them. But those who have learned of Christ, soon attain a full persuasion of the things they have been taught. The scripture speaks of a threefold assurance; an assurance of understanding^l, an assurance of faith^m, and an assurance of hope:

^e Matt. xv. 16.

^f Luke xxiv. 25.

^g John xvi. 13.

^h Matt. xi. 25.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 27.

^k Matt. xii. 20, &

^l Col. ii. 2.

^m Heb. x. 22.

Zech. iv. 10.

hopeⁿ: of all these, the men of this world have no idea: they are ready to speak of such things as marks of daring presumption. But the disciple of Christ has an inward witness of the truths he has learned^o; and knows perfectly that they are not a cunningly devised fable^p. He can venture his soul upon them with as much confidence, as he can recline his weary body upon his bed. He knows in whom he has believed; and that the soul which is committed to Jesus, is safe for ever^q.]

2. From the accusations of conscience

[In spite of men's endeavours to silence the convictions of their conscience, they never can obtain peace but in God's appointed way. But the person that has learned of Christ to rely simply on his blood and righteousness, enjoys a "peace that passeth all understanding." He knows that "the blood of Jesus will cleanse him from all sin," and that "there is no condemnation to the soul that believes in him"——]

3. From the turbulence of passion

[Whatever difference there may be in the natural tempers of men, all have some predominant passion that leads them captive. But the disciple of Christ has a new and more powerful principle infused into his soul^r; by means of which he is enabled to bring into subjection his corrupt appetites, and to mortify those evil dispositions which are such a fruitful source of misery to the unregenerate. This forms the great line of distinction between the Lord's people and others; for, whereas others are led captive by some sin, believers "have not so learned Christ, if they have indeed heard him and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus^s:" on the contrary, "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts^t."]

4. From the fear of death

[Men may brave death on a field of battle; but all, except the true Christian, shrink from it in its more silent and gradual approaches. But Christ purchased for his followers a deliverance from this bondage^u. With respect to them, death has lost its sting: yea, it is counted amongst their richest treasures^x: and they are enabled to look forward to it with pleasure, as the period when all their conflicts will cease, and their joys be consummated for ever^y——]

"Such is the heritage of the servants of the Lord;" and such is the rest that Christ will impart to all who learn of him.]

ADDRESS

ⁿ Heb. vi. 11.

^p 2 Pet. i. 16.

^q Eph. iv. 19—21.

^x 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^o Heb. xi. 13.

^r 2 Tim. i. 12.

^t Gal. v. 24.

1 John v. 10. & iii. 19.

^r Gal. v. 16, 17.

^u Heb. ii. 14, 15.

^y Phil. i. 23.

ADDRESS

[Are there *any* amongst us *that are prosecuting human learning with avidity*? O remember, that the knowledge of Christ infinitely transcends all other knowledge^a, and will bring with it a more certain, and far nobler, recompence. Be persuaded then to devote to it some portion of every day, and the whole of your sabbaths, that you may not only be wise, but “wise unto salvation^a.”

Are there *any that are dejected on account of their own incapacity to learn*? Consider the abilities of your Teacher; and say, whether he be not able to instruct *you*, as well as others? He can make “the blind to see out of obscurity, and out of darkness^b :” yea, he will the more readily exert himself on your behalf, because the excellency of the power displayed in your proficiency will the more evidently appear to be of him^c. Take comfort then, and expect the certain accomplishment of that promise, “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord^d.”]

^a Phil. iii. 8.^a 2 Tim. iii. 15.^b Isai. xxix. 18.^c 2 Cor. iv. 7.^d Hos. vi. 3.

DLXII. CHRIST'S RESIGNATION.

John xii. 27, 28. *Now is my soul troubled : and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour : but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.*

THE sight of one in affliction necessarily produces some emotion of pity in our breasts, if we be not dead to all the feelings of humanity. But if there be majesty in distress, and that majesty be accompanied with consummate goodness, we take a deeper interest in all the circumstances exhibited to our view. Behold then a spectacle, such as the world never saw before, never will see again! a sufferer, infinitely superior to the highest archangel in dignity and worth! a suffering God! Let us draw nigh with reverence, and learn from his own lips

I. The depth of his troubles

Man had not yet touched his body; nor, whatever weight we may give to his apprehension of bodily sufferings, can we suppose that it was *that alone*, or *that chiefly*, which drew forth these bitter complaints.

His

His soul was now enduring the severest agonies

[He particularly says, "Now is my *soul* troubled." If it be asked, What was the source of his troubles? we answer, he was now *sustaining the wrath of God*, and *conflicting with all the powers of darkness*.

It had been foretold that the Father should bruise his Son, and smite him with the sword^b of his inexorable justice. And now the season was come for the accomplishment of these prophecies. The wrath of God was the punishment due to sin: and that wrath Jesus was now enduring: Yes; he was become a curse, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law.

But it had also been foretold that the "Serpent should bruise his heel^d." And he himself had just before said, that the Prince of this world was coming to assault him^e. Satan, when first our Lord entered on his ministry, had made repeated efforts to destroy him^f; and, though foiled and vanquished, he retreated only for a season^g, determining to renew his assaults with increased vigour. This therefore seeming an opportunity peculiarly favourable to his designs, he failed not to improve it. He summoned all his principalities and powers to unite their efforts^h: and O, how desperate was their attack! Our blessed Lord himself, though victorious in the conflict, had almost fainted, if angels had not been sent to succour him from heavenⁱ.]

Under these agonies he was reduced to the greatest embarrassment

[Never was he embarrassed through the persecutions or cruelties of man: but when he endured the wrath of God, and the assaults of Satan, he could not but complain of his accumulated troubles: yea, so was he distressed, that he was at a loss what to say, or what to do. His nature dictated a prayer, which afterwards he saw occasion to revoke. He begged that the cup might pass from him, and that he might be saved from that tremendous hour^k. Nor was this petition in the least degree inconsistent with his fortitude or resignation. It shewed him to be a man; and it was such a petition as he might offer with perfect innocence; seeing that to dread and deprecate the wrath of God is our bounden duty.]

Recovering himself, however, he welcomes his afflictions, and states

II. The

^a Isai. liii. 10. first part.

^b Zech. xiii. 7.

^c Gal. iii. 10, 13.

^d Gen. iii. 15.

^e John xiv. 30. and xii. 31.

^f Luke iv. 2—12.

^g Ib. ver. 13.

^h Col. ii. 15.

ⁱ Matt. iv. 11.

^k Some read the words with an interrogation; thus: "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?" But our translation seems preferable, if we compare the account in Matt. xxvi. 38—42.

II. The grounds of his submission to them

1. It was with a view to those very sufferings that he had come to that hour

[These had been foreseen, when he first engaged to redeem a fallen world^l, and he had then stipulated to bear them for our sakes^m. It was with a view to them that he had assumed our nature, without which he would have been incapable of bearing themⁿ. And throughout the whole of his ministry he had frequently adverted to them as what he should undergo, as soon as his hour was fully come^o. Yea, he had reproved Peter with great severity for attempting to dissuade him from his purpose^p: and had expressed his eager "desire to be baptized with that bloody baptism," being greatly "straitened till it should be accomplished^q." And would he now recede? would he shrink from the trial now it was come upon him? would he rescind his own voluntary engagements, and abandon the work he had undertaken? No: difficult as it was to submit to these sufferings, he determined to endure them, since the purposes of his grace could in no other way be accomplished.]

2. They were necessary for the promoting of his Father's glory.

[This is strongly intimated in the latter petition. The Father's *justice* could not have been so much glorified even in the destruction of the whole human race, as in the sufferings of his only Son: in these it appeared altogether inflexible. And how glorious would be the display of the Father's *love*, when it was seen that he had adopted such a method of restoring man to his favour! Yea, how would every perfection shine forth in this stupendous mystery? Would Jesus then sacrifice the Father's glory to his present feelings? When the Father had already glorified *him* by repeated attestations from heaven, and by so many miracles, would Jesus now draw back, and rob the Father of all the glory that was to accrue to him from this dark and painful dispensation? No, by no means; and therefore he not only acquiesces in the appointment, but even prays, that, whatever he himself might endure, God would glorify his own name.]

This subject is capable of most useful IMPROVEMENT

1. For the awakening of our fears

[These sorrows were the just reward of our sins: and every one on whom sin shall be found must sustain them. Go then, ye who may mock at sin, go follow at your ease the imaginations

^l Isai. liii. 10. latter part.

^m Ps. xl. 7, 8.

ⁿ Heb. ii. 9.

^o Luke xviii. 32, 33.

^p Matt. xvi. 21—23.

^q Luke xii. 50.

tions of your own hearts. But consider, that, "if these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If the curse due to sin so overwhelmed the Lord of glory in the space of one hour, what effect shall it produce on you to all eternity? *Then* no supplication can remove, nor any submission mitigate, our anguish. This, this alone, is the time for prayer. If then we would escape the wrath of Almighty God, let us flee instantly to him, whose blood can cleanse us from the guilt of sin, and whose grace can rescue us from its dominion.]

2. For the encouraging of our hopes

[What do we owe to the adorable Saviour, for that in the hour of his extremity he did not recede? But he saved not himself, that he might save us: "He gave up his own life, that he might ransom us;" and drank, even to the dregs the cup of bitterness, that he might take it out of our hands for evermore. Let all then rest assured, that the debt once discharged by their great surety, shall never be required at their hands, provided they believe in him.]

3. For the regulating of our conduct

[There is no sin in praying for the removal of afflictions, provided we be willing, on the whole, that God's will should be done in preference to our own. But we must desire above all things the glory of God: and cheerfully acquiesce in any dispensation, provided God may be honoured by it.]

^r Luke xxiii. 31.

DLXIII. CHRIST'S PATIENCE UNDER SUFFERINGS.

Heb. xii. 3. *Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself; lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

THINGS are good or evil in this life chiefly by comparison: the happiest of men is unhappy in comparison of Adam in paradise; and the most miserable of men is happy in comparison of those who are in hell. This reflection will be of great service to us in estimating our own state. It is not indeed expedient that we should compare ourselves with those who appear in a more prosperous condition than ourselves (unless for the purposes of humiliation and self-abasement) lest we should be led to envy them, and

to repine at our own lot: but it will be highly advantageous to us frequently to view the wants and sufferings of others, in order to extirpate every murmuring thought, and to stimulate our own souls to gratitude and thanksgiving. A sight of Jesus in particular cannot fail to produce in us the best effects; since all that we are called to endure for his sake, is as nothing in comparison of what he patiently and willingly endured for us.

In the text we have this very direction given us, and for this express purpose. The apostle, in what he wrote for the comfort of the afflicted Hebrews, reminds us

I. That the soul is apt to faint under heavy trials

The people of God are taught to expect trials from an ungodly world; and to make their sufferings an occasion of joy and glorying. But

Even the most eminent saints have fainted under their trials

[In the scriptures we have the weaknesses of God's people as faithfully recorded as their virtues. And there is scarcely a saint who has not on some occasions shewn himself weak as other men. Jacob, in despondency, cried, "All these things are against me^a." Moses, by his wrathful inadvertence provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan^b. Job even cursed the day of his birth, and accused God of cruelty and oppression^c. David said it was in vain to serve God; and called all who had ever testified to the contrary, by the name of liars^d. Elijah, through the dread of Jezebel, begged God to put an end to his life^e. Jeremiah lamented that he had ever been born; and complained that God himself was to him "as a liar, and as waters that fail!" All of these were very distinguished characters, and yet, in circumstances of peculiar trial, lost that composure of mind which it was their duty, and their privilege, to possess.]

And who amongst us has not on many occasions betrayed the same weakness?

[We have borne up with fortitude perhaps against some trials, which have been light and transient; but how have we sustained those which were heavy, complicated, and of long continuance? When our troubles have arisen from those who were

^a Gen. xlii. 36.

^b Numb. xx. 10—12.

^c Job iii. 3. & x. 3. & xvi. 12—14.

^d Ps. lxxiii. 13, 14. & lxxvii. 4, 7, 8, 9. & cxvi. 10, 11.

^e 1 Kings xix. 4.

^f Jer. xv. 10, 18.

were our avowed enemies, we have endured them manfully: but when they have come from a quarter that we did not expect, or from a quarter from whence we had reason to expect nothing but support and consolation, how have we endured them *then*? If some near relative, or a friend that was as our own soul, have been the immediate cause of our affliction, and our enemies have been those of our own household, have we not given way to complaint and murmuring? Yea, have not our very spirits failed by reason of vexation, insomuch that we could find scarce any comfort in life. If we have not been turned from the faith, like those who were afraid to confess Christ^s, have we not been diverted from the path of duty, and been led to manifest a vindictive spirit instead of overcoming evil with good? Let this then suffice to shew us how weak we are, and how much we need the supports and consolations of the gospel.]

But in the text the apostle informs us

II. That a view of Christ's patience under sufferings will afford us most effectual relief

Many are the consolations which the gospel administers by pointing out to us the author, and the intent, of our trials, together with the benefit resulting from them. But there is no source of comfort so great as that which the consideration of Christ's sufferings opens to us.

The contradiction of sinners which Christ endured was wonderful indeed

[Consider *the unreasonableness* with which he was opposed, when, notwithstanding the myriads of miracles that he wrought, his enemies were continually demanding more signs, and pretending a want of evidence as the ground of their unbelief. Consider *the obstinacy* with which he was rejected, when his victory over the devils was ascribed to a confederacy with them; and Lazarus himself was made an object of murderous resentment, because his restoration from the grave was the means of converting some who were more open to conviction. Consider *the malice* with which he was persecuted. Incessantly did his enemies labour to ensnare him, and seek to take away his life. And, when they had a prospect of effecting their purpose, there was no method, however infamous, which they did not use to accomplish their wishes. With what inveteracy did they suborn false witnesses; and, on the failure of that device, compel the judge by clamours and menaces, to give sentence against him! Consider *the cruelty* with which he

^s John xii. 42.

he was put to death. They might, one would have thought, have been satisfied with seeing his back torn, and even plowed up, with scourges : but their cruelty was insatiable ; for, even when he was nailed to the accursed tree, they ceased not to mock and insult him, and to add by their indignities a tenfold poignancy to all his anguish.

Yet, notwithstanding the contradiction of sinners against him was so great and unparalleled, he endured it all with patience, never fainting, never wearied, till he expired under the accumulated load.]

A due consideration of this will keep us from fainting under our sorrows

[*What are our sorrows in comparison of his?* The utmost we have met with is a little contempt and ridicule, or perhaps the loss of some worldly interests or prospects. “ We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin^h ;” and any thing short of that should be deemed unworthy our notice. *How slight are the aggravations of our sufferings in comparison of his!* If we do not deserve such treatment from man, have we not merited infinitely worse from God? But he was altogether spotless ; nor could either men or devils lay any thing to his charge. Perhaps we have endeavoured to do some good to those who now hate and revile us : but he came from heaven for the salvation of them that hated him ; yea, and subjected himself to the power of his enemies, on purpose that he might effect their reconciliation with God. If then he patiently endured such things for *us*, should we faint when called to endure some light afflictions for *him*? Surely we should rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of testifying our love to him, and of approving ourselves faithful to his interests.]

We may IMPROVE this subject

1. For our humiliation

[How should we be ashamed of our readiness to shrink from the cross, and to complain when it is laid upon us! What if we should be called to lay down our lives for Christ, as thousands have been before us? How should we endure *that* trial? “ If we have run with the footmen and they wearied us, how shall we contend with horses? if we be wearied in a land of peace, how shall we do in the swelling of Jordanⁱ? ” Let us remember, that “ he who hateth not his own life, (when it stands in competition with his duty) cannot be Christ’s disciple.” Let us then never fear the face of man^k ; but whenever we are tempted to betray the cause of Christ, let us reflect on the example he has set us, and “ arm ourselves likewise with the same mind^l.”]

2. For

^h Ver. 4. ⁱ Jer. xii. 5. ^k Isai. li. 7, 8, 12, 13. ^l 1 Pet. iv. 1.

2. For our encouragement

[Some variation in our frames we must expect : but we must never suffer a desponding thought to lodge within us. Be it so ; our sufferings are very great : then we are the more conformed to the example of our blessed Lord. And shall not this thought console us ? And if we walk in his steps shall we not soon be with him where he is ? Let us then be content to “ fill up the measure of his sufferings,” and to follow him in his appointed way. Thus shall we, like him, “ be made perfect through sufferings ; and, having suffered with him for a little while, “ be also glorified with him” to all eternity^m.]

^m Rom. viii. 17.

DLXIV. CHRIST INTERCEDING FOR HIS ENEMIES.

Luke xxiii. 34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them : for they know not what they do.*

AS one of the most essential qualifications for a due discharge of the priesthood was, a disposition to “ commiserate those who were *ignorant* and out of the way^a,” so it was the express office of the priest to “ offer sacrifices for *the errors* of the people^b.” Our blessed Lord, who was our great high Priest, shewed himself on all occasions, but more especially in the instance before us, abundantly qualified for the office he had undertaken ; and, in the very hour that he offered himself a sacrifice for sin, he particularly pleaded the cause of those who *ignorantly* “ crucified him as a malefactor^c.”

In discoursing on his words we shall shew

I. In what respects ignorance extenuates the guilt of rejecting Christ

There doubtless have been instances wherein men have known the gospel, and yet refused subjection to it

[The sin against the Holy Ghost seems evidently to include in it a wilful, deliberate, and contemptuous rejection of Christ in opposition to the clearest convictions of our own minds ; and there is every reason to believe that this sin has often

^a Heb. v. 1, 2.

^b Heb. ix. 7.

^c See ver. 33.

often been committed: many also have “sinned wilfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth^d,” and have so “fallen away, as never afterwards to be renewed unto repentance^e,” from whence it is evident that *all* contempt of the gospel does not proceed from ignorance.]

Yet, generally speaking, a rejection of Christ arises from an ignorance of his true character

[This was certainly the case with respect to those who crucified our Lord; the prejudices of their education, together with the mean appearance of our Lord, blinded their eyes, so that they knew not how to acknowledge him as their Messiah. This our Lord himself confessed^f; St. Peter also declared the same^g; and St. Paul expressly says that, “if they had known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory^h.”

And is it not the same with respect to *us*? Would *the profane* person scoff at the followers of the blessed Jesus, or neglect to seek an interest in him, if he knew what a gracious, merciful, loving, and adorable Being he despisedⁱ? Or would *the self-righteous moralist* feel such reluctance to submit to the gospel, if he had any just conceptions of the suitableness and excellency of that salvation which it offered to him? Surely, however this might happen on some occasions, we cannot conceive that it should be a general, or even a common, practice.]

This view of men's conduct certainly extenuates their guilt in rejecting Christ

[We must not imagine that ignorance is a sufficient excuse for sin: for the very petition in the text intimates that, notwithstanding the murderers of Christ knew not what they did, they contracted guilt, and needed forgiveness, and in other passages of scripture it is said, that men perish for lack of knowledge^k; that “Christ will take vengeance on them” for their ignorance^l; and that “he who formed them will shew them no favour^m.”

But though ignorance cannot remove, it certainly *extenuates*, our guilt. The more opportunities of information any persons had, the more guilt they contracted in rejecting the truth; on which account our Lord's hearers were altogether inexcusableⁿ, and were involved in deeper guilt than even Sodom and Gomorrah^o. On the other hand, the less light any one had in his mind, the less was the malignity of his offence.

St.

^d Heb. x. 26.

^e Acts iii. 17.

^k Hos. iv. 6.

ⁿ John xv. 22.

^f Heb. vi. 4—6.

^h 1 Cor. ii. 8.

^l 2 Thess. i. 8.

^o Matt. x. 15.

ⁱ The text.

^j John xvi. 3.

^m Isai. xxvii. 11.

St. Paul tells us that this was, in a measure, *the ground* of his obtaining mercy^p; for that, if he had persecuted Christ as he did, and at the same time been aware of what he was doing, he would have been almost beyond the reach of mercy. And we are informed that in the final judgment the sentence denounced against the impenitent and unbelieving, will be proportioned to the light and knowledge against which they had sinned; “the servant that knew not his Lord’s will will be beaten with few stripes, while he who knowingly disobeyed it will be beaten with many stripes^q.”

The reason of this is evident; for an ignorant rejection of Christ will consist with a desire to please God^r; whereas that rejection of him that militates against the clear convictions of our own mind, argues a rooted love of sin, and an inveterate hatred to God and his Christ^s. While therefore the latter is “a sin unto death^t,” and a sure forerunner of perdition^u, the former may be repented of and forgiven.]

But, however true this statement may be, we cannot but admire

II. The wonderful love of Christ in urging this plea on behalf of his murderers

In contemplating this part of our subject, let us consider

1. What his conduct was towards his murderers

[Justly might he have aggravated the guilt of his murderers, and said, “These are they among whom I have wrought all my miracles; and multitudes of them have ^{ex}posed my power to heal: yet this is the way in which they requite all my kindness: I desire therefore, O my Father, that thou wouldest vindicate my cause, and execute upon them some signal vengeance as thou hast on others, whose guilt was infinitely less than theirs. Let the earth open to swallow them up, or lightning descend from heaven to consume them, or fire and brimstone be rained down upon them, or an angel slay hundreds of thousands of them in an instant. He might at least have said, as the martyr Zechariah did in similar circumstances, “The Lord look upon it and requite it^x.” But instead of this, he prayed that they might be forgiven: he sought out the only extenuating circumstance that could be thought of, and urged it as a plea on their behalf. This was a conduct truly astonishing, and worthy of an incarnate God.]

2. The

^p 1 Tim. i. 13.

^r Acts xxvi. 9.

^s 1 John v. 16.

^t 2 Chron. xxiv. 22.

^q Luke xii. 47, 48.

^u John xv. 23.

^x John iii. 19. Heb. x. 39.

2. The wonderful love displayed in it

[Suppose he had at such a time been praying for his friends, it would have argued most unbounded love; but to be praying for his enemies! to plead the cause of those who by their clamours had compelled his judge to deliver him up into their hands, and to be imploring the richest mercies for those who were loading him with all manner of insults and indignities! What love was this! that in the midst of his agonies he should lose all sense of the injuries he was receiving, and, without a murmuring or vindictive word, should occupy himself wholly about the welfare of his enemies, dreading nothing so much as their ruin, and desiring nothing so much as to have them partakers of his glory! Well might the apostle call this, a "love that passeth knowledge^r."]]

To IMPROVE this subject, let us reflect

1. How earnest we should be in seeking knowledge

[Some might be ready to conclude that, if ignorance is an extenuation of guilt, it were safer and better to continue ignorant. But let us not mistake: it is not wilful ignorance that is to be considered in this view, but that ignorance which is unavoidable, or, at least, unintentional. Besides, ignorance is sure to keep us from Christ, and consequently to bring us into condemnation: and it will be a poor consolation to a damned soul, that its guilt was not of the most aggravated kind. There is no way of escaping condemnation but by believing in Christ; and we cannot believe in him unless we know him: therefore we must seek divine instruction as the only means of everlasting salvation. This is the declaration of God himself^z: the Lord grant that we may ponder it in our minds, and be regulated by it in our lives!]

2. What encouragement we have to pray for mercy

[Never were more atrocious sinners on the face of the earth than those for whom Christ prayed: nor was any prayer ever more signally answered than that he offered for them: for no less than three thousand of those very people were forgiven in an instant, and adopted into the family of God. It was in answer to that prayer that the very blood which they had profanely desired "to be upon themselves and upon their children^a" in a way of judgment, came upon them in a way of mercy, and cleansed them from the guilt of shedding it. Who then amongst us need despair of mercy? If Christ interceded so for persons in the very act of crucifying the Lord of glory, will he not intercede for mourning penitents? If he obtained

^r Eph. iii. 19.^z John xvii. 3.^a Matt. xxvii. 25.

obtained mercy for those who rejected him, will he not much more for those who “desire to be found in him?” Let us not despond, but carry all our iniquities to him, that they may be cleansed by his atoning blood, and be forgiven through his prevailing intercession.]

3. What obligation lies upon us to forgive one another

[The generality, when injured, are ready to search out every possible aggravation, in order to lower their adversary in the estimation of others, and to justify their own resentment against him. But how differently did Jesus act! Yet “he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps^b.” Let us then cultivate a forgiving spirit, yea, even towards those whose malice is most inveterate, and whose conduct towards us is most injurious. It was thus that Paul^c, and Stephen^d trod in their Master’s steps: and thus must we, if we would find mercy at his hands in the day of judgment^e. The express command of Jesus to every one of us is, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you^f.” And indeed, if we do not exercise this disposition, we cannot repeat the Lord’s prayer without praying for our own damnation^g. “Let us therefore be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven us^h.”]

^b 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^d Acts. vii. 60.

^f Matt. v. 44.

^g Matt. vi. 12, 14, 15.

^c 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

^e Matt. xviii. 35.

^h Eph. iv. 32.

DLXV. THE BENEFIT ARISING TO CHRIST FROM HIS OWN SUFFERINGS.

Heb. v. 7—9. *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*

THE priestly office, as marked out by God, belonged exclusively to the tribe of Levi—Yet our Lord, though he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood appertained, was truly and properly a High Priest.—He was constituted

a priest of a different order from that of Aaron—And executed the duties of the priesthood in a far different manner than it was possible for any other person to perform them—He offered not the blood of bulls and of goats, but his own body, for the sins of the world—The apostle describing the manner in which he ministered, sets before us

I. His conduct under his sufferings

Never were the sufferings of any creature comparable with those of Christ

[His bodily sufferings perhaps were less than many of his followers have been called to endure^a—But those of his soul were infinitely beyond our conceptions^b—The assaults of Satan, and the wrath of God, combined to produce that bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane^c—]

Under them he poured out his heart in prayer unto his heavenly Father

[He never lost sight of God as his Father, but addressed him with the greater earnestness under that endearing title^d—He knew that his Father was “able to save him from death”—He therefore repeatedly besought him to remove the bitter cup, and urged his petitions “with strong cries and floods of tears”—Not that he repented of the work he had undertaken; but only desired such a mitigation of his sufferings as might consist with his father’s glory, and the salvation of men^e—]

Nor did he desist from prayer till he had obtained his request

[Him the Father always heard—Nor was an answer now denied him—He was delivered from that which he chiefly deprecated^f—Though the cup was not removed, he was not suffered to faint in drinking it—He was strengthened by an angel in answer to his prayer^g—And clearly shewed what an answer he had received, by the dignified composure with which he

^a It is possible indeed that the perfect temperature of his body might give a more exquisite sensibility to the organs; but this is no where affirmed in scripture.

^b Ps. xxii. 14, 15. with Matt. xxviii. 38.

^c Luke xxii. 44.

^d Mark xiv. 36.

^e John xii. 27, 28. As a *man*, he could not but feel, and as a *good* man, he could not but deprecate the wrath of God: but he desired nothing that was inconsistent with the divine will, Matt. xxvi. 39.

^f The learned differ about the sense of ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας; some translate it *pro reverentia*, others *ex metu*. See Beza on Heb. v. 7.

^g Luke xxii. 43.

he immediately resigned himself into the hands of his enemies^h—]

His sufferings indeed could not be dispensed with ; but they were amply recompensed by

II. The benefit he derived from them

The benefits accruing to our Lord from his own sufferings were

1. Personal

[It was necessary for him as our high Priest to experience every thing which his people are called to endure in their conflicts with sin and Satan^l—Now the difficulty of abiding faithful to God in arduous circumstances is exceeding great—This is a trial which all his people are called to sustain—And under it they more particularly need his almighty succour—This therefore he submitted to learn—Though as the Son of God he knew all things in a speculative manner, yet he could not know this *experimentally*, but by being reduced to a suffering condition—This therefore was one benefit which he derived from his sufferings—He learned by them more tenderly to sympathize with his afflicted people, and more speedily to succour them when imploring his help with strong crying and tears^k—]

2. Official

[As the priests were *consecrated* to their office by the blood of their sacrifices, so was Jesus by his own blood^l—From that time he had a right to impart salvation—From that time also he exercised that right—The persons indeed to whom alone he is “ the author of eternal salvation,” are, “ those who obey him”—Not that they possess this qualification *before* he vouchsafes his mercy to them—But he invariably transforms his people into his own image—And makes them, like himself, obedient unto death^m—]

We may learn from hence

1. What we should do under sufferings, or a dread of God's displeasure

[We should not hastily conclude that we are not his childrenⁿ—We should rather go with humble boldness to God as our Father^o—We should plead his gracious promises^p—Nor can

^h John xviii. 4—8, 11.

^l Heb. ii. 17.

^k Ib. ver. 18.

^l *ἁγιασθῆναι* sometimes means “ *consecrated* :” see Heb. vii. 28.

^m Phil. ii. 8.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 6.

^o Luke xv. 17, 18.

^p Ps. l. 15.

can we possibly be too earnest, provided we be content that his will should be done—(Alas! that there should be so little resemblance between our prayers and those of Christ!)—We should however consider *that* as the best answer to prayer, which most enables us to glorify God—]

2. Whither to go for salvation

[The Father was “able to save his Son from death”—And doubtless he can save *us* also—But he has exalted his Son to be a Prince and a Saviour—To Christ therefore we are to go, and *to the Father through Christ*—In this way we shall find him to be the author of eternal salvation to us—]

3. What is to be our conduct when he has saved us

[Jesus died “to purchase to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works”—We must therefore *obey* him, and that too as willingly in seasons of severe trial as in times of peace—We must be content to be conformed to the likeness of our Lord and Master—Let us be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life—]

^a Acts v. 31.

^r Eph. ii. 18.

^s Heb. vii. 25.

^t Rev. ii. 10.

DLXVI. CHRIST'S PERSEVERING DILIGENCE.

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, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

WHEN we read the history of the Jews as recorded in the sacred volume, we in general feel no other interest in the events related concerning them, than we do in those which are handed down to us by the historians of Greece and Rome. But, allowing for some local and circumstantial differences, the same things are transacted amongst ourselves; and the records which we read, may serve as a glass wherein to see all that is now passing in the world. The saints of old, even from righteous Abel to the end of the

the

the prophetic age, were called to a life of suffering, and by their sufferings were made perfect. Thus also "must we go through much tribulation in our way to the heavenly kingdom;" and fill up the measure of sufferings which is allotted us in this vale of tears.

The apostle having given us a long catalogue of worthies, who had approved themselves faithful unto death, and had thereby "obtained a good report," exhorts us to follow their example, and more especially the example of our blessed Lord himself.

In this passage are contained

I. An exhortation to run our race

All of us are called to "run our race with patience"

[There is a course marked out for us by God himself: nor can any one err from it, who duly attends to the directions given him in the holy scriptures. In this course we are to run. We are not left at liberty to prescribe a path for ourselves: the race is "set before us," and to that we must strictly adhere. But we cannot hold on in it without much and continual exertion. Many are the difficulties that obstruct our way: sometimes our path is steep and slippery; and sometimes it is rough and thorny. Often are we wearied in it and ready to faint, before our course is half finished. And not unfrequently they who ought most to aid and encourage us, exert themselves to the utmost to impede our progress. But our duty is to run our race "with patience;" to hold on till we arrive at the goal, in spite of all our external trials, or inward weakness; and "by patient continuance in well doing to seek for glory and honour and immortality." To run well for a season will avail us nothing: we must "endure unto the end, if ever we would be saved."]

To this we should be stimulated by the consideration of the many witnesses that surround us

[The saints who have gone before us, having finished their course with joy, are represented as being *spectators of our conflicts*, and *witnesses to us that our persevering efforts shall be crowned with success*. In both of these views, the consideration of *them* is calculated to refresh our spirits, and to quicken our languishing exertions. Conceive "a cloud," or multitude of departed saints, and more especially of those who ran together with us; conceive them looking upon us with eager solicitude, rejoicing when they behold us rapidly advancing, and ready to weep over us, if at any time they see us on the decline; conceive them crying out to us, Press forward; remember me; I once endured the same trials; I, like

like you, was ready to faint; but, through grace, I held on; and at last I obtained the prize: hold on then a little longer, and the crown of righteousness is yours; "be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not:" I say, let us dwell on this thought; and surely, if ever men running in a race were encouraged by the acclamations of their friends, much more shall we by such animating considerations as these.]

Together with this earnest exhortation, the apostle gives us

II. Directions to insure success

1. We must put away whatever obstructs our progress

[They who are about to run a race need not be reminded of the necessity there is to cast off all unnecessary weight, or any long garment which might impede their motion. But in running our spiritual race we are apt to be forgetful of this obvious and necessary caution. Many things there are which operate as a burthen to weigh down our spirits; and to exhaust our strength. How often do the cares or pleasures of the world divide our attention, enfeeble our efforts, and prevent our advancement in the divine life! There is in every one some "sin that more easily besets him," and which, like a flowing robe^a, diminishes his activity in the service of his God. What sin this is we should be careful to enquire. It will in general be found to be some inward lust that is constitutionally wrought into our frame, or some evil, incident to our situation, our company, or our employment. Whatever it be, whether pride, or passion, whether covetousness or uncleanness, whether sloth or intemperance, whether unbelief or impenitence, whether self-righteousness or self-dependence, we must "put it away." Whatever tends to divert us from the path of duty, or to embarrass us in it, must be sacrificed, if we would "so run as to obtain the prize."]

2. We must direct our eyes to Jesus Christ

[Jesus is here proposed to our view both *as our successful pattern*, and *as our almighty friend*. Never had any other person such a difficult course to run: nor could any other ever have persevered in it. The cross he bare was heavier than we can possibly conceive: nor was the ignominy of it less than the pain: but "he endured the cross and despised the shame:" he looked to "the joy that was set before him," the joy of glorifying his heavenly Father, the joy of delivering a ruined world, the joy of being for ever the acknowledged author of their salvation: and in the prospect of having all this consummated,

^a Ἐνπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν.

summed, he disregarded all his trials and difficulties, he even "longed to be baptized with his bloody baptism," and continued with unabated ardour till he could say, "It is finished;" and till, in consequence of his victorious career, he was exalted to the "right hand of the throne of God."

How should we be encouraged by the sight of this *our successful pattern*! for, what are our trials in comparison of his? How richly too are his exertions recompensed, even as ours also shall in due time be, in the full possession of the prize that was set before him!

But the apostle directs us to look unto Jesus also as *our almighty friend*. It is he who marked out for us our course, who called us forth to run in it, who holds out to our view the prize, who sits as umpire to award the prize to every one that wins it, and who will bestow it on us with his own hand. He is "the author and the finisher of our faith;" from him proceeds that faith whereby we are stimulated to engage in the race, and that whereby we are enabled to persevere in it to the end. Let us then look at him, and see how sufficient he is to renew our strength, and how interested he is in crowning our efforts with success.

There is a peculiarity in this direction which we must by no means pass over. The Apostle tells us not merely to *look unto* Jesus, but, in so doing, to *look off^b* from every thing else. We are apt to look at our own weakness, at the length and difficulties of our way, at the strength and number of those who are endeavouring to cast us down, or to any thing that tends to discourage us: but we should look off from all these things; and keep our eyes steadily fixed on Jesus as our pattern, and our friend: and then our difficulties will appear as nothing; and we shall proceed cheerfully in an assured expectation of the prize^c.]

ADDRESS

1. To those who have never yet begun to run

[Were it optional with you whether you would have any interest in this race or not, we might leave you to your choice: but you are of necessity entered upon the lists, and must have all the shame and misery of failure, if you run not so as to obtain the prize. The loss of heaven is not the sole consequence of your sloth: for, if you be not judged worthy of the felicity of heaven, you will receive the doom of the wicked and slothful servant in the torments of hell. Consider then how much time you have lost, how little may yet remain, and what an arduous race you have to run; and begin immediately, while yet the prize is in your view, and Jesus is ready to assist your feeble efforts.]

2. To

^b Ἀποσώρτες.

^c 1 Cor. ix. 26.

2. To those who are halting, or turning aside out of the course

[Many "run well for a season, and yet, after all, are hindered"^d from pressing forward to the goal. Enquire, my brethren, whence it is that such a lamentable change has taken place in you? What is there that will compensate for the loss of the heavenly prize? It were better far to part with every weight, and every incumbrance, whether friends, or interests, or pleasures of whatever kind, or even with life itself, than to be diverted from your course, or to be retarded in it. Be assured that as "he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven," so neither can he be who halts in his Christian race. May God enable you to resume your labours! and know for your encouragement, that, if persisted in, "they shall not be in vain in the Lord"^e.]

3. To those who are resolutely hastening toward the goal

[Doubtless you are sometimes ready to faint: but look at the cloud of witnesses that are gone before you: look at Jesus in particular, that bright example of all righteousness, and that gracious helper of all his followers. Look too at the prize, the joy that is set before you; and "have respect unto the recompence of reward:" how richly will that repay you for your persevering exertions! Methinks you are now come within a short distance of the goal, and thousands of God's dear children, though invisible to you, are looking on, and standing ready to congratulate your success. Press on then a little longer, "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before"^f: so shall you "finish your course with joy," and "receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of Jesus, your righteous Judge"^g.]

^d Gal. v. 7.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^f Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

DLXVII. ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

Rom. iv. 20—25. *He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall*

shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

THERE is no Christian grace, the want of which is so much condemned in scripture, or the exercise of which is so much applauded, as faith. In the Epistle to the Hebrews there is one whole chapter occupied in celebrating the saints that were distinguished for this grace. Amongst these Abraham makes a very conspicuous figure. In the chapter before us also the apostle mentions this eminent trait in Abraham's character, and expatiates upon it in support of that, which it is the one scope of this whole epistle to establish, namely, the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

In opening the Apostle's words, we shall consider

I. Abraham's faith

His faith had respect to those things which were contained in the promise :

1. To the numerous posterity which he was to have by Sarah

[This is particularly noticed in the verses before the text, and in the history to which the apostle more immediately refers^a. He could entertain no doubt by whom the promise was given; or to what it related. The only question therefore that arose in his mind, was, whether God had power to perform his promise? But here also he was "fully persuaded;" so that he did not doubt or hesitate one moment; but believed, that it should be even as it had been said unto him. As for the difficulties arising from the deadness of his own body, and of Sarah's womb, they were not suffered to weigh any thing against the power and faithfulness of Jehovah. There was indeed no hope according to the judgment of sense and reason: but "against hope he believed in hope," that the promise made to him should be fulfilled.]

2. To Christ, in whom both he and all the nations of the earth were to be blessed

[In the original promise repeatedly made to Abraham, respect was had to both of these things, and a manifest distinction was made between them^b. In the New Testament, both also are noticed; but more especial attention is paid to the latter, in order to shew, beyond a doubt, that Abraham
believed

^a Gen. xv. 4—6.

^b Gen. xii. 2, 3. and xxii. 17, 18.

believed in Christ for justification and acceptance. Our Lord himself expressly declares that Abraham had, though at the distance of two thousand years, beheld him as the promised Messiah, and had rejoiced exceedingly in the prospect of the blessings, which he himself and all his believing children should receive by *his* means^c. So great indeed was Abraham's joy on this account, that he could not forbear expressing it in a way of laughter^d. Sarah also laughed, when she heard the tidings^e; but her's was a laugh of unbelieving derision; whereas his was a laugh of believing exultation.

Now with respect to this, as well as to the former subject, Abraham believed God: he did "not stagger at all through unbelief," but, with strong, unshaken affiance, committed his soul to Christ, that it might be washed in his blood, and be clothed in his righteousness.]

Having seen how strong in faith Abraham was, let us notice

II. The benefit he derived from it

Abraham was justified by the righteousness of Christ

[Abraham being a sinner, he was obnoxious, like others, to the curse denounced against every transgression of God's holy law: and being condemned by the law, he could not obtain salvation by it. He therefore was forced to seek justification in the righteousness of another, even of Jesus, in whom he believed. The same is observed respecting David, who speaking of himself no less than of others, declared *him* to be the only happy man, who had "righteousness imputed to him without works^f." From these two examples the apostle infers, that all must be justified in the same way, namely, through the righteousness of Christ. In reference to Abraham, he with great care removes all occasion of glorying either in his moral or ceremonial obedience; and affirms, that his circumcision, so far from being a ground of his acceptance, was only "a seal of that righteousness which he had for many years already possessed^g."] This

^c John viii. 56.

^d Gen. xvii. 17.

^e Gen. xviii. 12.

^f It is worthy of remark, that the apostle here *alters* the words of David so as to make them bear more fully upon his point; for David speaks only of the *non-imputation of sin*; whereas the apostle (doubtless under the inspiration of that divine Spirit who dictated the words) understood his words as expressing a positive *imputation of righteousness*; which view of them alone suited his argument. He, moreover, *leaves out* the words that immediately follow his quotation, lest by citing them he should give occasion to an adversary to say, that our guileless state is in some measure united with faith in the matter of our justification before God. Compare Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. with ver. 6, 8.

^g Ver. 9.—11.

This benefit he received by faith

[It is said repeatedly that "Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness;" the precise import of which expression is not easy to be understood. We must not imagine that the mere *act* of faith constituted his justifying righteousness; (for then he would have had a ground of glorying within himself as much as if he had been justified by love or any other work) faith is here put for the *object* of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, who in a similar way is called "our hope^b:" and that which in this chapter is called "the righteousness of faith," is elsewhere contrasted with our own righteousness, and is more accurately called "The righteousness of *God* by faith in Christ¹." Faith indeed may be said to justify us *instrumentally*, as apprehending Christ, in whom we are justified: but the expression in the text is better explained as relating to the *object* of faith, not only because *it is a very common mode of expression in the scriptures*, but because it comes up most fully to the language of the apostle, inasmuch as "the righteousness of Christ is unto all, and upon all them that believe^k," and Christ is called on this very account, "The Lord our righteousness¹."]

That this account of Abraham's faith may not appear uninteresting, let us consider

III. The instruction and encouragement it affords to *us*

Though God was pleased to honour his servant Abraham by transmitting to posterity an account of his faith, yet this was not the only, or the principal, reason that induced him to record these things concerning Abraham. His chief intent was

1. To shew us how we are to seek justification before God

[Abraham believed in God as able to accomplish all that he had promised: and by this faith he was justified. Thus we are to believe in God as having already accomplished his promises, in having given up his Son to "die for our offences," and having raised him from the dead as the author and pledge of our eternal justification. It is by the death of Christ, and through the prevailing intercession, which, in his exalted state, he makes for us, that we are to be reconciled to God. We must not for one moment dream of any other way of acceptance. If so eminent a man as Abraham was incapable of being

^b Heb. vi. 18.

^k Rom. iii. 22.

¹ Phil. iii. 9.

¹ Jer. xxiii. 6.

being justified by his works, much more must we : and if he was necessitated to look to Christ in order to obtain salvation, beyond all doubt we must stand indebted to the same Saviour for all our hopes of happiness and glory.]

2. To assure us that, if we truly believe in Christ, we cannot fail of being justified

[Abraham's views of Christ must assuredly have been very obscure : yet, dark as they were, they availed for his justification before God. But we have an incomparably clearer knowledge of Christ : we see him in his person, work, and offices, and therefore have stronger ground for our faith in him. If we then receive the record of God concerning him, and rely fully upon him as "dying for our offences, and as raised again for our justification," shall not we be accepted? We need not fear. Our souls may appear as dead with respect to spiritual fruitfulness, as Abraham's and Sarah's bodies were with respect to their having a son and heir; and to the eye of sense it may appear as improbable that we should inherit the promise, as that *they* should; but if we believe, we shall soon find that "all things are possible to him that believeth:" we shall have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; and, being made heirs with Abraham, we shall be enabled to "walk in his steps^m" on earth, and "sit down with him in the kingdom of our Lord in heavenⁿ."]]

By way of conclusion, we would entreat you to REFLECT upon

1. The folly and danger of self-righteousness

[For what end did the apostle take such pains to shew us that the most eminent saints of old were not justified by their works, but to caution us the more strongly against trusting in our own works? Let us not imagine this a light matter: on this one point our everlasting happiness depends. If we will renounce all dependence on ourselves, and "submit to Christ's righteousness," we shall be saved : but if we will "go about to establish our own righteousness" either in whole or in part, we must inevitably, and eternally, perish^o.]

2. The value and importance of faith

[The highest commendation imaginable is given to faith, in the words before us. Two things are spoken of it, which should render it very precious in our eyes; it "gives the highest glory to God," and brings the richest benefit to man. Faith glorifies all the perfections of the Deity, in a far higher degree than any other grace whatever: and it saves the soul; which

^m Ver. 12.

ⁿ Gal. iii. 6—9.

^o Rom. ix. 30—32. & x. 3.

which cannot be said of any other grace. Faith is the (instrumental) *cause* of our justification: but all other graces are the fruits and *effects* of justification already imparted to us. Let us seek then to exercise faith, and to be "strong in faith:" and let us be well assured, that the more confidently we rely on the promises of God, the more certainly shall we laugh with holy exultation, and obtain a testimony from God that we were accepted in his sight.]

DLXVIII. THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING FOR OUR GREAT ACCOUNT.

Job xxxi. 14. *What shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?*

THE testimony of a good conscience is a source of rich consolation at all times, but more especially when we are suffering under afflictions from God, or calumnies from man. Job, in the midst of all his troubles, was upheld by it, when, without such a support, he must have inevitably sunk under his accumulated burthens. It must be confessed indeed, that this holy man, when urged and irritated by his uncharitable friends, expressed himself too strongly upon this subject: yet we cannot fail of seeing throughout his whole history, that his conscious integrity enabled him to hold fast by God, and to wait with patience the issue of his unexampled calamities.

In the passage before us he is specifying many things commonly practised by others, but from which he had been preserved pure. Among these he mentions his conduct to his servants; and observes that, if in this he had been arbitrary and oppressive, he would have a melancholy account indeed to give in the day of judgment; "*Then*, says he, *What shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?*"

These words may be considered as

I. A weighty reflection

Job is contemplating his responsibility to God, together with the impartiality that will be shewn in the future judgment

[In speaking of his accountableness to God, he does not limit it to such actions as are reprobated among men, but

mentions it in reference to (what is generally but little regarded) his spirit and temper in domestic duties. He well knew that God took cognizance of small things as well as great, and of things relating to civil and social life as well as those that pertain more immediately to religion. He was certain also, that at God's tribunal the slave and his master, the beggar and the king, would have their cause determined with equal and unerring justice. Hence, when calumniated and condemned by men, he naturally reflects on the sentence that would be passed upon him at God's tribunal, on the supposition that there were any wilful and allowed sin found in him, whatever the nature of that sin might be, and however venial it might be deemed by the world at large.]

Such a reflection will be highly profitable to us also

[For great and heinous sins, as they are called, we all feel ourselves accountable to God; but we scarcely think that any responsibility attaches to the dispositions we manifest in the family or the state: we may be querulous and contentious subjects, or proud and oppressive masters, or slothful and impertinent servants, and yet never imagine that God will notice such faults in the day of judgment. The rich and the great are ready to think, that they shall find some favour with God on account of their earthly distinctions: and that, while a poor man who robs or injures them, is deserving of the heaviest judgments, they may rob and injure others to ever so great an amount by their extravagance or extortion, and yet pass without censure. But the great and terrible God has no respect of persons^a, but will "judge every man according to his works." And it will be well for us, if we take a retrospect of our actions, and *seriously reflect*, what answer we shall give to God in the day that he shall visit us.]

But these words may also properly suggest to us

II. An instructive enquiry

The enquiry is twofold: if God should call us to his judgment-seat before we have truly repented of our sins

1. What shall we "do?"

[Shall we go before him with boldness, as too many rush into his presence now? Will not his purity abash us, and "his excellency make us afraid^b?"

Shall we hide ourselves from his presence, and elude his search? Whither shall we flee in order to effect this^c? In vain shall we "call upon the rocks to fall upon us, or the hills to cover us."

Shall

^a Deut. x. 17.

^b Job xiii. 11.

^c Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

Shall we resist his summons? How vain the attempt! "Shall our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us^d," or, "can we thunder with a voice like his^e?"

Let us then bethink ourselves "what we shall *do* in the day of visitation? to whom shall we flee for help? and where shall we leave our glory^f?"

2. What shall we "*answer*?"

[Shall we say with that amiable, but mistaken, youth, "I have kept all thy commandments^g?" Alas! which of the commandments have we not broken times without number? Let it only be considered that an angry word is murder^h, and an unchaste look adulteryⁱ; and we shall find abundant reason, even as holy Job himself did^k, to blush and be confounded before the heart-searching God^l.

If this appear too presumptuous, shall we, like the Pharisee, tell him of our comparative goodness^m? Suppose we do differ from others, what ground of glorying is this to usⁿ? And how infinitely short have we come of the perfection which God requires of us! Yea, the very disposition to justify ourselves is sufficient to make God utterly abhor us^o.

Shall we answer, that we had other things besides religion to attend to? But what other things? If they were lawful in themselves, they were not in the least degree incompatible with religion: and if they were unlawful, they ought to have been renounced.

Shall we reply, that we did not think God would ever condemn any one for the want of religion? But why did we entertain so fond a hope? Were we not sufficiently warned to the contrary? Was it possible for God to declare in more express terms his determination to punish impenitent transgressors^p?

Whatever other answers we may be disposed to make, let us consider whether they do not admit of a reply that shall stop our mouths, and utterly confound us? In this way we shall gather instruction for which we may have reason to bless God for ever.]

The oblique hints which both Job and his friends repeatedly gave to each other, may lead us further to consider the words as

III. A solemn

^d Ezek. xxii. 14.

^e Job xl. 9.

^f Isai. x. 3.

^g Matt. xix. 20.

^h Matt. v. 21, 22.

ⁱ Ib. 28.

^k Job ix. 20.

^l Ib. ver. 2, 3.

^m Luke xviii. 11, 12.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^o Job ix. 30—32.

Luke xviii. 14.

^p Ps. ix. 17. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

III. A solemn warning

If a master's unkindness to his servant would bring down upon him the divine judgments, Job's friends might see, that their uncharitableness towards him would not pass unnoticed. In the same manner, these questions convey a solemn warning

1. To those who are altogether regardless of religion

[We are well aware that when a fellow-creature expostulates with such persons, they will fill their mouths with arguments, and turn to ridicule "the words of truth and soberness." But it is not a worm like themselves that they must answer, but the living God. Let careless sinners then consider what they shall answer HIM? And, before they speak peace to themselves, let them think whether HE will deem their excuses sufficient? It is by *his* judgment that they must stand or fall; and therefore they must be satisfied with nothing which will not satisfy *him*. It will be to but little purpose to be justified in their own eyes, and in the opinions of a partial world; for if *he* should refuse his sanction, they will have nothing left but to bewail their folly in everlasting torments.]

2. To those who rest in an outward and formal religion

[It is not the observance of forms, but the devotion of the heart, that God requires. Religion is to be our business, yea, our very element wherein we live. Our daily care, and our supreme delight must be to maintain fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and to glorify God by a holy conversation. These are the things which God will enquire into at the last day: and if we tell him then, that such a life was generally reprobated as hypocrisy or enthusiasm, will he account it a sufficient excuse for our conduct? What? he may say, were all the prophets, and apostles, yea, and my only dear Son too, hypocrites and fanatics? And were others to be condemned in proportion as they resembled these divine patterns? Did you not know in your consciences, even while you ridiculed the godly, that both you, and they, *ought* to walk as Christ walked?

Know then that the form of godliness, however exemplary, will, if destitute of the life and power of it, leave you without excuse in the day of judgment.]

3. To those who profess religion indeed, but walk unworthy of it

[Every question put to careless or formal Christians will have tenfold force when addressed to those who profess godliness: for they acknowledge their obligation to piety, and seek to be esteemed as truly religious characters; and therefore

to all their other guilt they add the basest hypocrisy, if they live in any wilful sin. Let those (if such there be amongst us) who, while they “seem to be religious, either bridle not their tongue^a,” or yield to the solicitations of wrath, envy, malice, lewdness, covetousness, or any other vile affection, let them, I say, consider what *they* shall answer when God shall visit them? If others be punished, much more shall *they*^r: yea, their condemnation shall be increased in proportion to the mercies they have slighted, and the advantages they have abused.]

We cannot conclude without adding one word of
DIRECTION

[It has been shewn already, what answers will *not* suffice at the day of judgment. It is but reasonable then to ask, What answer *will* suffice? To solve this important question, we reply, That doubtless we must renounce all habitual and allowed sin: but that, with respect to the sins of infirmity that are incident to our fallen nature, we should lie low before God^s, seeking mercy through Christ only, and declaring our affiance in the promises which God has given us in his word^t. Then, though vile, we should not be cast out; nor should our past sins be remembered against us any more for ever^u.]

^a Jam. i. 26.

^r Amos iii. 2. Isai. xxxiii. 14.

^s Job xl 4, 5. and ix. 15.

^t Isai. xliii. 25, 26. See this very question, “What shall we *do*?” and the answer given to it by the voice of inspiration, Acts ii. 37, 38. and xvi. 30, 31.

^u Heb. viii. 12.

DLXIX. ENCOURAGEMENT IN GOD.

1 Sam. xxx. 6. *But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*

IN seasons of prosperity the superior happiness of a Christian is not visible to all—

But in adverse circumstances he has a manifest advantage over others—

The ungodly, when the cisterns from whence they draw their water are broken or emptied, have no comfort left—

But when every stream is dried up, the godly have still access to the fountain itself—

This was experienced by the church of old ^a—

And it is beautifully exemplified in the history before us—

David was in great trouble, being suspected by the Philistines—plundered by the Amalekites—and threatened by his own soldiers—

But in the midst of all he encouraged himself in God—

We shall shew

I. What reason he had to do so

Though reduced to the greatest extremities, he derived encouragement

1. From the perfections of God as revealed in the word

[He was no stranger to the character of God as it was revealed to Moses ^b—

Or to the unnumbered illustrations of it which the history of his nation afforded him—

Consequently he knew that there was nothing too hard for God to effect, or too great for him to give—]

2. From the experience which he himself had had of God

[The lion, the bear, the Philistine giant, and the murderous rage of Saul, had given him abundant proofs of God's superintending providence ^c—

These he called to mind in this season of trial and distress ^d—
And wisely judged that, with such a friend on his side, he had no cause for fear ^e—]

3. From the covenant which God had made with him

[God had covenanted with him to give him the throne of Israel—

Hence he was assured that his life should be spared till this promise was accomplished—

It was in this view that he was enabled to call God his God—

And the thought of this relation to God added tenfold confidence to his soul—]

While we admire the conduct of David in this particular, let us consider

II. What reason we have to do likewise

Certainly

^a Hab. iii. 17, 18.

^b Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^c 1 Sam. xvii. 37. xviii. 11. and xix. 10, 11.

^d Ps. xlii. 6. lxxvii. 10, 11.

^e 2 Cor. i. 10.

Certainly the grounds of David's encouragement are equally calculated for our support

[*God is still the same* almighty and gracious Being as ever—

His arm is not shortened, nor is his ear heavy with respect to us—

We may also see much of his goodness *in our own experience*—

Wonderful have been the ways in which he has dealt with us for the awakening, preserving, and sanctifying of our souls—

He has *also covenanted with us* that “he will never leave us nor forsake us^f”—

Nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail—

Are not these then grounds of encouragement to us as well as to David?—]

But we have far greater reason to encourage ourselves in God than David had—

We have seen more stupendous displays of God's *power*

[David had read of the wonders wrought in Egypt and the wilderness—

But what were these wonders when compared with the victories gained over all the passions and prejudices of the world by the preaching of a few poor fishermen?—]

We have beheld more astonishing exercises of his *love*

[The history of the Jews records many instances of God's love towards them—

But what were these when compared with the gift of his dear Son to die for us, and of his holy Spirit to renew us?—

These things are as much beyond any thing that David had ever seen, as the substance is beyond the shadow—]

We have experienced more abundant proofs of his *faithfulness*

[How many promises, made to the church at large, have been accomplished by the mission of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit!—

And all the members of the Church, from its first establishment to the present moment, have found the promises of the gospel fulfilled to them in their season!—

In proportion therefore as God's faithfulness has been tried and ascertained, our confidence in him must be increased—]

APPLICATION

1. Let us endeavour to secure God as *our* God

[Unless

^f Heb. xiii. 5.

[Unless God be ours, we can have but little reason to encourage ourselves in him—

Let us then look to Christ, that through him we may find acceptance with God—

So shall God be our friend, our father, and our “eternal great reward”^e—]

2. Let us encourage ourselves in God

[We must expect to meet with many difficulties and troubles—

Nor can we find any grounds of encouragement in ourselves—

But in God there is all that we can either need or desire—

Are we then discouraged by outward difficulties or inward corruptions? let us direct our eyes to him, as our compassionate, almighty, and ever faithful friend—

Let us, like David, chide our unbelief^h, and henceforth say with him, “In the day of my trouble I will call upon God”ⁱ—]

^e Gen. xv. 1. John i. 12. 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^h Ps. xliii. 5.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxvi. 7.

DLXX. THE CHRISTIAN'S CHOICE.

Ps. lxxiii. 25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

THIS evil and deceitful world promises happiness to its votaries—

And men, naturally carnal, are too willing to be deceived by it—

Even the godly themselves are sometimes drawn aside by its delusions—

But when the snare is broken, they see, and lament their folly^a—

David contrasted the mirth of the wicked with the troubles he had to conflict with—

And was ready to conclude that they had a better portion than himself^b—

But

^a Ver. 22.

^b Ver. 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14.

But on deeper investigation he found, that their happiness was soon to end ^c—

Whereas, however difficult his path at present was, God would guide him safely to the regions of eternal felicity ^d—

Hence, as the result of his more deliberate judgment, he determines to take God as his only portion ^e—

I. The Christian's choice

The Christian, by nature, differs not at all from those who are still in darkness—

He once chose the world as the portion in which his soul delighted—

But now he renounces it as sincerely as he ever loved it

[He does not indeed treat it with stoical indifference—

He knows that wealth and honour are capable of important uses—

And that, if God bestow them, they may be richly enjoyed ^f—

But he is well assured that they are not a satisfying portion—

He is persuaded that our cares increase with our possessions ^g—

And that Solomon's testimony respecting the world is true ^h—]

God is the one object of his choice

[Before his conversion he could think as lightly of God as others ⁱ—

But grace has altogether changed his sentiments and desires—

God appears to him now exceeding great and glorious—

The love of God in sending his own Son to die for us has made an indelible impression on his mind—

Since the Christian has been enabled to see this mystery, all created beauties have vanished as the stars before the sun—

There is nothing “on earth” which, in his eyes, can stand for one moment in competition with his incarnate God—

The pleasures, riches, and honours of the world seem lighter than vanity—

By the cross of Christ he is utterly crucified to them all ^k—

Without the Saviour's presence there would be nothing desirable even “in heaven” itself—

The

^c Ver. 17—20.

^f 1 Tim. vi. 17.

ⁱ Job xxi. 15.

^d Ver. 23, 24.

^e Eccl. v. 11.

^c Ver. 25.

^b Eccl. ii. 11.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

The glorified saints and angels would have nothing to attract the soul—

Nor would the bright regions in which they dwell, be any better than darkness itself—

Created glory would be utterly extinguished, if the Sun of righteousness were withdrawn¹—

The Christian has ALL in God; without him NOTHING—]

Nor is this an exaggerated description of the Christian's character

[The children of God in all ages have been of one mind in these respects—

Though their *attainments* have been different, their *aims* have been the same—

David frequently expresses, in yet stronger terms, his desires after God^m—

And declares that he coveted nothing so much as the divine presenceⁿ—

St. Paul had as much to glory in as any man whatever—

Yet he despised it all as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ^o—

Nor were these views peculiar to these distinguished servants of God—

They were common to all the saints in the days of old^p—

Nor is there a true Christian now, who, if interrogated respecting true happiness, would not reply in the language of the Psalmist^q—]

However enthusiastic such a choice may be thought by a blind and sensual world, it is perfectly rational and wise

II. The reasons of it

Whatever men choose, they invariably choose it under the idea of good—

Now there is no created good that can be at all compared with God

1. He is an *ever-present* portion

[We may possess many things, yet not have them with us in the time of necessity—

Yea, we may be utterly deprived of them by fraud or violence—

But God is every where present, to afford us help—

Though we be immured in a dungeon, he can visit us—

Nor

¹ Rev. xxi. 23.

ⁿ Ps. cxvii. 4.

^p Isai. xxvi. 8, 9.

^m Ps. cxlii. 1, 2. and cxliii. 1, 2.

^o Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^q Ps. iv. 6.

Nor can any human power intercept his gracious communications—

This was a reflection peculiarly grateful to the Psalmist^r—

And, doubtless, was an important ground on which he fixed his choice^s—]

2. He is an *all-sufficient* portion

[A man may enjoy all which this world can bestow—

But what can it avail him while racked with excruciating pains?²—

What relief can it afford him under the agonies of a guilty conscience?²—

Or what can it do to appease the fears of death?²—

But there is no situation wherein God is not a suitable portion—

In the possession of earthly blessings, his presence will greatly enhance our enjoyment of them—

In the absence of all temporal comforts, with HIM we can feel no want^t—

A view of him as our friend will allay every fear, and assuage every pain—

Nor, having HIM, can we want any other thing that is good^u—

• 3. He is an *eternal* portion

[However long we retain earthly things, we must part with them at last—

Death will reduce us to a level with the poorest of mankind—

Nor can we carry any thing along with us into the invisible world^x—

But, if God be ours, we shall possess him for ever—

We are not left without many rich communications from him *now*—

Yea, sometimes, even in this vale of tears, our joy in him is unspeakable^y—

But it is not till after death that we shall have the full enjoyment of him—

Now we taste of the streams; *then* we shall drink at the fountain-head—

Now our capacity to enjoy him is but small; *then* all our faculties will be wonderfully enlarged—

Now our delight in him is transient; *then*, without intermission or end^z—

Hence

^r Ps. cxxxix. 7 -10.

^s 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. and 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^t Ps. xlix. 17. ^y 1 Pet. i. 8.

^u Ib. ver. 17, 18.

^v Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10.

^z Ps. xvi. 11.

Hence the Psalmist looked forward to that period for his full satisfaction^a—]

INFER

1. How little is there of true religion in the world !

[If to be called after the name of Christ were sufficient, his flock would be large—

If to attend his ordinances and profess his faith were enough, there would be many in the way to heaven—

But God will judge us, not according to our professions, but our practice—

That, which alone can constitute us truly religious, is, to choose God for our portion—

Can we then, like David, *appeal* to God himself, that we do this?—

Could we make Peter's reply to the question which was put to him^b?—

Does the ardour of our devotions attest the strength of our desires after God?—

Have we the same evidence of our supreme regard for him, that the sensualist or worldling have of their love to the things of time and sense?—

Let us be assured that God can never be our portion, unless we deliberately choose him in preference to all others—]

2. How enviable a character is the true Christian !

[He can adopt the language of David^c, and of the ancient church^d—

Hence, however destitute he *seem* to be, he need envy none—

He is freed from the cares which corrode the hearts of others—

He is sure, not of attaining only, but of possessing for ever, the object of his desires—

And that, in proportion as he delights in God, his God will delight in him^e—

Surely we cannot but subscribe to the truth of that assertion^f—

Let us then beg of God to deliver us from the love of this present evil world—

And so to cast the mantle of his love upon us, that we may seek him for ever^g—]

^a Ps. xvii. 15.

^b John xxi. 17.

^c Ps. xvi. 5.

^d Song v. 16.

^e Zeph. iii. 17.

^f Ps. cxliv. 15.

^g 1 Kings xix. 19—21.

DLXXI. REASONS FOR WEEPING OVER SINNERS.

Ps. cxix. 136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

THE generality, if exhorted to labour for the salvation of others, are ready to reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?" But they who have truly the fear of God in their hearts will be anxious for the welfare of their fellow-creatures. This concern has at all times distinguished the saints of God^b; and it was eminently conspicuous in David. Repeatedly in this Psalm does he declare his feelings on this subject^a; and with peculiar energy in the words before us.

We propose to shew on what account we ought to weep for sinners

I. On account of the blessings they lose

There are many *present* blessings which men lose by not keeping God's law

[There is a "peace that passeth understanding," and a "joy unspeakable," that attends the believing in Christ, and the devoting of ourselves to his service. The having all one's lusts in subjection must contribute not a little to serenity of mind; but the enjoying of God's favour, and the light of his countenance, is a source of the richest happiness that mortals can possess on earth^d.

But what peace is there to the wicked^c? What can he know of the love of God shed abroad in his heart? What comfort can he have in the prospect of death and judgment?]

But the *eternal*, blessings which they lose, exceed our highest conceptions

[The obedient believer has "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading^e." There is a crown of righteousness, and a throne of glory, reserved for him in heaven^f; and he shall spend eternity itself in the immediate vision and fruition of his God.

But can we say this respecting the impenitent and unbelieving? No: there is no admission for him into those bright abodes: "the unrighteous cannot inherit that kingdom^h;" "the

^a Gen. iv. 9.

^b Jer. ix. 1.

^c Ver. 158. and 53.

^d Ver. 165. Prov. iii. 17. Isai. xxxii. 17.

^e Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

^f 1 Pet. i. 4.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 9.

“ the unclean cannot enter there^l. ” There shall be “ a difference between those who serve God, and those who serve him not^k: ” and the wish that ungodly men feel to be found at last in the place of those whom they now despise, is a proof that they have in their own minds some apprehension of the sentence that awaits them in another world .]

And are these things matters of just lamentation?

[It is much to be regretted that men will “ feed on ashes^m, ” and seek to “ fill their belly with the east windⁿ, ” when they might “ eat the bread of life, ” and “ delight their souls with marrow and fatness^o. ” And still more must we pity him, who, when there is a rest prepared, and a supper spread for him in heaven, has provoked God to swear, that he shall never enter into that rest^p, nor ever partake of that supper^q.]

But there is yet greater reason to weep

II. On account of the miseries they bring upon themselves

Not to mention the misery of a guilty conscience, which in many instances is so great as to render life itself a burthen

How inexpressibly dreadful are the judgments which the wicked will endure in hell !

[However men may labour to disprove it, hell must be the portion of all that forget God^r. And who can form any adequate conception of the torments that shall be there endured ? To spend an eternity in such a furnace as that which Nebuchadnezzar kindled for the destruction of the Hebrew youths, would be beyond measure dreadful : but what must it be to lie down in that lake of fire which the breath of the Almighty hath kindled^s ?]

And can we view sinners hastening to that place of torment, and not weep over them ?

[Our blessed Lord wept over Jerusalem on account of the *temporal* calamities that should come upon it: and shall not we weep over the eternal miseries which men are bringing on themselves ? Must not our hearts be harder than adamant, if they do not melt into tears at such a sight ? Can we weep at the recital of a story we know to be fictitious, and not mourn over such awful realities ?]

There

^l Rev. xxi. 27.

^k Numb. xxiii. 10.

^m Job. xv. 2.

ⁿ Heb. iii. 18.

^o Ps. ix. 17.

^p Mal. iii. 18.

^q Isai. xlv. 20.

^r Isai. lv. 2.

^s Luke xiv. 24.

^t Isai. xxx. 33.

There is, however, yet greater reason to weep

III. On account of the aggravated guilt under which they perish

Devils and heathens will have more to urge on their own behalf, than they who perish under the light of the gospel

[The devils may say, Had the Son of God taken our nature, and died for our redemption, we would gladly have availed ourselves of such a provision for our safety; we never would have despised one that had been sent from heaven to redeem us. The heathens may say, Though there was a Saviour given, yet we were never privileged to hear his gospel: had his mercy been ever offered to us, we should "long ago have repented in dust and ashes:" But what will ungodly *Christians* say before God? Will they say, They had not a Saviour? or, That his gospel was not proclaimed to them? No: you know there is a Saviour, who bought you with his blood, and who has offered you, times without number, a full and free salvation. Your mouths therefore must be for ever shut^u.]

What additional reason does this give for weeping over the ungodly!

[Every offer of salvation greatly aggravates the guilt of those who reject it: and every increase of guilt will be followed with a proportionable increase of misery. How lamentable then is it, when that very gospel, which should have been a savour of life unto life, is made, through the obstinacy of man, a savour of death unto death^x! How truly lamentable when Christ himself becomes an occasion of greater damnation to the very people whom he died to save! Alas! that men should ever *so* despise their own mercies! O that "*Rivers of tears might run down our eyes!*"]

INFER

1. How little true love is there in the world!

[However strong and numerous be the instances of men's carnal attachment, there are few indeed who manifest any regard for the souls of their fellow-creatures. Instead of weeping for others, the generality would laugh at those who wept for themselves. But, if we have not this mark in our forehead, we are destined to feel the stroke of God's avenging rod^y.]

2. How

^u Matt. xi. 21.

^u Matt. xxii. 12.

^x 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

^y Ezek. ix. 4—6.

2. How earnest ought ministers to be in dealing with the souls of men!

[If all ought to weep for the ungodly, much more should ministers, who are sent to call them to repentance, "Warn them night and day with tears²." Forgive then the earnestness, we should rather say, the want of earnestness, of him who labours among you; and pray, that he may so "declare the whole counsel of God," as to be "pure from the blood of all men."]

3. How earnest ought men to be in seeking the salvation of their own souls!

[If it be the duty of others to weep for us, how much more should we for ourselves! Let us then lay to heart the state of our souls, and sow in tears that we may reap in joy³.]

² Acts xx. 31.

³ Ps. cxxvi. 5.

DLXXII. PAUL'S LOVE TO THE ELECT EXEMPLIFIED.

2 Tim. ii. 10. *I endure all things for the elects sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

THE labours of faithful ministers are, for the most part, but ill requited by a wicked and ungrateful world. But, in the midst of all the opposition they meet with, they have the consolation to know, that all efforts to stop the progress of the gospel shall be in vain. This was St. Paul's comfort, when imprisoned at Rome for the word's sake, that, however *he* might be bound, the *word* was not; and "*therefore*" he submitted the more cheerfully to his troubles, being assured, that his endeavours to save the souls of his fellow-creatures would be crowned with success.

This subject leads us to consider

I. St. Paul's love to the elect

Notwithstanding the word "elect" has passed into a term of reproach, there most assuredly is an elect people, "a remnant according to the election of grace^a," whom
"God

^a Rom. xi. 5.

“God has chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth^b.”

Towards these St. Paul felt a peculiar regard

[He loved all, even his very enemies, and would gladly have submitted to the heaviest afflictions for their sake^c. But his love to the elect was both more exalted in its nature, and more abundant in its degree. He considered them as the special objects of God's love; as children of the same heavenly parent; as members of the same mystical body; and as fellow-heirs of the same glory. Hence they were all engraven on his very heart: and hence he exhorts us, while we do good unto all men, to do it more especially unto the household of faith^d.]

For their sake he willingly endured every trouble that could come upon him

[No man ever endured so much as he in his Master's cause. This we may see from the long catalogue of his troubles which he himself has left us^e. But, says he, “None of these things move me^f.” “I rejoice in my sufferings for the elects sake^g.” “most gladly will I spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly I love them, the less I be loved^h: I am so affectionately desirous of them, that I am willing to impart to them, not the gospel only, but my own soul also, because they are dear unto meⁱ.” “yea, if I be offered (and my blood be poured out as a libation) upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, I joy and rejoice with them all, and desire them also to joy and rejoice with me^k,” for, so far am I from looking forward to it with fear, or accounting it an occasion of grief, that I esteem it a blessed subject of mutual congratulations.]

How amiable and praiseworthy was this heavenly disposition!

[Certainly the love of Christ in dying for us, infinitely exceeds all that ever was manifested by any human being. But, next to Christ, St. Paul seems to have most abounded in love to man. He was indeed a very bright resemblance of his divine Master. And what a world would this be, if all were actuated by the same spirit and temper! Even those who cultivate least of this spirit themselves, must confess, that the universal prevalence of it would make a very heaven upon earth.]

But

^b 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^c Rom. ix. 1—3.

^d Gal. vi. 10.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^f Acts xx. 24.

^g Col. i. 24.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 15.

ⁱ 1 Thess. ii. 8.

^k Phil. ii. 17.

But the apostle's regard to the elect was not a mere carnal affection, as we shall see if we consider

II. The end he aimed at on their behalf

The happiness provided for the elect, is exceeding great and glorious

[For them is reserved "salvation," even salvation from sin and Satan, death, and hell. It is, moreover, a salvation "with glory;" not a mere exemption from punishment, but an unspeakable felicity in the immediate vision and fruition of their God. Nor is it ever to come to an end: its duration will continue as long as the soul itself shall exist. To crown the whole, it is a salvation in Christ Jesus, not merely as it is purchased by his blood (though *that* will infinitely enhance its value) but as it is treasured up in him, and shall be enjoyed in and through him, as the one medium of its communication for ever and ever.]

That they might obtain this, was the great object of his desires, the one scope of his labours

[He had no doubt at all respecting his own salvation^l. But could he be content to go to heaven alone? No; he would gladly have drawn all he could along with him^m. It was for this end that he became all things to all menⁿ: and to this he looked forward as his joy, his hope, his crown of rejoicing^o. There was not one weak, but he sympathized with him; not one turned aside, but he burned with an ardent desire to restore him^p. To such a degree was his soul bound up in the welfare of the elect, that he could say, "Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord;" nor did any thing appear too great for him either to do, or suffer, provided he might be instrumental in accomplishing this blessed end^q.]

INFER

1. What reason have most professors of religion to be ashamed of their attainments!

[Beyond a doubt, the apostle's spirit ought to be the spirit of all Christians^r; but how little of it is seen in the Christian church! How many are there who are ready to "bite and devour one another," instead of being willing to lay down their lives for each other! And how little self-denial is there even in the best of us! How little will we do, or suffer, either for the temporal or spiritual welfare of our brethren! Let us blush at our want of love; and labour henceforth

^l 2 Cor. v. 1.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

^q 1 Thess. iii. 7—9.

^m So the church. Song i. 4.

^o 1 Thess. ii. 19.

^r 1 John iii. 16.

^p 2 Cor. xi. 29.

henceforth to benefit the bodies, and more especially to save the souls, of all around us.]

2. How infatuated are they who have no concern for their own souls !

[Wherefore was Paul so earnest for the salvation of others, but because he knew somewhat of the value of a soul? He knew its happiness, if saved; and its misery, if lost. Shall another then be more concerned for us, than we for ourselves? Shall another be ready to do and suffer all things for us, and we be unwilling to do or suffer any thing for our own good? Let us remember, that no present gratifications can compensate for the loss of salvation; and that eternal glory will infinitely over-balance all that can be endured in the pursuit of it.]

3. How must they be blinded by the devil, who oppose the salvation of their fellow-creatures !

[There are too many who scoff at piety, and endeavour, by ridicule or persuasion, to turn men from the practice of it. Alas! what an awful contrast do their characters form with that of the apostle! Let such consider the warning given them by our Lord, That it were better for them to have a mill-stone hanged about their neck, and to be cast into the sea, than they should offend one of his little ones*.]

* Luke xvii. 2.

DLXXIII. PAUL'S MEEKNESS.

1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. *Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.*

AS there is a wide difference between the characters of the wicked and the righteous, so there are strong marks of discrimination between those who are truly pious, and those who have taken up a profession of religion without having felt its transforming efficacy. In too many there remains a proud, contentious spirit, amidst all their pretensions to piety: but in the upright Christian there is a meek, patient, and benevolent disposition, which will shew itself in the most trying circumstances, and afford a

decisive evidence of his sincerity. Of the former description were those teachers, who, in order to gain over to themselves a party in the Corinthian church, introduced among them contentions and divisions. But to these the apostle's conduct forms a striking contrast: and though he doubtless was peculiarly eminent in his attainments, we may see in him what every Christian, according to the measure of his grace, will surely practise.

We shall take occasion from his words to shew

I. The treatment which every Christian meets with from an ungodly world

The people of God have in every age been despised by the world

[It was the common complaint of all the prophets^a, and apostles^b, and of Christ himself^c, that they were objects of hatred and contempt to all around them. We also are taught to expect the very same treatment at the hands of ungodly men^d. We shall be "defamed" behind our backs, and "reviled" to our face: nor will our enemies be satisfied with injuring us merely by their words; they will also "persecute" us by acts of open hostility^e: yea, they will account us as the very scum of the earth, and as execrable wretches that are fit only to be sacrificed to devils, to appease their wrath in a time of public calamity^f.]

Strange as this may seem, it may be easily accounted for

[Christians are not thus detested because they are worse than others (for they are "the excellent of the earth," "more excellent than any of their neighbours^g,") but because they exhibit a light which forces men to see their own wickedness^h. To this we must ascribe Cain's murder of his brotherⁱ, and the universal opposition which the seed of the serpent make to the seed of the woman^k. If we were of the world, the world would love its own: but because we are chosen out of

^a *David*, Ps. xxv. 19. and lvi. 5, 6. *Jeremiah*, Jer. xviii. 18. and Lam. iii. 62. In reference to *all* of them, see Acts vii. 52.

^b 1 Cor. iv. 9.

^c John vii. 7. and xv. 24, 25.

^d Matt. x. 22, 24, 25.

^e Matt. v. 11. and 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^f This is the precise idea suggested in the text; and it refers to a custom which obtained in some heathen countries, and was probably well known at Corinth. See Doddridge on the place.

^g Ps. xvi. 3. Prov. xii. 26.

^h Matt. v. 10. Luke vi. 22. John iii. 19, 20.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 12.

^k Gen. iii. 15. Gal. iv. 29. Ps. xxxviii. 20.

of the world, and walk contrary to its sinful customs, it does, and will, hate us even unto death¹.]

Doubtless such treatment is hard to be borne; but the Christian distinguishes himself by

II. His behaviour under it

There are two things that characterize a true Christian under all his trials

1. A passive meekness

[The saints are men of like passions with others; but, through grace, they are enabled to repress the workings of corruption, and to regulate their tempers by the word of God. Instead of giving loose to a vindictive spirit, they bear with silent resignation the injuries that are inflicted on them, or, if they speak, it is only in words of gentle "intreaty." David, in his conduct towards Shimei^m and Saulⁿ, exemplifies in both these points of view the Christian's duty, and the Christian's experience. There are indeed occasions whereon, through inadvertence or the power of temptation, they may be overcome^o: but, on the whole, they will "possess their souls in patience^p," and "shew all meekness unto all men^q." Rather than provoke contention they will endure the wrong that is done towards them^r, and, forbearing to notice it in complaint to man^s, will commit themselves into the hands of a righteous God^t.]

2. An active benevolence

[The natural man, under injuries received, is mindful only of his own troubles: but the Christian feels a concern for the souls of those who injure him. He is grieved for them^u; and would be willing to sustain any temporal evils whatever, if by means of his own sufferings he might bring his enemies to a better mind, and avert from them God's heavy displeasure^x. He will even bless his enemies, and pray for them^y, and, rendering to them good for evil, he will heap coals of fire, as it were, upon their heads, in order to melt them into love^z. He will contend indeed; but he will use no weapon except that of love: and in this warfare he will fight strenuously, till, instead of being overcome of evil, he overcomes evil with good^a.]

INFER

¹ John xv. 18—20.

^m 2 Sam. xvi. 5.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxvi. 8, 9, 18, 19, 20, 24.

^o e. g. *Moses*, Num. xx. 10. Ps. cvi. 32, 33. & *Paul*, Acts xxiii. 3—5.

^p Luke xxi. 19.

^q Tit. iii. 2.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 7.

^s Ps. xxxviii. 12—14.

^t 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^u Ps. xxxv. 7, 11—17.

^x Exod. xxxii. 32. Rom. ix. 1—3.

^y Luke vi. 27, 28. Rom. xii. 14.

^z Rom. xii. 17, 19, 20.

^a Ib. ver. 21.

INFER

1. How different is the judgment of God from that of sinful men!

[Men hate and despise the righteous^b; and would pour out their blood as water, if God should withdraw his restraints from them^c. But God declares that, instead of their being unfit to live in the world, the world itself is not worthy of them^d; that their blood is precious in his sight^e; that whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of *his* eye^f; and that it were better for any man to be cast into the sea with a mill-stone tied about his neck, than that he should offend one of his little ones^g. Moreover the time is fast approaching, when this difference of sentiment shall be made to appear before the whole assembled universe, to the everlasting comfort of his afflicted people, and the eternal confusion of his enemies^h. Let us then learn to “take up our cross daily,” and to follow the example of our blessed Lordⁱ; so shall we approve ourselves his true disciples^k, and obtain a glorious reward in the day of judgment^l.]

2. How superior are the operations of divine grace to all the suggestions of human wisdom, or all the efforts of human power!

[Philosophy never could devise means to eradicate a vindictive spirit from the heart: on the contrary, it extolled revenge as a virtue, and regarded the temper that is exhibited in the text, as meanness and pusillanimity. If men had even endeavoured to exercise such a disposition as Paul's, they would have failed in the attempt, because unassisted nature is wholly incompetent to such a work. But what cannot the grace of God effect? It will turn a lion into a lamb; or rather, it will transform the vilest of the human race into the image of our incarnate God. Let us then follow the example of the saints and martyrs that have gone before us^m. Let us exert ourselves in dependence on the Lord Jesus, and not doubt but that “his grace shall be sufficient for us.” Then shall our very enemies be constrained to “glorify God in usⁿ,” and to “confess that God is with us of a truth^o.”]

^b Ps. xxxvii. 32. Isai. lix. 15.

^d Heb. xi. 38.

^g Matt. xviii. 6.

^k Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

^l Gal. i. 24.

^c Ps. cxvi. 15.

^h Isai. lxvi. 5.

ⁱ Matt. v. 12.

^o 1 Cor. xiv. 25,

^e Ps. lxxix. 2—4.

^f Zech. ii. 8.

^j 1 Pet. ii. 21, 23.

^m James v. 10.

DLXXIV. AN ISRAELITE INDEED.

John i. 47. *Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*

IT is comfortable to reflect, that there are many whose hearts are upright before God, while, from a variety of circumstances, they are unknown to the world. Nathanael was not yet evangelized; nor had he attained that eminence in the divine life whereby he was afterwards distinguished: yet was he among the Lord's "hidden ones," and justly entitled to the encomium passed upon him in the text. We shall

I. Consider the character of Nathanael

If ever the character of any human being deserved particular attention, surely that must, which was drawn by our Lord himself. Let us notice

1. The terms in which our Lord's testimony is expressed

[The whole body of the Jews were called Israelites as being descended from Jacob, to whom the name of Israel was given by God himself. But we are taught to distinguish between those who were "Israelites after the flesh," and those who were Israelites in a higher and more appropriate sense; for "all were not Israel who were of Israel:" those only who partook of Jacob's spirit, were numbered amongst his spiritual seed: and hence it was that Nathanael, being a heavenly-minded man, and an earnest wrestler with God in prayer, was called "an Israelite *indeed*." But Jacob was represented as "a plain man," in opposition to his brother Esau, who was "a cunning man:" and though on two occasions his conduct was far from corresponding with this character, yet, on the whole, he was a person of guileless simplicity: and it is in reference to this that Nathanael is further said to be, a man "in whom was no guile."]

2. The facts by which that testimony is confirmed

[The first evidence which we have of Nathanael's integrity, is *his openness to conviction*. He laboured under the prejudices which obtained through the whole of his nation, and thought that nothing good could proceed from Galilee: but when invited by Philip to "come and see" for himself, he instantly complied, in order that he might form a right judgment

judgment respecting the momentous question that was then agitated, the Messiahship of Jesus. Such candour uniformly characterizes the true Israelite — — —

The next thing we notice in him is, *his readiness to follow his convictions*. What were the particular circumstances that had taken place under the-fig tree, whether Nathanael had been adverting to Jacob's vision, or had been praying for divine instruction relative to the expected Messiah, or indeed what had been the precise workings of his mind, it is not possible for us to say : but Jesus intimated to him that he knew all that had passed there, and had approved the workings of his mind. This declaration, accompanied with a decided testimony respecting his character, convinced Nathanael that he was the true Messiah ; and drew from him an unequivocal acknowledgment of his divine mission. Such a readiness to receive the truth is a further ingredient of guileless integrity — — —

We have yet another proof of his sincerity in *his determination to approve himself to God at all events*. He could not but know that the prejudices he had imbibed, were common to the whole nation ; and that to become an open follower of Jesus would expose him to much obloquy and contempt. But he would not confer with flesh and blood : having found the truth, he embraced it boldly ; and from that moment became a stated attendant on his Lord. This, above all, displayed the uprightness of his soul : and this decided conduct, this prosecuting of his duty without any fear of consequences, is the surest test of radical and unalloyed integrity — — —

If our Lord's testimony stood in need of confirmation, we could not wish for more ample proof of its truth than arises from the facts that are here adduced.]

After such a delineation of Nathanael's character, we may well

II. Commend it to your imitation

It is not to gratify our curiosity, but to edify our souls, that so many bright examples are set before us in the scriptures. St. Paul exhorts us not only to be followers of him, but to " mark those who walk after his example." That you may be induced to imitate the example now set before you, consider

1. The excellence of such a character

[The righteous is deservedly said to be " more excellent than his neighbour." To compare a guileless person with one that is sensual or profane, would be to compare " light with darkness, and Christ with Belial." Let us therefore institute the comparison rather between a true Israelite, and the most moral and specious of those who retain any allowed guile : and

then the superiority of a Nathanael will appear in its true light: the hypocrite may have clearer views of divine truth, and appear in many respects to greater advantage before men, but he is radically a lover of sin, and a vassal of the wicked one; while the guileless person is transformed into the divine image, and is a friend, a favourite, a child of God.

Shall not this consideration operate upon us? Can we need any other inducement to imitate the glorious character before us?]

2. The importance of attaining it

[The time is shortly coming when all of us must appear in the presence of Christ: and, as he discerned the character of Nathanael so as to pronounce upon it with infallible certainty, so does he now weigh our spirits, as in a perfect balance, in order that he may give to every man his proper portion of censure or applause. Of those who were truly upright he will say, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile: I saw him under the fig-tree; I heard his groans; I saw his wrestlings with God in prayer; I treasured up his tears in my vial; and I testify before all, that his heart was right with God." But of those who harboured any secret iniquity he will say, "Behold a man that was called an Israelite, but was in reality a dissembler with God: he had 'a name to live, but he was really dead:' I saw him under the fig-tree; I marked the secret lusts which he harboured in his heart, and the allowed neglects of which he was habitually guilty: he would follow his convictions, and devote himself to me as far as his ease, his honour, and his interests would permit, but no further; and therefore, on account of his secret reserves, and his allowed guile, he must take his portion with the hypocrites and unbelievers."

Who can reflect on the consequences of that decision, and not desire so to live that Jesus may bear a favourable testimony on his behalf?]

ADDRESS

1. Those who do not so much as profess to be true Israelites

[You boast perhaps that, whatever you are, you are not hypocrites: but, though you make no profession of religion before men, the very calling of yourselves Christians implies that you acknowledge yourselves bound to follow his steps. Compare then your conduct with your obligations, and think what your doom must be in the day that he shall judge the world.]

2. Those who are Israelites, but not in truth

[If it were as easy to deceive God as it is to maintain a blameless

blameless appearance before man, we should be less anxious about your eternal interests. But the Lord Jesus searcheth the heart and trieth the reins ; and will adjudge men to happiness or misery, according to the real state of their souls. We are told that he who committeth sin is of the devil ; and that whosoever is born of God sinneth not. This must certainly imply, that if we have any allowed guile, we are not true Israelites, nor can we have our portion with them. O lay this to heart ; and seek “ that ye may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless.”]

3. Those who are Israelites indeed

[The ungodly world may brand you with the name of hypocrites and deceivers ; but the Lord Jesus looks upon you with pleasure and delight, and will now in your hearing, as it were, and ere long in their hearing also, bear testimony to your integrity, to the unspeakable comfort of your souls. O be careful to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man. Remember that, as your comfort depends on the preservation of your integrity, so does his honour. The ungodly may do what they will, and no reflections are cast upon religion : but if an Israelite do any thing unworthy of his profession, the gospel itself, yea, and the Lord Jesus Christ also, is condemned for it. Cut off occasion then from those who seek occasion to calumniate the way of truth ; that while you have the comfort of your integrity, God may be glorified by it, and his enemies be put to silence.]

DLXXV. THE NEED OF FLEEING FROM SIN WITH ABHORRENCE.

Gen. xxxix. 9. *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

THE grace of God is equally necessary for us in every situation of life ; in adversity, to support us ; and in prosperity, to keep us—We should have been ready indeed to congratulate Joseph on his advancement in the house of Potiphar, as though his trials had been ended : but we see that, if his former path was strewed with thorns, his present station was slippery, and replete with danger—His history is well known, and need not be insisted on : suffice it to say, that when tempted by his mistress, and importuned from day to day to commit sin with her, he resisted

resisted her solicitations with unshaken constancy, and rejected her proposals with indignation and abhorrence—The reply, which through the grace of God he was enabled to make, leads us to observe that

I. Sin is no light evil

The world in general imagine sin to be of very little moment

[Sin universally prevails, and, except where it greatly interferes with the welfare of society, is countenanced and approved—The customs of the world sanction the practice of it to a certain extent in every one, whether male or female; though the greater latitude of indulgence is allowed to men—The very education that is given both to our sons and daughters, tends only to foster in them pride and vanity, wantonness and sensuality, worldliness and profaneness: let but these dispositions assume the names of ease, elegance, and gaiety, and they instantly lose all their malignant qualities; and, instead of exciting our abhorrence, endear to us the persons by whom they are indulged—Too many indeed will not submit to any restraints, but will even justify the grossest immoralities—They impose upon their excesses some specious appellation; they call drunkenness, conviviality; and whoredom, youthful indiscretion—Thus they commit sin without fear, persist in it without remorse, and even glory in their shame, when, through age and infirmity, they can no longer follow their former courses—]

But, if viewed aright, it will appear a dreadful evil

[Can that be light or venial which cast myriads of angels from their height of glory into the bottomless abyss of hell?—Is that of trifling importance which in one moment ruined the whole race of man, and subjected them to an everlasting curse?—But if these effects be not sufficient to convince us, let us behold the Saviour in the garden of Gethsemane, or on the hill of Calvary: let us behold the Lord of glory bathed in blood, and expiring under the curse which our sins have merited; and we shall instantly confess with Solomon, that they are “fools, who make a mock of sin”—]

Not however to insist on this general view of sin, we observe that

II. Considered as an offence against God, its enormity is exceeding great

This is the particular light in which it struck the mind of Joseph—Though the iniquity to which he was tempted, would have been a defiling of his own body, and an
irreparable

irreparable injury to Potiphar his master, yet every other consideration seemed to be swallowed up in that of the offence it would give to God^a—Sin is levelled more immediately against God himself—It is

1. A defiance of his authority

[God commands us to keep his law; and enforces his commands with the most awful and encouraging sanctions—But sin says, like Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that I should regard him? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice^b”—And is it a light matter for a servant thus to insult his master, a child his parent, a creature his Creator?—]

2. A denial of his justice

[God threatens that “the wicked shall not be unpunished”—But what does sin reply? It says like them of old, “God will not do good, neither will he do evil^c”—And shall it be thought a trifling matter to rob the Deity thus of his most essential perfections?—]

3. An abuse of his goodness

[It is altogether owing to the goodness of God that we are even capable of sinning against him—It is from him that we receive the bounties which administer to our excess, and the strength whereby we provoke the eyes of his glory—And can any thing be conceived more vile than to make his goodness to us the very means and occasion of insulting him to his face?—]

4. A rejection of his mercy

[God is continually calling us to accept of mercy through the Son of his love—But sin “tramples under foot the Son of God;” it even “crucifies him afresh, and puts him to an open shame”—It proclaims aloud, that the glory of heaven is not to be compared with the gratification of our lusts; and that it is better to perish by self-indulgence, than to obtain salvation in the exercise of self-denial—What terms then can sufficiently express the enormity of that, which so blinds and infatuates its wretched votaries?—]

It is not possible to behold sin in this light, without acknowledging that

III. We ought to flee from it with indignation and abhorrence

Instead

^a David viewed his sin in this light, Ps. li. 4.

^b Exod. v. 2. See also Ps. xii. 4. and Jer. xlv. 16.

^c Zeph. i. 12.

Instead of tampering with it we should flee from it

[Sin is of so fascinating a nature that it soon bewitches us, and leads us astray—As “a man cannot take fire into his bosom without being burnt,” so neither can he harbour sin in his heart without being vitiated and corrupted by it—Had Achan fled from the wedge of gold as soon as ever he found a desire after it springing up in his heart; and David turned away his eyes the very instant he saw Bathsheba, how much shame and misery would they have escaped! But the breach, which might easily have been stopped at the first, presently defied the efforts of an accusing conscience; and a flood of iniquity soon carried them away with irresistible impetuosity—Thus also it will be with us; if we parley with the tempter, he will surely overcome us: we must resist sin at the first, if we would oppose it with success—]

Instead of loving it, we should utterly abhor it

[The grace of God enabled Joseph to reject with abhorrence the offers proposed to him; and to prefer a dungeon with a good conscience before the indulgence of a criminal passion, or the favour of a seducing mistress—Thus should we turn with indignation from the allurements of sin—We should “make a covenant with our eyes,” yea, with our very hearts, that we may close, as much as possible, every avenue of ill—Instead of palliating sin, we should view it in all its aggravations; and especially as an offence against a just and holy, a merciful and gracious, God—Nor should we ever forget, that, though it be “rolled as a sweet morsel under the tongue, it will prove gall in the stomach;” and though it flatter us with its innocence, “it will bite as a serpent, and sting like an adder”—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who think lightly of sin

[We well know that the generality of men have much to say in extenuation of their guilt; and, if they had been in the situation of Joseph, would have accounted the greatness of the temptation a sufficient excuse for their compliance with it—But to what purpose shall we palliate our guilt, unless we can prevail on the Judge of quick and dead to view it with our eyes? We may indeed weaken our present convictions, but we shall only secure thereby, and enhance, our eternal condemnation—Let us remember that “fleshly lusts war against the soul^d,” and that either we must mortify and subdue them, or they will enslave and destroy us^e; for, even though the whole universe should combine to justify the commission of sin, not one who yields to its solicitations, shall ever pass unpunished—]

2. Those

^d 1 Pet. ii. 11.

^e Rom. viii. 13.

2. Those who begin to see the evil of it

[It is an unspeakable mercy to have any view of the malignity of sin—To see how much we have deserved the wrath and indignation of God, is the very first step towards repentance and salvation—Let not any then turn away from this sight too hastily, or think they have discovered the evil of sin in its full extent—This is a lesson we are to be learning all our days; and it is only in proportion as we advance in this humiliating knowledge, that we shall be qualified to receive and enjoy the Saviour—It is necessary indeed that, while we look at sin, we look also at him who made atonement for it; for otherwise, we shall be led to despair of mercy: but, if we keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and see the infinite extent of his merits, we need never be afraid of entertaining too bitter a remembrance of sin—The more we loathe ourselves for past iniquities, the more shall we be fortified against temptations to commit them in future, and the more will God himself be ready to preserve and bless us—]

3. Those who, like Joseph, are enabled to withstand it

[Blessed be God, there are many living witnesses to prove, that the grace of God is as sufficient at this day, as ever it was, to purify the heart, and to “keep the feet of his saints”—Let those then who are enabled to hold fast their integrity, give glory to him, by whom they are strengthened and upheld—But let them remember, that they are never beyond the reach of temptation, nor ever so likely to fall, as when they are saying, “My mountain stands strong; I shall not be moved”—Let us then continue to watch against the renewed assaults of our great adversary—Never let him find us off our guard, or draw us to a parley with him—Let us suspect him, and he shall not deceive us; let us resist him, and he shall flee from us: and the very assaults that he shall make upon us, shall terminate in our honour and his own confusion—]

DLXXVI. A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

Acts xxiv. 16. *Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.*

THE gospel of Christ has in all ages been stigmatized as having an unfriendly aspect on morality; and its professors have been accused as maintaining this position, “that we may continue in sin that grace may abound.” But, however the disgraceful conduct of hypocrites may have

have appeared to countenance such a charge, it is certain that every true Christian is a living witness for God, and a public monument of the sanctifying influence of the gospel. St. Paul was not inferior in holiness to any human being, our blessed Lord alone excepted: yet was he inveighed against as a man that was not fit to live upon the earth. In the passage before us we have an account of the accusations brought against him by a certain orator, named Tertullus. He was represented as “a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and, to complete the whole, an impious profaner of the temple,” (ver. 5, 6.) In other words, he was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness. In answer to these allegations he shews that, *as to sedition*, the reason of his coming to Jerusalem was to bring alms to his nation, and to present his offerings to God; and that his demeanour there had been peaceable and quiet, for they had not found him in the temple disputing with any man, nor raising up the people either in the synagogue, or in the city. As to the charge of *heresy*, he acknowledges, that after the way that they called heresy, he did worship the God of his fathers, believing those very scriptures, and hoping for the accomplishment of that very resurrection, which his accusers themselves professed to believe and hope for. And lastly, as to the *profaneness* and impiety with which they charged him, he declares that his principles led him to a far different conduct: that that faith and hope, which he professed, stimulated him to the most scrupulous performance of every duty both to God and man: “herein,” says he, (or as it might be translated, *on this account*, that is, on account of this faith and hope,) “I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.”

We propose to shew,

I. What we are to understand by a conscience void of offence.

II. That every true Christian labours to maintain it.
Ist.

Without entering into any metaphysical enquiries concerning the *nature* of conscience, we may observe that its

office is to testify to every man the quality of his past actions, and to regulate his conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong. It does not so properly judge respecting the truth or falsehood of any position: (*that* is rather the office of the understanding) it regards rather actions than sentiments; and the good or evil that is in them, rather than any prudential considerations respecting them. It is a monitor in every man's own bosom that may be called, in a qualified sense, the voice of God within him. It is not wholly subject to his own control: for though much may be done to bribe, or silence it, yet sometimes it will speak out, and force the most obdurate sinner to listen to its voice.

The rules whereby it judges are various: where the light of revelation does not shine, it has no better rule than the law of nature, or the law of a man's own mind. It is *then* regulated by every man's own apprehensions of good or evil: and therefore must of necessity give a verdict more or less erroneous, as the person's mind is more or less instructed in moral truth. On this account, it would not be easy with respect to heathens to determine precisely what a conscience void of offence is; for certainly, allowances must be made for the different degrees of light which men enjoy. But with respect to us, who live under the clear dispensation of the gospel, these difficulties in a great measure vanish.—The following considerations may help to throw some light upon the subject.

The conscience is not to be judged void of offence *merely because it does not accuse us*. There are many so thoughtless and dissipated that they give themselves no time to reflect. They are engaged in a continual round of business or amusement; they shun all those scenes which would be likely to bring their sins to remembrance; they avoid all serious conversation; and thus they pass months and years without feeling any remonstrances of conscience: that faculty is lulled asleep; and, if by any means it be in the least degree awakened, every method is adopted to check its clamours, and restore its wonted tranquillity. Of such persons God speaks by the prophet Hosea, when he says, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness."

There are others who imbibe principles which are well
calculated

calculated to weaken the influence of conscience. They take it for granted, that there is no great evil in sin; that God will never execute his threatenings against it; that *they* cannot be obnoxious to his wrath, because they have not committed any heinous sins, or, if they have, they were only such as the fashions of the world, and the frailties of their nature might well excuse. By such principles as these they persuade themselves that they have no ground for fear: like some of the Jews of old, they “heal their wounds slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace,” or, like others of them, they affirm boldly, “I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart.”

There is yet another description of persons who have at times been harassed with remorse of conscience; but they have so often resisted their convictions, sinned against the light, and done violence to all their own feelings, that they have, as the apostle says, “seared their consciences as with a hot iron,” and rendered themselves “past feeling.”

Now it will be needless to prove that such persons have not a conscience void of offence; they may be rather said to have no conscience at all; or, if they have, it must be called, what the apostle does call it, an *evil conscience*.

As a conscience is not void of offence merely because it does not accuse, so neither is it *necessarily* so, *even if it should approve*.

Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong. Even among those who bear the Christian name, how many are there who think that religion consists in penances and pilgrimages, and in the observance of superstitious rites and ceremonies; yea, who would think, that the extirpation of heretics was the most meritorious work they could effect! Yet, if they were to abound in such works as these, and thereby gain the approbation of their own consciences, must we therefore say that their consciences were void of offence? Surely not. St. Paul has told us with respect to himself, that he verily “thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus:” but does he assert his innocence upon that ground? No; he calls himself “a blasphemer and injurious, and a persecutor, yea, the very chief of sinners.” Our Lord tells his disciples, that many would think,

“whosoever killed them would do God service:” but could this conceit excuse their murderous acts? No. If we act upon wrong principles, our actions must be bad: nor can our error change the quality of our actions: it may indeed extenuate our guilt; but it can never render that good, which is in its own nature evil.

To speak then immediately to the point—There are two things necessary to constitute a conscience void of offence; it must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty; and it must testify upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between that rule and our actions.

It must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty. The rule of duty is concise and plain: we are to “love God with all our heart and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves: On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Now this rule, in theory, is universally acknowledged; but, through the influence of our carnal interests and passions, we lose sight of it entirely, and imagine ourselves conforming to it, when we are violating it in every point of view. We suppose that the love of this present world will consist with a good conscience, though God himself has told us, that “if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” We think we may indulge pride, envy, selfishness, and a thousand other malignant passions, and yet conform to the law of love.

While the eyes of our understanding are thus blinded, we cannot be said to have a conscience void of offence; because the conscience being unenlightened with respect to the rule of judging, it cannot possibly give a just verdict on our case. It must be acquainted with the several relations in which we stand to God and man: it must see what is required of us as creatures, as sinners, as redeemed. It must know that God claims our entire dependence, supreme regard, unreserved obedience. It must feel the necessity of abasing ourselves before God in dust and ashes, and of “fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us.” In short, it must be convinced, that “a life of faith on the Son of God,” and “a cleaving to him with full purpose of heart,” are the distinguishing features of the true Christian: but besides this, it must be acquainted also with the several duties which we owe to our fellow-

fellow-creatures, as superiors, equals, and inferiors; and that too not only in their civil capacity, but in their relation to us as members of Christ's mystical body. When it is thus enlightened, then, and then only, is it capable of being void of offence toward God and man.

But it is yet further necessary that conscience should be able to testify, upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between this rule of duty and our actions.

Its testimony must proceed from a watchful observation of all our motives and principles of action. It must be in the habit of bringing our conduct to the touchstone, and of discerning between the pure metal and the most specious counterfeits. It must be on its guard against the bias it receives from prejudice and passion; and must be able to appeal to the heart-searching God for the truth of its testimony. Not that it need testify, that there is no sin in us; for then who could ever receive a favourable verdict, seeing "that in many things we all offend?" But its testimony must be to *this* effect; that, after searching the sacred records, after praying for the teachings of God's spirit, after carefully investigating not only our actions, but our motives and principles, and after comparing these with the rule of duty, it cannot discern that there is any one sin habitually indulged, or any one duty allowedly neglected.

This is the true import of what is called in our text, "a conscience void of offence."

That every true Christian labours to maintain this, is the II^d. point which we proposed to establish.

Men in general are well pleased if they can secure the approbation of their *fellow-creatures*, and maintain a character for probity in *the world*. They are therefore chiefly attentive to their *external* conduct, and not very solicitous about the thoughts or desires of their hearts. But this will not satisfy the true Christian. He knows that the eye of God is upon his heart, and that the most secret thought is "naked and open before him." Like the apostle, he accounts it "a small matter to be judged of man's judgment;" he says, "What good can the applause of men do me, if I be condemned of my Judge? Or, Why need I regard the opinion of the world, if I am accepted and applauded by my God?" Seeing how con-

temptible every testimony is in comparison of that of his Maker, he “studies to approve himself to God, a servant that needeth not to be ashamed.” In whatever relation of life he stand, he endeavours to fulfil the duties of it. Is he in authority? he conscientiously improves his influence for the good of men and for the glory of God. More especially, if he sustain that weighty office of a minister of Christ, he will not be a faithless steward, or a slothful servant, but will “be instant in season and out of season,” and will “watch for souls as one that must give account.” On the other hand, is he in an inferior station? he will perform his duties, “not with eye-service, as a man-pleaser, but as unto God.” He will not esteem himself at liberty to yield a *partial* obedience: he will not think that his observance of relative duties supersedes the necessity of delight in God: nor on the other hand, will he imagine, that the devoutest exercise of prayer and praise can absolve him from his obligation to equity and mercy. Every duty both to God and man occupies his attention, and is performed in its season, “without partiality and without hypocrisy.” Nor is this strictness merely *occasional*: it does not exist only in a time of sickness, or during a season of preparation for the Lord’s supper: no: he is “*always*” engaged in the same “exercise:” the law of God is written in his heart; obedience to it is his delight; nor can any consideration whatever divert him from his purpose. He is not insensible how hard it is to flesh and blood to “cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye:” but no regard to carnal ease will induce him to spare his idol. He expects not that the world should love or honour him, when he recollects how it treated his divine Master: he is well assured that, “if he will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution.” But so far from being terrified at the cross, he takes it up and glories in it. He reverences himself, his conscience I mean, more than he does the whole world. He studies by meditation and prayer to get his conscience well informed; and then he confers not with flesh and blood: he asks only, “What is duty? How shall I maintain a good conscience? How shall I please my God?” These questions satisfactorily determined, he can say with the apostle,

apostle, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in the path of duty, for the name of the Lord Jesus."

That this is no exaggerated statement, but really the character of every true Christian, will appear from the clearest declarations of holy writ.

St. Paul repeatedly speaks of Christians in this light : he represents them as being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shine as lights in the world:" and he prays for them that they may be "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ;" yea, "that their whole spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And David, giving the character of those who are accepted of God, expressly declares that they are "without guile." "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and *in whose spirit there is no guile.*"

If it would afford us any additional satisfaction to find men of like passions with ourselves who have attained to this character, the scriptures afford us many striking instances. St. Paul himself could testify before the Jewish Sanhedrim, that he had "lived in all good conscience before God until that day." And in another place he speaks of the testimony which his own conscience bore to his character in these respects, as a source of most exalted pleasure to his soul: "our rejoicing," says he "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." A similar testimony was given by our Lord himself to a man of far less attainments than St. Paul: of Nathanael he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

But it may be said, "We acknowledge that Christians are so described, and that some eminent persons have attained to that character: but still the question recurs, *Cannot a man be a true Christian, without having such a conscience as has been described?* Before we give a precise answer to this, we should observe, that it is possible a man may be a Christian, and yet not enjoy the *comfort* of such a conscience: the corruptions of his heart, the temptations

of Satan, an occasional commission of sin, and even certain disorders of the body, may prevent his conscience from yielding such a testimony; yea, may cause it to accuse and condemn him, notwithstanding he be a real Christian. But if any ask, whether any one can be a true Christian without having a just *ground* for such a testimony, or in other words, whether he can be in a state of salvation without possessing real integrity of heart? We answer, that, if there be any truth in the word of God, HE CANNOT. What says David with respect to this? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." This cannot mean that if he *have* iniquity in his heart, God will not hear him: but that if he harbour it, or allow it in any instance, it will be in vain for him to hope for any mercy from God. St. John speaks yet more strongly to the same effect: "He that committeth sin is of the devil: 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: in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God." Now what can be the import of this passage? To interpret it rigorously according to the strict letter of the words, would certainly render it inconsistent with other passages of scripture, which declare that "there is no man that liveth and sinneth not:" but to reconcile it with any *allowed* sin, is absolutely impossible.

Here then we trust we may satisfactorily close the discussion of our text. Seeing that the conscience has been shewn to be without offence *only* when it can testify of our *unreserved* conformity to God's law; and that no one can be a true Christian, unless it be his chief labour to maintain such a conscience; it only remains that we improve the subject.

And now may God in infinite mercy send down upon us his Holy Spirit, to impress our minds with conviction, if we have not yet attained the Christian character, and to fill us with consolation if we have!

We all profess to be Christians in reality, as well as in name. We all feel averse to acknowledge that we have no part or lot in the gospel salvation: and surely it is a painful task to rob any one of a hope so comfortable, so delightful. It will be far more congenial with our feelings, if

if we take for granted, that, in this Christian assembly, we all deserve the Christian name. Let us then indulge the pleasing thought : let us now consider ourselves as genuine disciples of Christ ; let us give him the glory of what he has wrought in us ; and let us, for the confusion of all the adversaries of the gospel, and for the confirmation of our own souls, unite in making our acknowledgments to God.

“THOU SEARCHER OF ALL HEARTS, who at this instant observest the state of every soul here before thee, we would not approach thee with any pharisaical boasting, pretending to give the glory to thee, while we are indeed taking it to ourselves : no, Lord, let that be far from us : we know, that, if we had done all that had been commanded us, we should have been only unprofitable servants : but instead of being merely unprofitable, we feel that we are vile and miserable sinners. Nevertheless, we trust that we are monuments of thy grace ; and we desire now to join in humble adorations and thanksgivings for what thou has done for our souls. Through thy grace and mercy we enjoy a conscience void of offence toward thee and toward man. We feel at this time, that, notwithstanding all our short-comings and defects, we have an unfeigned and uniform desire to please thee. Our consciences testify, that there is no one instance wherein we knowingly do to others, what we should not think it right for them, in a change of circumstances, to do to us. Nor are we contented with doing as we would be done unto : no, Lord : Thou, who seest in secret, knowest what longing desires we have after thee : thou beholdest us daily approaching thy footstool with deepest humiliation and contrition ; and hourly, as it were, washing in the fountain of Christ’s blood, which alone can ‘purge our consciences from dead works.’ Nor does our hope of forgiveness embolden us to sin ; but rather, thou knowest, animate us to obedience. As for sin, we can appeal to thee, we hate and abhor it. If at any time we commit it, even in thought, thou knowest how much our souls are pained, and how we renew our applications to thee for pardon and strength. ‘We say the truth in Christ, and lie not, our consciences also bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost, that we have great heaviness and continual sorrow in our hearts’ for the corruptions that yet remain within us ;

us ; and that, if we could have the desire of our hearts, we would bid an eternal farewell to sin, and be holy as thou art holy, and perfect as thou art perfect. We adore thee, that we have such an evidence of our sincerity before thee : we thank thee that we do not now feel any misgivings in our consciences respecting these things ; and we earnestly pray that thou wouldest perfect thy good work in our hearts ; for we are all ‘ utterly purposed ’ that from this moment we will no more offend.”

Thus far have we taken for granted that all act agreeably to their profession, and that all are walking in the paths of peace. But have the consciences of all approved these acknowledgments ? Have none felt any misgivings ? Has not conscience whispered to any one, “ This is not thy state ? ” If this be the case with any one, let him hearken to the friendly intimation, the faithful remonstrance : for, “ if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things : but if our heart condemn us not, then, and then only, have we confidence towards God.”

This Analysis of the foregoing Sermon is added, in order that the Reader may see how easily a Skeleton may be turned into an entire Sermon.

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

Acts xxiv. 16. *Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.*

THE gospel is often represented as unfavourable to morality—

But true believers are living monuments of its sanctifying influence—

St. Paul was deemed a “ fellow not worthy to live upon the earth ”—

He was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness^a—
But

^a Ver. 5, 6.

But he distinctly and satisfactorily disproved the allegations^b—

And boldly affirmed that his principles had quite an opposite effect^c—

We shall endeavour to shew

I. What we are to understand by “a conscience void of offence”

A metaphysical enquiry into the *nature* of conscience would be to little profit—

Its *office* is to testify the quality of our actions, and to regulate our conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong^d—

The rule, whereby it should judge, is, the word of God—

And it is considered as good or evil, according to the verdict it gives—

Not that it is void of offence *merely because it does not accuse*

[There are many so immersed in cares or pleasures that they never reflect on the state of their souls^e—

And, if at any time their conscience be alarmed, they instantly endeavour to check its clamours, and restore its tranquillity—

Others persuade themselves that they have no cause for fear—

And that they shall have peace notwithstanding all their sins^f—

Others have, by resisting, quenched the light within them—

And thus have reduced themselves to a state of awful obduracy^g—

Such persons have no other than “an *evil* conscience”—]

Nor is a conscience *necessarily* void of offence, *even though it should approve*

[Many

^b Respecting *Sedition*, ver. 12. *Heresy*, ver. 14, 15. *Profaneness*, in general, ver. 16; in the particular that had been specified, ver. 17, 18.

^c If *ἐν τούτοις* were translated *on this account* (as it might be) the connexion between his principles and conduct would be more clearly marked.

^d It regards actions rather than sentiments, and the good or evil that is in them rather than any prudential considerations respecting them.

^e 11os. vii. 2.

^f Jer. viii. 11. Deut. xxix. 19.

^g 1 Tim. iv. 2.

[Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong—

By conforming to their own principles they may gain the approbation of their own minds—

But it does not *therefore* follow that they are innocent—

Their mistakes cannot change the quality of their actions—

Error may extenuate, but cannot remove their guilt ^h—]

To be truly void of offence, conscience must have *a clear discovery of the rule of duty*

[The rule of duty is concise and plain ⁱ—

This however, though allowed in theory, is practically denied—

Men persuade themselves that the love of the world will consist with their duty to God ^k—

And that pride, envy, selfishness, &c. may accord with love to man ^l—

How should conscience, thus blinded, give a just verdict?—

Or how should its blindness cause that to be good which is in itself evil?—]

It should be able also to testify upon good grounds that there is a *correspondence between that rule and our actions*

[It should be in the habit of examining our principles and motives—

And be on its guard against any bias from prejudice or passion—

It should be able to appeal to God for the truth of its testimony—

Not that it need to testify of sinless perfection ^m—

But it must testify, that, after the strictest search, it can find no sin *habitually* indulged, or duty *allowedly* neglected—]

The true import of “a good conscience” being fixed, we observe

II. That every true Christian labours to maintain it

This is certainly the character of one who fears God

[The world are satisfied with gaining the applause of men—

But

^h Would those who think it meritorious to extirpate heretics, or those, of whom our Lord speaks, John xvi. 2. be justified in following the dictates of their deluded consciences? St. Paul determines this in his own case, compare Acts xxvi. 9—11, with 1 Cor. xv. 9. and 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

ⁱ Matt. xxii. 37—40.

^k 1 John ii. 15.

^l 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^m That is not possessed by any, James iii. 2.

But the Christian makes but little account of man's judgmentⁿ—

He knows that the eye of God is upon his heart^o—

He therefore “studies to approve himself to God”—

He has respect to every part of his duty “toward God and man^p”—

And this, not at certain seasons only, but “always”—

Nor will he be deterred by any regard to ease, or interest, or fear—

Enquiring only, “What is duty?” he will say with the apostle^q—]

Nor can any one be a true Christian who has not attained it

[Every pardoned sinner is supposed to be without guile^r—

All in the primitive church are spoken of in this light^s—

St. Paul did not hesitate to affirm that this was *his* character^t—

And the same is ascribed to one who was far inferior to him^u—

Nor is any one in a state of salvation who has not attained it^x—

This is expressly asserted by David^y, and St. John^z—]

APPLICATION

[We all are willing to believe ourselves *real* Christians—

And it is painful to rob any one of so comfortable a hope—

Let us then, as Christians, unite our acknowledgments to God^a—

Let us adore him for that grace, whereby he enables us to maintain, always, and in all things, a conscience void of offence—

But

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 3.

^o Heb. iv. 13.

^p He does not think that his observance of relative duties supercedes the necessity of delight in God; nor, on the other hand, that the devoutest exercise of prayer and praise can absolve him from his obligations to equity and mercy. Jam. ii. 17.

^q Acts xxi. 13.

^r Ps. xxxii. 2.

^s Phil. i. 10. and ii. 15. See also 1 Thess. v. 23.

^t Acts xxiii. 1. 2 Cor. i. 12.

^u John i. 47.

^x Many things may conspire to rob a Christian of the comfort of such a conscience, (the corruptions of his heart, the temptations of Satan, and even bodily disorders, may cause him to despond for a season) but a *just ground* for such a conscience he cannot but possess.

^y Ps. lxxvi. 18.

^z 1 John iii. 8—10. If this were *rigorously* interpreted, it would contradict other passages of scripture, 1 Kings viii. 46. But to reconcile it with *allowed* sin is impossible.

^a Rom. ix. 1, 2.

But if, in this appeal to him, we feel misgivings, or conscience suggest an opposite testimony, let us remember that admonition^b—]

^b 1 John iii. 20, 21.

DLXXVII. PAUL'S INDIFFERENCE TO MEN'S JUDGMENT.

1 Cor. iv. 3—5. *With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

THE ministers of Christ are generally either unduly exalted, or undeservedly depreciated, by those around them—

But they should discharge their duties with fidelity, without any regard to the opinions of men—

And approve themselves to him who will judge them righteously in the last day—

I. The tribunal to which Paul referred his character

He was *not* concerned about *man's* judgment

[By some he was looked up to as the head of a party^a—

By others he was deemed unworthy to live^b—

But he knew that men's judgment would continue only for a day^c—

He was therefore alike indifferent to their censure or applause—]

He could *not* wholly depend upon *his own* judgment

[He did not know that he lived in any allowed sin—

Yet he was aware that, through the deceitfulness of sin and of his own heart, he might be led to form too favourable an estimate of his own state—

He knew that God might discern much iniquity where we see none^d—

He

^a 1 Cor. iii. 4.

^c This is intimated in the original.

^b Ver. 13.

^d Luke ix. 55.

He therefore could not venture too confidently to trust even to the testimony of his own conscience—]

He committed himself *rather* to the unerring judgment of *God*

[He did not indeed hope for an acquittal on the ground of innocence—

Or expect a reward as due to him on the footing of strict justice—

But he relied on God's equity as tempered with mercy—

And willingly left himself to the righteous disposal of his Judge—]

II. The advice he gives to us in reference to this subject

He guards us against passing an uncharitable judgment on others

[There are certain cases in which we are necessitated to judge others both for our own security, and for the church's good^e—

But we should not needlessly or uncharitably exercise this right—

To scrutinize too narrowly the motives of men, is to invade the province of God himself^f.—

We should therefore forbear to execute an office, for which we are neither qualified nor designed—]

He recommends us to leave others to the judgment of God

[A time is coming, wherein God himself will judge the world—

He will then bring to light the most hidden counsels of our hearts—

Every holy desire or evil inclination shall then have its due influence in the sentence passed upon us—

And “all shall have praise” or dispraise, in the proportion and degree that the unerring Judge shall appoint—

To him then we should commit each other and ourselves, in an assured expectation that “the Judge of all the earth will do right”—]

INFER

1. How little do they know of Christianity who are of a proud censorious spirit!

[Many who profess religion are exceeding prone to indulge this unchristian temper—

But

^e 1 Cor. v. 3, 5, 11, 12.

^f James iv. 11, 12.

But amidst their high conceit of their own attainments they themselves are only as tinkling cymbals^g—

Let them consider what judgment awaits them at God's tribunal^h, and they will need no persuasion to correct their sinful habits—]

2. What consolation does the gospel afford to those who are persecuted for righteousness sake!

[Christians must expect to have “all manner of evil spoken of them falsely for Christ's sake”—

But God will “bring forth their righteousness as the noon-day”—

The speedy approach therefore of his judgment may well reconcile them to the momentary disgrace which they are called to sufferⁱ—]

3. What need have we all to prepare for the judgment-seat of Christ!

[It will be to little purpose that we have been admired of men—

Our state will be fixed at last agreeably to our character in the sight of God—

Let us then study to approve ourselves to “him who trieth the heart, and searcheth the reins”—

And endeavour so to act in all things, that, whether applauded or condemned by men, we may be accepted of our God—]

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^h Matt. vii. 1, 2. James ii. 3.

ⁱ As a man, knowing that his innocence would be indisputably proved before a judge in a few hours, would disregard the hasty judgment of a malignant enemy, or an ignorant stranger, and rather rejoice in the prospect of a more equitable decision, so should the Christian cheerfully endure the short-lived ignominy that is undeservedly cast upon him.

DLXXVIII. WEANEDNESS FROM THE WORLD.

Ps. cxxxi. 2. *My soul is even as a weaned child.*

AMONG the great variety of representations whereby the Christian's character is set forth in the holy scriptures, that of a little child holds a very distinguished place^a.

To

^a Matt. xviii. 3.

To this we annex the idea of humility, and teachableness, and resignation to the will of our heavenly Father. In this last view more especially the behaviour of a child was beautifully exemplified in the conduct of David. He had been anointed to the kingly office by God's command; yet he waited patiently for many years without ever aspiring to the kingdom, till the Lord's time came to give it him. Though he was persecuted with murderous rage and jealousy by Saul, he would never lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, or give occasion of offence to the government under which he lived: on the contrary, he appeals to God in this psalm, that he had not indulged any ambitious thoughts, or interfered in any affairs of state, but had acquiesced in the disposals of an all-wise Providence, even as a weaned child does in the directions and government of his mother^b.

To illustrate this disposition of mind, we shall shew

I. What those things are from which we ought to be weaned

[The circumstances alluded to in the text will serve to direct our thoughts. David's indifference to all the pomp of royalty shews, that we should be weaned from *pleasure*, from *riches*, from *honour*, from *every thing* which we possess in this world.

Pleasure is but ill suited to the advancement of a soul in the divine life. There are indeed pleasures which we may lawfully enjoy: but if the heart be set upon them, we cannot properly engage in that race which we are to run, or that warfare we are to maintain: nor can we have any more decisive evidence of our being still unrenewed by divine grace^c.

Riches also may be possessed with innocence: but they must not be coveted. They should rather be considered as a snare which we are to dread, than as a blessing we are eager to obtain. They are as clay upon the feet of one that is running a race^d, or as a weight tied to the neck of one that is swimming for his life^e. There has scarcely ever occurred an instance wherein the acquisition of them has furthered the divine life; but thousands have been retarded by them, and not a few eternally destroyed^f.

Reputation

^b Ver. 1, 2.

^c Luke viii. 14. 2 Tim. iii. 4. Jam. v. 1, 5. 1 Tim. v. 6.

^d Hab. ii. 6. ^e Matt. xix. 23, 24. ^f 1 Tim. vi 9—11.

Reputation is that which men in general are most averse to sacrifice: but we must be willing to part with it, if we would be Christians indeed. If we seek the honour that cometh of men, we cannot possibly be stedfast in the faith^e; we shall shrink from reproach, and prove unfaithful to God in the time of trial^h; and being ashamed of Christ, we shall cause him to be ashamed of us, in the day of judgmentⁱ.

There is not any thing, not *health*, or *friends*, or *liberty*, or *life* itself, that we should value any further than as it may be improved to the glory of God^k. Our hearts must be weaned from all, so as to be ready to part with every thing, whenever God, in his providence, shall call for it.]

To evince that such a state is attainable, we shall shew

II. What methods God uses to wean us from them

[Without any indelicacy or impropriety we may observe, in allusion to the metaphor in the text, that to wean us from creature-comforts, our heavenly Parent *embitters them to us, withdraws them from us, and gives us something more suitable in their stead.*

Such is our attachment to earthly things, that we should never be willing to part from them, if they were not in some way or other embittered to us. God therefore, in mercy to us, mixes gall and wormwood with every cup he puts into our hands. In the pursuit of pleasure, our brightest prospects become clouded, our highest gratifications cloy, and numberless unforeseen accidents arise to damp our joys, and to disappoint our expectations. In the attainment of wealth, there are many cares to corrode, many vexations to disquiet us, so that we must write on all the bags that we have amassed, “This is vanity and vexation of spirit.” The acquisition of knowledge seems to promise the most permanent satisfaction; but such is the labour requisite to attain it, and so little, after all, is within the reach of human intellect, that the wisest of men was constrained to say, “Much study is a weariness to the flesh; and he that increases knowledge, increases sorrow^l.” Even those dear relations of life which God has given for our richest consolation, the wife of our bosom, or the fruit of our body, are not without their attendant troubles; which are designed to teach us, that “this is not our rest^m,” and that God alone is the proper portion of the soul.

But notwithstanding all our disappointments, we are prone to seek our happiness in the creature; on which account God is necessitated, as it were, to deprive us of things, which, if

^e John v. 44.

^h John xii. 42, 43.

ⁱ Mark viii. 38.

^k Col. iii. 2. ^l John ii. 15—17. Luke xiv. 26.

^l Eccl. i. 18. and xii. 12.

^m Mic. ii. 10.

if continued to us, would rob him of our hearts. Hence it is that the dearest of God's children are often most heavily afflicted. He sees perhaps that our health, our riches, our friends, have drawn us aside from him, or impeded our progress in the divine life, or that they will prove disadvantageous to us in the issue; and therefore he lays us on a bed of languishing, or causes our "riches to fly away," or "cuts off the desire of our eyes with a stroke." But his design in all this is, to weaken our idolatrous regard for created enjoyments, and to make us seek our happiness in him alone. And thousands have had more reason to bless him for the bereavements they have experienced, than for all the bounties he ever bestowed upon them^a.

Nothing however will finally destroy our attachment to earthly things, till we have learned how much more suitable provision God has made for the souls of his people. When therefore God, by his providence, has embittered or withdrawn our comforts, he leads us, by his grace, to that fountain of consolation, the sacred Oracles. There he proposes himself to us as a reconciled God and Father in Christ. He sets before our eyes "the unsearchable riches of Christ," the "honour that cometh of God," and the "pleasures that are at his right hand for evermore;" and, having enabled us to taste of these, he makes us to despise every thing in comparison of them, and willingly to relinquish the husks of this world, for the bread that is in our Father's house.]

But that we may not form a wrong opinion of our state, we shall declare

III. When our souls may be said to be as a weaned child

[The whole world, with respect to earthly enjoyments, are like a child either *before it is weaned*, or *while it is weaning*, or *when it is altogether weaned*.

The generality are like a child at the breast, minding nothing but their carnal gratifications. The world, in its pleasures, riches, or honours, is the one object of their desire, the one source of their comfort: they feed upon it all the day long; they fall asleep, as it were, with it in their mouths; they are clamorous for it as soon as they are awake. In their very slumbers they not unfrequently shew, how wholly their minds have been occupied with that one object. Give them their favourite gratification, and they care for nothing else: rob them of that, and not all the world can pacify them.

Such

^a Ps. cxix. 71, 75.

Such are they who have a fulness of earthly comforts. But others, to whom these things have been embittered, or from whom they have been withdrawn, are, like a weaning child, disquieted beyond measure: they are unhappy in themselves; and they disturb all around them with their peevishness and discontent. Having lost that in which alone they found delight, they can take comfort in nothing else: yea, because of one thing of which they are deprived, they have no enjoyment of all the other things that they possess. In vain have they more suitable and substantial blessings offered them; they have no appetite for the provisions of the gospel; they refuse that which would infinitely overbalance their loss; and they pine away in querulous lamentations, when they might be nourished with "angels' food."

Some there are, however, who with David, resemble a weaned child. *They are become indifferent to carnal enjoyments.* They use with gratitude whatever God has bestowed; but they do not set their hearts upon it, or consider it as essential to their happiness°. *They suffer the loss of all earthly things with a holy resignation and composure of mind.* Doubtless they have their feelings, like other men: but these feelings are moderated by religion, and brought into subjection to the divine will^p. *The more they are bereaved of earthly comforts, the more entirely do they live by faith on Christ, and the more abundantly do they grow in every grace.* Afflictions drive them, not from God, but to him: and in the midst of all their bereavements they shew, that they "have meat to eat which the world knows not of," and "joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not."]

APPLICATION

[Let those whose hearts are set upon the world, remember, how transient and unsatisfying their enjoyments are——— Let those who are disconsolate on account of their troubles, consider for what gracious ends God has caused them to be afflicted———And let those who feel a measure of David's spirit, strive for yet higher attainments, in the assured expectation that the more they are weaned from all but God, the more will God communicate to them out of his inexhaustible fulness.]

° Phil. iv. 12. Heb. xi. 24—26.

^p 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

DLXXIX. THE PATIENCE OF JOB.

James v. 11. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord: that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.*

ONE of the most singular ideas that can be suggested to a carnal mind, is that which occurs in the words immediately preceding the text; “We count them happy that endure.” An ungodly man sees, that it is better to bear afflictions patiently than to sink under them; but he can scarcely conceive how afflictions, under any circumstances, can become a ground of congratulation. This difficulty, however, is solved by taking into the account “the end” of those afflictions: and it admits of easy illustration from the case of Job.

In prosecuting the apostle’s view of this subject, we shall consider

I. The patience of Job under his afflictions

Great and unparalleled were the afflictions of Job

[The destruction of all his property, and all his servants, by bands of robbers, and by lightning, announced to him as it was in three different accounts, by different messengers in speedy succession, would of itself have been sufficient to overwhelm his mind, if he had not been endued with uncommon fortitude; since by this he was reduced in a moment from the height of opulence and grandeur to the lowest indigence and want ^a.

But, distressing as these events were, what an inconceivable aggravation must they have received from the tidings delivered by a fourth messenger, the sudden death of all his children! Had he heard of only one child dying, and that by any natural disorder, it would, to such a parent, have been a fearful addition to all his other burthens: but to hear of seven sons, and three daughters, all crushed in a moment by the falling of his house ^b, if it did not bereave him of his senses, we might well expect, that it should, at least, draw forth some murmuring, and unadvised expressions.

To all these calamities were added yet others, that affected more immediately his own person; and which, in such a conjuncture,

^a Job i. 13—17.

^b Ib. ver. 18, 19.

conjuncture, must be beyond measure afflictive. Satan, having permission to try him to the uttermost, smote him from head to foot with the most loathsome ulcers insomuch that he was constrained to sit down among the ashes, and to scrape himself with a potsherd^c.

In the midst of all this trouble one might hope that he would have some comfort in the kind offices of neighbours, the compassion of friends, and the tender assiduities of his wife. But, alas! his servants turned their back upon him^d: the children in the streets despised and mocked him^e: the very friends who came to comfort him, loaded him with the most unfounded accusations, and asserted, that his sufferings were indications of peculiar wickedness, which God was now disclosing and punishing^f. His wife also derided his affiance in God, and counselled him to renounce it utterly, yea, to "curse God, and die^g."

Take any one of these trials separately, and it was great: but view them collectively, and they exceeded all that ever were endured by mortal man.]

They served however to call forth his most unrivalled patience

[Mark his conduct when informed of all his accumulated misfortunes, and especially the loss of all his children: "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped; and said, 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^h."

Behold him yet again after his body was so smitten, and when his wife gave him that desperate, that atheistical, advice: all was meekness still: his very reproof was mild, though firm: "He said unto her, 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?"

Thus "in all this he never once charged God foolishly, or sinned in the least respectⁱ."

It is true that, after this, we find him "cursing the day of his birth," and uttering some unwarranted expressions against God: nor would it become us either to conceal, or to extenuate, his guilt in these respects. Our blessed Lord alone was *absolutely* without sin. But though Job betrayed his infirmity in some hasty words, yet, on the whole, his argument was right in opposition to that of his friends: and God himself,

^c Job ii. 7, 8.

^d Job xix. 15, 16.

^e Job. ver. 18.

^f Passon.

^g Job ii. 9.

^h Job i. 20, 21.

ⁱ Job i. 22. and ii. 10.

himself, as the arbiter of the dispute, declared, that “they had not spoken the thing that was right as his servant Job had^k.” Moreover, the deep humility with which he acknowledged his offence, proved his title to the character which God had given him in the beginning, that he was the most perfect and upright of the sons of men^l.]

Having taken this view of Job’s afflictions, and of his patience under them, let us consider

II. The design which God had in them

We, who behold every part of this mysterious dispensation in one view, are enabled, from its catastrophe, to mark the design of God in every intermediate step of the plot : we see what God intended, by what he actually effected.

1. He confounded Satan

[Satan had accused Job as a hypocrite, who, if he were brought into trying circumstances, would even curse God to his face : and he undertook to prove him such a character, if God would only suffer him to make the trial. God gave him this permission^m, and thereby afforded Satan an occasion to prove himself a liar, and to demonstrate that integrity, the existence of which he was so forward to deny.

Nor is this a small consolation to the people of God, whom Satan is ever ready to accuse, and harass. When he would persuade them that they are hypocrites, they may recollect, that “he was a liar from the beginning.” When he, through divine permission, assaults them either in body or mind, they may look back to this history, and see, that he can in no respect exceed his commission, or overthrow those who trust in God. He may toss them vehemently as in a sieve ; but shall never destroy the smallest grain of solid wheatⁿ.]

2. He exercised and improved the graces of Job

[If “men do not light a candle, in order to put it under a bushel, but that it may give light to those who are in the house^o,” we may be sure that God does not implant his grace in the heart, but with a view to call it into exercise. Now he had endued Job with such eminent patience, that the common events of life were not sufficient to call it forth : he therefore suffered Satan to exert all his power against him,
in

^k Job xlii. 7.

^l Job i. 8. and ii. 3.

^m Job i. 9—12. and ii. 4—6.

ⁿ Luke xxii. 31. with Amos ix. 9.

^o Matt. v. 15.

in order that Job's piety might be displayed, augmented, and confirmed. Behold the sufferer when coming out of his trial; how bright does he shine, when "abasing himself in dust and ashes!" How eminent does he appear, when God himself not only takes his part, but refuses forgiveness to his uncharitable friends, except as an answer to his intercession for them^p! Truly he lost nothing in the furnace but his dross; and "he came out of it purified as gold^q."

3. He increased Job's happiness both in this and in the eternal world

[Doubtless the afflictions of Job were inexpressibly severe: yet was he no stranger to consolation even in his most distressing hours. If all his earthly comforts were dead, and he had lost all hope of happiness on this side the grave, still he saw that he had a Redeemer living; and he knew that the day was fast approaching, when he should enjoy an intimate and everlasting communion with him^r.

But beyond all expectation he was raised from his low estate; his family was again increased to the very number he had before lost; his possessions were doubled; and his life, which probably at that time was somewhat advanced, was prolonged an hundred and forty years, that he might see his posterity even to the fourth generation^s. We must confess, therefore, that even in this life he was abundantly recompensed for the months of trouble that he had endured.

How much his eternal happiness was affected by it, it is impossible for us to say: but sure we are that his affliction was the means of greatly augmenting it. In this view, affliction was better to him than heaven itself would have been: for, if he had been removed to heaven at once, his state, though glorious, would have been for ever fixed: whereas his affliction was "*working for him*" as long as it continued: it was every moment increasing that weight of glory which he was to possess for ever^t. Who does not see that it would be better for a man to be cut off and be cast into hell immediately, than to live only to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath^u?" for though his torments would come upon him a little sooner, yet the respite of a few months, or years, would bear no proportion to the increased weight of misery that he must eternally endure. And exactly thus the additional weight of glory which Job will eternally possess, will far overbalance the trials he suffered, or the short period of bliss, which, by an earlier removal, he might have enjoyed.]

To

^p Job xlii. 8.

^q Job xxiii. 10.

^r Job xix. 25—27.

^s Job xlii. 10, 13, 16. ^t 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^u Rom. ii. 5.

To make the just improvement of this history, we must notice

III. The general character of God, as it is exhibited in this particular dispensation

This seems to be the more immediate object, to which St. James would direct our attention. Persons in the midst of their trouble are apt to entertain hard thoughts of God: but we who, in this instance, “have seen *the end* of the Lord,” may rest assured “that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy,” however dark or painful his dispensations towards us may be. It is by love alone he is actuated

1. In sending afflictions

[He does “not willingly afflict his people^x.” He knows what we stand in need of; and he sends it for our good. He chastises us, not as earthly parents too often do, to indulge their own evil tempers, but purely “for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness^y.” And as he knows what we want, so he knows what we can bear; and will take care either to apportion our burthen to our strength^z, or to give us strength sufficient for our trials^a. Besides, in all our afflictions he sympathizes with us^b; he watches over us with the care of a refiner^c, and the solicitude of a parent^d: and when he sees that his rod has produced its desired effect, he is glad to return to us in the endearments of love, and to confirm our confidence in him by the sweetest tokens of reconciliation and acceptance^e.]

2. In multiplying afflictions

[When our troubles, like those of Job, are many and various, we are ready to conclude that they are sent in wrath. But it is not for us to prescribe how many, or of what continuance, our afflictions shall be. We must consider God as a physician, who prescribes with unerring wisdom, and consults the benefit, rather than the inclination of his patients. We must “walk by faith, and not by sight:” it will be time enough hereafter to see the reasons of God’s procedure^f. Job was induced at last to account God his enemy: and they who beheld the afflictions of Christ, were ready to say, that “he was judicially stricken, and smitten of God” as the most abandoned

^x Lam. iii. 33.

^y Heb. xii. 10.

^z 1 Cor. x. 13.

^a Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^b Isai. lxiii. 9.

^c Mal. iii. 3.

^d Ps. ciii. 13.

^e Jer. xxxi. 20.

^f John xiii. 7.

abandoned of mankind^g. But we know that, as Job was, so was Christ, beloved of the Father; and never more beloved than when crying in the depths of his dereliction, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Let not any then "write bitter things against themselves" on account of the greatness of their afflictions, but rather accept their trials as tokens of his love; for, "whom he loveth he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth^h."]

ADVICE

1. Let none be secure, as though affliction were far off from them

[We may be to-day in affluence; to-morrow in want: to-day in health; to-morrow languishing on a bed of sickness: to-day enjoying the society of wife, or children; to-morrow lamenting their loss. Let us remember, that whatever we have is *God's*; it is only lent us for a little while, to be recalled at any hour he shall see fit. Let us learn to hold every thing as by this tenure, that we may be ready at any moment to give up whatever he shall be pleased to require of us. Since "we know not what a day may bring forth," we should stand girt for the service of our God, ever ready to do or suffer his righteous will.]

2. Let none be hasty in their judgments, when called to suffer

[Jacob thought all his trials were *against* him; when, in fact, they were designed for the good of himself and of all his familyⁱ. And we know not but that the events we so deeply bewail, are indispensably necessary to our salvation. We have reason to think that, if we saw *the end* as God does, we, instead of regarding our losses or bereavements as afflictions, should adore God for them as much as for the most pleasing of his dispensations. Let us then wait till he shall have discovered to us the whole of his designs; and be content to form our judgment of him when all the grounds of judging are laid before us.]

^g Isai. liii. 4.

^h Heb. xii. 6.

ⁱ Gen. xlii. 36. with xlv. 5, 7. and l. 20.

DLXXX. PARADOXICAL EXPERIENCE.

2 Cor. vi. 10. *As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

THEY who form their opinions on mere outward appearances, will almost invariably err. But in nothing will they be more mistaken, than in their judgment of the Christian state. The experience of one that is converted to God is a perfect paradox: and they who are strangers to it, evince that they yet need to learn the very first principles of true religion.

St. Paul is enumerating a great variety of things whereby he had “approved himself a faithful minister of God:” and after a multitude of other paradoxes, he comes at last to those in the text. Doubtless, they had a more immediate reference to his own state, and, in some points of view, were applicable to him alone: but in other respects, they are equally true of “all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”

We shall take occasion from these words to shew

I. How poor the Christian is in himself

The bitter persecutions, the painful wants, and the continued load of care, under which the Apostle laboured, might well make him sorrowful. But if we drink not of his cup in these respects, there yet are other grounds on which we may be called, like the Laodiceans, “wretched, and miserable, and poor^a.”

1. We are destitute of all that is truly desirable

[The man who wants all the necessities of life, does not feel himself more destitute than the Christian.

How poor is he that has *no righteousness* to justify him before God! Yet the Christian has none *in himself*; he has nothing whereon he can rely, no, not any more than the fallen angels themselves^b.

How poor is he that has *no strength* whereby to serve God! Yet this is the Christian's condition. If the thinking of a good thought would save him, he has not *of himself* a sufficiency to do it^c.

How

^a Rev. iii. 17.

^b Isai. lxiv. 6.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5.

How poor is he who has *no wisdom* to guide him one step of his way towards heaven! Yet thus destitute is the Christian. If he should in any one instance lean to his own understanding, he would as surely err, as if he should attempt blindfold to explore the most intricate path^d.

In short, if he had attained the eminence of Paul himself, he still must say, "In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth *no good thing*^e."]]

2. We have continual cause of sorrow

[Numberless are the conflicts which the Christian has to maintain with his indwelling *corruptions*: and too frequently he receives a wound that fills him with the acutest anguish^f.

Many are the seasons too when his soul is "in heaviness through manifold *temptations*^g:" and when, through *the hidings of God's face*, he "walks in darkness and has no light^h."

Supposing him ever so free from persecution, still he has in these things abundant reason for grief. Well may he on these accounts exclaim, with the apostle, "O wretched man that I am!ⁱ"]]

But the Christian's poverty is rather a subordinate point in the text: we therefore pass on to shew more fully

II. How rich he is in Christ

With respect to this, every Christian is on the same footing with the apostle himself

1. He has an inexhaustible fulness of all good

[Is not he rich, that has *reconciliation with God*; and that has "all his iniquities cast into the depths of the sea?"

Is not he rich, that has *liberty of access to God* at all times, and that can obtain, day and night, *the manifestations of his presence*, and the *testimonies of his love*?

Is not he rich, who, besides the present aids and consolations of God's Spirit, has *an assured prospect of eternal happiness and glory*?

Yet this, and more than this, does the Christian possess in Christ. "All things are his, when he is Christ's^k." He is "complete in Christ^l;" he is "enriched with unsearchable riches^m;" and "blessed with all spiritual and eternal blessingsⁿ."

Compare with these things all the wealth of kingdoms; and say, whether it be not lighter than vanity itself?]

2. He

^d Jer. x. 23. Prov. iii. 5, 6.

^e Rom. vii. 23.

^f Ps. lxxxviii. 14—16.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

^h Eph. iii. 8.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 18.

^j 1 Pet. i. 6.

^k Rom. vii. 24.

^l Col. ii. 10.

^m Eph. i. 3.

2. He has an incessant ground of joy and glorying

[Let the Christian be in the most afflictive circumstances with respect to the things of time and sense, and yet may he rejoice in Christ.

What an inexpressible comfort must it be to him to contemplate *the virtue of his sacrifice—the efficacy of his intercession—the sufficiency of his grace—the extent of his promises*—and lastly, *his inviolable truth and faithfulness!* May not he well adopt the language of the text, “I am sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; having nothing, and yet possessing all things?” Yes; it is his privilege to “rejoice in the Lord alway^o,” and that too, “with joy unspeakable, and glorified^p.”]

INFER

1. What an exalted character is the true Christian!

[The men of this world are altogether dependent on outward circumstances for their happiness; and, if their cistern fail, they are bereft of all. But the Christian is independent of every thing here below. He may be deprived of health and liberty, of possessions and friends; but nothing can hinder his communion with Christ. Neither men nor devils can intercept the communications of heaven; which, for the most part, are increased, in proportion as other comforts are withdrawn^q.

Let Christians then shew by their contempt of this world, that they are born from above; and prove in the midst of all their tribulations, that they possess indeed the magnanimity imputed to them.]

2. How pitiable is the state of unconverted men!

[If they be poor and afflicted in a temporal view, they have nothing to sustain their drooping spirits. If, on the contrary, they be rich and gay, still their happiness is but empty, transient, delusive. In a little time they will be poor, and miserable beyond conception. In their very best estate therefore they are objects of pity and compassion: they may possess much, but yet are destitute of all things; they may be often rejoicing, but have continued occasion for grief and sorrow.

O that they were wise, and would consider this! O that they would begin to seek an interest in Christ, that through him their state might be reversed, and that they might partake the Christian's lot!]

3. What a blessed work is that of the ministry!

[The apostle gloried in this, that “though poor, he made many rich.” And is not this the one intent of our ministry? Is

^o Phil. iv. 4.

^p 1 Pet. i. 8.

^q 2 Cor. i. 5.

Is it not that, for which we were consecrated to the service of the sanctuary? Has the Christian preacher no better end in view than to display his talents, and obtain applause? Surely, if we have been anointed with an heavenly unction, and ever learned the true nature of our office, our only desire is to "win souls:" and, as that is the scope of our labours, so, when we behold one and another coming to the possession of the true riches, we consider our success as the most glorious of all rewards^r.

O that every minister might view his office in this light; and every faithful preacher be thus recompensed for his labours!]

^r 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

DLXXXI. DAVID'S GRATITUDE.

² Sam. vii. 18, 19. *Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?*

IT is no small comfort to reflect that the dispositions of our hearts are noticed by God, and, if good, are well pleasing in his sight. There are many holy desires and purposes which we are not able to accomplish; which yet are accepted before God, as much as if they had been carried into effect. David had conceived a wish and determination to build a house for God, in order that the ark, which was the symbol of the divine presence, might no more dwell within curtains, while he himself was dwelling in a house of cedar. But God did not suffer him to execute his purpose, on account of his having shed much blood in war^a: nevertheless he commended the desire ("thou didst well that it was in thy heart^b") and made it an occasion of discovering to him the honour that was to be conferred on him and his posterity. Struck with the majesty and condescension of God, David went
in

^a 1 Chron. xxii. 8.

^b 1 Kings viii. 18.

in before him, and burst forth into these expressions of devoutest adoration. We shall

I. Consider the grounds of David's gratitude

Though David was not suffered to gratify his own inclinations in the particular before mentioned, yet he found abundant cause of thankfulness in

1. The mercies already vouchsafed to him

[He had been taken from a very low employment^c; chosen in preference, not only to all his own family, but also to the whole nation; preserved in the midst of numberless dangers; exalted in due season to the throne prepared for him; made victorious over all his enemies; and brought to a state of unrivalled power, affluence, and prosperity^d. On a review of these mercies, he could not but be astonished at the divine goodness to him, or refrain from proclaiming it with rapturous admiration.]

2. The mercies yet further promised to him

[God had promised that he should have a son, on whom the honour of building a temple should be conferred; yea, moreover, that the Messiah also should spring from his loins, and sit upon his throne for ever and ever^e. In comparison of this, David observes that all his personal advancement was "but a light matter:" and then, as utterly at a loss to express his sense of the divine goodness, he exclaims, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" is this the way in which mean and worthless men, such as he felt himself to be, are treated by their fellow-creatures^f? No: it is peculiar to God, who magnifies his own sovereignty in conferring the richest benefits on the most unworthy of mankind.]

But however distinguished a favourite of heaven David was, let us

II. Enquire whether *we* have not equal, or even greater, reason for gratitude and thanksgiving

Let us view our obligations to God

1. As creatures

[We were originally formed of the dust of the earth: yet, though so mean in our original, we were distinguished above the whole creation by having a rational and immortal soul breathed into us, and a capacity given us to know, to love, to serve, and to enjoy God. Let any one of the human race reflect

^c Ver. 8.

^d Ver. 9.

^e Ver. 12—14. with Heb. i. 5.

^f See 1 Chron. xvii. 17.

reflect on this, and say, whether he has not reason to adore the goodness of God, who has given him powers so infinitely superior to any that are possessed by the brute creation, and faculties that shall enjoy eternal blessedness, if it be not utterly his own fault. Let but this elevation of our nature be considered, and we shall exclaim, with profoundest reverence, "Who art thou, O Lord God, that thou hast brought me hitherto?"]

2. As sinners

[As we are by nature *mean*, so are we by practice *inexpressibly vile*. Yet when we were deserving of nothing but his wrath, God loved us, and gave his own Son to die for us. Further, when we were even trampling on the blood that was shed for us, he sent his Spirit to reveal his Son in our hearts, and both to fit us for his glory, and to bring us safely to the possession of it. And "is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Man selects those who are great and worthy, in order to bestow on them his richest favours; but God has chosen the vilest and most unworthy to bring them into the nearest state of communion with himself; "he has lifted the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among princes, and to make him inherit a throne of glory^g." O what marvellous condescension is this! and what gratitude does it demand at our hands! "Who is a God like unto thee^h?"]

INFER

1. What reason have all of us to blush for our ingratitude!

[We all acknowledge ourselves to be miserable sinners; yet how insensible are we of God's love in providing a Saviour for us, and in following us with offers of mercy and salvation! Many of us, in all our days, have never spent one hour in devout and grateful adorations to the Author of these mercies: and have not such persons cause to blush for their baseness? And if the devoutest amongst us will but compare his gratitude with the mercies he receives, he will find no cause for self-complacency, but rather, for the deepest humiliation and contrition.]

2. What encouragement have we to interest ourselves for the honour of God!

[David had been thinking how he might honour God; and it was on that occasion that God chose to make known to him the purposes of his grace. And should not we also enquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" Should not we consider how we may advance his honour in the world? We are enjoying divine ordinances in abundance, while many of

^g 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^h Exod. xv. 11.

of our fellow-creatures have not a place where to worship God, or a minister to declare to them the way of salvation. Alas! how great a part of the world have never so much as heard of the name of Christ! And should we sit at our ease, and not think how we may promote the Redeemer's interests among them? Shall we grudge any expense or trouble that may be subservient to his glory? Let us stir ourselves up: assured that if our plans be not attended with all the success that we could wish, God will accept our pious endeavours, and bless us with a more abundant blessings, both in this world and the next.]

DLXXXII. PETER'S FALL AND REPENTANCE.

Luke xxii. 61, 62. *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

THE fidelity of the sacred historians is a strong argument for the truth of what they wrote, and for the divine commission which they bore. Had they been impostors, they would never have recorded all their own failings in such an artless and faithful manner. A greater blemish could scarcely exist in the character of an apostle, than that which is here exposed: and yet it is not only mentioned by all the four Evangelists, but St. Mark, who wrote his gospel under the immediate inspection of St. Peter himself, is most diffuse in aggravating the crime, and most reserved in noticing the repentance: he tells us of Peter's oaths and curses; but observes only, that he wept: whereas St. Luke, who omits the former, tells us, that he wept "bitterly." The immediate occasion of Peter's repentance is mentioned only by St. Luke. It should seem, that his heart was affected by the expressive look which our Lord gave him.

It will be useful therefore to enquire

I. What that look expressed

We may be certain that there was nothing vindictive in it

[Never on any occasion did our Lord assume a menacing

tone towards those who injured him: "when he suffered, he threatened not." When Judas came to betray him, he saluted the traitor by the tender appellation of Friend, "Friend; wherefore art thou come^a?" When the people came to apprehend him, he only asked whom they sought? and then told them, that he was the person. Yea, in the midst of all the torment and ignominy of crucifixion, he extenuated the guilt of his very murderers, and prayed to his heavenly Father to forgive them. Justly indeed might he have looked on Peter with anger, and have intimated, by an indignant aspect, that he, who now thus basely denied his master, should speedily be denied by him at the bar of judgment. But, as no such words ever escaped his lips, so no such disposition ever manifested itself in his looks: he was altogether meek and silent, like a sheep before her shearers, or a lamb led to the slaughter^b.]

Nevertheless it, doubtless, conveyed a reproof to Peter

[We may conceive, that our Lord intended to remind him of his folly in boasting, and of the presumption he had manifested, in declaring that, though all the disciples should deny their master, he never would; and, that he would rather die with him than deny him. Such a reproof was necessary: but still it was expressed only in a look: and how different was it from the rebuke given him on another occasion! When Peter, though in real kindness, desired to divert his Lord from the thoughts of suffering, Jesus, in righteous displeasure, said, "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me^c." But, when Peter wished to shrink from sufferings himself, even though, in order to avoid them, he denied his Lord with oaths and curses, the severest reproof that Jesus gave him, was, a look, a gentle intimation, that he had fallen by his own vain confidence and self-dependence.]

But the principal thing expressed in that look, we apprehend to have been pity and compassion

[Having nothing revealed respecting this, we can only speak from conjecture. But, if we may be permitted thus to interpret a look, which perhaps no words could *fully* express, we may suppose it to have intimated somewhat to this effect: "Ah! Peter, see the sad consequence of trusting in yourself. See how you have not only dishonoured me, but wounded your own soul. But still, though your sin is so great, do not give way to despair. You will soon hear, into what a dreadful measure Judas has been precipitated, through a sense of guilt, and a despair of mercy: but be sure you do not imitate him. I told you before, that I had prayed for you^d; now then

^a Matt. xxvi. 50.

^b Isai. liii. 7.

^c Matt. xvi. 23.

^d Luke xxii. 32.

then go, and pray for yourself: only repent, and you shall even yet find mercy, yea, and be restored to the office which you have so disgraced: return, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely^e: go instantly, and cry unto God for pardon; and all shall yet be well with you, both in time, and in eternity.”]

That something inexpressibly moving was intimated in that look, cannot be doubted, if we consider

II. What effect it produced

A voice from heaven could not have been attended with a more instantaneous or powerful effect on the mind of Peter:

1. It brought his sin to remembrance

[It is astonishing to see how awfully the conscience even of a child of God may, on some occasions, be lulled asleep. David after his fall, seemed wholly insensible of his wickedness, for no less than nine months. While he was disposed to punish, with most excessive severity, a crime of infinitely less enormity than that which he had committed, he appeared unconscious of having himself contracted any guilt at all^f. Thus it was with Peter on this occasion. He had denied his master; he had repeated that denial with yet greater vehemence; and no less than an hour had elapsed without his discovering any signs of penitence and contrition^g. His heart even seemed to be more and more hardened: for, not contented with continuing to deny his Lord, he added oaths to his protestations, and perjury to lies.

And is it not thus with too many professors of religion, who allow themselves in pride, envy, malice, wrath, covetousness, impurity, or some other secret evil, and go on from year to year without being sensible that they have done any thing amiss? Perhaps there may be instances, wherein even a follower of Christ has acquired unjust gains, defrauding his customers by false weights and measures, or by bad commodities; defrauding the revenue too by withholding customs, and taxes, that were clearly due. O that the consciences of all such persons might be awakened from their lethargy, and be excited to remonstrate against such unchristian practices!

But this look of Jesus brought to Peter's mind the warnings he had slighted, the vows he had broken, and the complicated evil he had just committed. All his conduct now appeared in its true colours; and he saw himself, as in a mirror, a base, cowardly, perjured apostate.

And

^e Hos. xiv. 4.

^f 2 Sam. xii. 1—7.

^g Ver. 59.

And such is the effect, which the testimonies of Christ's compassion will produce on all, who duly receive them ^h — — —]

2. It filled him with compunction and contrition

[Instantly his heart bled with a sense of sin, and was tortured with the bitterest anguish. Had Jesus reproached him with severity, it is probable he would have yielded to despondency, and sought refuge in suicide, from the horrors of a guilty conscience. But the look, that pierced his soul, poured also a healing balm into the wound. He could now no longer continue in the company of the ungodly, or indulge a vain curiosity respecting the issue of his master's trial: his heart was now full; and he sought retirement, that he might give vent to his feelings, and implore that mercy which he so greatly needed.

Thus will a view of God's mercy operate on us. Even a wicked Saul, when he saw the lenity and forbearance of David, was overcome with a sense of the kindness shewn him, and lifted up his voice and wept ⁱ. How much more should the tender mercy of our God abase us in the dust, and cause the tears of penitence to flow apace! Yes, doubtless, it will instantly lead us from the scenes of folly and dissipation to the more suitable employments of meditation and prayer ^k — — —]

To IMPROVE this subject, let us consider

1. To what a shameful state the most exalted Christian may be reduced, if he be left to himself one single moment!

[Who, that had been witness to Peter's confession of Christ ^l, or had seen him jump into the sea to embrace his master ^m, or had beheld him wielding a sword in his defence ⁿ, and above all, had heard his promises of being faithful unto death ^o, would have supposed that, in so short a time, this most favoured apostle should so grievously transgress? Let this then be a lesson to us all. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall ^p." Let every one of us remember, that there is not any sin whatever, which we shall not commit, if we be left to ourselves: and let our daily prayer be, "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not; hold thou me up, and I shall be safe ^q."]

2. How connected and precipitous are the ways of sin!
[Peter began by indulging a confidence in his own strength:

^h Ezek. xvi. 60—63.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxiv. 16.

^k Ezek. vii. 16. may, in an accommodated sense, be applied to this.

^l Matt. xvi. 16.

^m John xxi. 7.

ⁿ John xviii. 10.

^o Mark xiv. 31.

^p 1 Cor. x. 12.

^q Ps. xvii. 5. & cxix. 117.

strength : then he followed Jesus "afar off"^r : then he mixed himself needlessly with ungodly company^s : then he yielded to the fear of man : and then he denied his Lord with oaths and curses. And have not we also found that we have proceeded from one sin to another ; and that, when once we have given advantage to the enemy, he has prevailed against us in a far greater degree than we ever could have imagined ? Let us then enquire, whether there have not been some warnings given us, of which we are unmindful ; some resolutions, which, having been made in our own strength, we have violated in the hour of temptation ? Let us enquire, whether we be not at this moment walking at too great a distance from our Lord ? whether we be not influenced by the fear of man ? whether we be not associating too much with the enemies of our Lord ? or whether there be not some other sin, which we allowedly indulge ? Let us remember, that to descend is easy ; and that, when we enter on the downward road, none but God can tell, where we shall stop^t.]

3. How unbounded is the compassion of our blessed Lord !

[Well might our Lord have exposed Peter to those whom he feared : or rather, well might the insulted Jesus have looked him dead upon the spot, even as Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead with a lie in their mouths". But that compassionate Saviour cast only on his apostate servant a look of love and pity ; yea, and that too, in the very midst of his sin.

And may we not suppose, that he is at this very moment looking in the same manner on some amongst us, who have dishonoured their profession, and grieved him by their unworthy conduct ? Let us endeavour to realize this thought. Let us examine whether there be not a cause, which our blinded consciences have been too backward to condemn ? And, if we can find any thing that has grieved his soul, let us instantly go home, and "weep bitterly," till he forgive us. Let us then think on our ways, and turn unto God's testimonies : let us *make haste, and not delay*, to keep his commandments^x.]

^r Ver. 54.

^s Ver. 55.

^t Compare Eccles. xix. 1. with Prov. xxviii. 18.

^u Acts v. 1—10.

^x Ps. cxix. 59, 60.

DLXXXIII. REPENTANCE EXEMPLIFIED IN THE
CORINTHIAN CHURCH.

2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. *Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold, this self-same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

IT is sometimes urged against faithful ministers, that they distress the minds of their auditors by their preaching: and it must be confessed that the accusation is true. But it must not be concluded from thence, that they take a pleasure in grieving any, or that they are too harsh in their ministrations: they must declare the mind of God respecting sin and sinners, in order to bring men to repentance: and if they find any persons truly humbled for their sins, they account it the richest reward of their labours.

St Paul had reproved the Corinthian church for taking part with the incestuous man, instead of casting him out from their society^a: and his Epistle had been the means of producing in them a godly sorrow, together with a suitable demeanor. When he found this to be the case, he wrote again to them, and told them, that it had pained him exceedingly to grieve any of them; but that he rejoiced in seeing their grief operate in so beneficial a manner; this godly sorrow had answered the very end of his admonitions; and he was now ready to pour the oil of joy into the wounds which he had inflicted^b.

We shall take occasion, from the words before us, to trace repentance

I. In its cause

[If we would trace repentance to its highest source, we must refer you to God, the giver of every good gift^c, and to Christ, who is exalted to bestow it^d. But it is our intention rather

^a 1 Cor. v. 1—5, 13.

^c Jam. i. 17.

^b Ver. 8, 9.

^d Acts v. 31.

rather to point out that which is the main spring of it in the heart

Repentance arises from godly sorrow, from which it differs as the effect from the cause: "godly sorrow worketh it."

To ascertain what godly sorrow is, we must compare it with "the sorrow of the world," with which all of us are in some measure acquainted. The sorrow of the world may either relate to *that sorrow which arises from worldly troubles*, or *that sorrow which a worldly man may have in reference to his sins*. In either view it is a sorrow which "worketh death."

The troubles of this life often depress men, so as to indispose them for their proper business, and rob them of all their comfort, and destroy their constitution, and ultimately to bring them to the grave^c.

Many also are greatly distressed in reference to their sins: they are filled with dreadful apprehensions of God's wrath; they are harassed with unbelieving fears; they are even brought into the depths of despair, conceiving that there is no mercy for them, that they are not of the number of God's elect, that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and that it would be either hypocrisy or presumption in them even to offer up a prayer to God. Now this sorrow, like that before mentioned, worketh only death. It keeps us from God, instead of bringing us to him^f; it leads us to cloke and extenuate, rather than to confess and aggravate, our sins; it stimulates only to self-righteous purposes and endeavours, which are invariably frustrated by the power of indwelling corruption; and sometimes it terminates even in suicide itself^g. At all events it causes hard thoughts of God, and utterly unfits the soul for real humiliation and contrition; so that, whether it be more or less afflictive at present, it equally furthers our eternal condemnation.

In direct opposition to this is that godly sorrow which produces genuine repentance. The fore-mentioned sorrow consists of *unbelief*, *despondency*, and *fear* of punishment; but the most essential ingredients of godly sorrow are, *faith*, *hope*, and *love*. The person sorrowing goes to God, *believing* him to be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him — — — He goes to God through Christ, *hoping* that for Christ's sake his sins shall be forgiven him — — — He goes to God *with love* in his heart, determining to justify God in whatever he shall do, yea, even in his own eternal condemnation — — —

Now this sorrow worketh repentance to salvation: it disposes a man to search out all his sins, and to humble himself for them in dust and ashes: it urges him to plead with earnestness

^c It is not uncommon to say of such persons, They died of a broken heart.

^f Jer. ii. 25.

^g Judas.

ness the promises which God has made to returning penitents, and humbly to rely upon them : it causes him to seek after a conformity to God's image ; and determines him to glorify his Saviour with all the powers that he has. Such a repentance as this no man ever yet repented of ; nor would he ever repent of it, however distressing the means had been by which it had been wrought in him. Every sorrow, short of this, would only issue in everlasting sorrow : but this sorrow invariably works repentance to life.]

Thus we have traced repentance to its source, and seen it in its cause. Let us proceed to trace it

II. In its effects

[The apostle enumerates a great variety of effects produced in the minds of the Christians at Corinth : and his words have certainly a primary reference to that particular people on that particular occasion : but they admirably express also the emotions which are universally produced by true repentance, in whomsoever it obtains. We may therefore be permitted to consider them in that view, or, at least, to accommodate them to that subject.

For the sake of an easy distribution of the subject we shall transpose the first word, and consider it last : we shall then see the effects of genuine repentance in reference to our *past*, *present*, and *future* conduct.

The Corinthians, humbled by St. Paul's reproofs, were studious to "clear themselves" to the world, to the Church, to their monitor, and to God himself; and to shew that they sincerely repented of what they had done amiss. They felt an "indignation" against the sin they had committed, and against themselves for having committed it; nor could they forgive themselves, till they knew that God had forgiven them. Thus will every true penitent endeavour to "clear himself," and render it conspicuous both to God and man, that he is indeed a new creature — — — He is "indignant," nor can he endure himself, when he reflects on his past life : when he calls to mind his rebellion against God, and his contempt of Christ's redeeming love, he is covered with shame and confusion of face — — —

The Corinthians, penetrated with a sense of their misconduct, felt a holy "fear," lest they should ever relapse into the sin of which they were repenting, or be drawn aside again to any similar enormity. They "vehemently desired" pardon of God for their past transgression, and grace, that they might be enabled to act with more consistency in future. They were animated in this with a "zeal" which nothing could damp, and with a "revenge" which determined them neither to spare the public offender, nor the evil dispositions of their own hearts.

hearts. And do we not see in them the character of every true penitent? In all who truly repent, there will be an humble “fear” of falling again under the power of those lusts which formerly led them captive — — — a “vehement desire” to serve, to enjoy, to glorify their God — — — a “zeal,” which enables them to set their faces as a flint against the whole world — — — and a “revenge” that determines them to sacrifice their bosom lusts, though dear as a right eye, or useful as a right hand — — —

The apostle further notices the “carefulness” with which the Corinthians exerted themselves to avoid every thing in future which might turn them aside from the path of duty. What word can more fitly characterize the disposition of a penitent in reference to his future conduct? Once he could walk at large, without taking any heed to his ways; but now he enquires whether the action be pleasing to God or not: he watches over the motives and principles by which he is actuated: he considers what may be the consequences of his actions both to himself and others: he is solicitous to avoid not only what is in itself evil, but whatever may be the means and occasion of evil. Hence he will not readily expose himself to temptation: he keeps at a distance from those amusements, and those companions that have formerly ensnared him: and he begs of God to guide his every step, and to “preserve him blameless unto his heavenly kingdom.”]

WE CONCLUDE with enquiring whether the commendation bestowed on the Corinthians in the text, can with propriety be applied to us?

[“*HAVE WE in all things approved ourselves to be clear in this matter?*” We ask not, whether we have had any repentance at all or not: (though perhaps there are many amongst us that have had no concern for their past sins, and that feel no anxiety about their eternal salvation) but we ask, whether we have had any other sorrow for sin, than such as will spring from worldly principles, and consist with a worldly mind?

Let us enquire whether our sorrow be of an unbelieving, desponding, *nature*, that is little else than slavish fear; or whether it be of an ingenuous kind, that leads us to rely on Christ in the exercise of an humble hope, and fervent love? — — —

Let us examine thoroughly the *effects* of our sorrow, and see whether they accord with those which were produced in the church at Corinth? —

Can we appeal to God, that we have “approved ourselves to be clear in this matter,” so that there is no room to doubt whether our repentance be genuine or not? If God were now to call us to his judgment-seat, could we appeal to him, as the searcher of our hearts, that it has been, and yet is, our daily endeavour to exercise such repentance as this?

Let

Let it be remembered, that all other repentance must, and will be, repented of: all other repentance will leave us short of salvation: all other repentance will deceive us to our ruin. Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "except we repent, we must all perish:" and we have now seen the nature of repentance, not in a mere superficial manner, but as it may be distinguished from every thing that is apt to be mistaken for it. Behold then, life and death are before us; let us beg of God to undeceive us all, and to give unto us that repentance which shall never be repented of.]

DLXXXIV. THE SINNER'S FAITH.

Luke vii. 50. *And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

TO associate with the ungodly world is by no means expedient for those who have been redeemed out of the world. Yet there is a certain degree of intercourse with them which is both proper and desirable. There is a medium between an affecting of their society for our own gratification, and a contemptuous separation from them. Our blessed Lord has exhibited, as in every thing else, so in this also, a perfect pattern. When invited by a Pharisee to dinner, he accepted the invitation with a view to instruct him and do him good: and when a woman who had been a notorious sinner came to him at the Pharisee's house, he did not refuse her admission to his presence, but received with kindness the expressions of her regard, and imparted to her both the blessings and the comforts of his salvation.

The particular notice which our Lord took of the woman's "*faith*," and the reward he gave her on account of it, leads us naturally to consider

I. The marks and evidences of her faith

The first thing that calls for our attention is

1. Her zeal

[She had doubtless seen many of our Lord's miracles, and heard many of his discourses; and though she was not yet one of his avowed followers, yet, having received good to her soul, she was desirous of honouring him to the utmost of her power. For this purpose she sought him out in the Pharisee's house, and

and went to him with a full determination to shew him some signal mark of her regard.

Now this argued no little zeal. She was of the weaker sex, and therefore the more liable to be condemned as officious, impertinent, and obtrusive. She was of a notoriously vile character, and therefore still more obnoxious to insult and contempt. But unmindful of these things, she went uninvited, to the house of a proud Pharisee (where she was least of all likely to meet with any favour) and (indifferent to the construction that might be put upon her conduct by any censorious spectators, or even to the treatment she might receive from them) in the presence of the whole company expressed to him all that was in her heart.

And what was it that enabled her thus to "despise all shame," and to triumph over the fear of man? Doubtless it was her faith: for the apostle says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."]

2. Her humility

[Though she was bent on executing her pious purpose, she was solicitous to do it in as private and modest a manner as she could. She therefore went behind him as he lay upon the couch^a, and, having easy access to his feet, placed herself there, without attracting the notice of the company, or interfering with the conversation that might be passing at table.

This also was a strong mark and evidence of her faith. She knew his august character, and felt herself unworthy to enter into his presence; yea, she accounted it the very summit of her ambition to be permitted to kiss his feet. It was in this way that the faith of the centurion and others shewed itself^b; and though, through the remaining pride and ignorance of their hearts, young converts often, like Jehu, seek the notice and applause of men, humility will always be found to exist in the soul in exact proportion to our faith.]

3. Her contrition

[No sooner had she placed herself near the Saviour, than all her sins presented themselves to her mind, and filled her with deep compunction. Instantly she burst into a flood of tears, with which she bathed, as it were, the feet of her Lord, while she embraced them, in hopes of finding mercy from the friend of sinners.

Now it is the property of faith to "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn^c." Yea, the more lively faith any have possessed, the more abundant has been their self-loathing and

^a They did not sit at table as we do, but lay on couches.

^b Luke vii. 6, 7. Mark v. 25—28.

^c Zech. xii. 10.

and self-abhorrence ^d. We cannot doubt therefore but that faith was the principle from whence her humiliation flowed.]

4. Her love

[While she wept over the Saviour's feet, she wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed them, and anointed them with odoriferous ointment. It was not possible for her to manifest stronger tokens of her affection.

And was not this also an evidence of her faith? Had she been an unbeliever, she would have seen "no beauty or comeliness in Jesus" that deserved her admiration ^e: but believing in him, she accounted him "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely ^f," according to that declaration of the apostle, To them that believe, he is precious ^g.]

5. Her confidence

[She would not have ventured to approach the Pharisee in this manner, because she knew that he would despise her in his heart, and dismiss her with scorn. But she felt no apprehension of such treatment from the Saviour. She well knew his condescension and compassion; and therefore without reserve, and without fear, she cast herself upon his mercy.

In this too she shewed the strength of her faith. Unbelief would have suggested many doubts; Will he receive me? Will he deign to look upon such an abandoned wretch? But faith enabled her to approach him under a full persuasion, that "whosoever came to him should in no wise be cast out."]

It was not in vain that she thus approached the Saviour; as we shall see, while we consider

II. The fruits and consequences of her faith

Though despised and condemned by the Pharisee, she was well rewarded by her Lord. She obtained from him

1. The pardon of her sins

[Numerous as her iniquities had been, they were all in one moment blotted from the book of God's remembrance. Jesus, who "had all power on earth to forgive sins," pardoned all her offences, and "cast them, as it were, behind him into the very depths of the sea." What a blessed fruit and consequence of her faith was this! Had she been subjected to all the evil treatment that could have been shewn her, she would have had no reason to regret that conduct by which she had obtained so inestimable a blessing.

And was this peculiar to her? Shall not we also have our iniquities forgiven, if we apply to him in humility and faith?

Shall

^d Job xlii. 6. Isai. vi. 5. 1 Tim. i. 15.

^e Cant. v. 10, 16.

^f Isai. liii. 2.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 7.

Shall the greatness of our sins be any bar to our acceptance with him, if we repent and believe? Let the word of God be deemed worthy of any credit, and all such apprehensions will vanish in an instant^h— — —]

2. An assurance of her acceptance

[Twice did our Lord repeat to her the joyful tidings, that her sins were pardoned, and that her soul was saved; and to confirm it, he bade her depart in peace. What a cordial must this have been to her drooping spirit! How transported must she have been with the joyful sound! And what comfort must she enjoy through life in a sense of the divine favour, and in a prospect of the divine glory!

But neither was this peculiar to her. It is true, that many real Christians never attain to this high privilege: but it is owing to the weakness of their faith: if their faith operated as her's did, if it shewed itself in such humility, such contrition, such love, such confidence, such zeal, they also should hear him say to them, "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." What though he should not utter it by an audible voice from heaven, can he not reveal it to the soul by his Spirit, and enable us to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his^l?" Yes: let us only glorify him to the utmost of our power, and he will give us a peace that passeth all understanding^k, and a full assurance of hope unto the end^l.]

3. Everlasting happiness and glory

[In the declaration of Jesus she received both an earnest and a pledge of her eternal inheritance. Nor can we doubt but that after waiting her "appointed time upon earth," she was admitted to the enjoyment of her Lord in heaven, not any longer to weep at his feet, but to sit with him on his throne, and to participate his glory.

Thus also shall it be with all who truly believe: "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life^m"— — —]

From this history we may LEARN

1. The nature of faith

[We cannot too carefully enquire into the nature of faith; for there is nothing respecting which so many, and such fatal, mistakes are made. Faith is not a mere assent to any doctrines whatsoever; but it is a living principle in the soul, which evidences itself by precisely such a regard to Christ as this woman manifested on this occasion. Would we then ascertain whether our faith be genuine and saving? let us enquire whether it lead us to Christ, in spite of all obstacles from

^h Acts xiii. 39. Isai. i. 18. ^l Cant. ii. 16. ^k Phil. iv. 7.

^l Heb. vi. 11. See also 2 Tim. i. 12. & iv. 8. ^m John iii. 16.

from without or from within, with humility and contrition, with love and confidence? For in proportion as we abound in these graces, or are destitute of them, we either possess, or are destitute of, a living faith.]

2. The excellence of faith

[Admirable were the graces which this woman exercised; yet not one of them was noticed by our Lord: he overlooked them all; and noticed that only *which was least apparent, and which every one else would have overlooked*, namely, her faith. He knew that this was the root or principle from whence all her other graces sprang. It was this that led her so to honour him; and therefore he determined to honour it. And must not that be excellent which he so highly regarded, so studiously searched out, and so eminently distinguished?

But what is it that he here assigns to her faith? it is nothing less than the saving of her soul: he passes by all her other graces as having no weight or influence whatever in her justification before God, and specifies her "*faith*" as that which "*saved*" her. Is it possible to bestow a higher commendation on it than this?

If it be asked, why faith is thus distinguished above all other graces? we answer, it is because faith unites us unto the Saviour, and interests us thereby in all that he has done and suffered for us: but this cannot be said of any other grace whatever; and therefore, though every other grace *adorns* the soul, no grace but faith will *save* it.

Let us all seek to attain right sentiments on this most important point, and pray with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith."]

3. The condescension of Christ to believing penitents

[If a person of an abandoned character, however changed in his conduct, should come to us when in the midst of company, and that company of a higher order and a pharisaic cast, and should express such affection for us, our pride would be apt to rise; and, while we blushed for the degradation we seemed to suffer, we should be ready to condemn him for his impertinent intrusion, or perhaps to suspect that he was deranged in his mind. But Jesus accounted himself honoured by the testimonies of the woman's regard: and, though he could not but know what reflections would be cast upon his character on account of his kindness to her, he vindicated her conduct, and richly recompensed her kind attentions.

Thus will he do to every believing penitent. He will compensate the scoffs of an unbelieving world by manifest tokens of his approbation. He will not regard the quantity or quality of a man's past offences; but will speak peace to his soul, and in due time "*wipe away all tears from his eyes*" for ever. O that we might all consider this, and experience it to our eternal joy!]

DLXXXV. THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE
OF CHRIST.

Phil. iii. 7, 8. *What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*

MANKIND in general are agitated by various and contending passions, while the true Christian enjoys serenity and composure: he is indeed tempted like others to gratify his corrupt nature; but he has one supreme desire which overcomes and regulates all the rest—He is compared to a wise merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, sells all that he has and buys it—Whatever stands in competition with the welfare of his soul will be renounced by him; and, with the apostle, he will “count all things but loss for Christ”—To impress this truth more deeply on our minds, we shall consider

I. What things Paul had which were gain to him

Amongst all the sons of men there never was any in whom so many and so great excellencies combined, as in the Apostle Paul

[In respect of *civil distinctions*, he was highly dignified by *birth*, being “an Hebrew of the Hebrews”—He was also eminent for *learning*, having been “brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and profited above many his equals”—

Nor was he less distinguished in respect of *moral qualities*—Such was the *strictness of his principles*, that he joined himself to the Pharisees, the strictest sect among the Jews—His *probity of conduct* was irreproachable; for he had “lived in all good conscience before God from his very youth”—His *zeal* also, though not according to knowledge, was peculiarly earnest; insomuch that, touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless; and he opposed the gospel to the uttermost, because he thought it subverted the law of Moses—

But however illustrious he was as a Jew, he was still more so as a Christian and an apostle—His *religious attainments* were never equalled by any mere man—His *exertions* in the cause of Christ surpassed those of all the other apostles—He also *suffered* more than any for the sake of the gospel; yea, he

was

^a Phil. iii. 5.

^c Acts xxvi. 5.

^e Phil. iii. 6. Acts xxvi. 9, 10.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^b Acts xxii. 3. Gal. i. 14.

^d Acts xxiii. 1.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 10.

was “in deaths oft,” “not counting his life dear to him, so that he might finish his course with joy”—]

These things might well be accounted gain to him

[His *civil distinctions* might recommend him to his countrymen, and augment his influence^h—And though he would not make a parade of his learning, he found it useful on some occasionsⁱ—His *moral qualities* also might well be valuable in his sight: for though no strictness of principles, probity of conduct, or zeal for religion, could recommend him to God, yet they were ample testimonies of the integrity of his heart—His *religious attainments* were still more deserving estimation; for though not meritorious in the sight of God, they tended greatly to the glory of God, and the edification of the church, and were undoubted evidences of his meetness for heaven—Well therefore might he rejoice, as he did, in the testimony of a good conscience^k—]

But he possessed something of incomparably greater value than these things, as will appear, if we enquire

II. What that was which he preferred before them

The apostle had happily attained the knowledge of Christ

[A mere general uninteresting knowledge of Christ would not have been very high in his esteem: that, which he possessed, was *distinct* and *experimental*—He saw Christ as God, equal with the Father, though appearing in the form of a servant^l: he beheld him sustaining various offices in the economy of redemption, and executing them for his people's good—He beheld him as the “*Christ*,” “anointed by the Spirit to preach glad tidings to the meek;” as “*Jesus*,” the person commissioned to “save men from their sins;” and as “*the Lord*,” who was constituted the living Head, the Supreme Governor, and the righteous Judge of his redeemed people—

But not even this *distinct* knowledge would have been valued by him, if it had not also been *experimental*—The expressions following the text respecting his “winning Christ, and being found in him, and knowing him in the power of his resurrection,” evidently imply that he tasted a sweetness, and felt a peculiar efficacy, in this knowledge—He found by happy experience that he had communion with Christ in his offices^m—

He

^h 2 Cor. xi. 21, 22. Acts xxii. 25—29.

ⁱ Thrice he quoted the Greek Poets in confirmation of the truth: and took advantage of his knowledge of the Greek language to oppose more successfully the heathen idolatry. Acts xvii. 23.

^k 2 Cor. i. 12.

^l Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^m 1 John i. 3.

He saw Christ not merely as a prophet, a priest, or a king, but as that very teacher who had opened his eyes; that very Lamb that had taken away his sins; that very Head, to whom he himself was vitally united, and from whom he derived all his supplies of grace and strength—Hence in speaking of Christ he calls him, “Christ Jesus my Lord”—]

This it was which he esteemed beyond all other things

[In comparison of this, his *civil distinctions*, his *moral qualities*, and even his *religious attainments*, appeared to him “as dung and dross”—He clearly perceived that none of those things could ever justify him at the tribunal of God; and that, if ever he were saved, he must “be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ:” hence he accounted his former gain to be not only dung, but “loss,” that is, not only useless, but prejudicial, if it diverted his eyes from Christ, or weakened his dependence upon him—Nor did he entertain the smallest doubt respecting the justness of his views; but repeated his assertions in the strongest and most decisive terms, “yea, *doubtless*, and I count *all* things but loss”—Nor did his confidence proceed from inexperience; for repeating the same thing a third time, he adds, “for whom *I have suffered* the loss of *all* things, and *do count* them but dung”—]

The propriety of his judgment will be seen by considering

III. The grounds of his preference

There was an “excellency” in that knowledge that far surpassed every thing else—

The *object* of it was truly wonderful

[Who can think of an incarnate God, bearing the sins of his rebellious creatures, and not stand amazed?—Who can view the wisdom, power, and goodness of God as exhibited in the face of a dying Saviour, and not confess, that “great is the mystery of godliness?” The consideration of this alone had been a very sufficient ground for his declaration in the text—]

The *effects* of it transcend all that eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived

[The knowledge of this adorable Saviour *will comfort us under all troubles*—None ever endured greater bodily trials than Paul; yet “none of them could move him; and he was exceeding joyful in all his tribulation”—The trials of his soul were far greater; yet while he was groaning under their

utmost

^a Acts xx. 24. 2 Cor. vii. 4

utmost weight, a view of Christ instantly turned his mourning into thanksgivings and the voice of melody^o; and, on another occasion, while he was cruelly buffeted by Satan, an answer of peace from Christ enabled him to glory in his infirmities, and even to take pleasure in the most complicated distressesⁿ—

Moreover, this knowledge *will transform the soul into the image of God*—Before his conversion, his zeal shewed itself in persecuting unto death the greatest friends both of God and man: how unlike the conduct of Jesus, who died for his very enemies! But when converted to the faith, he had “ continual sorrow in his heart on account of his brethrens obstinacy, and wished himself even accursed from Christ for their sake^q”—He, like his divine Master, was willing to die for his enemies, and rejoiced exceedingly in the prospect of being sacrificed for the good of the church^r—To what can we ascribe this change, but to the knowledge of Christ^s?—And if to *that*, what reason had he to prize it!—

Lastly, this knowledge *will avail for the salvation of all who possess it*. Paul, though he thought himself “ alive ” before his conversion, found at last that he was really “ dead^t : ” but after his conversion, he was no longer dead, either in reality, or in his own apprehension: he frequently speaks with the fullest assurance respecting the safety of his state^u; and teaches all who know Christ to expect with confidence a crown of righteousness in the day of judgment^x—

On such grounds we must not only approve the apostle’s judgment, but account it madness to differ from him—

APPLICATION

[All of us possess something which we account gain—Some are more elevated by birth or fortune, others by education and learning: some value themselves on their moral qualities; others on their religious attainments: let us freely acknowledge the *gain* which may be found in these things^y: but let us never forget that there is *ONE* thing of infinitely greater value than all those together, and for which our gain must be accounted loss. To have a *distinct experimental* knowledge of Christ, to be able to say, “ He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*, ” is of more value than ten thousand worlds: it is that, and that alone, which can ever comfort, sanctify or save the soul—Let us then seek to know Christ and him crucified, and to “ grow in the knowledge of him, ” till we “ see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known ”—]

^o Rom. vii. 24, 25.

^p 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.

^q Rom. ix. 2, 3.

^r Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^s 2 Cor. v. 14. & iii. 18.

^t Rom. vii. 9.

^u 2 Cor. v. 1—4.

^x 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^y If this be the subject of a *Commemoration Sermon*, the advantages arising from the institution may be stated, together with just acknowledgments both to God and the benefactors.

DLXXXVI. HUMILIATION FOR THE SIN OF THE HEART.

2 Chron. xxxii. 26. *Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart.*

THE best of men are liable to fall through temptation—

But they will deeply bewail any sin into which they have been betrayed—

Hezekiah was a man of very distinguished piety^a—

But he was not sufficiently aware, that his integrity was the effect of divine grace, and not of human power—

God therefore left him for a moment to the influence of his own heart^b—

In consequence of this he soon gave a proof of his inherent depravity—

But, on discovering his sin, he instantly humbled himself for it before God—

We shall

I. Shew the nature and grounds of Hezekiah's humiliation

The sin committed by him does not in human estimation appear great

[The princes of Babylon sent to congratulate him on his recovery—

He received them with all the kindness and courtesy that he could express—

And shewed them every thing in his dominions that could afford them entertainment—]

But his conduct was exceeding sinful in the sight of God; for in it

1. He sought his own glory

[Hezekiah evidently thought of nothing else at that time—

He wished to shew how great a man he was, in order that his alliance might be courted, and his power feared—

Now this would have been highly criminal in any man^c—

But it was especially so in him, at that particular juncture—

He had just been at the border of the grave; and therefore should

^a 2 Kings xx. 3.

^b Ver. 31.

^c Prov. xxv. 27.

should have been more impressed with the vanity of earthly grandeur—

And should have seen the folly and wickedness of *priding himself* in things so empty, so worthless, so transient—]

2. He sought his own glory in preference to God's honour

[He had now a happy opportunity of magnifying the God of Israel—

He might have told the ambassadors, what God had done for his nation in former times—

He might have recited the wonderful restoration which God had at this time afforded to himself in particular, together with the stupendous miracle with which the promise of that recovery had been confirmed^d—

He might have commended Jehovah as an answerer of prayer^e—

And in this way have exalted him above all the gods of the heathen—

And surely the mercies that had been vouchsafed unto him, demanded such a tribute—

But he was pitifully occupied about SELF—

And basely preferred *his own* honour before God's—]

3. He sought his own glory before the good of his friends

[The ambassadors were shewing great kindness to him—

He should therefore have recompensed them in the best way—

He should have instructed them in the knowledge of the God of Israel—

And have told them how willing HE was to become their God—

Thus perhaps he might have converted and saved their souls—

And have spread the knowledge of the true God in Babylon—

Yea, eventually, he might have been instrumental to the salvation of thousands—

But he utterly forgot the necessities of their souls—

And was offering incense to his own vanity, when he should have been promoting their eternal welfare—]

This was his sin; and God denounced a heavy judgment against him on account of it

[His riches were all to be taken away by the Chaldeans—

His own children were to be made eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace—

And

^d 2 Kings xx. 11.

^e Ib. ver. 4, 5.

And the whole nation to be led into a miserable captivity—]

But, if his offence was great, his humiliation also was remarkable

[He heard with trembling the judgments which God threatened to execute—

Instead of palliating his sin, he acknowledged at once the justice of the Deity in inflicting such a punishment on account of it—

In concert with all his subjects, he implored forgiveness at God's hands—

And, having obtained a respite of the sentence, thankfully acquiesced in the determinations of Heaven †—]

While we see in him much to shun, and much to imitate, let us

II. Enquire whether we also have not similar grounds for humiliation?

Pride is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man—

We are prone to be lifted up on every occasion

[We are vain of any *natural endowments* of body or mind—

The strong displays his strength; the beautiful, her beauty—

A penetrating mind, or tenacious memory, are made grounds of self-admiration, and self-preference—

Any *acquired distinctions* also become food for our vanity—

The man of wealth, of honour, or of power, assumes a consequence from his elevation, and demands from others a homage as his due—

The proficient in any art or science courts applause, and delights to have his talents admired—

Even the *gifts of grace*, through the depravity of our nature, become occasions of pride—

Not only an ability to speak or pray with fluency, but even an insight into the corruption of the heart, is often exhibited more for the purpose of attracting admiration than of doing good—

Whatever we have that elevates us a little above our fellow-creatures, our proud hearts are fond of displaying it, and pleased with the flattering attentions which it procures for us—]

We indulge the disposition too to the neglect of God's honour, and of the eternal welfare of those around us

[How many glorious opportunities have we of speaking for God!—

What

† Isai. xxxix. 8.

What grounds of praising him might we find in the sacred records!—

How many too might we find in our own experience!—

And what unspeakable benefit might arise to mankind, if we carefully improved these opportunities!—

But how rarely is our intercourse with each other made subservient to these ends—

We waste our time in flattering attentions and unprofitable civilities—

We are as intent on gratifying the vanity of ourselves or others, as if our social converse were capable of no better improvement—]

How much then do we need to imitate Hezekiah's humiliation!

[However innocent we may think such conduct, it is highly criminal in the sight of God—

It renders us justly obnoxious to God's heaviest judgments—

Should we not then humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes?—

Should not the forbearance he has exercised call forth our devoutest acknowledgments?—

And should we not adore his goodness even if he only delay to execute his threatened vengeance?—

Let us not attempt to palliate this common, but vile, iniquity—

But rather unite in deprecating the wrath we have deserved—]

INFER

1. What dreadful evils arise from small beginnings!

[Hezekiah at first probably intended only to shew civility to his friends—

But through inattention to the motions of his heart, he fell into grievous sin, and brought on the whole nation the heaviest judgments—

And what enormities have not the motions of pride, of lewdness, of covetousness, or revenge, produced amongst ourselves, when, if they had been checked at first, they might have been easily subdued?—

Let us learn then to mark the first risings of sin in our hearts—

Let us remember, that God notices and abhors sin in the heart, no less than when it is brought forth into open act—

Let us entreat him to sanctify our inward man^b—

And *never to leave us to ourselves for one single moment—]*

2. How

^a Matt. xii. 36, 37

^b 1 Thess. v. 23.

2. How great is the efficacy of fervent prayer and intercession!

[The judgment denounced against Hezekiah was to have been speedily inflicted—

But he and Judah sought the Lord by humble and fervent prayer—

And the Lord deferred the evil till the next generation—

Thus will he do also in answer to our prayers—

If we turned to him as a nation, he would *prolong our national prosperity*—

And would *blot out for ever the personal guilt* of every true penitent—

Let us then humble ourselves for our abominations both of heart and life—

So shall we find God as gracious unto us, as he was to his people of old—]

DLXXXVII. PAUL'S SPIRITUAL CONFLICTS.

Rom. vii. 24, 25. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

THE Epistle to the Romans, as a clear, full, argumentative, and convincing statement of the gospel salvation, far exceeds every other part of holy writ. And the seventh chapter of that Epistle equally excels every other part of scripture, as a complete delineation of Christian experience. The Psalms contain the breathings of a devout soul, both in seasons of trouble and under the impressions of joy. But in the passage before us the Apostle states the operation of the two principles which were within him, and shews how divine grace and his corrupt nature counteracted each other. The good principle did indeed liberate him from all allowed subjection to sin: but the corrupt principle within him yet exerted such power, that, in spite of all his endeavours to resist it, he could not utterly overcome it. Having opened thus all the secret motions of his heart, he gives vent to the feelings which had been alternately excited by a review of his own experience, and of the provision which was made for him in Jesus Christ.

In discoursing upon his words we shall shew

I. The apostle's experience

We shall not enter into the general contents of this chapter, but confine ourselves to the workings of the Apostle's mind

1. In the views of his sin

[*He considered sin as the most loathsome of all objects.* In calling his indwelling corruption "a body of death," he seems to allude to the practice of some tyrants, who fastened a dead body to a captive whom they had doomed to death, and compelled him to bear it about with him till he was killed by the offensive smell. Such a nauseous and hateful thing was sin in the apostle's estimation. He felt that he could not get loose from it, but was constrained to bear it about with him wherever he went: and it was more loathsome to him than a dead body, more intolerable than a putrid carcass.

The bearing of this about with him was an occasion of the deepest sorrow. Whatever other tribulations he was called to endure, he could rejoice and glory in them, yea, and thank God who had counted him worthy to bear them. But under the burthen of his indwelling corruptions he cried, "O wretched man that I am!"

Not was there any thing he so much desired as to be delivered from it. When he had been unjustly imprisoned by the magistrates, he was in no haste to get rid of his confinement; instead of availing himself of the discharge they had sent him, he said, "Nay, but let them come themselves and fetch me out." But from his indwelling sin he was impatient to be released; and cried, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Not that he was at a loss where to look for deliverance; but he spake as one impatient to obtain it.]

2. In the views of his Saviour

[If his afflictions abounded, so did his consolations abound also. He knew that there was a sufficiency in Christ both of merit to justify the guilty, and of grace to sanctify the polluted. He knew, moreover, that God for Christ's sake had engaged to pardon all his sins, and to subdue all his iniquities. Hence with an emotion of gratitude, more easy to be conceived than expressed, he breaks off from his desponding strains, and exclaims, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord;" I thank him *for* Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour; and I thank him *through* Christ, as my all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator. While he saw in himself nothing but what tended to humble him in the dust, he beheld in Christ, and in God as reconciled to him through Christ, enough to turn his sorrow into joy, and his desponding complaints into triumphant exultation.]

That

That we may not imagine these things to be peculiar to St. Paul, we proceed to shew

II. Wherein our experience must resemble his

“As face answers to face in a glass, so doth the heart of man to man :” and every one who is converted to God will resemble the apostle

1. In an utter abhorrence of all sin

[Sin is really hateful to all who see it in its true colours ; it is properly called, “filthiness of the flesh and spirit^a :” and all who feel its workings within them, will “loathe both it, and themselves on account of it, notwithstanding God is pacified towards them^b.” Ungodly men may indeed hate sin *in others* : as Judah did, when he sentenced his daughter Tamar to death for the crime in which he himself had borne a share^c ; and as David did, when he condemned a man to die for an act, which was but a very faint shadow of the enormities which he himself had committed^d. Ungodly men may go so far as to hate sin *in themselves*, as Judas did when he confessed it with so much bitterness and anguish of spirit ; and as a woman may who has brought herself to shame, or a gamester, who has reduced his family to ruin. But it is not sin that they hate, so much as the consequences of their sin. The true Christian is distinguished from all such persons in that he hates sin itself, independent of any shame or loss he may sustain by means of it in this world, or any punishment he may suffer in the world to come. The apostle did not refer to any act that had exposed him to shame before men, or that had destroyed his hopes of acceptance with God, but to the inward corruption of which he could not altogether divest himself : and every one that is upright before God will resemble him in this respect, and hold in abhorrence those remains of depravity which he cannot wholly extirpate.

Nor will the true Christian justify himself from the consideration that he cannot put off his corrupt nature : no ; he will grieve from his inmost soul that he is so depraved a creature. When he sees how defective he is in every grace, how weak his faith, how faint his hope, how cold his love ; when he sees that the seeds of pride and envy, of anger and resentment, of worldliness and sensuality, yet abide in his heart ; he weeps over his wretched state, and “groans in this tabernacle, being burthened.” Not that this grief arises from fear of perishing, but simply from the consideration that these corruptions defile his soul, and displease his God, and rob him of that sweet fellowship

^a 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^c Gen. xxxviii. 24—26.

^b Ezek. xvi. 63.

^d 2 Sam. xii. 5—7.

fellowship with the Deity, which if he were more purified from them, it would be his privilege to enjoy.

Under these impressions he will desire a deliverance from sin as much as from hell itself: not like a merchant, who casts his goods out of his ship merely to keep it from sinking, and wishes for them again as soon as he is safe on shore; but like one racked with pain and agony by reason of an abscess, who not only parts with the corrupt matter with gladness, but beholds it afterwards with horror and disgust, and accounts its separation from him as his truest felicity.

Let every one then examine himself with respect to these things, and ask himself distinctly, "Am I like Paul in loathing sin of every kind, and of every degree? Does my grief for the secret remains of sin within me swallow up every other grief? And am I using every means in my power, and especially calling upon God, to destroy sin root and branch?"

2. In a thankful reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ

[The hopes of every true Christian arise from Christ alone: if he had no other prospect than what he derived from his own inherent goodness, he would despair as much as those who are beyond a possibility of redemption. But there is in Christ such a fulness of all spiritual blessings treasured up for his people, that the most guilty cannot doubt of pardon, nor can the weakest doubt of victory, provided he rely on that adorable Saviour, and seek his blessings with penitence and contrition. In him the apostle found an abundance to supply his want; and from the same inexhaustible fountain does every saint draw water with joy.

And what must be the feelings of the Christian when he is enabled to say of Christ, "This is my friend, this is my beloved?" Must he not immediately exclaim, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!" Must not the very stones cry out against him, if he withhold his acclamations and hosannas? Yes; "to every one that believes, Christ is, and must be, precious." "All that are of the true circumcision will rejoice in him, having no confidence in the flesh." And the deeper sense any man has of his own extreme vileness, the more fervently will he express his gratitude to God for providing a Saviour so suited to his necessities.]

Let us then LEARN from this subject

1. The nature of vital godliness

[Religion, as it is experienced in the soul, is not as some imagine, a state of continual sorrow, nor, as others fondly hope, a state of uninterrupted joy. It is rather a mixture of joy and sorrow, or, if we may so speak, it is a joy springing out of sorrow. It is a conflict between the fleshly and spiritual principle,

principle^c, continually humbling us on account of what is in ourselves, and filling us with joy on account of what is in Christ Jesus. And the being thus emptied of all our own imaginary goodness, and being made thankful to God for the blessing we receive in and through Christ, is that which constitutes the warfare, and the victory, of every true Christian.]

2. How little true religion there is in the world

[We hear every living man complaining at times of troubles civil, domestic, or personal: and we find every man at times exhilarated on some occasion or other. But we might live years with the generality of men, and never once hear them crying, "O my inward corruptions: what a burthen they are to my distressed soul!" Nor should we see them ever once rejoicing in Christ as their suitable and all-sufficient Saviour. Yea, if we were only to suggest such a thought to them, they would turn away from us in disgust. Can we need any further proof of the prevalence, the general prevalence, of irreligion? May God make use of this indisputable fact for the bringing home of conviction upon all our souls!]

3. What consolation is provided for them who have ever so small a portion of true religion in their hearts

[Many experience the sorrows of religion without its joys; and they refuse to be comforted because of the ground they have for weeping and lamentation. But if their sins are a just occasion of sorrow, their sorrow on account of sin is a just occasion of joy: and the more they cry, O wretched man that I am, the more reason they have to add, "Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ." Let *this* be our alternate effusion now; and ere long it shall be our only, and uninterrupted, song for ever.]

^c Gal. v. 17.

DLXXXVIII. THE SUCCESS OF FERVENT PRAYER.

^a Cor. xii. 7—9. *Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

THERE is scarcely any thing in the scriptures that more deserves our attention than the remarkable instances of answers to prayer. Throughout the whole Bible, if we see any one betake himself to prayer, we may know beforehand the issue of his conflicts: whatever be his difficulties, if only he go to God, saying, “I have no might in myself, but mine eyes are unto thee,” we may be well assured of his success: his petition invariably brings Omnipotence to his support; and he is made more than conqueror over all his adversaries. St. Paul relates a most encouraging instance respecting himself, wherein he found to his unspeakable comfort the efficacy of prayer. To illustrate it, we shall consider

I. His trial

Highly favoured as the apostle was, he was nevertheless bowed down with a heavy affliction

[None, however honoured and beloved of God, can hope to escape trouble. What was the particular trial, with which the apostle was assaulted, it is impossible to say. The most reasonable conjecture seems to be, that it was something occasioned by his vision, perhaps some distortion of his features, or impediment in his speech, that rendered both his person and his speech contemptible; and of which the false teachers, those “messengers and ministers of Satan^a,” took advantage, to undermine his influence in the church of God^b. This to the apostle, whose heart was wholly bent upon glorifying God, and saving the souls of men, would be a heavy affliction, like “a thorn in his flesh,” festering and causing the
acutest

^a 2 Cor. xi. 14, 15.
καλαφίζη; and compare 2 Cor. x. 10. with Gal. iv. 13, 14.

^b Construe ἄγγελος Σατᾶν with ἵνα μὴ

acutest pain. But, whatever it was, Satan took occasion from it to distress the mind of the apostle with a far keener anguish than his body could have sustained from the severest blows of men^c. Nor need we regret that we are ignorant of the precise temptation with which St. Paul was harassed; since, whatever our trials be, we may consider ourselves as in his situation, and obtain relief in the same way that he did.]

The reason for which that affliction was sent him, it is of great importance to observe

[The apostle was not yet perfect: and though he had been caught up into the third heavens, he was yet liable to sin: the seeds of pride were yet in his heart; and they would derive life and vigour even from those very mercies, which, to human appearance, should have had a tendency to destroy them. To counteract this evil of his heart, God sent him a heavy trial^d. And, if we were more attentive to the *ends* of God's dispensations towards ourselves, we might always find some good reason for them within our own hearts. Pride is a hateful and accursed evil; and, if suffered to reign within us, will bring us "into the condemnation of the devil:" nor, however severe the remedy may be, should we be averse to endure it, if only it may be instrumental to the extirpating of this deeply-rooted propensity. In this case, though *Satan* may be the agent that *inflicts* the stroke, *God* is the kind friend that "*gives*" it: and though Satan intends us nothing but evil, God overrules it for our good.]

The conduct of the apostle under his trial will be instructive to us, if we consider

II. The means he used to obtain deliverance from it

He carried his trouble to a throne of grace

[Paul well knew the efficacy of fervent prayer, and how vain it was to contend with Satan in his own strength. He therefore besought the Lord to extract this thorn, and to relieve him from his distress. The Lord not immediately vouchsafing him an answer, he renewed his petitions with yet greater fervour: and when still no answer came, he became more and more urgent, determining, like Jacob of old, that he would not go without a blessing. This was a certain mean of obtaining deliverance. It was the mean which our Lord himself used under the pressure of that wrath that was due to our sins: He prayed "*thrice*" that the cup might pass from him. Nor is such urgent prayer at all expressive of a want of resignation to the will of God: it is our privilege and our duty to "call upon God in the time of trouble;" and troubles are

^c *ολαφίζε.

^d This is *twice* mentioned in ver. 7.

are often sent for this very purpose, to bring us nearer to God; and are continued for a time, to discover to us more abundantly the condescension of God in the removal of them.]

The person, whom he immediately addressed, was the Lord Jesus

[Paul had heard Stephen in the hour of martyrdom calling on the Lord Jesus; and had seen what support was administered to him on that trying occasion^c. And whither should he himself fly but to that same adorable friend, who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and, “having been in all points tempted like us, is able and willing to succour his tempted people^f.” That his petitions were immediately addressed to Christ, is certain; for we are told in the text, that it was Christ who answered him, and on whose promised aid the apostle was enabled to rely. Is Christ then a mere creature? Can he be any other than God, equal with the Father, God over all, blessed for ever? Thus, if we go to Christ, or to the Father in Christ’s name, “whatever we ask, Christ will do it for us, that the Father may be glorified in the Son^g.”]

In viewing the means resorted to by the apostle, it will be encouraging to notice

III. The success of those means

In due time our blessed Lord answered his petitions

[At last the suppliant was informed, that the grace of Christ which had already been so abundant in his first conversion, should be “sufficient for him” under every subsequent trial: and that, however disheartened the apostle might be on account of his great and manifold infirmities, he should experience no real evil from them: on the contrary, they should be a source of much good, inasmuch as they should be the means of displaying, and magnifying, the strength of Christ. Thus all cause of complaint was taken away from him, because Satan was sure to be defeated by him, and the work of Christ to be advanced, both in his own heart, and by his ministrations in the world.]

This answer, though not precisely agreeable to the letter of the apostle’s petition, fully corresponded with the spirit of it

[Our blessed Lord himself, when “supplicating with strong crying and tears” for the removal of the cup, did not obtain the precise object of his request; yet we are told that he

^c Acts vii. 58, 59. ^f Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15. ^g John xiv. 13.

he "was heard," because he was strengthened, and enabled to drink it^b. Thus the apostle's petitions also were crowned with success. The trial was indeed continued: but the end for which God sent it, was accomplished. Had God removed the thorn, it is possible that the apostle might have been "exalted above measure," and might thereby have suffered irreparable loss in his soul: but by sanctifying the trouble, God confirmed him in his humility, and rendered him a distinguished instrument of good to his church. Now it is in this manner that God often answers the petitions of his people: and it is of great importance that we should be apprized of this, lest we be tempted to ask with the wicked, "What profit is there that we should pray unto him?" If it be a blessing to have affliction removed, it is a far richer blessing to have it sanctified for our spiritual and eternal good.]

That the apostle considered his petition as completely answered, will appear from

IV. The effect which this success instantly produced upon his mind

From this moment all his sorrows were turned into joy [St. Paul did not merely submit to the divine will, and bear with patience a trial which he could not remove; but he even gloried in his tribulations; and made those very infirmities, which just before had been a subject of such pathetic lamentation, an occasion of joy and triumph. It is thus that every Christian is called to manifest his acquiescence in the appointments of Heaven: he should count it all joy when he falls into divers temptations, and, being strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with *joyfulness*, he should *give thanks* unto the Father, who, by trials, is fitting him for glory¹.]

The consideration that Christ would be glorified in him, was sufficient to counterbalance all that he had suffered, or might yet suffer for his sake

[The honour of Christ was dear unto the apostle, and should be dear unto all who call themselves Christians. The continuance of the trial in the apostle's flesh, was an occasion of Christ's more abundant kindness towards him. His compassionate Saviour drew nigh unto him, and dwelt as it were, upon him; as God, by the symbol of his presence, had formerly rested on the tabernacle in the wilderness^b. And as the rebellious Israelites had been constrained to acknowledge the presence of God with Moses, so were Paul's enemies constrained

^b Heb. v. 7.

¹ Jam. i. 2. Col. i, 11, 12.

ⁿ ἐπισκευάζοντι

constrained to acknowledge that Christ was with him of a truth. The more weak and contemptible he was in their eyes, the more they must be compelled to glorify Christ, by whom he was strengthened in his spirit, and made successful in his ministrations. And if more glory might be brought to Christ by means of these infirmities, he was not only willing to endure them, but ready to glory in them even unto death¹.]

EXHORTATION

Let us enquire into the cause of our troubles

[The rod has a voice which we ought to hear^m: and, if we would attend to it, would discover to us many hidden but grievous abominations, which lurk unseen in our hearts.]

Let us carry them all to a throne of grace

[It is to little purpose to complain of them to our fellow-creatures: but “God never says to any, Seek ye my face in vain.”]

Let us exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

[He says to us, “Believe in God; believe also in MEⁿ.” He is God, equal with the Father; and “in him all fulness dwells.” His promise is addressed to all his suffering and tempted people; and the truth of it shall be experienced by them all. Only let us believe in him; and no adversary shall be too strong, no calamity too heavy, no duty too difficult; for “all things are possible to him that believeth.”]

¹ Phil. i. 20.

^m Mic. vi. 9.

ⁿ John xiv. 1.

DLXXXIX. THE PRAYER OF JABEZ.

¹ Chron. iv. 10. *And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me. And God granted him that which he requested.*

REMARKABLE is the honour which God puts upon prayer—

And numberless are the instances which are recorded of its efficacy—

Jabez is here mentioned in a long catalogue of names—
But

But while the names only of others are recorded, he is particularly noticed—

He is even declared to have been more honourable than all his brethren—

This distinction indeed might be given him on account of his primogeniture—

But it was certainly still more due on account of his piety—

Like the patriarch Jacob, he “wrestled with God, and prevailed”—

I. The import of his prayer

In its primary sense it evidently related to *temporal* blessings

[God had promised his people an inheritance in Canaan—

But they were not able of themselves to drive out the inhabitants—

Jabez therefore, sensible of his insufficiency, prayed to God for help—

He begged for the blessing of God upon his own endeavours—

He desired to be preserved from the dangers to which his military exploits would expose him—

And to have, through the divine interposition, an enlarged inheritance in the promised land—

These requests he urged with a significant and earnest plea^a—]

But there is reason to think it had also a *spiritual* meaning

[The earthly Canaan was typical of the heavenly kingdom—

The enemies also that were to be driven out, were typical of the enemies with whom the Christian has to contend—

Moreover, the assistance, which God rendered to his people, was intended to shew us what aid we might expect from him—

And what evil will a child of God deprecate so much as sin?—

Surely

^a Almost all Hebrew names had some peculiar signification. Jabez signified sorrow: the name was given him in remembrance of the unusual sorrows his mother endured in childbirth. And it was in reference to this that he deprecated the evils to which he was exposed; “Keep me,” &c. lest I be Jabez in my *experience*, as well as in my *name*.

Surely nothing is so “grievous” to him as the prevalence of corruption^b—

Well therefore may Jabez be considered as looking beyond this world—

And as imploring a secure possession of his heavenly inheritance—]

In both these views the prayer is well worthy of our notice

II. The excellence of it

It is the sentiment, rather than the expression, that gives excellence to prayer—

But in both respects we may admire that before us—
It was

Humble

[He felt his entire dependence upon the power and grace of God—

This is intimated not merely in the petitions offered, but in the very manner in which they were offered—“Oh, that,” &c.

Such humility is absolutely necessary to render prayer acceptable—

The more we abase ourselves, the more will God exalt us—

Let this be remembered in all our addresses at the throne of grace—]

Diffusive

[Jabez did not content himself with a mere general petition—

He opened distinctly his several wants to God—

A similar conduct is proper for us also^c—

Not that God needs to be informed of our wants, or that he will hear us for our much speaking^d—

But we need to recite our wants, in order to impress our own minds with a sense of our utter helplessness and unworthiness—]

Importunate

[He enforced his request with a very earnest plea—

Nor, in reference to sin, could any plea be more proper for him—

We indeed should urge the prevailing name of Jesus—

But we may also properly deprecate sin as “grievous” to our souls—

Yea, a disposition to do this is both an evidence of our sincerity, and a pledge of the divine acceptance—

And,

^b Rom. vii. 24.

^c Phil. iv. 6.

^d Matt. vi. 7, 8.

And, in pleading thus, we may well adopt the words of Jacob^e—]

Believing

[The title, by which he addressed the Deity, argued his faith in God—

It expressed a confidence in God as the hearer of prayer^f—

It is in this way that we also should approach the Deity^g—

Without such faith our petitions will have but little effect^h—

But with it, they shall never go forth in vainⁱ—]

Prayer possessing such qualities could not fail of success

III. The success with which it was attended

We have no detailed account of God's kindness towards him—

But we are informed that God granted him all that he requested

[If Jabez was not straitened in asking, much less was God in giving—

“The prayer of the upright is God's delight”—

We cannot possibly enlarge our requests too much—

We lose much by not using more of holy vehemence^k—

The promises made to us exceed not our desires only, but our conceptions^l—

Petitions offered in faith, have, as it were, the force of commands^m—

The more we abound in them, the more we shall find that saying trueⁿ—

And often will God vouchsafe us an instantaneous answer^o—]

Let us therefore take encouragement from this concise history

[Many and great are the blessings we need from God—

But the throne of his grace is always open to us—

Let us then spread all our sins, and wants before him—

Let us approach him as our God in Christ Jesus—

Let us view him as a gracious answerer of prayer^p—

And our success shall surely correspond with that of Jabez—

“God never did, or will, say to any, Seek ye my face in vain”—]

APPLICATION

^e Gen. xxxii. 26.

^f Ib. 28.

^g Heb. xi. 6.

^h Jam. i. 6, 7.

ⁱ Mark xi. 24.

^k 2 Kings xiii. 19.

^l Eph. iii. 20.

^m Isai. xlv. 11.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^o Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

^p Ps. lxxv. 2. and lvii. 2.

APPLICATION

[Let all now call to mind their several wants and necessities—

Let nothing be thought too small, or too great, to ask—

Let our prayers, like that of Jabez, be daily recorded in heaven—

Let the pressure of our wants, and the richness of our prospects, stimulate us—

Let us expect the accomplishment of that glorious promise^a—

And in due time our prayers shall be turned into everlasting praises—]

^a John xiv. 13, 14.

DXC. ENOCH'S WALKING WITH GOD.

Gen. v. 24. *And Enoch walked with God, and he was not : for God took him.*

THE cares of a family are by no means incompatible with a life of devotedness to God. The man distinguished for his piety above all others in the antediluvian world, had a very numerous offspring^a, to whom doubtless he paid every attention in his power : yet he was not impeded in his spiritual course ; but found time to serve his God, as much as if he had been free from all concern about this present world.

We shall consider

I. His conduct

His “ walking with God ” implies

1. Agreement

[Enoch was once alienated from God, like others^b, and full of enmity against him both in heart and life^c ; once he “ walked after the flesh,” according to the course of this world, and altogether contrary to God^d. But now he was reconciled

^a His eldest son, Methuselah, was born to him at the age of sixty-five ; after which he continued for the space of three hundred years to beget sons and daughters.

^b Eph. iv. 18.

^c Rom. viii. 7. Col. i. 21.

^d Rom. viii. 1. Eph. ii. 2. Lev. xxvi. 27, 28.

reconciled to God through faith in Christ^c— — — And was brought by this means to an agreement with him both in mind and will.

Thus must all of us obtain reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ, before we can resemble this eminent saint; for it is “not possible for two to walk together except they be agreed^f.”]

2. Familiarity

[Friends who associate much together, contract a familiarity with each other: they open to each other their sorrows and their joys: they consult each other in their difficulties; and maintain with the greatest freedom a mutual intercourse. Thus did Enoch with his God. He considered God as his friend: he had familiar access to him at all times: he opened to him all his wants, all his fears, all his trials: he did nothing without first asking counsel of his friend, and engaging his assistance.

Nor was this an honour peculiar to him: it is the duty and the privilege of all the saints: we may go and knock at the door of our friend, and he will always open unto us^g: we may have access to him with boldness and with confidence, even in his most private apartments^h: we may ask what we will of him, and he will do it for usⁱ. He, on the other hand, will come and knock at our door; and will come in and sup with us^k: he will communicate to us his secrets^l; and will in ten thousand ways manifest himself unto us as he does not unto the world^m.]

3. Affection

[Affection is the very essence of friendship: mere agreement or familiarity are of little value without it: where this does not exist, the intercourse cannot be such as is implied in walking with God. Enoch loved his God, in a measure, with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: God would never have given him a special testimony of his approbation, if his heart had been destitute of this sacred flame. He went forth

^c It is said in Heb. xi. 5. that Enoch was “translated by faith:” and though that faith might have more immediate respect to some promise given him relative to his translation, yet we can scarcely conceive but that it had a further respect to the promised Messiah. And this idea is greatly strengthened by the account St. Jude gives of him, ver. 14, 15. If Enoch prophesied of Christ’s second coming, doubtless he was not ignorant of his *first* advent.

^f Amos iii. 3.

^g Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^h James iv. 8. Eph. iii. 12. Heb. x. 19.

ⁱ John xv. 7.

^k Rev. iii. 20. John xiv. 23.

^l Ps. xxv. 14.

^m John. xiv. 21, 22.

forth to meet his God, as Adam was wont to do in his state of innocence: he looked forward with joy to the seasons when he should again renew his fellowship with him: he studied to avoid every thing that might in any respect grieve him; and made it the great object of his life to do what was pleasing in his sight.

It is in this way that we also are to walk with God: we must commune with him not by constraint, but willingly and of a ready mind^a. We must delight ourselves in him^o. His loving-kindness must be better to us than life itself^p; and it must be as marrow and fatness to us to serve and honour him^q.]

How acceptable to God this conduct was, we may learn from

II. His reward

The manifestations of God's presence and favour which he continually enjoyed, were a rich recompence for any self-denial which he exercised, or any exertions which he used, to please his God. But, besides all these, God

1. Exempted him from death, the common lot of all men

[All, the righteous as well as the wicked, must pay the penalty of death, which has been entailed on them by the sin of Adam, and been richly merited by their own personal transgressions. But God has been pleased to exempt from it one in the old world, and one in the new^r. This testimony of his approbation God vouchsafed to Enoch. He took him from a persecuting and ungodly world, who probably enough were seeking to destroy him on account of his faithful admonitions^s. He took him in the prime of life, without any previous pain or sickness. To some indeed it might appear a calamity to be taken away, in the midst of his useful labours, and while his family were still looking up to him for instruction and support: but he thought it "far better to depart and to be with Christ," than to prolong his days in the midst of a tempting and ungodly world; and God gave him the desire of his heart.

We, however diligent in walking with God, cannot hope to participate in such a reward as this. But death shall be disarmed of its sting, so that it shall be to us rather an object of desire,

^a 1 John i. 3.

^o Ps. xxxvii. 4.

^p Ps. lxiii. 3.

^q Ps. lxiii. 5.

^r Compare 2 Kings ii. 11. with the text.

^s In Heb. xi. 5. before cited, it is said "he was not found." This may refer to some search made by his friends (see 2 Kings ii. 15.) or rather by his enemies, (see 1 Kings xviii. 10.)

desire, than of fear and terror¹: and while the most stout-hearted sinner trembles at its approach, we shall be enabled not only to meet it with serenity and composure, but to triumph over it as a vanquished enemy².]

2. Exalted him both in body and in soul to a more immediate enjoyment of his presence

[While Enoch was in the body, he could not endure the full splendor of the divine glory³: he could only behold his God through the dark medium of faith⁴, or, at most, be permitted to "see his back parts⁵." But God translated him, both in body and soul, to the highest heavens; making him thereby, not only an eminent type of Christ's ascension, but an earnest and pledge to us, that our bodies shall hereafter be raised to a participation of the happiness, which our glorified souls shall enjoy at their departure from the body. To what extent the blessedness of every individual will be advanced by the re-union of the soul and body, it is not possible to say: but it is reasonable to suppose, that that which consummates our reward, will greatly enhance our felicity. This, however, Enoch had not to wait for; he received his full reward at once; and was thereby distinguished from all those disembodied spirits, which, though perfected in glory, waited for their complete happiness till the day of judgment. The happiness of Enoch in communing with God on earth was doubtless exceeding great: but when he arrived at the full fruition of the divine glory, his blessedness as far exceeded all that he had before experienced, as the early dawn is surpassed by the meridian light.

It need not, however, be any matter of regret to us, that we are not to expect this reward; since, on our dismissal from the body we shall instantly be in Paradise; and at the day of resurrection, we shall have our bodies raised to a participation of our bliss.]

3. Made him a most distinguished monument to the whole world, of the love he bears to those who seek communion with him

[We know but little of the state of those who are gone into the invisible world, though we believe, from the word of God, that they are completely happy. But here is an evidence to our very senses, that none shall be suffered to "seek God's face in vain." Who, after beholding such an interposition of the Deity, such an honour conferred on a "man of like passions

¹ 2 Cor. v. 4.² 1 Cor. xv. 55.³ 1 Tim. vi. 16.⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.⁵ Exod. xxxiii. 23.

passions with ourselves," can doubt one moment of the acceptance which all shall find, who serve their God in sincerity and truth ^a?

In this view then we may consider his reward as an earnest of ours. We shall not be left without many expressions of God's love even in this world, if we endeavour to walk closely with him. But, whether our present state be more or less joyous, we are sure that in the eternal world we shall not lose our reward. We need only to consider the exalted condition of this distinguished saint, and we may see in him the blessedness reserved for us.]

INFER

1. What an *honourable* character is the Christian!

[We consider those as honourable who associate with great men on earth: but the Christian has higher company than earthly monarchs; he walks with God himself; and God is not ashamed to call him his friend ^b. In some sense, the Christian is already translated into God's kingdom ^c, is admitted into the heavenly Zion, and is joined to the society of glorified saints and angels ^d.

Let every one then walk worthy of this high calling; and, in a dignified contempt of all inferior objects, endeavour to attain this sublime privilege in its highest perfection.]

2. What a *happy* character is the Christian!

[His singularity may bring upon him much odium and persecution. But what need he to regard the society of men, who enjoys fellowship with God? One smile from his almighty friend is sufficient to counterbalance all the indignities that can possibly be cast upon him. Yet, after all, his happiness in this world is but as the drop before the shower. When he has filled up the measure of his obedience, God takes him to himself; a band of angels are sent to bear his spirit to the regions of the blest. It must not be said, "He dies;" but merely, that "God translates him" from a world of sin and misery, to a world of blessedness and glory. "Such honour have all his saints;" God grant it may be ours for ever and ever!]

^a Isai. lxiv. 5.

^b Heb. xi. 16. James ii. 23. John xv. 15.

^c Col. i. 13.

^d Heb. xii. 22, 23.

DXCI. A SENSE OF WEAKNESS CONDUCTIVE TO
STRENGTH.

2 Cor. xii. 10. *When I am weak, then am I strong.*

THERE are many things in scripture which appear inconsistent and contrary to truth. Christ is represented as God, and yet a man; as the Lord of David, and yet his son; as a lion, and yet a lamb. And, as his person is thus variously described, so is his work: he is said to heal us by his own stripes, and to give us life by his death. But, however strange such expressions may seem, they contain many important truths. In the same manner the apostle's words, which we have now read, may be thought to imply a contradiction: but they accord with the experience of all God's people, and justly deserve the most attentive consideration.

In discoursing on this paradoxical assertion, we shall *illustrate, confirm, and improve* it.

I. Illustrate it

A part of David's history will help us to elucidate the words before us

[When the champion of the Philistines defied, and terrified, the whole army of Israel, David, "a stripling," without armour, defensive or offensive (except a sling and a stone) went forth against him; and, though unused to war himself, entered into combat with that experienced and mighty warrior. But the weaker he was in himself, the more confident was he in his God; and instead of being intimidated by the threatening aspect, and boasting determinations of his adversary, he was as assured of victory, as if he had seen his enemy already under his feet^a.]

But the context will give the best clue to the apostle's meaning

[St. Paul laboured under a heavy trial, which he calls a thorn in his flesh^b. Apprehensive that this would counteract his usefulness in the world, he cried most earnestly to the Lord Jesus Christ to remove it from him. But his Lord, not judging it expedient to grant him his request, promised him (what was incomparably better) more abundant communications of grace,

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47.

^b Ver 7, 8.

grace, whereby he should obtain in a more advantageous manner the desires of his soul. Observe the effect—Paul remained as weak as ever; but, being persuaded that Christ's power should be the more magnified through his weakness, he was satisfied; yea, rather, he made *that* a matter of joy and triumph, which had just before been a source of the greatest trouble. He was well assured that, however unable he was in himself either to bear his trials, or to fulfil his duties, he could not but succeed, when his almighty friend was pledged to succour and support him.]

The apostle's assertion being equally applicable to all believers, we shall

II. Confirm it

A sense of weakness necessarily tends to make us strong, inasmuch as it makes us

1. Watchful against temptations

[If we conceive ourselves to be strong, we shall be fearless of temptation; and by exposing ourselves to it, shall be in greater danger of falling: whereas, if we feel our utter weakness, we shall not only pray, "Lead us not into temptation," but shall carefully shun the places, the books, the company, that may ensnare us. Like Joseph, we shall not parley with the tempter, but flee in haste: or, if we cannot flee, we shall oppose our enemy at first; and thus vanquish that, which, if it had time to gather strength, would soon vanquish us.]

2. Importunate in prayer

[It is the sick alone who calls for a physician; they who are strong in their own conceit, will never pray in earnest; but he who feels his need of divine assistance will seek it at a throne of grace. Now if we do not pray for God's aid, we cannot receive it; and therefore in the hour of trial shall surely fail. But, if we pray with importunity and faith, we shall obtain the things we ask for; and consequently shall be upheld, while others fall. It was by this means that Paul obtained strength; "he prayed to the Lord *thrice*:" the answer vouchsafed to his petition dissipated all his fears, and strengthened him with might in his inner man: and similar means will always be attended with similar success.]

3. Dependent on Christ

[In proportion as we fancy ourselves strong, we must of necessity confide in our own strength; the consequence of which may be sufficiently seen in the repeated falls of Peter. But, if we are conscious that we are wholly without strength, and can do nothing of ourselves, we shall be more simple and uniform

uniform in our dependence on Christ. Now Christ will never suffer those who trust in him to be confounded. He would consider it as an impeachment of his own veracity, if he did not give them "grace sufficient for them:" consequently we never are so truly strong, as when we are deeply convinced of our own utter impotence.]

This truth enters deeply into the experience of all the Lord's people: we shall therefore endeavour to

III. Improve it

Among the various lessons which it teaches us, let us especially learn two

1. Not to be too much elated on account of any manifestations of the divine favour

[Paul was caught up into the third heavens; but soon afterwards we behold him crying, with much anguish of mind, under a severe affliction. Thus it may soon be with us. Indeed the seasons most distinguished by God's favour to us, are often most distinguished also by Satan's malice. It was immediately after they had received peculiar tokens of God's love, that he assaulted Paul^c, and Peter^d, and Christ himself^e. Let us then, when most highly favoured, "rejoice with trembling^f," and not while harnessed, boast as if we had put off our armour^g.]

2. Not to be too much dejected on account of our manifold infirmities

[Jacob was lamed by God himself, that he might know he had not prevailed by his own strength^h. And Paul had a thorn in the flesh given him, "lest he should be exalted above measure." Now our infirmities are very painful: but they are necessary, in order to keep alive in our minds a remembrance of our own weakness and vileness: and, if we do but carry them to God in fervent prayer, he will glorify himself by means of them, and "perfect his strength in our weakness." "Let the weak then say, I am strongⁱ;" let them "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^k;" and, doubtless, they shall receive that effectual succour, which believers, in all ages, have experienced^l, and shall invariably find their "strength according to their day" of trial^m.]

^c Ver. 4.

^e Matt. iii. 17. and iv. 1.

^g 1 Kings xx. 11.

ⁱ Joel iii. 10.

^l Heb. xi. 34.

^d Matt. xvi. 17, 23.

^f Ps. ii. 11.

^h Gen. xxxii. 25.

^k Eph. vi. 10.

^m Deut. xxxiii. 25.

DXCII. HOLY AMBITION ENCOURAGED.

Phil. iii. 13—15. *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.*

TRUE religion affords such perfect satisfaction to the mind, that from the time we become possessed of it, we lose our relish for other things, and feel ourselves at rest, as having attained the summit of our ambition^a. But though we cease to hunger or thirst after the vanities of time and sense, our appetite for spiritual blessings is quickened: nor can the richest acquisitions content us, as long as there remains any thing further to be enjoyed. This was St. Paul's experience. He had been apprehended and arrested, as it were, by the Lord Jesus, in order that he might be made to possess all the treasures of grace and glory: and, from that hour, he could never be satisfied with any thing short of the full enjoyment of them^b. And, while he cherished this holy ambition in his own bosom, he recommended it earnestly to all others.

There are two things which, in the words before us, he recommends from his own example

I. An humble sense of our present attainments

St. Paul, though so eminent, entertained but low thoughts of himself

[Never was there a man more distinguished than he, whether we consider in general his love to God^c and man^d, or examine the particular graces that adorned his soul^e. He not only was not inferior to any other apostle^f, but he laboured more abundantly than they all^g. Yet, from an impartial view of himself, as compared with the requirements of God's law,

^a John vi. 35.

^c 2 Cor. v. 14. Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

^b Ver. 12.

^d Rom. ix. 1—3. Phil. ii. 17.

^e Sympathy, 2 Cor. xi. 29; Contentment, Phil. iv. 11, 12; Deadness to the world, Gal. vi. 14; Industry, Rom. xv. 19; Self-denial, 1 Cor. ix. 15.

^f 2 Cor. xi. 5. and xii. 11. ^g 1 Cor. xv. 10.

law, and the example of his divine Master, he was constrained to confess that he had not yet attained that measure either of knowledge or of holiness, which it was his duty, and his privilege, to possess. This, I say, he found from an exact computation^h, and has recorded it for the instruction of the Church in all ages.]

In this respect he proposes himself to us as an example

[The word “perfect,” in the close of the text, is not to be understood in the strictest sense (for then it would contradict what he had before saidⁱ) but as signifying that degree of maturity at which the generality of Christians arrive^k. To persons of this description he says, “Be thus minded:” and surely it is impossible not to feel the propriety of the exhortation. Let any one of us, even the best amongst us, compare himself with the perfect law of God, or with the spotless example of our Lord, and will he not find in himself deficiencies without number? Let him even compare himself with Paul, a man of like passions with ourselves, and will he not appear a dwarf, a very child in comparison of him? Let him examine himself with respect to every Christian grace, and see whether he do not fall very far short of that bright pattern? Well then may all of us confess, that “we have not yet apprehended that for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus.”]

This however is not to discourage us, but to stimulate us to

II. A diligent pursuit of higher attainments

Glorious was the ardour with which the apostle was animated in his high calling

[He considered himself as “called by a reconciled God” to enter the lists in the Christian race, and as now actually contending for the prize. Much of his ground had he already passed over; but, like the racers in the Olympic games, he “forgot what was behind,” and was mindful only of that which yet remained for him to do. He saw the prize in full view, and strained every nerve^l in order to obtain it: and the nearer he approached the goal, the more earnestly did he “press forward,” desiring nothing but to “finish his course with joy.” This was “the one thing which he did.” Nothing else occupied his mind, nothing else was deemed worthy of one moment’s attention. Nothing could, in his apprehension, be lost, if that prize were gained; nor any thing gainer^m, if that prize were lost.]

In

^h λογίζομαι.

^k 1 Cor. ii. 6, and xiv. 20. and Eph. iv. 13.

ⁱ Ver. 12.

^l ἐπεκτεινόμενος 15.

In this way he exhorts us also to prosecute the great concerns of our souls

[The same prize which was set before him is held up to us also : and we are called by God to run for it. It may be that we have both done and suffered much for God already : but we must not think of any thing that is passed (except for the purpose of humbling ourselves, or of glorifying God) we must be intent only on present duty, and engage in it with all our might. To get forward must be our constant uniform endeavour. It is “the *one thing* needful.” As persons running in a race find no time for loitering or diversion, but distinguish themselves from mere spectators by the exertions they make ; so must we manifest to all around us that we have but one pursuit, with which we are determined that nothing shall interfere, and which we will never relax, till we have reached the goal.]

This subject is of peculiar use

1. For reproof

[How are they condemned, *who have never yet begun the Christian race!* Do they expect to win the prize without running for it? This cannot be: “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force^m.” Still more are they condemned *who would discourage others that are engaged in the contest.* Are they “like minded” with the apostle, whose one endeavour is, to damp the ardour which they will not emulate? Nor are they less worthy of reproof who have *relaxed their diligence in the ways of God.* To such Paul says, “ye did run well ; who hath hindered youⁿ? Yes ; enquire diligently who or what hath hindered you : for you had better be stripped of all that you possess, than be impeded by it in your Christian course. Shake off then the thick clay from your feet^o : put aside the garment that obstructs your progress^p : mortify the flesh that pleads for indulgence^q : and “run with patience the race that is set before you.”]

2. For encouragement

[Some perhaps are faint, and ready almost to give up the contest. But behold the prize : will not *that* repay? And is not the attainment of it certain, if you hold on your way^r? Yea more, shall not your strength be renewed, if only you wait upon your God^s? In a few more steps you will reach the goal : and will you stop when the prize is already, as it were, in your hands? O press forward : follow the apostle : endure to the end ; and receive “the crown of glory that fadeth not away.”]

^m Gal. v. 7.

ⁿ Hab. ii. 6.

^o 1 Heb. xii. 1. *ὑπερίσταν ἀμαρτίαν* ; See Beza's note on those words.

^p 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

^q Matt. xxiv. 13.

^r Isai. xl. 29—31.

DXCIII. PRESENT TROUBLES NOT TO BE COMPARED
WITH THE FUTURE GLORY.

Rom. viii. 18. *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

AN expectation of ultimate advantage is that, which gives activity to men in every situation of life. But, while it operates with full force in things relating to this world, its influence is scarcely felt by the generality of mankind in relation to things spiritual and eternal. Hence they are easily drawn aside from the path of duty by the allurements of time and sense, or driven from it by the terrors of persecution: whereas, if they would duly estimate the pleasures or pains of this present life, and weigh them in a balance against the glory and felicity of the world to come, they would be stimulated to patience and diligence in well-doing, since they could not but see with the apostle, that the one were not worthy to be named in comparison of the other. We shall

I. Compute^a the sufferings of this present time

[“Man is born to trouble,” and every man must expect his share of it in this world. But the saints have a greater portion of it than others.

In common with others, they are called to endure pain of body, distress of mind, loss of friends, embarrassment of circumstances, and every other evil incident to this mortal state.

But besides all this, they have many trials *peculiar to themselves*. *From within*, they are often bowed down under a sense of guilt, or under their indwelling corruptions: they are sometimes harassed with temptations, which, as fiery darts, wound and inflame their inmost souls: and sometimes they are overwhelmed with the hidings of their Father’s face, and ready to sink in utter despair. How grievous these sensations are, no words can adequately express. They are also not a little tried *from without*. The contempt, the hatred, the persecutions they endure, are often grievous to be borne; and would shake their fidelity, if they were not upheld and strengthened by their God.

Let

^a λογίζομαι.

Let this accumulated load be weighed as in a balance, and it will be found exceeding heavy, insomuch that, "if in this life only they had hope, the saints would be of all men most miserable."]

II. Compute the glory that shall be revealed

[There is a glory that shall be revealed *to* us, and a glory that shall be revealed *in* us: both of these are included in the words before us^b; and taken together, they comprise all the glory and felicity of heaven.

The very place to which we shall be admitted, is described by all the powers of language, in order to convey to us some faint idea of its beauty^c. There we shall behold all the angelic hosts with the spirits of just men made perfect; (how bright and blessed an assembly must that be!) yea, we shall see the Lamb of God, that very Jesus who was crucified for us, seated on his throne; and we shall behold the Father also face to face: we shall see him as he is, in all the brightness of his glory.

Together with this, we ourselves shall be fully changed into the image of our God; we shall resemble him both in body and soul, as far as finite creatures can resemble the infinite Jehovah. We shall also participate the blessedness of the Deity: and every vessel, according to its capacity, shall be filled with joy.

But it is in vain to estimate what is so infinitely above our comprehension; for "we know not yet what we shall be." Even our present privileges surpass all that the carnal eye, or ear, or heart, has ever seen, or heard, or conceived^d; much more therefore must the happiness of heaven infinitely exceed all that language can express, or imagination conceive.]

III. Balance the two together

[Sufferings, of whatever kind, are painful to flesh and blood; but when estimated according to the word of God, they are *light, mixed, and momentary*. How light are they in comparison of what we deserve, or what they might be, or of what Jesus endured for us, or of what myriads of our fellow-creatures are now enduring in hell! Besides, amidst them all, we have innumerable mercies for which to be thankful: and, if they were continued throughout our whole lives, they would be short as the twinkling of an eye, in comparison of the state to which we are hastening.

But the glory that awaits us is *exceeding great*, even "a weight" as great as the soul with its most enlarged powers is able to support. It is also *unmixed* with any alloy of sin, or
sorrow :

^b εἰς ἡμᾶς.

^c Rev. xxi. 10—23.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 9.

sorrow: and its duration will be *eternal*, even co-existent with the soul itself.

What comparison then is there between them? So infinitely does the glory exceed all the sufferings that we can endure in this life, that if we add hyperbole to hyperbole, and strain all the powers of language and of thought, to express the difference, we never can do justice to the subject, or declare a thousandth part of that which really exists.]

IMPROVEMENT—We may learn from hence

1. How to judge of God's dispensations

[To those who look no farther than to the present life, "the ways of God appear unequal;" since the godly are oppressed, and the wicked triumph. But let eternity be taken into the account, and all the seeming inequalities will vanish: the godly will be recompensed for their sufferings; and the wicked will receive the due reward of their impieties. The Judge of all the earth will not only do right, but will manifest the equity of all his dispensations.]

2. How to compose the minds of others

[When persons are complaining that their trials are exceeding heavy, and that they are ready to faint because of them, we should lead them to view their sufferings *in a way of comparison*, or *in a way of contrast*. We should compare the good they lose, or the evil they sustain, with the good and evil that are beyond the grave: or we should contrast the good to be enjoyed in a life of sin, with the evil which sin will hereafter bring upon us; or the evil to be sustained in this life, with the good with which it shall hereafter be compensated. In either of these methods^e we may, with God's help, put an end to their murmuring; and make them willing to bear their present afflictions in expectation of the benefit that will result from them.]

3. How to regulate our own conduct

[We are apt to indulge impatience under our trials; and to shew a vindictive spirit towards our persecutors. But we should view our sufferings as ordered by God himself in
number,

^e See 2 Cor. iv. 17. in the Greek.

^f The scriptures point out these distinctly: they *compare* present with future good, Heb. xi. 16. and present evil with future, Luke xii. 5. So also they *contrast* present good with future evil, Eccl. xi. 9. and present evil with future good, Heb. x. 34. And the effect of both these methods in composing the mind is intimated in 2 Cor. iv. 18.

number, weight, and duration, and consider them as means appointed by him for the perfecting of his work within us. Then we shall not stand up to avenge ourselves, or give way to an undue depression of mind; but shall commit ourselves to God in silent resignation, and wait for our recompense in the eternal world.]

DXCIV. THE MAGNANIMITY OF THE APOSTLES.

Acts v. 41, 42. *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

IN the annals of the world we find many examples of magnanimity, which excite our admiration, and shame the lowness of our attainments. But it may well be doubted whether any single instance which we read of in profane history, will stand the test of close examination. Pride and ostentation were almost invariably the fountain from which the most specious actions of heathens flowed: and in proportion as the principle was bad, the action itself also must have been depraved. But in the passage before us, we behold a greatness of mind which was truly admirable, and in every point of view worthy of our imitation. In discoursing upon the conduct of the apostles as it is here set forth, we shall

I. Illustrate their magnanimity

The whole of their spirit and conduct on this occasion was in the highest degree worthy of their high calling

1. They gloried in all their sufferings for Christ's sake

[Poor and illiterate men are apt to be disconcerted if called into the presence of their superiors, especially if those superiors have the power and inclination to oppress them under the forms of law. But these poor fishermen, when summoned before the supreme council, pleaded their own cause with undaunted firmness, testifying against their very judges, that they had crucified the Lord, and exhorting them to believe in him as their exalted Prince and Saviour.

After having been unjustly imprisoned, and miraculously delivered from their confinement, they were again summoned before their oppressors, and again, though without either in-

vective

vective or complaint, they vindicated their conduct in an unanswerable manner: and, notwithstanding they were beaten, and menaced with severer treatment, and might therefore have felt indignation rise in their bosoms, they lost sight of all the injuries which they themselves had sustained, and gloried in their sufferings as an honour conferred upon them, an honour of which they deemed themselves utterly unworthy.]

2. They persisted unalterably and indefatigably in the path of duty

[Though they gloried at present in their sufferings, it might have been expected that they would be very cautious of exposing themselves to the increased resentment of their persecutors. But they well knew that Jesus Christ was the only Saviour of the world, and that all must eternally perish who did not believe in him. They therefore lost no time, but instantly resumed their labours both in public and in private. They declared the death of Christ to have been an atonement for sin; they testified of his resurrection and ascension to carry on his work in heaven; and they proclaimed a full, a free, an everlasting salvation to all that would believe in his name. This was the obnoxious doctrine which they were forbidden to preach: but they proceeded on this one principle, that they were bound to "obey God rather than men:" and they were determined to suffer the last extremities rather than swerve from the path of duty, or relax their exertions for the instruction and salvation of immortal souls.

But it was not their perseverance that we admire, so much as the spirit and temper with which they conducted themselves throughout the whole of their trials: they shewed a firmness that was invincible; but without petulance, without anger, without ostentation, without complaint. They acted, not from self-will, but from zeal for their Lord, and love to their fellow-creatures: and their glorying was, not from a proud conceit of being martyrs to their cause, but from a persuasion that to suffer any thing for Christ was the greatest honour that could possibly be conferred on mortal men; since it gave them an opportunity of manifesting their love to Christ, and rendered them conformable to his blessed image.]

Such being the example which they have set us, we would

II. Recommend it to your imitation

We are required to "be followers of them who through faith and patience now inherit the promises." Therefore, that we may indeed be such

1. Let us get that love to Christ, which was the governing principle in their hearts

[Without a supreme love to Christ, it is in vain to hope that we shall attain to any eminence in the divine life, or indeed to any real experience of it. We shall never be willing to endure much for him, much less be able to glory in sufferings and shame for his sake, if our hearts do not burn with love towards him from a sense of what he has done and suffered for us. This therefore is the first thing we are concerned to seek after: let us get the knowledge of Christ as our crucified, risen, and exalted Redeemer, and, under the constraining influence of his love, devote ourselves entirely to his service.]

2. Let us be steadfast in our obedience to the will of Christ

[We shall find many things both from within and from without that will endanger our fidelity to Christ. But nothing must be suffered to divert us from the path of duty. *We owe allegiance indeed to our governors in all things lawful; but if their commands be opposite to those of God, there can be no doubt whom we are to regard in preference, and to whose authority we must yield obedience. We must therefore arm ourselves equally against the allurements of inward temptation, and the terrors of outward persecution; and have it as an established principle in our hearts, that nothing is, on any account, to interfere with our duty to God.]

3. Let us account it an honour to suffer for our Lord

[Sooner or later we must have a cross to bear, if we will be followers of Christ. We may be screened for a time; but "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." Nor should any be ashamed of the cross; but rather, as Moses and all the saints of old, accounted the reproach of Christ to be their honour, and loss for Christ their gain ^a, so should we rejoice and leap for joy, if we be counted worthy to endure any thing for our blessed Lord ^b. To suffer for him is represented as a special favour conferred on us by God for Christ's sake; a favour equal, if not superior, to the gift of salvation itself ^c. In this light then let us view the cross; and we shall take it up with cheerfulness, and bear it with unshaken constancy.]

4. Let us take heed to our spirit when we are under persecution

[It

^a Heb. xi. 26. and x. 34.

^b Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Pet. iv. 12—16.

^c Phil. i. 29.

[It is no easy matter to unite firmness and constancy with meekness and love. We are in danger on the one hand of yielding to intimidation, or on the other hand, of indulging an angry, complaining, ostentatious, or vindictive spirit. It may be well therefore frequently to set before us the examples of our blessed Lord and his apostles^d, that we may follow their steps, who returned nothing but blessing for curses, and fervent prayers for despiteful persecutions. The whole of our duty is contained in one short but comprehensive sentence (may God inscribe it on all our heart-!) “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good^e.”]

^d 1 Pet. ii. 20—23. 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

^e Rom. xii. 21.

DXCIV. OUR DUTY TOWARDS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Luke xix. 40. *I tell you, that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.*

THE exercise of the affections is not only approved, but applauded, when earthly things are the objects of our pursuit: but, when the soul is attracted by heavenly objects, the livelier emotions of the mind are deemed enthusiasm; and even gratitude itself must restrain its voice, lest it incur the censure of the world. But, whatever construction may be put upon our conduct, or whatever difficulties we may be called to endure in the discharge of our duty, we should study to approve ourselves to God, and to render unto him the honour due unto his name. At the time of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem “the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice, and to praise God for all the mighty works that they had seen^a.” But, acceptable as this tribute of praise was to God, it excited only envy and indignation in the breasts of the malignant Pharisees. They considered this display of their gratitude as a just ground for displeasure; and therefore desired our Lord to silence them; “Master,” said they, “rebuke thy disciples.” Our blessed Lord, however,

^a Ver. 37.

however, instead of rebuking, vindicated his disciples; and declared, that if, from any motive whatever, they should be induced to withhold their grateful acknowledgments, they would do so to their eternal shame: "I tell you," &c.

In discoursing on these words, we shall

I. Shew what obligations we lie under to magnify and adore the Lord

The disciples at that time had abundant reason to praise his name

[*They had seen the miracles he had wrought*, and especially that of raising Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead four days^b: perhaps many of them had themselves experienced his power to heal. From what they had seen and heard, *they were assured that he was the Messiah* so long promised to the world^c: and *they regarded his advent as the most wonderful expression of God's favour toward their whole nation*. Could they then keep silence? Were they to be blamed for testifying their love to this august personage, now that they saw him in the very act of fulfilling one of the most remarkable of all the prophecies^d? When they were thus highly privileged to witness, what "many prophets and kings had in vain wished to see and hear," would they not have been guilty of the basest ingratitude, if they had held their peace? If Abraham leaped for joy at a distant prospect of that period, should not they much rather^e?]

But our obligations to praise him are far greater than theirs

[We have a far clearer knowledge of *the dignity of his person*. They viewed him indeed as "a great Prophet;" and on some occasions they seemed to have thought him more than human: but, on the whole, they considered him as a mere man, though indeed the greatest of men. But we know him to be "God manifest in the flesh," even "God over all, blessed for ever!" And shall we behold in him such adorable majesty and condescension, and yet withhold from him our tribute of praise?

We also are far better acquainted with *the ends of his mission*. The disciples supposed that he was sent to instruct them more fully in the knowledge of God's will, to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and to make them a prosperous and happy people. But we know that he came to deliver us from the yoke

^b John xii. 17, 18.

^c Ver. 38.

^d Compare Zech. ix. 9. with John xii. 13—15.

^e John viii. 56.

^f 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. ix. 5. Heb. i. 3. Col. ii. 9.

yoke of sin and Satan, to reconcile us to God by the death of his cross, to teach us, not by his word only, but by his Spirit, and finally, to save us with an everlasting salvation. Are not *we* then bound to bless and adore his name?

Moreover, we have a far deeper insight into *the extent of his benefits*. If the disciples had seen their nation raised to universal empire, and enjoying uninterrupted peace and prosperity, they would have been well satisfied, and would have looked for nothing beyond it, especially if they themselves were exalted to the highest offices of dignity and power. But we look for infinitely richer benefits at his hands. We expect the pardon of sin, and peace with God, and victory over our spiritual enemies, and “a kingdom that cannot be moved.” Shall *we* then refuse to praise him? “If we should hold our peace, will not the very stones cry out against us?”]

This being clear, we shall proceed to

II. Enforce our duty from some additional considerations

That we may be excited to rend the air with our acclamations and hosannas, let us consider

1. How delightful a duty this is!

[It is justly observed by the Psalmist, that it is not only “a good,” but also “a pleasant thing to be thankful.” Who can doubt which were the happier, the disciples who shouted forth the praises of their Lord, or the Pharisees, who, with malignant jealousy, strove to silence them? Indeed, a devout and grateful spirit is a foretaste of heaven itself; and, as far as relates to the outward exercise of their affection, the disciples on that occasion strongly resembled the heavenly hosts: they all were penetrated with fervent love to the same divine object, and exerted all their powers to magnify his name. Let us then, each in his place and station, be followers of them; and our happiness shall rise with our employment.]

2. How reasonable it is!

[The Pharisees, if they had been asked the reason of their conduct, would doubtless have offered many specious arguments in vindication of themselves. They might have imputed the conduct of the disciples to enthusiasm, ostentation, hypocrisy. They might have blamed Jesus for suffering them to raise such a tumult, and to endanger thereby the peace of the whole city. They might have ascribed his acquiescence to vain-glory, and a love of popularity, which did but ill accord with his pretensions to wisdom and humility. This would have appeared very satisfactory in their eyes; and they, like our modern Pharisees, would have arrogated to themselves the exclusive name of *rational* Christians. But we know on whose side reason was in the instance before us: and as long as

infinite greatness, and unbounded goodness, deserve our admiration, so long will it be reasonable to adore our Jesus with all our might.

3. How necessary it is !

[The Pharisees thought that, if Jesus merited any respect at all, his disciples should have regarded him only with silent reverence, instead of attracting so much attention by their clamorous proceedings. But our Lord told them, that silent reverence, however great, was not sufficient ; that they were bound to give a public testimony of their affection ; and that, if they withheld it, they would be traitors to his cause. Though therefore we be not called to bear our testimony precisely in the same way, yet are we all bound to confess Christ before men^g, and to let it be seen, “ Whose we are, and whom we serve.”

Shall it be said, That there is no such occasion now for our public acknowledgments as there was then : we answer, That the world needs as much as ever to have their attention drawn to Jesus, and to be stimulated to love and serve him. And, if this were not the case, still it would be our duty to confess him openly, since in heaven, where he is universally known, he is universally and incessantly adored.]

ADDRESS *

1. Those who, like the Pharisees, have no heart to adore the Lord

[It is not difficult to determine who would have taken part with the disciples, and who with the Pharisees. We need only ask, What is our conduct *now*? Are we frequently and fervently engaged in the secret exercises of the closet, and are we bold in confessing Christ before an ungodly world? Or are we formal in secret duties, and ready to blame the superior zeal of others? If we be of this latter class, we should surely have joined the Pharisees in their opposition to the disciples. To such then we say, Deceive not yourselves with vain excuses; nor think to justify yourselves by condemning others. Suppose for a moment that the disciples, in their zeal, had exceeded the strict bounds of prudence and propriety : was that any reason why the Pharisees should render him no praise at all? Was less due from them, because others paid too much? And was not their pretended zeal for propriety, a mere cloak for

^g Matt. x. 32, 33.

* It is this the subject of a *Commemoration Sermon*, the particular blessings that are commemorated should be opened in this place, and the audience be exhorted, in their *carnal* feasting, not to be unmindful of that *spiritual* joy, which the occasion demands. In this case, the following address might be omitted.

for their own envy or indifference? Away then with such base dispositions as they manifested; and, instead of blaming the zeal of others, endeavour to “glorify Christ with your body and your spirit which are his^h.” Far be it from us to countenance excess: but, in this lukewarm age, we are far more in danger of erring from defect. This, at least, is *your* danger; and therefore to *you* we say, “Be zealous and repentⁱ.”]

2. Those who, like the disciples, feel their hearts warmed with love to Christ

[You must expect to meet with opposition from the world, and especially from proud, envious, malignant Pharisees. But let not the fear of their censures deter you from the path of duty^k. If Jesus have given up his life for you, it is a small matter for you to give up your names for him: and if you will not bear so light a cross as that of being called by some opprobrious name for him, you have little reason to number yourselves among his true disciples^l. It will be proper indeed for you to consider times and places, and sometimes to lay a restraint on your feelings, lest by an unseasonable disclosure of them, you “cast your pearls before swine, that will only turn and rend you^m.” But let not the fear of man be the restraining principle: rather, let the love of Christ be the one motive for moderating, as well as for exhibiting, the proofs of your love. Then shall you in due season have a public testimony of *his* approbation, when those who now condemn you shall be themselves condemned.]

^h 1 Cor. vi. 20.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 19.

^k Heb. xiii. 13.

^l Matt. x. 38.

^m Matt. vii. 6.

DNCVI. THE GROUNDS OF PRAISE TO CHRIST.

Rev. i. 5, 6. *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

WHILE men continue in a natural and unrenewed state, they feel very little gratitude for the mercies of Providence, and are altogether unmindful of the blessings of redemption. But when the grace of God has wrought effectually on their hearts, they begin to view his hand in all the comforts they enjoy, and to bless him more especially

especially for the wonders of redeeming love. Whenever they are in a frame of mind at all suited to their character, they are ready to burst forth, like the beloved disciple, into expressions of rapture and adoration.

In the words before us we are led to consider

I. The grounds of our love to Christ

Doubtless he is worthy of our love for his own sake, seeing that "he is fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely^a:" but he is also to be loved on account of what he has done for us:

"He has loved us"

[This he has done from all eternity: he has done it, notwithstanding there was nothing lovely in us, neither had we any love for him; yea, notwithstanding there was every thing in us that was hateful, and we were full of enmity against him^b. Though he never manifested any love to the angels who fell, yet has he loved us: and love has been the one principle that actuated him in all that he has done for us^c.]

"He has washed us from our sins in his own blood"

[Rivers of tears were insufficient to wash away one sin: nor was there any fountain in the whole creation that could cleanse a guilty soul. He therefore, rather than we should perish, provided one for us; and suffered his own sacred body to be broken up, in order that we might be washed in his precious blood. This is sufficient, as thousands have experienced, to purge from sins of deepest die; and every believer, however aggravated his past iniquities may have been, may glory, in that he has been made whiter than wool or snow^d.]

O what love was this! If he had washed us in the blood of slain beasts, or sent an angel to die for us, it were a wonderful act of mercy: but to wash us in his own blood! O the heights and depths of this incomprehensible love!]

"He has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father"

[Astonishing is the exultation which the believer now enjoys: even Lazarus was greater than the highest monarchs upon earth, and exercised a government to which their power could not extend. The Christian's spiritual enemies are under his controul: his lusts are subjected to his dominion^e; and Satan himself flees from him with trepidation, as from a victorious prince^f.]

With

^a Cant. v. 10, 16.

^c Eph. v. 2, 25. Gal. ii. 20.

^e Gal. v. 24.

^b Tit. iii. 3. Rom. viii. 7.

^d Isai. i. 18.

^f James iv. 7.

With this dignity, he bears also that of priesthood. Time was, when God himself would avenge the insult, if even a king had dared to invade the office of the priesthood^g; but now all Christ's ransomed people are admitted to it^h; they are anointed to it with an holy unction; they have access at all times within the veil; and they offer unto God continually the sacrifices of prayer and praise.]

If, on considering these things, we feel love and gratitude rising in our hearts, let us learn from the apostle

II. The manner in which we should express it

We should not rest in the gift, but raise up our minds unto the donor

1. We should contemplate him in our minds

[The abrupt manner in which the apostle introduces this song of praise, and the energetic way in which he directs our eyes to Christⁱ, sufficiently shew, that his mind was filled with his subject; and that he had a lively sense, not only of the benefits conferred on him, but also of the excellency of that Saviour, from whom they were derived. Now thus it should be with us: "Our hearts should muse, till the fire kindles, and we speak with our tongue." And is there any other subject in the world so interesting, so noble, so profound? Is there any other being to whom we are so indebted, or in the contemplation of whose glory we can rest with such delight? Let us then keep our eyes fixed on HIM, till we exclaim with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty^k!"

2. We should adore him with our lips

[Higher strains of adoration cannot be paid to God the Father, than are here offered to Jesus Christ^l. We therefore may worship him as the supreme God, even as all the hosts of saints and angels are doing around his throne^m. He has all those perfections that deserve glory, and all that power that is entitled to dominion. To him therefore let glory and dominion be ascribed. Let us never be afraid of honouring him too much; for we never more truly exalt the Father than when we honour the Son as the Fatherⁿ.]

3. We should glorify him by our lives

[When the Apostle ascribed glory and dominion to Christ, he did not mean to except himself from the number of those
who

^g 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21.

^h "To him, to him."

ⁱ Compare 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. and 1 Pet. v. 11.

^m Rev. v. 12, 13.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^k Zech. ix. 17.

ⁿ John v. 23.

who should honour his perfections and submit to his government: but rather, by the addition of "Amen," he purposely expressed his acquiescence in that which he required from others. Thus, without claiming any exemption for ourselves, we should cordially devote to him the souls which he has purchased with his blood: we should yield to his authority in all that he commands; and seek his glory in all that we perform.]

ADDRESS

1. To those who are unmindful of what Christ has done for them

[It scarcely seems credible that such persons should be found in a Christian land: but, alas! they abound in every place. But let them blush for their ingratitude. Let them know too, that the very blood which was shed to cleanse them from their sins, will aggravate, instead of removing, their eternal condemnation.]

2. To those who are doubting whether they be interested in what Christ has done

[We are not to ascertain our interest in Christ *first*, and then to go to him for salvation; but first to go to him for salvation, and then, from the exercises and fruits of our faith, to conclude that we do indeed belong to him. If the time that is lost in doubting and questioning, were improved in fervent applications to him for mercy, we should soon be enabled to say, "He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*°." Instead of asking, Am I washed in his blood? go, and wash in it, and be clean.]

3. To those who are glorying in Christ as their Saviour

[What a heaven upon earth do you enjoy! for, what is the state, what is the employment, of those above? They are kings seated on their thrones: they are priests offering their sacrifices before the mercy-seat: they are singing, in one universal chorus, Salvation to God and to the Lamb. Such is your state, such is your employment, at this very hour. It is not said, that you *shall be* washed, or *shall be* made kings and priests unto God, but that you already possess these inestimable privileges. Go on then, ever mindful of these mercies, and of him who procured them for you by his blood: and give him glory and dominion for ever and ever, as well in the rectitude of your lives, as in the devotion of your hearts.]

° Gal. ii. 20.

DXCVII. THE STATE OF GOD'S CHILDREN.

Rom. viii. 23. *And not only they, but ourselves also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

MUCH is spoken in the scriptures respecting the happiness of the saints—

And doubtless they are on many accounts the most blessed people in the world—

But they also experience in a great degree the sorrows that pervade the universe—

It is not in this, but in the future world, that they are to attain uninterrupted felicity—

The apostle is here encouraging the afflicted Christians to endure their trials patiently in expectation of a rich and eternal recompense—

He tells them that the whole creation were supported under their present sufferings by a hope of some happier state—

And that he himself, notwithstanding the privileges he enjoyed, participated with them in the common lot—

We are naturally led to consider

I. The state of the creation at large

This is fully described in the four verses preceding the text—

There are however considerable difficulties in the passage, which are much increased by the inaccuracy of the translation—

We shall briefly suggest what we suppose to be the sense of those verses, and then pass on to the consideration of the text

[The words, translated differently, will be more intelligible —

It

* Κτίσις should be uniformly translated, as it is in Ver. 22. "Creation." Verse 20. (except the two last words) should be in a parenthesis. Ἐπ' ἡλπίδι should connect ver. 19, and 20. Ὅτι, in ver. 21, should be rendered, "that." The whole should be rendered thus: "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God (for the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same) in hope that the creation itself also shall, &c. &c."

It is not however easy to determine what is meant by "*the creation*"—

Some think it relates *to the Gentile world*—

And doubtless they are in a state of sin and misery, to which they have been subjected by the fall of our first parents—

And there is a period coming when they shall be brought into the light and liberty of God's children—

For this period too they may justly be said to wait and groan^b—

But the apostle seems to be speaking, not of the millennium, but of the day of judgment, when "our bodies," as well as our souls, will be "redeemed" from death—

And *that* should rather be dreaded as the day of their condemnation, than be desired as a day of salvation—

Others apply the words *to the brute creation*—

Certainly the brutes are subjected to much misery by the sin of man—

And they may well be said to groan for deliverance from their sore bondage—

But no other scripture speaks of their resurrection to a happier life—

Much less, of their participating "the glorious liberty of God's children"—

It would be absurd therefore to found such a notion on so obscure a passage—

The most probable sense of the words is, that they relate to the material world—

The earth, with its surrounding atmosphere, has been cursed for the sake of man^c—

Hence have proceeded storms and pestilences in the air, and thorns and barieness in the ground^d—

The scripture too seems to intimate that the world, after its dissolution by fire, shall be formed anew^e—

For this period the creation may, in some sense, be said to wait—

Such a renovation moreover will have some analogy with "the redemption of our bodies"—

And may, though doubtless by a very bold figure, be called a "deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of God's children"—]

Having thus endeavoured to throw light on this obscure passage,

^b As Christ is called "the desire of all nations," not because all nations actually desire him, but because they would desire him if they knew what a Saviour he is; so the millennium may be said to be waited for by the Gentiles, notwithstanding they are ignorant of God's purposes respecting it; because, if they knew the mercy reserved for them, they would wait for it with an earnest desire.

^c Gen. iii. 17.

^d Ib. ver. 18.

^e 2 Pet. iii. 12, 13.

passage, we proceed to speak of (what is both more certain and more important)

II. The state of God's children

It is "not only the material world," or its ungodly inhabitants, that wait for a change—

The very children of God themselves are in a similar predicament—

They do indeed enjoy "the first fruits of the Spirit"

[The first-fruits were a part of any produce, devoted to God as an acknowledgment that the whole was from him—

And, while they sanctified, they assured also to the offerers the comfortable possession of the remainder^f—

The full harvest of "the Spirit" which we are hereafter to receive, consists in perfect holiness, and perfect happiness—

The first-fruits of the Spirit therefore are the graces and consolations which he now imparts to the soul—

And *these* every Christian in some measure already possesses—

They are to him an earnest and foretaste of his eternal inheritance^g—]

But, notwithstanding this privilege, they have much reason to "groan within themselves"

[They are subject, like others, to the various ills and calamities of life—

Nor, though supported under them, are they insensible to the pain arising from them—

But, besides these, they have trials which the world knows not of—

They are often harassed with fierce temptations and fiery assaults of Satan—

They carry about with them a hateful body of sin and death—

Hence, like the holy Apostle, they often exclaim, "O wretched man that I am!"—

Their worldly afflictions are as nothing when compared with this—

They can often "glory in tribulation," but always groan under sin—]

There is a time, however, of perfect deliverance awaiting them

[There was a twofold "adoption" among the Romans, the one private, the other public in the forum—

Now God often makes known to his people that they are taken into his family—

But

^f Deut. xxvi. 2, 10, 11. Prov. iii. 9.

^g Eph. i. 13, 14.

But *hereafter* he will proclaim them *his* before the assembled universe—

Then they shall be wholly “freed from the bondage of corruption”—

Then shall “body,” as well as soul, experience a complete “redemption”—

And they shall possess for ever “the glorious liberty of God’s children”—]

For this period they wait with eager expectation

[They “groan^h” after it, as one bowed down under a load would groan for deliverance—

They stretch out the neckⁱ, as it were, with holy impatience in looking for it—

Yea, they altogether travail, as it were, in the pangs of parturition^k, till they shall be liberated from their present burthen—

Such is the state of every true Christian^l—

Such is the state which the gospel itself is intended to produce^m—

It is indeed a high and most desirable attainmentⁿ—

And was eminently conspicuous in the Apostle Paul^o—

Nor will any that experience it ever have reason to regret their pains^p—]

ADDRESS

1. Let us not take up our rest in this world

[The world itself is like one large hospital that is full of patients—

All are diseased, and many are dying of their spiritual disorders—

Some are convalescent, and in hopes of a perfect cure—

What then is our business here, but to attend to the welfare of our souls?—

What should be our great desire, but to be healed before we are dismissed?—

Every thing we see or feel speaks to us in the language of the prophet^q—

Let us then resemble those who lived as pilgrims and sojourners in the world^r—

And cultivate more the views and dispositions of the great apostle^s—]

2. Let us press forward more earnestly after the happiness reserved for us

[Who

^h στενάζομεν.

^k στενάζει και συνωδίνει, ver. 22.

^m Titus ii. 13.

^o 2 Cor. v. 2—5.

^r Ps. xxxix. 12. Heb. xi. 13

ⁱ Ἀποκαταδοκία, ver. 19.

^l 2 Pet. iii. 13.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 7. 2 Thess. iii. 5.

^p Heb. ix. 28. ^q Mic. ii. 10.

^s 2 Cor. v. 6, 8.

[Who can conceive the blessedness of the saints at the last day?—

If the possession of the first-fruits be so glorious, what must the full harvest be?—

If the comfortable hope that we are God's children so raises us up above all present sufferings, what must the open manifestation of our adoption be when we are perfectly free from sufferings of every kind!—

Let us then forget what is behind, and press toward the prize of our high calling—

Let us willingly endure whatever God may send in our way to the kingdom—

And let us frequently be crying out with John, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly"—]

DXCVIII. PAUL'S CONFIDENCE.

Rom. viii. 33, 34. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

OF all the systems that mankind have devised for reconciling themselves to God, there is not any that will afford solid confidence to the soul: they have never been able to fix a standard that should be a sufficient test of men's attainments, or to draw a line of distinction between those who should attain salvation, and those who should fall short of it. Hence, after all their labours, they are left in a painful uncertainty about their eternal state. But the gospel removes all suspense on this subject; and gives to those who cordially embrace it, a full assurance of their acceptance with God. In the New Testament we find scarcely any intimation of believers being harassed with doubts and fears; but there are many instances wherein they express the most assured expectation of happiness and glory. In confirmation of this, we need look no further than to the words before us; wherein St. Paul speaks of them as having communion with Christ in his most exalted privileges, and as possessing the very same

confidence as the Messiah himself enjoyed^a: he, not in his own person only, but in the behalf of all God's people, challenges the whole universe to lay any thing to their charge, so as ultimately to condemn them.

We shall consider

I. His confident challenge

The name by which he characterizes God's people is most appropriate

[Among the ungodly world, there is scarcely a more sarcastic or contemptuous expression ever used, than that by which God himself designates his own people. When they say, "There is one of *the elect*," they mean by it, "There is a sanctimonious hypocrite, and a contemptible fanatic." But, whatever opprobrium they may attach to the word "*elect*," be it known, that there is an elect people, whom "God has chosen in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world^b," and *that* too, irrespective of any works that they should afterwards perform^c. He chose them because he would choose them, and loved them because he would love them^d. And if any are disposed to quarrel with this exercise of sovereign grace, let them tell us, *who* made the distinction between the Jews and the rest of the world; and *why* he did so: let them also tell us, why he, who in that sovereign way chose nations, may not also choose individuals: and why he, who chose some to enjoy the means of salvation, may not choose others to salvation itself. Proud man may frame distinctions, if he pleases: but if the exercise of God's sovereignty be unjust in the one case, it must be unjust also in the other; and if it be admitted in the one case, it must be also in the other.

Ignorant men are ready to think, that this is a *proud* title: but it is the most humiliating title that can be imagined; because it acknowledges that no man on earth would ever have chosen God, if God had not first chosen him: and it is the rejection of this title, not the assumption of it, that argues pride; inasmuch as it implies, that some have within themselves an excellence, which has attracted the notice of Almighty God, and induced him to confer on them the most distinguished privileges.]

In behalf of these he expresses the most assured confidence of their salvation

[No assertion, however strong, could so fully declare his confidence, as the challenge does which he gives to the whole universe.

We

^a Compare Isai. l. 7—9. with the text.

^c 2 Tim. i. 9. Rom. ix. 11.

^b Eph. i. 4.

^d Dent. vii. 6—8.

We are not to understand him as saying, that there is *no ground* for accusing and condemning the elect; but, that they are brought into such a state that nothing ever shall be laid to their charge so as finally to effect their ruin.

Let us then, with him, give the challenge to all who may be supposed most likely to prevail against us; to *the law*, to *Satan*, to *conscience*, yea, with reverence be it spoken, even to *God himself*.

The *law* indeed may accuse us of having violated every commandment in ten thousand thousand instances: yet will we defy it to condemn us. *Satan* may affirm with truth, that we have been his vassals far the greater part of our lives: yet shall not he prevail against us. As for *conscience*, that will testify against us, that we have indulged many secret lusts, and been guilty of innumerable transgressions: yet shall not its allegations be heard to our confusion. It is needless to say what the omniscient *God* might lay to our charge, what rebellion against his Majesty, what neglect of his dear Son, what opposition to his holy Spirit: but yet, notwithstanding all, *so* is the believer circumstanced, that God himself can find nothing for which to condemn him.

Doubtless these are strong assertions; and we may perhaps be ready to question the truth of them. But, if there were the smallest room for doubt, would the apostle have been so confident in his challenge? Would he have repeated the challenge in such unqualified terms, if he could have been answered in so easy and obvious a manner as some imagine?]

Arrogant as the apostle may appear, we shall cease to think him so, if we consider

II. The grounds of his confidence

His answers might be read, like the questions themselves, in the form of interrogatories; and they would derive much additional spirit and force from this construction, which indeed both the preceding and following context seem to countenance. But in whatever way his words are pointed, the import of them is much the same. He grounds his confidence on

1. The sovereignty of the Father's grace

[The elect, having believed in Jesus, are actually brought into a justified state. Now justification implies a *free*, a *full*, an *everlasting* remission of all our sins. It is a free gift bestowed upon us, not as saints, but as sinners: we are not first made godly, and then justified; but are first justified, and then made godly. St. Paul expressly gives this title to God, "The justifier of the ungodly^e." When God of his infinite mercy

vouchsafes

^e Rom. iv. 5.

vouchsafes to justify a sinner, he does not put away some sins, and retain others; but "blots them all out as a morning cloud^f," and "puts them from us as far as the east is from the west^g." It is a blessed and a certain truth, that "all who believe are justified from *all* things^h." Nor does God cancel our debt for a time only, intending to call us to account for it at a future period: for he covenants with us, that "our sins and iniquities he will remember no moreⁱ," and he assures us, that "his gifts and calling are without repentance^k."

Now if God thus justify his elect, we may well ask, "who shall condemn them?" If he "cast all our sins into the very depths of the sea^l," who shall bring them up again from thence, and lay them to our charge? He "beholdeth not iniquity in Jacob^m," but views us as "complete in Christⁿ;" and has formed a chain that shall not be broken: "whom from eternity he foreknew and predestinated, them, in his appointed time, he called and justified; and them he will also glorify" for evermore^o.]

2. The perfection of the Redeemer's work

[Every part of Christ's work was considered by the apostle as a security for the salvation of God's elect. His *death*, his *resurrection*, his *ascension*, his *intercession* are so many pledges, that no one shall ever trust in him in vain.

For what end was it that Christ *died*, but to procure "eternal redemption" for his people^p? "He gave his own life to be a ransom for them^q;" "he shed his blood for the remission of their sins^r:" "he died that they might live no longer to themselves, but unto him that died for them^s." We confess, that, if we look only at their steadfastness, they may come into condemnation; and "the weak brother for whom Christ died, may perish^t;" but their security is in Christ; who will not readily forego the ends of his death, or give up to Satan the souls which he has purchased at so dear a rate.

The *resurrection* of Christ is a great additional security to the believer; because it was a liberating of our surety from the prison to which he had been carried on our account; and consequently it argues the full discharge of that debt which he had taken upon himself. Hence a *peculiar stress* is laid upon it in the text; as also in another place, where it is said, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life^u." Now if he "died for our offences, and

rose

^f Isai. xlv. 22.

^g Heb. x. 17.

^h Num. xxiii. 21.

ⁱ Heb. ix. 12.

^j 2 Cor. v. 15.

^k Rom. v. 10.

^l Ps. ciii. 12.

^m Rom. xi. 29.

ⁿ Col. ii. 10.

^o Matt. xx. 28.

^p Rom. xiv. 15. and 1 Cor. viii. 11.

^q Acts xiii. 39.

^r Mic. vii. 19.

^s Rom. viii. 30.

^t Matt. xxvi. 28.

rose again *for our justification*^x," will he suffer this end to be defeated? We may be well assured he will not.

From the *ascension* of Christ a yet fuller assurance may be derived, because he is gone to "the right hand of God" both as our forerunner and our head. He is not only "preparing places for his people," but is invested with all power in heaven and in earth, and has the government of the whole universe committed to him, on purpose that he may put down all his, and his people's, enemies^y. If then he kept his people when he was on earth, so that not one of them was lost^z, will he now suffer any to pluck them out of his hand? No: he has said, that "they shall never perish^a:" and he will assuredly fulfil his word.

If any thing further be requisite for the comfort of our minds, we find it abundantly supplied in the *intercession* of Christ. The only doubt that can arise on this subject is, whether our manifold backslidings will not provoke the Father to cast us off? But "Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us," and thereby preserves that peace, which otherwise would be interrupted every hour. If indeed our transgressions were wilful and habitual, we should prove ourselves at once not to be of the number of God's elect. But if they be only such as arise from the infirmity of our nature; if they be lamented, resisted, and diminished; and if they make us to cleave more earnestly to Christ, Christ will be "our advocate with the Father^b," and will prevail^c so as to "save us to the uttermost^c."

From all these grounds we may affirm with the fullest assurance, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus^d."

To IMPROVE this subject, let us stir up ourselves

1. To humble enquiry

[Are we of the number of "God's elect?" This is no difficult point to ascertain: for though we cannot look into the book of God's decrees, to see whether God have chosen us, we may search the records of our own conscience, to see whether we have chosen God: and this will determine the point at once. If we have chosen God as our portion, and Christ as our way to the Father, it is an indisputable evidence that God had before chosen us; because we never should have loved him, if he had not first loved us. But if we feel no such delight in God, we have no reason to think that we belong to him. Let this mode of enquiry be instituted; and let it be pursued with the seriousness which it deserves.]

2. To

^x Rom. iv. 25.

^y 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

^z John xvii. 12.

^a John x. 28.

^b 1 John ii. 1.

^c Heb. vii. 25.

^d Rom. viii. 1.

2. To grateful adoration

[What debtors are we to the grace of God, that grace that chose us, that grace that treasured up a fulness for us in Christ Jesus! What do we owe to him, who, when he might justly have driven us beyond the hope of mercy, has placed us beyond the fear of condemnation! Surely, if we pour not out our hearts in devoutest gratitude before him, the very stones may well cry out against us.

But while we render to him the tribute of a thankful heart, let us also glorify him by a holy life. Let us walk worthy of our high calling: let us cultivate all the dispositions of God's elect; and be as studious to avoid all grounds of condemnation, as to escape the miseries of condemnation itself.]

DXCIX. PAUL'S ASSURANCE OF PERSEVERING.

Rom. viii. 38, 39. *I am persuaded 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.*

AS there is a typical resemblance between that good land which was promised to the Jews, and that better country which is reserved for us in heaven, so is there a striking resemblance between those, whether Jews or Christians, who have looked forward to the accomplishment of the promises. We see Moses while he was yet on the other side of Jordan, and Joshua soon after he had arrived on the borders of Canaan, appointing the boundaries of the twelve tribes, settling every thing with respect to the distribution of the land, and ordering various things to be observed, just as if they were already in full possession of the whole country without one enemy to oppose them. This appears at first sight presumptuous; but they knew that God had given them the land; and therefore, notwithstanding the battles which were yet to be fought, they doubted not in the least but that they should obtain the promised inheritance. Thus also the apostle, in the passage before us, speaks in the language of triumph on behalf of himself and of all the Christians at Rome, and that too even while they were surrounded

surrounded with enemies, and conflicting on the field of battle.

It will be profitable to consider

I. The point of which the apostle was persuaded

[“The love of God” is that which God has manifested to us “in Christ Jesus,” not merely in sending his Son to die for us, but in forgiving our sins, and adopting us into his family for his sake.

From this love the apostle says, Nothing shall ever separate us : and, to strengthen his assertion, he calls to mind the various things which might be supposed capable of effecting a separation ; and declares concerning each, that it shall never be able.

He mentions four distinct couplets. First, “neither death nor life” shall be able. Death is that which is most of all dreaded^a, and life that which is most of all desired^b ; more especially, if the one be attended with bitter agonies, or the other with all the pleasures of sense, their influence over us is exceeding great. But neither the one with all its terrors, nor the other with all its comforts, shall ever dissolve the union that subsists between God and his believing people.

Next, “neither angels, nor principalities nor powers” shall be able. By angels must certainly be meant the evil angels, since the good angels are employed in ministering to the heirs of salvation, and would rather confirm them in the love of God than separate them from it : whereas, the evil angels, like a roaring lion, are constantly seeking whom they may devour. “Principalities and powers” are civil magistrates, who hold dominion over the visible, as the devils do over the invisible, world : and who, alas ! too often unite their influence with that of Satan to destroy the church. But neither the one nor the other, nor both combined, shall ever separate a believer, how weak soever he may be, from the love of God.

Moreover “things present or things to come” will be found alike impotent in this respect. Present things may be so embarrassing as greatly to perplex us ; and things future may appear so formidable as to make us think it almost impossible for us to maintain our ground against them ; but they shall never prevail to destroy a child of God.

Lastly, “neither height nor depth” shall be able. To some the height of earthly prosperity is a dreadful snare ; to others the depth of adversity and distress. But the believer may defy them both : for not only *they* shall not be able, but
“nothing

^a Heb. ii. 15.

^b Satan for once spake true, Job ii. 4.

"nothing in the whole creation" shall be able, to separate him from the love of God.]

This confidence of the apostle being so extraordinary, let us consider

II. The grounds of his persuasion

These were twofold; *general*, as relating to others; and *particular*, as relating to himself; the former creating in him an assurance of faith; the latter an assurance of hope. We notice

1. The general grounds

[These are such as are revealed in the holy scriptures, and are common to all believers.

The stability of the covenant, which God has made with us in Christ Jesus, warrants an assurance, that all who are interested in it shall endure to the end. It secures to us not only a new heart, but a divine agency "causing us to walk in God's statutes^c." It engages that God shall never depart from us, nor we from him^d. In short, it promises us "grace and glory^e." Now this covenant shall not be broken: if heaven and earth fail, *this* shall not^f; there shall not be one jot or tittle of it ever violated: it is "ordered in all things, and sure^g." Consequently the believer shall never be deprived of any of its blessings.

The immutability of God is another ground of assured faith and hope. Wherefore did God originally set his love upon us? Was it for our own goodness, either seen or foreseen? Alas! we had no existence but in God's purpose: and, from the moment we began to exist, we have never had one good thing in us which we did not first receive from God^h. If then God loved us simply because he would love usⁱ, and not for any inherent loveliness in us, will he cast us off again on account of those evil qualities which he well knew to be in us, and which he himself has undertaken to subdue? This would argue a change in his counsels: whereas we are told that, "with him there is no variableness neither shadow of turning^k;" and that "his gifts and calling are without repentance^l."

The offices of Christ may also be considered as justifying an assured hope of final perseverance. For our Lord did not assume the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices merely to put us into a capacity to save ourselves; but that his work might be effectual for the salvation of all whom the Father had

^c Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

^f Isai. liv. 10.

^l Doubt. vii. 7, 8.

^d Jer. xxxii. 40.

^g 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

^k James i. 17.

^e Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 29.

had given to him : and at the last day he will be able to say, as he did in the days of his flesh, Of those whom thou hast given me I have lost none. If he is ever living on purpose to make intercession for them, and is constituted head over all things to the church on purpose to save them, then he will keep them ; none shall ever pluck them out of his hands ^m, nor shall any thing ever separate them from the love of God.]

2. The particular grounds

[We need not resort to any express revelation made to Paul, in order to account for his confidence : for he could not but know that he had believed in Christ, and that he was as desirous of being sanctified by his grace as of being saved by his blood ; and consequently, he could not doubt his interest in the promises. And wherever conscience testifies that this is the real experience of the soul, there a person may entertain the same assured hope as Paul himself did.]

It would not indeed be expedient for *young converts* to indulge too strong a confidence ; because their sincerity has been but little tried, and they are by no means sufficiently simple in their dependence on God : in proportion therefore as the evidences of their faith are defective, and the means of stability are overlooked, they must relax their confidence of persevering to the end. As for *those* who are already in a *back-slidden state*, it would be a most horrible delusion in them to say, that nothing should separate them from the love of God ; since they have reason to doubt at this moment whether they be at all interested in his love.

But a humble contrite person, that is living by faith on the Son of God, and maintaining a suitable conversation in all his spirit and conduct, *he* may conclude himself to be in the love of God, and be persuaded firmly that nothing shall be able to separate him from it. He then stands in the very situation of the apostle, as far as respects his own personal experience, and therefore may indulge the same joyful hope and persuasion that he shall endure unto the end. Nor need he be at all discouraged on account of his own weakness, since the more weak he feels himself to be, the stronger he is in reality ⁿ, inasmuch as he is made more dependent on his God.

In a word, an assurance of faith respecting the accomplishment of God's promises to believers, should be maintained by all, since his word can never fail ; but an assurance of hope respecting our own personal interest in those promises, should rise or fall according to the evidences we have of our own sincerity.]

ADDRESS

^m 1 Sam. ii. 9. 1 Pet. i. 5. John x. 28.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

ADDRESS

1. Those who know nothing of this joyful persuasion

[Do not condemn that of which you are not capable of judging aright: but seek an interest in the love of God; and believe in Christ, through whom the Father's love shall be secured, and by whom it shall be revealed to your soul. When "the love of God has been shed abroad in your own hearts," you will be better able to judge of the confidence which that love inspires.]

2. Those whose persuasion accords with that of the apostle

[Nothing surely can be conceived more delightful than to possess an assured hope of eternal happiness and glory. But let it never be abused to the encouragement of sloth. If we profess that nothing shall separate us from the love of God, let us take care that nothing does separate us from it. Let not the temptations of Satan, or the persecutions of men, not the comforts of life, or the terrors of death, let nothing felt at present, or feared in future, let nothing in the whole creation draw us aside from the path of duty, or retard our progress in the divine life*.]

* Jude 20, 21.

CONCLUSION.

DC. THE USE AND BENEFIT OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Ps. xix. 10, 11. *More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

GOD has at no time left himself without witness in the world, seeing that he has spoken to all, in and by the visible creation, from which the most unenlightened heathens might learn his eternal power and godhead. But to us he has communicated a perfect revelation of his mind and will, which, as the Psalmist informs us in the preceding verses, is capable of producing the most beneficial effects. It was but a small portion of the scriptures which David possessed; yet his testimony respecting them shews, that they were inestimable in his eyes, and that to all who received them aright, they would be a source of the richest blessings. In discoursing on his words we shall point out

I. The excellency of the scriptures

Gold and honey are both excellent in their kind, and may fitly represent those things which are most pleasing to a carnal, and a sensual, appetite: but the scriptures are infinitely preferable to both.

1. They are "more desirable than gold"

[Gold, though so ardently and universally desired, is yet very confined in its uses. It is useful only to the body; yet not to that in all circumstances, nor for any long duration. But the scriptures are profitable to the soul, and that too in every possible condition: nor will there be any termination to the benefits they convey. What light do they bring into the mind! the weakest Christian upon earth that is instructed out of them, as far surpasses all the philosophers of Greece and Rome, as they surpassed the most ignorant of the human race. How powerful too is their operation on the soul! the suggestions of man's wisdom were utterly incapable of counteracting the

the vicious propensities of the heart : but these, when applied with power from on high, subdue the soul to God, and renovate it after the divine image. Can gold then, however "great" in quantity, or "fine" in quality, be compared with these?]

2. They are "sweeter also than honey"

[The most delicious honey is not near so grateful to the palate, as the scriptures are to the spiritual taste. *The doctrines* of the gospel, especially that which is the fundamental article of our faith, salvation through the blood of our incarnate God, how inexpressibly sweet are they to a weary and heavy-laden soul! What a delightful feast do *the promises*, "the exceeding great and precious promises," afford to those who live upon them! *The precepts* too are equally high in the Christian's estimation: their purity exactly suits his appetite, and instead of disgusting him, renders them tenfold more pleasing to his soul^a. Nor is he averse to *the threatenings* themselves: while he regards them as holy and just, he considers them also as good^b. In short, the Christian feasts upon the blessed book of God; he finds it the joy and rejoicing of his heart^c; he esteems it more than his necessary food^d.]

But we will proceed to mark more distinctly

II. Their use

A variety of uses are mentioned in the preceding context: but the text comprehends them all under two particulars:

1. They warn us against much evil

[We could have had no conception of the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart, if God had not revealed it to us. But from the insight into it which the scriptures afford us, we learn that to trust in one's own heart is the most consummate folly^e, since it is sure to mislead us, and sure to betray us into some evil.

From the same fountain of knowledge also we learn that there is an invisible, but mighty, agent, whose malice is most inveterate, whose devices are most subtle, and whose labours to destroy us are incessant. Against his wiles we are put upon our guard: we are taught how to distinguish his agency, and to defeat his plots.

There is yet another danger, of which we could have formed no idea, if God had not instructed us respecting it. We

^a Ps. cxix. 140.

^d Job xxiii. 12.

^b Rom. vii. 12.

^c Jer. xv. 16.

^e Prov. xxviii. 26.

We are told of another invisible power, even the Holy Ghost himself, who strives with us, and endeavours to establish the kingdom of God in our hearts. But we may “grieve,” and “vex” that divine Agent, and may so “resist” him as to “quench” his sacred motions. Against this therefore, as the greatest of all evils, we are frequently and strongly warned.

It is no small advantage to us that every duty, and every danger, is set before us in living characters. We are enabled in the scriptures to discern the track of the godly, and to see where all that have suffered shipwreck, have perished: so that, notwithstanding we are passing through an ocean filled with hidden rocks and shoals, yet, if only we attend to the buoys which God has placed in our sight, we cannot but navigate it in perfect safety, and reach in due season our destined port.]

2. They lead us to much good

[We speak not of the recompence, which those who love the scriptures will meet with in another world. There is a reward *in* keeping the commandments, as well as *for* it; and it is of that *present* recompence that we are called to speak. In receiving the doctrines, what peace do we obtain with God, and in our own consciences! In resting on the promises, what ineffable joy flows into our souls! In obeying the precepts, what heavenly dispositions do we exercise, and what conformity to God do we obtain! And lastly, in following the bright examples that are set before us, how is our ambition stimulated, how are our steps advanced! Unanswerable in every view is that appeal of God to man, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?”]

ADDRESS

1. Those who neglect the scriptures

[How vitiated is your taste, that you can prefer a novel or a newspaper to the inspired volume! that you can be anxious about the things of *time* and *sense*, and be indifferent to that, which is more valuable than *gold*, more sweet than *honey*! Ah, think what durable riches, what heavenly delights, you lose! Did you but know what reason you have for shame and regret, you would go and search the scriptures till you had learned their value by your own experience, and had found them to be the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

2. To

† Mic. ii. 7.

2. To those who are like-minded with the Psalmist

[What do you owe to God, who has given you a spiritual taste, a spiritual discernment! By this, as much as by any thing, you may know your state towards God: you may mark, as by a scale, your progress or decline. With your advancement in the divine life, the scriptures will rise in your estimation: with your declension, your relish for them will abate. O then "let them be your meditation all the day; let them be your delight and your counsellors." Thus will your spirit and temper be cast into their mould, and you will be gradually fitted for that place, where all that is now held forth to your faith, shall be for ever realized.]

A P P E N D I X.

DCI. THE CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH.

Eph. vi. 10. *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

THE Christian's life is frequently represented in the scriptures under the metaphor of a warfare. Christ is called "the Captain of his salvation^a;" and they who have enlisted under his banners, and "quit themselves like men," "fighting the good fight of faith^b," and enduring cheerfully all the hardships of the campaign, are called "good soldiers of Jesus Christ^c." "Like warriors, they do not entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, that they may please him who has chosen them to be soldiers^d;" but they set themselves to "war a good warfare^e," and they look for the rewards of victory, when they have subdued all their enemies^f.

In the chapter before us, this subject is not slightly touched, as in the detached passages above referred to, but is treated at large; and that which in other places is only a metaphor, is here a professed simile. St. Paul, standing, as it were, in the midst of the camp, harangues the soldiers, telling them what enemies they have to combat, and how they may guard effectually against all their stratagems, and secure to themselves the victory. He begins with an animating exhortation, wherein he reminds them of the wonderful talents of their General, and urges them to place the most unlimited confidence in his skill and power.

The exhortation being contracted into a very small space, and conveying far more than appears at first sight,

we

^a Heb. ii. 10.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 3.

^e 1 Tim. i. 18.

^b 1 Cor. xvi. 13. 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^d b. vet. 4

^f 2 Tim. iii. 7, 8. Rev. iii. 21.

we shall consider, first, *What is implied in it*; and afterwards, *What is expressed*.

I. What is *implied* in the exhortation.

The first thing that would naturally occur to any one to whom this exhortation was addressed, is, *that the Christian has need of strength*; for on any other supposition than this, the words would be altogether absurd.

But the Christian will indeed appear to require strength, whether we consider *the work he has to perform*, or *the difficulties he has to cope with*. It is no easy matter to stem the tide of corrupt nature, to control the impetuous passions, to root out inveterate habits, to turn the current of our affections from the things of time and sense to things invisible and eternal. To renew and sanctify our hearts, and to transform them into the divine image, is a work far beyond the power of feeble man; yet is it indispensably necessary to his salvation.

But as though this were not of itself sufficient to call forth the Christian's exertions, he has hosts of enemies to contend with, as soon as ever he addresses himself in earnest to the work assigned him. Not to mention all the propensities of his nature, which will instantly rise up in rebellion against him, and exert all their power for the mastery, the world will immediately begin to cry out against him; they will direct all their artillery against him, their scoffs, their ridicule, their threats: his very friends will turn against him; and "those of his own household will become his greatest foes." They would let him go on in the broad road year after year, and not one amongst them would ever exhort him to love and serve his God: but the very moment that he enters on the narrow path that leadeth unto life, they will all, with one heart and one soul, unite their endeavours to obstruct his course; and when they cannot prevail, they will turn their back upon him, and give him up as an irreclaimable enthusiast.

In conjunction with these will Satan (as we shall hereafter have occasion to shew) combine his forces: yea, he will put himself at their head, and direct their motions, and stimulate their exertions, and concur with them to the uttermost to captivate and destroy the heaven-born soul.

And

And can such work be performed, such difficulties be surmounted, without the greatest efforts? Surely they who are called to such things, had need "be strong."

A second thing implied in the exhortation is, *that the Christian has no strength in himself*; for, if he had, why should he be exhorted to be strong in another?

Little do men imagine how extremely impotent they are, in themselves, to that which is good. It must be easy, one would suppose, to *read* and understand *the word* of God, or, at least, to *profit* by a clear and faithful *ministration of it*. But these are far beyond the power of the natural man. The word is "a sealed book" to him^g, which, for want of a spiritual discernment, appears a mass of foolishness^h, a "cunningly devised fableⁱ." When it was even explained by our Lord, the apostles, for the space of more than three years, were not able to comprehend its import, till he opened their understandings to understand it^k; and Lydia, like thousands of others, would have been unmoved by the preaching of Paul, if "the Lord had not opened her heart" to apprehend and embrace his word^l. It should seem however, that if these things be beyond the power of man, he can at least *pray* to God to instruct him. But neither can he do this, unless the Spirit of God "help his infirmities," teaching him what to pray for^m, and assisting him in offering the petitionsⁿ. If he be insufficient for this work, it may be hoped he is able to *do something*. But our Lord tells us, that, without the special aid of his grace, he "can do nothing^o." Can he not then *speak* what is good? No: "How can ye, being evil, speak good things^p?" says our Lord: and St. Paul says, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost^q." Still may he not *will*, or at least *think*, what is good? We must answer this also in the negative: "It is God alone who worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure^r." Nor had St. Paul himself, no, not even after

^g Isai. xxix. 11, 12.

ⁱ 2 Pet. i. 16. and Ezek. xx. 49.

^k Luke xxiv. 44, 45. ^l Acts xvi. 14.

^m Jude 20. Zech. xii. 10.

ⁿ Matt. xii. 34. ^o 1 Cor. xii. 3.

^h 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^m Rom. viii. 26.

^p John xv. 5.

^r Phil. ii. 13.

after his conversion, an ability, of himself, to "think any thing good : his sufficiency was of God, and of God alone^{*}." Our impotence cannot be more fitly expressed by any words whatever, than by that expression of the apostle, "Ye are dead in trespasses and sins[†]:" for, till God quicken us from the dead, we are as incapable of all the exercises of the spiritual life, as a breathless corpse is of all the functions of the animal life.

There is yet a third thing implied in this exhortation, namely, *that there is a sufficiency for us in Christ* ; for otherwise the apostle would not have urged us in this manner to be strong in him.

Well does the apostle speak of Christ's "mighty power;" for indeed he is almighty, "he has all power committed to him both in heaven and in earth[‡]." We may judge of his all-sufficiency by what he wrought when he was on earth: the most inveterate diseases vanished at his touch, at his word, at a mere act of volition, when he was at a distance from the patient. The fishes of the sea were constrained to minister unto him: yea, the devils themselves yielded to his authority, and were instantly forced to liberate their captives at his command: they could not even enter into the swine without his permission. The very elements also were obedient to his word; the winds were still; the waves forbore to roll; the storm that threatened to overwhelm him, became a perfect calm. What then can he not do for those who trust in him? "Is his hand now shortened, that he cannot save? or is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" Can he not heal the di-eases of our souls, and calm our troubled spirits, and supply our every want? Cannot he who "triumphed over principalities and powers upon the cross, and spoiled them, and led them captive in his ascension^x," fulfil his promise, that "sin shall not have dominion over us^y," and that "Satan shall be bruised under our feet shortly^z?" Doubtless he is "the Lord Jehovah, with whom is everlasting strength^a," and who is therefore "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him^b."

These

* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

† Eph. ii. 1.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 18.

^x Col. ii. 15. Eph. iv. 8.

^y Rom. vi. 14.

^z Rom. xvi. 20.

^a Isai. xxvi. 4.

^b Heb. vii. 25.

These things being understood as implied in the exhortation, we may more fully comprehend in the 11d. place, what is *expressed* in it.

It is evident that there are two points to which the apostle designs to lead us: the one is, *to rely on Christ for strength*, the other is, *to "be strong in him," with an assured confidence of success.*

In relation to the first of these we observe, that a general must confide in his army full as much as his army confides in him; for as they cannot move to advantage without an experienced head to guide them, so neither can he succeed in his plans, unless he have a brave and well-appointed army to carry them into execution. It is not thus in the Christian army; there all the confidence is in the General alone. He must not only train his soldiers, and direct them in the day of battle, but he must be with them in the battle, shielding their heads, and strengthening their arms, and animating their courage, and reviving them when faint, and raising them when fallen, and healing them when wounded, and finally, beating down their enemies that they may trample them under their feet.

The fulness that is in Christ is treasured up in him for us^c, that we may receive out of it according to our necessities. As he came down from heaven to purchase for us all the gifts of the Spirit, so he has ascended up to heaven that he might bestow them upon us^d, and fill us, each according to his measure, with all the fulness of God^e. Hence previous to his death he said, "Ye believe in God; believe also in me^f:" let that same faith which you repose in God the Father as your Creator, be reposed in me as your Redeemer: let it be full, and implicit: let it extend to every want: let it be firm and unshaken, under all circumstances however difficult, however adverse.

Such was our Lord's direction: and agreeable to it was the experience of the great apostle, who says, "The life

^c Col. i. 19. Eph. i. 22, 23.

^e Eph. iii. 19. and iv. 7.

^d Eph. iv. 10.

^f John xiv. 1.

life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^g."

It is characteristic of every Christian soldier to receive thus out of Christ's fulness^h; and to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strengthⁱ."

But the principal point which the apostle aims at in the text, is, to inspire us with a holy confidence in Christ, so that we may be as much assured of victory as if we saw all our enemies fleeing before us, or already prostrate at our feet. We cannot have a more striking illustration of our duty in this respect than the history of David's combat with Goliath. He would not go against his adversary with armour suited to the occasion: he went forth in the name of the God of Israel; and therefore he did not doubt one moment the issue of the contest: he well knew that God could direct his aim; and that he was as sure of victory without any other arms than a sling and a stone from his shepherd's bag, as he could be with the completest armour that Saul himself could give him^k. What David thus *illustrated*, we may see *exemplified* in the conduct of St. Paul: "If God be for us," says he, "who can be against us?" Who is he that shall condemn me? (shall the law curse me? or Satan overcome me?) I fear none of them; since "Christ has died, yea, rather is risen again, and maketh intercession for me. Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us: for I am persuaded 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^l." Thus it is that we must go forth against all the enemies of our salvation: we must "have no confidence in the flesh^m;" neither must we have any doubt in our God: the weakest amongst us should boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will

^g Gal. ii. 20.

^h John i. 16.

ⁱ Isai. xlv. 24.

^k 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47.

^l Rom. viii. 31—39.

^m Phil. iii. 3.

I will not fear what men or devils can do against meⁿ :”
 “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me^o.”

IN APPLYING this subject to the different classes of professing Christians, we should first address ourselves to *the self-confident*.

It is the solemn declaration of God, that “by strength shall no man prevail^p.” We might hope that men would be convinced of this truth by their own experience. Who amongst us has not made vows and resolutions without number, and broken them again almost as soon as they were made? Who ever resolved to devote himself unfeignedly to God, and did not find, that he was unable stedfastly to pursue his purpose? What folly is it then to be renewing these vain attempts, when we have the evidence both of scripture and experience that we cannot succeed! How much better would it be to trust in that “mighty One, on whom help is laid^q!” Learn, brethren, before it be too late, that “without CHRIST you can do nothing:” that “all your fresh springs are in *him*:” and “of *him* must your fruit be found^r :” “in *him* alone shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory^t.” If you will not “be strong in *him*,” you will continue “without strength:” but if once you truly “know him, you shall be strong, and do exploits^u.”

We would next claim the attention of *the timid*. It is but too common for the Lord's people to be indulging needless fears, like David, when he said, “I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul^x.” But surely such deserve the rebuke which our Lord gave to Peter, “O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt^v?” If thou doubttest the Lord's willingness to save thee, say, wherefore did he die for thee, even for the chief of sinners? If thou callest in question his power, what is there in thy case that can baffle Omnipotence? If thou art discouraged

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 6.

^o Phil. iv. 13.

^p 1 Sam. ii. 9. see also Rom. ix. 16. & Zech. iv. 6. & John i. 13.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^r Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

^s Hos. xiv. 8.

^t Isai. xlv. 25.

^u Dan. xi. 32.

^x 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

^v Matt. xiv. 31.

discouraged on account of thy own weakness, know that the weaker thou art in thyself, the stronger thou shalt be in him^z; and that “he will perfect his own strength in thy weakness^a.” If thou fearest on account of the strength and number of thine enemies, he meets thy fears with this salutary admonition; “Say ye not a confederacy, a confederacy; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and let him be your dread^b.” Only trust in him; and though weak, he will strengthen thee^c; though faint, he will revive thee^d; though wounded, he will heal thee^e; though captive he will liberate thee^f; though slain, he will raise thee up again, and give thee the victory over all thine enemies^g. “Be strong then and very courageous^h :” abhor the thought of indulging a cowardly spirit, as long as “God’s throne is in heavenⁱ ;” and assure yourselves, with David, that though your “enemies encompass you as bees, in the name of the Lord you shall destroy them^k.”

Lastly, let *the victorious* Christian listen to a word of counsel. We are apt to be elated in the time of victory, and to arrogate to ourselves some portion of the glory. But God solemnly cautions us against this^l: and if, with Nebuchadnezzar or Sennacherib, we take the glory to ourselves, the time is nigh at hand when God will fearfully abase us^m. We cannot do better than take the Psalmist for our pattern: he was enabled to perform the most astonishing feats, and was honoured with the most signal victories: yet so careful is he to give the glory to God, that he repeats again and again, the same grateful acknowledgments, confessing God to be the sole author of his success, and ascribing to him the honour due unto his nameⁿ. Let it be remembered, that “our enemies still live and are mighty:” and therefore we must not
boast

^z 2 Cor. xii. 10.^a Ib. ver. 9.^b Isai. viii. 12, 13.^c Isai. xxvi. 6.^d Isai. xl. 29—31.^e Exod. xv. 26. Isai. xxxiii. 23.^f Isai. xiv. 2. & xlix. 24, 25.^g Isai. x. 4. This is a threatening; but it may be applied to God’s fi. ends *à fortiori*.^h Josh. i. 6, 7, 9.ⁱ Ps. xi. 1—4.^k Ps. cxviii. 6—12.^l Deut. vi. 10—12. and viii. 10, 11, 17, 18.^m Isai. xxxvii. 24—29. Dan. iv. 30, 31, 32, 37.ⁿ Ps. xvii. 29—42.

boast as if the time were come for us to put off our armour^o. We need the same power to keep down our enemies, as to bring them down at first: we should soon fall a prey to the tempter, if left one moment to ourselves. Let our eyes therefore still be to Jesus, "the author and the finisher of our faith;" depending on his mighty power for "strength according to our day^p," and for the accomplishment of the promise which he hath given us, that "no weapon formed against us shall ever prosper^q."

^o 1 Kings xx. 11.^p Deut. xxxiii. 25.^q Isai. liv. 17.

DCII. THE MEANS OF WITHSTANDING SATAN'S WILES.

Eph. vi. 11. *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

TO be possessed of courage is not the only requisite for a good soldier; he must be skilled in the use of arms; he must be acquainted with those stratagems which his adversaries will use for his destruction; he must know how to repel an assault, and how in his turn to assault his enemy: in short, he must be trained to war. Nor will his knowledge avail him any thing, unless he stand armed for the combat. Hence the apostle, having encouraged the Christian soldier, and inspired him with confidence in "the Captain of his salvation," now calls him to put on his armour, and by a skilful use of it, to prepare for the day of battle.

To open fully the direction before us, we must shew you, first, *the wiles of the devil*; and next, *the means of defeating them*.

I. We shall endeavour to lay before you "the wiles of the devil."

Satan is the great adversary of God and man; and labours to the uttermost to destroy the interests of both. In prosecuting his purpose, he has two grand objects in view, namely, *to lead men into sin*, and *to keep them from*

God. We must consider these distinctly; and point out the stratagems he uses for the attainment of his ends.

1. *To lead men into sin.*

To effect this, he presents to them such *temptations* as are best suited to their natural dispositions. As a skilful general will not attempt to storm a fort on the side that it is impregnable, but will rather direct his efforts against the weaker parts, where he has a better prospect of success; so Satan considers the weak part of every man, and directs his artillery where he may most easily make a breach. He well knew the covetous dispositions of Judas, and of Ananias and Sapphira: when therefore he wanted the one to betray his Master, and the others to bring discredit on the Christian name, he wrought upon their natural propensities, and instigated them with ease to the execution of his will^a. Thus he stimulates the proud or passionate, the lewd or covetous, the timid or melancholy, to such acts as are most congenial with their feelings, to the intent that his agency may be least discovered, and his purposes most effectually secured.

Much craft is also discoverable in *the seasons* which he chooses for making his assaults. If a general knew that his adversaries were harassed with fatigue, or revelling and intoxicated amidst the spoils of victory, or separated from the main body of their army, so that they could have no succour, he would not fail to take advantage of such circumstances, rather than attack them when they were in full force, and in a state of readiness for the combat. Such a general is Satan. If he finds us *in a state of great trouble* and perplexity, when the spirits are exhausted, the mind clouded, the strength enervated, then he will seek to draw us to murmuring or despair. Thus he acted towards Christ himself when he had been fasting forty days and forty nights; and again, on the eve of his crucifixion. The former of these occasions afforded him a favourable opportunity for tempting our blessed Lord to despondency^b, to presumption^c, to a total alienation of his heart from God^d: the latter inspired him with a hope of drawing our Lord to some act unworthy of

^a John xiii. 2, 27. Acts v. 3. —

^c Matt. iv. 6.

^b Matt. iv. 2, 3.

^d Ib. ver. 8, 9.

of his high character, and subversive of the ends for which he came into the world*. Again, if we have been elevated with *peculiar joy*, he well knows how apt we are to relax our vigilance, and to indulge a carnal security. Hence, immediately on Paul's descent from the third heavens, the paradise of God, Satan strove to puff him up with pride†, that so he might bring him into the condemnation of the devil‡. And with more success did he assault Peter immediately after the most exalted honour had been conferred upon him; whereby he brought upon the unguarded saint that just rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men§." Above all, Satan is sure to embrace an opportunity *when we are alone*, withdrawn from those whose eye would intimidate, or whose counsel would restrain, us. He could not prevail on Lot, when in the midst of Sodom, to violate the rights of hospitality; but when he was in a retired cave, he too successfully tempted him to repeated acts of drunkenness and incest. And who amongst us has not found that seasons of privacy, or, at least, of seclusion from those who knew us, have been seasons of more than ordinary temptation?

The means which Satan uses in order to accomplish his purpose will afford us a yet further insight into his wiles. Whom will a general so soon employ to betray the enemy into his hands, as one who by his power can command them, or by his professions can deceive them? And is it not thus with Satan? If he want to draw down the judgments of God upon the whole nation of the Jews, he will stir up David, in spite of all the expostulations of his courtiers, to number the people¹. If he would destroy Ahab, he becomes a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, to persuade *him*, and by *him* to lead Jehosaphat also and the combined armies into the most imminent peril². Would he have Job to curse his God? no fitter person to employ on this service than Job's own *wife*, whom

* John xiv. 30. Luke xxii. 44, 53. † 2 Cor. xii. 7.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 6, 7.

§ Numb. xxi. 1—4.

¹ Matt. xvi. 16—19, 22, 23.

² 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22. See

the instance also of Elymas the sorcerer, who on account of his efforts is called "a child of the devil." Acts xiii. 10.

whom he taught to give this counsel, "Curse God, and die¹." Would he prevail on Jesus to lay aside the thoughts of suffering for the sins of men? his *friend* Peter must offer him this advice, "Master, spare thyself^m." Thus in leading us to the commission of sin, he will use sometimes the authority of magistrates, of masters, or of parents, and sometimes the influence of our dearest friends or relatives. No instruments so fit for him, as those of a man's own householdⁿ.

There is also something further observable in *the manner* in which Satan tempts the soul. An able general will study to conceal the main object of his attack, and by feints to deceive his enemy^o. Thus does Satan form his attack with all imaginable cunning. His mode of beguiling Eve will serve as a specimen of his artifices in every age. He first only enquired whether any prohibition had been given her and her husband respecting the eating of the fruit of a particular tree; insinuating at the same time, that it was very improbable that God should impose upon them such an unnecessary restraint. Then, on being informed that the tasting of that fruit was forbidden, and that the penalty of death was to be inflicted on them in the event of their disobedience, he intimated, that such a consequence could never follow: that, on the contrary, the benefits which should arise to them from eating of that fruit, were incalculable. In this manner he led her on, from parlying with him, to give him credit; and, from believing him, to comply with his solicitations^p. And thus it is that he acts towards *us*: he for a time conceals his full purpose: he pleads at first for nothing more than the gratification of the eye, the ear, the imagination; but is no sooner master of one fort, or station, than he plants his artillery there, and renews his assaults, till the whole soul has surrendered to his dominion.

2. The other grand device of Satan is, *to keep men from God*. If, after having yielded to his suggestions, the soul were to return to God with penitence and contrition, all Satan's wiles, how successful soever they had before been, would be frustrated at once. The next labour therefore of our great adversary is, to secure his captive, that he may

¹ Job ii. 9.

^o Josh. viii. 5, 6, 15, 21.

^m See note ^b

ⁿ Matt. x. 36.

^p Gen. iii. 1—6.

may not escape out of his hands. The wiles he makes use of to accomplish this, come next under our consideration.

He will begin with *misrepresenting* to his captives *their own character*. One while he will insinuate that, though they may have transgressed in some smaller matters, yet they have never committed any great sin, and therefore have no need to disquiet themselves with apprehensions of God's wrath. If he cannot compose their minds in that way, he will suggest, that their iniquities have been so numerous, and so heinous, as to preclude all hope of forgiveness. He will endeavour to make them believe that they have been guilty of the unpardonable sin, or that their day of grace is passed; so that they may as well take their fill of present delights, since all attempts to secure eternal happiness will be fruitless. To such artifices as these our Lord refers, when he tells us, that the strong man armed keepeth his palace and his goods in peace^a.

Next he will misrepresent to his captives *the character of God*. He will impress them with the idea that God is too merciful to punish any one eternally for such trifling faults as theirs. Or, if that fail to lull them asleep, he will intimate, that the insulted Majesty of heaven demands vengeance: that the justice and holiness of the Deity would be dishonoured, if pardon were vouchsafed to such offenders as they. Probably too, he will suggest, that God has not elected them; and that therefore they *must* perish, since they cannot alter his decrees, or save themselves without his aid. He will, as in his assaults upon our blessed Lord^r, bring the scriptures themselves to countenance his lies; and, by a misapplication of difficult and detached passages, endeavour to hide from us the perfections of our God as harmonizing and glorified in our redemption^s. It was in this manner that he strove to discourage Joshua^t, and to detain David in his bonds^u: such advantage too he sought to take of the incestuous Corinthian^x; and, if this stratagem be not defeated, he will prevail over us to our eternal ruin.

But there is another stratagem which, for the subtlety of

^a Luke xi. 21, 26.

^r Matt. iv. 6.

^s 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^t Zech. iv. 1, 2.

^u Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^x 2 Cor. ii. 7, 11.

of its texture, the frequency of its use, and its successfulness in destroying souls, deserves more especial notice. When effectual resistance has been made to the foregoing temptations, and, in spite of all these misrepresentations, the sinner has attained a just view both of his own character, and of God's, then Satan has recourse to another wile, that promises indeed to the believer a speedy growth in the divine life, but is intended really to *divert him from all proper thoughts both of himself and of God*. He will "transform himself into an angel of light," and make use of some popular minister, or some talkative professor, as his agent in this business. He will by means of his emissaries draw the young convert to matters of doubtful disputation: he will perplex his mind with some intricate questions respecting matters of doctrine, or of discipline in the church. He will either controvert, and explode acknowledged truths, or carry them to an extreme, turning spirituality to mysticism, or liberty to licentiousness. Having entangled him in this snare, he will puff him up with a conceit of his own superior attainments, and speedily turn him from the simplicity that is in Christ. Little do his agents, who appear to be "ministers of righteousness," imagine that they are really "ministers of the devil;" and little do they who are inveigled by them, consider "in what a snare they are taken:" but God himself, who sees all these secret transactions, and discerns their fatal tendency, has given us this very account, and thereby guarded us against this dangerous device'.

Thus have we seen the *temptations* by which Satan leads men into sin, together with the *seasons*, the *means*, and the *manner*, of his assaults. We have seen also how he keeps them from God, even *by misrepresenting to them their own character, and God's, or by diverting them from a due attention either to themselves or God*.

Let us now proceed in the II^d. place to point out the means by which these wiles may be defeated.

This part of our subject will come again into discussion, both *generally*, in the next discourse, and *particularly*, when we treat of the various pieces of armour provided for us. Nevertheless we must distinctly, though briefly, shew

shew in this place, *What we are to understand by the whole armour of God*; and, *How we are to put it on*; and, *In what way it will enable us to withstand the devil's wiles.*

Armour is of two kinds, defensive and offensive; the one to protect ourselves, the other to assail our enemy. Now God has provided for us every thing that is necessary for a successful maintenance of the Christian warfare. Is our head exposed to the assaults of Satan? there is "a helmet" to guard it. Is our heart liable to be pierced? there is a "breastplate" to defend it. Are our feet subject to such wounds as may cause us to fall? there are "shoes," or greaves, for their protection. Is our armour likely to be loosened? there is a "girdle" to keep it fast. Are there apertures, by which a well-aimed dart may find admission? there is a "shield," which may be moved for the defence of every part, as occasion may require. Lastly, the Christian soldier is furnished with a sword also, by the skilful use of which he may inflict deadly wounds on his adversary.

But here it will be asked, How shall we get this armour? and, how shall we put it on? To obtain it, we must go to the armoury of heaven, and receive it from the hands of the captain of our salvation. No creature in the universe can give it us. He, and he only, who formed it, can impart it to us. As, when God had decreed the destruction of Babylon, we are told, that "the Lord opened his armoury, and brought forth the weapons of his indignation^a;" so, when he has commissioned us to go forth against sin and Satan, he must supply us with the arms, whereby alone we can execute his will: and we must be daily going to him in prayer, that he would furnish us from head to foot, or rather, that he himself would be "our shield and buckler," our almighty protector and deliverer^a.

When we have received our armour, then we are to "put it on." It is not given us to look at, but to use: not to wear for our amusement, but to gird on for actual service. We must examine it, to see that it is indeed of celestial temper, and that none is wanting. We must adjust it carefully in all its parts, that it may not be
cumbrous

^a Jer. l. 25.^a Ps. lxxxiv. 11, and xviii. 2.

cumbersome and useless in the hour of need : and when we have clothed ourselves with it, then we must put forth our strength, and use it for the purposes for which it is designed.

Our more particular directions must be reserved, till we consider the use of each distinct part of this armour. We shall only add at present, that, if we thus go forth to the combat, we shall surely vanquish our subtle enemy. We say not, that he shall never wound us ; for the most watchful of us are sometimes off our guard ; and the most experienced of us sometimes deceived. But we can assure the whole army of Christians, that Satan shall never finally prevail against them^b. Their head shall be preserved from error^c ; their heart, from iniquity^d ; their feet, from falling^e.

What remains then but that we call on all of you to put on this armour ? Let not any imagine that they can stand without it : for, if Adam was vanquished even in Paradise, how much more shall *we* be overpowered ? If the perfect armour with which he was clad by nature, proved insufficient for the combat, how shall we stand, who are altogether stripped of every defence ! If Satan, while yet a novice in the art of tempting, “ beguiled our first parents by his subtlety,” how much more will he beguile and ruin us, after so many thousand years of additional experience ! Arise then, all of you, and gird yourselves for the combat. *Ye careless ones*, know that ye are already “ led captive by the devil at his will^f ;” and the more you think yourselves secure, the more you shew that you are the dupes of Satan’s wiles. *Ye weak and timid*, “ be strong, fear not ; hath not God commanded you ? Be strong, and of a good courage ; be not afraid, neither be dismayed ; for the Lord your God is with you, whithersoever ye go^g.” Only go forth in dependence upon God, and “ no weapon that is formed against you, shall ever prosper^h.” But take care that you have on the *whole* armour of God. In vain will be the use of *any*, if *the whole* be not used. *One* part left unprotected will prove as fatal, as if you were exposed
in

^b Matt. xvi. 18.

^c Isai. xxxv. 8.

^d Rom. vi. 14.

^e 1 Sam. ii. 9. 2 Pet. i. 10.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^g Josh. i. 6, 9.

^h Isai. liv. 17.

in every part. But if you follow this counsel, you may defy all the hosts of hell: for "the weakest of you shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as Godⁱ."

ⁱ Zech. xii. 8.

DCIII. TO WITHSTAND THE POWER OF SATAN.

Ephes. vi. 12, 13. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

IN persuading men to undertake any arduous office, and more especially to enlist into the army, it is customary to keep out of view, as much as possible, the difficulties and dangers they will be exposed to, and to allure them by prospects of pleasure, honour, or emolument. It was far otherwise with Christ and his apostles. When our Lord invited men to enlist under his banners, he told them that they would have to enter on a course of pain and self-denial; "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Thus St. Paul, at the very time that he is endeavouring to recruit the Christian army, tells us plainly, that the enemies we shall have to combat, are the most subtle and powerful of any in the universe. Deceit and violence, the two great engines of cruelty and oppression, are their daily practice and delight.

In conformity with the apostle's plan, we have opened to you, in some small measure, the *wiles* of that adversary, whom we are exhorting you to oppose: and we shall now proceed to set before you somewhat of his *power*; still however encouraging you not to be dismayed, but to go forth against him with an assurance of victory.

We shall shew you

I. What a powerful adversary we have to contend with.

As soon as any man enlists under the banners of Christ, the world will turn against him, even as the kings of Canaan

Canaan did against the Gibeonites, the very instant they had made a league with Joshua^a. "Those of his own household will most probably be his greatest foes." To oppose these manfully is no easy task: but yet *these* are of no consideration in comparison of our other enemies; "We wrestle not against flesh and blood"^b, says the apostle, but against all the principalities and powers" of hell^c. It is not merely in a rhetorical way that the apostle accumulates so many expressions, to designate our enemies: the different terms he uses are well calculated to exhibit their power; which will appear to us great indeed, if we consider what he intimates respecting their *nature*, their *number*, and their *office*.

With respect to *their nature*, they are "wicked spirits." Once they were bright angels around the throne of God: but "they kept not their first estate;" and therefore they were "cast down to hell"^d. But though they have lost the holiness, they still retain, the power, of angels. As "angels, they excel in strength^e," and are far "greater in power and might"^f than any human being. They have, moreover, an immense advantage over us, in that they are spirits. Were they flesh and blood like ourselves, we might see them approaching, and either flee from them, or fortify ourselves against them: at least, there would be some time when, through weariness, they must intermit their efforts: but being spirits, their approaches to us are invisible, irresistible, incessant.

Their

^a Josh. x. 4. with John xv. 18, 19.

^b The terms "flesh and blood" are sometimes used to signify any human being, Matt. xvi. 17. and sometimes, our *corrupt* nature, whether intellectual, Gal. i. 16. or corporeal, 1 Cor. xv. 50. Here they denote the world at large.

^c Commentators labour exceedingly, but in vain, to make any tolerable sense of ἐν τοῖς ἐπεχράντοις as translated in our version. But, if they were construed with ἡ πόλη, thus, "Our conflict about heavenly things," and τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς ποιεῖας be considered as equivalent to ποιεῖα πνεύματα, the whole sense would be clear and unembarrassed. For that sense of ἐν, see Rom. xi. 2. and Gal. i. 24; and, for a much greater separation of words that are to be construed together, see Rom. ii. 12, 16. Indeed, the distance between ἡ πόλη and ἐν τοῖς ἐπεχράντοις is not worthy of notice, if it be considered, that four of the intermediate members of the sentence are a mere accumulation of synonymous expressions, a periphrasis for ποιεῖα πνεύματα.

^d Jude 6. & 2 Pet. ii. 4.

^e Ps. ciii. 20.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 11.

Their number is also intimated, in that they are represented as “principalities and powers,” consisting of multitudes who hold, like men on earth and angels in heaven^z, various degrees of honour and authority under one head. To form a conjecture respecting their numbers, would be absurd; since we are totally in the dark on that subject. This however we know, that they are exceeding many; because our Lord cast no less than seven out of one woman^h; and one man was possessed by a whole troop or “legion” at onceⁱ. We have reason therefore to think that their number far exceeds that of the human species; because there is no human being beyond the reach of their assaults, no, not for a single hour. Nor are they formidable merely on account of their number, but principally on account of their union, and subordination under one leader. We read of “the devil and *his* angels^k,” as of a king and *his* subjects: and though we know not what precise ranks and orders there may be among them, we know the name of their chief, even “Beelzebub, the prince of the devils^l.” It is because of their acting thus in concert with each other, that they are so often spoken of as *one*^m: and well they may be; for, the whole multitude of them are so perfectly *one* in operation and design, that, if one spy out an advantage, he may in an instant have a legion more to second his endeavours: and as this constitutes the strength of armies on earth, so does it give tenfold power to our spiritual enemies.

The office which they execute as “the rulers of this dark world,” may serve yet further to give us an idea of their strength. It is true, this office was not delegated to them, but usurped by them: still however, they retain it by God’s permission, and exercise it to our cost. Satan is expressly called “the prince of this worldⁿ,” “the god of this world^o,” “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience^p.” He “blinds them” that they may not see^q, and then, as the prophet led the Syrians, he leads them whithersoever

^z Col. i. 16.^h Mark xvi. 9.ⁱ Mark v. 9.^k Matt. xxv. 41.^l Matt. xii. 24.^m Luke iv. 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13. ⁿ John xii. 31. & xiv. 30. & xvi. 11.^o 2 Cor. iv. 4.^p Eph. ii. 2.^q See note ^o.

whithersoever he will^r; he takes them captive altogether^s. A few indeed who are brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel, have cast off his yoke: but except them, the whole world, enveloped in worse than Egyptian darkness, lieth under him as its universal monarch^t. The very elements are under his controul, and concur with men and devils to fulfil his will. Would he deprive Job of his substance? hosts of Sabeans and Chaldeans come at his call, to plunder him^u. Would he destroy all his family? the wind rises at his command to smite their house, and overwhelm them in its ruins^x.

Such are the enemies with whom we have to contend. If we desire to prosecute earthly things, we can go on with ease, we can follow them without interruption from day to day, and from year to year: with respect to these things, the devils would rather help us forward, than obstruct our way. But the very instant we begin to seek "heavenly things," all hell is in alarm, just as all the Canaanites were, when they understood that Joshua's spies had been seen in their land^y. If we begin to listen to the word of God, he will send some emissary, some child of his, whom he has endued with peculiar subtlety, to turn us from the faith^z. If the word, like good seed, be sown upon our hearts, he will send a host of devils, like birds of the air, to pick up the seed^a. If any, in spite of his efforts, take root in our hearts, he will instantly sow tares to grow up with the wheat^b, and thorns to choke it^c. We cannot go into the presence of God to pray, but "Satan will be at our right hand to resist us^d." The conflict we have to maintain with him, is not like that which is common to our armies, where a part bear the brunt of the battle, and the rest are reserved for exigencies: in this view it is more properly compared to "*a wrestling*," where every man meets his antagonist, and must continue the contest, till the fall of one party decides the victory. Such the scripture describes our contest to be; and such it is proved to be by every man's experience:

^r 2 Kings vi. 18—20.

^t 1 John v. 19. ^{τῷ} *ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, in the wicked one.*

^u Job i. 12, 15, 17.

^x Ib. ver. 19.

^z Acts xiii. 7—10.

^a Matt. xiii. 4, 19.

^b Matt. xiii. 7, 22.

^s 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^y Josh. ii. 9, 11.

^b Ib. ver. 25.

^d Zech. iii. 1.

experience: there is no man who, if he will only observe the ease with which he enters upon his worldly calling, and keeps up his attention to it, and the comparative difficulty he finds, as soon as ever he addresses himself to the concerns of his soul, shall see, that there is in him an impotence and reluctance, for which he cannot account, unless he acknowledge, what the scripture so fully warns him of, a satanic agency.

But shall we be intimidated by this account, and induced to surrender ourselves to Satan without a conflict? No. Formidable as he is, there is ONE above him, who circumscribes his powers, and limits his operations. He did, by God's permission, "cast *some* of the Ephesian church into *prison*, that they might be *tried*, for *ten days*:" but, if he could have accomplished all that was in his heart, he would have cast them *all* into *hell* that they might *perish* for *ever*—So far from being irresistible, he may be resisted, yea, and vanquished too, by the weakest of God's saints.

To encourage you therefore to fight against him, we shall shew

II. How we may effectually withstand him

The apostle renews, though with some variation, the directions he gave before; "not thinking it grievous to himself to repeat any thing that may conduce to our safety." St. Peter also was "careful to put Christians frequently in remembrance of many things, notwithstanding they knew them, and were established in the present truth." Well therefore may we call your attention once more to the exhortation in the text. Indeed, if the putting on the whole armour of God was necessary to guard against the *wiles* of the devil, it can be no less necessary as a preservative against his *power*: and the exhortation *enforced by this new consideration*, cannot reasonably be thought an uninteresting repetition.

But we shall have no need to repeat any former observations, seeing that what is new in the exhortation, will afford abundant matter for profitable, and seasonable, remark.

The

* Rev. ii. 10.

† Phil. iii. 1.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 12.

The time mentioned in the text as “the evil day,” refers to those particular periods when Satan makes his most desperate attacks. Sometimes he retires from us for a season, as he did from our Lord^b; or, at least, gives us somewhat of a respite from any violent assaults. But he watches his opportunity to renew his efforts, when by bringing a host of devils to his aidⁱ, or finding us off our guard^k, he may exert his power to more effect. Such a season was *that* wherein David complained, that “his enemies, compassing him like bees, thrust sore at him that he might fall^l :” and especially *that* wherein the Lord Jesus Christ himself was so weakened by him, as to need an angel from heaven to administer strength and consolation^m. All who know any thing of “Satan’s devices,” must have noticed this in their own experience: there have been times when the enemy appeared unmindful of his work, and other times when “he has come in like a flood; so that if the Spirit of the Lord had not lifted up a standard against himⁿ,” he must have utterly overwhelmed them. The hour of death is a season when he usually puts forth all his power, “having great wrath because his time is short^o.”

Now what shall we do in such seasons, if not clad in the whole armour of God? What hope can we have of withstanding such an enemy? If he should find us unarmed, would he not sift us as wheat^p, and reduce us to mere chaff? Would he not scatter us as smoke out of the chimney, or chaff driven by a whirlwind^q? Would he not precipitate thousands of us, as he did the swine, into instantaneous destruction^r, and into the abyss of hell?

But if we be armed with the divine panoply, we need not fear: he can have no power against us any further than it is given him from above^s: and, “howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so^t,” his efforts against us shall ultimately conduce to our good, to make us more humble, more vigilant, more expert.

This is particularly intimated in the text; and in *this* the encouragement given us exceeds what was contained in

^b Luke iv. 13.

^l Ps. cxviii. 12, 13.

^o Rev. xii. 12.

^r Matt. viii. 31, 32.

ⁱ Matt. xii. 44, 45.

^m Luke xxii. 43, 53.

^p Luke xxii. 31.

^s John xix. 11.

^k 1 Pet. v. 8.

ⁿ Isai. lix. 19.

^q Hos. xiii. 3.

^t Isai. x. 5, 7.

in the former exhortation. *There* we were taught to expect that we should not be vanquished by our subtle enemy: *here* we are encouraged with an assurance, that we shall not only effectually withstand his efforts, even when they are most desperate, but shall “*stand*” as victors on the field of battle, after having put our enemies to flight. To this also agree the words of St. James; “resist the devil, and he shall *flee* from you^u,” he shall not only not overcome you, but shall be so intimidated by your prowess as to flee from you with the greatest precipitation. Blessed truth! This mighty fiend, who dared to enter the lists with an archangel^x, and to contend even with the Son of God himself, shall be so terrified at the sight of a Christian champion, as not only to “forbear touching him^y,” but even to flee from his presence as for his very life.

It is true, he will never finally give over the contest, till we are got entirely beyond his reach: nor is he at any time so vanquished or intimidated but that he will number another host, like unto that which has been defeated, and renew his attack upon us^z: but his malice shall terminate in his own confusion^a: he may succeed to bruise our heel, but we shall ultimately bruise his head^b. “Our weapons, *through God*, shall be mighty, though wielded by the feeblest arm^c.” We shall “go on conquering and to conquer^d” till we set our feet upon his neck^e, and return with triumphant exultation from the combat, saying, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name^f.”

Nor is this your greatest encouragement: for as soon as you have “done all” that God has designed for you in this state of warfare, you shall “*stand*” before God, united to that noble army that are now enjoying their triumphs in his presence. Having “fought the good fight and finished your course, there shall be given to you a crown of righteousness” and glory^g; and you shall bear the

^u James iv. 7.^x Jude 9.^y 1 John v. 18.^z 1 Kings xx. 22—26.^a Ib. ver. 27—29.^b Gen. iii. 15.^c 2 Cor. x. 4.^d Rev. vi. 2.^e Josh. x. 24. This was altogether typical of the Christian's victories.^f Luke x. 17.^g 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

the palm of victory in the courts of heaven^b. Then shall be fulfilled to you what was spoken by our Lord, "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne^c." Only "be faithful unto death; and God will give thee a crown of life^k."

Before we dismiss this subject, we would address a few words

1. *To those who have never yet wrestled with this great adversary.*

We hope you are now convinced, that it is not a *needless* labour to engage in this contest. But you may still be induced to decline it, from the idea that it is a hopeless work. But know this, that you have undertaken a task which is infinitely more difficult than this; for, while you refuse to wrestle with Satan, you are actually wrestling with God himself. He who infallibly discerns, and rightly estimates, your conduct, says, that ye "resist the Holy Ghost^l" and "contend with your Maker^m:" and your own consciences will inform you, that you have often "fought against God," by resisting the influence of his word and Spiritⁿ. Suppose then ye gain the victory (which is but too probable) suppose God give up the contest, and say, "My Spirit shall strive with him no longer^o;" what will ye have to boast of? what cause will ye have for joy? Awful will be that day wherein God shall say, "Let him alone^p:" from that hour your condemnation will be sure, and Satan will have perfectly gained his point. Judge then whether it be not better to contend with Satan, than with God? with him whom you are sure to conquer, to your eternal happiness; than with him, by whose avenging arm you must be crushed for ever^q? Consider well which of the two ye choose for your enemy, God or Satan: And may God incline you to enlist under the Redeemer's banner, and in his strength to combat all the enemies of your salvation!

2. *Let us speak to those who have begun the arduous contest.*

Be

^b Rev. vii. 9, 10.

^c Acts vii. 51.

^k Gen. vi. 3.

^l Rev. iii. 21.

^m Job xl. 2.

ⁿ Hos. iv. 17.

^o Rev. ii. 10. latter part.

^p Acts v. 39. & xxiii. 9.

^q Isai. xxvii. 4.

Be not afraid of your great adversary. Do not be like the unbelieving Israelites, who, because the Anakims were of such extraordinary stature, and dwelt in cities that were walled up to heaven, were afraid to go up against them^r; but rather say, with Caleb, "They shall be bread for us^s:" instead of destroying, they shall be an occasion of good to, our souls: their spoils shall enrich us; and the opposition that they make, shall only be the means of displaying more abundantly the love and faithfulness of our God. "Take unto you" again and again "the whole armour of God;" and "fight, not as one that beateth the air," but as one that is determined to conquer or die: and if at any time you be tempted to give up the contest, think of "those who now through faith and patience inherit the promises^t." Once *they* were conflicting like you; but now they rest from their labours, and are anxious spectators of your conflicts^x. It is but a little time, and you also shall be numbered with them. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world^y." Only go forth therefore in the name of Christ; and *his* triumphs shall be the pattern, the pledge, the earnest of your own.

^r Numb. xiii. 28, 31, 33.^s Ib. ver. 30. with Numb. xiv. 9.^t 1 Cor. ix. 26.^u Heb. vi. 12.^x Heb. xii. 1.^y 1 John iv. 4.

DCIV. THE CHRISTIAN'S GIRDLE.

Eph. vi. 14. *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.*

IT is not possible to exceed in magnifying the grace of God: to *it* must every part of our salvation be ascribed: grace begins the work in our hearts; grace carries it on; grace completes it. No ground of glorying is left for man: his own wisdom, goodness, strength, weigh no more than the small dust upon the balance. All is the work of God; he lays the foundation; and when "the top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, we must

cry, Grace, grace unto it^a." But while we are jealous of God's honour, and desirous of magnifying the riches of his grace, we must be careful not to undervalue the work wrought in our hearts. In point of *merit*, there is nothing in us that is worthy of the smallest consideration: but in a variety of other views, the work of God's Spirit in our hearts can scarcely be appreciated too highly. This is manifest from the description which the apostle gives of the Christian's armour. He is careful in the first place to shew us, that we have not in ourselves any *inherent* strength; and that, consequently, we must depend entirely on God: but in entering more minutely into his subject, he declares, that those graces, which the Spirit of God forms in our hearts, are means of defence against our spiritual adversaries: for though as being *our* graces, they are weak and worthless; yet as being *the work of God's hands*, they are of great strength and value: they even constitute that armour, in which we are to go forth against the enemies of our salvation, and by which we shall be enabled to defeat all their wiles, and all their power.

The first grace that he mentions, is "truth:" in elucidating which we shall shew

I. What we are to understand by truth.

II. Its use and office in the Christian warfare.

I. What are we to understand by "truth?" It is a term of extensive signification. It is sometimes put for the gospel; in which sense the apostle speaks of "obeying the truth." But in this place, it rather means *sincerity*. The two terms are often used together as synonymous expressions; "Serve the Lord," says Joshua in his farewell discourse, "in sincerity and truth^b:" and St. Paul exhorts us to "keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^c."

But sincerity, Christian sincerity, is very little understood. For the most part, it is considered as importing nothing more than a good intention, without any reference to the manner in which that good intention operates. But the sincerity, of which the text speaks, is a Christian grace;

^a Zech. iv. 6, 7, 9.

Josh. xxiv. 14.

^c 1 Cor. v. 8.

grace; and consequently it must include something widely different from that which may be exercised by superstitious bigots^d, or blood-thirsty persecutors^e.

To mark it as distinctly as possible, we shall notice *four* things that are implied in it.

First it implies *a desire and intention to please God*. There is one canon, one universal rule of action, prescribed to us in the scriptures; namely, that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God^f." Whatever therefore springs from other motives and principles, must argue a want of sincerity, in proportion as God's honour is superseded by any selfish considerations. When Jehu, in compliance with God's command, extirpated the family of Ahab^g, his obedience was not considered as sincere, because he was actuated rather by vain-glory^h, than by a real desire to please God; and the blood that he shed in executing the divine command, was on that very account avenged by God himself upon his posterityⁱ.

The Jews also complied with the institutions of Moses in observing their religious fasts and feasts: but because "they did fast and feast unto themselves rather than unto God," and sought rather to cover their own enormities by such observances, than really to honour God, their services were deemed hypocritical, and were rejected with abhorrence^k. Thus must all our duties, civil or religious, have respect to God: We must have "a single eye," if we would please him^l. If we bring forth fruit to ourselves only, "we are empty vines," we are unprofitable servants^m.

Sincerity implies in the next place, *a serving of God according to the light we enjoy*. Sincerity will doubtless consist with defective views both of Christian duty, and Christian liberty: but it will not consist with allowed deviations from an acknowledged duty, either in a way of omission, or of commission. "The wisdom that is from above, is without partiality, and without hypocrisyⁿ." To be "partial in the law" is to dissemble with God: and
whether

^d Rom. x. 2.

^e 2 Kings ix. 6, 7.

^k Zech. vii. 5, 6.

ⁿ James iii. 17.

^g John xvi. 2.

^h 2 Kings x. 16.

ⁱ Matt. vi. 22, 23.

^f 1 Cor. x. 31.

^j Hos. i. 4.

^m Hos. x. 1.

whether we make outward duties a cloke for inward lusts, or present to God a mere "form of godliness without the power of it," we are really "hypocrites in heart"; and therefore can have no pretensions to sincerity.

But there is yet a third thing, which is absolutely essential to sincerity, namely, *a desire to know the will of God more perfectly*. Here it is that many, who have appeared most sincere, have failed. St. Paul before his conversion "thought he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus^p:" and truly he did them with a zeal suited to his persuasion. But can it be said, that at that time he possessed the Christian virtue of sincerity? By no means: for he had opportunities enough of information: the writings of Moses and the prophets were plain enough to convince any man that was not blinded by prejudice, and carried away by his own impetuous passions^q. Besides, he might have gone to the fountain head, and enquired of Jesus himself, what grounds there were for believing him to be the Messiah. Above all, he lived when the gospel was preached in all its purity, and attested from heaven by miracles without number. Why then did he not set himself to enquire more candidly? Why did he not, like the Beræans, search the scriptures, to see if things were as the apostles declared them to be^r? But this would not agree with his infuriated zeal: he hated the light, and therefore sought to the uttermost to extinguish it. How different was the conduct of Nathanael! He participated in the prejudices of his countrymen; and hastily concluded that "no good thing could come out of Galilee." But when he was desired to "come and see" for himself, he availed himself of the opportunity to form his judgment on surer grounds; and, on the very first demonstration which our Lord gave of his Messiahship, he believed in Jesus; and thereby evidenced his right to that title which our Lord had given him, "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile^s."

There is one thing more implied in sincerity, namely, *a determination to serve God without any regard to consequences*. Our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration.

^p Matt. xxiii. 23—28: and xv. 7, 8.

^p Acts xxvi. 9.

^r Luke xvi. 31.

^r Acts xvii. 11.

^s John i. 45—49.

consideration. When we know what he requires of us, we are not to be diverted from it by any losses or any sufferings. Who does not see the insincerity of those who believed in Christ, but were afraid to confess him¹; and of that amiable youth who turned back from Christ rather than part with his possessions²? If we be truly upright in heart, we shall say as St. Paul when he was solicited to shun the trials and afflictions which, as the Spirit testified, awaited him in every city; "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus³." And if the trials be ever so severe, we shall still "hold fast our integrity⁴," and adopt the language of the same apostle; "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and fulfil my duty to my God⁵."

This representation of "*truth*" is both illustrated and confirmed by the conduct of St. Paul on his first conversion to God. Till that hour, he had been walking blindly "after the course of this world," and "in the way of his own heart:" but as soon as his eyes were opened, even before he had any clear knowledge of Christianity, he desired to know, and determined to execute, the whole will of God: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do⁶?" 'Thou needest only to shew me wherein I am wrong, and to teach me thy way, and I will instantly through thy assistance change my conduct, and devote myself to thy service: nor shall any considerations of hope or fear ever turn me from the path prescribed by thee.' Nor was this a vain boast: for "he conferred not with flesh and blood," but set himself without delay to "preach the faith which he had laboured to destroy⁷," and persisted in preaching it even unto death.

The nature of "*truth*" being thus ascertained, let us proceed to shew

IIIdly. Its use and office in the Christian warfare.

Among the various parts of a soldier's armour, a "girdle" was of very principal importance; and in this view

¹ John xii. 42, 43.

² Mark x. 21, 22.

³ Acts xxi. 13.

⁷ Job xxvii. 5, 6.

² Acts xx. 24.

⁴ Acts ix. 6.

⁵ Gal. i. 15, 16, 23.

view it is frequently mentioned in the holy scriptures. The prophet, describing the irresistible fury with which the Chaldeans should overrun Palestine, says, "None shall be weary or stumble among them, none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall *the girdle of their loins* be loosed^c." And our blessed Lord, who, as the Captain of our salvation, was arrayed like all the soldiers of his army, is represented by the same prophet as habited in this manner; "Righteousness shall be *the girdle of his loins*, and faithfulness *the girdle of his reins*^d."

The use of the girdle was *to keep the armour compact, and to strengthen the loins*. And these are the offices which "truth" performs for the Christian soldier.

In the first place, *it compacts all the graces with which his soul is armed*. As the different parts of armour with which the body is fortified, would hang loose, and leave many apertures through which a wound might be inflicted, if they were not fastened together by a belt or girdle, so would the Christian's graces prove insufficient for his defence, if they were not all compacted together by the girdle of sincerity. Let us look at persons that seemed armed from head to foot, and prepared to defy all the powers of darkness. See Johanan, and the remnant of the Jews whom the Chaldeans had not taken into captivity, coming to the prophet, intreating him to ask counsel for them from God; and vowing in the most solemn manner to comply with any direction which the Lord should give them by his mouth—We have not a more hopeful appearance in all the sacred records: but they dissembled with God: no sooner was the answer given them, than they shewed by their conduct, that they were not sincere in their overtures; and they became the victims of their own hypocrisy^e. And how often are similar failures found amongst ourselves, from the very same cause! How many appear penitent and determined to serve their God, while they are under some heavy calamity, or in the near prospect of death; and yet discover their hypocrisy as soon as ever their professions are brought to the test! Yet daily is that account of the Jews realized amongst ourselves; "When he slew them, then

^c Isai. v. 27.

^d Isai. xi. 5.

^e Jer. xlii. 1—6, 19—22.

then they sought him, and enquired early after God, and remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer: nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, and lie unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant ^f.”

On the other hand, how impenetrable to the darts of the adversary were the graces of those who were sincere before God! Daniel not only would not relinquish, but would not so much as abate, or conceal, his devotions, though menaced with a cruel and speedy death ^g. Nor would the Hebrew youths comply with the edict of a haughty monarch, though they saw a furnace heated for their destruction, and might have pleaded in their defence the example of a whole nation ^h. Thus shall we also be enabled to brave every danger, and to endure death in its most awful forms, if our hearts be upright before God. As all our graces will be compacted together by sincerity, so every distinct grace will derive from it tenfold solidity, and strength: let our “faith be unfeigned,” our “love without dissimulation,” and our “spirit altogether without guile,” and we need fear no assaults, however artful, however violent.

The other office of truth is, *to strengthen our souls under great and long-continued conflicts*. This particular use of the girdle is repeatedly mentioned by the Psalmist. In reference to himself, he says, “Thou hast *girded me with strength* unto the battle ⁱ.” In reference to the Messiah also he uses a similar expression; “The Lord reigneth; he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with *strength, wherewith he hath girded himself* ^k.”

“Those who have a divided heart, will assuredly be found faulty at the last ^l.” Numberless are the instances wherein persons who have fought well for a season, have fainted at last through this sad defect. But we will mention only two; one, wherein the failure had nearly terminated in the destruction of many; and the other, wherein it involved one of the most eminent professors in utter and everlasting ruin. For the former instance we will

^f Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

^g Dan. vi. 10.

^h Dan. iii. 17, 18.

ⁱ Ps. xviii. 39.

^k Ps. xciii. 1.

^l Hos. x. 2.

will refer you, not to a man professedly ungodly, no, nor to a mere novice in religion, but to the most distinguished of all the apostles. With the name of Peter we associate the idea of courage undaunted, and of piety irreproachable. But behold him on one occasion, when his loins were loosed, and the girdle was wanting to complete his armour. This valiant hero, who had acquitted himself so nobly in many battles, was at last, through fear of offending the judaizing Christians, guilty of the basest dissimulation; undermining by his influence the most essential doctrine of that gospel which he was sent to preach; and, by his example, drawing Barnabas also, and a multitude of others, into the most fatal error. And, if St. Paul had not openly rebuked him before all the church, and thereby counteracted the effect of his misconduct, it is not possible to say, how far his error might have effected the eternal interests of millions ^m.

In the other instance, we must turn our eyes to one, whose eminence drew from St. Paul himself repeated commendations, even such as were bestowed on the Evangelist, St. Luke. After years of manly toil, and continued danger, Demas was left to prove, how weak the strongest are without sincerity. Wearied with his conflicts, he sought repose in the bosom of the worldⁿ; when, if he had fought with more sincerity, he might have endured to the end, and triumphed over all his adversaries. Unhappy man, to retain one secret lust, which, like a canker, eat out his vitals, or, like a leak unnoticed, sunk the vessel wherein he was embarked! But thus it will be with all, whose loins are not girt about with truth: "a double-minded man will be unstable in all his ways^o."

But if we have melancholy instances of failure through the want of this virtue, we have many noble instances of persevering zeal in others, whose hearts were right with God. Behold the Patriarchs sojourning for years in a strange land, when "they had opportunities enough of returning to their native country," if they had been so minded; but they were sincere in "seeking a better country,

^m Gal. ii. 11—14. "*to be blamed—dissembled—dissimulation—walked not uprightly.*"

ⁿ Compare Col. iv. 14. and Phileni. 24. with 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^o James i. 8.

country, that is, an heavenly ;” and therefore they willingly lived as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth^p.” Behold also the noble army of martyrs, who “out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens ;” yea, and women also, who, notwithstanding their natural weakness and timidity, would “not accept deliverance from their tortures, that they might obtain a better resurrection^q.” Indeed, where is there one who is truly upright before God, who has not frequently evinced a strength and steadfastness superior to the efforts of unassisted nature ? Who has not been called to make many sacrifices of pleasure, honour, interest ; and to lead a life of continual self-denial, both in the mortifying of inward lusts, and the enduring of outward persecutions ? But, “having set his hand to the plough, the Christian will not look back,” and having put on his armour, he will not put it off but with his life.

The vast importance of truth and sincerity being made apparent, let the following ADVICE be duly weighed.

1. Let us enquire whether we possess this part of Christian armour.

Perhaps there is scarcely any one who does not fancy himself sincere. But can we appeal to God that our daily aim is to please *him*, yea, to please him, not only in preference to ourselves or others, but in direct opposition to the whole world ? Do we labour to approve ourselves to him, forbearing every sinful thing, and doing every thing we know to be right ? Do we search the scriptures daily, and attend on the ministration of God’s word, on purpose that we may have our sentiments and conduct more entirely conformed to the will of God ? And finally, do we disregard the scoffs of an ungodly world, and determine to sacrifice even life itself, rather than violate the dictates of our conscience ? *This* is sincerity, *this* is truth. Doubtless there are infirmities in the best of men ; and consequently there will be occasional deviations from the path of duty : but if we be sincere, we shall not *allow* any sin whatever : we shall endeavour to be “pure as God is

^p Heb. xi. 15, 16.

^q Ib. ver. 34, 35.

is pure, and perfect as God is perfect." O that there were in all of us such a heart as this !

2. Let us be on our guard against those devices, whereby Satan would weaken our sincerity, or rob us of the comfort of it.

Satan will put forth all his wiles, and exert all his power, to loosen this girdle. He well knows, that, if he succeed in this point, all the rest will be easy : but that till this be effected, we are invulnerable. He will therefore try on all occasions to get advantage against us. He will cover his endeavours with the most specious pretexes, and present his temptations in the most alluring shapes. But let us watch against him : let not the example of an apostle, or the preaching of an angel[†], lead us to renounce one single truth, or to transgress one single precept. If we be not continually on our guard, that "serpent will beguile us : " yea, in spite of all our watchfulness will he deceive us, if we be not preserved by God himself. Let us therefore "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation."

But, if Satan cannot entice us to lay aside our girdle, he will endeavour to deprive us of the comfort of it. He will take occasion from our remaining infirmities to make us think ourselves hypocrites : and thus he will seek to effect that through despondency, which he could not effect through any other temptations. Let it then be our daily care so to fasten this girdle round our loins, that we may have in ourselves, and give to all around us, an indisputable evidence that we both possess and improve it. Then shall we have a consolation arising from it, and "rejoice in the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world[‡]."

Lastly, let us "*stand*" thus armed, and be in constant readiness to oppose our enemy. Let us not fear him, but resist him manfully. If we fight, we have nothing to fear : it is only when we turn our back, that we are left exposed to any mortal injury : in every other part we are armed sufficiently for our defence. Let us then beg of God to "put truth in our inward parts[§]." Let us "add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness,

‡ Gal. i. 8, 9.

§ 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Ps. li. 6.

liness, brotherly-kindness and charity, and keep them all compact with the girdle of truth; then have we God's promise, that we shall never fall^u." Through his grace, our "integrity and uprightness shall preserve us^x." Let us therefore "gird up the loins of our mind, and be sober, and hope to the end^y." Only let us "be sincere; and we shall be without offence till the day of Christ^z."

^u 2 Pet. i. 5—8, 10.

^x Ps. xxv. 21.

^y 1 Pet. i. 13.

^z Phil. i. 10.

DCV. THE CHRISTIAN'S BREAST-PLATE.

Ephes. vi. 14. *Stand . . . having on the breast-plate of righteousness.*

AS various parts of armour, however differing in shape, may be formed of the same materials, so amongst the Christian graces, there may exist a considerable resemblance, while yet there remains between them a manifest distinction. Righteousness is that particular grace which comes under our consideration at this time. By "righteousness" we understand, that *true* and universal *holiness*, which is characteristic of conversion, and constitutes that divine image, after which we are renewed^a. Now this, though nearly allied to sincerity, differs materially from it: sincerity relates to the aims and motives of a person; but righteousness to his actions and habits. Righteousness is that in actual attainment, which sincerity is in desire and purpose. Righteousness cannot exist without sincerity; but sincerity may, and often does, exist without righteousness; because (as was shewn in the preceding discourse) it may be found in blind zealots, and bloody persecutors.

The piece of armour to which righteousness is compared, is "the breast-plate;" which was of use to defend the vitals from the assaults of an enemy. Of such importance

^a Eph. iv. 23, 24.

importance was it to every one in the time of battle, that all, from the general to the soldier, were clad with it: nor can its importance to us more strongly appear, than from the consideration, that the Captain of our salvation, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, was thus arrayed. The prophet Isaiah, speaking expressly of him, says, "He put on righteousness as a breast-plate ^b."

In the metaphor before us, the apostle intimates, that without righteousness we should be exposed to imminent peril, yea, to certain death: but that, if we be clad with righteousness, our adversaries will never be able to prevail against us. It is evident therefore that there are two points to be considered by us, namely, *the necessity* of righteousness for our defence, and *its sufficiency* to protect us.

I. The *necessity* of righteousness

In order to destroy us, our great adversary uses both deceit and violence; against both of which it becomes us to be armed, in order that we may *discover the one*, and *repel the other*.

Righteousness then is necessary in the first place, that we may *discover his wiles*.

It is said with truth by an inspired writer, that "the god of this world blinds the eyes of them that believe not ^c:" and it is astonishing to what a degree he deludes their souls. He instigates them to the commission of sin under the idea that it is at least excusable, if not altogether justifiable and right ^d. He teaches them to "call evil good, and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter ^e." We may see one man carried on by ostentation and vanity, while he thinks himself actuated by zeal for God ^f. Another yields to a vindictive spirit, yet supposes that he is only maintaining a just regard for his own character, or perhaps for the rights of the community ^g. Through the agency of that subtle fiend, covetousness assumes the name of prudence ^h; prodigality is nothing but a commendable excess

^b Isai. lix. 17.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^d 1 Chron. xxi. 1—4.

^e Isai. v. 20.

^f 2 Kings x. 16.

^g Luke ix. 53—55.

^h Luke xii. 13—15.

excess of generosity : yea, the most cruel machinations of bigotry, are deemed a service well-pleasing to Godⁱ. Who has not noticed in others this sad infatuation? Who has not seen his neighbours acting under the influence of a bad principle, while they were at the same time as strongly persuaded that they were right, as if there were no room for doubt? Thus it is more or less with every unrenewed person; and too often with those also who are yet weak in the faith; they go on, "not knowing what spirit they are of." In vain do ministers set forth the evil of such a state: in vain do they discriminate, and mark the difference between truth and error: in vain do they endeavour to persuade men in private, as well as in their public ministrations: in vain do they confirm every word with the infallible dictates of inspiration: for while men continue destitute of righteousness, "they have eyes, and see not, ears, and hear not, neither do they understand^k." Nothing will effectually shew men their error, till they are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." Then they have the film removed from the organs of vision. Then they have a spiritual discernment^l: they are no longer deceived by specious appearances; they taste and see the real qualities of things: being "brought out of darkness into marvellous light," they view every thing, in a measure, as God himself views it: and the greater their proficiency is in the divine life, the clearer is their perception of the good or evil that exists^m, not in their actions only, but in their motives and principles of action. And hence it is that the apostle exhorts us to "be transformed in the renewing of our minds, that we may *prove* (and discern, not by theory only, but by actual experiment) what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of Godⁿ."

Righteousness is further necessary, that we may *repel the assaults* of our enemy.

Sin not only blinds, but debilitates the soul. It is scarcely

ⁱ John xvi. 2.

^k John viii. 43.

^l Eph. i. 17, 18. Col. i. 9. συνέσει πνευματικῇ.

^m Heb. v. 13, 14. ⁿ Rom. xii. 2. Ἔς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ἡμᾶς to the discerning of the qualities of metals by the furnace. See also Phil. i. 9, 10. where the same word is connected with τὰ διαφέροντα, things that differ.

scarcely to be conceived how impotent the natural man is to resist the temptations of Satan. For the most part he makes no resistance at all, but follows the dictates of his imperious master, and yields a willing obedience to his most fatal suggestions. To the ungodly Jews our Lord justly observed, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." Sometimes conscience will make a stand against the wicked one; but it is soon overpowered, and either bribed into consent, or stunned to silence, or forced, in spite of all its efforts, to give way. It may cause one to tremble^p; another to reform in many things^q; another to become almost a Christian^r; another to make a profession of religion, and openly to join himself to the church of Christ^s: but Satan has nothing to fear from its exertions, unless it stimulate a man to seek a thorough change of heart: he laughs at the fears of Felix, the reformation of Herod, the acknowledgments of Agrippa, and the professions of Simon Magus: he well knows that, as long as they are unrenewed, they are fast in his chains, and incapable of any effectual exertion: "Ephraim, though armed, and carrying bows, were so enfeebled by sin, that they turned back in the day of battle:" nor could Israel stand before their enemies while an Achan was in their camp^t. So neither can he resist Satan, who yields in any thing to the dominion of sin. If once we "put away a good conscience, we shall speedily make shipwreck of our faith" also^u. But let once the tamest of his vassals feel the influence of divine grace, and instantly he casts off the yoke under which he had groaned, and asserts his liberty. From that moment Satan is constrained to yield to that "stronger power that is come against him^v," and to relinquish the prey which he can no longer retain^w.

The *necessity* of righteousness being thus established, let us proceed to consider

II. Its *sufficiency*

The apostle would not have been so urgent in exhorting us to put on the breast-plate of righteousness, if he had not

^o John viii. 44.

^p Acts xxiv. 25.

^q Mark vi. 20.

^r Acts xxvi. 28.

^s Acts viii. 13.

^t Ps. lxxviii. 9, 10. Josh. vii. 8, 12, 24, 26.

^u 1 Tim. i. 19.

^v Luke xi. 21, 22.

^w Isai. xlix. 25.

not believed, that it would answer all the purposes for which it was designed. That it will protect us, we are well assured : that it will secure to us the victory, there can be no doubt : for it will turn *depravity to sanctity, cowardice to courage, and weakness to strength.*

First, it turns *depravity to sanctity.* It is by our inward corruptions that Satan works. He cannot force us to commit sin : he can only present to us such temptations as are suited to our natural desires ; and suggest such considerations to our minds, as are likely to procure our compliance with his will. When he came to assault our Lord, he could not prevail ; because “ he found nothing in him²,” that in the smallest degree closed with his suggestions. But when he comes to us, he finds in us a predisposition to receive him. If he assault our heart, there are many secret lusts that are ready to betray us into his hands : he has but to strike a spark, and there is within us combustible matter in abundance, that instantly catches fire, and that, if not extinguished by grace, will burn to the lowest hell. But when the soul is endued with righteousness, its dispositions are altogether changed : “ old things are passed away, and all things are become new³.” We say not indeed that there are no remains of corruption in the soul ; for the old nature still continues, and counteracts in a measure the operations of the new nature : but if “ the flesh lusts against the spirit, the spirit also lusts against the flesh, and gains (not indeed without many conflicts) an ascendant over it⁴ :” and hence the temptations, which would once have been irresistible, are repelled with indignant firmness ; as we see in Joseph, who, when repeatedly solicited to commit adultery, replied with horror, “ How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God⁵ ?”

This then is one way in which righteousness defends the soul : it makes “ sin appear exceeding sinful⁶ ;” and holiness to be esteemed as the perfection of bliss⁷ : and thus, by weakening the force of temptation, it enables us with success to resist the tempter.

In

² John xiv. 30.

³ Gen. xxxix. 9.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁵ Rom. vii. 13.

⁶ Gal. v. 17.

⁷ Ps. cxix. 128.

In the next place, it turns *cowardice into courage*. Sātan gets peculiar advantage over men by means of their carnal fears. In whatever degree men are endued with natural fortitude, their courage fails them when they are called to bear the cross of Christ. When our blessed Lord ministered on earth, Nicodemus, though a ruler and governor, was afraid to come in open day, lest he should be thought to favour his cause^f: nor did “the Pharisees who believed in him, dare to confess him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God^g.” In instances without number have men who were able to brave death itself on the field of battle, shewn themselves unable to endure the scorn and contempt that universally attach to religious characters: so true is that declaration of Solomon, “The fear of man bringeth a snare^h.” But righteousness emboldens the soul; and enables it to meet the hatred and menaces, or (what is still worse) the sneers and ridicule of an ungodly world, with a holy indifference; yea, it causes the soul to rejoice in these things as tokens for goodⁱ, and as testimonies of the divine favour^k. Behold the astonishing change that was wrought on Peter! When he had inconsiderately laid aside his armour, he was intimidated by the voice of a maid-servant, and induced to deny his Lord with oaths and curses. But when he had put on his breast-plate, he was undismayed in the presence of the whole council of the Jews: he boldly charged upon the rulers that were before him, the guilt of murdering their Messiah: and when they endeavoured to silence him with threats, he undauntedly replied, “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard^l.” Such was the courage also of the Hebrew youths, who, unawed by the fiery furnace, and unmoved by the example of a whole nation, disdained to comply with the royal edict; and resolutely exposed themselves to a cruel death, rather than violate the dictates of their conscience^m.

Thus wherever the soul is clad with righteousness, it is emboldened

^f John iii. 1, 2.

^g John xii. 42, 43.

^h Prov. xxix. 25.

ⁱ Luke xxi. 12, 13.

^k Phil. i. 23 & 1 Pet. iv. 14. & Acts v. 41.

^l Acts iv. 18—20.

^m Dan. iii. 18.

emboldened both to do and suffer the will of God : and, consequently, Satan's engine of persecution, whereby he has destroyed myriads, being divested of its power to intimidate the righteous, his dominion over them must for ever cease.

Lastly, righteousness will turn our *weakness to strength*. The powers of man, independent of divine grace, remain the same after conversion as before : of himself he can do nothing^a. But that divine principle which actuates the godly, is mighty in operation : however numerous or powerful their enemies may be, the " grace of Christ is sufficient for them^o ;" and the weakest in the universe may say, " Through Christ strengthening me I can do all things^p." Their inherent weakness does not at all militate against this assertion ; for, when they are weakest in themselves their strength is at the height : and when they look unto their Lord for help, " he will perfect his strength in their weakness^q." Survey for a moment the Christian's conquests : his lusts are subdued, condemned, crucified^r : the world is overcome, and put under his feet^s : the powers of darkness are put to flight^t : and he is triumphing daily in the God of his salvation^u : so " strengthened is he with might in his inward man^x," and so " mighty are his weapons to destroy the strong holds of sin and Satan, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^y."

What shall we now say to *you who are destitute of this armour*? Shall we congratulate you on your prospects of victory? Shall we even flatter you with hopes of escaping with life? We cannot; we dare not. There is a possibility, that you might vanquish an armed host with a broken pitcher^z; or make the walls of an impregnable fortress to fall with the sound of rams'-horns^a: but to succeed without righteousness in your spiritual warfare is impossible : for the truth of God is pledged that you shall
perish,

^a John xv. 5.^o 2 Cor. xii. 9.^p Phil. iv. 13.^q See Heb. v. 13, 14.^r Gal. v. 24.^s 1 John v. 4, 5. Gal. vi. 14.^t James iv. 7.^u 2 Cor. ii. 14.^x Eph. iii. 16. Ps. cxxxviii. 3.^y 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.^z Judg. vii. 19—22. ^a Josh. vi. 4, 5

perish, if you continue in your unrighteous state ^b. “Awake then to righteousness, and sin not ^c.” Let your earnest prayer ascend up before God, that you may be made new creatures in Christ Jesus ^d, and be turned effectually from the power of Satan unto God ^e. But do not mistake: do not imagine, that any righteousness which you can attain in your own strength, will thus protect you; or that even that which is wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, has *in itself* such mighty efficacy: that to which such glorious powers are ascribed, is wrought in you by the Spirit of God: and after all, it is not your inherent goodness, but the grace of God, that must preserve you from your enemies. Your inherent righteousness will indeed be made use of by him; but still God must be acknowledged as the only author of all that is done either in, or by you; and the glory must be given to him alone.

To you who have “the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left ^f,” we say, “Stand fast in the Lord ^g.” Let nothing prevail upon you to lay aside your breast-plate for one moment: the instant you part with it, you are shorn of your strength, and are become weak as other men ^h. “Hold fast then that ye have, that no man take your crown ⁱ.” Thus shall your subtle adversary be foiled in all his attacks: he shall never be able to inflict on you any deadly wound. “Then shall you not be ashamed, when you have respect unto all God’s commandments ^k.” As “the righteousness of Christ sustained him ^l” amidst the fiercest assaults of his enemies, so shall you be preserved whilst fighting under his banners, and following his commands. His express promise to you is, “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, shall never be moved ^m.” And again, “The Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly ⁿ.”

^b 1 Cor. vi. 9.

• Acts xxvi. 18.

^h Judg. xvi. 19, 20.

^l Isai. lix. 16.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 34.

^f 2 Cor. vi. 7.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 11.

^m Ps. xv. 2, 5.

^d Eph. ii. 10.

^e Phil. iv. 1.

^k Ps. cxix. 6.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

DCVI. THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAVES.

Eph. vi. 14, 15. *Stand . . . having . . . your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*

THERE are many things which the art of war has rendered necessary for the success of an army, besides those rude weapons which an untaught savage would employ : and though they may be of inferior and subordinate use, still the want of them may prove as fatal, as the want of things that are of primary importance. It would have been to little purpose, in some situations, for soldiers to have their vital parts covered with armour, if they had not also shoes, or greaves, to protect their legs and feet against the sharp stakes, that were fixed in the ground to obstruct their progress. That this was a part of armour in the days of old, the sacred history informs us. Goliath had “greaves of brass upon his legs, as well as a target of brass between his shoulders^a.” And, when the irresistible success of the Chaldeans was foretold, it was particularly said, that “the latchet of their shoes should not be broken^b.” In reference to this part of a soldier's accoutrements, the apostle exhorts us to have our feet guarded ; and intimates, that as the military shoes gave to him who wore them, a readiness to march over any obstacles that might lie in his way, so “the gospel of peace” gives to the Christian soldier a “preparation,” or readiness, to prosecute his warfare without halting. This it does

I. As bringing peace into the conscience ; and

II. As producing a peaceful disposition in the soul.

I. The gospel of peace gives us a readiness to march, *in that it brings peace into the conscience.* The gospel is the one source of peace to sinful man. If he obtain peace from any other source, he “heals his wounds slightly, and says, Peace, peace, when there is no peace^c.” It is in the gospel only that a Saviour is revealed. But there we are informed, that God's only dear Son became our surety,

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 6.

^b Isai. v. 27.

^c Jer. vi. 14.

surety, and our substitute. There we behold our adorable Emmanuel bearing our sins in his own sacred body upon the tree, and effecting by the blood of his cross our reconciliation with God. Through him peace is proclaimed to a guilty world^d: and all who receive into their hearts the record concerning him, have their iniquities blotted out as a morning cloud: their burthens are from that time removed; they have “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^e.”

Without a measure of this peace, a person finds but little ability to exert himself in his Christian calling. The more difficult duties will be considered as irksome, and impracticable. And this arises from the natural constitution of the human mind: for, what readiness can he have to forego the pleasures of time, who cannot look forward with a comfortable hope to the eternal world? Will not his “hands hang down, his knees be feeble, and his heart be faint?” Yea, will not Satan take advantage of his weak state to make him weary of well-doing; and to “turn him utterly out of the way^f”; and to make him say in despondency, “There is no hope: I have loved idols; and after them will I go^g?” To what a degree the boldest champion may be enervated by apprehensions of God’s displeasure, we may see in the conduct of Joshua. There was but one found in all the thousands of Israel so intrepid as he: yet when he had reason to think that God had withdrawn his favour from him, “he rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the Ark, and put dust upon his head, and said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore has thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan^h.” Thus will “our spirit fail,” and our progress be stopped, if “the peace of God keep not our hearts and mindsⁱ.”

But let “the love of God be shed abroad in the heart,” and instantly “the rough places become plain, and the crooked,

^d Acts x. 36.^e Jer. ii. 25.^f Isai. lxi. 3.^g Josh. vii. 6, 7.^h Heb. xii. 12, 13.ⁱ Isai. lvii. 16.

crooked, straight^k:" the "paths of religion become paths of pleasantness and peace." The most self-denying precepts are not then regarded as "hard sayings^l;" "nor are any of the commandments grievous^m." And though affliction cannot, in itself, be joyous, yet, as endured for the sake of Christ, it becomes a ground of joy: "having peace with God," says the apostle, "we glory in tribulations alsoⁿ."

Let us look into the scriptures and see how prompt *for obedience* the saints were made by a sense of God's pardoning love. No sooner had a live coal from off the altar been applied to the lips of the prophet Isaiah, in token of his acceptance with God, than he was willing, yea desirous, to undertake the most difficult and self-denying services^o. The Thessalonian converts were inferior to none in their attachment to Christ: and, if we enquire what was the source of their distinguished zeal, we shall find that "the gospel had come to them, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;" and from that moment they became the most eminent followers of Christ, and his apostle^p. It was no easy service which Mary Magdalen performed in washing the Saviour's feet with her tears; especially in the presence of such a company: yet, much having been forgiven her, she loved much; and therefore testified her love in the best manner she was able, notwithstanding she was likely to meet with nothing but derision and contempt from the proud Pharisee, in whose house she was^q. But on this subject we naturally turn our eyes to the Apostle Paul, who "laboured more abundantly than all the apostles^r." What the main-spring was of his activity, we are at no loss to determine: it was "the love of Christ that constrained him:" he had been redeemed from death by the death of Christ; and therefore to Christ he consecrated all his time, and all his powers^s.

A readiness *for suffering* also arises from the same source. The "peace" which Moses enjoyed "through believing," rendered him so superior to all the pleasures of

^k Isai. xl. 4.^l John vi. 60.^m 1 John v. 3.ⁿ Rom. v. 1—3.^o Isai. vi. 6—8.^p 1 Thess. i. 5—7.^q Luke vii. 44—47.^r 1 Cor. xv. 10.^s 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

of sense, that "he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt; and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season¹." St. Paul is yet a more illustrious example, as indeed might well be expected, considering how exceeding abundant had been the mercy shewn towards him²." He had already endured far more than any other apostle for the sake of Christ; yet when the Spirit testified that bonds and afflictions still awaited him where he was going, and the Christians besought him not to proceed on his intended journey to Jerusalem; he replied, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am willing not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus³." And is it not thus also with ourselves? If our souls be animated with faith and love, we shall "count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations⁴;" yea, we shall "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ⁵:" and the very things which were intended by our enemies for the destruction of the spiritual life, will tend rather to its furtherance and establishment⁶.

The same preparation for prosecuting our warfare is imparted to us by the gospel,

II. *In that it produces a peaceful disposition in the soul.*

The soul of man is naturally proud, irritable, vindictive^b. An injurious act, or an insulting word, is sufficient to call forth all our angry passions, and in many instances, creates within us a resentment, that can be pacified with nothing less than the blood of the delinquent. Behold David, when Nabal refused to administer to his wants! This one act of churlish ingratitude must be expiated by the life of the offender, and not of the offender only, but of all the males belonging to him; and David himself goes forth to execute the murderous sentence^c. What an awful picture of human nature does this exhibit! But the gospel lays the axe to this "root of

¹ Heb. xi. 24—26.

² James i. 2.

³ Tit. iii. 3.

⁴ 1 Tim. i. 14.

⁵ Acts xxiv. 1.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22.

⁷ Acts xxi. 13.

⁸ Phil. i. 12.

of bitterness," and, by shewing us how much we have been forgiven, inclines us to exercise forgiveness. It teaches us to "turn the left cheek to him who has smitten us on the right^d:" and "in no wise to render evil for evil^e." It enjoins us rather to love our enemies; and, instead of retaliating their injuries, to relieve their wants^f.

Without this disposition we are but ill prepared to surmount the obstacles which our subtle adversary will place in our way. The scorn and contempt that we shall meet with, will dismay us. Our feelings will be wounded every step we take: and we shall soon be weary of well-doing. In order to judge of the consequences that will ensue, if we be destitute of this part of Christian armour, let us only look at the most eminent saints, when, through haste and inadvertence, they had neglected to fasten on their greaves aright: *Moses*, the meekest of mankind, was inflamed with wrath; and, by his angry, unadvised words, provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan^g. *Peter*, when he beheld his Lord apprehended in the garden, began to fight after the manner of ungodly men; and brought on himself that just rebuke; "Put up thy sword; for all who take the sword shall perish with the sword^h." *St. Paul* himself too, on one occasion, was so irritated with the injustice of his judge, that he brake forth into passionate revilings against his ruler and governor, and was constrained to apologize for his conduct in the presence of his enemiesⁱ. If then these holiest of men were thus sorely wounded through their occasional impatience, what advantage will not Satan gain over those, whose spirit is altogether lofty and unsubdued? Doubtless he will harass them in their march, till they turn back, and recede from the field of battle^k.

But let the gospel have its due effect; let it render us meek, patient, forbearing, and forgiving; let it transform us into the image of the meek and lowly Jesus, who when he was reviled, reviled not again; and when he suffered,

^d Matt. v. 39---41.

^e Numb. xx. 10---12.

^f Acts xxiii. 3---5.

^g Rom. xii. 17.

^h Matt. xxvi. 51, 52.

^k Matt. xiii. 21.

^f Ib. ver. 19, 20. &

[Matt. v. 44.

suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously¹; and the stumbling-blocks that offended us before, will appear unworthy of any serious regard. When our enemies persecute us, we shall be ready to weep over them for the evil which they bring upon themselves, rather than be incensed against them for the evil they do to us^m. We shall use no other weapons against them than "faith and patience": "being defamed, we shall intreat; being persecuted, we shall suffer it^o." Instead of being overcome of evil, we shall endeavour to overcome evil with good^p: and by "letting patience have its perfect work, we shall be perfect and entire, lacking nothing^q."

It may be objected perhaps, that, while we conduct ourselves in this way, we shall be trampled under foot of all, and be vanquished by all. But to this we answer, that, though we should be trampled under foot, we should not be vanquished: on the contrary, though "we be killed all the day long, and are as sheep appointed for the slaughter, yet in all these things shall we be more than conquerors^r." We may, like Stephen, be stoned to death: yet, if like him we can pray for our murderers^s, we have the noblest of all victories, *that* of overcoming a vindictive spirit: and, though we fall in the conflict, we maintain the field against all our enemies. Who, do we suppose, was victor, the Jews, who, at Satan's instigation, put our Lord to death; or Jesus, who expired a victim on the cross? We cannot doubt; for we are told in the scriptures, that, "through death, Jesus overcame death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^t:" yes; "on his very cross he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it^u." Nor can we more effectually manifest our superiority to all the powers of darkness, than by "resisting unto blood in our strife against sin^x." Were we to become our own avengers, we should "give place to the devil^y;" but by suffering with our Lord,

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^o 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

^p Rom. viii. 36, 37.

^q Col. ii. 14, 15.

^m Luke xix. 41, 42.

^p Rom. xii. 21.

^r Acts vii. 60.

^s Heb. xii. 4.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 12.

^o James i. 4.

^t Heb. ii. 14.

^y Eph. iv. 27.

Lord, we become partners of his victory^z, and partakers of his glory^a.

What remains now but earnestly to *exhort* you to get "your feet shod with" this blessed gospel? Consider how many devices Satan has to wound your feet, and to cast you down. We have already noticed persecution, as a very principal engine used by him to obstruct your progress. But there are other means whereby he frequently effects his deadly purpose: many whom he could not stop by persecution, he has turned out of the way by error. Look into the epistles of St. Paul, and see how many he has "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ^b." He has his ministers, as well as Christ; and in outward appearance they are "ministers of righteousness;" nor are they themselves conscious that they are his agents. They propagate what they themselves believe, and oftentimes with a zeal worthy of a better cause. But they themselves are blinded by him; and then are used as his instruments to overthrow the faith of others^c. Which of the churches, planted in the apostolic age, was free from their influence? In which were there not "some who perverted the gospel of Christ^d," and some who, by their means, were "turned aside after Satan^e?" At Rome there were those who made it their business to "cause divisions; and by good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple^f." At Corinth, the church was so distracted by them, that Christian love was almost banished; and nothing but "debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults," obtained amongst them, insomuch that the apostle threatened to exert his apostolic authority, and to inflict on them some signal judgments, if they did not reform their conduct before he visited them again^g. As for the Galatian church, such an ascendancy had the false teachers gained over them, that there was scarcely one who retained his integrity: almost all of them had embraced, what

^z Rev. xii. 10, 11.

^a 2 Tim. ii. 12. and Rom. viii. 17.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^c Ib. ver. 13—15. with Rev. iii. 9. Such ministers with their hearers are "*the synagogue of Satan*," who is their teacher, their instigator, and their god.

^d Gal. i. 7.

^e 1 Tim. v. 15.

^f Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

^g 1 Cor. i. 10, 11, & iii. 3, 4. and 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21. & xiii. 2, 10.

what St. Paul calls, "another gospel;" and, so entirely had they transferred their regards from him to their new teachers, that notwithstanding "they would, not long before, have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them unto him," they now considered him in no other light than "an enemy^h." At Ephesus also there were some who, like "children, were tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, while others, by sleight and cunning craftiness, were lying in wait to deceive themⁱ." At Philippi too, there were "dogs and evil workers, of whom it was needful for them to beware^k." But time would fail us to enumerate the heresies that were propagated, and the apostasies that were occasioned by them, even in the purest ages of the church. The epistles to Timothy and Titus are full of complaints respecting these deceivers, and of *cautions to avoid all intercourse, either with them, or with their followers*^l.

Now let any one say whether, after so many sad examples, he himself needs not to be well established in the true gospel, lest he be "led aside by the error of the wicked, and fall from his own stedfastness^m?"

But it will be asked, How shall I know the true gospel from those counterfeits which are proposed for my acceptance? To this we answer, The true gospel is a "gospel of peace." It is a gospel which sets forth Jesus as our hope, "our *peace*," and our allⁿ. It is a gospel which leads us to "shew all meekness^o," and, "as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men^p." Particularly also will it prompt us to seek the welfare of the church, and to "follow the things which make for peace, and

^h Gal. i. 6. and iv. 9—11, 15—17. and v. 7, 8.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 14.

^k Phil. iii. 2.

^l 1 Tim. i. 3, 4, 6, 7, 19, 20. and iv. 1, 6. and v. 12, 15. and vi. 3, 4, 5, ("from such withdraw thyself;") 20, 21. and 2 Tim. i. 13, 14, 15. and ii. 16—18, 23. and iii. 5, ("from such turn away;") 6, 7, 8, 9, 13. and iv. 3, 4, 14, 15. Tit. i. 9, 10, 11, 13, 14. and iii. 9, 10, 11. See also Rom. xvi. 17, 18. before cited, "avoid them;" and 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2. and 1 John ii. 19. and iv. 1. and 2 John 7, 10, 11. "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed," &c. and 3 John 10. and Jude 4. and Rev. ii. 14, 15, 20, 24.

^m Heb. xiii. 9. 2 Pet. iii. 17.

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 1. Eph. ii. 14—17. Col. iii. 11.

^o Tit. iii. 2.

^p Rom. xii. 18.

and things wherewith one may edify another^a." Whoever therefore would turn us from Christ as the foundation of our hope; or would "cause divisions and offences in the church," in order to "scatter the flock of Christ, and to draw them" from their proper fold^r; we have reason to think him no other than a "wolf in sheep's clothing^s;" a minister of Satan in the garb of a "minister of righteousness:" and we should beware lest, by listening to such an one, our "unstable souls be beguiled^t," and we "fall so as never to be renewed unto repentance^u." We must not only take heed *how* we hear, but *what* we hear^x: for if "whole houses were subverted^y" in the days of the apostles, and "all the Christians in Asia were turned away from" the ministry of St. Paul^z, there is no minister whom we may not be induced to forsake, nor is there any one so established in the truth but he has need to pray that he may be kept from error.

Surely we need no stronger arguments to enforce the exhortation of the text. Let us get the knowledge of the gospel: let us receive it, not as a theory merely, but as a practical and living principle, that shall influence our hearts and lives. And when we have received it, let us be tenacious of it; let us "hold fast the form of sound doctrine that we have received^a." Let us make use of it to keep us firm in the midst of difficulties, and stedfast in the midst of errors. Let us "be ever on our guard, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble us, and thereby many be defiled^b." Finally, let us "stand fast in the Lord^c:" so we shall, like our Lord himself, "endure the cross, and despise the shame, and sit down as victors on the right hand of the throne of God^d."

^a Rom. xiv. 19.^r Acts xx. 29, 30.^s Matt. vii. 15.^t 2 Pet. ii. 14.^u Heb. vi. 6.^x Luke viii. 18, with Mark iv. 24.^y Titus i. 11.^z 2 Tim. i. 15.^a 2 Tim. i. 13.^b Heb. xii. 15.^c Phil. iv. i.^d Heb. xii. 2.

DCVII. THE CHRISTIAN'S SHIELD.

Eph. vi. 16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the armour of the ancients was generally so constructed, that it could repel any weapon that might come against it, the warrior did not conceive himself to be completely armed without a shield. In reference to the Christian soldier, this observation may be applied with still greater propriety; because, however excellent the different pieces of his armour may be, not one of them will suffice for his protection, unless it be itself also covered by the shield of faith. As “without faith it is impossible to please God,” so without faith it is impossible to withstand Satan. That powerful adversary will soon pierce through our “truth” and “righteousness,” if they be exposed to his assault without any additional defence. On this account the apostle directs, that “above all,” and in addition to all, we should “take the shield of faith.”

In illustrating this divine injunction we propose to shew
I. The office of faith in the Christian's armour.

II. Its transcendent excellence.

I. The office of faith in the Christian's armour.

The particular use of a shield is to ward off a blow from any part of the body, that may be menaced; and for that end it is to be applied in every direction, as occasion may require.

Now Satan strikes sometimes at one part, and sometimes at another, according as the different parts may seem most open to his attack. And the temptations with which he makes his assault, are as “fiery darts,” which fly with incredible velocity, and are calculated to inflame the soul with their deadly poison.

The office of faith, and its power to repel these darts, will distinctly appear, while we shew how it enables the Christian to foil Satan in all his attempts to wound either his *head*, or *heart*.

Satan

Satan has many fierce and fiery temptations, whereby he endeavours to wound the *head*. There is not any thing so horrid or blasphemous, which he will not suggest to the mind. Even *atheism* itself is not so shocking, but he is capable of impressing the idea of it upon the soul, and of leading men to an adoption of it in practice, at least, if not also in theory and judgment^a. From the apparent inequality that there is in the dispensations of Providence, Satan raises a doubt whether there be a God; or, at least, whether he interfere at all in the concerns of men^b, or will judge the world in righteousness at the last day^c. He will take occasion also from the difficulties that there are in scripture to draw men to *infidelity*. “How can that be the word of God which is so full of contradictions? And who can know with any certainty what it declares to us, when those who profess to believe it, are of such opposite sentiments?” By such temptations as these he assaults chiefly the avowed enemies of God. But there are other temptations whereby he labours (and with too much success) to turn from the faith those who confess the divine authority of the scriptures. He will draw them into *errors* of various kinds, and thus undermine the principles which he could not destroy by open assault. Time would not suffice to point out the innumerable errors to which he has given birth, and by which he has destroyed the souls of men: but there is one way in which almost all of them have been produced and propagated: *he induces men to take some one truth of scripture, and to magnify its importance beyond all due bounds, and to exalt it, not only above all other truths, but to the utter exclusion of them*; and thus he founds error upon truth, and the most “damnable heresies” upon the sacred records. Mark the different heresies, and examine them by this test; and the truth of the observation will immediately appear. Because our blessed Saviour was a man, and both lived and died as an example to his followers, therefore the *Socinians* affirm that he was *only* a man, and that he died *only* as an example; and thus they

^a Ps. xiv. 1.^b Ps. lxxiii. 12, 13.^c Zeph. i. 12.

they set aside both his divinity and atonement. Because the Spirit of God is represented as dwelling in believers, therefore the *Mystics* reduce all religion to a vain conceit about the light within them; from a regard to which, they overlook the work of Christ for them, yea, and supersede the plainest institutions of religion, and, in a very great degree, the scriptures themselves. In the same manner, the *Antinomian* advocate for faith excludes good works from his system; while the *Moralist*, from an ignorant zeal for good works, discards all concern about the faith of Christ. The rigid *Predestinarian* asserts the sovereignty of God to the subversion of man's freedom and responsibility; while *the contender for the freedom and sufficiency of man's will*, obliterates the decrees of heaven, and denies his dependence on God.

To enter more minutely into these various heresies would lead us too far from our subject. The point to be illustrated is, How does faith enable us to avoid them? But previous to this enquiry, it will be proper to shew briefly, that these errors do indeed proceed from Satan as their author; and that they are not unfitly compared to fiery darts.

Nothing can be plainer in the scriptures than that Satan is the great author of error, not only because he is "the father of lies^d," and "the deceiver of the world^e," but because the propagators of error are expressly called his children^f, and his ministers^g; and they who have embraced error, are said to have been "tempted of the tempter^h," and to have "turned aside after Satan;ⁱ" and to be "of the synagogue of Satan^k."

This point will receive additional confirmation, by observing with what propriety his temptations are compared to "fiery darts;" for how suddenly do they strike the mind! how deeply also do they penetrate! and with what venom do they inflame the soul! Truly "they set on fire the whole course of nature; and themselves are set on fire of hell^l." St. Paul speaks of those who are turned from the truth as being "bewitched^m;" and indeed, when

^d John viii. 44.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 15.

^f Rev. iii. 9.

^g Rev. xii. 9.

^h 1 Thess. iii. 5.

ⁱ James iii. 6.

^f Acts xiii. 10.

ⁱ 1 Tim. v. 15.

^m Gal. iii. 1.

when we see what infatuation seizes them, how their understandings are blinded, their judgments warped, their conscience perverted, and how they are carried away by their own pride and self-sufficiency, without ever considering what spirit they are of, or conceiving it possible that they should be misled; we cannot but confess that they are the unhappy victims of satanic agency.

Now we come to the point proposed, to consider how faith repels these fiery darts.

Faith, provided it be a true and living faith, receives the word of God simply on the authority of him that revealed itⁿ. It staggers not at any difficulties either in the dispensations of his providence, or the declarations of his grace. Conscious of man's inability to comprehend even the most common matters in their full extent; the believer submits his reason to God, and receives without gainsaying whatsoever divine wisdom has revealed^o. Now the interference of God in the government of the world, even in the falling of a sparrow^p, or of the hairs of our head^q, is most clearly asserted in the inspired volume; and, on that account, no occurrence whatever is suffered to weaken the conviction, that all things are under his immediate control^r. Nor do the difficulties that are in scripture at all lessen its authority in the believer's eyes: whatever he cannot account for as arising from the circumstances under which the scriptures have been handed down to us, he puts to the score of his own ignorance, and contentedly says, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter^s." And, as to all the heresies that have been broached in the Christian church, he has one way of repelling all: he "compares spiritual things with spiritual^t;" not hastily rejecting any plain declaration of God, because he cannot discern its harmony and agreement with some other declaration: he rather looks to God for the teachings of his Spirit; and keeps his mind ready to embrace whatever may tend to his own humiliation, or to the glory of God.

If

ⁿ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^o James i. 21.

^p Matt. x. 29.

^q Matt. x. 30.

^r Isai. xlv. 7.

^s John xiii. 7.

^t 1 Cor. ii. 13.

If it be thought, that still he will be as open to receive error as truth, we answer, that God has promised to “guide him into all truth^u,” and that every believer has within himself the witness of all the fundamental doctrines of our religion^x; so that, “though he be a mere fool” in all other matters, “he shall surely be kept from error” in the concerns of his soul^y.

We must next call your attention to the temptations wherewith Satan assaults the *heart*. Under this term we include both the will and the affections; the former of which he endeavours to weaken by terrors, while he corrupts the latter by the allurements of sense.

As soon as that wicked fiend beholds any turning unto God, he will suggest to their minds the comforts they must sacrifice, the reproaches they must incur, the losses they must sustain, and the insuperable difficulties they must encounter; that so he may shake their resolution, and divert them from their purpose. It was thus that he prevented the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan^z. It was thus also that he succeeded in damping the ardor of that wealthy youth, who, from love to his great possessions, relinquished all hope of an interest in Christ^a. And in the same manner does he prevail with thousands of the present day, who would gladly participate his blessings, if they could retain together with them their carnal attachments^b.

If he cannot succeed by these means, he will represent their case as hopeless; and dissuade them from prosecuting their course by the consideration, that their efforts will be in vain^c.

To others he will propose the pleasures of sense. He will set before them, as he did before our Lord^d, the glory of the world; he will draw their attention to “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life^e.” He will represent these things in the most fascinating view; well knowing, that if he can but induce them to love either the pleasures, the riches, or the honours of the

^u John xvi. 13.

^y Isai. xxxv. 8. with Ps. xxv. 9.

^z Matt. xix. 21, 22. ^b Matt. viii. 19—22.

^d Matt. iv. 8, 9.

^x 1 John v. 10.

^z Numb. xiv. 1—4.

^e Jer. xviii. 12.

^c 1 John ii. 15, 16.

the world, he has accomplished his purpose, and effectually alienated their hearts from God^f.

Now these also are as "fiery darts," which, if they once enter into the soul, will burn up all the good that is within it, and destroy it utterly.

But faith is as useful to protect the heart, as to defend the head. As it obviates every difficulty that may perplex the understanding, so it wards off every thing that may intimidate or defile the soul.

To the temptations that assault the will, faith opposes *the importance* of eternal things: "Be it so; I must endure much if I will adhere to my purpose of serving God: but what shall I have to endure if I do *not* serve him? It is not a matter of mere choice, but of absolute necessity; for 'what shall it profit me if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' Let me not then hear of difficulties; for if Nebuchadnezzar's furnace were before me, it were better to suffer martyrdom at once with the Hebrew youths, than to renounce my allegiance to God^h. With respect to the hopelessness of my case, nothing but destruction can result from despair: for 'to whom can I go, if not to him who has the words of eternal life?' God helping me therefore I will go forward; and if I perish, I will perish^k at the foot of my Redeemer's cross, crying for mercy as the chief of sinners."

Then to the temptations that assault the affections, faith opposes *the excellency* of eternal things: "True; I might enjoy the pleasures of sin; but would they equal the pleasure of serving God, and especially those 'pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore?' Are not 'the unsearchable riches of Christ,' together with 'the honour that cometh of God,' sufficient to counterbalance any riches or honours that I may forego for Christ's sake? Avaunt, Satan, for, what thou offerest me is poor, transient, delusive: whereas the blessedness
of

^f Matt. vi. 24, with James iv. 4.

^g Matt. xvi. 26.

^h Dan. iii. 18.

ⁱ John vi. 68.

^k Alluding to Esth. iv. 16. and to 2 Kings vii. 4.

of the saints, both in this world and the next, is substantial, exquisite, everlasting." Thus it was that Moses argued, when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season:" and the principle that dictated the argument, was "faith¹." This was his "shield;" and the same will enable us also to repel the darts of Satan, however fiercely they be hurled, and however formidably they may come against us.

Having thus illustrated the office of faith, we proceed to point out

II. Its transcendent excellence

Somewhat of this has already appeared: but the high encomium which the apostle bestows on this piece of armour in particular above all others, manifestly demands a more distinct consideration.

We may observe then in commendation of faith, considered as the Christian's shield, that its *use is universal*; its *application is easy*; its *success is sure*.

First, *its use is universal*. All the other parts of armour have their distinct province, to which they are confined. "Truth" and "righteousness" defend *the heart*; but they are of no use at all to protect *the head*. But faith is universally applicable to every species of temptation. Faith discerns *the truth* of the gospel, and thereby is fitted to preserve *the head from error*: it discerns also *the importance and excellence* of the gospel, and is therefore proper to preserve *the heart from sin*. It is no less useful to *the feet*; for we "stand by faith^m," and "walk by faithⁿ." Every step we take is safest under the guidance of faith, because it both affords us the best light, and enables us to walk without stumbling even in the dark^o.

Let this consideration then operate on all, and stir us all up to seek faith. Let us not hastily conclude that we possess this principle; for "all men have not faith^p." "Faith is the gift of God^q:" nor can we have it, unless it have been given us from above. O that all would seek
it

¹ Heb. xi. 24—26.

^m 2 Cor. i. 24.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 7.

^o Isai. l. 10. Mic. vii. 8.

^p 2 Thess. iii. 2.

^q Phil. i. 29.

it at the hands of a reconciled God! Beloved brethren, be not satisfied with "the girdle of sincerity," or "the breast-plate of righteousness," or "the greaves of gospel peace:" they are all good and useful in their place; but it is faith, that gives even to them their chief strength; and it is faith, by which alone you can ever be victorious. Does the world tempt you? "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith^r." Does corruption harass you? you must "purify your heart by faith^s." Do your graces languish? It is faith alone that will set them to work in a way of love^t. And lastly, does the devil as a roaring lion threaten to devour you? It is by being stedfast in the faith that you must resist and vanquish him^u. Think then of the use and efficacy of faith; and pray to our adorable Saviour in the words of his apostles, "Lord, increase our faith^x."

In the next place we observe, that *its application is easy*. A shield is easily transferred from one position to another as occasion may require: and faith also quickly moves to the protection of any part that is attacked. We do not say, that it is an easy thing to *produce* faith; for it requires no less power than that which was exerted in raising Christ from the dead, to create faith in the heart^r. But when a person has faith, then, we say, it is easy for him to apply it for his defence. Suppose that our head were attacked with subtle heresies, and we had nothing but reason to counteract the temptation; how weak, how tardy, how uncertain would be its operation! The greater part of mankind would not have either time or ability to follow Satan in all his arguments; nor would those of the strongest intellect ever arrive at certainty; they could rise no higher than opinion at the last; while those of inferior talents would be lost in endless perplexity. Suppose again that our heart were attacked with some fiery lust, and we had no better defence than that which reason could afford; would passion listen to the voice of reason? As well might we attempt to extinguish flames that were consuming our house, by a slight sprinkling of water with the hand, as to stop the
course

^r 1 John v. 4.^s Acts xv. 9.^t Gal. v. 6.^u 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.^x Luke xvii. 5.^r Eph. i. 19, 20.

course of our passions by the efforts of unassisted reason. But in either of these cases, one single word from scripture will suffice. How was it that our great Captain repelled the fiery darts that were cast at him? "It is written;" "It is written;" "It is written^a." Thus he fought; and his vanquished enemy fled from before him. Thus also must we fight; and by opposing to our enemy this shield, the weakest and most ignorant is as sure of victory, as the strongest and most intelligent. In some respects the poor and ignorant have an advantage over the rich and learned; because they exercise faith, for the most part, in a more simple manner; whereas the others are ever trusting, more or less, to their own reason: and it is expressly with a view to confound the pride of reason, that God has given this superiority to the poor, and "chosen them, in preference to others, to be rich in faith^a."

Let this then operate as a further inducement with us to seek faith, since none of us can get the victory without it^b; and by it the very weakest on earth shall be able to remove mountains^c.

Lastly, we may affirm, that *its success is sure*. But for their faith, the most eminent of God's saints would have been destroyed. "I had fainted," says David, "if I had not believed^d:" and Peter would have been driven away as the chaff, if our Lord had not secured his faith from failing^e. On the other hand, we have a host of saints upon record, who, "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens: women received their dead to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being

^a Luke iv. 4, 8, 10.

^a James ii. 5.

^b Isai. vii. 9.

^c Matt. xvii. 20.

^d Ps. xxvii. 13.

^e Luke xxii. 32.

being destitute, afflicted, tormented. *These all obtained a good report THROUGH FAITH^f.* Further, if we search the annals of the world, we shall not find one single instance wherein believers were ultimately vanquished. On many occasions they have been wounded, and sorely too: even the father of the faithful himself was not so expert in the use of his shield as to ward off every blow^g: but believers are secured from any fatal stroke. Our Lord himself has pledged his word that they shall never perish^h; that, if they fall, they shall be raised up again to renew the contestⁱ; and, that "Satan shall finally be bruised under their feet^k."

Remarkable in this view are the expressions of the text. The idea of "*quenching*" the fiery darts of the wicked one, may perhaps refer to the custom of making shields sometimes of raw hides, that, in case a poisoned arrow should perforate them, the wound, which on account of the poison must otherwise have been fatal, might be healed. But perhaps the true meaning may be, that by faith we shall as completely defeat the malignant efforts of Satan, as by the extinguishing of fire we shall be delivered from its fury. Nor is this true of *some* temptations only; it extends to "*all*" without exception. Nor can it be said of some believers only, who are of the highest class; for all who are armed with the shield of faith, whether they be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, "*shall be able*" perfectly, and for ever, to subdue their adversary.

To all then we say, "Have faith in God^l:" if "ye have believed in the Father, believe also in Christ^m." "Believe in the Lord, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosperⁿ."

^f Heb. xi. 33—39.

^h John v. 24. and x. 28.

^k Rom. xvi. 20.

^m John xiv. 1.

^g Gen. xii. 12, 13. and xx. 2.

ⁱ Ps. xxxvii. 24. and cxlv. 14.

^l Mark xi. 22.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xx. 20.

DCVIII. THE CHRISTIAN'S HELMET.

Eph. vi. 17. *And take the helmet of salvation.*

THE generality of mankind have very inadequate ideas of the Christian warfare. They know but little of the enemies with whom we have to contend, or of the imminent danger to which we are exposed through their continual assaults. But, as some conception might be formed of the power of an enemy, by viewing the extensive preparations that were made to oppose them, so may we learn to estimate the difficulties of the spiritual warfare, by surveying the various parts of armour which God has prepared for our defence. We have already noticed the girdle and breast-plate, for the body; the greaves, for the legs and feet; the shield, for the head, in common with the rest of the body: but yet the head is not sufficiently protected; it must have a piece of armour more appropriate; a piece suited to its necessities, and fitted for its use. In the account given us of Goliath, we read that "he had *a helmet* of brass upon his head^a:" and such a piece of armour is provided for us also; we are required to "take the helmet of salvation."

In opening this subject we shall shew

I. What we are to understand by "salvation."

II. Its use and importance in the Christian warfare.

I. What are we to understand by the term "salvation?"

It is evident that the expression is elliptical; nor should we know how, with any certainty, to complete the sense, if the apostle himself had not supplied the defect in a parallel passage: but all doubt is removed by that exhortation in his epistle to the Thessalonians^b, "Let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and *for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*"

From hence we see that HOPE is the Christian's helmet. Yet, because there are various kinds of hope, and only

one

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 5.

^b 1 Thess. v. 8.

one that will afford the Christian any effectual protection, we must enter more particularly into the subject, and distinguish the scriptural hope from every other that may be mistaken for it.

In the first place then, true hope has *salvation for its object*. This is very strongly marked in different parts of scripture: for we are said to be “saved by hope^c ;” and salvation itself is sometimes called hope; they who look for salvation, are said to be “looking for that blessed hope^d :” at other times, hope is called salvation: we are exhorted in the text to take the helmet of *salvation*. There are many, whose hopes have respect indeed to eternal life; but they are unmindful of their lost estate; they are regardless of that way of deliverance, which God has provided for them through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus; they expect heaven, because they have done nothing to forfeit it: if they have sinned, they have not sinned in such a degree as to deserve the wrath of God; they have committed only common and venial faults; they have, moreover, done many things to counterbalance their evil deeds; and therefore they hope for heaven as the award of *justice*, rather than as a gift of *unbounded mercy*. This, for distinction sake, we may call a *self-righteous* hope: whereas the hope of every true Christian is founded altogether on the merits of Christ, and has respect to salvation, as purchased for us by *his* obedience unto death.

Further, true hope has *God for its author*. There is scarcely a person to be found in the world, who, if the question were put to him, Do you hope to go to heaven if you die in your present state? would not answer in the affirmative. If we should proceed to enquire, Whence got you that hope? they would tell us, that they had always had it. But this is a *presumptuous* hope, the offspring of ignorance and conceit. Widely different from this is the Christian's hope. He has trembled for his state: he has seen his guilt and danger: he has “fled for refuge to the hope set before him.” God has revealed to him the riches of his grace; and has shewn him that, “where sin hath abounded, grace shall much more abound.”

^c Rom. viii. 24.

^d Titus ii. 13.

abound." The Holy Spirit has "taken of the things of Christ, and shewn them unto him:" yea, he has convinced him, that "the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse him from all sin;" and that "all who believe in Christ, are justified from all things." In this way God has inspired him with hope, that, notwithstanding all his past iniquities, he shall obtain salvation: and though there may be a considerable difference as to the degree of fear or terror that may precede this hope, yet this is the way in which it is invariably wrought in the soul. Hence it is said, that "God begets us unto a lively hope^e;" and "gives us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace^f;" and that "he fills us with joy and peace in believing, that we may *abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost^g*."

Once more; true hope has *holiness for its inseparable companion*. Whatever may be imagined to the contrary, there is no salvation to those who live in sin. Christ came to "save us *from* our sins," but not *in* them. We are expressly told that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ^h." There is a kind of hope that will consist with the indulgence of secret lust, and with a total want of holy dispositions: but that is "the hope *of the hypocrite* which perisheth, and shall be swept away with the besom of destructionⁱ. But the hope of the upright is far different from this: it will admit of no allowed sin, whether of omission or of commission: on the contrary, we are told, that "he who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as God is pure^k:" he will retain no bosom lusts; he will not so much as wish for any exceptions and reserves in his obedience to God: he will desire, and endeavour to be "holy as God is holy, and perfect even as his Father that is in heaven is perfect."

This then may serve to distinguish the Christian's hope from that which is *self-righteous, presumptuous, or hypocritical*;

^e 1 Pet. i. 3.

^f 2 Thess. ii. 16.

^g Rom. xv. 13.

^h Titus ii. 11—13.

ⁱ Job viii. 13, 14.

^k 1 John iii. 3.

critical; and consequently to determine with considerable accuracy, what that hope is, that is connected with salvation. And though the text itself does not so much as mention hope, and much less discriminate between its different kinds, yet the very omission of these things points out the evident propriety of marking clearly what the import of salvation is, and what that is which alone deserves the name.

We may now, with much greater advantage, proceed to shew

II. The use and importance of salvation in the Christian warfare

The importance of this helmet is not obscurely intimated in that prophecy respecting Christ, wherein it is said “He put on righteousness as a breast-plate, and a *helmet of salvation* upon his head¹.”

But, to mark it more distinctly, we may observe, that it *prepares us for* conflicts, *sustains us in* them, and *brings us victorious through* them.

Hope *prepares us for* conflicts. A man armed with a helmet, feels himself ready to battle: he fears not to meet his adversary, because he has a defence, which, he trusts, will prove sufficient for his preservation. Thus a man that has a hope of salvation, enters into the combat with holy confidence. He is not intimidated by the frowns of an ungodly world, because he “knows in whom he has believed, and that God is able to keep that which he has committed to him^m.” He says with David, “Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in him will I be confidentⁿ.” This subject cannot be more strongly illustrated than in Caleb and the whole nation of the Israelites. The nation were terrified at the report of the spies, and, instead of proceeding to fight against the Canaanites, proposed to appoint a captain, and go back again into Egypt: but Caleb, whose hope was lively, stood unmoved, and strove to animate his countrymen with an assurance of easy victory^o. And thus,

¹ Isai. lix. 17.

^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

ⁿ Ps. xxvii. 3.

^o Numb. xiii. 30, 31. and xiv. 1—4.

thus, while the hearts of others are failing them for fear, and they "turn back unto perdition," rather than contend with their adversaries, the true Christian, "encourages himself in his God^p," and makes up his mind to die or conquer.

Further, a true hope will *sustain us in* conflicts. Many who have shewn intrepidity at first, have yet fainted when their trials were severe and of long continuance. But he who has a hope full of immortality, will never yield, however painful the conflict may be, and however heavy the pressure. "The Patriarchs continued to sojourn in the land of promise as mere pilgrims, notwithstanding they had frequent opportunity to return" to their own country and kindred: but they accounted the trial as nothing, because "they looked for a better country, that is, an heavenly;" and expected in due time to arrive at "a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God^q." Many women also who were tortured by the most ingenious cruelty even unto death, yet declined accepting deliverance upon dishonourable terms, that they might be accounted worthy to obtain a better resurrection^r. St. Paul too, that bright pattern of all virtues, assigns this as the reason why he did not faint under his unparalleled afflictions: "his outward man decayed; but his inward man was renewed day by day:" and his afflictions appeared to him light and momentary, because he looked from the vanities of time and sense to the invisible realities of eternity^s.

Thus shall *our* trials rather confirm, than weaken, our hope, provided it be scriptural and genuine: "our tribulation shall work patience; our patience experience; and our experience, hope^t."

Once more: true faith will *bring us victorious through* our conflicts. The Lord Jesus Christ himself in this respect tully verified the prophecies respecting him; and set us an example, which it is our privilege to follow. The prophet Isaiah represents Jesus as speaking in these triumphant strains: "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face

^p 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

^r Heb. xi. 35.

^q Heb. xi. 8—10, 13—16.

^s 2 Cor. iv. 16—18.

^t Rom. v. 3, 4.

face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who shall contend with me? let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; Who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up^u." Thus will hope enable *us* also to anticipate the victory, while yet we are fighting on the field of battle: through it, we may defy all the powers of earth or hell ever to "separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus^x." Yea, such "an anchor shall it be to our souls," that we shall be steadfast^y in the midst of this tempestuous world, and be enabled to outride the storm, which causes many to "make shipwreck of their faith^z," and ultimately sinks them to everlasting perdition^a.

Let me then entreat you, first, to *get this helmet*. Be not satisfied with a delusive hope that will fail you in the day of necessity; but bring it to the trial: see whether it be able to endure the assaults of your adversary: compare it with the description which God himself gives of that, which is true and saving. Look well to it that it be not self-righteous, presumptuous, or hypocritical. Be well assured that it is of heavenly temper: and let daily experience shew, that it enables you to "lift up your head above all your enemies," whether outward or inward, terrestrial or infernal. Think with yourselves, how awful it would be to find, either in the hour of death or in the day of judgment, that you had deceived yourselves with some phantom of your own imagination, and formed expectations of happiness that cannot be realized. O do not expose yourselves to such a dreadful disappointment. Remember the fate of the foolish virgins: they hoped that their lamp of profession would suffice, though they were destitute of the oil whereby alone they could make their light to shine. Through this they perished^b, as thousands of others have done, by resting in their religious privileges, or their outward conformity to the divine will, when they had not the inward principle of renewing, sanctifying grace.

^u Isai. l. 7—9.^x Rom. viii. 31—39.^y Heb. vi. 19.^z 1 Tim. i. 19.^a Heb. x. 39.^b Matt. xxv. 4, 8—11.

grace^c. But let it not be so with you. "Judge yourselves, that you may not be judged of the Lord^d." And beg of God to give you that "hope, that shall never make you ashamed^e."

Next, we would urge you to *keep on this helmet* in all your conflicts. Constant will be Satan's endeavours to deprive you of it; and great his triumph if he succeed. Above all things, be careful that you "cast not away your confidence, but hold fast the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end^f." If at any time you begin to be distracted with doubts and fears; instantly check yourselves as David did; "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? *hope* thou in God^g."

Though you are to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling^h," you must "not run as uncertainly, or fight as one that beateth the airⁱ:" you must remember who is engaged for your support; and that "he is faithful who hath promised^k." It is true, "you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise^l:" but "if you hope for that you see not, such a hope implies, that you will with patience wait for it^m." St. James proposes to you the examples of the husbandman: "Behold," says he, "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient: stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nighⁿ;" and then shall your confidence be richly rewarded^o. "Gird up then the loins of your mind; be sober, and *hope to the end* for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ^p." This is the way, the sure way, to conquer. "Be stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing assuredly, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^q."

Lastly,

^c Matt. vii. 21—23.

^f Heb. iii. 6, 14.

ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

^m Rom. viii. 25.

^p 1 Pet. i. 13.

^d 1 Cor. xi. 31.

^g Ps. xlii. 11.

^k Heb. x. 23.

ⁿ James v. 7, 8.

^e Rom. v. 5.

^h Phil. ii. 13.

^l Ib. ver. 36.

^o Heb. x. 35.

^q 1 Cor. xv. 58.

Lastly, *let that which is your defence, be also your ornament.* There is not a more ornamental part of the soldier's armour, than the helmet. Nor is there any thing that more adorns the Christian, than a lively, steadfast, and consistent hope. In the exercise of hope, he stands, as it were, on the top of Pisgah, and surveys the land of promise, the land that floweth with milk and honey^r. He longs to leave this dreary wilderness, and to "enter into the joy of his Lord." Knowing that "when his earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, he groans earnestly, desiring that mortality may be swallowed up of life^s." If he had crowns and kingdoms in his possession, still he would account it "far better to depart and to be with Christ^t." He is "looking for, and hastening to, the coming of the day of Christ^u;" and thus has "his conversation in heaven," while yet he remains a sojourner upon earth^x. View the Christian in this frame, and confess, that the sun shining in his meridian strength, glorious as it is, "has no glory, by reason of the Christian's glory that excelleth." This, this, Christians, is the state in which you ought to live. Were you more habitually in this frame, your years of warfare would seem as nothing, for the greatness of the prize for which you contend^y. You can scarcely conceive what an energy such a frame would give to your souls. You would soon come to Jesus with joy and wonder, like his disciples of old, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name:" and he in return would increase your confidence by saying, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and *nothing shall by any means hurt you^z*." Do but consider, how weak will Satan's temptations be, when you thus abound in hope! how little will any thing be able to move you, when you are thus, by joyful anticipation, "sitting already with Christ in heavenly places!"

^r Deut. xxxiv. 1.^s Phil. i. 23.^t Phil. iii. 20.^u Luke x. 17—19.^v 2 Cor. v. 1—4.^w 2 Pet. iii. 12.^x Alluding to Gen. xxix. 20.

places^a!" Beloved brethren, this is your perfection: "you will come behind in no gift, when you are thus waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus^b." Whatever you have to do, you will do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance^c." May God enable you thus to live, till faith shall be lost in sight, and hope be consummated in enjoyment!

^a Eph. ii. 16.

^b Compare 2 Cor. xiii. 9. with 1 Cor. i. 7.

^c Col. iii. 22.

DCIX. THE CHRISTIAN'S SWORD.

Eph. vi. 17. *Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

THE Christian's warfare is principally of the defensive kind; yet not so entirely, but that he must follow up the advantages which he has at any time gained, and seek the utter destruction of those enemies which infest his soul: after sustaining their assaults, he must himself become the assailant: having resisted the world and sin, he must proceed to overcome^a, condemn^b, and crucify^c them; and having withstood Satan, he must go on to "bruise him under his feet^d." That he may be enabled to carry this into effect, God has provided for him an offensive weapon, which, if skilfully used, shall accomplish the ruin of all his enemies. To the consideration of this we are led by the text; in elucidating which we shall notice

I. The description given of the Christian's sword.

II. Its usefulness to him in all his combats.

I. Let us notice the description given of the Christian's sword.

What the sword is to a warrior, that the Scriptures are to

^a 1 John v. 4.

^c Gal. v. 24. and vi. 14.

^b Heb. xi. 7.

^d Rom. xvi. 20.

to a child of God; they enable him to inflict a deadly wound on his adversaries, and to subdue them before him.

Now the appellation here given to the scriptures is deserving of particular attention. They are called, "the word of God," and "the sword of the Spirit."

They are called, with great propriety, "the word of God;" first, *because they were inspired by him*. They were indeed written by men; but men were only the agents and instruments that God made use of: they wrote only what God by his Spirit dictated to them: so that in reality, the whole scripture was as much written by the finger of God, as the laws were, which he inscribed on two tables of stone, and delivered to his servant Moses. And to this the scriptures themselves bear witness; for in them it is said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God^e;" and again, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^f."

But they are called the word of God, not merely as being inspired by him, but also *as being a revelation of his mind and will to man*. In them his eternal counsels are opened to the world. In them he has declared in what way he will be reconciled to his offending creatures. In them he has displayed all the riches of his grace; and exhibited all his perfections as united and glorified in the person of Christ. In short, whatever could lead to the establishment of truth, or the refutation of error^g, to the correction of sin, or the promotion of righteousness, all is contained in that inspired volume, in which there is nothing superfluous, nothing defective: which therefore may be *wholly*, and *exclusively*, called, "the word of God."

But there is yet another, and a very important, ground of this appellation, namely, that the scriptures are *the voice of God to every individual of mankind*. It is thought by some, that the scriptures are a mere record of transactions that passed many hundred years ago; and that, however true and authentic they may be, they are no otherwise

^e 2 Tim. iii. 16.

^f 2 Pet. i. 21.

^g 2 Tim. iii. 16. Περὶς ἡλεγχον.

otherwise interesting to us, than as matters of curiosity and pleasing instruction. Even the Epistles are supposed to relate only to the particular churches to which they were written : and thus the use of the scriptures with respect to ourselves is wholly superseded. But we are abundantly guarded against this fatal error by the application which the inspired writers themselves make of numerous passages, which at first sight appear to be as remote from us, as any in the Bible. Let us select a few, that will place this matter in its true light. First, *take an historical fact*. A contention arose in Abraham's family. His child by Hagar mocked and insulted the child which he had by Sarah. Sarah took part with her son ; and desired, that Hagar, with her son Ishmael, should be cast out, and no longer be suffered to dwell in Abraham's house. Now what could the children's quarrels, and the mother's revenge, have to do with *us* ? The apostle tells us, that the casting out of the bond-woman and her son was intended to shew, that they who were yet in bondage to the law, should not have any part in the inheritance of those, who were made free by the gospel^b. Next, *take an occasional declaration*. Abraham had exercised faith in God ; and God declared, that his faith should be counted to him for righteousness. In what respect, it may be asked, can this apply to *us* ? We answer with St. Paul, that this declaration was recorded, not for Abraham's sake alone, but for ours ; to inform us, that the way of justification before God was, not by works, but by faith onlyⁱ. Next, *take a personal promise*. God, who had commissioned Joshua to destroy the Canaanites, told him that he would not leave him or forsake him in this arduous attempt. Would any one conceive, that that promise had any respect to *us* ? Yet it had ; and, in dependence upon it, every believer may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper ; I will not fear what man can do unto me"^k. Lastly, take as *insignificant an ordinance* as any that is to be found in all the Mosaic ritual ; "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth

^b Compare Gen. xxi. 10, 12. with Gal. iv. 30.

ⁱ Compare Gen. xv. 6. with Rom. iv. 3, 23, 24.

^k Compare Josh. i. 5. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

treadeth out the corn." Now the utmost that this might be supposed to teach us, is, mercy to our beasts. But it had a further reference : God's concern was, not for oxen, but for *us* ; and this ordinance was intended to declare, that all who serve at the altar, should live of the altar¹.

Let this suffice to illustrate the point in hand. You see from *an historical fact, an occasional declaration, a personal promise, and an insignificant ordinance*, that whatever the scripture speaks, it speaks to *us*. There is not *a precept* which is not as binding upon *us* as on those to whom it was delivered : there is not *a threatening*, at which *we* have not cause to tremble ; nor *a promise*, on which *we* are not warranted to rely, if only we believe in Jesus Christ.

We come now to notice that other appellation given to the scriptures, "the sword of the Spirit." In a variety of views this description of them is just and appropriate.

It is by the scriptures that the Holy Spirit speaks to men. He did indeed in the early ages of the world enlighten men by dreams and visions ; but since the publication of the written word, and especially since the completion of the sacred canon, he has called men to the law and to the testimony^m ; "they have Moses and the prophets," says our Lord ; "let them read themⁿ:" and again, "Search the scriptures ; for in them ye have eternal life^o." We do not say indeed, that the Holy Spirit never uses any other means of quickening or comforting the souls of men : but the scriptures are the means by which he usually works^p ; nor does he ever work at all, but in a perfect conformity to them.

The scriptures are further called the sword of the Spirit, *because they derive all their power from the Spirit*. In themselves, they are like a sword sheathed, and lying upon the ground : they are a dead letter : they convey no spiritual light : they impart no spiritual energy : they carry with them neither conviction, nor consolation :
whether

¹ Compare Deut. xxv. 4. with 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10.

^m Isai. viii. 20.

ⁿ Luke xvi. 29.

^o John v. 39.

^p Eph. v. 26.

whether read or preached, they are equally without effect. Paul was conversant with the scriptures before his conversion; but could not see in them that Jesus was the Christ; nor could he learn from them the temper and disposition of a child of God. The ministry of Christ was attended with but small success: nor did the number of those who were converted by the apostles, bear any proportion to that of those who rejected their message: and, in the instances wherein they did succeed, the success was “not owing to Paul who planted, or to Apollos who watered, but to God who gave the increase^a.” The word then only came with any beneficial influence, when it came, not in word only, “but in the Holy Ghost^r,” and “in demonstration of the Spirit’s power^s,” and Lydia would have remained as unconcerned as others, if “the Lord had not opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken^t.”

But there is yet another reason why the scriptures are called the sword of the Spirit; namely, that *by them he has wrought the most stupendous miracles* in the conversion of men. They are indeed “the rod of his strength^u,” and have effected far greater miracles than ever the rod of Moses did. By them he has changed the hearts of men instantaneously, thoroughly, abidingly. By them, in the space of one hour, he transformed three thousand murderers into the very image of their God^x. In his hands, “the word was quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword: it pierced even to the dividing of the joints and marrow: it laid open the inmost thoughts of men^y,” and “through God it is still mighty to destroy the strong holds” of sin and Satan^z: and when “it shall have free course and be glorified in the world^a,” when he shall “gird it on his thigh, and ride on prosperously” in his career, it shall be “very sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies^b,” and all nations shall be subdued unto the obedience of faith^c.

This is the weapon with which the Christian is armed; and

^a 1 Cor. iii. 6.

^r Acts xvi. 14.

^s Heb. iv. 12.

^t Ps. xlv. 3—5.

^u 1 Thess. i. 5.

^x Ps. cx. 2.

^y 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^z 1 Cor. ii. 4.

^a Acts ii. 41.

^b 2 Thess. iii. 1.

^c Ps. lxxii. 9—11.

and with which he shall conquer. To the eye of sense indeed, he goes forth only like David, with his sling and a stone, against Goliath^d: but, like him, "he shall be strong, and do exploits^e." With *this* he is "thoroughly furnished unto all good works^f;" "nor shall any of his enemies be able to stand before him^g."

To illustrate the virtues of this sword, we shall proceed to shew

II. Its usefulness to him in all his combats

It is needless to make any remarks on the utility of a sword in general, since every one must of necessity be well acquainted with it. But the particular manner in which the scriptures answer the end of a sword to the Christian, is not so obvious. We may well therefore examine this point with care and accuracy, in order that we ourselves may be enabled to "handle the weapon" provided for us, and use it with dexterity and success.

The Christian's enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil. And the scripture enables him to defeat them: first, by *its clear directions*. Does the flesh plead for any unhallowed indulgence? the scripture says, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good^h." Does the world solicit his embrace? the scripture says again, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the worldⁱ." Does Satan exert his wiles in order to deceive? the scripture says, "Him resist^k." And it is worthy of remark, that it was by means of the directions of scripture that our Saviour himself vanquished his wicked adversary. Did Satan recommend him to turn stones into bread for his support? he answered, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God^l." Did Satan then urge him to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple with an assurance of miraculous preservation? he replied again, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God^m." Did Satan once more assault him with solicitations to fall down and worship him? he smote the fiend yet a third time with the same irresistible weapon: "It is written, Thou

^d 1 Sam. xvii. 40.

^e Josh. x. 8.

^k 1 Pet. v. 9.

^h Dan. xi. 32.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 9.

^l Matt. iv. 4.

^f 2 Tim. iii. 17.

^j 1 John ii. 15.

^m lb. ver. 7.

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serveⁿ." Thus Jesus conquered: and thus his people in all ages have subdued *their* enemies. David tells us whence his success arose: "I have hid thy word within me, that I might not sin against thee^o:" and, "By the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer^p." To *us* also he recommends an adoption of the same plan; "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? even by taking heed thereto according to thy word^q."

The scripture aids us, in the next place, by *its powerful motives*. As for all the motives that reason can suggest, the experience of all ages has proved them weak and inefficient. But the scripture sets before us the happiness of heaven and the misery of hell: and thus with irresistible efficacy addresses itself to our hopes and our fears. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things^r," saith the Lord; "but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him: he draws back unto perdition^s." When an enemy would allure us by the prospect of pleasure, or alarm us by the apprehension of suffering, with what indignation shall we spurn him from us, if we advert for one moment to the concerns of eternity! Shall I forego the blessedness of heaven for a momentary gratification? Shall I consign myself over to all the torments of hell rather than endure some momentary evil? What if the acquisition be ever so precious; or the loss be ever so severe? had I not better pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right hand, than be cast into hell fire for retaining them^t? "Depart then from me, all ye wicked; I will keep the commandments of my God^u."

There is yet another motive that operates more strongly on an ingenuous soul than either the hope of heaven, or the fear of hell; I mean, a concern for the divine glory. "Has God committed to me such a sacred trust? is the honour of God himself dependent upon my conduct? Will my fall occasion "his name to be blasphemed;" and my stability be the means of exalting his glory? How then shall

ⁿ Matt. iv. 10.

^q Ps. cxix. 9.

^r Mark ix. 44—49.

^o Ps. cxix. 11.

^p Rev. xxi. 7.

^s Ps. xvii. 4.

^t Heb. x. 38, 39.

^u Ps. cxix. 115.

shall I give way to the tempter? how shall I so violate my obligations to God, and bring dishonour upon him, whom I ought to love and serve with my whole heart?" Many of God's saints have found this a counterpoise to the strongest temptations^x: and it is obvious that these considerations united together, are well calculated to defeat our enemies, and to secure us a decisive victory over all.

The scriptures give us a further advantage over our enemies by means of *its rich encouragements*. Not to mention the eternal rewards that have been just adverted to, the scripture promises, that God will be with us in every conflict, and beat down our adversaries before our face. "Fear not," says he, "for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness^y." "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, for thou shalt thresh the mountains^z." Now what can withstand a man that is armed with such promises as these? What can oppose any effectual obstacle in his way? Are his enemies numerous? He says, "They are more that are with me, than they that are against me^a." Does he feel himself weak? he says, "God will perfect his own strength in my weakness^b." Under these circumstances he is like to Gideon, when going against the confederate hosts of Midian and Amalek. God had promised him the victory even without the intervention of a human arm: this promise he had confirmed by repeated signs, and even by an attestation from the enemy themselves. In dependence on God, he surrounded their camp with his little band of three hundred men; and, with no other weapons than a pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet, gained the most signal victory^c. So the Christian, "encouraging himself in his God," and depending on his promised aid, goes forth with power and effect. The very end for which such "great and precious promises were given him was, that by them he might be a partaker of the divine nature^d;" and he does improve them to this end; and finds that by means of them he is enabled to "cleanse himself

^x Gen. xxxix. 9. & xlii. 18. & Neh. v. 15.

^z Isai. xli. 14, 15. ^a 2 Kings vi. 16.

^c Judg. vii. 19.

^y Isai. xli. 10.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^d 2 Pet. i. 4.

himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^e.”

The last advantage which we shall mention as derived from the scripture, is that which it affords us by means of *its instructive examples*. How can any one relax his determination to destroy sin, when he contemplates the destruction which sin has brought on those who yielded to its baneful influence? When he reflects on the doom of the apostate angels, or on the deluge that overwhelmed the world, or on the fire and brimstone that consumed the cities of the plain, can he trifle with that, which has so greatly provoked the Majesty of heaven^f? If it be to despondency that he is urged by Satan, will he not repel the tempter instantly, as soon as he recollects the character of thousands who have found acceptance with God? Can he despair, that considers for one moment the case of David, of Manasseh^g, of the dying thief? Can he despair, who sees the persecuting Saul arrested in his career; or who reads the catalogue of crimes of which the Corinthian converts had been guilty^h? It may be that he is induced to think there is something peculiar in his case, which justifies in an extraordinary degree his desponding fears. But when he hears, that “no temptation can take him, but that which is common to manⁱ,” and then surveys that cloud of witnesses who were once conflicting like himself, but are now in heaven attesting the power and faithfulness of a redeeming God^k, he cannot but say, “Get thee behind me, Satan^l!” “thou wast a liar, and a murderer, from the beginning^m!” and shall I credit thy lies to the disparagement of my God?

In this way it was that the saints of old triumphed: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? (Now mark the inference) Therefore the redeemed of the Lord (and

we

^e 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 4—6, 9.

^g 2 Kings xxi. 1—9.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 13.

^k Heb. xii. 1.

^l Matt. iv. 10.

^m John viii. 44.

we amongst them) shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head : they shall obtain gladness and joy ; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away ⁿ." A completer triumph than this cannot possibly be conceived. Yet thus will the scripture enable us to triumph, if we duly mark the examples which it sets before us.

In concluding this subject, we would impress upon your mind two important REFLECTIONS.

First, *how thankful should we be for the holy scriptures!* One of the greatest advantages that the Jews possessed above the Gentile world, was, that to them had been committed the oracles of God^o. This advantage we enjoy in a still higher degree ; inasmuch as we have the light of the New Testament in addition to that of the Old. To judge properly respecting this, we should put ourselves in the situation of unenlightened heathens. They are all " led captive by the devil at his will : " and no wonder, since they see no means of escape from his assaults, or of resistance to his power. But we, if it be not utterly our own fault, are asserting our liberty, and victoriously contending with him. Even those who are far from having attained their full growth, if only they are skilled in exercising this potent weapon, " have overcome the wicked one ^p." Let then the scriptures be precious to us, " sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb ^q," and " dearer than our necessary food ^r." Let " our meditation be in them day and night ^s : " let them be " a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths ^t." Let them on all occasions be " our delight and our counsellors ^u." Then may we be assured that they shall be " the power of God to our salvation ^x : " for God's promise to Joshua is, in fact, addressed to every one of us ; " This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein ; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success ^y."

Next

ⁿ Isai. li. 9—11.

^q Ps. xix. 10.

^r Ps. cxix. 105.

^y Josh. i. 8.

^o Rom. iii. 2.

^t Job xxiii. 12.

^u Ib. ver. 24.

^p 1 John ii. 14.

^s Ps. i. 2.

^x Rom. i. 17.

Next it may be observed, *How earnestly should we seek the influences of the Holy Ghost!* Many, instead of handling the sword for the subjugating of their enemies, are really using it in their defence: they draw from the scriptures only what shall appear to countenance their lusts and errors; and thus “wrest them,” as the apostle says, “to their own destruction^z.” And if “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation be not given to us^a,” to guide us into all truth^b, we shall derive no greater benefit from the sacred volume than they. We may perhaps adopt the sentiments contained in it; but we shall never experience its power to transform the soul, till “the Spirit of God write it on the fleshly tables of our hearts^c.” It is “the Lord alone that giveth wisdom; and therefore, while we search the scriptures as for hid treasures, we must also lift up our voice to him in prayer for knowledge and understanding^d.” Let us look then to the Saviour, “out of whose mouth goeth a two-edged sword^e,” even to him who is “the captain of the Lord’s host^f,” and beg, that he would both use that sword to slay the enmity of our hearts^g, and enable us also to wield the same for the destruction of our enemies. Let us pray that “the arms of our hands may be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob^h.” And let us go forth, like David, “not with carnal weapons, as a sword, and a spear, and a shield, but in the name of the Lord God of hostsⁱ.” Then shall we “smite our enemies till the sword even cleave to our hands^k,” and we shall experience, in its fullest extent, the import of that significant question, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly^l?”

^z 2 Pet. iii. 16.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 3.

^f Josh. v. 13, 14.

^l 1 Sam. xvii. 45.

^a Eph. i. 17, 18.

^d Prov. ii. 1—6.

^g Eph. ii. 16.

^k 2 Sam. xxiii. 10.

^b John xvi. 13.

^e Rev. i. 16.

^h Gen. xlix. 24.

ⁱ Mic. ii. 7.

DCX. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

Eph. vi. 18. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.*

IT is graciously ordained of God that none of his creatures should be independent of him : however richly they may be furnished with either gifts or graces, they are under the necessity of receiving continual supplies from him, and of acknowledging him, from day to day, as the one source of all their benefits. Hence, in addition to the armour with which the Christian is arrayed from head to foot, it is necessary that he wait upon God in prayer, agreeably to the direction given him in the text.

To enter into the full meaning of the apostle's words, as connected with the foregoing context, it will be proper to shew

- I. The aspect which prayer in general bears on the Christian warfare.
- II. The particular kind of prayer that will insure to us the victory.

I. In considering the aspect which prayer in general bears on the Christian warfare, it should be noticed, that prayer is the medium of communication between God and man : it is that whereby man ascends to God, and makes known to him his wants, and gains from him whatever he stands in need of.

It is by prayer that we must obtain the armour provided for us. No one part of the divine panoply can be formed by an arm of flesh : from the first infusion of faith and hope into the soul, to the perfect transformation of the soul into the divine image in righteousness and true holiness, all is of God. He is the only “ giver of every good and perfect gift ^a : ” and all his children in all ages have acknowledged their obligations to him in this view. The evangelical prophet confesses, “ Thou hast wrought all

^a James i. 17.

all our works in us^b;" and to the same effect the great apostle of the Gentiles speaks; "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God^c." But how must this armour be obtained from God? Hear his own direction: "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you^d." Desirous as he is to impart to us all spiritual blessings, "he yet will be enquired of by us^e," that he may bestow them on us as the reward of importunity^f. Not that he needs to be informed of our wants, for "he knoweth what things we have need of before we ask^g;" nor needs he to be prevailed upon by the urgency of our requests; for he is far more ready to give than we are to ask, and he stirs us up to ask, because he had before determined to give^h: but there is a propriety in this divine appointment: it necessitates us not only to feel our wants, but to confess our inability to relieve ourselves: it compels us to acknowledge God as the one source of blessedness to man, and to adore him for every thing we receive at his hands. It cuts off from us all possible occasion of glorying; and obliges us, when most completely armed, to say, "By the grace of God I am what I amⁱ."

Again; *it is by prayer that we must learn how to use this armour aright.* Men are disciplined to the use of arms: it is not deemed sufficient to clothe them with armour; they must also be taught how to guard themselves against the assaults of their adversary, and at the same time to inflict on him a deadly wound. Such instruction must the Christian receive from God. If he "lean to his own understanding," he will as surely be foiled, as if he trust in his own strength, or go unarmed to the field of battle. Many are the devices of the wicked one, of which the uninstructed Christian cannot be aware. He alone, "to whom all things are naked and open," knows his plots, or can put us sufficiently on our guard against them. He alone can tell us when, and where, and how to strike^k. With him alone is that "wisdom that is profitable to direct^l." But if we call upon him, "he will guide us by his

^b Isai. xxvi. 12.^c Ezek. xxxvi. 37.^d John iv. 10.^e Eccl. x. 10.^f 2 Cor. v. 5.^g Heb. xi. 6.^h 1 Cor. xv. 10.ⁱ Matt. vii. 7.^j Matt. vi. 8.^k 2 Sam. v. 23—25.

his counsel^m:" he will "give us a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and will make us quick of understanding in the fear of the Lordⁿ." He will inform us of the designs of our enemy^o, and shew us how to counteract them^p. And though in ourselves we be "unskilful in the word of righteousness^q," yet will he "give us the tongue of the learned^r," and the arm of the mighty^s: he will fight in us, as well as for us^t; and will give us reason to adopt the grateful acknowledgments of that renowned warrior, "Blessed be the Lord, my strength, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight^u." Still, however, must this be sought of him in prayer. His promise is suspended on this condition, that we pray to him for the performance of it: on our fulfilling this duty, he will interpose; "he will be very gracious unto us at the voice of our cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer us:" and *then* it is that "our ears shall hear a voice behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it^x." We must first "acknowledge him, and then he will direct our paths^y."

Once more—*It is by prayer that we must bring down the divine blessing on our endeavours.* Many noble purposes are formed in the minds of unregenerate men, which yet are "as the grass that groweth on the house tops, wherewith the mower filleth not his arms, neither he that bindeth up the sheaves, his bosom." Nor is it any wonder that those efforts should be blasted, which are undertaken without a reference to God, and which, if they succeeded, would confirm men in a conceit of their own sufficiency. God is a jealous God: and "his glory will he not give to another." Hence he is interested, as it were, in disconcerting the plans of those who disregard him, and in prospering the concerns of those who humbly implore his aid. Agreeably to this, we find in the sacred records that the most powerful armaments, and best concerted

^m Ps. lxxiii. 24.ⁿ Isai. xi. 2. 3.^o Luke xxii. 31.^p Josh. viii. 6—8.^q Heb. v. 13.^r Isai. l. 4.^s 2 Sam. xxii. 33—35.^t Isai. xlix. 25.^u Ps. cxliv. 1.^x Isai. xxx. 19. 21.^y Prov. iii. 5, 6.

concerted projects, have been defeated, when God was not acknowledged^z; and that the weaker have triumphed gloriously, when they sought the divine favour and protection^a. In one instance more particularly we see the prayer of faith blended with human exertions: and it was made manifest, for the instruction of that and all future generations, that, whatever means God himself might use, prayer was the most powerful of all weapons. When the hands of Moses hanged down through weariness, Amalek prevailed over Israel; but when he held up his hands, Israel prevailed over Amalek^b; so that, in fact, it was the prayer of Moses, rather than the sword of Joshua, that gained the victory. It is in this way also that we must vanquish our spiritual enemies. We must fight against them indeed, and seek their utter destruction; but our reliance must be altogether upon God, whose blessing we must obtain in a way of prayer. In vain shall we attempt to combat Satan in any other way. He laughs at an arm of flesh; and yields to Omnipotence alone. To him may be justly applied that lofty description of Leviathan; "Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish-spears? Behold, the hope of him is vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. His heart is as firm as a stone, yea, as hard as a piece of the nether mill-stone. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. Darts are counted by him as stubble; he laugheth at the shaking of the spear. He is king over all the children of pride^c." But prayer he cannot withstand; the man who fights upon his knees is sure to vanquish him: and the weakest Christian in the universe, if he has but an heart to pray, may say with David, "I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised, and so shall I be saved from mine enemies^d."

To prevent mistakes, however, it will be proper to shew

II. What

^z Isai. xxxvii. 36. ^a 2 Sam. xvii. 11—13.

^a 2 Chron. xx. 12, 25. ^b Exod. xvii. 11.

^c Job xli. 7, 9, 15, 24, 26, 27, 29, 34.

^d 2 Sam. xxii. 4.

II. What kind of prayer that is that will secure to us the victory.

Much that is called prayer is utterly unworthy of that sacred name. That which alone will prevail to the extent of our necessities, must be *comprehensive, spiritual, persevering*.

It must, in the first place, be *comprehensive*. In the text, mention is made of supplication, and of intercession: both of which are necessary in their season. Of SUPPLICATIONS, there are some *stated*, such as those which we offer regularly in the church, the family, and the closet; others are *occasional*; and are presented to God at those intervals, when any particular occurrence, whether prosperous or adverse, renders it necessary to obtain some special interposition of the Deity. INTERCESSIONS are those prayers which we offer *for others*; and which are intended to bring down blessings either on *the world at large* (for God commands “intercession to be made for all men, and more especially for kings, and all that are in authority”) or on *the saints in particular*, with whom we have a common interest; and amongst whom, as amongst soldiers in the same army, there should exist a solicitude to promote to the uttermost each other’s safety and welfare.

Now it is by a regular application to God, in all these ways, that we are to procure from heaven those seasonable supplies which we stand in need of. Respecting the customary devotions of *the closet*, both in the morning and the evening, corresponding to the sacrifices that were daily offered to God under the Mosaic law^f, there can be no doubt. A man who neglects them has no pretension to the christian name. Instead of being in a state of friendship with God, he must rather be numbered amongst his enemies; for the very description given of his enemies is, that they call not upon God^g; whereas the character of his friends is, that “they are a people near unto him^h.” Nor is it less necessary that we should worship God *in our families*: for, as we have family wants, and family mercies, it is proper that we should “offer the sacrifices of prayer

* 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

^f Exod. xxix. 38, 39, 42.

^g Ps. xiv. 4.

^h Ps. cxlviii. 14.

prayer and praise" in concert with our families. Abraham is commended for his attention to the religious concerns of his familyⁱ: and Joshua's noble resolution to maintain, both in his own soul and in his family, the worship of the true God^k, clearly shews, how important this part of a Christian's duty was considered among the saints of old. Nor can any expect the blessing of God upon their families, who will not unite with them in acknowledging the mercies they have already received. As for *the public worship* of God, none who have any regard for God's honour in the world can possibly neglect it.

The importance of *occasional* prayer may perhaps be not so clearly seen. But are there not frequent occasions when we need in a more especial manner the assistance of God? If any thing have occurred that is gratifying to flesh and blood, do we not need to call upon God for grace, that we may not, Jeshurun like, "wax fat, and kick" against our heavenly benefactor? If, on the contrary, we are suddenly involved in any afflictive circumstances, do we not need to implore help from God, in order that we may bear with patience his paternal chastisements, and that the trial may be sanctified to our eternal good? Sometimes indeed the seasons occur so instantaneously, that we have no time or opportunity for a long address to God: but then we might lift up our hearts in an ejaculatory petition; and in one short moment obtain from God the succour we require. Look at the saints of old, and see how they prospered by a sudden elevation of their souls to God: David, by one short prayer, "Lord, turn the counsels of Ahithophel into foolishness," defeated the crafty advice *he* gave to Absalom: and caused him, through chagrin, to put a period to his own existence^l. Jehosaphat, by a single cry, turned back his pursuers, who, if God had not instantly interposed on his behalf, would have overtaken and destroyed him^m. Nehemiah, by a silent lifting up of his soul to God, obtained success to the petition which he was about to offer to his royal masterⁿ. Thus we should blunt the edge of many temptations,

ⁱ Gen. xviii. 19.

^l 2 Sam. xv. 31. with xvii. 14, 23.

ⁿ Nel. ii. 4—6.

^k Josh. xxiv. 15.

^m 2 Chron. xviii. 31.

temptations, and defeat innumerable machinations of Satan, if we habituated ourselves on all occasions to make known our requests to God. Nor would prayer be less successful, if offered for others. Who can behold Moses repeatedly arresting the hand of justice, and averting the wrath of God from the whole Jewish nation^o; or contemplate Peter's deliverance from prison on the night preceding his intended execution, effected as it was in a way that appeared incredible even to the very people who had been praying for it^p, and not confess the efficacy of intercession, whether of people for their minister, or of ministers for their people? Indeed we need no other instance than that of Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah^q, to convince us, that it is our most glorious privilege to "pray one for another"; and that in neglecting this duty, we "sin against God", and against our brethren, and against our own souls.

Such then must be our prayers, if we would be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," or exert ourselves with effect against our great adversary.

In the next place, our prayer must be *spiritual*. Were our devotions multiplied in ever so great a degree, they would be of no avail, unless they came from the heart, and were offered up "through the power of the Holy Ghost." God has warned us, that "they who draw nigh to him with their lips while their hearts are from him, worship him in vain^r." Indeed how can we imagine that God should regard a mere repetition of words, when we ourselves should reject with indignation a petition offered to ourselves in a similar manner^u? Our "supplications must be in the Spirit," or, as St. Jude expresses it, "in the Holy Ghost^x." The Holy Ghost must teach us what to pray for, and must assist our infirmities in praying for it^y, quickening our desires after God, emboldening us to draw nigh to him with filial confidence, and enabling us to expect at his hands an answer of peace.

As

^o Exod. xxxii. 10—14.

^q Gen. xviii. 23—32.

^r 1 Sam. xii. 23.

^u Mal. i. 8.

^y Rom. viii. 26.

^p Acts xii. 5—16.

^r Jam. v. 16.

^t Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^x Jude 20.

As there is but one Mediator *through* whom we can have access to God, so there is only one Spirit *by* whom we can approach him ^z. But we need not on this account be discouraged: for the Spirit is promised to us for these ends ^a; and in whomsoever he is “a Spirit of grace, he will be also a Spirit of supplication ^b.”

Lastly, our prayer must also be *persevering*: we must pray “always,” watching thereunto with all perseverance.” It is by no means sufficient that we pray to God, as too many do, just under the pressure of some heavy affliction ^c, or be fervent for a time, and then relapse again into our former coldness and formality ^d. We must be “instant in prayer ^e,” “stirring up our souls to lay hold on God ^f,” and “wrestling with him,” like Jacob, till we obtain his blessing ^g. There is a holy importunity which we are to use, like that of the Canaanitish woman ^h, or that of the two blind men, who became more urgent in proportion as others strove to repress their ardour ⁱ. And because Satan will do all in his power to divert us from this course, we must watch against his devices with all possible care, and persevere in it without fainting ^k even to the end. If we notice our frames at the returning seasons of prayer, we shall perceive that there is often a most unaccountable backwardness to this duty. Any concern, however trifling, will appear a sufficient reason for delaying it, till, from weariness of body or indisposition of mind, we are induced to omit it altogether, or perhaps we fall asleep in the midst of it. We sometimes think in the evening, that we shall be fitter for it in the morning; and then in the morning we expect a more convenient season at noon-day; and at noon-day we look forward with a hope of performing our duty to more advantage in the evening; and thus we deceive ourselves with delays, and rob our souls of the benefits which God would bestow upon them. But who ever found himself the more ready for prayer on account of his having neglected it the preceding day? Do not such neglects “grieve the Holy Spirit,” and increase, rather than

^z Eph. ii. 18.

^c Isai. xxvi. 16.

^f Isai. lxiv. 7.

^h Matt. xv. 22—27.

^a Joel ii. 29, 32.

^d Job xxxviii. 10.

^e Gen. xxxii. 24—28. with Hos. xii. 4.

ⁱ Matt. xx. 30, 31.

^b Zech. xii. 10.

^c Rom. xii. 12.

^g with Hos. xii. 4.

^k Luke xviii. 1.

than diminish, our indisposition for prayer? Most assuredly they do: and therefore we should “watch” against all excuses, all neglects, all formality; and “persevere” in a steady, uniform, and conscientious performance of this duty. It is not necessary indeed that we should at all times occupy the same space of time in our devotions; for “we shall not be heard for our much speaking¹”; but we should endeavour at all times to maintain a spirituality of mind in this duty, and improve in a more particular manner those seasons, when God stretches out to us, as it were, his golden sceptre^m, and admits us to a more than ordinary “fellowship with himself and with his Son Jesus Christⁿ.”

We shall conclude this interesting subject with an ADDRESS,

1. *To those who neglect prayer.*

What easier terms could God have prescribed, than those on which he has suspended the communication of his blessings? or what could you yourselves have dictated to him more favourable than that condition, “Ask, and you shall have?” Do but consider, what will be your reflections as soon as ever you enter into the invisible world! When you see the door of mercy for ever shut, and begin to feel the judgments which you would not deprecate, how will you lament, and even curse, your folly in neglecting prayer! When you call to mind that heaven with all its glory was open to you, and you had nothing to do but to ask for it at the hands of God, you would not give yourselves the trouble to call upon him! What can you expect, but that the threatening, already recorded for your instruction, shall be executed upon you; “Because I called, and ye refused, I stretched out my hand, and ye regarded me not; but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall ye call upon me, but I will not answer; ye

¹ Matt. vi. 7. ^m Esth. iv. 11. with v. 2, 3. ⁿ 1 John i. 3.

ye shall seek me early, but ye shall not find me ; for that ye hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord : therefore shall ye eat of the fruit of your own way, and be filled with your own devices °.” O let not this awful period arrive. “ Arise, ye sleepers, and call upon your God ¢.” Is not heaven worth asking for ? Is it not worth your while to escape the miseries of hell ? What if diligence and self-denial be necessary ; will not the prize repay the labours of the contest ? Perhaps you are saying in your hearts, that you will begin to pray at some future, and more convenient, season ¢ : but dream not of a more convenient season, lest that season never arrive. Procrastination is the ruin of thousands, and of millions. It is Satan’s grand device for keeping you from God. Should he tempt you to say, “ I will never pray at all,” he knows you would revolt at the idea ; and therefore he prompts you only to defer it in hopes of finding your mind better disposed to the employment on some future day. But let him not deceive you. Delay not a single hour. Yea, at this very moment lift up that ejaculatory petition, “ Lord teach us to pray ¢ :” and embrace the first moment to begin that work, which if prosecuted with fervour and perseverance, shall issue in present peace, and everlasting triumphs.

2. *To those who are daily waiting upon their God,* we would also address a few words.

That you find much cause for humiliation in your secret walk with God, is highly probable : for though nothing would be easier than prayer, if you were altogether spiritual, the remaining carnality of your hearts renders it inexpressibly difficult. Nor can we doubt but that Satan labours to the uttermost to increase your discouragements, both by distracting your minds in prayer, and by insinuating, that your labour will be in vain. And too often are you inclined perhaps to credit his suggestions, and to say, like the unbelieving Jews, “ what profit should we have, if we pray unto him ¢ ?” he will not hear : “ he has shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure.” But rest assured that he will not suffer you to seek his face in vain. His
answers

° Prov. i. 24—31.

¢ Jonah i. 6.

° Acts xxiv. 25.

‡ Luke xi. 1.

§ Job xxi. 15.

answers may be delayed ; but they shall come in the best time. You have only to wait ; and the vision, though it may tarry for a season, will not ultimately disappoint you ¹. Sooner or later, “God will assuredly avenge his own elect ².” There is no situation so desperate, but prayer will relieve us from it ³ : no object is so far beyond the reach of human influence, but prayer will attain it ⁴. The efficacy of prayer is as unlimited as omnipotence itself, because it will bring omnipotence to our aid ⁵.

But some are ready to say, “I have prayed, and earnestly too ; and yet have obtained no answer to my prayer.” It may be so ; because you have “asked amiss ⁶ ;” or because the time for answering it is not yet arrived. But it often happens, that persons think their prayers are cast out, when they have indeed received an answer to them, yea, the best answer that could have been given to them. Perhaps, like Paul, they have prayed against a thorn in their flesh ; and, instead of having it removed, have received strength to bear it, and grace to improve it to their spiritual good ⁷. But is this no answer to their prayer ? Is it not the best that could possibly be vouchsafed ? A trial may be removed in wrath ⁸ ; but it cannot be sanctified from any other principle than love ⁹. The removal of it may produce present ease ; but its sanctified operations will ensure and enhance our everlasting felicity ¹⁰.

Let us then “tarry the Lord’s leisure, and be strong,” knowing that the prayer of faith can never go forth in vain ; nor can a praying soul ever perish. Let us “in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our requests known unto God ; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus ¹¹.”

¹ Hab. ii. 3.

² Luke xviii. 7.

³ Jonah ii. 2—7.

⁴ James v. 17, 18.

⁵ John xiv. 13, 14.

⁶ James iv. 3.

⁷ 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

⁸ Isai. i. 5.

⁹ Heb. xii. 10.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

¹¹ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

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^a The Author's Sermon, preached before the *Society for Missions to Africa and the East*, is here inserted.

^b None were written expressly on occasion either of an *Ordination*, or a *Visitation*. The numbers referred to under those heads, merely direct to Skeletons which have some reference to the Ministry.

^c See note ^b.

☞ Several having been written with a view to exemplify PERPETUAL APPLICATION, they are here referred to—Skel. 137, 262, 292, 346, 359, 367, 379, 424, 427, 435, 460, 465.

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